

**ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**MILLINGTON, MICHIGAN**

# **SELF-STUDY REPORT**

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December, 2017

## OPENING THOUGHTS

St. Paul Lutheran Church has been tremendously blessed in the 120 years of her existence in many ways, including property, facilities, ministry staff, multi-generational families, and committed members.

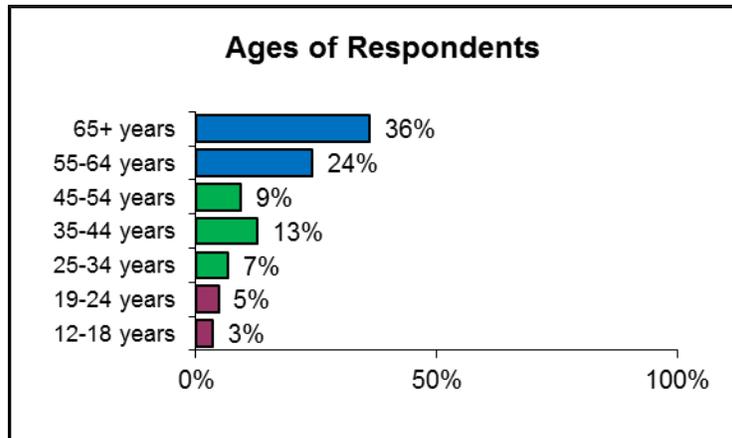
Christian education has been an important part of St. Paul's ministry throughout her history. A Christian Day School, which began classes in 1905, has continued to nurture children in the Christian faith to the present day.

When St. Paul's associate pastor accepted a Call to another congregation, discussions began concerning how, or even should, the congregation replace his position. The leadership of the congregation requested an "outsider's eyes" to assist in thinking through the possibilities of staffing and how the ministry of St. Paul Lutheran Church could be strengthened. That is the purpose of this report. It is intended:

- To reflect to staff and leadership the feelings of the members obtained through the congregational survey
- To give a snapshot of St. Paul Lutheran Church through the eyes of an outsider based on the congregational survey, the information provided by St. Paul leaders, and the Natural Church Development survey
- To suggest for consideration staffing possibilities for future ministry
- To offer encouragement for your ministry and suggestions for your consideration as you move forward in ministry into the next generations.

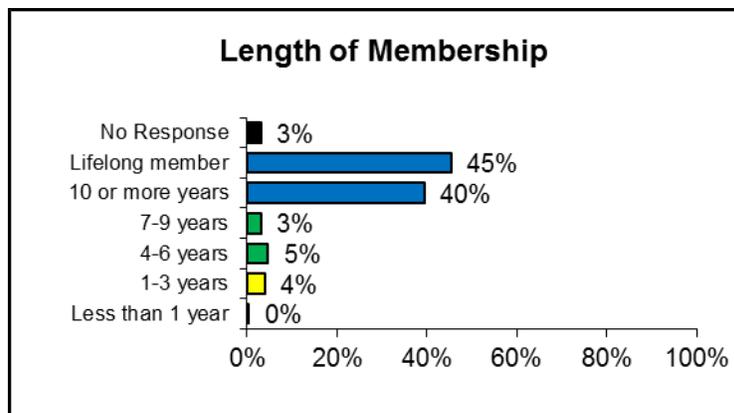
## I. A general overview of the congregational survey (258 surveys returned)

### A. Ages of respondents



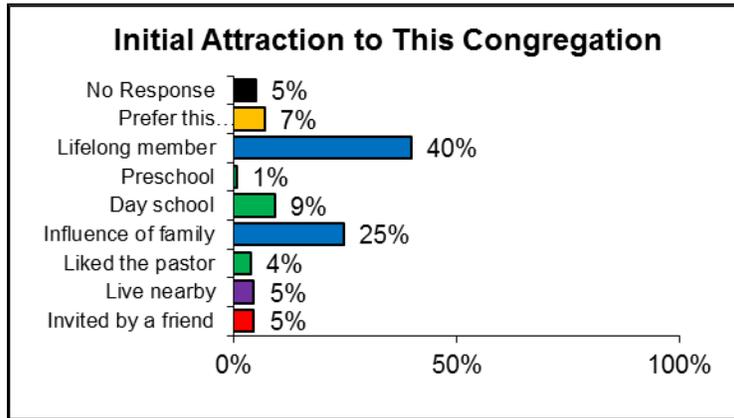
- 60% over 55 years of age
- 29% 25-54 years of age
- 8% 12-24 years of age

### B. Length of Membership



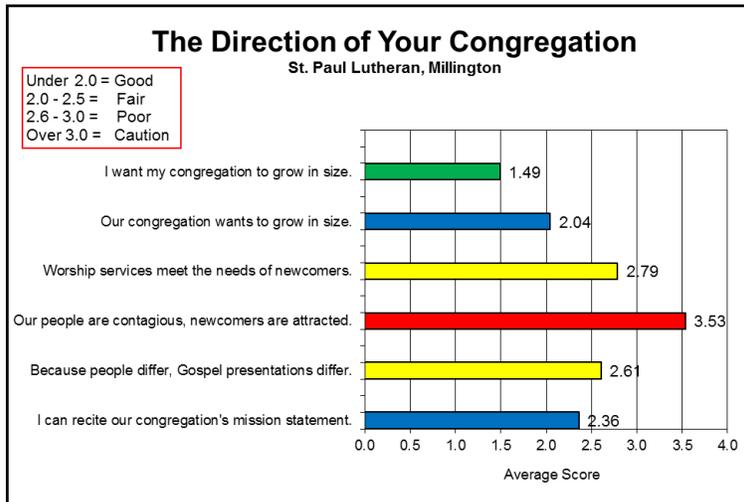
- 85% members more than 10 years
- 8% members 4-9 years
- 4% members less than 3 years

C. Initial attraction to St. Paul



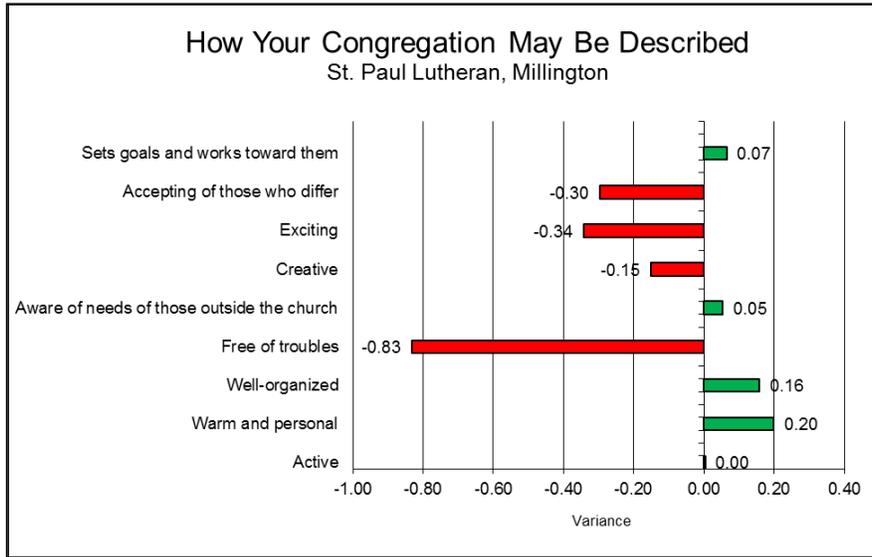
- 65% came to St. Paul as a result of family
- 14% came to St. Paul because of pastor / staff / ministry
- 7% came to St. Paul because it's "Lutheran"
- 5% came to St. Paul because of location
- 5% came to St. Paul as a result of a friend's invitation

D. The direction of our church



- 87% said they want St. Paul to grow (there was 1 mildly disagree response), but 70% said they thought St. Paul wants to grow (there were 15 mildly and 6 strongly disagree responses)
- 55% responded that they could recite St. Paul's mission statement, while 16% said they could not
- 35% said they felt the worship services meet the needs of newcomers, while 19% said they did not
- 51% indicated agreement with presenting the Gospel in a variety of ways, while 21% did not
- 48% said they felt that St. Paul does not do well at attracting newcomers

E. How our church may be described



- 41% describe St. Paul as warm and personal (27% said she is impersonal), 28% say she is aware of the needs of those outside the church (23% said she is focused on the needs of members), and 40% describe her as being narrow and critical (26% said she was accepting of those who differ)
- 33% describe St. Paul as an inactive congregation (32% say she is active), 34% describe her as unimaginative (25% say she is creative), and 38% describe her as dull (16% describe her as exciting)
- Administratively, 38% described St. Paul as organized (23% say she is disorganized) and 33% thought she sets goals and works towards them (24% say she accepts things as they come)
- 59% say St. Paul is troubled

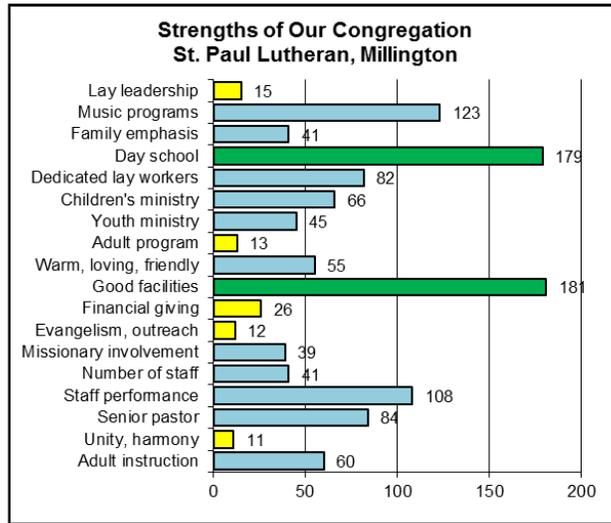
F. St. Paul's purpose – why she exists



Equip Christians for daily living (59%)  
 Bible instruction, training (50%)  
 Fellowship (50%)

World missions (9%)

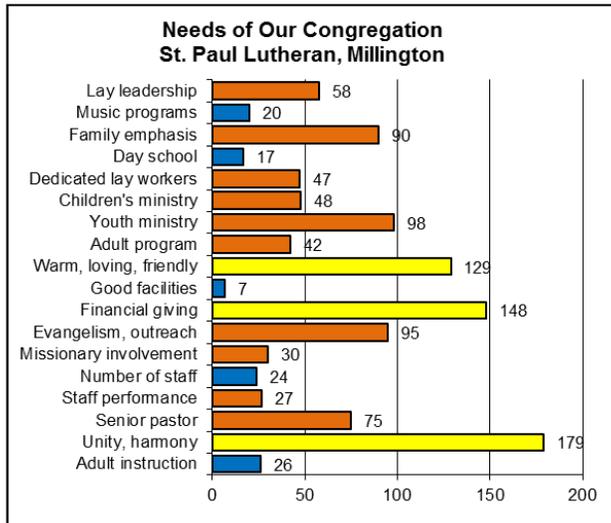
G. St. Paul's strengths



Good facilities (70%)  
Day school (69%)

Financial giving (10%)  
Lay leadership (6%)  
Evangelism, outreach (5%)  
Adult program (5%)  
Unity, harmony (4%)

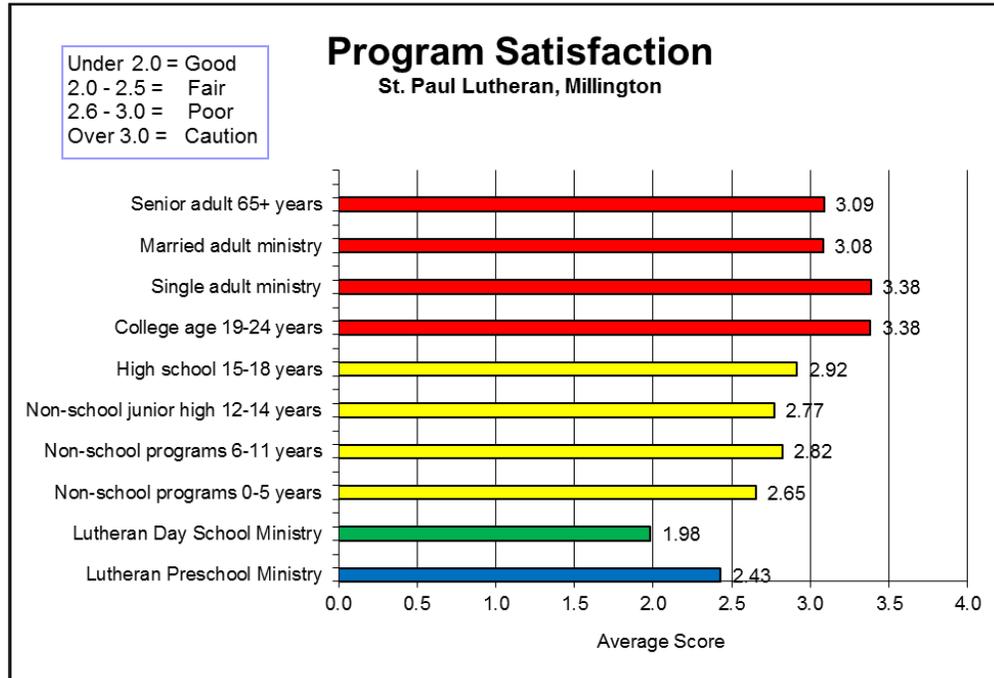
H. St. Paul's opportunities for improvement



Unity, harmony (69%)  
Financial giving (57%)  
Warm, loving, friendly (50%)

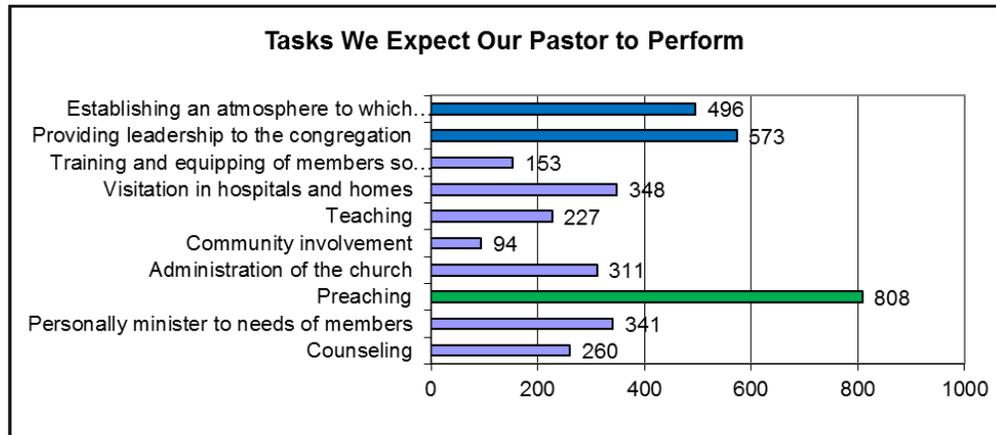
Adult instruction (10%)  
Number of staff (9%)  
Music programs (8%)  
Day school (7%)  
Good facilities (3%)

## I. Program satisfaction



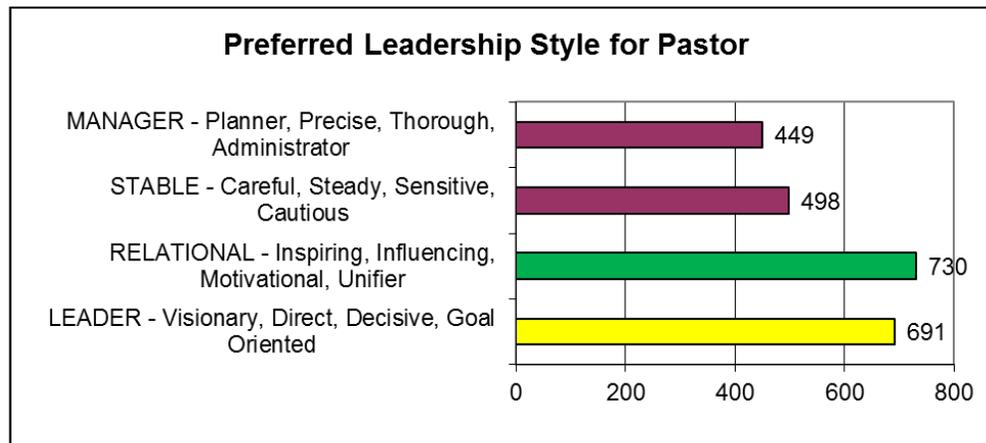
- 64% feel relative satisfaction with the Lutheran Day School ministry program
- 41% feel relative satisfaction with the Lutheran Pre-school ministry program
- 29% feel relative satisfaction with the Pre-school ministry program
- 27% feel relative satisfaction with the Junior High ministry program;
- 27% feel relative satisfaction with the High School ministry program;  
22% feel relative dissatisfaction
- 25% feel relative satisfaction with the School-age ministry program
- 23% feel relative dissatisfaction with the Married Adult ministry program;  
19% feel relative satisfaction
- 25% feel relative dissatisfaction with the Senior Adult ministry program;  
21% feel relative satisfaction
- 29% feel relative dissatisfaction with the College Age ministry program
- 33% feel relative dissatisfaction with the Single Adult ministry program

J. Tasks members expect pastor to perform



- There is a very high expectation and importance placed on preaching
- There is also an expectation that the pastor provide leadership to the congregation and take the lead in establishing an atmosphere to which people are attracted and in which they can grow

K. Preferred Pastoral Leadership Style



- *LEADER* – a style of leadership that is characterized by the pastor being a visionary; direct, decisive and goal-oriented
- *RELATIONAL* – a style of leadership in which the pastor is characterized as inspiring, influencing and motivational; a unifier

## II. General observations (in no particular order)

- A. St. Paul Lutheran Church is a large congregation in a small town. She has been tremendously blessed in the 120 years of her existence in many ways, including 17.5 acres of property, facilities, ministry staff (including 12 full time pastor and teachers; 10 part time teachers and support staff; and many volunteers), and committed members.
- B. The area 10 miles around St. Paul has declined - 3.6% (from 35,981 to 34,683) since 2000, and is projected to decline an additional - 1.4% (from 34,683 to 34,198) by 2021.
- C. The area is predominately (95%) of Anglo ethnicity, older in median (42) and average (41.3) age [Michigan ages: 39 and 39.9, respectively], with an estimated average household income of \$57,249 [Michigan: \$66,760].
- D. The current facilities provide an adequate setting for the ministry needs at present, and the 17.5 acres of land provide the opportunity to expand facilities for future ministry.
- E. There is an expressed dedication and commitment to St. Paul Lutheran Church and her ministry.
- F. There are no written position descriptions for professional or support staff positions.
- G. Financial support is given to such mission efforts as
  - a. TIM sponsorship
  - b. Children of the Promise
  - c. POBLO
  - d. District and Synod
- H. There appear to be past, as well as current, issues, hurts, and situations that remain unresolved and are festering.
- I. Over the nine year period from 2008-2016, membership and worship attendance changed in the following manner:
  - & worship attendance - 36%, from 477 to 306
  - & Baptized membership + 8%, from 1908 to 2068
  - & communicant membership + 2%, from 1461 to 1611
  - & children not confirmed + 2%, from 447 to 457
- J. The four-week worship survey showed...
  - & worship attendance averaged 333
  - & there were 8 unchurched visitors
  - & 68% of attendees became members 21 or more years ago
  - & 12% of attendees became members in the past 5 years

K. The age breakdown during the four-week worship survey looks like this...

AGE	WORSHIP AVG.	% OF ATTENDEES
0-12	35	12%
13-18	21	7%
19-25	9	3%
26-35	21	7%
36-45	35	11%
46-55	32	11%
56+	154	50%

L. A quick look at the community in which God has placed St. Paul to be His people and carry out His direction to “make disciples”...

10 miles around St. Paul’s building		15 miles around St. Paul’s building	
0-13	15%	0-13	15%
14-17	5%	14-17	5%
18-21	6%	18-21	6%
22-24	4%	22-24	4%
25-34	11%	25-34	11%
35-44	11%	35-44	11%
45-54	14%	45-54	14%
55-64	16%	55-64	15%
65-74	11%	65-74	11%
75+	7%	75+	7%

M. It is estimated that

- Just over 1% of the confirmed membership is involved in formal Bible study
- It was not reported how many of the Baptized children are involved in Sunday School
- Approximately 15% of the membership attend worship services
- It was not reported how many members are actively involved in the life and work of the congregation
- The number of members who communed at least once in the previous year was not noted.

N. There is a perceived lack of cohesive vision for future ministry.

- O. The Christian Day School has provided a Christ-centered education since 1905 – a ministry noted as valued in the survey. However, in recent years, enrollment has declined, while the number of children of school age in the congregation has remained the same.
  
- P. The structure of the congregation appears to be well ordered. However, it may also be cumbersome, with layers of steps to move through for approval. And it was suggested that it is sometimes difficult to fill and retain all required positions identified in the constitution.
  
- Q. The financial concerns are strong. There were many references made to financial fears. It appears (if my calculations are correct) that approximately 87% of the work program is dedicated to salaries and benefits, and an additional 9% for facilities-related expenses (utilities, insurance, etc.). The indebtedness from the building addition adds to the burden. This leaves very little funding available for ministry endeavors and initiatives. There are cash reserves in various accounts that are helpful in keeping ministry going in leaner times, but that is not a good healthy term practice.

### III. Suggestions and Recommendations

These suggestions are offered from one pastor's eyes and heart and perspective.

St. Paul Lutheran Church must pray about them, evaluate them and adopt them, adapt them or discard them. The point is – they must be yours.

They are not in any order of perceived importance.

- A. St. Paul is at an important point in her history. It seems to me that the congregation is situated to positively impact the community with the Gospel. The all-important question to ask is: “What would God have us do in ministry in 2018? in 2020? in 2023?” Ask: “What will we look like as we carry out our mission / purpose tomorrow?” Will St. Paul focus on caring for her members or intentionally reach out to those around her who are not yet in her fellowship – or both? To answer those questions, three steps are recommended:

1. Reviewing the mission statement,
2. Defining a vision to guide St. Paul's total ministry (church and school)
3. Identifying specific steps toward making that vision a reality

This would provide a framework to evaluate efforts of ministry, as well as encourage connection with, support of and participation among members for the congregation's direction in ministry.

I would recommend that the congregation chair appoint a task force of 18 members, composed of 8 elected/appointed lay leaders, 5 staff, and 5 congregation members for this task.

- B. Commit to a time of individual and corporate prayer, earnestly praying for one another and the ministry God has placed before the congregation to carry out in His name.
- C. Ministry to children and youth is highly valued at St. Paul. The demographics of the community (and I would assume the congregation as well) suggest that consideration be given to expanding the focus to an all-inclusive approach (i.e., when thinking of ministry to children, intentionally include the parents and grandparents, not only the children). A family ministry target could also include a senior ministry component, (which scored low on the congregational survey) and would be an appropriate emphasis. Area demographics suggest that devotion to family is very strong – might St. Paul be the “family church” in the area?
- D. The Christian Day School is the primary avenue of children's ministry in the congregation – and it is a limited one. By that I mean, it is focused on education Monday-Friday during the day for 10 months of the year. By my estimate, perhaps 30% of the eligible children attend the Day School. The ministry of the Day School must become an integral part of the entire congregation's ministry – and a more visible part of the congregation's ministry. A focus on ministry to families (see above) would give a venue for that to take place.
- E. In the 10 miles area around St. Paul, religious faith is considered to be “important,” but “religiosity” – the practice of one's faith – is somewhat low. Also, 58.4% of Tuscola

County residents are unchurched. That would suggest that in the 10 mile radius around St. Paul's building, upwards of 20,000 people are unchurched. The fields are indeed white for harvest! How might you more intentionally reach out and impact the community with the Gospel message (not friendly people but a forgiving God)? Many of these families have children and teenagers. What "doors" to the community could be opened? The Pre-school and Day School certainly are "doors" already in place – what a wonderful opportunity to introduce children – and their parents! – to Jesus. What new "doors" could be opened – what could be done that is not currently being done to reach the community? As you ask such questions, remember that the target audience will be from a different perspective and experience than in the past, perhaps necessitating a different or additional approach.

- F. While specific involvement if members in Bible study opportunities were not available, it appears that the majority of the current membership is not involved in any formal study of God's Word and raises the question, "What example are children seeing of the importance of God's Word?" If adults are not being fed on meat, how can children be fed (consider 1 Peter 2:2)? An intentional commitment to participation in Christian education should be sought from every member. Perhaps expanded small group opportunities, which would address not only the study of God's Word but also the relational connection within the Body of Christ and living the Christian faith (there could also be an outreach component to these groups); or perhaps a variety of settings and times for organized study; or perhaps resources for individual, personal study through print and electronic means (website, Facebook, etc.) could be pursued.
- G. Continue to strive for effective communication with members in a variety of ways. Communication is not simply saying or announcing – connection is critical. Continue incorporating the website in the communication cycle to encourage member communication with staff and leadership, outreach opportunities and encouragement and ministry resourcing.
- H. Far too many of St. Paul's members are observers (at best) or absent (at worst). In a healthy, vibrant congregation 50%-60% of the members are actively involved in the congregation's ministry – being involved in what the ministry is doing for others outside of worship and Bible study participation. As potential areas of ministry are identified, it will be important to connect people to those ministries and permit and encourage them (not the pastor or board members) to implement them. An intentional assimilation process connecting people to ministry would be beneficial.
- I. It was observed earlier that the structure of the congregation appears to be well ordered. However, it may also be cumbersome, with layers of steps to move through for approval. In the Natural Church Development survey, Empowering Leadership was identified as an area for improvement. Empowering leaders equip the saints for ministry and allow them to do ministry. Factors influencing this include a common vision of ministry, equipping and mentoring current and future leaders, and effective delegation for and delegation of responsibility. This would be good to include as a component of the task force suggested in A above. Resources to aid in strengthening empowering leadership are available.

- J. Prepare consistent position descriptions for all full- and part-time paid staff positions, as well as all volunteer positions. As an addendum, annually identify the congregation ministry targets and/or outcomes and measurements for which the staff person is responsible and accountable, and utilize in the annual evaluation process.
- K. Develop a Council policy manual clearly defining ministry expectations and parameters, including which actions by staff need approval and which do not.
- L. Lay leaders and staff should participate in the “*Healthy Congregations*” workshop series as a learning process to strengthen healthy relationships within the congregation, first with the leadership (professional and lay), then the entire congregation, especially in light of the “troubled” response on the congregation survey. This would also address another identified area for improvement in the Natural Church Development survey, Loving Relationships. The congregation survey reflected the need for harmony, and comments were offered that suggest that this would be an important step to take as a congregation – comments that reflected hurt feelings, separation, anger, disappointment, frustration toward situations, individuals, decisions made, and the like. Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy congregation. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Consider appointing a 5 member task force to identify ways and opportunities to strengthen loving relationships within the congregation, using resources provided by the district.
- M. Recommit to focusing on Jesus and the ministry He lays before St. Paul Lutheran Church, and your individual role in that ministry.
- N. Financial shortfalls can be addressed by decreasing expenses or increasing income. The expense side is the prudent task – and a critical one – of leadership, asking how can we best carry out the ministry we must? This has been done and the work program is lean. The income side is the spiritual task of Biblical education toward living as God’s redeemed child according to God’s plan for His people (stewardship) – living the prayer, “Not my will, Father, but Yours be done.” It may be that the financial struggle is the symptom of a deeper spiritual issue. A time of prayer and education in Biblical stewardship, perhaps during the upcoming Lenten season, could be considered. Also, consider a capital campaign leading into the approaching 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary for debt reduction and ministry enhancement. Lastly, consider instituting an estate planning program for members.
- O. What would you be willing to do / change / begin so that your grandchildren and great-grandchildren (or their generation) will be blessed through the ministry of St. Paul Lutheran Church?
- P. Staffing thoughts...
  - a. St. Paul has had a history of being served by two pastors. Her membership, both “on the books” and average weekly worship attendance, suggest that the Calling

of a second pastor would be an appropriate step to take. However, financially I caution against taking this step and immediately calling from the field. The ratio of salary and benefits in the work program is dangerously high. It is generally considered prudent that salaries and benefits not be more than 60%-65% of the work program. However, the ministry needs are present and real – and one pastor will have difficulty having enough time to effectively meet all of the ministry needs. A short-term consideration could be to engage a retired pastor in the area to assist with pastoral care and other pastoral duties as identified in a part-time way. This would provide pastoral ministry support, yet minimally impact the work program, and allow time to address the financial/spiritual situation Biblically. A possible option could be to apply for a candidate from the seminary in the spring placement – the time to do that is approaching. A younger pastor would bring fresh ideas, energy, and enthusiasm.

- b. Should the family ministry emphasis be pursued, I would recommend that a director of family life be Called. The skills and training would be supportive of the ministry suggested above. An intentional connection with school families (both members and nonmembers) would be worthy of including in the position, as well as a ministry to seniors. And maybe, if the part-time pastoral assistance is effective and helpful, this position could be the first to be considered. If a candidate from the seminary is obtained, this may need to be pushed back a bit. However, this area of ministry seems to me to be a critical component for St. Paul. But again, the concern for the percentage of work program dedicated to salaries and benefits must be considered.
- c. Another staff position – part-time or volunteer – could be to coordinate and connect people to opportunities for ministry and service in the congregation – both church activities and school activities – and the community. (Perhaps a “Living your faith” coordinator) In a church the size of St. Paul, this type of position is common, and often more effective than being part of a board responsibility. However, if the volunteer position is pursued, perhaps there could be two or even three volunteers so that the work not be overwhelming for a volunteer – but this would necessitate a staff person overseeing them.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Just as St. Paul Lutheran Church has been tremendously blessed in the past, so, I am convinced, she will be tremendously blessed in the years to come.

God is guiding you at this time to be very intentional about your future by actively seeking His will and allowing it to develop under His guidance and blessing, and according to His timetable. It is my prayer that that intentionality will permeate many of the things you will do. Take a deep assessment of who you are and what Christ is calling you to do as members in His kingdom and as servants in these days before He returns again. Consider these observations and suggestions. Disregard those which are unrealistic or which are just plain wrong. Use those that might be appropriate or correct to allow you to do your own thinking and your own assessment. Ultimately the direction and actions of your church's future belong to you.

If I may be of assistance in responding to specific questions or clarifying things raised or identifying or planning, please ask.

God bless you in your ministry, in your love for one another, in your outreach with the Holy Gospel to people who do not know Jesus.

***To God alone be the glory!***