

A Special Congregation Meeting
will be held
Sunday, April 7, 2024
following Worship
for the purpose of voting on the following recommendations
of the Four Church Collaboration Committee:

Motion: To join the consolidation of the ELCA Lutheran churches in Bristol and Plainville to create a new single ministry - "NAME" – located at 1125 Stafford Ave., Bristol, with a satellite campus housing Meals for Neighbors at 27 Judd St., Bristol, according to the proposal shared with the affected congregations. This motion empowers the leadership of our congregation to take necessary steps to move the process forward including preparations to sell property and retain legal representation.

Following approval of this motion:

Elect 3 lay leaders to serve on a 12-person Transition Steering Committee of the forming ministry. These leaders will then be empowered to make necessary decisions to move the process forward, recognizing that the congregational councils remain the legal leadership until a final consolidation vote creates the new ministry. The Steering committee will become the council of the new ministry for a period of one year at which point new elections will be held at an annual meeting.

Elect 2 lay leaders to serve on an 8-person call committee to interview candidates for the position of pastor of the new ministry.

A copy of the final version of the Four Church consolidation proposal can be found below. Printed copies are available at the church.

All four congregations in the collaborative effort will be voting on these motions on Sunday morning, April 7.

The Congregation Council will announce a slate of candidates for the Transition Steering Committee and the Call Committee in an upcoming edition of the weekly NewsNotes.

Proposal for A New Lutheran Ministry in Bristol

Name: TBD – (See notes included below)

Location: 1125 Stafford Ave., Bristol, CT

Mission:

Guiding Scriptures:

- Matthew 8:23-27 – Those who follow Jesus experience fear in the midst of storm around them. Jesus is present with them and shows them God's power and faithfulness. In the midst of the storm God brings calmness and courage
- Psalm 98 – “Sing a new song to God, who has done marvelous things.” God has done and will do marvelous things among us – our response is the joyful praise of many voices singing one song

This is a multi-generational ministry that cares deeply for the surrounding community and welcomes all people in a caring and supportive way. This is a community which recognizes both the risks and challenges of following Jesus and, at the same time, trusts in God's steadfast love.

Core programming commitments:

- A dynamic Sunday morning worship and at least one alternative worship service available at another time of the week
- A vibrant music ministry that includes at least an adult choir and bell choir and potential for a youth music ministry
- Christian education for all ages provided in a variety of ways and schedule options
- Youth programming and support for families raising children; commitment to making changes that welcome families
- Serving as the umbrella organization for Meals for Neighbors
- A variety of additional community outreach opportunities
- Initiate a process toward Reconciling in Christ (LGBTQ+ affirming and anti-racism) in the first year of the new ministry

Process:

- This proposal will come before a formally called congregational meeting of each of the existing congregations on Sunday, April 7, 2024
- After affirmative votes, the congregations will individually contract with Pr. Maria Hammons, Congregational Merger Consultant (services provided free of charge through the synod's congregational care fund – see below); realtor(s); synod attorney Brad Cook (paid from the assets of the congregations), and others as needed. Work begins to navigate the details necessary to create the new ministry and handle the legacy of existing congregations.
- Conversations will continue about the shape of the new ministry including plans jointly to call a pastor.

- Legacy congregations may need additional meetings related to legal decisions such as sale of property.
- Once appropriate steps have been taken, congregations will hold final congregational meetings to approve legal consolidation documents, formally creating the new ministry.
- Ministry begins together!

Timeline: We expect that necessary steps can be completed to begin functioning together as a ministry in 4-6 months time from the approval of this proposal. It is possible that sale of buildings may not be completed at the time of consolidation and steps will be taken to ensure that assets are distributed according to the plans of the legacy congregations.

Member care: Members will be transferred to the new ministry at the completion of the consolidation. Care will be taken to identify any members who do not wish to continue with the new ministry and connect them with other avenues for spiritual care and opportunities for membership in other congregations.

Staff:

- Church musician(s), administrator, and sexton will be hired temporarily from existing staff of the congregations. The church musician(s) need to have capacity to lead various styles and groups and commit to the planned additional weekly service. It is recommended that the administrator take on some bookkeeping tasks. In the first 6 months of the tenure of a new pastoral leader staffing will be reevaluated and permanent hiring can take place.
- Staff not brought to the new ministry will be supported in finding new employment and granted appropriate severance at the determination of the legacy congregations who employ them. Note that church employees are not eligible for unemployment benefits because churches are exempted from paying into the unemployment system.

Pastoral leadership: Once the new ministry is established they can formally call a pastor. An effort will be made to develop a profile and search for candidates in advance of the final legal consolidation so that a new pastor can begin as soon as possible.

Lay Leadership: A 12-person Transition Steering Committee of the forming ministry will be elected with 2 members from each legacy congregation. These leaders will then be empowered to make necessary decisions to move the process forward, recognizing that the congregational councils remain the legal leadership until a final consolidation vote creates the new ministry. The Steering committee will become the council of the new ministry for a period of one year at which point new elections will be held at an annual meeting.

Meals for Neighbors: The new ministry will maintain the building currently housing Zion and Meals for Neighbors. The new ministry will hold oversight of MFN as part of its ministry. The building will continue to house MFN. There may be opportunities to expand the ministry of MFN in this new model. A governing board from the members of the new ministry will be elected or appointed to serve on behalf of the church council.

Finances: Acknowledging that the new ministry will be stewarding significant financial assets, the Transition Steering Committee will plan for meeting with a financial advisor as soon as the new ministry is officially formed.

Legacy of existing congregations:

- Buildings:
 - Zion's building will be used as a mission site for Meals for Neighbors; The Transition Steering Committee will arrange to have the building inspected before the final consolidation
 - Gloria Dei and Grace will sell their properties.
 - St. Andrew will prepare its building to welcome the new ministry including allowing the Transition Steering Committee to begin any recommended building improvements and determine locations for various ministries of the new congregation
 - Zion and Gloria Dei will sell rental properties
- Furnishings
 - Gloria Dei, Grace, St. Andrew, and Zion will identify sacred objects that are most meaningful and discuss together with all the congregations how some of those might find use or display in the new ministry. Any additional furnishings, sacred or otherwise, are offered to other congregations, sold, or discarded as appropriate.
 - All the congregations will consider intentional hospitality, that is, making space for one another as they come together in a single location
 - Zion and the steering committee will consider in this process to what extent they will maintain the sanctuary for use as a satellite worship space and/or for rental to other congregations.
- Archiving of Records
 - All congregations will identify essential records (parish registers, historic documents, necessary legal files) to be carried forward and housed with the new ministry. Items of particular historical value may be shared with appropriate archival entities (e.g. local historical societies).
- Finances
 - 10% of assets of legacy congregations will be shared with the Congregational Care Fund of the New England Synod to support the closing and merger of congregations.
 - 10% of assets will be the legacy congregation's choice to distribute to non-profits of their choosing; in recognition of moving out of Plainville, Grace may choose to give an additional 10% of their assets to local Plainville nonprofits
 - Legacy congregations will identify the charities they support and forward those to the new ministry's council for consideration in future charitable giving
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Each congregation will hold a meeting immediately following worship on April 7, 2024, with the following motion and elections:

Motion: To join the consolidation of the ELCA Lutheran churches in Bristol and Plainville to create a new single ministry located at 1125 Stafford Ave., Bristol, with a satellite

campus housing Meals for Neighbors at 27 Judd St., Bristol, according to the proposal shared with the affected congregations. This motion empowers the leadership of our congregation to take necessary steps to move the process forward including preparations to sell property and retain legal representation.

Following approval of this motion:

Elect 3 lay leaders to serve on the 12-person Transition Steering Committee of the forming ministry. These leaders need to be available to make a significant investment of time over the next 18 months.

Elect 2 lay leaders to serve on an 8-person call committee to interview candidates for the position of pastor of the new ministry.

We give thanks for the work of the members of the Collaboration Team:

Deb Ahl (GD), Karen Biernat (SA), Cookies Capsalors (G), Arlene Creswell (SA), Wendy Colite (GD), Bob Cummiskey (Z), Bob Harold (SA), Valerie Holcomb (GD), Linda Klopp (G), Sandy Milke (Z), Mike Robotham (Z), Edie Valencis (G), Owen Van Brocklin (SA)
Pr. Chris Dion (G), Pr. Ed Duffy (Z), Pr. Danny Hammons (GD), Pr. Les Swenson (SA)
Advisors: Pr. Steven Wilco, Pr. Maria Hammons (New England Synod)

Rationale for the Collaboration Team Location Recommendation

The decision of which property to recommend for the new ministry was certainly the most difficult decision we had to make. We intentionally considered it over a period of several months with input from pastors and lay leaders beyond our congregations, formal building inspections, conversation with property and finance leaders, and input from those members of the four congregations who attended the open houses. While we carefully considered the properties themselves, we continually returned to the mission we have identified together, asking “What will allow us best to accomplish our hope for this new ministry?”

What made the decision so difficult was that both properties could certainly be able to house the new ministry. They had much in common, and the differences seemed to balance each other out.

What tipped the scale toward the Stafford Ave. property was ready physical accessibility. This was named as a core concern by the team, outside reviewers, and those who attended the open houses. This is a concern that immediately affects both current members of the four congregations as well as potential new members of the ministry. The cost of making the Camp St. property more accessible would be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars (mainly the installation of an elevator and the complete regrading of the front entrance) and would result in the building being technically accessible but perhaps still not ideal for those with significant mobility concerns.

We recognize that this necessitates the movement of Gloria Dei’s Memorial Garden, a logistically possible but emotionally difficult change. We also recognize the commitment of Gloria Dei to the pipe organ and recommend a conversation about the feasibility of moving it.

We recommend that in preparation the Stafford Ave property receive kitchen upgrades, new flooring for the sanctuary, and upgrades to make more physical space for wheelchairs and for young kids in the sanctuary, and preparing a classroom to house the diaper and food distribution storage (or consideration of space for such at the Judd St. property). These items address some of the gifts of the Camp St. property that were not as strong at Stafford Ave. as well as concerns that would need to be addressed at both properties. These changes would be made at the direction of the newly elected Transition Steering Committee. The team felt these changes were more affordable and manageable in a shorter time frame in order to give the new ministry an opportunity to move forward in focusing on its vision.

Naming the New Ministry

The collaboration team reviewed the suggested names from the March 10th meeting, focusing on the names that received the most votes. We considered especially how the names might communicate to people in the community we desire to reach who may not have much church knowledge or experience. We also considered practical concerns like what acronyms might evolve. The team is recommending 5 names for further consideration and conversation:

Hope Lutheran Church
New Hope Lutheran Church
Living Hope Lutheran Church
United in Faith Lutheran Church
Faith Lutheran Church

The team changed or eliminated some parts of the top names for the following reasons:

- Living Grace includes the name of one of the existing congregations, which might go against our work to truly create something entirely new.
- United Lutheran Church – The team felt that while coming together in a united way is a task now, that long-term we may want to communicate something broader about our ministry. As this was the most popular option we tried to include “United” in one of the options.
- Faith United creates an unfortunate acronym.
- Bristol Lutheran Church would indicate its new location but fails to honor that we are intentionally including people coming from outside Bristol including those from Plainville.

The team felt that “hope” was overall more inspiring to non-churched individuals and what they might be seeking. While there was a positive association with “faith,” the team wondered if people seeking solace but without a context for religious faith would resonate as well with that term.

The Collaboration Team commends these suggestions and reflections to the Transition Steering Committee that will be formed so that a new name can be chosen soon in the process.