

# Effective Communication: A Guide for Congregations

## Creating a Congregational Mission Statement

### Why Prepare a Mission Statement?

A mission statement will help members focus on who they are as Lutheran Christians - as a gathering of God's people within the community. It will help clarify the congregation's mission and renew commitment to that mission, and will provide a basis for setting goals, making decisions and planning actions that reflect congregational rather than individual priorities.

Having a mission statement makes it possible to evaluate the congregation's communications, to express concisely what the congregation is about and to set goals for communicating the gospel. It also assists with providing a unified "look" to congregational communications.

### Working Through the Process

This resource suggests a three step process to arrive at a Mission Statement:

- I. Developing Congregational Identity** (Understanding who you are).
- II. Developing Congregational Mission** (Stating what you are about).
- III. Moving from Mission to Action** (Moving toward using the statement in planning).

One way to use the three steps might be:

- Work through Part I with a number of groups in the congregation. Ask participants to write down their understanding of the congregation's identity. Use these written statements with the Church Council as you move to Parts II and III.
- On a retreat with all of the congregational leaders, work through all three parts of the process. Make it your goal to come up with a working mission statement at the end of the retreat.
- Be sure to check current congregational documents (e.g., constitution) for previous mission or purpose statements to consider as you formulate your new statement.

### Part I. Developing Congregational Identity - Who Are We as God's People in this Place?

Our understanding of who we are (identity) will shape what we do (mission). This study will help

us clarify our congregational identity from Biblical, confessional and situational points of reference.

#### Biblical

The Bible uses more than 500 nouns and adjectives to describe Christians. Taken together, these words build a picture of who we are from God's point of view. Review the following references and jot down what each passage says about who we are:

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9, 10	Ephesians 2:11-22
Ephesians 4:4-6	Luke 17:20-21
Romans 3:23-24	1 Corinthians 12:12, 29
Matthew 16:15-18	John 15:5-17

Discuss: What are the implications of each of these passages for our congregation?

#### Lutheran Confessional

We want to look at how being Lutheran Christians makes us different from and similar to other Christians in what we believe and do.

Review at least Articles V, VII, and XIV of the Augsburg Confession, then look at Luther's Small Catechism before reflecting on and discussing the following questions:

- What are the strengths (insights, understandings, gifts) Lutherans can bring to the total witness of Christians in the world?
- How are those strengths (should those strengths be) at work in our congregation?

#### Situational

Here we want to look closely at our congregation as a part of our community. As we do so, we will want to talk about what part we play in the life and activities of this community. How are we perceived? How do we contribute? How should we be functioning in this community?

To answer those questions effectively, we may want to look at some of the following:

- When and how did we begin as a congregation?
- What are our ethnic roots? How do our roots and our history that affect who we are and what we do?
- Where do our people come from? Are they life-long Lutherans? What other backgrounds do they bring?
- What is the significance of our congregation's name for our life and mission?

## Part II. Developing Our Congregational Mission Statement

After summarizing the highlights of your study of your congregational identity, see if you can come to a consensus that brings together the important elements of your understanding.

Review some mission Scripture references. What does each of the following say about our mission?

Mark 10:41-45	Luke 4:18-19
Romans 12:1-2	1 John 5:6-12
Psalms 99	Matthew 8:1-13
1 Corinthians 11:23-26	Mark 10:35-45
1 Corinthians 16:1-2	John 16:12-13
Matthew 11:29	John 13:34-35
Ephesians 4:15-16	Matthew 25:31-46
Mark 6:7	Acts 2:43-47
Luke 10:1	Philippians 1:3-6

After reading the passages and talking about their impact on our mission:

- Ask individual members to write words or phrases that express the congregation's mission.
- Make a list of items that you can agree should be a part of the congregation's mission statement.
- Write a rough draft of a statement.

You might take time to get input and reaction from others in the congregation. Then when you meet again, do a finished version of the statement.

Publish your statement in various ways. It might be included in bulletins, distributed as a book mark, written attractively and posted in the church narthex, and the like. It needs to become an integral part of all congregational communications.

## Part III. Moving from Mission to Action

Your mission statement needs to be a working document informing council and committee actions. You might use the statement in steps like these:

### Assess Needs

Identify and assess needs/hurts/problems that you in your congregation are called upon to address. What action needs to be taken?

### Identify Resources

What resources are available to you to help you accomplish God's mission through your congregation? Think broadly about people,

institutions, talents, dollars, partners and the like. List them.

### Set Goals

What specific positive, achievable pieces of your congregation's mission do you want to accomplish in the next three years? Write out those goals.

### Develop Action Plans

Plan the steps that will be needed to accomplish your goals. Identify who will be responsible for what activities. You might have several action plans for each goal.

### Evaluate Progress and Results

Establish periodic evaluation periods to see how you are doing. Ask: What are we learning? What remains to be done? What changes are needed? What new opportunities challenge us? Revise your goals and action plans accordingly.

## Where to Get Additional Help

For additional help with a congregational visioning, planning process, the Congregational Leader series from Augsburg Fortress (800/328-4648 or [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)) is an excellent resource. Titles include:

- Called to Lead: A Handbook for Lay Leaders
- Growing Together, Revised Edition: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees
- Our Context: Exploring Our Congregation and Community
- Our Mission: Discovering God's Call to Us
- Our Structure: Carrying Out the Vision

