

1 Bethesda Lutheran Church 5-Year Strategic Plan, 2025-2029

2 Our Common Christian Mission

3 The Church was created by and belongs to God, who has redeemed the world through God's only Son, Jesus
4 Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection has brought salvation for all and reconciles all of creation.
5 Congregations, their volunteers, and their staff are formed to serve God, our neighbors, and the world. All
6 faithful church programming, governance, and structural decisions are made with this in mind.

7 Our Mission Statement

8 Bethesda Lutheran Church members have congregated to serve Christ Jesus and the specific mission God has for
9 this congregation. We are guided by our mutually discerned mission statement:

10 GATHER all people into a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

11 GROW as disciples through worship, prayer and the study of God's Word.

12 GO into the world to share the gospel in word and deed.

13 This mission is a continual cycle rooted in "gathering all people into a living relationship with Jesus Christ." We
14 who believe, who have been gathered, grow as disciples and go into the world so that even more may gather,
15 grow, and go until "every knee should bend and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the
16 glory of God the Father" through lives of faithful service to other people.

17 S.W.O.T. Analysis

18 Strengths – Outreach, Worship, Fellowship, Music

- 19 • Lead Pastor's 9-year tenure builds consistency with new staff/volunteers
- 20 • Dedicated and experienced staff with an average tenure of 9 years
- 21 • Sacraments offered in worship nearly every week and privately to homebound members
- 22 • Well-maintained facility with central location, green space, parking and space for many functions
23 (including use by community groups)
- 24 • Strong commitment to inclusion and anti-racism
- 25 • Strong commitment to those in need
 - 26 ○ Food Pantry
 - 27 ○ Clothing Closet
 - 28 ○ Sponsorship and support of refugees and asylum seekers
 - 29 ○ Tanzania covenant relationship
 - 30 ⊖ Saving Suds
- 31 • Established church with over 100 years' history
 - 32 ○ Solid foundation of established families and loyalty
- 33 • High music quality
 - 34 ○ Organ, choir, bells, Saturday worship band, cantatas, gifted instrumentalists in congregation that
35 honors both contemporary and traditional styles, Christmas program/festival
- 36 • Worship choices
 - 37 ○ Traditional and contemporary services offered every week
 - 38 ○ Mid-week Cross-Gen worship service – Interactive worship inclusive to all ages
- 39 • Education for all ages

- 40 ○ Splash children's faith formation and Vacation Bible School
- 41 ○ Oasis Confirmation program and FLOOD for high-school students
- 42 ○ Living Water Wednesday – United faith formation for children and youth
- 43 ○ Voyager's Adult Forum, Women's / Men's Bible Studies, Online Bible study
- 44 ● Charitable giving of both funds and time to other ministries (e.g. Good Neighbor, AMOS, Ames Sanctuary
- 45 Interfaith Partners, Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance, The Bridge Home, CROP Hunger Walk, etc.)
- 46 ● Location in a college community (access to young adults, skilled professionals, international scholars,
- 47 retirees)
- 48 ● Regularly scheduled intergenerational fellowship events (e.g. Maundy Thursday Seder/Living Last
- 49 Supper, Ladies Lunch Bunch, Friday Night Wind Down, BBQ Cook-Off, Sunday Night Suppers, Chili Cook-
- 50 Off, Trunk-or-Treat, Living Water Wednesday Meal, Café Bethesda, Sunday Coffee Fellowship, etc.)
- 51 ● Established communication channels with members of the congregation (website and social media,
- 52 monthly newsletter, weekly bulletin and bulletin boards for boards and ministry teams)
- 53 ● Growing endowment fund for perpetual support of our mission.
- 54 ● Best Place to Worship in Story County – 8 consecutive awards

55 Weaknesses

- 56 ● Unexpected Associate Pastor vacancy - threatening momentum
- 57 ● Proportionately low numbers of youth and younger families among church membership
- 58 ● Proportionately low number of dedicated volunteers for scale of programming (especially food
- 59 preparation, youth programming)
 - 60 ○ Temptation is to become a member who receives goods/services even if capable of actively
 - 61 participating in the mission of the congregation.
- 62 ● Lack of evangelism
- 63 ● Lack of regular pastoral care to homebound
- 64 ● Governance structure
 - 65 ○ Still confusion over new system
 - 66 ○ Not full implementation

67 Opportunities

- 68 ● Largest ELCA congregation no longer affiliated with ELCA
- 69 ● Many unchurched and formerly churched among those living in Ames, coming to Ames for work or
- 70 retirement, and a growing university community (students, faculty and staff)
- 71 ● Many service opportunities throughout the community with existing and new partners
- 72 ● Continued partnership with Prairie Flowers could lead to mutual benefit
- 73 ● Evangelism/Outreach opportunities to local neighborhood
- 74 ● Opportunities for dialogue and partnership in a transient, diverse community (including members of the
- 75 Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Unitarian faith traditions)

76 Threats

- 77 ● Largest ELCA congregation no longer affiliated with ELCA
- 78 ● Large number of church worship options in Ames and surrounding area, high competition for same
- 79 believers.
- 80 ● Increasing secularization of society
- 81 ● Decreasing importance of church as cultural center
- 82 ● Busyness of working generations hinders regular participation

- 83 • Established church with over 100 years' history
- 84 ○ Temptation to restore the old versus reform towards the new
- 85 ○ Different core memories among generations as to church history/what is considered important

86 Goal Summary

87 Based upon our mission statement, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, our goals for the next 5
88 years are:

- 89 1. Youth - Be a place of welcome and meaning for children, youth, and families.
- 90 2. Service - Make God's love known to the community through our service to others.
- 91 3. Evangelism - Be present within the community and actively invite others into our ministry.

92 Auxiliary benefits of achieving these goals include stronger base to strengthen volunteerism, educational
93 opportunities, stewardship, musicianship, service, outreach, etc.

94 Goal 1: Be a place of welcome and meaning for children, youth, and families

95 Steps to take:

- 96 1. Ensure spaces dedicated to children and youth are updated, inviting, and comfortable for all.
 - 97 a. Update spaces with current technology and décor to allow seamless transition for engagement.
 - 98 b. Discover and implement ways to provide welcome to all genders, sexualities, and races.
 - 99 c. Receive input from youth on how to add their unique taste.
- 100 2. Provide children, youth, and families with a holistic approach to discipleship, engaging both the head
101 and the heart.
 - 102 a. Actively invite all ages to participate in the life of the congregation's worship, leadership, and
103 service.
 - 104 b. Use curriculum that teaches lessons with several different modes of learning.
 - 105 c. Bring learning home by strengthening caretakers' role in faith formation and celebration of
106 milestones.
- 107 3. Encourage active participation in service-learning within and outside of Bethesda's walls.
 - 108 a. Create opportunities for service for youth and their families.
 - 109 b. Strengthen already existing service opportunities across all ages.
 - 110 c. Consider purchasing a 15-passenger vehicle to ease transportation to outside activities.

111 Goal 2: Make God's love known to the community through our service to others

112 Steps to take:

- 113 1. Ensure current members and friends are spiritually cared for.
 - 114 a. Strengthen homebound pastoral care and actively recruit and train new lay care ministers.
 - 115 b. Enrich bereavement care for those suffering grief, including intentional outreach and visits.
 - 116 c. Continue ongoing fellowship events that fundraise for outside beneficiaries and consider
117 additional opportunities.
 - 118 d. Build a network of small group opportunities, both ongoing and ad hoc, to strengthen
119 relationships.
- 120 2. Tell Bethesda's story of living out God's love to those unfamiliar with Bethesda.
 - 121 a. Actively engage news organizations and relevant blogs/website of Bethesda's ongoing ministry
122 to others.
 - 123 b. Consider our branding when actively engaged in service work, which helps identify our work
124 with our church, communicating the motivation behind it.

- 125 c. Determine what would be the appropriate times and places to present the Gospel as part of our
126 work of service.
- 127 3. Strengthen existing ministries and partnerships and, if needed, seek out new ones.
- 128 a. Research efficacy of existing ministries and partnerships.
- 129 b. Find ways to strengthen less effective ministries and partnerships or, if necessary, withdraw
130 from existing ministry or partnership.
- 131 c. Evaluate other ministries and partnerships to engage in that further the core of Bethesda's
132 identity and calling in Christ.

133 **Goal 3: Be present within the community and actively invite others into our ministry**

134 Steps to take:

- 135 1. Break down barriers that prevent people from participating in Bethesda's ministries.
- 136 a. Research common barriers and consult both members and non-members on perceived barriers
137 to participation.
- 138 b. Consider buying a 15-passenger vehicle or accessible vehicle to make transportation to
139 Bethesda easier.
- 140 c. Publicly engage in issues of justice for underrepresented groups of people.
- 141 2. Train members and friends to share the story of God's redeeming grace.
- 142 a. Create a more comprehensive adult education program, equipping students to also be teachers
143 of the faith.
- 144 b. Provide training specifically around the topic of sharing faith with others.
- 145 c. Engage small groups to invite non-members to occasional get-togethers.
- 146 3. Create opportunities throughout the community to form relationships of trust.
- 147 a. Consider regular opportunities and incentives to invite others to worship/events.
- 148 b. What if Bethesda owned a business venture in the community? One that allows for gathering
149 and interaction, like a restaurant/café/pub, etc. or entertainment venue, etc.
- 150 c. Engage in regular participation in community events throughout Ames and neighboring
151 communities as opportunities present.