

SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR SUNDAY, MAY 5, AFTER WORSHIP

A special Congregational Meeting has been called for Sunday, May 5, after worship, in order to vote on the Proposal for the Consolidation of Grace Lutheran Church of Plainville, and Zion and St. Andrew Lutheran Churches of Bristol. Since Gloria Dei Church has chosen not to continue with the consolidation, this meeting is necessary to re-affirm our decision to move forward toward the formation of a new ministry now with three congregations instead of the four that we originally voted for on April 7.

A copy of the Proposal naming the three churches and only slightly altered from the April 7 Proposal can be found below. Note the Motion on which we will be voting in the text of the Proposal. This will be our only action at the meeting. We will not need to repeat the elections for the Steering Committee or Call Committee.

This Meeting was first announced after worship this past Sunday morning, April 21. Our thanks to all who participated in the informal congregational meeting to discuss this change in the original Proposal. Your conversation was honest, constructive and thoughtful as we move toward change and new life together.

(P.S. On another note If you would like to participate in the Zoom Easter Season Bible Study: "The Church's Expansive Mission...Stories from the Book of Acts" on Wednesday evenings, 7-8 p.m., please email Pastor Swenson and he will send you the Zoom link. pastorlrs@comcast.net Thanks!

Proposal for A New Lutheran Ministry in Bristol

Name: _____ Lutheran Church (TBD – see included notes)

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
- Immediately initiate the Reconciling in Christ (LGBTQ+ affirming and anti-racism) process toward a vote to become RIC within the first year. This recognizes the RIC commitment of Grace and the welcoming stance of Zion and St. Andrew as well as the need to learn and grow together as one before voting to officially become RIC.

Process:

- Following votes on April 7, congregations will affirm the change to a 3-church consolidation on May 5, 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 9-person Transition Steering Committee of the forming ministry will be elected with 3 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. These are open meetings to any members of the congregations who have been involved in collaborations.

Meals for Neighbors: The new ministry will maintain the building at 27 Judd St. and Meals for Neighbors. The new ministry will hold oversight of MFN as part of its ministry. That 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:
 - 27 Judd st 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
 - Grace Lutheran will sell its church property
 - Zion will sell its rental property (including the parish house if it is possible within zoning restrictions)
 - The Transition Steering Committee will prepare 1125 Stafford Ave to welcome the new ministry to begin any recommended building improvements and determine locations for various ministries of the new congregation. Understanding funds will not all be available upfront, this will include dedicated

space within the sanctuary and in an enclosed but connected room for families with children, space for wheelchairs in the sanctuary, sanctuary flooring, as well as possible kitchen upgrades.

- Furnishings
 - Grace, St. Andrew, and Zion will all 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
 - The steering committee will consider in this process to what extent they will maintain the sanctuary at Judd St. for alternative worship services 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 non-profits
 - Legacy congregations will identify the charities they support and forward those to the new ministry's council for consideration in future charitable giving

Amended Motion for consideration of a 3-church partnership

Motion: To affirm joining the consolidation of 3 ELCA Lutheran churches: St. Andrew and Zion in Bristol and Grace in 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 9-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 the 6-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 Cumiskey (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)

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.