

**Report to the Edina Community Lutheran Church  
COUNCIL**

**by the  
Task Force on Strategic Planning Goals Assessment**

**25 August 2005**

The Edina Community Lutheran Church (ECLC) Council, in looking to the future, concluded at its April 19, 2005 meeting, that a task force be appointed to assess progress in achieving implementation of the five goals described in the strategic plan that was completed in 2001. The plan covered years 2002 through 2006.

A six-member Task Force convened its first meeting on May 31, 2005, and outlined an approach to assessing progress to date on the five goals:

- Deepen the ECLC community's corporate and individual relationship with God.
- Build and nurture community while addressing hopes and aspirations of diverse clusters of people within the congregation.
- Boldly engage the ECLC community in missions of justice and service to shape the life of the congregation and the world around it.
- Share the word and life of the Gospel with others.
- Enhance governance, structure and infrastructure to assure effectiveness and optimally achieve our mission.

The Task Force reviewed key objectives under each of the five goal statements, evaluating outcomes and data when available, as well as soliciting perspectives from more than 25 individuals who helped to develop the 2002-2006 strategic plan and others who have contributed to outcomes that have been generated through the plan. In addition to assessing successful outcomes, the Task Force especially noted key objectives that were particularly challenging or deserve further consideration.

Detailed descriptions of findings related to objectives under each of the five goals are provided under separate cover. A summary of the findings and conclusions of the Task Force follows. The Task Force also provides recommendations to the Council for next steps, based on lessons learned from the assessment process.

**Growth and Faithfulness**

The following analysis summarizes the ways that the stated goals of the five-year mission plan cohere the ministry and work at ECLC since 2002. Thus, the report

references measurements, growth, accomplishments and successes – and work still to be done. However, the emphasis always remains on ECLC’s overarching commitment to be faithful to God’s call to us. It is important that we keep in mind that we are called to faithfulness – a special journey in relationship to God and in community, far and near. We undertake this journey together as a congregation, gathered by God, giving witness to the Gospel in this time and place. As such we are also called to discern in prayer and mutual conversation how our journey into these next years is to be shaped by God’s gracious “Yes.”

Trends that are tracked by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America show that ECLC is growing by conventional benchmarks. In 2004, ECLC grew by 94 members. From 2002 (the first year of the existing strategic plan) to end-of-year data for 2004, for example, baptisms increased from 10 to 12; transfers into ECLC increased from 28 to 40; and confirmations increased from 6 to 12. The average annual number of people attending worship each week has increased from 229 in 2002 to 253 in 2004. As of January 2005, ECLC has a total baptized membership of 597.

*ECLC is increasing by the numbers in nearly all categories, but what is more striking is the increase in engagement and active participation of congregational members.* It is important to note that the Task Force assessment uncovered great enthusiasm for new ideas and new actions that will deepen our collective faith and our commitment to God, our community and our neighbors broadly defined. These new ideas, however, pose important questions for the future direction of this active and growing congregation. (These questions are addressed at the close of this report.) In brief, the following are noted as accomplishments within specific objectives under the five goals.

- Goal I: Deepen the ECLC community’s corporate and individual relationships with God.
  - **Forms of worship.** Notably, a number of worship and liturgy styles have been incorporated into Sunday and mid-week services including Advent, Lenten and summer Wednesday and summer Sunday evening services.
  - **Instruction about worship/support for teachers and parents to nurture children and youth.** Instruction about worship has been enhanced through guest presenters, special Adult Form series discussions, Sunday school and confirmation classes, and sessions for new members. Sunday School teacher gatherings, increasingly well-organized curriculum and special Sunday School and intergenerational events, and a strong emphasis on electronic communications with parents better support our teachers and parents as they help to integrate faith into daily life, every day.
  - **Music.** Overwhelmingly, members respect, celebrate and enjoy the richness of ECLC’s music and musicians. The varied joyful and often moving instrumental and vocal contributions of our members make ECLC’s services unique and widely noted.

- Goal II: Build and nurture community while addressing hopes and aspirations of diverse clusters of people within the congregation.
  - **Meeting needs of clusters of people/develop groups for fellowship, study, action.** Vibrant gatherings of members have been successful and matured over the years. These include Women in Transition (WIT), Women's Bible Study, 55 Plus, the Mission Committee, the Environmental Concerns Committee and various choirs. In addition, after a year of planning, new topically and issue-focused Small Groups will begin in Fall 2005. Two new clusters have formed within the past 18 months: (1) The LAMBS group, which includes parents and expectant parents of children ages 0 to 3 years; and (2) the Lavender Sheep group, which invites fellowship of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members and friends. Other annual activities such as the Progressive Dinner have drawn steadily increasing attendance each year.
  - **Integrate new members.** New members have reported that they feel welcomed during their initial experiences at ECLC. The congregation successfully continues its commitment to an open and warm environment. Word of mouth and an active member network bring in the majority of new members.
  - **Year-round activities for high school students.** The annual mission trips have offered life-changing experiences for our youth. A record 26 students joined the trip to Panama in Summer 2005. A part-time staff member was added to the ECLC staff 18 months ago to better coordinate and engage our high school youth.
  - **Collaborate with other faith communities.** Relationships with others have deepened, for example, with Families Moving Forward, Redeemer Lutheran in North Minneapolis and churches collaborating on the Edina Housing Initiative (see also Goal III sections on Volunteerism and Advocacy).
  
- Goal III: Boldly engage the ECLC community in missions of justice and service to shape the life of the congregation and the world around it.
  - **Volunteerism.** ECLC members are participating in stable and increasing numbers in volunteer mission and social justice activities including Habitat for Humanity, Volunteers Enlisted to Assist People (VEAP), Families Moving Forward, The Peace Foundation, ZOOM House, Southside Family Nurturing Center, Plymouth Christian Youth Center, Our Savior's Housing and many others.
  - **Fundraising.** ECLC met its goal of \$250,000 for the mission appeal. The goal includes supporting position of mission developer as well as maintaining funds to support mission projects.
  - **Stewardship.** The ECLC congregation responds with faithful commitment in the sharing of offering, meeting the expectations that it sets for itself. Subsequently, ECLC is financially sound, with an even operational cash flow. Since 1997, ECLC has increased its giving by 40 percent (adjusted for inflation).

- **Advocacy.** Each year ECLC has sent a delegation to St. Paul to lobby as part of the Joint Religious Legislative Commission. Affordable housing was the 2005 session focus of our advocacy efforts. ECLC has been instrumental in establishing the Edina Housing Initiative, with the participation of several of our members. ECLC and peer churches and organizations have continued to address constitutional issues of religious freedom through the legislative and judicial processes required to challenge Minnesota's conceal/carry gun law.
- **ELCA involvement.** ECLC has made it a priority to be represented in the ELCA's hierarchy with an emphasis on justice. An ECLC member also serves on the Minneapolis Area Synod Council.

It is important to note the wide-ranging recognition of ECLC's mission of service and social justice at both the local and national levels. Many new members note that indeed it is this emphasis on social justice and active community engagement that draws them to our congregation. Certainly, when God's people work together to help each other, God is glorified in their work.

- Goal IV: Share the word and life of the Gospel with others.
  - **Overall assessment.** The five objectives under this goal are (1) Discuss and analyze what it means to share the Gospel with others, (2) develop a communication strategy that conveys to others ECLC's commitment to connect faith and daily life, (3) implement a strategy to share the word and life of the Gospel, (4) provide opportunities for congregational growth through additional worship, and (5) partner with other congregations who share focus on the connections of mission, ministry and justice.

ECLC has met this particular goal with great success – notably without a detailed plan to do so. ECLC reaches out through its worship elements: liturgy, music, preaching, hospitality and fellowship. It reaches out through educational offerings such as the presentations on Marcus Borg and the extraordinarily well-attended lectures on *The daVinci Code*. ECLC touches many communities and the broader citizenry through synod and national assemblies; Reconciling in Christ; food security and hunger (Meals on Wheels, Loaves & Fishes, Bread for the World letter-writing campaigns and VEAP, for example); and many previously mentioned activities and programs.

ECLC has increased membership, active participation and partnership opportunities during the last three years – without a communications and external relations strategy. An external relations strategy that includes additional website information and services, intentional promotion of engagement activities and welcoming opportunities that attract new members would elicit immediate response and success, without doubt, given our successes by less organized, informal means. However, such intentional efforts to “share the word and life of the Gospel with others” prompts us to thoughtfully and prayerfully question ourselves as a congregation about increasing the number of congregational members, accommodating children and youth in our programs, creating additional

opportunities for topical and interest fellowship and study groups, and managing physical space and staffing needs.

- Goal V: Enhance governance, structure and infrastructure to assure effectiveness and optimally achieve our mission.
  - **Stable operational budget.** Two new elements support the objective of a stable and consistent budget, where facilities needs and other maintenance responsibilities could be met without special funds requests, for example. They are “Simply Giving,” the automated giving option for members and the establishment of a capital reserve fund. In January 2002, approximately \$1,400 per month was received through “Simply Giving.” By July 2005, that offering amount had increased to \$12,300 per month. Offering through “Simply Giving” is now about 31 percent of the budgeted member giving. The automated giving option has helped ensure a consistent cash flow, particularly during the summer months, when consistent offering had been periodically problematic. A capital reserve fund has been established, however, no significant balance has been achieved to date.
  - **Establish long-term funding methods.** ECLC is in the process of creating an ECLC foundation, or endowment fund, for mission, outreach and general ministry. An initial gift of \$20,000 has been received. Potential for a capital campaign is under discussion currently by the ECLC Council.
  - **Staff appointments to achieve strategic plan.** Only five years ago, ECLC employed two pastors, an office manager and three part-time employees as music, accounting and custodial staff. Now, to meet increasing needs, ECLC additionally employs a third part-time pastor, a youth coordinator (with hours to be increased in Fall 2005), a nursery attendant, a mission developer, and instrumental and choral music coordinators.
  - **Review all written materials.** Currently, the Personnel Committee is reviewing ECLC employment guidelines, the personnel handbook, all job descriptions and the annual performance review process. The ECLC Constitution and by-laws require review.
  - **Maintain property and real estate.** The monitoring and maintenance of the buildings, infrastructure and equipment are shared responsibilities of the pastors, the minister of properties, the office manager and the custodian, with assistance from a variety of vendors as needed.

Importantly, the objectives in Goal V provide the mechanisms to help achieve the other four goals. That is, the nuts and bolts of governance, structure and infrastructure support our ability to deepen the ECLC community’s relationship with God, to build community across diverse clusters of people, to engage in justice and service missions, and to share the word and life of the Gospel with others.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

ECLC is clearly meeting and in most areas surpassing the basic objectives in its 2002-2006 strategic plan. The Task Force finds the five goals to be comprehensive and actionable – and ECLC members have progressed in their richly rewarding journey that brings an action agenda to life through faith and works. Further, we suggest that these five goals can continue to carry ECLC forward beyond 2006, with actions that enhance and expand the already successful programs and innovations that have been initiated to date.

Success, such as we witness from the assessment of the 2002-2006 strategic plan, can also create new challenges as we continue our journey of faithfulness to God. Even without implementation of an external communications plan or specific goals for evangelism, the ECLC congregation is growing. Its members are becoming increasingly involved in a range of volunteer and member-group activities. Notably, the Task Force assessment revealed that members have even more creative ideas for actions that include everything from organizing community service tailored for more senior members to strengthening learning and participation on the continuum from young children through middle schoolers to young adults, to creating new opportunities that present the history and theology of the Lutheran Faith.

Success at ECLC in many ways means growth. More members. Retention of existing members. More children. More clusters of active members. More desires to become involved in additional mission work and social justice issues. More engagement with communities and new partner organizations, near and far. And, this growth and activity necessitates additional emphasis on organizational structure, management, facilities, budgets and staffing.

### **Growing, Questioning**

Growth, whether in an organization, a metropolitan area or an expanding family, is fraught with a balance of tension and opportunity. Growth must now be the focus of discussion at ECLC. How many new members can we welcome? How do we best accommodate increasing numbers of children in our lower-level classrooms? How can we meet the wide-ranging needs and interests of our diverse current members? Can we support existing activities – and add new activities – through existing ECLC staff? How do we comfortably welcome and seat members at services – more services, new seating arrangements, more parking? How do we match an operational budget to congregational needs, services and our desire to increase mission and outreach and other ministries? How do we integrate more and more people who wish to be part of a “small” community church?

And where does God enter into a discussion of growth? What is God calling us to do? A church is an organic body. It grows, feels growing pains, matures. Growth and life are inextricably linked. It is God in us and with us.

## Conclusions

The Task Force summarizes a significant body of information, faith-driven outcomes and challenges for the ECLC Council in three component conclusions:

- An operational plan should emerge from discussions of how ECLC's stated goals can continue to be met in the face of increasing growth in membership and in the level of activities around worship, fellowship, social justice and community services and integration of faith in daily life.
  - **Facilities and infrastructure.** Our ability to share our liturgy, worship, preaching, music, education and service with others each week is contingent on our facilities, space management, organizational expertise, and communications (print and, increasingly, electronic and web-based). The Council must evaluate best use of facilities, infrastructure and technology to address immediate needs, but especially to best meet the needs of the congregation over the next 5 to 10 or more years.
  - **Staffing.** New members, public successes, and increasing programming and ministries translate as increased workload for the ECLC staff – even with the significant and exceptional work of ECLC member volunteers. Our successes and growth require that the Council develop more formalized position descriptions for full- and part-time staff, streamline operations procedures, assess workload and responsibilities for staff and, most important, maximize the Council's opportunity to apply the expertise, insights and knowledge of the Pastors and staff to governance and operations. The Council, in conjunction with the Pastors, should clarify and describe this critical partnership.
  - **Ministries, Programming.** ECLC has dramatically increased its engagement at the local, national and international levels in a few, short years. It is recognized as a true and giving partner, and as a community of generous, action-oriented individuals who support one another and so many others in a range of communities and networks. ECLC has expanded its community partnerships as well as its internal worship, education, service and fellowship groups. The Council should seek input from ECLC members on the types of ministries and programming that are most valued and of benefit to members and to those we wish to serve. For example, a focus on faith formation – needs and interests of older ECLC members, engaging youth, nurturing new members – has continued to be discussed as a priority since the strategic planning effort that resulted in the 2002-2006 goals.

ECLC is characterized by a faithful, busy, well-educated, and fast-moving membership. The Council should explore, with the congregation, ways to effectively focus in on priority programming in ministry.

## **Recommendations**

To best consider the conclusions stated above, the Task Force recommends that the ECLC Council fully engage the ECLC congregational members in a strategic planning process specifically around the issue of growth. It is critical to emphasize again that the issue of growth cannot be separated from the overarching questions: What is Edina Community Lutheran Church? How do we discern our commitment to inclusiveness, service, faith and our relationships with God and our neighbors? Growth cannot be separated from discussions of evangelism, faith formation, shepherding, stewardship, mission, worship, music or properties.

The Task Force sees immediate need for some decision-making related to growth that affects staffing, facilities and space and accommodating the needs and interests of members in worship settings and in service opportunities. However, a detailed plan for growth over the longer term is essential.

We further recommend that such a strategic planning process commence as soon as possible, incorporate the ideas and concerns of all who can and will share their perspectives and faith for the future, and conclude with final recommendations by January 2006.

We believe that ECLC will continue to expand and deepen its contributions to God's people in the natural process of growing gracefully.

*Respectfully submitted by,*

### **The Task Force on Strategic Planning Goals Assessment**

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