

St. John's Strategic Planning Project Benchmarking

As noted in last month's Reed, strategic planning is a process where an organization defines its vision of the future and creates a roadmap of how it intends to get there. The first and most important step in this process is to create the vision. The approach will be to compare St. Johns to what model or benchmark congregations within our Synod are doing and define a set of "best practices" that sets them apart from others; examine some churches in the western suburbs near us to assess their strategic direction; survey the staff and the congregation for their input; and consolidate all this into a unified vision that fits our congregation and is affordable.

The congregations we have selected as benchmark churches are:

Bethlehem, 4100 Lyndale Avenue South, Minneapolis
 Lord of Life, 18500 CR 101, Maple Grove
 Mount Olivet, 5025 Knox Avenue South, Minneapolis
 St. Philip the Deacon, 17205 CR 6, Plymouth

The other west suburban churches near us we have selected to examine are:

Mount Calvary, 301 CR 19, Excelsior
 Immanuel, 16515 Luther Way, Eden Prairie
 Trinity, 6th Avenue North, Long Lake

The Strategic Planning Team believes the single most important indicator of the vitality of a congregation is average weekly worship attendance. The ELCA has a statistical report called Congregation Trend Report that provides this as well as other information for each of its churches from year 2000 through 2007.

Average weekly worship attendance for the groups was as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>St. Johns</u>	<u>Benchmark Ave.</u>	<u>Other Group Ave.</u>
Year 2000	407	2,565	558
Year 2007	375	2,723	631
% Change	-7.9%	+6.1%	+13.1%

The benchmark churches are sometimes considered "mega churches" because of their size but in our opinion their reported results become that more impressive when taking their size into account.

The Team is not focused on the decreased attendance of St. Johns because we think that is understandable. We are instead focused on what

both of the other groups of churches have done to grow their attendance because this reflects their vitality.

The next planned step is to visit each of the benchmarked congregations to determine what “best practices” they follow that we should consider implementing at St. John’s to improve our performance. To identify these “best practices” we have created a survey form based on the work of nationally known church consultant Kennon Callahan who has worked with thousands of churches and has identified 12 keys to an effective, thriving church. We will be visiting and completing a survey form for each of the above listed churches but we will begin by performing a self assessment of where we see St. Johns today.

This is the second in a series of articles that will describe the strategic planning process in greater detail and keep the congregation informed of the team’s progress and status.

We welcome input and help from any member. If you have comments, questions, and suggestions or want to participate on the project please see any team member or send an email to Skip Smith at: hssmithiii@frontiernet.net. Other members of the team are: Pastor Ed, Cheri Fischer, Marshall Saunders and Rob Beyer.