

LIFELINES

of

LORD OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Vol. 38, No. 1

Plano, Texas

January 2024

Strategic Planning

Should Lord of Life hire a new staff member? Should the new person be a music director or another pastor? How about a deaconess? Or a vicar? Maybe instead we should build a new sanctuary? Or, just a renovation? What if we built a gymnasium? ... Obviously, big questions like this should not be decided by one or two members of the congregation. Because our resources are limited, we cannot do everything, but only those things we can afford and which will be supported by most of our members. But how should we decide which way to go? Which opportunities should we take advantage of and which should we let pass us by?

Last year, using tools developed by the LCMS Office of National Mission, our congregation completed a survey assessing our state of development or decline [CADDs]. The survey showed we are strong in almost all areas of congregational life, but we could improve on reaching out to our community. This year we will be using another tool from the synod designed to help us identify our purpose and mission and develop a strategic plan. This tool is called: *Serving in God's Mission*.

We will begin the process during the Bible Study hour for the first few Sundays in January. After this, a planning team will be identified and a series of evening or weekend meetings will continue the process. While all are welcome to get involved and be a part of the planning, we will be looking for leaders who want to be part of a core planning team. This group will put in the work to help identify our congregation's core values; build consensus among our members; assess our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; come up with a vision statement, and set some goals for the future.

If this is something interesting to you and you think you would like to be a part of it, then please plan to attend Bible classes the first few weeks of this month.

Thank You!

As ever, your generosity is amazing. Thank you so much for the Christmas bonus and the raise in salary. I appreciate it very much.

Cuba

In the December newsletter I hinted at an exciting new mission opportunity our church is involved with. That has to do with supporting Lutherans and Lutheran churches in Cuba. Last month I was privileged to travel to Cuba to witness the ordination of a Lutheran Pastor, Hector Paneque, in Holguin, Cuba.

Cuba is a curious place. It is beautiful and was once very prosperous; however, after decades of communism, the poverty there is staggering. I was humbled at what we take for granted living in such a prosperous place. But the Christian people I met are wonderful and full of God's love and good cheer. They know and love our Lutheran doctrine and are eager to share it with others. I had an amazing trip and if you didn't hear about it when I presented on it in Bible Class in December, I will gladly tell you all about it, just ask me.



Pastor Hector Paneque and members of his congregation as well as visiting friends from Havana.



Holguín, Cuba



Hector and I on the day of his ordination.

QUICK GUIDE

RE:VITALITY

SERVING IN GOD'S MISSION

Strategic Planning for Congregations

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (PROVERBS 16:3).

OVERVIEW

Serving in God's Mission (SGM) provides a comprehensive, consensus-based approach for guiding your congregation through a strategic planning process tailored to meet the unique needs of Lutheran congregations. The overall goal of *SGM* is to assist your congregation with developing a strategic planning mindset that goes beyond putting a plan together to integrating a Strategic Ministry Plan (SMP) into the planning and management of your congregation's role in God's Mission.

The expected outcomes of *SGM* include:

- A working knowledge of the strategic planning process and its supporting tools;
- Achieving consensus in the congregation at each stage of strategic planning; and
- A realistic, meaningful and useful Strategic Ministry Plan.



APPROACH



SGM begins with taking inventory of what the Lord has invested in your congregation and how He has shaped it as the Body of Christ in a place, at a time, for a people of His choosing. Using God's Word and this assessment as the basis for understanding God's Mission for the congregation, *SGM* guides you through a tailored strategic planning process to develop a Strategic Ministry Plan that addresses how to faithfully carry out your part in God's Mission in the unique context of your congregation.

DEVELOPING CONSENSUS

When, why and how to develop consensus highlights one of the key differences between secular strategic planning and the strategic planning process of *SGM*. While secular approaches typically begin with a vision cast by a leader which is then “sold” to the rest of the organization, *SGM* approaches strategic planning as an activity in which the congregation-at-large is engaged from the beginning. Consensus-building is begun very early in the strategic planning process and continues throughout

the process. The resulting Strategic Ministry Plan is not “sold” at a voters’ meeting, but owned by the whole congregation which has participated in developing it.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AND TOOLS

The strategic planning process of *SGM* guides you through the steps of developing and implementing a Strategic Ministry Plan. The process and tools may be familiar to participants who have engaged in strategic planning in their workplaces. However, the process and tools will be applied in a different order, with a different emphasis and with a different goal than they might be in a secular context. Some of the tools used to support the strategic planning process include the resource inventory, SWOT analysis, essential core values of Lutheran congregations, mission statement, vision statements and SMART goals.



FORMAT

SGM is a self-directed workshop that takes place through a series of sessions that include video instruction, case studies for discussion, and the development of the Strategic Ministry Plan (SMP). Each session supports the spiral development of the congregation’s SMP through iterations that provide multiple levels of involvement and build consensus for the SMP as it is developed. The three levels are the Core Planning Team (CPT), the Expanded Planning Team (XPT) and the congregation-at-large.



WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

The CPT should include a cross-section of 4–6 key influencers in the congregation. This includes the pastor, other professional church workers, council members, board members and informal leaders (i.e., the people to whom other members look for direction). Participants do not require prior knowledge of strategic planning but do need to be willing to engage in planning activities. The XPT adds four or more people to the CPT. The congregation-at-large includes any and all members of the congregation who wish to participate in the strategic planning process. (*Note: smaller congregations may combine the CPT and XPT.*)

COST

SGM is available to LCMS congregations through the LCMS Office of National Mission at no cost.

GETTING STARTED

CONTACT US for more information about or to schedule *Serving in God’s Mission* for your congregation at

✉ WOR@lcms.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION about *re:Vitality* please visit

🖱 lcms.org/revitalization

📘 facebook.com/LCMSreVitality





prepare for worship in January

January 7: Baptism of Our Lord

Texts: Gen. 1:1-5; Rom. 6:1-11; Mark 1:4-11

Hymn of the Day: "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord," 407

January 14: Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Texts: 1 Sam. 3:1-10 (11-20); 1 Cor. 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

Hymn of the Day: "The Only Son from Heaven," 402

January 21: Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Texts: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Cor. 7:29-31 (32-35); Mark 1:14-20

Hymn of the Day: "O Christ, Our True and Only Light," 839

January 28: Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Texts Deut. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

Hymn of the Day: "'Away From Us!' the Demon Cried," 541

The conclusion of 2023 also brought an era to its end as Tony Hernandez, the longtime custodian and handyman for Lord of Life called it a career and officially retired. Tony was a faithful and dedicated employee who took a great amount of pride in his efforts to keep our facilities and exterior property in excellent condition. Many times visitors to the church have made comments about how well our building looks and how clean it is. Our congregation is truly blessed to have had such a hard working colleague and all around great person who served Lord of Life for the past 15 years. We wish Tony all the best for him and his family as he enjoys his retirement years.

God's blessings Tony!



Teen Times

It is hard to believe that I am writing this for the January, 2024 issue of Lifelines. The years seem to be passing by at a hormone producing rate of speed. It sounds as though I have been around teenagers too much, but no offense though as I am entering my 14th year in the youth ministry at Lord of Life and have enjoyed every minute of it. I think about how fast children become teenagers, start confirmation classes, get involved in the youth group, graduate high school, attend college, and eventually begin a career. It's great to see the success of children becoming young Christian adults, and becoming an adult means being resolved to improve oneself or to do things better.

So as a teenager, what is your New Year's resolution? What are you determined to do differently, to improve, to do less or more of, or to not do at all? Whatever it is, commit to it and stick with it. Don't wait because time will pass quickly and then it may be too late! From a parent's point of view, time has a way of passing by at break-neck speeds, or so it seems. Your moms and dads can look back at 2023 and reminisce about all of the things that have happened, good and bad, and how they have shaped who you are as a person and what you might become in the future. Looking ahead to 2024, there will be many opportunities and circumstances that will require you to make difficult decisions. For example, do you follow the crowd and take part in something that you know is wrong, or stand up to say, "that's not for me"? Should I study a little more to improve my grades, or say, "this is good enough"? Can I refrain from spreading gossip, talking trash, or elevating my own status on my social networking sight? Will this please my parents or upset them? Do I really believe that God does not know what I am doing right now?

Whatever you have done in the past, right or wrong, cannot be changed. What's done is done; but there is hope. The things that we have done right can be commended, and the things that we do wrong can be forgiven. If we sincerely confess that we have sinned against God, someone else, or even ourselves, forgiveness can be assured by God's grace and mercy through Jesus' death on the cross. We can also be assured of a new life with Him through his resurrection. So you can make a decision for 2024, today, right now, to do what is right and to not do what you know is wrong. Be resolved!

To quote a line from Kung Fu Panda; "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift, that is why it is called the present."

We all have that gift; the gift of hope through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God's blessings in the New Year!

Scott Peters

Just As I Am

"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12).

Charlotte Elliott was born in Clapham, England, in 1789. In her younger years, Charlotte was a writer and artist, but by age 30 her health began to fail. For the next 50 years, she would live in pain and illness. Because of her constant sickness, she frequently became frustrated and despondent. She would often say, "If God loved me, why would he do this to me?"

One day, a Swiss minister came to the Elliott house for dinner. During the meal, Charlotte, as she was prone to do, burst into a temper tantrum and stormed out of the room, much to the embarrassment of her family.

The minister followed her into the next room and quietly told her that she felt such anger because she had nothing to cling to. Her only hope, he told her, was to turn to the Lord.

But she didn't know how she could do that. "How could I, such an angry and bitter person, turn to God?" she asked.

"You can go to God," the minister told her, "just as you are."

Charlotte Elliott never forgot that pastor's advice and years later she penned what would become one of the most famous hymns of all time. She wrote: "Just as I am, without one plea But that thy blood was shed for me And that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come" (CW 397:1).

For those of us who struggle with self-esteem, who look at ourselves in the mirror and don't like what we see, who feel like nobody who really knows us could love us, there were no more comforting words ever spoken.

God accepts me. God loves me. God receives me just as I am.

It is important, however, that we understand what that means. God accepts you just as you are, but that doesn't mean you are acceptable just as you are.

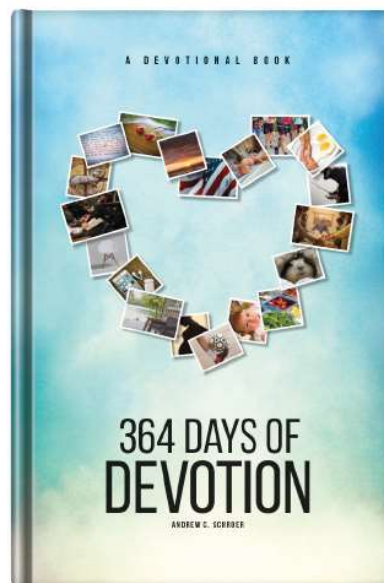
Acceptance doesn't mean God sees the good in everybody. It doesn't mean you are good enough just the way you are. You are a sinner. You are a liar. You are stubborn. You hold grudges. You worry. You doubt. You have dark and dirty sins no one else knows about. You are not good enough just as you are. You are not acceptable by God's standards.

Yet he still accepts you because he made you acceptable in his eyes. God rejected his Son, Jesus—punished him for your dirty sins—so that he could accept you. You have been washed clean in the blood of Jesus and the waters of Holy Baptism.

God accepts you because of Jesus. He accepts you because of his love. His love and acceptance make you special. You are a dearly loved child of God. You are perfect in God's eyes—not because you are perfect, but because you are washed in Jesus' blood.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done, you can go to God ... just as you are.

From the devotional *364 Days of Devotion* by Andrew Schroer © 2021 Northwestern Publishing House. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission. Book available at www.nph.net (Item no. 0600767).



The Chief Stewards of Humanity: Mom and Dad

St. Paul tells the Ephesians that the first commandment with a specific promise attached to it is, “Honor your father and mother so that it may go well with you, and you may live long in the land” (Eph. 6:2). This promise is one indication of the importance of this commandment. The other thing that highlights the special nature of this commandment is its placement within the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are clearly organized in two big categories. The first three commandments deal with our relationship with God. This category is called the First Table of the Law. The last seven commandments, the Second Table of the Law, tell us how we should relate to other people. These two tables correspond to what Jesus calls the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39).

The order of the Second Table of the Law is also important. Murder is a greater sin than adultery, which is a greater sin than stealing, or lying, or coveting. But why is the Fourth Commandment first in the Second Table, ahead of “you shall not murder”? Is disobeying your parents really worse than murder? Or maybe we should give up on thinking these commandments are ordered?

The overall effect of this order is to get us to see our parents as a connection point between our neighbors and our God. Throughout our upbringing our father and mother stand between us and God and deliver His gifts to us: God clothes us, feeds us, protects us and teaches His Word to us through our parents.

So, parents have a very high calling from God. They are called to be stewards of the greatest gift: the gift of life.

Parenting thus gives us a keen insight into all our stewardship. Parents know that they have been given a great treasure in their children, a treasure that does not belong to them, yet for which they feel a great deal of responsibility. Truth be told, every gift we have been given is like this, because everything we have — whether our own personal skills and powers or our wealth and time — is all from God. He entrusts it all to us so that we can use it all and take care of it all for His great purposes.

*LCMS-Stewardship-Ministry-Newsletter-Article-
January-2024*



Exodus 20:12

Lord of Life Small Groups

EPIC PARENTING

- † For 30ish couples with kids
- † For info contact Ben Scarth
BenjaminScarth@yahoo.com
- † Usually meet one Sunday a month in the afternoon or evening

FRUITS OF THE VINE CARE GROUP

- † For info contact Scott Peters at 972-898-3351 cell or speters@planolutheran.com
- † Usually meet one Sun. a month at 5:30 PM

GOOD NEWS CARE GROUP

- † For info contact Mike Kunschke at (847) 951-6974
- † Will meet Sat., Jan. 13 at 6:30 PM for Bible study

COLLEGE GROUP

- † For students in college or recent grads
- † For info contact Pastor Shaltanis at PastorShaltanis@yahoo.com
- † Usually meet after the late service for lunch and Bible study



On Friday, January 12, Lord of Life will host a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner for those serving in various positions. We are appreciative of all that you do!



We can't thank you enough
for the year-end bonuses
that everyone contributed
to so generously!

| JANUARY <i>Birthdays and Anniversaries</i> | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 2 | Kristof Nuschler |
| 2 | Stu & Sandy Ehrett (37) |
| 5 | Nolan Helms |
| 8 | Lauren Moudy |
| 8 | Linda Tischler |
| 10 | Sandy Paradise |
| 19 | Elizabeth Beisert |
| 21 | Brian Hahn |
| 22 | Lora Frinsko |
| 22 | Linda Hixson |
| 22 | Cecy Solano |
| 23 | Curtis & Sydney Peters (3) |
| 28 | Amy Kunschke |
| 30 | Karl Olsen |

Lord of Life Lutheran Church
Summarized Statement of Activity
11 Months Ending November 30, 2023

| | Y-T-D Operating Funds | Y-T-D Budget | Variance | Jan-Dec 2023 Budget |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Contributions | | | | |
| Regular Offerings | \$530,329 | \$509,347 | (\$20,982) | \$560,692 |
| Other | \$47 | \$0 | (\$47) | \$0 |
| Total Income | \$530,376 | \$509,347 | (\$21,029) | \$560,692 |
| Expenses | | | | |
| Benevolences | \$37,022 | \$35,654 | (\$1,368) | \$39,248 |
| Elders | \$349,355 | \$354,112 | \$4,757 | \$386,297 |
| Education | \$35 | \$250 | \$215 | \$1,000 |
| Outreach | \$1,253 | \$850 | (\$403) | \$600 |
| Office Expenses | \$10,503 | \$10,645 | \$142 | \$12,090 |
| Utilities | \$34,082 | \$31,370 | (\$2,712) | \$33,415 |
| Property Maintenance | \$34,545 | \$32,720 | (\$1,825) | \$34,440 |
| Stewardship | \$0 | \$350 | \$350 | \$350 |
| Family Ministries | \$1,868 | \$4,790 | \$2,922 | \$5,290 |
| Youth Board | \$5,967 | \$5,700 | (\$267) | \$6,100 |
| Children's Ministry | \$3,170 | \$6,050 | \$2,880 | \$6,700 |
| Admin Council | \$1,834 | \$2,350 | \$516 | \$2,600 |
| Total Operating Expense | \$479,634 | \$484,841 | \$5,207 | \$528,131 |
| Extraordinary Expense | \$2,435 | | | |
| Mortgage Payment | \$12,036 | \$25,800 | \$13,764 | \$30,960 |
| Total Expenses | \$494,105 | \$510,641 | \$16,536 | \$559,091 |
| Surplus or (Deficit) | \$36,271 | (\$1,294) | (\$37,565) | \$1,601 |
| Other Information: | | | | |
| Operating Fund Balance | \$155,956 | | | |
| Restricted Funds Balance | \$132,585 | | | |