

transitions

SUMMARY OF THE BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH 2015 CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

**Approved by the Bethany Transition Team
March 16, 2015**

**(This summary will appear as an appendix/addendum to the final
Transition Team Report now in progress.)**

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PREFACE

“My dream for Bethany is that we move forward without fear, but rather into the direction the Spirit is leading. That we are an open, warm, safe, accepting, loving home for all... old and new members alike. And that we are committed to growing as Disciples of Christ in our faith and our service. Not afraid to change how we've always done things: and open to new ways too. ALIVE with the Spirit of Christ.”

The quote above came to us via the current Congregational Survey, and it does appear to reflect in some aspects the mainstream view of the congregation. It also sets a worthy challenge to us in terms of ascertaining our vision for mission at Bethany Lutheran Church.

The following document is a summary of the findings of the 2015 Congregational Survey, done as part of the transition period toward calling a new pastor(s) to Bethany. The entire body of data from the summary will be available to the church Councils and Transition Team online.

This survey was based on 41 initial questions gleaned from a university-developed survey that has been used at a number of other ELCA churches, supplemented by questions developed by the Mission and Vision study group of the Bethany Transition Team and standard demographic questions adapted to Bethany's needs.

Over 600 surveys were submitted, and after setting aside incomplete surveys 590 viable surveys were used. This is a very large sample and represents a significant percentage of the regularly attending congregation.

A paper survey was used so data input was done by a number of volunteers including the entire Transition Team. To assure data integrity a standardized protocol for data entry was developed and monitored during the online data entry period, and careful accounting was kept of the completed surveys from submission through data entry.

Overall, this survey is seen to be a valid and reliable representation of the wishes of the Bethany Lutheran Church congregation in the current period.

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DEMOGRAPHICS – WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY

Gender: 58% Female, 42% Male *

Age:

Confirmation	14-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
6%	5%	3%	7%	12%	21%	22%	15%	8%

Marital status:

Single	Married	Separated	LifePartner	Divorced	Widowed
17%	68%	1%	1%	7%	6%

Children under 18 currently: 27% Yes, 73% No

Length of membership at BLC (years):

0-1	2-3	4-5	6-10	11-20	20+	Freq. Attend/ Non member
3%	5%	7%	14%	30%	34%	7%

Hours volunteered at BLC:

< 1	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	> 15
45%	17%	18%	9%	4%	7%

Frequency attend services, on average:

1x/week	2-3x/month	Few times/year	Holidays
45%	17%	18%	9%

*All percentages are rounded off.

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QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS – STATEMENTS 1 THROUGH 41

One way to view the statements that are the first part of the survey is by the order of importance of which the congregation rated them. This rough sorting of the data is shown on **page six**. Caution must be used in using such as rough representation of the data, as the differences in averages between the first and fifth statement, for example, are not very great. These kinds of data can best be viewed as approximations of what the congregation considers most important.

Statements 1 through 41 can also be sorted according to the *type* of statement presented, a category or factor. By combining statements into their factors you add strength to the assessment of how important the statements are to the congregation. Since these 41 statements were not designed by members of the Bethany Transition Team, but by someone else, a *post hoc* or after the fact analysis of the factors in them had to be done. This post hoc analysis was informed by the results of the analysis of the written statements on our survey from the open-ended question that was posed in the last part of the survey: “My dream for Bethany’s future is:”, along with a careful analysis of the wording of the 41 statements.

The analysis was validated by blind ratings of the members of the Mission and Vision team who developed the survey. 80% or higher concordance, (agreement) between the raters was the threshold used, and 90% of the statements met this test, indicating most of the statements are representing a single category or factor.

Not surprisingly, since these 41 statements were developed by university personnel, about one fourth of the statements in the questionnaire fell into the “**teaching**” factor or function of ministry (“Teach members about...”, “Help members learn...”, “Address educational ...concerns...”). The remaining categories or factors we identified and validated are **hospitality/fellowship, worship experience, spiritual growth, and outreach**.

When averaged (non-weighted), the order of importance for our congregation of the factors in the 41 statements for our congregation were:

- 1. Worship Experience**
- 2. Spiritual Growth**
- 3. Hospitality and Fellowship**
- 4. Service and Outreach**
- 5. Teaching**

Note that “teaching” includes Christian education but the survey muddies the water with other aspects of teaching in ministry such as teaching about other faiths and social/political/economic issues. Confirming this, even a simple rank ordering of how the congregation rated the importance of Christian education places it in the top ten, so its place at the bottom of this list appears to be more a function of ill-differentiated survey statements than a mandate from our congregation.

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QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS – WHAT DID WE DESCRIBE AS OUR DREAM?

When the statements that our congregants wrote down to describe our dreams for Bethany's future were analyzed for the category (factor) of the statement and how frequently people used the statements the results matched what was found in the quantitative analysis of statements 1 through 41, with one surprise.

The most frequently written statement (which occurred almost twice as often as the next most frequent statement) to describe our dreams for Bethany's future can be summed as

1. Hospitality and Fellowship (Community) – a welcoming, supportive, happy, and connected congregation of worshippers.

The surprise was the second most frequently used statement to describe our dreams for Bethany's future:

2. Growth – a living and growing large church.

The other top factors that emerged, in line with the quantitative analysis, in order were:

3. Christian Education (children, youth, adults)

4. Spiritual Development

5. Worship Experience

6. Service and Outreach

One other factor that appeared in the top six had to do with "clergy", which is more properly assigned to the other question congregants were asked to write about, "For me, the two most important characteristics I look for in my future pastor(s) are:" so it was moved to that analysis (forthcoming in a separate document).

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DISCREPANCY ANALYSIS – HOW ARE WE DOING?

A third analysis of the data was done to compare what the congregation identified as most important to them versus how well those things are being done at Bethany.

The difference between what we value and how well we perceive it is being accomplished says a lot about what our chief priorities are for needed change. Starting with the positive, there were two areas that the congregation identified as meeting or exceeding expectations. One was our music ministry.

The congregation identified excellent, inspirational, and spiritually uplifting music as being in the top ten of importance to Bethany's ministry. They also identified that the current music program is meeting or exceeding their expectations for this.

The second area identified as meeting or exceeding the congregation's expectations in relationship to its importance to Bethany is world outreach.

Conversely, areas which Bethany's congregation believes have the highest importance but that we are not doing well include Christian education, services to our elderly and disabled, and the preaching* dimension of our worship services.

We confirmed that this finding about preaching being of high importance and low in performance is historical at Bethany, and not an indictment of our current interim pastors. The last call committee found that one of their top mandates was to find a pastor who could provide great preaching, and generally our congregation grieves loss of prior pastors' style in preaching until a new long-term pastor is called. Pr. Paul confirmed for us that this is universally true in the many congregations he has helped through transition.

From interviews it appears that the perceived disparity in importance versus satisfaction with our Christian education program and services to elderly has been a factor for a few years, and precedes our current interim period.

* Footnote on preaching – In the Lutheran tradition preaching is not viewed as part of the church's *educational* ministry, but as part of its liturgy. A sermon is a liturgical act that serves as a means of grace, conveying law and Gospel to the people. It proclaims God's Word that judges and God's Word that saves. (Mark Allan Powell, *Law & Gospel*, 2009 Hain-Fry lectures.)

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SUMMATION

Looking at how the congregation responded to the survey, we conclude:

1. Christian education appears at the top of the lists for importance in both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, yet the performance of this vital function in the church is rated as well below expected.

2. Worship experience, hospitality and fellowship (community), spiritual development opportunities and service/outreach to our communities remain vital to our congregation. It appears that service/outreach (mission) component has a lower priority than our current mission and vision statements would predict, and our research outside of the survey validates this is true nationwide.

3. The congregation sees the music aspect of our worship service as being the most important and successful program we have, and as a body we are looking for a matching level of quality in the delivery of The Word in our worship experience.

4. Desire for growth of Bethany's congregation is very much on the congregation's mind, yet this may have been underestimated in previous attempts to discern what direction Bethany should take in our vision for mission. This should receive close scrutiny in discerning the future direction for Bethany.

4. Hospitality and fellowship (community) also appears to be a much higher priority for our congregation than may have been predicted before. In terms of what our needs are for growth, and what current research says about what people who are without a church home are seeking, it seems prudent to give this careful thought as well – it may well be that people are seeking mission less than they are a spiritual home.

5. Consistently, both in this survey and in the extensive research that was done in support of it's use and interpretation at Bethany, it appears our values as a church are clear: **Christian Education, Community, Nurturing Worship, Spiritual Development, and Service/Outreach.** And in what appears to be a message from The Spirit and an endorsement of the "great commission" (Matthew 28:16-29) our congregation is yearning for growth in our efforts to share Christ's church with others.

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ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

As a side note, one effort taken on in the congregational survey was to attempt to validate the use of the data from a much smaller sample (n=143) of the congregation done as part of the Resource Alignment Study Group (RASG) report of 2013.

With a much larger sample of the congregation in the current survey it was believed that comparing results on a few key questions can help inform Council regarding the confidence with which they can use the data from the RASG congregation survey in their deliberations.

We compared three key questions that were asked on the RASG survey with three similar questions on the 2015 Congregational Survey. See the separate attachment to this summary for results of this comparison.

It appears that in the main the data RASG obtained is useful and relevant, although a bit old. Not all the data match closely, so caution is urged in drawing conclusions solely on the RASG survey's data.

KEY RAW DATA – LISTS OF TOP PRIORITIES

Top twenty statements by weighted average

Provide a strong Christian education program for children
Provide strong and vital preaching
Provide a strong Christian education program for teenagers
Nurture faith and Christian values in our youth
Provide support and love to members experiencing hardship
Provide spiritually uplifting worship experiences
Help members apply faith to daily life
Provide a strong Christian education program for adults
Provide excellent and inspirational music in worship
Provide counseling for teens and adults who express need
Help nurture family life spiritually
Get youth and adults involved in projects and programs to help others
Provide visitations by staff/volunteers to our elderly
Help people understand theology and church doctrine
Provide regular opportunities for adults and children to worship together
Help members become more skilled at showing love and compassion
Support a strong program of mission outreach locally
Help members understand stewardship as a central aspect of Christian life
Make use of each member's talents and abilities
Provide opportunities for fellowship, support, service and education for women of the church
Help nurture family life educationally

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Top twenty statements by most rated as “Essential”

Provide a strong Christian education program for children
Provide a strong Christian education program for teenagers
Provide strong and vital preaching
Nurture faith and Christian values in our youth
Provide spiritually uplifting worship experiences
Provide support and love to members experiencing hardship
Provide a strong Christian education program for adults
Provide excellent and inspirational music in worship
Help members apply faith to daily life
Help nurture family life spiritually
Provide counseling for teens and adults who express need
Provide visitations by staff/volunteers to our elderly
Get youth and adults involved in projects and programs to help others
Provide regular opportunities for adults and children to worship together
Help people understand theology and church doctrine
Help members become more skilled at showing love and compassion
Provide worship music in a variety of forms/styles
Support a strong program of mission outreach locally
Provide opportunities for Bible study
Help members understand stewardship as a central aspect of Christian life

Note that the differences in numerical ratings between the individual statements on these lists' are small, so it is best to view these lists as a general indication, rather than drawing the conclusion that the statement on top is twenty times more important than the statement on the bottom of the list.

KEY RAW DATA – TOP 10 AREAS IN WHICH WE NEED TO IMPROVE

Teach Christian perspectives on moral questions.
Spiritually uplifting worship experiences.
Services for our elderly and disabled.
Provide strong and vital preaching.
Nurture faith and Christian values in our youth.
Educational and social concerns facing our elderly.
Counseling for teens and adults who express need.
Christian education program for teenagers.
Christian education program for children and youth.
Christian education program for adults.

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