

APPENDIX 1
LOOKING TOWARD 2008
A Vision for First Lutheran Church
January 2002

Jesus' final charge to his followers according to Matthew was: "...go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

The mission statement of our congregation clearly captures this charge. We are to **KNOW CHRIST AND MAKE HIM KNOWN**. The second part of that statement most certainly depends of the first. We can't effectively make Christ known if we don't know him well ourselves. Hence, we believe that, as disciples (learners/followers) of Jesus Christ, we are called to grow from spiritual infancy to maturity and stay connected to Christ through an abiding personal relationship. During the past year, our congregation's leadership has placed significant emphasis on helping our members develop that relationship, as we encouraged life-change and spiritual growth through small group fellowship and study, classes, retreats, and sermons.

Many of us who have been around awhile learned a Sunday School song years ago that began, "Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a river flowing deep and wide." It is a demonstrated fact that a congregation's ministry can only grow as wide as the members are willing to grow deep. If we try to broaden our ministry without growing deep in our faith, we're just spinning our wheels. So we can expect that the emphasis on increasing our congregation's "passionate spirituality" will continue on into the future.

Assuming that more and more of our members will grow in their personal relationship with God in Christ, what can we expect our ministry to look like five or six years from now? Where is God leading us in the future? What kinds of ministries are possible in the next few years?

Our congregation celebrates its 140th anniversary in 2008. Here is my vision for what I think our congregation's ministries could look like six years from now.

I'd like to outline this vision in a slogan we can all remember: "**BRING THEM IN, TURN THEM ON, AND SEND THEM OUT!**" I'd like to suggest that his slogan summarizes our ministry priorities for the next six years.

First of all, BRING THEM IN!

Jesus' mission was to "seek and save the lost." When he died on the cross, he said, "It is finished!" In other words, "I came to do the will of my Father, and I've completed it." The work of saving the world was done. But most of the world didn't know him then, and still doesn't today. So he charged his followers to "go...and baptize!" The "seeking" part of his mission he left to his followers. Therefore, our mission, yours and mine personally, and our mission as a congregation, is to, first of all, BRING THEM IN. At a council/staff/ministry leaders retreat held at Prairiewoods this past January 18-19, we compiled a list of possible goals that could help us advance our vision. Among other things, as we seek to "bring them in" we might consider:

- "putting our money where our mission is" and commit at least 15% of our budget toward "seeking the lost" (evangelism). The average Christian church in the U.S. spends 2% of its annual budget on evangelism. Successful evangelistic churches spend 10-20%. We currently spend less than 1%.
- making evangelism a priority in our preaching and teaching in order to raise the "evangelistic temperature" of our congregation.
- teaching the Contagious Christian course to at least 75% of our membership.
- adding a part-time evangelistic "point person" to our staff who will partner with the pastors in championing the evangelism cause.
- holding at least three major "outreach events" each year (big-name Christian band concert or evangelistic speaker; fine arts Christmas and/or Easter event for the community).
- adding a second "seeker" worship service, or find another location (Coe College Sinclair Auditorium ?), or build an auditorium/gymnasium on-site which could be used for this purpose.
- establishing a "Matthew's Café" Coffee House (named after Matthew 9:9-10) where local Christian talent performs.

Once we bring them in, our next step is to TURN THEM ON.

When Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission (quoted above), he was asking his followers to spread the word of salvation to the whole world. But it is interesting that the action of the text does not center on going. The participles going, baptizing, and teaching are all subordinate to the action of the main verb in the passage: the command to disciple or make disciples. God's primary plan for the church is for disciples of Jesus to develop other men and women into disciples.

Only a minority of churches today are focusing on what they should be doing, which seems incredible in light of such a direct order from our spiritual Commander in Chief. The church at large has, for the most part, ignored its marching orders. It isn't that

Christians are deliberately avoiding God's plan for the church. Rather, we have our focus in the wrong place.

Since discipleship is the primary thrust of the commission we've been given, it must function as the heart of our congregation's ministry. In fact, most existing programs should be evaluated in light of whether or not they are in some way contributing toward developing disciples. Not only is it our task to grow the new members we "bring in" to maturity, but faith maturity should be the goal for each and every existing member of our congregation as well.

In light of that, our congregation will consider among other things, the following:

- offering the Alpha course on an annual basis as a way of teaching the basics of Christianity to seekers.
- creating a "discipleship profile" or "covenant" outlining the faith habits expected of members that indicate a vibrant relationship with God.
- establishing a "Lay School of Discipleship" to help members and seekers to grow spiritually into that vibrant relationship.
- adding a Spiritual Director to the church staff to mentor growing disciples.
- offering regular "Prayer Seminars" to help people grow in their prayer life.
- reaching the point where small groups are no longer a "program" but a way of understanding the way our congregation is organized. We look forward to at least 75% of our members being in some kind of small group by 2008.

Finally, we SEND THEM OUT!

Our formal mission statement defines making Christ known in this way: "it is our mission to share the good news of God's love by word and deed with people everywhere." I've already pointed out Jesus' directive to his disciples to witness in the words of the "Great Commission". Jesus also gave his disciples some other very explicit instructions when he gave them the "Great Commandment" (see Luke 10:25-37) at the last supper he shared with them. The second part of that command is to "love your neighbor as yourself."

How important is this command? God says it's so important that getting everything else right won't matter if we don't get this right. We can evangelize right. We can get discipleship right. But a church, or a person, who doesn't love right is not getting much else right.

What would happen if we truly began to take Jesus at his word and loved this way? What would this do to our church? Can you imagine what kind of world we would live in if people in the church operated by this principle? What would it be like if we really were

as concerned about others' happiness, problems, and disappointments as we are about our own?

As our congregation attempts to live out this "Great Commandment" and "Great Commission" in the next six years, we hope to consider, among other things:

- growing our Stephen Ministry program to at least 200 trainees.
- establishing a Parish Nurse Ministry.
- reaching a goal of 75% of our members discovering their spiritual gifts and using them in some way in ministry.
- developing an assisted living center for lower income persons in cooperation with St. Luke's Hospital or some other organization.
- establishing a center of healing for youth hurt emotionally or chemically.
- providing an annual short-term mission trip to a third world country.
- providing annual youth mission and service trips to needy areas of our country.
- planting a new mission in the Cedar Rapids area (possibly a "satellite" ministry of our congregation or a new mission congregation).

I want to take this opportunity to put in a good word and a huge "thank you" to members of our staff, council, and ministry teams. We have a fabulous staff, all dedicated, hard-working people who are committed to seeing this vision become a reality. And the same could be said of the lay leadership in the congregation. Doing ministry is "fun" in this place, and I'm grateful to be here.

And it's a vital ministry that is happening here, growing and becoming more exciting with each passing year! Sometimes I think the church gets too caught up in statistics, but statistics can be a measure of our effectiveness. And if that's true, then we're on the right track. Worship attendance grew by over 5% in 2001 (over 11% at the 11:00 a.m. service)! Income increased by over 5% for at least the fifth year in a row.

But even more significant, I believe, are the comments from folks in our congregation and community. A member said recently, "I'm convinced we're right on the edge of something really big happening here! Our church is just going to explode in a positive way in the next year or two!" Last fall, I received a note from someone who had visited our church for the first time. It said, in part: "Wow! (My son) and I were blessed by the exciting service Sunday at 1st Lutheran! What a warm and inviting atmosphere – which started and ended in the parking lot! We've got to come back so (my daughter and husband) can experience it all first hand! Thanks to all of you for your hard work in study and practice and for sharing your gifts – we loved worshipping with you!" And just this week, a person new to Cedar Rapids said to me, "What an exciting place! The worship service and the people are all so alive!" Then she went on to say that since moving to town, she's heard more than one person in the community say something like, "The Lutheran church downtown is the place where things are really happening!"

From small beginnings, as the result of believers committed to growing deep in their faith, greatness grows. Any congregation, beginning where it is, fueled with a passionate love God and for the world God loves, can become a sign of the reign of God, a place where all are invited, where none are excluded, and where everyone celebrates with joy the presence of God.

Jesus said it well: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31-32)

First Lutheran Church is becoming just such a place. Let’s plan on celebrating this vision becoming a reality by the time we reach our 140th birthday in six years!

Thanks for your partnership in the Gospel!

s/ Dan Kolander
Senior Pastor

CORE VALUES
FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

As members of First Lutheran Church, we value...

...a commitment to be deeply rooted in the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible.

- We treasure the Biblical message of God’s grace, his amazing love for undeserving people through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, and his death on the cross for us. (John 3:16) In fact, the Bible is central to, and the basis for, every aspect of our congregation’s ministry for the sole purpose that Jesus Christ might be exalted as Savior and Lord. For us, the Bible is the primary source of truth. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

...a commitment to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

- As disciples (learners/followers) of Jesus Christ, we are called to grow from spiritual infancy to maturity (Philippians 3:3-14; Ephesians 4:12-14) and stay connected to Christ through an abiding personal relationship (John 15:1-17). Evidence of a genuine saving relationship with Jesus Christ is a life of holiness and obedience, attained by believers through the power of the Holy Spirit.

...a commitment to stay connected to God through daily worship and prayer.

- Worship is a personal and corporate encounter with the living God (Psalm 84:1-4, 10-12; Ephesians 1:3-14). True worship, recognizing the “worth-ship” of God and offering him praise and thanksgiving, involves both joyous exultation and quiet reverence. We believe that worship is not driven by a particular style, but rather by the experience of God’s awesome presence. We also believe that God desires his people to pray and that he hears and answers prayer (Matthew 7:7-11; James 5:13-18). Understanding that, not only our personal lives, but also the ministries and activities of this church, are characterized by a reliance on prayer.

...a commitment to live out our faith in relevant Biblical community.

- Research demonstrates that people respond best to the gospel when it is presented within the context of loving relationships. Therefore, we believe that building relationships is vital to the spiritual growth of our congregation. We further believe that those relationships are best realized in small groups, places where we get to know one another, develop caring concern for each other, hold each other accountable, and offer newcomers a safe place to belong (Acts 2:42-47).

...a commitment to cultivating a Christ-like and loving atmosphere within the body of Christ.

- Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy community of believers. Jesus said that people will know we are his disciples by our love. We are a church of individuals, different in many ways, yet called together by God to be one in ministry and mission (John 17:20-23). Among us, love for one another is the norm (John 13:34; Romans 13:8), conflicts are resolved according to the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 18:15-17), and we seek to build each other up (I Thessalonians 5:11).

...a commitment to multiply ministers for God’s work in the world.

- We hold to the creedal statement, “Every member a minister.” We believe that the primary responsibility of the pastors and program staff in the local church is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:12) Church leaders, therefore, have the responsibility to help believers discover, develop, and exercise their spiritual gifts in appropriate ministries.

...a commitment to reach out to the unchurched in meaningful ways.

- Because all people matter to God (Luke 15:1-32; 19:10), we will continually seek new ways to connect with the unchurched so that they can consider the claims of Jesus Christ in an atmosphere of openness and encouragement. God desires for us, individually and corporately, to reach as many people as possible with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. We believe it is our task to go out to help a dying world and are committed to that mission locally, nationally, and internationally (Matthew 28:19-20).

...a commitment to generously share the resources God has given us.

- We recognize that everything we have is a gift from God and that God expects us to manage these gifts wisely. However, we also understand that ultimately, good stewardship is not a matter of wise money management or even responsible living. It is a matter of extravagant love. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed, "... (The unfailing love of the Lord never ends... Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day." (Lamentations 3:22-23) God's love toward us overflows. When hearts are transformed by that extravagant grace, believers generously share their resources with others and God blesses them in return. (Acts 2:32-34; Malachi 3:10)

...a commitment to creativity, innovation, and excellence in all that we do.

- In today's rapidly changing world, forms and methods must be continually evaluated, and if necessary, altered to fit new conditions. We are more concerned with effectiveness in ministry than with adherence to tradition (Luke 5:33-39). We also believe that our great God, himself a God of excellence, deserves the best we have to offer. The apostle Paul encourages us to "whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not your masters..." (Colossians 3:23). Doing what we do with excellence honors God and inspires people.