

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past months, we've been on a journey of faith, seeking to discern God's will for Christ Lutheran Church. As part of this effort, we've been holding a series of workshops led by Pastors Kyle Severson and Dave Daubert of the Chicago Metropolitan Synod. Ahead of our third and final workshop, we look back at the conversation so far.

In our first workshop, we were asked to define the mission of Christ Lutheran Church and rate our ability to achieve that mission. This provided the foundation for our discussions during the second workshop. At that time, we explored three different possible scenarios for our congregation. The first scenario: Continuing as a congregation in our own building and the challenges involved. The second scenario: Closing our doors and ceasing to exist as a congregation. In essence, brushing the dust from our sandals and walking away. The third scenario: We sell our building and continue as a reinvented Christ Lutheran Church.

In the first scenario, we discussed the challenges we may face in continuing as a congregation in our own building. At the top of our list of challenges was the undeniable fact that we are, at this point, an aging and dwindling congregation. Following close behind was the difficulty meeting the basic, day-to-day expenses involved in keeping the doors open, including paying a pastor. We also acknowledged the mounting capital improvement costs, currently estimated at approximately \$100,000. A final concern was the ability of the members to work together to achieve a common goal, in this case, God's mission for our congregation. There have been divisions and tensions among the members that could make working together troublesome. While the first two challenges seemed far more daunting, we agreed that, if we are willing, the problems involved in coming together can be overcome more easily and quickly.

The second scenario presented by Pastor Daubert, that of closing our doors and walking away, was far more upsetting and elicited many passionate responses. We discussed the consequences of such a move both on the community at-large and each of us personally. The biggest losses on a personal level were the loss of the relational connections on which we've come to depend. The church is our faith family and losing it would lead to grief and a spiritual emptiness. The loss of the pastoral guidance we find in connecting the Word to our daily lives was also mentioned. Some indicated how difficult it would be to find another congregation as accepting and open. As for the community at-large, participants noted that we are considered a valuable contributor to that community with all we do, including the preschool, and the space we provide for meetings (boy scouts, AA). With rumors flying, people have already been approached by the others expressing concern at the possibility of Christ Lutheran Church closing.

The third scenario involved the sale of the church building (possibly with the proviso that the preschool be allowed to continue in its space for a given number of years) and a couple of different ways to continue as a congregation. While the idea of renting space back from our purchaser seemed the most obvious choice, Pastor Daubert pointed out that any congregation moving in would have their own plans for how to use the building and when, which may limit our access. As a much smaller group, we could find a different, smaller location, using some of the proceeds from the sale to help us make that transition. We could "yoke" with another congregation, using some of their resources and pastor, in essence becoming a satellite of the other church. A final possibility the pastor presented is called a Synod Approved Worship Community (SAWC). This option would allow us to continue as basically a mission church with the support of the synod. This last option was one we weren't familiar with but would like to learn more about, perhaps in our next workshop.

Obviously, our journey is far from complete, but we travel the road together and with God leading us. We are thankful for the support of Bishop Curry and Pastors Daubert and Severson as we work to discern God's will for our congregation. We've had a lot to think about and discuss, with more ahead in the coming weeks. We encourage everyone to join us for the third and final workshop scheduled for Saturday, August 7 from 1:30-3:30. Your insights and input are vital to this process. This workshop is your opportunity to voice those thoughts and concerns.