

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH
LONG RANGE PLANNING TASK FORCE FINDINGS

Mission Statement: We are called, gathered and blessed to be a community and instrument of grace for all sheep of the Good Shepherd.

I. **Introduction:**

The Long Range Planning Task Force (LRPTF) was selected by the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (GSLC) Council in the fall of 2023. It consists of Gina Crittenden, Pete Dumpis, Tony Endozo, Michael Epstein, Donna Garges and Anna Louise Panhorst. This group is guided by our Interim Pastor Karen Boda and utilized multiple tools, including the books *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going* by Susan Beaumont and *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* by Michael R. Ward. The Chair of the task force is Tony Endozo and Gina Crittenden and Donna Garges co-chair Communication duties, providing updates to both Council and the Congregation. The task force is intentional in praying that the Holy Spirit is always with us in our efforts and discussions and is represented by a lit candle at each meeting.

Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me” has guided the work of this Task Force.

For reference see Good Shepherd Lutheran Constitution:

C12.04. The Congregation Council shall have general oversight of the life and activities of this congregation, and in particular its worship life, to the end that everything be done in accordance with the Word of God and the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The duties of the congregation Council shall include the following:

A. To lead this congregation in stating its mission, to do long-range planning, to set goals and priorities, and to evaluate its activities in light of its mission and goals.

NOTE: Questions have been raised about the role of the LRPTF, particularly in relation to the Call Committee. The role of the LRPTF is to provide input regarding desired goals and future plans for GSLC, but it is not chartered with, nor has responsibility for, defining the characteristics of the next pastor. While LRPTF envisions that its work will provide guidance to the next Call Committee, it is a completely separate entity.

II. Collaborations with the Congregation:

After several initial meetings, beginning on November 8, 2023, the LRPTF decided on two projects. First, was the history timeline, “Together on Our Good Shepherd Journey.” This was displayed in the Fellowship Hall and allowed members to share special moments and milestones in the life of the congregation, the church, and their personal faith journeys. LRPTF encouraged the congregation to fondly recall and share memorable events from our church history in a positive, healing way that would help lay a foundation for the forward-looking work that lay ahead.

The second, and primary focus of LRPTF, were the two “Circle Conversations.” These communal discussions were undertaken with two goals in mind. First, it sought to recognize the congregation’s desire to provide feedback into both the long-range plan and the call process. Second, LRPTF sought to augment and confirm the feedback provided by the Appreciative Inquiry interviews undertaken by the Council at the end of 2021.

- LRPTF utilized an open conversation method so that congregation members could share their feedback in a collective environment. This served as a way to broaden the conversation, hear other voices outside of our own echo chambers, cross worship service boundaries, and develop a sense of excitement and unity for the future. We believe that this was accomplished.
- Approximately 100 congregation members participated in these two three-hour sessions, conducted on January 27, 2024, and February 4, 2024.
- Five questions were asked at the Circle Conversations:
 1. How do you see Good Shepherd in the community going forward to serve?
 2. What church values do you feel most passionate about?
 3. What would you take with us in the future? What would you leave behind?
 4. If the church had \$100,000 to invest today, how would you spend it?
 5. What did we not ask you that you would like to share with us?

After the Circle Conversations, LRPTF met multiple times to identify consistent themes, values, and messages.

III. **A Note on Liminality:**

Life is full of liminal experiences- times when something has ended, but the new thing has not yet begun. During the Circle Conversations, and in daily church life, LRPTF heard some church members express a readiness to move forward to the next stage. LRPTF thinks it is important to note that while liminal seasons can be unsettling and uncomfortable, this is a normal, even desirable, stage as GSLC prepares for its next phase. (See *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*).

IV. **Summary:**

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is an ELCA congregation of engaged leaders who care deeply for one another, our Lutheran faith, and the mission God has called us to in the community. We are a people of grace who aspire to welcome all in our worship, our outreach, our programs, our fellowship and our education. Seeking to build on our strengths, GSLC can grow in the next three to five years by maximizing our outreach opportunities and nurturing our multigenerational connections within the congregation.

V. **Observations on Core Values:**

The above conclusion is based on information gathered in the conversations with the congregation. These observations are also validated by the data gathered from the Appreciative Inquiries.

1. We are proudly Lutheran, and this element needs to be maintained in all worship and education events. Concepts such as grace and forgiveness for all, open communion, and the baptism of children were deemed vital to our Lutheran experience.
2. The ideal of “all are welcome” is a core value and strength that was emphasized throughout the conversations. There is always room to evolve and grow, however, and it will be exciting for GSLC to seek new opportunities to welcome our neighbors. Honest communication and a willingness to consider fresh ideas will be important.
3. All members are important and valued. It is recognized that the congregation is aging. There is also excitement and energy surrounding our youth and their activities.
4. There is a desire to continue doing everything that we've always done, but the flesh is not always willing or able. Volunteers are at a premium. In addition, staffing has been

reduced, and the impact on the current staff is significant and needs to be considered in discussions going forward.

Note: Amidst our interactions and data gathering with the congregation, the Task Force found an interesting absence of conversation around the updating of, or changes to, the Praise Service despite being a significant topic in the 2022 MSP. Upon sharing this information with GSLC Council, they asked LRPTF to explore the issue further. The Task Force held an online focus group discussion regarding the Praise Service; the resulting report can be found attached herein as Appendix A.

VI. **Opportunities for Consideration:**

While not part of the summary above, LRPTF identified the following opportunities for consideration:

1. When it comes to outreach, there is a sense that we are wide but not deep. There is a desire for GSLC to be known in the area, have a core identity, plus gain more face-to-face time with our neighbors while out serving in the community. However, there was also discussion that the current arrangement may make it difficult to achieve these goals.
2. Being a multigenerational church is a critical part of who we are and who we desire to be in the future. We must find innovative ways to attract all ages, then foster connections and relationships among members of all life stages, so all are cared for, valued, and nurtured as Christ has cared for and nurtured us.
3. The lack of a specified Evangelism Committee has led to decreased attention to our call to welcome and witness into the community. GSLC has a message of grace and acceptance for all that is not well known in the immediate neighborhood or the regional areas that we serve. There is also a lack of understanding within the community of what it is to be a Lutheran. We believe that GSLC is different and has much to offer to our neighbors. We need to reevaluate our ideas about evangelism.
4. Our immediate neighborhood is surrounded by schools and young families. As an example, 100 children use our building each day at Child's Play Preschool. This relationship with Child's Play, and potentially other young families in our community, should be fostered and developed in the near future. We have an opportunity to welcome and witness to these families through weekly preschool chapel, common outreach initiatives, additional invitations to congregation events, and scholarships for families who need assistance.
5. There is support for increased attention for the provision and enlargement of an endowment to support GSLC today and into the future --providing for capital

improvements, support of new ministries in our community, scholarships for those attending ELCA colleges or seminaries, ministries of the ELCA and more. This work has already begun and should continue, but the congregation needs to be aware of it. More information about the Endowment Fund and other forms of legacy giving would be appropriate moving forward. The Mission Endowment Committee was established pursuant to our Constitution to manage the assets of the Endowment Fund. The current Committee, consisting of Patrick Swinford, Jaime Escamilla, Margaret Mixon, Tracey Homer and Chuck Storla, is working with the ELCA Foundation to update our policy and create a Gift Acceptance Policy.

VII. **Conclusion:**

GSLC is engaged, involved, faithful, and excited for the future ministry. We will certainly face challenges moving forward, but there are many reasons to be positive about the road ahead. While the LRPTF is a representation of the congregation at GSLC, we feel that the congregation and Council, led by the Holy Spirit, will be the key components of what comes next.

APPENDIX A:

LRPTF Report to Council: Updated Findings Regarding Praise Service

In response to the GSLC Council's request that the Long Range Planning Task Force (LRPTF) collect more information with regard to the lack of data surrounding the Praise Worship Service, the LRPTF conducted an online Focus Group discussion on May 15, 2024. We had 14 attendees (not including task force members) and a little over half of these regularly attend the 10:45 Praise Service.

The LRPTF revealed to the panel that there had been a discrepancy between comments made about the Praise Service during Appreciative Inquiry Interviews several years ago and the lack of remarks during Circle Conversations several months ago. After a fruitful and faith-led discussion, there was no clear conclusion; however, the following points emerged:

1. The desire to maintain the Lutheran aspect of this worship was confirmed; while not a traditional service, the Lutheran elements are still of great importance. This is not a seeker service (because it is so clearly Lutheran), but it is a simpler entry point for visitors.
2. We prefer participation over performance based worship; we enjoy singing along and joining in the service versus having someone perform for the congregation. However, there was no real conclusion on best practices for congregational involvement (providing lyrics versus lyrics plus music, screens versus bulletins, etc.)
3. There was agreement on technology improvements, such as better sound quality and audio enhancements for livestream, even painted walls for projection. However, there was a lack of energy and enthusiasm for budgeting for larger improvements.
4. Some value the contemporary, more relaxed style of the service while others prioritize the convenience of the later time of the service (leaving it unclear which element is driving attendance).
5. It will be important to find a pastor that values, contributes to and seeks to improve both Traditional and Praise styles of worship.

While there is no definitive answer to the question as to why the Praise Service was a concern during Appreciative Inquiry and not during Circle Conversations, it does not seem to be a priority in need of overhaul, but rather a worship experience that could use some fine-tuning.