



Trinity Lutheran Church

Church of the Cross in the Foothills

Foothill & La Cumbre  
Santa Barbara, California

## REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), located in Santa Barbara, CA. At about 600 members, the website states: “We are a congregation that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person – questions, complexities and all. Join us as we do God's work in Christ's name for the life of the world.”

The Mission Statement declares: Praising and thanking God, we affirm our mission to:

- **LOVE** all persons in Jesus Christ;
- **NURTURE** the family of faith through teaching, learning and worship;
- **SERVE** the needs and heal the hurts of others through the unselfish giving of ourselves;
- **SHARE** the crucified and resurrected Christ within Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Santa Barbara and the whole world so that all may experience the redeeming love of God.

### Background

In the fall of 2012 Trinity Church Council established a sanctuary renewal task force to explore options to renew Trinity's worship spaces. Based on extended discussions and exchange of ideas, the task force prepared a report detailing opportunities for improvement the narthex, nave, and restroom facilities. While emphasizing the importance of congregational input, the task force recommended retaining an architect to develop initial designs, working with an organ builder to determine the feasibility of moving an organ to the front of the sanctuary, and assessing the composition of the popcorn ceiling material.

### Council Recommendations to the Congregation

Over the past year members of council and the task force have taken action on these recommendations by soliciting congregational feedback during ‘brainstorming’ meetings, discussing the technical details of the proposed projects with architects and organ builders, and developing a preliminary budget for each element of the plan. Based on this information, a refined set of priorities was presented at a special congregational meeting in January 2016. Details of the proposal can be found through the following links.

**Nave and Chancel:** Many aspects of the sanctuary renewal proposal focus on improving the flexibility of our worship spacing while improving acoustics and creating a more intimate environment. A key element involves building a new organ in the front of the sanctuary based on components of the existing organ and pipes from the organ removed from Grace Lutheran Church.

**Narthex:** The renewal program aims to make the narthex more open, inviting, and less cluttered.

Restrooms: Ensuring that restrooms meet accessibility standards while improving comfort has been ranked as a very high priority.

Having contracted with Kairos and Associates, a Listening Phase of work began to assess process, strategy, congregational perspectives and priorities, and to determine the best path forward.

The following Report details some of what has been learned.

## **Discoveries**

All churches benefit from a clear understanding of who they are—their mission, and where they're headed—their vision. Yet, the reality is that finding the time to pause and reevaluate, as well as knowing what processes and resources to use for such an endeavor, generally results in leadership often taking steps forward as best as can be determined. It can sometimes feel like a guessing game.

Kairos' Listening Phase is an intentional approach to congregational life that seeks to utilize organizational intelligence of different sorts in order to make better decisions in less time and with more confidence. Three features are included: the CAT (Church Assessment Tool) congregational survey; member interviews/conversations; and an external listening event that takes place as a community panel discussion with area leaders and partners. Out of this comes a more holistic understanding of the variety of factors at play within each congregation's sense of mission and ministry.

The CAT—Church Assessment Tool—was administered to the entire congregation in the winter of 2015. In all, 94 confirmed members took the CAT, 75% of the average weekly worship attendance. This was a more than sufficient database of input so as to have a very high level of confidence in the results.

An interpretation of the *Vital Signs Report* was provided by consultant Tim Johnson to a significant cross-section of leaders and interested members. Some of what continued to be noteworthy and compelling for shaping mission and ministry includes:

- In assessing an overall “snapshot” of congregational health and vitality, Trinity scores slightly above average on levels of energy and satisfaction. That said, it should be noted that 52% of the respondents were generally “on the fence” when responding to the statement that the church seems to be just going through the motion of church activity and that there isn't much excitement among the members. This is important because what happens next will help to sway these members one way or another.
- Congregational priorities revealed three that were statistically far out front of the others:
  - Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth to our church
    - a. Determined and clear focus, and resources being dedicated here will determine the extent to which the congregation makes concrete forward movement on these priorities
  - Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church

- b. This priority generally suggests a re-engagement with traditional and new evangelism strategies, PR/publicity efforts, as well as a review of the church's hospitality ministry.
- Enlarge or improve the physical facilities of our church to expand or enhance our ministries.
  - c. Here, one presumes that this priority has risen high on the overall list because of the sanctuary renewal plans/conversation that has been happening at the church for some time.
- In comparison with other churches in the database, Trinity scores on the "Progressive" end of the Theological Perspective Index. As well, on the Flexible Style Index, Trinity scores on the "More Adaptable" end of the scale.
  - o These two indices, when combined together, identify a cultural dynamic that places Trinity in a "performance" quadrant. This should increase the confidence that Trinity can indeed move forward with initiatives that they deem important to the overall mission and vision of the church.
- There are four Indices that further describe and assess the health and vitality of the culture of church. For Trinity, they all rate on the relatively higher scores in relationship to other churches. These cultural impactors are:
  - o Hospitality (scoring slightly below the mid-point)
  - o Morale
  - o Conflict management
  - o Governance
- There are four Indices that in brief capture/express the "how" of ministry life. These are performance indices that give a snapshot of how the effectiveness how ministry is perceived. Two rank high; two rank below the mid-point:
  - o Spiritual Vitality: 42/100
  - o Readiness for Ministry: 77/100
  - o Engagement in Education: 90/100
  - o Worship & Music: 39/100
- Other Information reveals:
  - o Average household income of \$102,453
  - o Average contribution per household of \$2,725
  - o 73% of those who took the survey were over the age of 65
  - o 49% have been Trinity members for over 20 years
  - o All but 2% have at least some college education
  - o 63% use daily devotions as a part of their spiritual journey
- Building Fund Profile information reveals:

- o 80% agree (to different degrees of strength) with moving forward with a capital appeal
- o 42% intend to give greater financial support over the next three years (to an appeal)
  - i. The hope is that this figure would, of course, increase as a by-product of an actual appeal
- Just over 90% of those taking the survey believe that at least some change is required for Trinity to realize your vision for the church
- The full breadth of the Vital Signs Report should be routinely referred to for congregational leadership planning

**A Community Panel Discussion** brought together five leaders from various organizations in the broader Santa Barbara community. The following are some highlights discovered from that time together:

- Great appreciation on the part of all participants that Trinity had invited them and was interested in the broader community's issues/concerns
- A broad level of resources and services are available through many of these agencies. Most of them have a sense of working together in different ways
- Homelessness is indeed an issue in Santa Barbara. To understand the full breadth of this, one must include the many who do not have regular housing (not just those either in shelters or on the streets). That is to say that they couch-hop or that they have multiple families living in sometimes one place. Observations:
  - o Providing security in housing helps to facilitate other assistance needed for most all of these people
  - o Low vacancy rates and high rent are a part of the problem
  - o There is indeed a goal to reduce homelessness in the area, though specifics weren't identified
  - o Meal sharing in one/more of the parks is an important service/ministry to the homeless and others. Many church groups help with this effort
  - o Mental illness and severe mental illness is a significant cause of homelessness and this prolongs that situation
- Sex trafficking is something that has grown here. The needs are not only to respond in the most holistic way, but primarily simply retaining a safe apartment is a need. The cost for this is somewhere around \$1,800-2,000/month at most
- Collaboration among institutions, churches and other agencies is critical in serving the marginalized
- There is a far higher level of free and reduced lunches in some schools, thus revealing that many families are "on the edge"
- There are many children who are in or coming out of tough situations. The relational needs are significant!

- Neighborhood watches are needed, particularly in the geographical area of Trinity. These are great ways to connect neighbors and to reduce crime
- It was noted that opportunities to serve and make a significant impact in the lives of others is a tremendous opening to engage younger generations. There is a real resonance with hand-on service
- A lot of latch-key kids in the community. Engaging them in a safe environment, offering them activities can be a way to serve those families.
- Needed:
  - To create a culture of acknowledgement and respect
  - To help church members know the breadth of needs and opportunities to engage
  - Choose even just one agency for the church to connect with
  - Consider serving in one of the many boards or committees serving these organizations
  - Caring for your own family
- All were open and eager for most any form of collaboration or partnering where possible.

**Member Interviews/Conversations** provided an opportunity to connect one-on-one in order to hear people's personal perspectives, thoughts and opinions on ministry. The following is a broad sample of the comments shared on the part of the members. There is no significance to the *order* of what follows. And it should be noted that some comments reflect more than one member's input.

When asked what had members call Trinity home, or what they identified as **core strengths** of the church, the following was shared:

- A wonderful staff—great appreciation for the staff overall and the work they do
- Pastor Truls embodies who we are—welcoming, non-judgmental, easy-going, thoughtful in faith
- Strength of worship—music and Pastor Truls sermons were named over and over again as being top-notch
  - Appreciate that we have a variety of worship opportunities
  - Very much appreciate and enjoy the children and family focus of the second service
  - Love the variety of music leadership here
  - Love the chapel as a place to worship—very personal and intimate
  - Love that when we pass the peace, it takes a while!
- This is where my family/friends are. This place is like home to me. Such important relationships. The community and fellowship we share is wonderful!
  - This is a caring community of folks who are always there for one another

- A number of personal stories were shared
      - Very welcoming; a great sense of belonging here
      - A community where people give more than they take
- Trinity is a church committed to reaching out and helping others—this is such an important thing not only for the church as a whole but for me personally
- We have an amazing campus here and it seems to be very well-used!
  - It's a highly visible location
  - Located between Montecito and Goleta—we draw from both sides
- Strong Lutheran core to our identity
- We have great leaders on our Council
- We have a huge endowment—what would it mean if we were to really be progressive/proactive in making some things happen for the future?
- Kids programs—though we don't have a whole lot of kids here, we've got some great leadership and opportunities!
- Adult education is excellent here—good variation and many opportunities to learn/grow
- Youth ministry, though small, is good and so important to who we are
- The Garden is such an important part of what we provide to the broader community
- The breadth of outreach is great!
- Men's ministry is an important part of my life here.
- Our church does some really cool stuff!
- We have the ability to move and shift—let's use this strength!

When asked what most needed attention in shaping a new chapter of life for Trinity, the following summed up the most recurring responses of things to advance or “pay attention to”:

- Clearly, a focus on membership growth is key. Not sure how we do this.
- We need to lay claim to evangelism and all the ways that can happen. We need to invite, welcome, pay attention to those who come. It's not that we don't, but we need to re-double our efforts
- Congregation needs to be challenged. The truth is that while we do a number of things well, but unless we heed a wake-up call and engage in a new way, Trinity will continue in decline. I'm not a pessimist but a realist.
- Need to look at and revise our Mission Statement. Our mission and identity needs “a hook,” something that not only defines us but motivates us in our work together.
  - We're the church that \_\_\_\_\_. How do we fill in that blank?
- Reality is that if we want to grow, we need to really focus. And we need to be able to identify clearly exactly what it is that we're changing. What will that be?
- Jesus had a heart for the lost—who do we have a heart for? Would we leave the 99?

- Fairly radical change is needed. Not so as to turn things upside down, as such, but to make a genuinely new chapter of ministry here.
- Let's not keep presuming that people will show up. We take people and our church for granted. We're comfortable, and that's not always good.
- How does TLC get out into the community? Isn't that what it means "to go?" We're continually expecting people to come here, but we don't so much go to them.
- We are organizationally weaker than we'd need to be to charge forward with plans/ changes.
- Let's do the renovation so long as it's not just about that! We need to renew our sense of mission and identity, as well.
- Let's not do anything in the sanctuary unless we're going to also put in screens. Virtually all congregations, when they're doing some sort of renovation, pay attention to the versatility of screens.
- What about some renewal of the chapel? We have two services in there, and more people attend there than the sanctuary. With the project moving forward, how are we going to reckon with this reality that few worship in the larger space? Will we all go in there? How will those decisions be made?
- Not sure that this is the best use of \$1M
- What if we utilized the fellowship hall for some sort of contemporary worship? Or all of our worship?
- How about an analysis of all of our buildings? With such changing needs, what about perhaps senior housing?
- How do we maximize our relationship with the preschool?
- We have almost no marketing plan for the church. No brochure; no ads; little compelling programming brings in any new people. What about our signage on Foothill...more updated and compelling? Our website has some gaps.
- Why are we so timid in inviting groups that use our facilities. There's a difference between a clear and warm invitation or explanation of the breadth of who we are, and proselytizing.
- Need to pay attention to young families more if we're going to grow. What about a shift in our adult ed to at least partially offering things relevant to families?
- What would it look like to pay attention to the college students not far from us?
  - Top notch speaker series
  - Travel opportunities
  - Hikes
  - Bible study
- What about different worship experiences? Taize, Saturday, contemplative...
- Keying in with seniors within the broader community
  - Book clubs

- o Special speakers
- o Trips
- o Dining out
- o Walking
- We need greater challenge in our stewardship. It's often almost an after-thought. It seems as though if we don't meet the budget that the Endowment will just cover it.
- We're mostly staff driven; not as strong in teams/committees as we could be

Responding to the question of “unique challenges,” the following was shared:

- Hopeful that our endowment will be able to help us realize our sanctuary renewal project
- We're an aging congregation—what can we do about drawing in and welcoming younger folks?
- I wonder if we're not a bit “stuck in the past.” That is to say, we need some new orientation around what it means to be the church.
- We need vibrancy and to be challenged more
- How we can we do more cooperatively with other churches?
- Financially, we have plenty of money; but we need to be giving more for the sake of the church
- I'm not sure we're using our buildings in the best way. We need to step back and look at all of this.

What might increase our energy here?

- Really owning this idea of a new chapter of life for us
- Being clear about our intended outcomes as a church
- More fully engaging our members
- Just do what we're doing more but have more people help
- New members would infuse us with new energy
- Challenge us in a new way
- Invite others
- Share Trinity with the broader community. I don't think we actually do that at all. It's not surprising that we're not growing if we're not even reaching out. This needs to be our top priority
- Would love to have a bigger 20's to 40's peer group
- Let more people use our facilities; then share who we are with them; invite them
- Reaching out to the colleges nearby
- Let Little Angels use more of our facilities—that would be good for them and for us

- Grow our contemporary worship and music. So many people are simply looking for that.
- A fairly radical change is needed if we're to create new/more energy

### **Misc.**

Finally, when asked what might be a measure of support for the **upcoming capital appeal**, those who responded did so with:

- \$3K
- \$20-25K
- \$15K
- \$15 or more
- Can't commit
- \$10-30K
- \$2K
- Nothing
- \$3-5K/year
- Many said they simply didn't know at this point but that they would support the appeal
- \$5K
- \$1-3K
- \$50K
- Perhaps \$25K, depending upon a couple of things
- \$100K
- Don't think we'll be able to give more than we do now
- \$5K
- We're not as yet in support of the appeal

The preceding is of course just a sampling of what members indicated they may well give. It seemed evident that people were still in an early stage of considering what they would perhaps give. And when I had conversations in which people made it known right away that they weren't in support of the appeal, I of course did not ask them. It is a reasonable expectation, though, that members will give more the more compelling the mission connection is to the project and the more aware that members are of final details as they will come.

### **Appeal Preparatory Considerations**

The reality is that Trinity Lutheran has a number of financial and ministry objectives that require funding. Raising funds for the annual ministry needs as well as the sanctuary renewal project need constant encouragement toward generosity. This happens through the message of generosity being interwoven continually through preaching, teaching, various communications, and generally helping members to see that giving is a spiritual discipline.

For Jesus, few things were more important than our relationship with money. In fact, he saw it as that which competes with our devotion to God (Matthew 6:24). Thus, this should not be a peripheral part of ministry priorities and emphasis, but rather it should be central to that which informs our personal and corporate discipleship.

One of the most important ingredients of a successful capital appeal is the extent to which it engages the congregation. This begins with the Appeal Leadership Team, its sense of cohesion, its commitment and enthusiasm, how it speaks about its work, and its ability to draw others into the goals and objectives of the appeal. Persistent and creative communication with the congregation has been a priority here, and it will continue to be important. Even through informal conversation, we advance the cause of an ever-deepening commitment and excitement about the ministry.

The theme of congregational renewal has been chosen to center the appeal efforts. The narrative has been advanced by a dedicated group, and it will continue to be honed over the coming months.

***Renewing Our Life Together***  
***In worship***  
***In welcoming***  
***In caring and serving***

An architect has been hired and is already at work in ultimately providing drawings, plans and details for the project. Congregational involvement and awareness here are a key, as well.

Appeal teams are being formed; training will be provided.

## **Comments/Observations**

People love the people and ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church! Members are deeply appreciative of the ministry that is shared and generally people are optimistic. That said, it seems that there is some yearning for new energy or perhaps a new reason to rally as a congregation. There are many who statistically are “on the fence.” Again, what happens next is what will help sway those members to become impassioned supporters and participants in the mission calling of Trinity Lutheran. Leadership has done an excellent job in working out details in the pursuit of the renewal project. There has had to be a consolidation of efforts, clear communication between groups/members, and a persistent determination to involve the congregation as a whole. While the support for the project is broad, it is noted that there is a cross-section who are not on board or not fully on board. There is concern that the church is not growing; though there is hope that Trinity can seize this moment in the congregation’s life to advance its mission.

The upcoming appeal is far more than just about raising funds, though it is very much that. It is an opportunity to be even more deeply grounded in mission and ministry, and to invite others into a deeper commitment and generosity for the sake of the Gospel. Trinity

leadership and membership is well-positioned to engage in a successful capital appeal for the sake of their future goals and aspirations. Inviting people into a greater joy of giving is a spiritual endeavor that not only furthers the mission and ministry of the congregation, but it is a blessing and encouragement to the individual giver.

Submitted

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