

Visioning Retreat Report

Salem Lutheran Church - Lake Mills, IA

Prepared by Peter Soli

On Sunday, April 26, 2015 members of the Salem Church Council, the Transition Team, and Call Committee met in a visioning retreat. The event was held in the Mills Theater in Lake Mills. The retreat was facilitated by Pr. Peter Soli.

Those able to attending were: Brad Evenson, Becky Helgeson, Abby Holtan, Sue Langerud, Carlton Shaw, Bill Tweeten, Ron Moen, Sue Myli, Harris Honsey, Scott Hagenson, Yvonne Beenken, Mike Swenson, Alan Skellenger, Keith Johnson, Wayne VanVeldhuizen, Karla Eaton, Janelle Gilbertson, Steve Nelson, Pr. Melinda McCluskey, Pr. Peter Soli, and Assistant to the Bishop - Pr. Steve Brackett

The retreat represented the culmination of the interim work shared between these three leadership groups and the congregation. I represents a shift in focus from making sense of the past to establishing direction for the future. The retreat was framed by the following question.

What future is God calling Salem Lutheran to create together?

The retreat began with worship and with a review of the document entitled *Crafting the Story* which was based on the "Let's Talk" sessions. It is included in the appendix of this report.

The bulk of the group's time was given to three related tasks. These tasks were guided by the following:

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| 1. What would please God to see in place in the next 3 – 5 years as the result of our actions? | VISION |
| 2. What is blocking us from moving toward our vision? | UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS |
| 3. What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the underlying contradictions and move us toward our vision? | STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS |

Vision

The group agreed upon and identified nine main accomplishments they believe would be positive and contribute to the health and vitality of Salem's ministry. These were in response to the question: "What would please God to see in place in the next 3-5 years as the results of our actions?" These accomplishments are detailed in the appendix.

1. Active family involvement
2. Uniting and caring for community
3. Spirit-filled worship
4. Inspirational music and singing
5. Committed and engaged leadership
6. Active study groups
7. Welcoming and growing relationships
8. "State of the art" facility
9. Responsible fiscal management

Underlying Contradictions

In an effort to understand what might prevent, block, or impede moving towards the nine part practical vision, the group did a sober analysis of the factors and realities of the congregation. They responded to the question: "What is blocking us from moving toward our vision?"

There were seven primary areas identified to be addressed. These seven areas are detailed in the appendix.

1. Unclear duties/roles/responsibilities of position
2. Financial planning for uncertain future
3. Unwillingness to commit or be involved
4. Overlapping schedules and priorities
5. Mismatched expectations pastor/congregation
6. Unclear vision for facility
7. Need for comprehensive plan

Strategic Direction

Leadership was asked to brainstorm actions designed to overcome or work around existing blocks to achieving the vision. They responded to the question: "What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the underlying contradictions and move us toward our vision?" The results of this portion of the workshop are detailed in the appendix.

Individual strategic actions were grouped together into nine areas:

1. Involving young families in church
2. Providing youth activity and involvement
3. Encouraging singing and music in worship

4. Developing small groups
5. Improving facilities
6. Preparing for leader transitions
7. Tending church finance and giving
8. Uniting and caring for community
9. Reconnecting and welcoming

These nine action areas were then grouped into three strategic directions:

1. Engaging and involving congregation
2. Preparing and planning for the future
3. Revitalizing and building relationships

Closing

Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Steve Brackett was welcomed and he shared thoughts about the visioning process, Salem's readiness to begin the call process, and the role of the synod in the call process. He addressed questions raised by the group. It was noted that he would return to Salem that next Tuesday to formally launch the call process.

The retreat concluded with participants sharing those things from the day that they felt were positive and those which caused concern. There was a unanimous positive response by the group to the retreat and the planning which had been accomplished. Concerns seemed to cluster around those who might still harbor negative feelings and attitudes towards what happened in the past.

The retreat ended with a circle of affirmation, prayer, and the Lord's Prayer.

Crafting the Story – Based on “Let’s Talk”

Setting

The setting for the story is Salem Lutheran Church in Lake Mills, IA. The church is located across the street from the school and there is a close connection between the church, the school, and the community. The building is has the largest sanctuary in the area and the membership is the largest of any one church of the churches in the Lake Mills area.

The mood of the congregation might be best described as cautiously optimistic and hopeful. A year and a half ago the congregation was bitterly divided and a pastor was given a severance package in return for his resignation. At that time there were many unanswered questions, secrecy and confidentiality around the conflict and the leaving. This was the third pastor in a row who resigned with a severance package.

This series of failed pastorates, the internal conflict, the disagreements with Synod leaders, and the loss have many valued members remains in the background as Salem begins a new chapter in their ministry. There has been healing and people are positive about the future however it is fragile and there is fear of going through more turmoil.

Salem is a congregation where worship is perhaps the most important part of ministry. Much of the story going forward will take place in the sanctuary, on the lawn under the tree, in the chapel, and in the fellowship hall. Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings will be critical times.

Ministry will also take place in the community. It will be woven into exchanges and relationships which happen casually at school events, downtown, in restaurants, with civic organizations, and outside the church building.

Characters

The new pastor is expected to play a leading role in the chapter(s) in Salem’s story. He or she will be seen multi-tasking and making sure that worship is done well. The pastor will not be alone, the part-time associate pastor, the office administrator, and church musicians will have key roles in the story. Joining them will be Church Council members, board and committee leaders, and Synod personnel.

The congregation will seek a pastor who is friendly, personable, trustworthy and approachable. The pastor will balance his or her time between worship, pastoral care, and leadership and give emphasis to worship and pastoral care. In addition, the pastor will need to work creatively with the youth of the congregation and collaborate with parents and the One in Christ parish.

The Council will seek to effectively exercise leadership in the business of the church.

Theme

If there is an overall theme to the story ahead, it is, with God’s help, building or establishing a safe, nurturing church home to members and others. Aspects of this theme include: a coming together and healing of broken relationships; growing outreach to community and uninvolved members; clear communication; and patient, mutually respectful ways of working through differences and conflict.

Conflict

As with all congregations one can anticipate tension and struggles going into the future. Salem is likely to have struggles in the area of worship – in regards to worship styles, numbers of worships, and the worship schedule. There is also apt to be tension around the question of leadership and how the pastor and lay leaders shape partnership in ministry. If the congregation's financial capacity is diminished there will be a conflict over how to best use the money available for staff, the size and makeup of the staff.

Until the congregation claims and proclaims a clear sense of direction and mission, the underlying internal tensions between members who have been on opposite sides of the different pastor conflicts will continue affect ministry. Once Salem is clearly headed in a positive direction with worship, programming, and overall ministry these past conflicts should lose their potency and negative affect.

Plot

As Salem's story unfolds the plot will most likely center around the area of worship, rebuilding relationship within the church and outside the doors of the church, the interplay between pastor, congregational leaders, community leaders and synod leaders. Questions that remain to be answered are:

- How many worship services and what style(s)?
- How are the needs of members (young and old) addressed?
- How is Salem thought of in the community? What will be the talk on the street?
- What will be the next conflict and how will it be handled?
- What will programming and ministry look like for youth, young adults, and families?

What would please God to see in place in the next 3 – 5 years as the result of our actions? (Part 1)			
Active family involvement	Uniting and caring for community	Spirit-filled worship	Inspirational music and singing
Activities for young families	Work with other congregations and community	Meaningful worship – word/music	Full choir 25 – 30
Evening young family meal – once a month	Visible mission work outside of the congregation	Leaving worship feeling hopeful	Youth choir grades 3 - 6
Growing Sunday School programs	Involvement with community – One in Chris	Double attendance in 3 – 5 years	Choir in every service
Activities for young families	Work with other churches	One service – combine regular and contemporary	Increased music involvement - choirs
Youth program in High School	Welcome meal to community (to get them in Salem’s doors)	Morning chapel	A gospel choir
Programing past confirmation	Open facilities to other groups		
Youth involved in church activities	Faith in action		

What would please God to see in place in the next 3 – 5 years as the result of our actions? (Part 2)				
Committed and engaged leadership	Active study groups	Welcoming and growing relationships	“State of the art” facility	Responsible fiscal management
Council and pastor know their roles	Bible study for all ages	“Cheers” a place where everyone knows your name	New educational building	Balanced budget
Keep blue sheet	Men’s Bible study	Cross generation relationships	Remove and replace education wing	Maintain a balanced budget
Pastor willing to listen and lead	Parent Bible study	Salem as a positive in the community	New education unit	
Strong lay leadership	Study groups	Member care – parish nurse		

What is blocking us from moving toward our vision?						
Unclear duties/roles/responsibilities of position	Financial planning for uncertain future	Unwillingness to commit or be involved	Overlapping schedules and priorities	Mismatched expectations pastor/congregation	Unclear vision for facility	Need for comprehensive plan
Limited number of leaders – attitude	Limited \$\$	Burnout	Sporting events – too busy	Memory of outgoing pastor not working well	Limiting factors of the architecture of sanctuary	Finding interesting topics or study group
Finding a good leader for study groups	Restricted \$\$	apathy	Time competition with other activities	Not choosing the right person	Not agreeing on design	What to plan? Developing correct programs
Difficulty of finding a choir director	Too many needs for the budget	People want to be asked individually instead of volunteering	Enough time – scheduling conflicts	Trouble finding the right pastor		
Difficulty of finding a music director	Untimely giving – cash flow	Members not reaching out	Time constraints not having time to be involved	A dispirited pastor		
Finding a good music director	Unclear financial information	Little reach out in conversation – narrow circles	Finding available time for study group			
Lack of directors – music	Understanding stewardship – time, \$\$, & talents	Difficulty in getting people to serve	Finding a time for practice - music			
Turnover in positions (leadership)	Declining population of Lake Mills	Getting people to commit – music				
Finding the right people for their talents	Low paying jobs in the area	Stuck in “old” ways				
Understanding stewardship – time & \$ & talents	Attitude of ELCA					

Strategic Actions				Strategic Directions
<p>Involving young families in church</p> <p>One service each Sunday – choir and kids sing Involve youth in services (choir, readings, usher, communion) Parents join youth for Sunday School – one time Sunday School sing once/month Monthly activities for families (dinners, bowling, swimming) Mentor ushering – youth/adult Once a month students lead worship Children’s church Develop plans for family programs</p>	<p>Providing youth activity and involvement</p> <p>Bible verse geocaching or scavenger hunt Have High School students meet Wed. night for Bible Study “Rent” a confirmation student Youth rake leaves Wed. after school program Having hayrides/boating events Monthly family events</p>	<p>Encouraging singing and music in worship</p> <p>Choir members sit with family if desired Develop ensemble groups Pairing senior choir with youth who want to sing Inspirational music – variety of music</p>	<p>Developing small groups</p> <p>Offer (pre-work) early AM Bible study + breakfast Have everyone assigned a WELCA circle Stimulate with interesting topics Active study groups – specific information on topic Study groups (different leaders each time)</p>	<p>Engaging and involving congregation</p>
<p>Improving facilities</p> <p>Make chapel in more usable space Improve existing education unit – make more energy efficient and usable Change a room into short-term living (overnight) Hire architect firm to draw up plans for our bricks and mortar future</p>	<p>Preparing for leader transitions</p> <p>Committed and engaged leadership – clear, concise job descriptions Have a retreat for leaders (Jan or Feb) Mentor new positions</p>	<p>Tending church finance and giving</p> <p>Fundraiser challenge Fundraiser & tithe Send pledge/offering received quarterly statements Responsible fiscal management – matching skills with expertise – wants vrs. needs</p>		
<p>Uniting and caring for community</p> <p>Citywide church service July Jubilee – float and walkers (flyer and promotional items) Uniting and caring for community – invite other churches for an evening service on occasion Pastor needs to be visible in community Look for ways to work with One in Christ</p>		<p>Reconnecting and welcoming</p> <p>“We miss you” cards Smile and welcoming when ushering Intentional personal contacts Bring a friend to Sunday School Email list of members to communicate with them Newspaper ad invitation to Salem Mailboxes to help track people</p>		<p>Revitalizing and building relationships</p>

