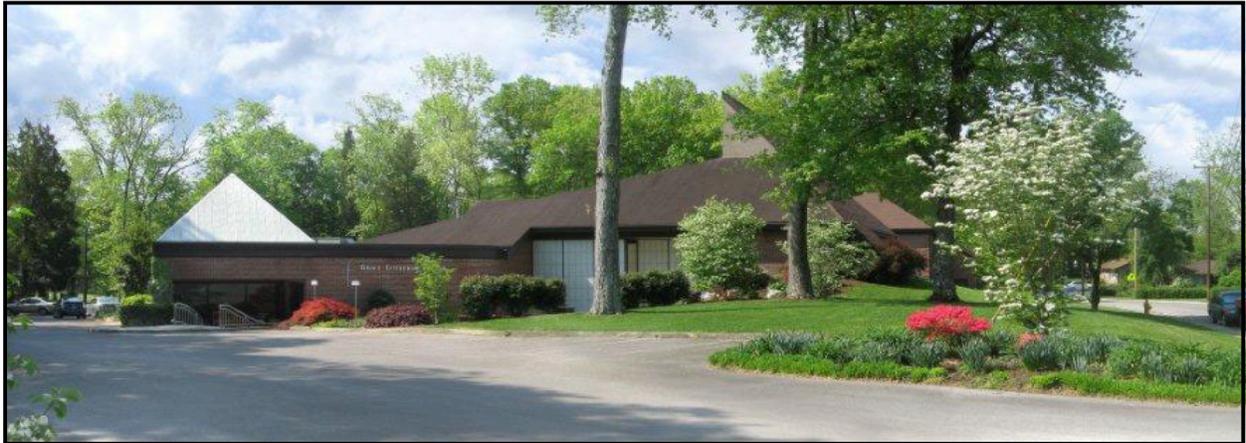


August 16, 2015

2015 VISION TEAM REPORT



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE

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GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF OAK RIDGE VISION FOR TOMORROW PLAN

INTRODUCTION:

The last strategic planning activity at Grace Lutheran culminated in January, 2005, with the publication of the Final Report, Strategic Ministry Task Force.

The 2005 Task Force made a number of recommendations; some of which were successful, and some not so much. Times have changed since then, and a number of new challenges exist along with some of those also identified in 2005. We need to learn from the past, and adapt to the reality of the current trends, as all organizations go through cyclical changes. Perhaps it is worth repeating the old adage: “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.”

With this in mind we have taken a fresh look at where we are today, and are seeking new ways to utilize our resources to continue to follow our mission statement:

“Love Jesus and help others love Him too.”

See Appendix A for a description of the current Vision for Tomorrow process. Other appendices have detailed results of the information gathered in the process.



Strategic Planning Session

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Accomplishments Since January 2005 Strategic Ministry Task Force Report

Bread of Life ministry was established for laity to take communion to home-bound members and those in assisted living and nursing home settings, plus make additional visits to these folks.

Christian Education program was revitalized, especially Sunday School for both children and adults, and Vacation Bible School events were enhanced.

Twice-monthly evening prayer meetings were instituted.

Via de Cristo activities were established for spiritual nourishment and lay leadership development.

Pet Fest and Blessing was expanded, especially with addition of Pets Are Blessings 5K Run/Walk in 2013.

The ways we welcome new visitors have expanded.

Online outreach expanded via two main approaches:

- Improvement of Grace website; addition of Pet Fest and Blessing website and Facebook page, plus Twitter account; 2015 major revamp of Grace website.
- Addition of Grace Facebook presence.

Advertising increased via more press releases, large banner signs for special events and services, and new venues for paid ads.

Full-time Minister of Music was added which resulted in:

- Expansion and further development of Ringspiration, our bell choir.
- Establishment of Break of Day group to support congregational singing at the 8:30 service.
- Establishment of annual Music Festivals.
- Consolidation of two praise bands for 9:30 service into one group, New Creation.
- Restart of children's choir, Grace Notes.

Replacement of Minister of Music and organist in early 2015 will bring other changes.

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Fellowship and interest group activities changed:

- Restart of Grace's Greatest on quarterly basis.
- Replacement of Grace Prime Time with monthly Fellowship Dinners.
- Annual Grace Women's Teas started.
- Occasional youth/adult movie nights held.

Three new serving/outreach ministries were established:

- Ministry to the Hispanic community to assist in cultural assimilation through thrice-weekly classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and programs to learn of the community needs and issues. Classes expanded in July-August 2015 with the loss of the Adult Ed program that furnished teachers at Grace (2 evenings) and TORCH (daytime). Participants have come from 10 countries to date.
- Mental Health Ministry with near-monthly community events.
- Stephen Ministry, with three volunteers trained as Stephen Leaders in January 2015, and training for Stephen ministers to start in January, 2016.

Food pantry scope and operations ramped up as the need has increased substantially.

Fellowship Hall renovated in 2010.

Planning done for Christian Education/community wing renovation/redecorating, and initial improvements begun in narthex.

Grace: A Congregation in Transition

Grace Lutheran Church was chartered on December 1, 1946 after three years of meeting in homes and other temporary venues, starting in the early days of the Manhattan Project. Thus Grace has had a presence in Oak Ridge for over 70 years. Grace grew rapidly, soon needing two services even after building the first worship space in 1950 at 131 W. Gettysburg Avenue in the Woodland neighborhood. The congregation was very young like the rest of Oak Ridge, with many young couples starting their families.

Grace matured quickly, having vibrant ministries and serving activities that contributed much to the surrounding community, region and world. It has continued to expand its serving ministries, starting Blanket Workshop in 1972; becoming a founding member of CONTACT in 1973; establishing a literacy program (Tri-County Literacy Council) in 1976; resettling three

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refugee families in 1976, 1979, and 1982, and again one in 1986; becoming a founding member of the Ecumenical Storehouse in 1984; starting Angel (and Stars) Tree (1986); starting a Food Pantry in 1987; then added distribution of holiday food “baskets.” Most recently, Grace has begun a ministry to the Hispanic community (2013) that includes English classes, a Mental Health Ministry in 2013, and a Stephen Ministry start in 2014-2015.

The majority of Grace members now are retirees. See Appendix 3 for data on membership and attendance. In summary, since 2004, Grace has gradually declined in both attendance (from 244 to 132 per Sunday) and membership, like other mainline congregations here and across the country, including ELCA congregations. As the core of original members has aged and passed off the scene, Grace has not found a way to replace them, especially with younger participants. A major turnaround will be necessary to stabilize the congregation.

Situational Challenges and Opportunities

Opportunities for ministry abound as the Oak Ridge community and surrounding areas become more diverse, as Oak Ridge ages up with the graying of the early Manhattan Project workers and their families, and with population growth remaining relatively stagnant. Many more children in the Oak Ridge schools are on the free or reduced lunch program, reflecting an increasing proportion of lower income families. The improving economy, the new Westcott Center anchored by Kroger Marketplace, upcoming redevelopment of the mall property, the congressional act designating Oak Ridge as one of the sites for a new National Historical Park, and other new businesses point to new ministry opportunities within Oak Ridge. The city, with help from UTK, has earmarked the Woodland neighborhood as a model area for revitalization. Woodland School is a focal point for community activities that can be complemented by its neighbor, Grace Church, where various community activities already take place. Woodland has become a largely rental (>80%) area, with one of the two highest concentrations of Hispanic residents.

Grace continues to draw significant membership from the surrounding region, especially Clinton and the area around it that is steadily growing. As the workforce at the DOE facilities plateaus or declines, and the majority of new hires have located homes outside Oak Ridge, the employment base for Grace members has become much more diverse than in the past.

The Future

Grace will celebrate the 70th anniversary of its charter signing on Dec. 1, 2016, marking nearly three-quarters of a century of ministry in Oak Ridge and the surrounding region. Many opportunities are here for a grace-centered faith community. We face the future with confidence that God has much in store for this congregation as we live out the following statements:

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Mission, Purpose, and Vision Statements and Motto

OUR MISSION

Love Jesus and help others love Him too.

OUR PURPOSE

Led by the Holy Spirit, we are called to worship God,
Love our neighbors as ourselves, and
Inspire others to seek Jesus and
Experience God's grace in their lives.

OUR VISION

Grace Lutheran ~ A Christian church dedicated to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to a diverse community by loving our neighbors as ourselves, developing vibrant ministries to meet current and emerging needs, and helping people know Jesus.

Grace is a congregation striving to know and love Jesus, to grow into discipleship, to worship with passion, and to love and serve each other, the stranger, and all those in need.

- We recognize that all are God's children and commit ourselves to reach out to all whom we encounter in our daily lives.
- We strive to provide diverse opportunities for worshipping, learning, and serving the needs of our members and all others.
- We follow Jesus' example for making disciples and enhancing our ministries:
- We build relationships. We grow together by worshipping, praying, learning, serving; reaching out to others via groups both large and small and other available avenues; and having fun together. We invite all to share in this spiritual journey.
- We build a foundation of prayer to guide our journey, providing and seeking opportunities for prayer together and individually.
- We build a deepening understanding of Jesus and our calling, offering a variety of learning experiences for all ages.
- We serve those in need, both among Grace's people and the wider community, seeking to meet the needs of all.

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- We give with extravagant generosity of ourselves, our spiritual gifts and talents, and our financial resources to enable Grace's mission of sharing Jesus' love and message.

OUR MOTTO

- *Grace makes a world of difference.*



A typical gathering of congregation members for discussions and input to the Vision process.

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OUR PLAN IN LIGHT OF *FIVE PRACTICES OF FRUITFUL CONGREGATIONS*

Why the Five Practices?

“The most visible way God knits people together into community to fulfill the mission of Christ is through congregations, and these five practices give congregations a common language.”*

- Radical Hospitality
- Passionate Worship
- Intentional Faith Development
- Risk-Taking Mission and Service
- Extravagant Generosity

These practices are intentional actions to equip all of us to carry out the mission of the Church. The work of the church is putting discipleship into daily practice. Therefore, the ministry of the congregation is based upon the faith formation of the individual in each of the five practices. “These practices stir the church to unexpected renewal and expanded vision.”*

Our council is using Schnase’s book to stimulate discussion in the congregation so that we may further expand our envisioning process for Grace and ensure progress toward our goals in a cohesive way. See Appendix 2 for a more extensive discussion by Pastor Damos of these practices and how they can enrich and guide Grace as we move forward.

*From Robert Schnase, Bishop of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*.

OUR GOALS

Overarching Goals

OUTREACH VIA RELATIONSHIPS

We are called to model our efforts to share the good news on approaches used by Jesus. We are called to invite people to “come and see” as we have a chance within the context of relationships. These don't necessarily need to be close relationships, but enough that there is some sense of comfort in speaking about grace and things of faith.

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BECOMING AN INVITING CHURCH

We are called to invite others rather than waiting passively for visitors to come through our doors. We will use approaches developed by others to help us become more comfortable with speaking about our church and inviting others.

SMALL GROUPS

Our Commissions will work collaboratively to develop more small groups to which participants can invite acquaintances and in which participants can get to know each other better. This can be a mainstay of becoming an inviting church and doing evangelism outreach via relationships.

Grace has a number of small groups, some around fellowship, some focused on Bible study or other educational activities, on music, some around service, and some being mixtures. However, Grace needs more points of entry for people into the congregation and to which it is comfortable to invite non-members.

Overarching congregation goals (May 2013):

1. Strengthen all aspects of attracting new members and enhance new participant/member integration and retention; discover ways to attract young families by upgrading children's space in the church and emphasizing youth participation in worship, Sunday school, Bible study, service to community, and other activities.
2. Learn how to reach out effectively to unchurched via relationship development.
3. Build more small groups to give more people ways to participate.

Commission Goals

Goals are described in terms of a vision, a strategy for accomplishment, and the expected outcomes. Each Commission has a set of goals related to the Congregational goals agreed to in May 2013. These are highlighted in the following paragraphs. These goals are also categorized according to one of the "Five Practices" discussed above.

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GOALS DERIVED FROM RADICAL HOSPITALITY



PROCLAIMING COMMISSION: “DO EVANGELISM VIA RELATIONSHIPS”

Vision Summary: We will share our GRACE-based faith with others as we find ways to develop loving relationships via small groups as well as in one-on-one encounters

Strategy: Evangelism is sharing who we are and whose we are in personal and small-group relationships. We have been commanded to share our faith and we are blessed with a GRACE-based faith. We will work to become an inviting church, strengthen the ways we welcome visitors, and explore small-group approaches to draw others into Grace's activities and ministries. We will strive to develop ever more loving relationships within our congregation and with others not yet a part of our faith community. Real love radiates joy and attracts others to a place of grace.

Vision Outcomes:

Grace will have strong and effective approaches to drawing in new participants including young families with children.

Grace will:

I

Improve website and Facebook presence, and use of other digital media

- Add new features to Grace website such as audio and eventually video of sermons and services

Work to become an “inviting” congregation

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Strengthen all aspects of welcoming visitors

Involve more congregation members in welcoming via greeting, gift bag delivery, being pew partners, buddies or mentors, making visits to homes, etc.

- Add greeters at 8:30 a.m. service
- Train all greeters (welcoming, safety issues, etc.)

Strive to become better known to the community

- Get large sign made for Easter [DONE]
- Expand participation in 5K run/walk and Pet Fest generally
- Explore using ads in *Visions* Magazine [DONE]
- Look for other innovative means to spread the word about Grace's offerings

Undertake a communications audit and produce a communications plan so as to make best use of our resources [DONE]

Grace will have at least a few new small groups that draw in new participants, particularly unchurched or formerly churched persons.

Grace will:

Explore, collaboratively with other commissions, starting small groups that have an aspect of inviting and drawing in others not already actively involved in other churches

Offer a variety of groups that may have a focus on spirituality, learning, serving, sports, recreation, or the like, based on the passions of leaders

Grace will have a growing ministry to Hispanics and other non-English speakers via ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) instruction and acculturation help, and relationship-based outreach. The ministry will expand congregational involvement via education about acculturation needs and justice issues.

Grace will:

Hold ESOL Classes with Child Care

- Recruit a coordinator for ESOL class support
- Provide continued publicity to the congregation and community via newsletter, bulletins, flyers, press releases etc. [IN PROGRESS]
- Involve more members in Wednesday class participation (as practice partners)

Learn about acculturation needs, share with congregation [IN PROGRESS]

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- Invite speakers to Ministry Team meetings (Alysa Medina, Paula Trujillo, others)
- Invite speakers to other congregation group meetings
- Explore justice-related needs of the Hispanic community and other immigrants

Proclaiming Commission-related congregation goals (May 2013):

1. Strengthen all aspects of attracting new members including young families with children.
2. Learn how to reach out effectively to unchurched via relationship development.
3. Build more small groups to give more people ways to participate.
4. Explore ministry to Hispanics: ESOL (English as a Second Language) instruction for isolated Hispanic women and help with acculturation, plus building relationships both with other Hispanic women and church members or friends.



Preparing for annual Pet Fest and Blessing rummage sale.

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ADMINISTERING COMMISSION: “MAKE GRACE ATTRACTIVE, ACCESSIBLE, INVITING”



Vision Summary: We will strive to make our building and grounds just as warm and inviting as possible in order to “communicate maximum hospitality, an unmistakable sense of welcome, and complete accessibility.” *

Strategy: We will evaluate all portions of our facilities, especially the education/community wing to determine needs for renovation or upgrade, in order that all will look as inviting as possible and best serve the evolving needs of our new and existing ministries.

Vision Outcomes: We will have a renovated and freshened facility by the end of 2015 that will be welcoming and attractive to visitors and provide a venue for improved and expanded ministries, including for children and youth.

*Schnase 2007, p. 24.

Grace will:

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Upgrade church facilities to facilitate programs and attract new members.

- In 2014, working with all commissions, identify facility needs, with a major focus on the educational/community wing but not limited to that. [DONE]
- Put priorities on needs and develop plans to accomplish the needed changes. First priority is making upgrades in both narthex restrooms to increase accessibility.
- Accomplish the needed upgrades in 2014 – 2015.

Administering-Commission related congregation goals (May 2013):

1. Strengthen all aspects of attracting new members . . . ; discover ways to attract young families by upgrading children's space in the church.
2. Explore enhancements to Food Pantry/Food Basket Ministry. [via facility improvements]

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GOALS DERIVED FROM PASSIONATE WORSHIP



WORSHIPPING COMMISSION: “STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE”

Vision Summary: As Christians, we worship the risen Christ; therefore, we will provide inspiring, passionate, celebratory and meaningful worship and praise services that glorify God; proclaim the risen Christ as our Lord and Savior; and celebrate the renewing power of the Holy Spirit in the church and in our lives. Our worship life is grounded in the rich heritage of the Christian faith and the traditions of Lutheran worship, around the Word

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and Sacrament. While acknowledging that through these means, God meets us in our faith journey, we are also committed to offering diverse forms of worship experiences to a new generation.

Strategy:

- **Strive for excellence in worship by providing worship experiences that engage and connect worshippers with the risen Jesus and the community of faith, so that God's grace may be experienced in a diverse, multi-cultural community.**
- **Utilize traditional and non-traditional worship styles, including the use of technology and visual and performing arts, to enhance the worship experience.**
- **Provide music that utilizes the vocal and instrumental gifts of members and other musicians to the glory of God and the edification of the worshippers' spiritual life.**
- **Use liturgy and worship activities such that children, youth and adults may share their spiritual gifts of ministry in worship.**
- **Provide faithful stewardship so that the worship space and appointments are maintained to honor the God we worship and praise.**
- **Intentionally and actively welcome guests and members into a safe and inviting space to participate in worship and church activities.**

Vision Outcomes:

- **God is glorified; Christ is praised; the Holy Spirit is celebrated.**
- **Worshippers are drawn into God's salvation story and encounter the risen savior as lives are empowered by the Holy Spirit.**
- **Worshippers' faith and life are renewed, enriched, challenged and transformed.**
- **Worshippers know they are disciples of Christ and called to use their spiritual gifts to God's glory in service to church and society.**

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- **The congregation's purpose, mission and ministry are strengthened, benefitting the world and the local community with the love of God.**

Grace will:

Create a more attractive and welcoming worship facility by assessing needed upgrades and improvements and striving to facilitate same in a timely manner.

Identify opportunities for increasing involvement of children and youth in worship services; e.g., have older youth give the children's sermon, have children/youth perform brief skits, and reinstate Youth Sundays once or twice a year.

Provide the Jacob's Ladder volunteers with additional resources and assistance so that the time in Jacob's Ladder is a worship and learning activity that includes singing as well as learning and minimizes or eliminates free play time.

Facilitate exploration by youth/children of special rituals/activities that are practiced in other countries/cultures at Christmas and Easter and include same in the worship services during Advent and Lent.

Enhance the worship services by identifying and encouraging members with musical gifts to lead selected hymns and/or praise music.

Develop a formal Visual Arts Team to be responsible for auditory and visual enhancements to the worship services, including utilization of the computer at the Contemporary Service. Explore re-creation of a Drama Team.

Consider special activities/services, such as Taize, a labyrinth, inviting a praise band from another church to perform at a midweek service, and dramatic presentations.

Worshipping Commission-related congregation goals (May 2013):

1. Related congregation goals (May 2013): Work to strengthen worship, especially the contemporary service, by making the contemporary worship service more participatory.

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GOALS DERIVED FROM INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT



NURTURING COMMISSION: “MAKE DISCIPLES”

Vision Summary: We will form disciples, offering a variety of means for people of all ages to learn together in community.

Strategy: Grace will nurture participants in the faith by giving them high-quality opportunities to learn together in a caring community, forming disciples as Jesus did.

Vision Outcomes:

- Grace will have an active and vibrant program of adult Christian Education, including Sunday School classes, Bible study options, small group discussion groups at church or in homes.
- Grace will have an innovative program of Christian education and activities for children and youth, not limited to Sunday School and Youth Group.

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- **Grace will have additional types of small groups for a variety of interests that both offer discipling, fellowship, and draw in others not already involved at Grace.**

Grace will:

Continue to strengthen Christian Education for all ages. [IN PROGRESS]

Investigate and consider need for continuing Christian Education during the summer months. [DONE]

Restart the Youth Group. [DONE]

Establish ongoing Fellowship activities. [IN PROGRESS]

Nurturing Commission-related congregation goals (May 2013):

1. Strengthen all aspects of attracting new members and enhance new participant/member integration and retention; discover ways to attract young families by upgrading children's space in the church and emphasizing youth participation in worship, Sunday school, Bible study, service to community, and other activities.
2. Learn how to reach out effectively to unchurched via relationship development.
3. Build more small groups to give more people ways to participate.

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GOALS DERIVED FROM RISK-TAKING MISSION AND SERVICE



SERVING COMMISSION: “MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

Vision Summary: We will continue to find and enhance avenues of risk-taking mission and service through which participants can use their gifts to make a difference in the lives of those both near and far from Grace. We will improve the climate of hospitality around our serving ministries.

Strategy: We will pursue ways to develop more of a relationship with those we serve. To the extent possible, we will try to find avenues to serve in ways that increase our clients' self-sufficiency.

Vision Outcomes:

Grace will have a more hospitable space for Food Pantry patrons to wait in and make it possible to develop more of a relationship with them.

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Grace will have improved hospitality associated with our other serving activities.

Grace will have even stronger and improved ministries of the Serving Commission by mustering the needed leadership, talent, and funds.

Grace will:

Recruit new members for the Commission and to help with the various ministries under Serving.
Create a reception area and improved registration station for the Food Pantry.

Work with the Administering Commission to develop a plan for facility upgrade [DONE]

Improve the telephone communications between the Food Pantry and Office

Plan for refreshments and greeters at functions where we are serving the community.

Improve signage for various activities (have already added some signs).

Establish and support a Mental Health Ministry to Grace and the wider community promoting understanding, hope, wellness and healing. [DONE]

Serving Commission-related congregation goals (May 2013):

1. Explore opportunities for ministry related to mental illness (education, advocacy, resource location, etc).

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GOALS DERIVED FROM EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY



STEWARDING COMMISSION: “GIVE JOYOUSLY AND GENEROUSLY”

Vision Summary: Stewardship is about using our gifts of time, talents and interests, our presence, and our financial resources joyfully and with extravagant generosity in the service of ministries that spread the good news of God's love in Christ, nurture people in the faith, and serve our neighbors.

Strategy: We will find ways to learn about people's gifts and interests and help them find ways to engage in the life of the congregation to use those gifts in their areas of interest. We will strengthen the shepherding program and find other ways to support the ill and bereaved. We will develop high-quality year-round stewardship education encompassing all aspects of stewardship (of time, talents, presence, and financial resources) and carry out effective stewardship campaigns.

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Vision Outcomes:

Grace will have improved and intentional ways to discover people's gifts and interests and have more people integrated more quickly into the life of the congregation.

Grace will have functional shepherding zones and more involvement by shepherds and members, especially to support those who are ill or bereaved.

Grace will have an effective year-round stewardship education program and a high-quality stewardship campaign that encourages giving joyous and generous giving to the mission and ministries of the church rather than to a budget.

Grace will:

Strengthen Zones and Zone Shepherds and increase members' awareness of the shepherding arrangement. [IN PROGRESS]

- Put articles in *The Light*.
- Put Zones and Shepherds on the website.

Explore ways to get more members and attendees involved in using their skills, talents, etc in church ministries. [IN PROGRESS]

- Publicize service opportunities and new ministries via website, *The Light*, church bulletins and announcements at worship services.
- Provide time/talent information to Cabinet and Commissions.
- Investigate audio/visual capability in church and make better use of such.

Explore becoming a Stephen Ministry congregation [DONE]

- Understand what's happening in the lives of members/community and develop ways to minister.

Explore ways to invigorate stewardship awareness year round.

- Put Stewardship articles in *The Light* on a regular basis.

Stewarding Commission-related congregation goals (May 15, 2013):

1. Strengthen all aspects of attracting new members including young families with children. [One of these aspects is an effective means to link people's interests with ministries of the congregation.]
2. Build on Bread of Life communion distribution. Start more frequent organized visiting of ill, hospitalized, home-bound, caregivers, and those in assisted living or nursing home settings. Get basic visiting team(s) organized. Explore starting Stephen ministry program.

PROCESS: MONITORING, REPORTING AND EVALUATION

Details of the Vision Process are provided in Appendix 1. A continuing follow-up program will be implemented to track the actions and progress in achieving the established goals. A status chart will be posted in a prominent place at the church, and activities will be reported in *The Lutheran Light*. The chart should be updated on at least a quarterly basis.

Corrective measures will be taken in cases where progress is not being made, and consideration will be given to discontinuing activities if resources can be spent more effectively in another area. Periodic updates of the vision and strategy will be recommended.

Vision for Tomorrow Team Role

The Vision Team will be responsible for preparing a written summary of progress toward meeting the goals for the January semiannual congregational meetings. It will prepare a chart to post in a visible location and keep it updated on progress toward our goals. It will prepare interim progress reports for *The Lutheran Light*.

Council Liaisons' Role: Accountability

The Congregation Council has supported the Visioning process to encourage enthusiastic and active engagement by members. The Council President acted as a facilitator in the last gathering on goal selection.

Council liaisons to the Commissions will be tasked with monitoring progress on the goals, helping Commissions access needed resources, and helping them stay on task with regard to accomplishing their goals.

NEXT PLANNING CYCLE (2016-2017)

It is anticipated that this plan will be revisited, progress assessed, and the plan updated in 2016 for the two-year period of 2016-2017.