

## GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH

### *Celebrating Our Story*

In order to create a church that is active and can serve its members and the community following Jesus' example, we need to periodically take stock of what the Congregation has accomplished lately, assess whether we have served as we are called, and to prayerfully consider how we continue to serve in the future. We must then discern the needs of our members and the community at large, look at our resources, identify areas of opportunity, and decide how we want to move forward. This process is often called strategic planning.

The last time we took on this process was in 2015, and at the that time we identified Our Story. Through surveys and small group meetings we asked Congregation members what they identified as important Bible verses and what was important to them that Grace accomplish. From that information we identified a Scripture passage that best identified our Congregation's mission and used it as our guiding principle to develop programs and activities that complemented what we were already doing successfully. Our Story verse was Matthew 24:35-36, 40.

*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'... 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

All good strategic plans have long- and short-term goals. Below is a summary of what we set out for ourselves by living into Our Story. You will also see a description of our level of success in achieving those goals. Starting with this information we can take a moment to look at what we did well and what needs improvement. Next, we can take the time to reassess what is important to our current Congregation. Then we can, as a Congregation, consider how we have changed across time and how we can work towards new goals that meet our current needs. In 2015, part of the Our Story plan was to revisit and revise in 5 years, so we are due to engage in this process again.

#### **2015 Long Range Goals:**

- **Reconfigure its Purpose Statement** – This goal has been met and our purpose was redefined as follows: *The purpose of our church is to make a difference by serving others through God's love and our faith.*
- **Reconfigure its Story Mission Statement** – This goal has been met as we identified the verse from Matthew as Our Story.
- **Increase engagement with community service agencies** – This goal has been met with active participation with Family Promise, New Hope Ministries, Christian Churches United, and the Susquehanna Harbor Safe Haven Homeless Shelter, as well as our study buddy program with Highland Elementary. Grace youth have been actively engaged in community service and adults have been active here also. Due to COVID restrictions, this level of participation has reduced off in recent months. We are prepared to renew these relationships when the time is right.

- **Enhance the Community Meals Program** by renovating our out-of-date kitchen (\$400,000 Capital Campaign) – This goal has been met. The renovation project is complete, and the Capital Campaign loan has been paid off.
- **Turn the house adjacent to the church into a mission house for the underserved** – This goal has been actively addressed in the last few years and has been met with challenges. Initially the rental property at 1604 Carlisle Rd was set up to serve as transitional housing for people in the homeless community. This effort resulted in lack of good faith effort on the part of these residents related to maintaining the property, and the project was terminated. Another effort to use the property for mission was a partnership with Family Promise to assist with transitional housing with a family that was a client of Family Promise. This time Family Promise would support the family to help ensure more success. Once again, this situation did not work out and the project was ended. The property is currently used as a rental and no determination has been made at this time as to what to do with it.
- **Seek a part-time pastor/intern to assist current pastors** – This goal has been modified partly due to the changing environment that is brought on by the COVID pandemic: changing revenue, changing worship and program needs. Council realized that there is no room in the budget for an Associate Pastor and chose to withdraw the Profile from Synod. The Profile does remain intact for resubmission if this process is determined to be appropriate. However, this goal has been met in that we do have a new intern is currently serving with us.

#### **2020 Short Term Goals:**

- **Become financially stable** – This goal will be completed by the end of 2021 through changes in the budget process, record keeping, and the setting of more clear financial goals. We have paid off the Capital Campaign loan and received several major bequests to assist with balancing the budget as well as benefitting from the PPP grant received from the government due to COVID.
- **Upgrade church properties** – This goal is ongoing and involves the church property, the rental property and 1604 Carlisle Rd, and Kentland. The Property Board has been revitalized and is systematically prioritizing and addressing physical plant needs at all church properties. Some of these needs are large and will need careful consideration and planning.
- **Meet the needs of the community** – This goal has been met and continues to develop and grow. The Giving Pantry opened to provide meals and food staples to those in need in our community. From this start the pantry also ran a clothing closet, provides holiday meal distribution, school supplies and diaper distribution. Again, the services provided by the Giving Pantry shift as the needs of the community and response to COVID require.

#### ***Planning for the Future***

By setting goals and priorities Grace Lutheran Church has been intentional and faithful in living out its mission. The time is right to look into the future to update goals and priorities to set the course for the future. As a faith community, the Grace planning process will involve working together to discern what God is calling the congregation to do as we move forward.

The Congregation Council along with Pastor Cover, Vicar Susan Scott, and Director of Youth and Family Ministries Jesse Woodrow are the Planning Team. They, along with facilitator Jill Schumann, will guide the process. Steps to creating the plan will include:

- **Fall 2021 – Gathering input**
  - Inviting the Holy Spirit into the discernment process through shared prayer and stories
  - Asking members to fill out a brief survey either in writing or online to gather a range of perspectives
  - Reaching out to partners and other stakeholders for conversation
- **Winter 2021/2022 – Identifying and prioritizing options**
  - The Planning Team will review the input and determine the big questions the plan needs to answer and identify which need further exploration or information gathering.
  - The Planning Team will craft several “alternative futures” or pathways the congregation could consider and the implications of those.
- **Spring 2022 – Deciding on plan priorities**
  - Small group meetings (online or in-person depending on the state of the pandemic) will be held with congregation members to discuss options and priorities.
  - Then, the Planning Team will recommend a plan for the next 3-5 years.

### ***Important to Note***

#### ***Coming together***

In a congregation as lively and diverse as Grace, there will be many different perspectives on what should be prioritized. That’s the reason it is so important to emphasize discerning what God is calling the people of Grace to do together. And, it will be important to extend “Grace” to one another throughout the conversations. There will be lots of opportunities for everyone in the congregation to be part of the process and also to roll up sleeves as the plan is turned into action.

#### ***Turning plans into action***

The Planning Team wants to make sure that the resulting plan will be implemented and not just be a nice document that sits on a shelf. Therefore:

- The plan will include assignments of responsibility and timeframes for accomplishment.
- An update on the plan and its implementation will be part of Council meeting agendas.
- An update on the plan and its implementation will regularly be part of Congregation meetings and there will be regular updates in the newsletter with invitations to participate in specific ways.
- The plan goals and priorities will be used to guide decision-making.

As with the unexpected advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the flexibility required to address that, Grace Lutheran Church will continue to discern God’s call in an ongoing way.

