

**Ascension Lutheran
Church & School
2016 Visioning Team**

Final Report
4/20/16

Introduction

Ascension Lutheran Church is at a crossroad. Data show stagnation (at best) or decline (at worst) in many measurable areas of church life, including worship attendance, membership and baptisms. For example, currently only 25 percent of those who identify as Ascension members say they attend worship services on a given weekend. Consistent with national trends, giving levels and overall participation in ministries at Ascension have also been slipping.

The retirement of Ascension's previous Senior Pastor in 2015, combined with an increased restlessness among current members concerning the status quo, provided the congregation with an excellent opportunity for Visioning, allowing Ascension, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to reimagine our calling and mission in the community and in the world.

In response, a Visioning Team was formed by Church Council to facilitate the formation of a new Vision for Ascension. Over the last eight months, that seven-member Team has reviewed mountains of data, surveyed the membership, conducted robust interviews with key leaders, and held two large congregation-wide events to cast as wide a net for input as possible. The participation of Ascension members and the support of the pastors, staff, ministries and Church Council far surpassed the Team's expectations and is credited with helping this endeavor succeed. The Holy Spirit was also a vital participant in this exercise.

This **Visioning Team Final Report** is intended to provide a springboard for church leadership in determining next steps for Ascension. We hope the plan outlined in this document provides clear direction for a potential Call Committee, a re-visit of the previous Master Plan and the creation of task forces or subcommittees that will look more deeply into the major challenges and issues identified in the Visioning process.

Humbly submitted with the intent of glorifying God and advancing his Kingdom,

The Ascension Visioning Team



The Context of our Visioning

‘I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.’

1 Corinthians 1:10

The four key areas of our visioning

1. Personal inreach – “Me”

- What are my and my family’s most significant needs, and how can my church help fill those needs?

2. Congregational inreach – “Us”

- What are the most significant needs of other members of my church, and how can we meet those needs?

3. Local outreach – “Them”

- What are the most significant needs of people in my community, and how can my church help meet those needs while sharing the Gospel?

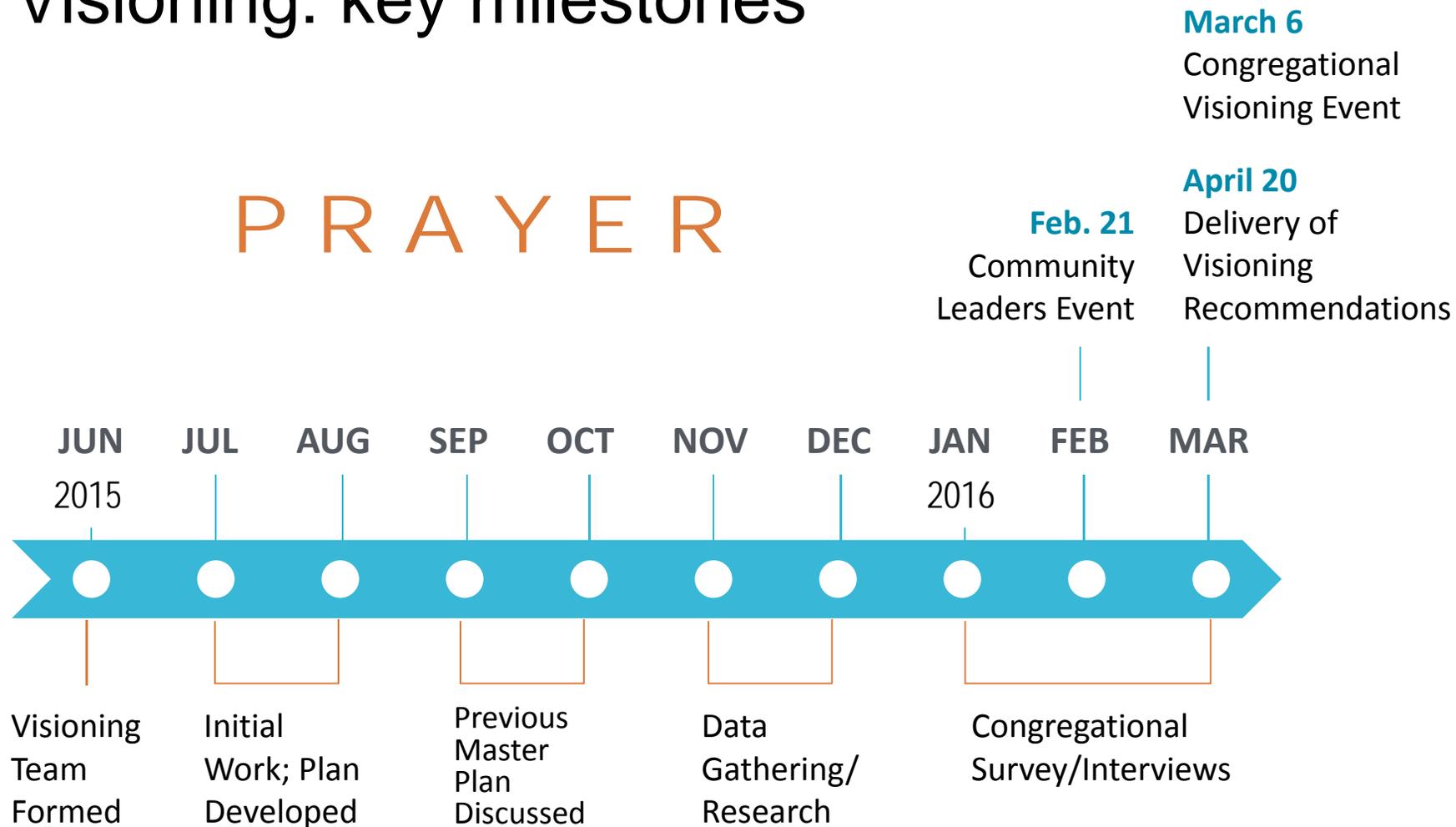
4. Global outreach – “The World”

- What are the most significant needs of people in other parts of the country and the world that my church can meet while sharing the Gospel?

A Key Question for Each Member: “In which of these areas am I equipped to serve and do I have a passion to serve?”

Visioning: key milestones

P R A Y E R



Methodology



Evaluating trend information on Christian churches nationwide and on Ascension specifically to determine challenges, threats and opportunities for ministry.

Conducting surveys, interviews and events to gather perspectives from congregants and the community about Ascension's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Compiling all of the data and feedback, reviewing it, reflecting upon it and praying about it – all in an attempt to discern the Spirit's leading.

Distilling all of the data and input into a final report to Church Council for action.

Visioning Team members

- Allen Carter** Ascension member for four years. Currently serves or has served on Member Evangelism and Outreach Committee, Global Ministries, Adult Ed Leader, and Bible study facilitator.
- Brian Festerling** Ascension member for 40 years (baptized in childhood at Ascension). Participant in TJ Express house building trips, a SAM's tram driver, Dugout construction participant, and a member of men's bible study.
- Charlotte Gessler** Ascension member for 40 years. Currently serves or has served in positions on Church Council, VBS, Lunch Bunch, youth programs and Sunday School and countless other volunteer positions.
- John Guarino** Ascension member for 29 years. High School Sunday School teacher for 25 years. Serves or has served on Church Council, School Board, Evangelism Committee, co-chair of a pastoral call committee, in leadership in Senior Luther League, and Adult Ed Leader.
- Ed Klodt** Ascension member for 28 years. Longtime lay minister, two-term Church Council President, Adult Ed Leader.
- Valinda Korshavn** Ascension member for 26 years. Serves or has served as Foundation trustee, communion assistant, VBS teacher, member of PALS, Project Response participant.
- Ron Rudrud** Ascension member for 40 years. Serves or has served as member of 2002 Visioning Team and EIO Committee, co-chair of a pastoral call committee, Alpha program leader, small group leader, Christ Care equipper.

Broad research focus areas

Worship

Church Leadership

Administration

Evangelism & Outreach

Lutheran Theology

Stewardship

Participation & Attendance

Ministries

Church / School / Foundation

Facility

ASCENSION



Large buckets encompass many things

Worship

Services, Music, Theology, Format, Liturgy, Service Offering, Age, Gender, Racial, Ecumenical Diversity

Church Leadership

Pastors, Staff, Lay Leaders, Council, Ministry Leadership

Administration

Communication, Running of the Organization

Evangelism and Outreach

Community Participation, Outreach and Growth, Community Involvement, Lutheran World Relief

Lutheran Theology

ELCA, Synod, Baptism, Confirmation

Large buckets encompass many things

Stewardship

Tithing, Financial Security, Debt

Participation and Attendance

Total Attendance, Attending Members, Non-member attendance

Ministries

All of the Ministries the Church is Offering and Expansion

Church / School / Foundation

The Three Organizations that Make Up ALC&S

Facility

The Site: Buildings, School, Parking

Engaging All ALC Members

‘For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.’

1 Corinthians 12:12

Executive summary

The Visioning Team identified five critical factors for Ascension's success:

1

Worship

Reinvigorate the weekend worship experience to address all age groups, leverage new technologies, and encourage individuals of all ages to remain on campus to participate in other opportunities.

2

Evangelism & Outreach

Develop and promote an evangelism culture at Ascension, and purposefully equip members for outreach.

3

Youth

Focus on family, youth and young adult ministries to engage demographic groups whose participation is declining significantly.

4

Staffing

Determine whether Ascension should embrace a lay ministry or staff-driven model, and then train and provide appropriate support and staffing.

5

"One Ascension"

Introduce greater alignment and touch points between church, school, Foundation and different ministries.

A photograph of a lighthouse on a dark, rocky cliff at night. The lighthouse is illuminated from within, and its light is visible. The scene is set against a dark, cloudy sky. A large, white, glowing circle is superimposed over the image, framing the lighthouse and the text. The text "Findings & Implications" is written in white, sans-serif font, centered within the circle.

Findings & Implications

Worship – Keep what’s working but try some new things

KEY FINDING

1 For attending members our worship experience is one of Ascension’s core strengths; there is a desire to try new things and create a more dynamic worship experience.

IMPLICATION

There is a desire to evolve and grow the worship experience by making it more relevant. Our Pastors are beloved and a strength. As we develop strategies to address shrinking membership, our strength in worship should be leveraged, and care should be taken not to jeopardize this core strength as we explore new worship opportunities as a part of our evangelism process.

FINDINGS

53% of survey respondents thought that worship was the single best task Ascension does (out of 15 listed tasks).¹

Of the 10 survey choices provided for reasons that people were first drawn to Ascension, the top 2 were Pastors and worship style. The same 2 were tops for reasons for staying.¹

Pastors may not be clearly addressing relevant life needs in their sermons.²

IMPLICATIONS

There is a strong connection to the worship experience, the format and the liturgy of the traditional service. It strongly resonates with worshiping members. Our survey data suggest that this is a core strength. We should ensure that in a desire to grow and develop, we do not abandon that strength.

Our Pastoral staff are a significant and strong part of our worship service and offering. Although attendance is down, those that have joined and stay cite the Pastors and our Worship Services as reasons why.

One area that came up both in the interview data as well as the Percept report was to address relevant life needs for members in our sermons. Reaching out to, and preaching about problems members are having today could make the worship service more relevant and applicable to their lives and could be a vehicle for greater evangelism.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

Feedback indicates there is a strong sense of community within our congregation.²

In the past, there was a resistance to changing the worship experience and trying new ideas.²

Music is strong (11:00 service could use some renewing).²

Many are satisfied with traditional services.²

People in our area have a strong need for specific spiritual growth programs that are different than the national perspective.³

Our study area is 38% more likely than the national average to seek or expect their worship style to be intellectually challenging vs. emotionally uplifting.³

IMPLICATIONS

Interviewed members suggest that there is a strong sense of us as a caring community. Other data suggest this may be a dichotomy within the church where current members feel welcome and visitors – especially newer young people – may not.

An openness to new ideas and change could reveal new opportunities to grow and reach the congregation during worship service.

Saturday night, 8:00 and 9:30 worship music is widely appreciated and is a strength, the 11:00 service music could be improved and become a vehicle to reach out to young people (*although recent changes made to the 11 a.m. service may help*).

In an effort to evolve and change we should be cautious about abandoning the traditional services completely as they very strongly resonate with a large number of members.

- People in study area are more likely than the national average to be concerned with:
 - Finding/Providing Aging Parent Care
 - Finding/Providing Good Schools
 - Dealing with Neighborhood Gangs
 - Dealing with Social Injustice (Key Finding)
 - Achieving Long-Term Financial Security
 - Finding Time for Recreation / Leisure
 - Achieving a Fulfilling Marriage
 - Developing Parenting Skills

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

Church Leadership – Members desire a Senior Pastor with many skills, who can develop a strong following

KEY FINDING

2 Members have a definite desire for strong Senior Pastoral leadership, though specific suggestions for what this looks like vary.

IMPLICATION

Our call committee has much to consider, including the qualities of a future Senior Pastor, the most appropriate number of rostered pastors, and emphasis on lay leadership positions. The congregation universally suggests that the new Senior Pastor must be a dynamic leader who is capable of creating a following. The need for Youth Ministry Leadership is also critical.

FINDINGS

Of the 6 characteristics presented for a new senior pastor, the most important was “Experience.” The least important was “Gender.”¹

The top 2 adjectives respondents chose to describe qualities they’d like to see in a new Senior Pastor were “Dynamic” and “Compassionate.”¹ “We need to ensure the Senior Pastor that is called is a dynamic pastor.”²

32 respondents posited a pastoral call opinion for the “single best idea” question.¹

IMPLICATIONS

The data suggest that members want a Senior Pastor with great depth of experience, who is dynamic and who will shake things up, while not abandoning who we are. Not an easy task. This issue is compounded by a strong need and desire to reprioritize and vitalize the youth ministries.

The congregation is seeking energy and the things that are needed to “right the ship” and begin growth again. But we are who we are, and there is a needle to be threaded here to make sure the called Pastor is compassionate and caring in a way that our current and past Pastors have been.

When asked for specifics about what the new Pastor should be like, opinions vary. The verbatims can be found in the final survey report. However one thing is clear: **This** call is perceived by members as one of the most important decisions that Ascension has ever made.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

There is a universally perceived need for a strong youth leader/pastor to grow our youth program.²

Interviewed people feel that we have caring pastors who are accessible, godly men.²

The church is looking for strong administration skills.²

Staffing opinions from the “single best idea” question included:

- Hire a church administrator (5)
- Call a dynamic Senior Pastor (4)
- Call Pastor Tim for Senior Pastor (4)
- Call one of our current pastors for Senior Pastor (3)
- Call a female Senior Pastor (3)
- Etc... [see the “Staffing” section of the final survey question results]¹

IMPLICATIONS

The youth program is suffering and no longer robust. Historically it was a strength and is critical to a healthy and growing church. This program is a high priority fix for most people interviewed. There are currently two open positions, that of Senior Pastor as well as Youth Minister. It is critical that the Call Committee understand each of these needs and a recommendation is made before the job description is created.

Our current pastors are beloved by an overwhelming percentage of the people interviewed. The connection to the congregation has with these pastors should be leveraged, and they should be empowered to use those relationships to evangelize both members and others to build the church moving forward.

The organizational administrative skill set to lead the organization, develop staff and evaluate and reward employees may be lacking , but is is critical to any healthy organization.

Individuals cited specifics around the pastoral call as well as church administration and leadership when asked about the “single best idea”. Although we received small amounts of data on this, some insights can be gleaned. Probably most important is that there will be strong opinions about what type of pastor to call, and who to call. It is critical that the Call Committee identify a specific skill set that reflects input that members provided as part of the Visioning process while also accomplishing the tasks outlined in this Visioning Plan. Members will look to the new Senior Pastor for direction and organizational leadership, as well as to grow the church family and meet members’ spiritual needs.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

Administration – Ascension needs to be more focused organizationally

KEY FINDING

3 The church lacks administrative leadership and a strong organizational process. Both are critical to the effectiveness of the organization.

IMPLICATION

The church employs and relies on staff to function efficiently. The perception is that we have not been deliberate enough about the process of building and developing the organizational elements of the congregation. Training, financial savvy, job descriptions (as well as goals and expectations) must be improved to have a highly functioning organization/congregation.

FINDINGS

We need stronger relationships between church, school and Foundation.²

We are weak in financial management.²

There is a fairly strong consensus that a re-evaluation of the congregation's structure is needed.²

IMPLICATIONS

By creating a notion of "one Ascension" and fostering strong communications between the three groups we can build a stronger church community that is integrated and growing.

There is a perception that some members may be reapportioning their pledged giving to special fundraisers after making their annual pledges. This can create serious cash shortages for day-to-day finances. It would appear to be a best practice to remind members that giving to these fundraisers is over and above their annual commitment to the church's general fund (*the stewardship insert into the 4/17/16 bulletin will likely be helpful here*).

There is a fairly strong opinion among those interviewed that the current organizational structure is not working or as effective as it should be. Church leadership should evaluate the entire organizational structure, possibly leading to a complete restructure in both lay and staff positions.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

There is a lack of training of ministry leaders/church council members.²

There is high interest in strengthening staff goals and accountability.²

Ascension is not effectively communicating important decision-making processes and outcomes.²

84% of our survey respondents use e-mail daily.¹

Only 44% of respondents use social media daily, and 35% of respondents don't use social media at all.¹

IMPLICATIONS

There is widespread feedback that discipleship emphasis and training is not occurring. Both are critical to the health and success of the congregation. We should evaluate and implement a robust program that ensures people who are asked to lead and contribute are trained and have the tools to do so.

Pastors and staff need organizational and career goals that are measurable as a part of their job functions. In order to have a thriving, effective organization, people need to be provided with clear job expectations.

Given low attendance levels and the need to engage all members, the congregational meeting may no longer be an effective way of communicating to the membership. Efforts should be made to identify new ways to communicate as well as ensure that the culture of the organization is one of openness and transparency.

Technology is a challenging issue when we consider how to grow and evolve. We are considered experts when it comes to electronic communications. A web site audit revealed that ALCS has a top shelf digital / social Media capability, as does the National ELCA. The congregation should investigate how to make this strength something we leverage not just for current members but to expand our communication capability as a vehicle for outreach and evangelism.

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Evangelism & Outreach – If Ascension doesn't start growing it will continue to die

KEY FINDING

4 ALC is declining. All the data we have compiled suggest that a more rigorous, deliberate, and effective E&O program is critical if we are to survive.

IMPLICATION

An overwhelming number of members recognize that ALC is in decline. As such, we are the victims of both national and local trends as well as our own failure to evolve and develop. Aggressive and progressive evangelism and outreach efforts will not only help Ascension grow but is consistent with the Great Commission to go out into the world and spread the Gospel.

FINDINGS

We have not issued a strong call for others to become a part of the body of Christ.²

Global ministries are strong, local outreach is weak.^{2,5}

A strong connection to CLU could pay significant dividends.^{2,5}

IMPLICATIONS

The perception is that our church and worship services may not be tailored to be evangelical in experience. The Lutheran experience is designed to create a place of praise and adoration of God. If this experience requires Evangelism to occur through the church community then action and activity to share the Gospel should be compelled by the Church leadership and its pastors.

There is a perception among those interviewed and other data that we may be focusing too much of our evangelism efforts and financial efforts on global ministries at the expense of outreach possibilities closer to home. However, global outreach is a cornerstone of the Lutheran experience as well as a strong vehicle of outreach to young adults. Percept data also show that households in the community are interested in local mission substantially more than global mission (34.8% vs. 6.1%), indicating stronger potential for ALC evangelism in the community by focusing more on local needs.

By reaching out to the Church and Family majors in the CLU Religion Department, relationships there could become a resource that not only helps with evangelism but also to develop new ministries across the organization.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

We should more purposefully reach out to other cultures/non-English speakers.^{2, 5, 6}

The Conejo Metropolitan Statistical Area reflects the same trend as ALC, however, there is some opportunity for outreach to increase ethnic diversity.³

The population of 21 to 34 year olds as well as 60 to 84 years old is consistently trending up and is projected to continue to do so.³

Approximately two thirds of the families in the study area are married- couple families. For people 25 years old or older, half are college graduates.³

Households in our area are less likely than the national average to have a Christian faith preference.³

IMPLICATIONS

By more accurately aligning with the local community as identified by Percept data and reaching out to them, Ascension would more clearly identify who we are as a community and that connection would be a vehicle for outreach and growth. We could potentially consider ethnic diversity in the pastoral staff and in the worship experience.

Asian and Hispanic communities are growing in the area and have a higher than national average church attendance. As we consider what outreach looks like, these are two important groups to consider.

The population of young adults as well as elderly are consistently trending up. If we are to reach out to the community and share the Gospel with the unchurched, it is important to realize that these two demographics represent a rapidly growing opportunity.

The majority of families in the area are married-couple families. This is higher than the national average and most of those people in the area are college graduates. The intellectual approach of Lutheran Theology, combined with the grace of the Gospel should appeal to these individuals, and deliberate effort should be made to focus on their needs when planning.

About 80% say they “believe there is a God.” If they participate in a spiritual experience, they want it to be intellectually challenging. It has long been thought that the evangelical, emotional church experience is desirable. Data suggest this may not be true. The data suggest that our area has a significant number of Christians who would respond to the more intellectually stimulating worship experience at Ascension.

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FINDINGS

“None” was the most common answer for the number of people that members invited to church in the past year (31%), but 45% of respondents indicate that 4+ of their closest friends attend Ascension.¹

Expand our garden ministry/invite the public to participate/add to food pantry from garden.^{5, 6}

Areas to focus our global outreach include:

Grow the Fair Trade program.

Better leverage the resources of the ELCA; tie into more of their outreach programs.

Find opportunities for international or domestic mission trips that are of shorter duration.⁵

IMPLICATIONS

Although we have “invite friends” campaigns and cards (“Invite One”), many members do not feel it is an expectation for them to invite others to church. The data suggest that once here, strong relationships can be developed and lifelong connections are made. An effort should be made to connect these dots. Inviting friends, family and neighbors is the easiest way for us to grow, and develop our community at the same time.

There is a strong desire to connect to our community and to invite them to be a part of our church community. Success here is critical to the vitality and long-term success of the church. Evangelism and outreach efforts have to focus on the community and aggressively pursue inviting individuals from the community to participate.

Although the data suggest that many members feel we may be emphasizing Global Ministries at the expense of our own church and community, remaining focused here is important for a few reasons. First, there is a strong passion among many members for global ministries, and ensuring they remain engaged is important. This also makes a strong commitment to the ELCA in a way that is not polarizing. Lastly, data suggest that focus here is critical to the deepening of faith experience that will resonate with young people. This suggests we need to equally balance our emphases on global and local mission.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

Lutheran Theology – Outreach and service are at the core of what it means to be an ELCA Lutheran

KEY FINDING

5 ALC integrates some of the best Lutheran elements in our worship experience. Grace and God's will for a more joyful life are resonant messages.

IMPLICATION

As we seek to evolve and grow as an organization it is critical that we also ground ourselves in who we are and what we believe. Lutheran theology and the Lutheran experience is at the core of who we are. Members appreciate it, and data suggest that the messages of salvation through grace will resonate with the younger demographic we need to reach to grow the church.

FINDINGS

Being Lutheran is an important part of our identity and grounds our theology.²

Our sermons are Biblically based.²

We need to stay God's course (fear of losing focus on our mission).²

IMPLICATIONS

The data suggest that being Lutheran and the grace-based nature of our theology are positive for many members. However, there may be a need to reinvent how we offer and share this in a way that might be more effective in the culture.

A strong connection to the word of God is appreciated by the membership and a critical part of a strong worship experience. Our pastoral staff is made up of theologians, and their understanding of the Word of God is a strength.

There was a concern by some in the congregation that in our Visioning efforts we might abandon God's course and stray from his will. Focusing here may cause us to make difficult decisions that are unpopular but aligned to his will. By remaining diligent in prayer and service to God, we ensure the best chance at an outcome consistent with God's will.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

Our relationship with the ELCA can be polarizing.²

Global outreach, working for good, and improving conditions in the world are at the core of the Lutheran experience.⁴

“Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered and sent for the sake of the world.”⁷

“...accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission; and building capacity for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.”⁷

The ELCA is engaged in work and projects around the world to spread the messages of Christ, the cross, and God’s grace.⁷

IMPLICATIONS

We need to be cautious about strongly embracing or abandoning the ELCA as we run the risk of alienating a large contingent of the congregation or abandoning a very strong vehicle for outreach and potential new members.

Ascension has historically been a strong supporter of ELCA global outreach. We send money and people, and some members are very committed. There may be an opportunity to make this cornerstone of Lutheranism more a part of the Ascension DNA, which could have strong evangelical impact.

The ELCA’s mission statement is one of action and sending by God, on behalf of the world. To be a Lutheran in the ELCA is to believe that God calls us to engage – to go into the world and do good works on his behalf and for his glory

The ELCA sees itself as partners with its member congregations, a resource for information, direction and financial support. Evangelical witness is at the root of its goals, but trying to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth through outreach is core to our ethos. Ascension may not be as engaged in this part of the Lutheran experience as it could be.

The ELCA Malaria Campaign, ELCA World Hunger, HIV/AIDS Ministry, Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Social Ministry Organization are all examples of how Ascension lives its faith through works and in a positive light that will resonate with others, especially young people.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event, 7. ELCA web site

Stewardship – Ascension must be more deliberate in ensuring members better understand financial stewardship

KEY FINDING

6 A small number of families give a large % of the operating funds. Electronic fund raising seems to drive more robust giving, and outreach should be a goal.

IMPLICATION

Ascension could increase revenue by expanding its circle of significant givers and expanding electronic giving opportunities. More research should be done to establish a strong cause and effect relationship, however. More deliberate capital and giving campaigns are the cornerstones of successful churches. Evangelism and growth would also increase funding.

FINDINGS

There is a lack of a strong, integrated and effective stewardship campaign.²

Lack of communication about finances allows poorly directed or misinformed giving.²

Simply Giving and credit card giving combine to account for 30% of our offerings, there are 87 Simply Giving participants. Another 10 give online.⁴

IMPLICATIONS

As a critical part of the health of the organization and the vehicle that drives many of the ministries and what we are offering to the membership, we need a purposeful plan to grow giving.

Sometimes members give to designated gifts rather than to the general fund. This lack of communication and leadership is creating a situation where, in a time of limited financial resources, we are not optimizing the giving potential that exists.

The data suggest that Simply Giving and online giving participants give more per household than do envelope givers. And less than 2% of overall funds come from loose donations (non-envelope), although the Visioning Team recognizes that many of those loose donations are Caring Ones.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

Of the nearly 2,500 members, and those who attend weekly ... only 97 families support 30% of the church budget.⁴

Global Mission support as a percentage of regular giving is around 3%. As a percentage of total benevolence ~20%.³

The number of affluent families is 400% above the national average.³

Although study area families are affluent statistically, the cost of living may be offsetting that wealth.³

IMPLICATIONS

We have a small number of families driving a significant amount of giving. Research should be done to see if increasing Simply Giving participation would increase per-member giving.

Global Mission work is a major significant goal of the ELCA and a significant part of the Lutheran experience, and ALC does not seem to share that goal / focus. The data suggests that there are some dedicated parishioners, but as a congregation it is not a goal. This actually aligns with regional demographic sentiment on this issue.

The community that surrounds Ascension is made up of individuals and families whose household income are significantly higher than the national average HOWEVER . . .

The cost of living in the Greater Conejo is high, and some families may be struggling. This may be reflected in our limited focus on mission outreach as well as the spiritual goals of people in the area. (see Worship: Key findings)

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Participation & Attendance – We are a long-tenured and active group of believers that is getting smaller

KEY FINDING

7 Ascension is a wonderfully tight-knit community. Our worship attendance is predominantly white, old, and entrenched.

IMPLICATION

Ascension has a devout following among its shrinking group of attending members. We are a very homogeneous group of people, and we don't do much to change that by way of outreach. Our entrenchment makes us complacent, and evangelism/outreach has become problematic for us.

FINDINGS

Worship service Attendance is continuing to decline.¹

Our in-reach and onboarding new members' process requires improvement.²

The highest interest areas – by far – were in Congregational Inreach and Local Outreach.⁵

IMPLICATIONS

People are very concerned about attendance declining, and it is impacting every other facet of the organization. **There is a mandate from the surveys to actively address regaining growth in the church.** There is also information that suggests there are changes afoot in what "participation" means and how to become a broader part of the "town common of the community" and how they participate. The church needs to redefine what participation and "attendance" means, build around the hub of the Sunday morning worship experience but also offer options and activities that make the church more of a multi-day, constant part of people's lives.

In order to become a member of the church and an active participant, people need to understand the breadth and depth of the church community they are joining. The data suggest that by reinvigorating this new-member process, we will create more engaged new members who stay at Ascension.

The congregation is most interested in making sure we are developing our church for current members as well as reaching out to our local community to share the Gospel.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

In 2010 the church removed 667 members as a result of cleaning up its database.³

Adjusted for that change, Church membership has been flat for the past 7 years and up slightly since 2000.³

Affirmation of faith appears to be the largest source of new members adding 311 members since 2007.³

IMPLICATIONS

Ascension annual reports suggest a significant decrease in membership in 2009, that bump was presumably due to a purge of the membership roster of inactive, moved or deceased members.

Ascension membership (*not worship attendance, which is a more meaningful metric!*) is actually flat to slightly up, over the last 7 years which bucks a national ELCA trend.

Further research is needed here to determine who these individuals are and their reasons for having joined ALC (as opposed to other churches, Lutheran or non-Lutheran).

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

We must find a way to increase participation and volunteerism.²

Our survey respondents were mostly long-term members who worship regularly. 73% of respondents were 10+ year members. 86% of respondents worship at least 2x per month.¹

The survey listed 15 statements about “congregational family” issues. The one with the strongest agreement was: “Members help each other out in times of trouble.”¹

The aging population of the church membership is a blessing.^{2,5}

We should find opportunities to mentor – between older adult and youth. Help our seniors share their experience/life lessons with youth.⁵

IMPLICATIONS

The survey data suggest that people universally see a need to increase participation in our ministries. “God’s work, our hands” is a cornerstone of the ELCA Lutheran experience, and it needs to be developed at Ascension. As the world evolves and people’s lives become complicated, they are asking for more creative ways to be involved in ways that align-with their busy lives. They also expect to be invited to participate.

Our responding church members are long-tenured folks who have been participating for a long time. They also regularly attend worship.

Ascension members consider themselves part of a tight-knit family. The people who responded to the survey feel loved and supported by other members. They also feel the same about the Pastors and the intimacy of the worship service.

The senior members of the congregation are a resource and the heart of the church. We should further utilize their time, talents and treasures to develop the church’s ministries and outreach.

There is a wealth of experience, desire and opportunity for our seniors to help the next generation of believers to understand the role God could be playing in their lives and how a vibrant faith can be helpful in meeting life’s challenges.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

69% of survey respondents have lived in the area for 20+ years.¹

ALC is an overwhelming white congregation with 97% of its reporting members claiming “white” as their racial ethnicity.¹

The racial ethnicity of the surrounding area reflects that same trend although 65% of people living in the MSA report “white” ethnicity.³

Worship attendance is down and very low recently. A relatively small percentage of members regularly attend. The data also suggest that – other than on Christmas and Easter – we have a very small number of non-members attending.⁴

Worship attendance was relatively flat from 2000 – 2008. Since 2009 the worshipping trend has decreased each year with 2014 being the lowest in decades.^{4,2}

IMPLICATIONS

Many of Ascension’s members are longtime members of the community with strong ties. This could be one of the reasons there is such a strong desire to focus more on local area and community outreach and ministries.

As the church seeks to grow and be more evangelical in its outreach, care should be taken to be aware of this and address it wherever possible, especially as the local Hispanic population grows.

Although not heterogeneous, the surrounding area does offer some opportunity for outreach, especially to Hispanics. Future evangelism plans should have a goal to try to reach out to underrepresented groups where possible.

This aligns with a national trend line of apathy and disconnection that is manifesting itself through lower attendance in churches throughout the U.S. Ascension has never been a church that worships a large percentage of members regularly. Data do not show any trend where one service was suffering the most from attendance decreases. The Confirmation program and the traditional worship services seem to be anchors that we should look at more closely to help increase worship attendance.

The worshipping church stopped growing in 2003 at an average attendance of 849. Worship attendance has been trending down for some time. The 2014/2015 attendance numbers are in the low 500’s, and **this trend needs to be considered very seriously.** Worship service attendance is a strong indicator of the vitality of the church.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

Actual confirmations remain constant with a lightly upward trend.^{4,5}

On average about one fourth (~25%) of members regularly attend worship services.⁴

The 9:30 service is by far our most popular. 50% of attendees go to that service.⁴

More purposeful invitations need to be made by members to one another to engage in a new or already-existing ministry, group or activity.⁵

IMPLICATIONS

Confirmations remain constant. However, attendance at confirmation classes is down, suggesting that while parents feel a strong need / desire to confirm their children, they may not be fully committed to their attendance. When we think about growth, it is important to consider the positive impact a strong confirmation program can have.

25% is a low number – not alarming, but low. When you consider that membership is flat and attendance is down, the data suggest apathy and a disconnection of the rank and file members.

Although each service has a devout following, the traditional 9:30 is the overwhelming favorite. Effort should be made through further research to determine why. Is it preference for the traditional liturgy, time of day or simply logistics?

A recurring theme is the need for us to reach out to each other – to invite each other and for Ascension to expand its network of “friends”. We have very strong communities within the church, but they can sometimes become isolated. Some members who worship at 8 a.m. don’t recognize members at the 11 a.m. service and vice versa. Ministries are a critical conduit to us creating “One Ascension”

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

Ministries – We need to reprioritize the ALC experience outside the worship service

KEY FINDING

8

Although ministries have been a strength for ALC, many have become unmanaged, unfunded, and deprioritized. The youth ministry stands out as an urgent need.

IMPLICATION

A critical part of the ALC experience, the many ministries we offer have been the things that define our church outside the worship service. There is a perception that this is no longer an area of focus and strength. Sunday school, Luther League, Confirmation Class participation is down, but not because membership wants it to be; staffing and energies should be focused there.

FINDINGS

There is a perception of strong programs.²

Many feel a ministry coordinator is needed.²

More small groups.^{2,5}

IMPLICATIONS

Our church community offers many ways for people to grow in Christ. They (our programs) are a strength and beloved by participants. There is a perception that we could do a better job of communicating what is available as well as coordinating them all together. The church should create a task force to evaluate all the ministries we offer to ensure they are all aligned with who we are as a community, our vision, and that we are resourcing those opportunities to maximize impact and participation.

One opportunity to consider as we grow and develop our ministries is the need for a dedicated ministry coordinator. The perception is that Ascension has had great success with someone in that role in the past and that it should be considered as a part of the ministries evaluation committee.

There is a contingent of individuals who feel affectionately about the small group ministry and would love to see that specific ministry revisited and developed. This could be a particularly critical element if we are successful in attracting new members and want to anchor them effectively in the congregation.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

Members would like to see more care for seniors.^{1,5}

People would like more adult education opportunities.^{1,2,5}

The most popular category of response to the “single best idea” question on the survey had to do with ministries. The most popular ministries response was “expand/enhance youth ministry” (24 responses).^{1, 5}

Individuals would get more involved in ministries and activities if they were invited.⁵

The highest amount of interest among Congregational Visioning Event attendees is in addressing the needs of two specific populations – youth/young adults and older adults/seniors.⁵

IMPLICATIONS

The Community Leaders Event, the surveys and interviews point to a need and desire to offer help to seniors both on the church campus as well as in their homes and communities. Senior care, caregiver assistance and handyman ministries are all possibilities.

There has been a decline in the opportunities and value of the adult educational programs. There are many reasons for this. One of them is that structure of our worship service forces members to choose between their desired worship experience and broader educational opportunities. The church should consider the possibility of restructuring the entire Sunday morning and weekly church experience to ensure alignment with all the opportunities.

The youth ministry development is a must-have and needs to be comprehensive in its scope – from pre-school to senior high program, including Sunday school. A former strength for our church, the youth ministries program has become not relevant as is demonstrated by the waning attendance and survey data. Focusing on the youth program is a mission-critical issue to be addressed immediately to ensure health of the organization moving forward.

There is a strong desire for people to be asked to participate. The “menu of services and offerings” approach we have taken has reached many of the people inclined to seek out opportunities. However, some members want to be invited. *(Note: Some of those interviewed indicated that they had submitted their “time and talents” form last year and had never received a call inviting them to participate in the areas they had expressed interest.)*

Addressing these two demographic groups will shore up our ministries offering as well as address a lot of our evangelism needs.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

More social experiences that members could join to engage more deeply with other members were very popular ideas at the Congregational Visioning Event.⁵

Find opportunities for entire families to engage in ministry and activities together.^{5,3}

Discernment of member talents to match community needs.^{5,6}

IMPLICATIONS

These findings are consistent with the data that suggest members are friends with the people they go to church with. People are looking for social things they can do with like-minded believers. The Percept data suggest that by increasing these offerings we also create a church experience that aligns with the very important youth and young adult demographic from an evangelism perspective.

Data suggest that one of the things that members, as well as the community, yearn for is a way to improve relationships within their family and with their children. The data suggest that our church and our community trend above the national average for nuclear family presence. Caution should be taken to not alienate those without this experience, but by bolstering our commitment to highly functioning families, we can address a significant demand and need.

Ascension is a generous congregation, and it reflects the best of the Lutheran experience in a desire to help and serve. Some members struggle with understanding how to engage their talents in a way that is meaningful and aligned with their schedules. If the church became more purposeful in being the conduit to help connect talent to task, a significant amount of resources would become available, which in turn could become a meaningful witness to the community.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

Church/School/Foundation – We must pursue the creation of “One Ascension” as a definition of who we are

KEY FINDING

9 There is a perception that we are operating as three separate entities. There is also a strong desire to have each of the functioning groups at Ascension work more closely together.

IMPLICATION

The relationship between the Church Leadership, Church Council, School Leadership and Staff, as well as the Ascension Foundation has been variable over the years. There is a strong desire and mandate from the members to eliminate these tensions and make our best practices routine.

FINDINGS

The organization is siloed in a way that is preventing it from being fully effective.²

We need to continue improving communication.²

Leverage the day school to invite new members.²

IMPLICATIONS

To be effective the organization has to be integrated and working together. There needs to be a deliberate vision and effort to align the organization to become “One Ascension”.

Lack of a deliberate communication process between these organizations creates leadership gaps and siloing. The notion of “one Ascension” as a defining ethos of who we are is a goal to be pursued. It is important that the new Senior Pastor be a shepherd of this commitment and ensure that we are communicating and that those communications are aligned with a shared vision of who we are.

As a ministry of the church, the school should be a resource and way to reach out to the broader community. It offers a very positive and a quality education experience. The students attending are from families and represent the demographic we need to reach. The church should strive to create more proactive outreach programs designed to invite the school families to become active members of Ascension.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

Responses during the Congregational Visioning Event indicate a need for more communications – both internally and externally – to help members and individuals in the community become aware of what is already going on at Ascension.⁵

IMPLICATIONS

Our church communicates a lot. We are experts at using the internet (the Web Site, Facebook, etc), e-mail, bulletins and newsletters and the announcements on Sunday to give out a lot of information. Yet, the data suggest we are not communicating effectively. Survey and interview data as well as the Congregational Visioning Event suggest that it's not the volume of information that is the issue. It may be the prioritization. The Visioning Team believes that a specific work stream should be created to investigate how better to communicate within Ascension and to the outside world.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

Facility – Members would like to see better care taken of our facilities and a greater focus on how they can help us accomplish our mission

KEY FINDING

10 There is a strong desire to take better care of the physical property we already have.

IMPLICATION

The maintenance of our existing facilities should be addressed. The facility is a rich resource and a blessing. It offers us opportunities for ministries and outreach that wouldn't exist otherwise.

FINDINGS

Our land and facilities is a rich resource with limitless development opportunities.^{1,5}

Master Plan should be revisited.²

Sanctuary ladies room is abysmal.¹

Make the Ascension campus more of a center for the community.¹

IMPLICATIONS

As we create a Vision and plan for where Ascension will go, we need to make sure we are being good stewards of the blessing we have in our facilities, and also ensuring that the opportunities it creates to accomplish our goals is an integral part of our planning process.

Regardless of the Master Plan issue at hand, the current Master Plan is not broadly understood by the congregation and is polarizing for some members.

The sorry state of the restrooms off the sanctuary is a distraction and universally perceived as an urgent issue to address. This specific item was mentioned numerous times in survey responses.

There is a strong feeling that the facility could be developed in many ways to reach out to our current members as well as a resource for our evangelism and outreach. A community center is an example of a big idea along these lines.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event

FINDINGS

More use of the Dugout.²

11% of our “single best idea” responses had to do with our facility in one way or another. Of these, the most popular response was “better maintain our property”.¹

There is a desire to create a “green” campus that will demonstrate to the community our commitment to the Earth as a gift from God.^{2,5}

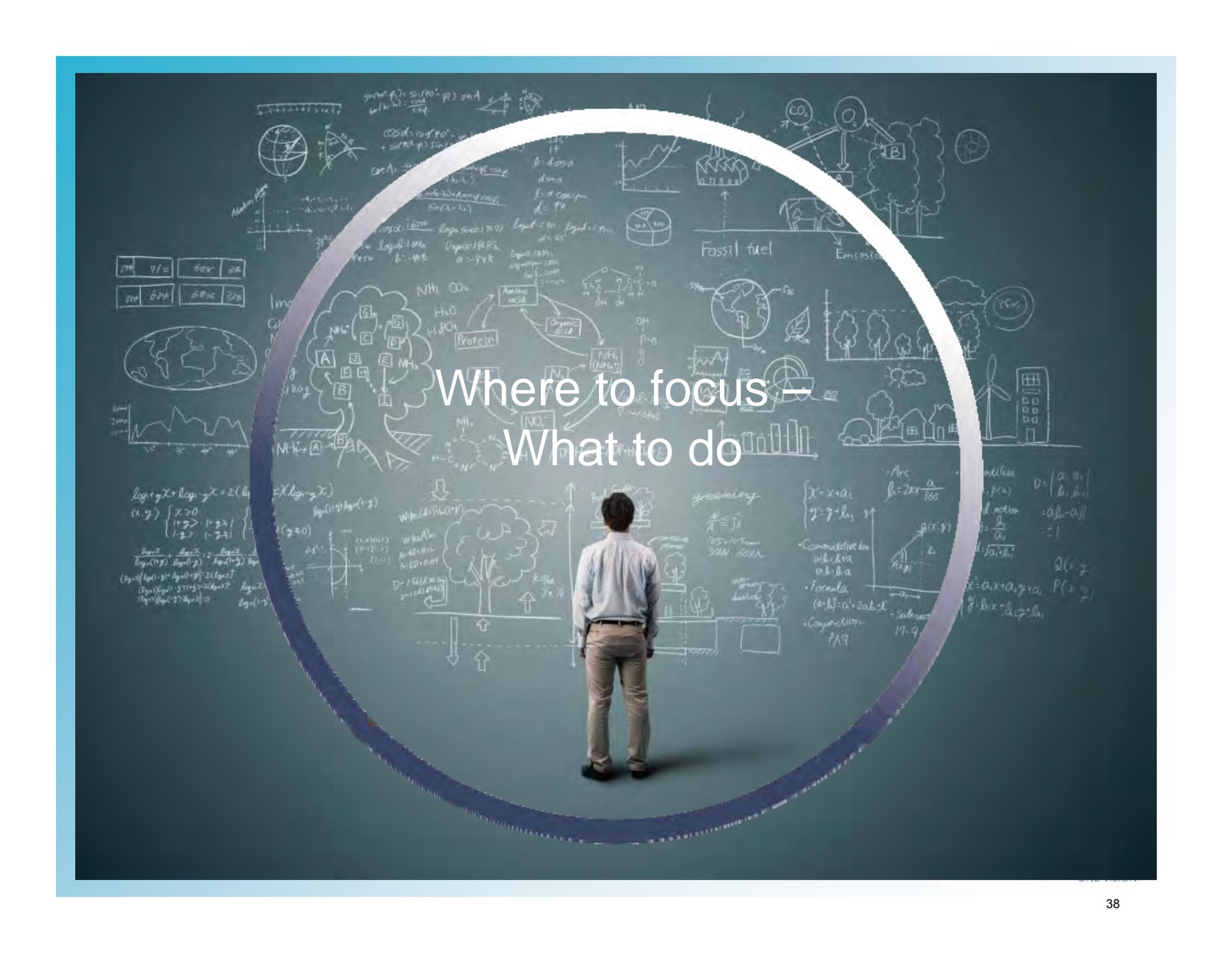
IMPLICATIONS

This is a holdover of the desire to change the way we use the facility and break away from old rules about use and opportunities.

Our facilities are viewed by our members and the public alike. They are the face of Ascension and tell others about how much (or how little) we care about them and our ministries. Throughout the Visioning data gathering process we were reminded by members of the importance they place on properly maintaining our facilities (landscaping, meeting rooms, sanctuary, etc.), which is not always being maintained to high standards.

Stewardship of the planet demonstrates our commitment to God’s gifts to us. The environment is a very resonant message with youth and by demonstrating these values we create an effective evangelism tool we can use to reach that group. The garden helps us in that evangelism and inreach. Members expressed an interest in looking at other opportunities, such as solar energy, more purposeful recycling, etc.

1. ALVT Congregational Survey, 2. ALVT interview Data, 3. 2015 Percept Ministry Area Profiles Report, 4. ALC Annual Trends Report Summary, 5. ALVT Congregation Wide Visioning Event, 6. ALVT Community Leaders Event



Where to focus –
What to do

WHERE TO FOCUS

1

Worship

2

Evangelism & Outreach

3

Family, youth and young
adult ministries

WHAT TO DO

- Reinvigorate Saturday nights and Sunday mornings
- Revisit worship times and style offerings to attract and retain worshippers of all age groups.
- Better integrate Adult Ed into Sunday mornings; consider “study time” between two services.
- Provide more attractive opportunities for worshippers to remain on campus before, between and after services.
- Seek a two-hour weekend time commitment from members and visitors.

- Develop and promote an evangelism culture at Ascension with the expectation that members continually invite others. Set specific goals.
- Develop guides, programs and education that equip members in effective evangelism.
- Develop events (both secular and spiritual) that bring the community onto the campus and provide opportunities for evangelism.

- More purposefully reach out to and engage ALS parents and students as participants in the ministries of Ascension; increase ALC membership among ALS parents.
- Leverage time and talents of older adult members of Ascension in reaching out to youth as mentors.
- Develop more programs that attract and serve young adults, esp. millennials.
- Use CLU students as additional part time staff members to help with our development of youth programs and young adult ministries.

WHERE TO FOCUS

4

The Church Organization
& Staffing

5

“One Ascension”

WHAT TO DO

- Determine whether Ascension should follow a lay ministry or staff-driven model.
- If Ascension returns to a more lay-ministry-driven model, develop guides, programs and education that equip members for leadership in ministry.
- Realign staff positions to support key ministries and activities
- Completely review staff qualifications and performance levels to determine fit in new roles.
- Better align all of Ascension’s diverse ministries and activities to support the overall mission of the congregation
- Develop a more robust internal and external communications process so that Ascension members and the community better understand our mission and how to plug into it.
- More purposefully unite church, school and Foundation to create a more cohesive ministry.
- Create more frequent touch points between Ascension’s different groups/ministries.
- Eliminate ministries that have low participation.

A photograph of a person's hand pointing at a visioning map on a whiteboard. The map is a grid with several rows and columns, containing text and numbers. The hand is in the foreground, pointing towards the map. The background is a blurred office setting with a window. A large, semi-transparent blue circle is overlaid on the image, framing the hand and the map. The text "Visioning Maps" is centered within this circle.

Visioning Maps

Goals

- For Ascension to have a dynamic worship experience that is grounded in Lutheran theology and tradition and appeals to a broad constituency of believers
- To have a large number of attending worshipers participate in activities in addition to attendance at worship services

Objectives

- Evolve the worship experience at Ascension to address the needs of a more broad group of potential worshipers without alienating a strong core of current members.
- Develop and provide opportunities for worshippers to remain on campus before, between and after services.
- Ensure all attendees understand and know how to participate in all the worship opportunities available to them.

Drivers

Ascension has a strong core group of attending members that appreciate and love our church, and their worship experience.

Our Pastors are beloved by the congregation and grounded in bible based, Lutheran theology.

Barriers

The current weekly worship experience is centered around participation in a 1 hour "worship Event."

The current traditional service is appreciated by our worshipers but younger people and the unchurched seek a more contemporary service style.

People may not be aware of the changes occurring and not able to participate as a result. Success will require a robust communications campaign.

Spiritual Imperatives

Create and charge a task force to work with Pastoral leadership to revisit worship times and style offerings as well as revise our weekly ministries to attract and retain worshippers of all age groups.

Develop programs and ministries that expand the Sunday morning experience to include Adult Ed, Youth, and social opportunities that are aligned with peoples needs.

Expand the Saturday / Contemporary service offerings and make it a more prominent part of the worship service experience.

Develop a communication plan that informs people about the changes that are occurring and invites them to participate.

Goals

- To grow Ascension’s average weekly worship attendance XX% (*Council decides*) by January 2020
- To be a church organization that reaches out to the community and makes evangelism part of its daily life, inviting others to worship with us and become a part of the Ascension family
- Be an organization that is diverse in its membership and is welcoming to all

Objectives

- Create a culture of evangelism that pervades the organizational DNA.
- Ensure a deliberate process to create programs that are targeted to specific demographic groups as well as and have an annual plan that is targeting invitation and growth.
- Work to identify who the priority opportunities are for evangelism and outreach.

Drivers

Lutheran theology and our Pastors are strengths that can be leveraged for Evangelical outreach.

There is a significant number of people in the Percept area that identify as Christian that do not have a church home.

Barriers

Evangelism and Outreach will require behavioral change and effort that may be resisted by membership.

Parts of our existing liturgy and operations are not always as accessible or inviting as possible for visitors .

Ascension is not as ethnically diverse as the Percept area surrounding the church.

Spiritual Imperatives

Create a task force as a part of the Evangelism and Outreach Committee to identify target demographic groups that are high potential opportunities for outreach and build guides, programs and education that equip members in effective evangelism. Make them annual, regular evangelism efforts that are in constant execution.

As a part of the Evangelism & Outreach effort create a church campaign to ensure the church understands the issue, the problem, and desired outcome.

As a part of the worship evaluation process, ensure that we are pressure-testing our worship process and ensure it is welcoming in nature.

Identify racial, cultural and socioeconomic opportunities in our surrounding areas and target those opportunities as a part of our evangelism efforts.

Goals

- To be a church that is offering families, young adults and youth opportunities to follow Christ that align with their specific needs and faith/life journeys
- To regain robust participation in our youth ministries program from pre-K to high school
- To target and grow participating of 18- to 35-year-olds by XX% (*Council decides*) by 2020

Objectives

- Build a world class youth program that is aligned with young people’s needs, that is fun and helps them on their personal faith journey through active participation.
- Ensure a strong relationship between ALS families and the church.
- Align our youth programs with issues and concerns that resonate with them and challenge them.

Drivers

Our facility and the surrounding area are resources to be leveraged to align with the needs of this demographic.

Our membership and history offer a wealth of resources to address the needs of young people and families.

Barriers

There does not appear to be a current outreach or offering specifically aimed at young adults.

Lack of a long-term commitment to a youth ministries pastor / leader.

Old programs and ministry offerings are not aligned with the needs of young people today.

Spiritual Imperatives

Make a deliberate effort and create and/or grow specific ministries that make youth, young adults and young families a priority. Leverage existing families, and the older adult members of the congregation as resources to help align these programs.

Develop a program that reaches out to CLU students to identify opportunities for evangelism and direction for ministries' that will resonate with younger individuals.

It is a mission critical need for the health of the church to identify, hire and empower a dynamic youth pastor or leader once the current leader leaves.

Form a task force to reevaluate ministry opportunities that specifically target youth, young adults, and families.

Goals

- To create a highly professional church organization that develops strong organizational acumen
- To have a church organization that has the proper mix of pastoral, lay staff and volunteers to optimally realize Ascension’s vision
- To create an organization that possesses and is trained in all the skills needed to provide more effective administration of all elements at Ascension

Objectives

- Define and implement the most appropriate organization size and structure to carry out Ascension’s mission.
- Develop all goal, review and evaluation processes and procedures to empower the organization.
- Create a staffing plan that clearly defines the goals and expectations for each individual engaged in a leadership or staff position.

Drivers

Staff is very supportive of each other and work well together as a team. There is a strong service culture within the church.

We are a church with a dynamic history and infrastructure.

Barriers

The current organization lacks, organizational and financial acumen and training.

The organization is siloed and resources are not always aligned with ministries and efforts.

A reorganized staffing structure may create some skill set and performance gaps with current staff.

Spiritual Imperatives

Create a task force of organizational structure and/or H.R. professionals from the congregation to build, from the ground up, the appropriate organizational structure to implement the vision and mission plan.

Develop and fully implement a training program that addresses the needs of the entire organization.

Realign staff positions to support key ministries and activities that align with the congregation’s Vision.

Completely review qualifications and performance levels of staff to determine fit in new roles.

Goals

- To be an organization that aligns all of Ascension’s ministries, activities and staff structure to more strategically support the congregation’s mission.
- To bring together church, school and Foundation into better missional alignment.
- To be laser-focused on ministries and activities that offer the greatest benefits and the greatest opportunity for success.

Objectives

- Refocus all Ascension entities on the congregation’s overall mission, and align all ministries, activities and staffing around that.
- Eliminate all ministries, activities and staffing that no longer support the mission or have low participation.
- Help each group at Ascension understand how it fits into the bigger picture of ministry and build bridges between those groups to share resources and information. (Resurrect monthly All-Committee Night? Conduct conference calls? Other ideas?)

Drivers

There is interest by members in all three entities of church, school and Foundation.

There is high potential for Ascension to leverage the combined efforts of church, school, Foundation and other groups in the church to effective ministry.

Barriers

Even engaged members of Ascension say they feel disconnected from other ministries/groups.

Much of the communication to members separates into church, school or Foundation with few connection points.

Current lay ministry and church staffing may not align with a more purposeful vision (esp. around evangelism) and an integration of church, school and Foundation.

Spiritual Imperatives

Revisit coordination and communication among church, school and Foundation to better align with Ascension’s mission, especially in addressing challenges identified in the Visioning endeavor – such as evangelism and outreach, ministry to youth and services to seniors.

Better integrating Ascension’s many ministries might require a Senior Pastor who has more of a CEO role.

Conduct an audit of all ministries and activities to determine current participation levels and the potential for growth – all aligned with Ascension’s mission.

Revisit all pastoral, lay ministry and staff positions to determine if they align with Ascension’s mission.

What Success Looks Like . . .

‘Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**’

Acts 2:46-47

Context

This report, created in April 2016, is a sincere effort to reflect data and opinion from a very wide variety of sources and a large number of individuals and groups, hopefully under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In spite of painstaking work and close review by the Ascension Visioning Team, there will surely be omissions and an occasional inaccuracy in this report.

As with many projects in which the Spirit's direction is sought, this report is a living document. It is not intended to be a final say in Ascension's Visioning process but rather to open dialogue and inform the work of future task forces, working groups and a possible Call Committee.

We hope that this report provides stimulus and a clear direction for ongoing conversations and ultimate decisions regarding the future of Ascension Lutheran Church.

Appendices

<p>A. <u>Congregational Survey</u> <i>[Activity E>2016-Ascension-Vision-Survey-Results.pdf] [Activity E>Final Survey Question Summary.xls – all worksheets except last two]</i></p>	<p>Over the course of a month, the Visioning Team gathered 369 survey responses, representing more than half of ALC’s worshipping attendance. The complete survey results are shown in this appendix, along with some summary slides.</p>
<p>B. <u>Visioning Team Interviews</u> <i>[Activity J>Tally of Visioning Interviews.pdf]</i></p>	<p>The Visioning Team conducted 46 interviews, including the 3 rostered pastors, 9 non-rostered pastors who attend Ascension, the individual leaders of some of our church ministries, group interviews of others, and some members-at-large. To ensure confidentiality, specific data from the interviews will not be made available. A summary of our interview findings are presented in this appendix.</p>
<p>C. <u>2015 Percept Ministry Area Profile Report</u> <i>[Activity B>Percept Ministry Area Profile 11-11-2015.pdf]</i></p>	<p>This appendix contains a complete and detailed community demographic package for a 10 mile radius around ALC, compiled by Percept Group, Inc.</p>
<p>D. <u>ALC Annual Trends Report Summary</u> <i>[Activity D>Review of ALC Annual Reports ~ 2009-2015.pdf]</i></p>	<p>An ALVT review of ALC annual reports from September 2010 to September 2015.</p>

Appendices

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| <p>E. <u>Visioning Team Congregational Visioning Event Summary</u>
<i>[Activity I>Congregational Visioning Event Summary.pdf]</i></p> | <p>On March 6, 2016 the Visioning Team conducted group brainstorming exercise open to all confirmed members of Ascension. Approximately 175 members participated. A summary of the findings from this event are contained in this appendix.</p> |
| <p>F. <u>Visioning Team Community Leaders Event Summary</u>
<i>[Activity H>Community Leaders Event Summary.pdf]</i></p> | <p>On February 21, 2016 the Visioning Team hosted a panel of eight community leaders on our campus. Each leader was given a chance to present community concerns that ALC might be able to address through its ministries. Over 200 of our members were on hand and had an opportunity to pose questions. Due to time constraints, not all questions were able to be fielded by the panel. The results of this activity are presented in this appendix.</p> |
| <p>G. <u>Church and National Social Trends</u>
<i>[Activity A>Church and National Social Trends.pdf]</i></p> | <p>A collection of research articles from Pew, The Barna Group, the ELCA, Nielsen and other sources, along with findings.</p> |