



Spring 2021

A Congregational Strategic Plan

Equipping the Saints

Muhlenberg Lutheran Church

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Strategic Mission Plan DRAFT, spring 2021

Muhlenberg Lutheran Church

“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift... The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

--Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

Introduction to the Strategic Plan

In 2019, a group of leaders gathered to begin the work of this Strategic Plan. It was an exciting time: Muhlenberg was in the midst of a period of great transition, and energy for forward momentum was high. Over the course of several Congregational Council retreats, the beginnings of this plan were sketched out. We could not have dreamed that very soon the world would be forever changed by a global pandemic and work on this plan would have to be set aside to attend to the immediate concerns of being church in this strange new world.

But this work was not forgotten, and revisiting the plan over the fall and winter of 2020 revealed that while our methods may change (hello, digital ministry!) our core commitments remain. Guided in particular by the fourth chapter of Ephesians, our leaders explored together what it means to live within God’s grace. We are held by the calling of God, given to one another by the Spirit, and united in Christ who is the head of the whole body. We are gifted in many diverse ways, and brought together to share those gifts for the sake of the world. As we strive to be a wellspring of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we live out our mission to equip all people to live out Christ’s love.

The title of this document, therefore, is *Equipping the Saints*. We envision our congregation as a place for spiritual growth, deepened relationships, and transformational love. When we gather, we are equipped to participate in faith practices that nourish and nurture our lifelong growth as children of God. This plan is a road map for the next several years as we seek to learn and grow together.

What this plan is *not*, however, is finished. We intend this to be a living document, constantly being updated and shaped and formed by the gifts of every member of the Muhlenberg community. As you read, feel free to get out a pen and start marking this document with the dreams God has placed on your heart. Find ways to engage in the living out of these plans and bring the gifts you have been given. Each and every one of us has the responsibility of ensuring the success of this plan.

In 1849, when a small group of Lutherans gathered to form a congregation in the newly-incorporated town of Harrisonburg (population 713), they likely could not have dreamed that their humble gathering would grow into the Muhlenberg Lutheran Church we know today. Likewise, as we approach our 175th anniversary as a congregation, we have no way of knowing what the next 175 years will bring. But like that faithful group of founders, we trust that the Holy Spirit is leading us forward, united in Christ, equipping us for the work of ministry in this place. Thanks be to God!

--Pastor Lauren Eanes and Pastor Alex Zuber, April 15, 2021

About the Development of This Strategic Plan

Through a series of conversations with staff and congregational leaders, Muhlenberg's Congregational Council prayerfully developed this plan over the course of 2 years. Using Michael Ward's book *Abundance* as a guide, we recommitted ourselves to our vision for ministry and core values, while also seeking an active statement of mission. We asked questions about what ministries we truly valued with our time and resources, and discerned where we wanted to focus our energy in the future. This produced key focus areas for ministry that were discussed and refined over time. Our Congregational Council asked faithful and honest questions about who we are and what our purpose is for our wider community, and began to set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely goals (S.M.A.R.T. goals) for seeing our vision for ministry come to fruition.

In the Strategic plan that follows you will find a clear articulation of our congregational identity through our Vision, Mission, and Values. You will then find six focus areas for ministry with corresponding S.M.A.R.T. Goals and the objectives necessary to achieve them. We encourage you to add to the continued development of this plan by bringing your creativity, gifts, and discernment to this shared future.

About Our Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision: Muhlenberg Lutheran Church strives to be a wellspring of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

A wellspring is an original and bountiful source offering a continual supply of something. The wellspring around which we gather as a community of faith is the abundant grace of God made known through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a vision statement sets our attention on the future for which we strive, we envision a community who knows that God's abundant grace can be found through the ministry of Muhlenberg Lutheran Church. We trust that the community will know that God's grace is abundant, continual, and poured out for all people. As we gather around word and sacrament together, and grow together through learning and service, we envision a community renewed, enlivened, and sustained by the everlasting waters of grace. This is the future we trust that God will provide as we live out our mission and live into our values.

Mission: To equip all people to live out Christ's love

While a vision statement points us toward the hope of our future, a mission statement roots us in who we are and our purpose in this community. In order for our wider community to know God's grace, we believe it's essential to equip the Muhlenberg community to share the love of Christ. Through worship, bible study, devotion, music, faith formation, service, and so much more, we see our purpose lived out in nurturing the gifts of each member for the ministry of sharing Christ's love with everyone we meet. As we hear in Ephesians chapter 4, God has given many diverse gifts that all point to our call to equip God's people for the ministry of love, unity, and redemption. Through the various ministries of this body of believers, we see it as our purpose to discern, build up, and grow into the gifts God has given, that all people may feel equipped to live out Christ's love.

Values: Open, Authentic, Relational, Serving

These words represent the kind of congregation we strive to be:

A community that is truly OPEN to all people, whoever they may be, however they may have come to be part of our community—without judgment or expectation—a simple welcome following the example of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

A community that is real, honest, and AUTHENTIC as God's people as we work with one another and serve our wider community. We want what you see to be what you get--saints and sinners at the same time!

A community that is RELATIONAL--marked by genuine, safe and healthy relationships. In many and varied ways we come together in large and small gatherings for worship, meetings, fellowship, and education, to get to know one another as individuals. This allows us to grow and support each other, working side by side for common goals.

A community of faithful people SERVING others. We serve thousands of people a year through dozens of local and global missions. We firmly believe that we receive God's peace and the support of this community so we can serve others in our daily life.





Create a culture of welcome, hospitality, and care.

Focus: Create a culture of welcome, hospitality, and care.

Goal: By 2023, all ministry participants will be able to name at least five close relationships they have with others in the congregation.

Objectives:

1. Extend a gracious and proactive welcome to all who enter
 - a. Develop a leadership team to oversee Muhlenberg's community welcome
 - b. Redevelop the system of identification/welcome for tracking new comers as they transition from a first visit to participation
 - c. Develop a system to record attendance in worship
 - d. Train greeters who will be stationed around the building on Sunday morning, especially at the welcome desk, and greeters for online worship
 - e. Create events and provide opportunities for members to invite friends or community at large
 - f. Encourage a spirit of invitation and periodically assess how members feel about inviting friends and neighbors
2. Develop geographically-based and interest-based opportunities for connection
 - a. Develop a leadership team to oversee Muhlenberg's small group ministry, including staff support
 - b. Explore the redevelopment of existing Shepherd Groups for fellowship and care activities
 - c. Develop a structure for home-based small group gatherings and online small group gatherings
 - d. Develop a structure for forming new groups and events based on common interests (eg, crafting, rec league teams, Beer and Hymns)
3. Strengthen opportunities for relationship-building on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings
 - a. Change Sunday morning worship schedule to allow for Christian formation as well as other gatherings in between worship services
 - b. Work with Building Use Task Force to develop space at Muhlenberg that can be used on a regular weeknight for weekly meal, fellowship, learning, and worship together
4. Provide opportunities to serve one another
 - a. Develop a listserv/email list for posting needs within the congregation (eg. rides to other parts of state or local appointments, small fix-it jobs, clothing/furnishing needs)
 - b. Provide better structure for medical supply ministry (location, communication, organization)



Become a congregation of storytellers.

Focus: Become a congregation of storytellers.

Goal: Shift our internal and external communication model to a “storytelling” approach in such a way that the majority of active Muhlenberg participants will be able to know the story of Jesus and communicate his story in relation to Muhlenberg’s activity by May 2022.

Objectives:

1. Orient all communications toward telling God’s story and the story of our congregation and its ministries
 - a. Develop a staff team to cultivate storytelling tools within the congregation (Communication Minister, Youth Minister, Children’s Minister, Parish Admin, Pastors)
 - b. Build a Communication team to work with Communication Minister to develop strategies for communicating God’s and our story
2. Provide at least one new learning opportunity each quarter through Christian Formation, Small Group, and Biblical Storytelling ministries to explore and tell the Biblical story
3. Utilize Narrative Lectionary resources, sermon series, and music to increase Biblical fluency
4. Experience a variety of voices sharing the story of God, and learn to listen to stories and experiences different from our own
5. Develop methods to gather stories and history from Muhlenberg members and friends
 - a. Appoint volunteer historian (or history team)
 - b. Record stories through communication team
6. Develop website and social media as way of sharing story



Engage all ages in learning.



Focus: Engage all ages in learning.

Goal: By June 2023, more than 50% of congregants will participate in one or more Christian Education opportunities, outside of worship.

Objectives:

1. Designate a Christian Formation Hour on Sunday mornings that does not coincide with a worship service
 - a. Discern with the entire congregation what the Sunday morning schedule will be through scheduled conversation groups, survey, etc.
 - b. Develop and communicate new Sunday morning schedule when Gathering Together Task Force has determined it is safe to gather in person again
2. Develop intergenerational and age-specific Christian Education programming
 - a. Conduct an interest survey to determine possible topics and meeting times for new Christian Education opportunities
 - b. Redefine staffing for Christian Education to support birth-5th grade, 6th-12th grades, and adult learning, aligned with a greater emphasis on small group programming (e.g., SALT [Service and Learning Together] groups, neighborhood groups) and building connections between age groups
 - c. Provide training for lay leaders
3. Continue to offer digital methods of learning in addition to in-person opportunities
4. Create a system of attendance record-keeping and opportunities to invite new participants
 - a. Upgrade church management software to collect and analyze data
 - b. Christian Education team will utilize the software and make recommendations based on data analyses
5. Communicate and promote Christian Education opportunities in a variety of effective and innovative ways
 - a. Invite congregation to be intentional about inviting congregants to educational programs
 - b. Partner with Communication Minister to explore innovative ways of communicating to the greater Muhlenberg community educational opportunities offered
6. Work with Building Use Task Force to strategically renovate classroom spaces



Know our neighbors, and serve together with them.

Focus: Know our neighbors, and serve together with them.

Goal: Answer the question, “Who are our neighbors, and how can we serve with them?” by spring 2023.

Objectives:

1. Develop a strategic, deliberate process to develop relationships with residents of the community (e.g. residents of Northeast Neighborhood, families of Second Home and Day Care, nearby faith communities of diverse races and ethnicities, and neighboring businesses)
2. Meet with leaders in the community to discern needs and explore possible solutions. (e.g. school principals, mayor, city council, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, JMU/EMU/Bridgewater leadership, leaders of community organizations such as Faith in Action, Bridge of Hope, United Way, etc.)
3. Create a task force to gather data and collate responses to community conversations, and provide recommendations on how MLC can engage in new ways (e.g. incubating a new ministry for the community, developing focus areas for Local/Global mission, etc.)
4. Continue to grow participation in advocacy and justice ministries, especially in the areas of the environment, poverty, hunger, homelessness, and racism.
 - a. Increase communication and teamwork between service and advocacy ministries of the congregation
5. Develop deeper relationships with our current partner organizations
6. Communicate and promote service and advocacy opportunities in a variety of effective and innovative ways
7. Challenge each ministry group to find a way to become involved with the community (e.g. choir sing at nursing home, youth neighborhood clean-up, MaryMartha make dinner for First Step etc.) with a focus on developing relationships



Center our community life together around worship.

Focus: Center our community life together around worship.

Goal: Nurture a deep, relational sense of faith in God among ministry participants through worship life at Muhlenberg. Develop a hybrid model of worship, integrating in-person and digital methods, to strengthen and expand current worship opportunities during the summer/fall of 2021.

Objectives:

1. Explore and assess opportunities for worship and music
 - a. Facilitate conversations with the Muhlenberg community regarding styles, formats, times, and days for worship
 - i. Consider: non-Sunday morning Eucharist service, evening prayer services, midweek noonday worship, “contemporary” service, locations other than our sanctuary, etc.
 - b. Develop and communicate new schedule for worship when Gathering Together Task Force has determined it is safe to worship in person again
 - c. Expand opportunities for learning and outreach through music
2. Develop long-term plan and infrastructure for enhanced digital worship
 - a. Determine staffing needs for Communication Department and technology production plan
 - b. Determine technology needs for a weekly live-streaming service
 - c. Work with Generosity Committee to determine how to support this ministry financially
3. Work with Building Use Task Force to enhance building infrastructure for in-person and digital worship
 - a. Improve acoustics in sanctuary
 - b. Replace organ (Note: Capital Campaign Committee already formed and working)



Be good stewards of the gifts we have been given.

Focus: Be good stewards of the gifts we have been given.

Goal: Have a comprehensive 5-year plan for our financial and property resources in place by fall 2022.

Objectives:

1. Form Building Use Task Force to develop a Facilities and Grounds Master Plan
 - a. Considerations (not an all-inclusive list):
 - i. Departure of Day Care (2022 or '23?)
 - ii. Needs of Second Home moving forward
 - iii. Use of Ott St house
 - iv. Outdoor space
 - v. Needs for Christian Formation, Fellowship, Digital Ministry, Local Mission, Music Ministry, etc.
 - vi. Safety and Security Team input and recommendations
2. Develop Generosity Committee to grow congregational understanding of financial stewardship and sustainability