**Welcome Task Group**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Report**

**January 28, 2018**

**A Summary of Our Work**

Company is coming! St. Benedict teaches us to see Christ in the guest/other. So, we welcome Christ in each other and especially in the most vulnerable; children, widows, the sick, lonely, grieving, the marginalized and immigrants. Trinity’s purpose is to nurture and grow our faith family, centered on Word and Sacrament, by exemplifying the love of Christ as we respond to the needs of one another and our world.

Last fall the Trinity Lutheran Church council appointed a Welcome Task Group to explore what it means for Trinity to welcome. Laurie Bestvater, Marc Cajolet, Laura Cormier, Ed Jonson, Robyn Kressin, Pauline Ray, Dina Morrison and Rev. Erica Kennedy have been meeting frequently since early October 2017.

The Task Group explored what it means to be welcoming by examining scripture readings and reflecting on the imagery of welcome from these lessons. Dwelling in God’s Word and working as a team, the task group focused on values that best identify the Trinity Congregation and physical space. These values and images serve to guide our vision for sharing God’s *welcome*.

**Some Biblical Images of Welcome**

The biblical images that resonated for us were the Sheltering Oaks from the story in Genesis 18 when God appeared to Abraham in the heat of the day. Trinity’s oak trees and park-like setting provide a shelter from the hustle and bustle of daily life, work and school. The beauty of the sanctuary provides a calming place to meet Jesus, be fed at the Lord’s Table, and sent out to serve our neighbors.

Another key image comes from Jesus meeting the woman at the well in John 4. Jesus meets the woman in the heat of the day and promises living water. Jesus, the Living Water, satisfies our spiritual thirst and with the well of abundant opportunities through Trinity’s various ministries invites us to worship God and serve our neighbors. The water of God’s love flows from this place out into the world.

Within these Bible Lessons, we encountered many powerful images and ideas:

* God shows up in the unexpected...the strangers in the heat of the day...Jesus at the well in the heat of the day.
* Removing barriers to be open –being ready to welcome God in the other – being shaped by these experiences and becoming instruments of God’s work.
* Our building, grounds, and faith community offer solace in a chaotic and sometimes troubling world.
* Listening to our guests.
* Welcoming the stranger with hospitality and generosity.
* Taking risks to move beyond our comfort zones so that we might open to being changed by others in unexpected ways.
* Offering our little oasis surrounded by the natural beauty of the suburban forest.
* Opening the doors to the sanctuary like a massive tent where people of all sorts can seek refuge from the struggles of modern life.
* Offering the banquet of the sacrament in the same simple way Jesus first offered it to his disciples.
* As a dynamic community, we nurture our faith family like the refreshing water from a spiritual well, responding to the needs of one another.

The team felt a verse and image that sums up our welcoming mission comes from Hebrews:

*“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:2*

**Areas of Welcome & Anticipation We Considered**

*Rationale:*

We have been welcomed into God’s family so we should welcome members, friends, and strangers into our church home. In a hectic world of endless choices, we all long to be genuinely invited to rest, to make sense of our lives, to live well in community, and to find God’s peace.

A welcoming environment allows visitors/guests to feel they have a connection with others. A welcoming atmosphere encourages current members to continue involvement and guests to come back. We want everyone to return and find that Trinity feels like home.

A clean, tidy, and organized church appearance presents a caring welcome to members and guests. Renovations and expansion will have a positive effect and extend the legacy for the future of Trinity. The physical spaces where we gather, worship, meet and share fellowship make an impression. We want all who walk through our doors to feel as if they’ve entered a space in which they can feel welcome and experience God’s love and peace.

To that end, Trinity Lutheran Church needs to be as attractive and barrier-free as possible. Everything should convey, “You have been anticipated and are most welcome.”

**Promote a welcome atmosphere during and after worship.**

*Possible Actions:*

* Make sure the service is easy to follow
	+ Why: Changes to liturgy and music add nice variety, but can be challenging, particularly to visitors/guests.
	+ How: Familiar/uncomplicated songs with intention teaching and introduction when introducing new music
	+ Clear direction in bulletin or clear verbal direction (no jargon or unfamiliar abbreviations)
	+ Who: Review with Pastor, Worship and Music and Welcome Team.
* Train/encourage worship facilitators (usher, greeter, etc.) to focus on welcome
	+ Why: We offer welcome, ease and comfort
	+ How: Smile and a handshake, sit in a different place, introduce yourself to those around
	+ Offer logistical assistance as needed (placement of wheelchair, walker, make parents aware that children are welcome as well as point out activity bags and/or the availability of nursery care)
* Ensure service energy and participation
	+ Evaluate whether 1 or 2 services is ideal
	+ Evaluate whether the service times/days are conducive to busy parishioners
	+ Evaluate complexity of music and liturgy for a small group (lack of participation/singing due to unfamiliar melodies, etc.)
	+ Why: Unity services have louder voices, greater community connection among all
	+ How: Try one service, ask for feedback
	+ Who: Worship & Music/Christian Education and Pastor
* Provide support to families to strengthen inter-generational involvement
	+ Why: Provide opportunities to connect beyond Sunday mornings
	+ How:
		- Family nights to provide fellowship with families in similar stages of life
		- Dinner groups to provide fellowship with families in similar stages of life
		- “Adopted grandparents” for families with children who do not have close family in the area
		- Modern playground equipment (or hand-me-down swing set) behind the church
		- Vacation Bible School and similar activities
		- Evaluate scheduling of church activities with any potential conflicts with school activities
* Provide opportunities for sharing and learning
	+ Why: Get to know one another at a deeper level, find more shared interests
	+ How:
		- Song requests (songs we grew up with)
		- Prayer/Scripture requests
		- Share faith stories from home country/childhood/etc.
	+ Who: Pastor and Worship & Music

**Communicate "Welcome" more thoroughly and intentionally through all Trinity Lutheran Church (TLC) signage, documents, website, and social media.**

*Possible Actions:*

* Why: Making written communication easy to discover, understand and self-start
* How:
	+ Evaluate current and possible communications for welcoming message, ease of use, aesthetics and branding.
		- Employ the talents of a design firm to help us align and communicate our message.
	+ Provide clear maps and signs throughout the building, campus and community to guide users and guests.
		- Offer information as well as publicly convey Trinity’s personality.
		- Possibly positioning signs along the drive while you enter and exit the parking lot. Ex: “All” “Are” “Most” “Welcome” “Here” “Please” “Come” “Again”
		- For indoors – A digital sign could be placed in the entry near the office with scrolling information.
	+ Create brochures, bulletin boards and other current vehicles to welcome guests and provide information to members.
		- Use a multiplicity of venues available to us to create connections. For instance, easy to use website, social media (Twitter, FaceBook, others), digital signage/screen in the building, group texting, etc.
* Who: Form new Communications Team that would collaborate with Property and IT

**Make intentional welcoming connection with ‘new’ worshipers/guests and community**

*Possible Actions:*

* Make connections by following up with first time worshipers after initial visit.
* Why: To let everyone know they are welcome.
* How:
	+ Form a Welcome Team that will be to find ways to reach out and follow-up.
	+ Train greeters, ushers, etc. to connect with everyone who enters.
	+ Create a welcome gift which would include information about the congregation.
* Who: Those with skill and/or inclination for welcoming and hospitality.
* Who: Members of the Welcome Team working closely with greeters and Pastor to determine who may be new.
* Create Serving Teams for Fellowship Hour(s). This will make the “job” easier and more enjoyable for those involved.
* Why: Many hands make light work as well as increases involvement, ownership and variety.
* How: Create teams (of 10-12 families) who would serve monthly and cycle through the year. A team might serve 2-3 times per year.
* Who: With leadership from the Fellowship Committee, in partnership with all families, individuals and those who regularly attend coffee hour.
* Charge the Welcome Team with being available to speak to others about their interests and opinions.
* Why: To prevent people from feeling as if they don’t belong.
* How: Identify Welcome Team as “go to” people for key information.
* Who: The Welcome Team would consist of interested members of the congregation who have the skill and/or inclination for hospitality
* Determine whether we are creating a welcoming atmosphere with our outdoor space Perhaps some park-like seating and landscape in the greenspace under the oaks.
* Why: To create one space for the grounds and building.
* How: Add some benches or Adirondack chairs beneath the oaks.
* Who: Memorial funds and aesthetics committee?
* Create brochures offering information on various ministries Trinity mission groups/activities.
* Why: For both members and guests to Trinity. Many walk through the door who do not see any information about our church.
* How: Various committees would create and with a designated display space(s).
* Who: Various committees to create. Property committee to find a way to display. Communication Team to oversee and assist stylistically.

**Plan facility updates that say Welcome!**

*Possible Actions:*

* Establish a Task Force to work with the Council and Congregation to determine priorities and feasibility for things to do with our building to enable the desired welcoming environment. This analysis should involve all users of Trinity’s space to consider all needs.
	+ Why: To make sure that we make the best choices for an orderly investment of resources.
	+ How: Look at building, space and usage. What makes the most sense?
	+ Who: Involve many within our congregation as well as appropriate outside consultants. Query groups who regularly use the church for input as they see things differently from us.
* Provide accessibility required for all public buildings
	+ Create an indoor ramp that accommodates wheel chairs and assisted walkers traveling between the Sanctuary and adjoining education building
	+ Shorten or remove a few pews to accommodate wheel chairs and walkers as first class citizens
	+ Integrate the ramp project with a larger vision of modernization and accommodation with the professional advice of an architect.
	+ Provide means for people with visual impairments to access our space by adding braille to wayfinding signs and doorways
	+ Provide assistive technology to worship services to accommodate people who are hard of hearing
	+ Add some sound damping décor and furniture to the Luther room to enhance conversation by reducing noise
* Modernize bathroom facilities
	+ Provide spacious and modern restrooms in proximity to the largest congregation area, the Sanctuary
	+ Integrate the bathroom project with a larger vision of modernization and accommodation with the professional advice of an architect
* Create a larger, more open greeting space for fellowship time in close proximity to the Sanctuary
	+ Eliminate the ‘coat room’ and back pew on the same side to allow for wheel chairs, choir procession, and post worship gathering
	+ Remove the wooden wall covering the beautiful stained glass in the coat rack area. Add moveable coat racks that can be removed when out of season.
	+ Create a bright and inviting gathering space that reflects the mid-century modern architecture with the professional advice of an architect
	+ Consider enclosing new space immediately in front of the Sanctuary or adjacent to the Sacristy
* Update the kitchen to comply with current food service requirements
	+ Update kitchen space, surfaces and sinks to provide safe food preparation and service area so that internal and external events have sufficient food safety
	+ Add a more attractive ‘coffee corner’ in the Luther room with some comfortable furniture, high-top tables and atmosphere that invites people to linger instead of leaving to meet friends at Starbucks or Panera

**Spruce up environment to say welcome.**

*Possible Actions:*

* Why: A clean, tidy, and organized church physical space presents a caring welcome to members, guests, and potential new members
* How: Form sub-committees or teams, administered by the Property Committee, to care for different areas of our church/grounds.
* Who:
	+ Landscaping Team(s)
		- weeding, planting, pruning
	+ Painting Team
		- paint walls and trim
		- Spruce up our interior space by painting walls and trim with updated color scheme.
	+ Carpentry
		- construct small projects for organization and tidiness.
	+ Interior Decorating/Design Team
		- look at our space with “fresh” eyes, focusing on cleanliness, decluttering, and brightening.
* Devise and implement a way to cover the “attic” spaces above the classrooms and offices for a tidier appearance.
* Dedicate a space for clothing, food collections and remove clutter from hallways and sanctuary.
* Remove and relocate hallway bulletin boards. Replace with appropriate art work.

**Possible invitational statement**

Jesus says come, just as you are. Trinity Lutheran Church, in the wooded hills of Chelmsford, Massachusetts embodies Jesus’ welcome and invites you to rest here. Please join us in worship and fellowship on Sunday mornings, where you will find a shelter for your soul and nourishment for the days ahead. Feast on God’s Word, be filled at the well of music and service, use your gifts and skills to make a difference in the Greater Chelmsford community, and rest in the joy of God’s unconditional love and healing. All are most welcome.