

# HAMILTON LUTHERAN AMALGAMATION EXPLORATION

## ACTS BIBLE STUDY CONVERSATIONS

### Listening for God's call – responding with our action

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Between May 26 and June 10 members of Faith, Grace, St. John's, and Transfiguration congregations gathered to share their hopes and ideas for the future. There was a very high level of participation in this Bible study-based amalgamation exploration process in each of the 4 congregations. Inspired by the picture of the early church as described in Acts 2:41-47, people took the opportunity to think about the future of Lutheran ministry and mission in Hamilton.

While there were groups discussing each of the 6 ministry categories, the most interest was in categories of (a) forming and sustaining community within the church, (b) outreach and social justice, and (c) evangelism: inviting, welcoming and including people into the church. Worship, fellowship and pastoral care, and teaching and learning garnered the least interest for different reasons.

- For worship, there was a sense that both what was happening now was meeting the needs of your current members well. People are satisfied. This being said, there was strong recognition that you need to diversify worship and music if you are to grow.
- People generally feel that you are doing pastoral care well.
- For teaching and learning, there is a sense that this mostly happens in worship. Others see that learning happens in all activities. So, there is a sense that this ministry doesn't have a lot of definition and is an area of potential development.

#### THEMES:

The following are the key motivations, anxieties and opportunities that will need to be addressed in the amalgamation vision and strategic plan.

Regrouping to have enough volunteers: For many in the congregations, the primary motivation and purpose of the amalgamation is to regroup, strengthening the volunteer corps so that you can keep your programs and ministries going. You are worried about the capacity of the congregations and the burden being put on your aging congregational leaders.

In an amalgamation you are concerned that all your congregations have essentially the same age profile. Something has to be done to rebuild the congregations or you will simply be on the same decline slope at a slightly slower pace.

Ministry with young adults/young families, children and youth: Another strong motivation for an amalgamation is to rebuild your ministries with young families, children and youth. This is imagined in both outreach ministries and in worship and educational ministries. While there is undoubtedly a substantial desire to build relevant and attractive programs and ministries, there is also recognition that

the congregations don't have the expertise or skill to do so now. This would need to be developed from scratch.

Diversifying worship and music: Each group acknowledged the need and importance for offering different styles of worship and music on Sunday morning and at different times in the week.

#### Flexibility of space and other uses for property

- Flexible worship space that can accommodate different styles of worship
- Becoming a community hub

Linking outreach with community-building: People see that Good Food Box, Steps to Health, CAP help a lot of people and provides the opportunities for members of the congregations to connect with people in the community. There is a lively question about how a newly amalgamated church can expand these so that you have more opportunities to build relationships with people using these programs. Ideas include having a community kitchen, community chef, offering cooking classes.

#### Consultants' observations and questions

- People don't yet realise the extent of a resource base they would have to support their ministries in an amalgamated congregation. Ideas are very moderate with an attitude of scarcity rather than abundance. What would it mean to cast a more ambitious plan for the future? How would this need to be communicated to engage people's imaginations and sense of what could be possible?
- What is the gift of Lutheran ministry and mission for the people of Hamilton? How do you define this and then how will you communicate it/brand yourself to the public?
- Going bigger – choosing a focused strategy – creating a clear plan that allows for a diversification of mission and ministry while taking care of the elders.
- There is a need to develop your web-presence and social media resources as a core part of your vision. There isn't yet a lot of imagination regarding the potential for these tools to support your programming.

### **CHALLENGES TO BE SATISFIED**

Building enough motivation to create and implement a vision for something new – a ministry that will change the course of the Lutheran Church in Hamilton. Developing the will and enthusiasm to try new things, develop realistic expectations, not being afraid of risk, learn from those things that don't work and immediately trying something else rather than getting stopped.

Redefining sustainability as a church whose focus is on mission and new, transformed ministries. What does this mean for how we allocate our finances and other resources?

Overcoming the perception that we are a German ethnic church. Also learning to integrate new, non-German people into the community of our church. Doing this while tending to the needs of the German-speaking elders for worship and pastoral care in their mother tongue.

Transportation is a concern that was raised frequently in the discussions. Hamilton doesn't have a transportation infrastructure to support people being able to get to church easily. There is an opportunity to think creatively about this challenge with the resources available through an amalgamation.

The Mountain: presence on the Mountain is a concern of the Transfiguration congregation. What are the possibilities for maintaining a presence on the Mountain that serves the needs of the community and represents an honourable legacy for the Lutheran ministries in this area?

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## SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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### WORSHIP & MUSIC (7.5:8/10)

For most, this is where we put most of our energy and resources. It's very important to us. It's the heart and soul of our congregations. Worship is inspiring and the music brings us closer to God.

All see the opportunity to direct more energy and imagination to developing what you offer in worship and music.

#### *New ideas*

- We would like to offer lots of options in worship and music with particular focus on becoming attractive and meaningful for younger people
  - 5 pm Saturdays
  - More personal worship – consider how clergy are dressed, how we interact with each other in worship
  - Messy Church
  - Incorporate bible studies into an alternative worship service
  - Member led worship
  - Flexible seating – so lots of different arrangements
  - Worship outside
- We need to move away from focusing on our own needs and preferences and consider those of our neighbours – people we would like to be attractive to
- Develop a richer prayer life to invite people to participate in
- Reach out to invite people with special needs
- Advertise – especially to students

## THE FORMING AND SUSTAINING OF COMMUNITY (9/10)

- We have lots going on already and are making lots of impact on people's lives. We know we can do this well.
- We have friends and are supported and sustained by the caring we feel and welcoming we are able to offer.
- There are endless opportunities. Our programming is strong. Our participation is weak.
- Our issue is to not stress our volunteers
- There is a growing anxiety that our core members are losing their capacity to attend regularly and participate fully.
- What about following up with people who have left or drifted away? We don't do this well.
- Not able to build a self-sustaining congregation with the energy and resources it needs to continue
- We use to visit people in the area who had babies – with a card and practical support. We could do this again, notice what's happening in our neighbourhoods and respond.

### *New ideas*

- What's our uniqueness as Lutherans? Need to be able to identify it and express it so we can grow these things.
- In an amalgamation we will need to develop better and more systematic in-reach ministries.
  - Weekly coffee hours
  - Develop and host peer group ministries.
  - Do an "every member" visitation to maintain and build contact – strengthen relationships when they might be made more tenuous by an amalgamation
  - Develop a system to purposefully follow up with people who are drifting away or who seem to have left.
- Support for seniors and peer groups for youth.
- Bridge the divide between the German and English communities.
- Being open to new leadership doing things in new ways.
- Need a good business plan for development – something we can consider and decide whether it's worth our buy-in.
- In-reach programs i.e. hymn sing events

## FELLOWSHIP AND PASTORAL CARE (8/10)

- This is a strength of our congregations. We make people feel wanted and loved. We look after those who are shut-in

- We have good fellowship groups – people find companionship, they are less lonely because of our ministries.
- Our aging members can find lots of fellowship and support within the congregations. There are strong and long-standing (multigenerational) connections here. Strong sense of belonging among the congregations.
- We are small groups of friends and we're used to this. This will be challenged if/when we become a larger, amalgamated congregation.
- It's not just the ministers offering pastoral care – we participate. We care for the sick, visit the shut-in, at times of distress and trauma.
- There is a risk that we, who live all across the GHA will simply disperse once the amalgamation happens. The vision needs to be compelling enough to encourage us to go.

#### *New ideas*

- There are opportunities to expand our ministries of pastoral care and fellowship with new innovative ways of keeping in touch
- We will need to pay attention to caring for people on the Mountain – to continue the ministries of fellowship and pastoral care done through Transfiguration now
- In a newly amalgamated church we will need a system so that we know each other well enough to be able to offer pastoral care to others in the church
  - Have more events/gathering in people's homes aka Transfiguration
  - Host trips
- Develop ways to offer relevant pastoral care to younger people
- There are needs for transportation that the city isn't meeting. This will definitely be true for people who will need to travel to a new church site – further away from home after an amalgamation.

#### **EVANGELISM: INVITING PEOPLE INTO OUR FAITH COMMUNITY THROUGH HOSPITALITY, WELCOME AND INCLUSION (6-8:5:/10**

- We have lots of events. Lots of time invested in this ministry (i.e. Pancakes, Welcome Back Sunday, MACSoc (Out of the Cold), Messy Church, Little Library...)
- While we invest a lot of time to these ministries we don't invest a lot of money to them – this has been limited and limiting
- Many of these activities are geared towards outreach rather than in-reach and this is not meeting our needs to build up and support our congregation's community.

- We do a good job as greeters at the door on Sunday, but we should all be greeters and welcome people. This is especially true in our coffee hour/lunches when we need to talk with people we don't know or don't know well.
- What does it mean to be invitational rather than welcoming? How do we learn to invite?
- What does welcome and inclusion mean in our congregations? Are we really open to including people different from "us"?
- We know we can do this well
- It's almost too much to manage. Our volunteers are stretched. Our issue is to not stress our volunteers.
- There are transportation issues to be managed. People don't want to drive or travel at night.

#### *New ideas*

- Offer something to new residents in Hamilton – immigrants i.e. social events and places to gather.
- Learn to notice and connect with the communities around the church – their lives, needs, hopes
- Create a multipurpose building – with seniors apartments, multiuse space for community programs
- We need to focus and select our priorities
- Desire to form community with/for young people: music, activities, learning.
  - Youth minister
  - Activities not on Sunday
  - Connections with CLAY
  - Programming for youth in the community
  - Computer centre, mentors for homework, volunteering opportunities with seniors, community-building
- We have a real heart for making positive difference in the lives of young families
  - Programs for families in need.
  - Need to invest financial resources in this program – as well as leadership and time. It will take a purposeful commitment to (re)building this ministry. We need to be realistic about what it will take in terms of resources and our attitudes/participation/permission.
- Let's learn from churches who are able to do successful youth and young family programming
- We have habits to break so that we will be open to getting to know new people
- Refocus our perspective/emphasis: meet and invite people to participate in activities rather than 'come and join our churchy'
- We would like to be more welcoming and inclusive in our approach.

- We want to be a place where people can find support for their spiritual life
- We want to learn to be a place that welcomes and serves children and youth

### EVANGELISM: OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRIES (5:7-8/10)

- Food programs/ministries: Food box, gardening, donations to food programs for children
- Supporting programs for health – CAP/\$ for living
- MacSOC community, Living Rock – sandwiches and neighbourly love)
- Women’s groups – knitting and sewing
- Refugee family
- Few are involved now
- We get good support when we raise issues – but we don’t raise them enough
- We (Grace) have a few new people becoming part of our church through these ministries. Mostly through relationships made with pastor.

#### *New ideas*

- We have a challenge to grow ministries of outreach and justice in a purposeful expansion and growth of outreach and social justice ministries
  - Extend and expand our food ministries – community kitchen, chef, meals (dinners, breakfasts)
  - ESL cafes
- Multiple possibilities such as networking with schools, churches, other charitable organizations, updating the building to meet accessibility standards.
- We have the opportunity to garner the good will of people through our ministries of outreach and justice. This will motivate people to participate and support us.
- Opportunities with students; new residence for international students; newcomers to the city
- We need to build partnerships within the community with other agencies and churches – working in cooperation means we will be more effective.
- Using our property as a community centre/hub for activities, arts, day care, youth programming
- Opportunities with James St development and transportation plans
- More presence in the community – speakers, preachers
- More communications about what we are doing and wanting to do.
- A larger voice in national concerns too
- Build partnerships with other organizations to do this effectively

- Focus first on working together for common concern with no need or pressure to join the church
- We need more volunteers whose energy is directed towards this ministry
- Needs dedicated ministry support from pastor
- We need to learn to go to people and not expect them to come to us – and to do this in a way that isn't preachy and off-putting

#### TEACHING AND LEARNING (4-5/10)

- This is not important enough. There are some opportunities but not a lot of people are involved and we don't know why this is.
- We look to worship as the primary place of learning and teaching. Also in the Cumberland Group.
- We see it in the Sunday School and Children's time in worship but we would like this learning to continue to older youth and young adults as well, but we lose church members during these years.
- Does what we offer reach people?
- We have a very small Sunday School if any at all. Again, we are not sure what to do.
- We want to change but we don't know how.

#### *New ideas*

- Need to build up the ministry of learning in an amalgamated church.
- We need human resources who have experience and expertise in the area to help us develop and grow our program.
- We need a deliberate, focused and strategic approach which offers multiple entry points into the teach and learning available through our church.
- More tools to engage and know the Bible.
- Adult Sunday School at sometime during the week, either at church or at home.
- Learning opportunities for single adults
- How do we overcome the challenge of "time" – as a really scarce resource in people's lives?
- Be prepared at all times to provide teaching – and to continue to learn ourselves.
- We need to be a place where it's safe to question, doubt, discuss.
- What about having a new image for our teach and learning ministries -> spiritual growth
- Become a place to develop as faithful disciples
- Ways of becoming engaging and relevant to younger adults and families. These groups are missing from our congregations and we don't know what we could do to reach out to them and

let them know that what they could learn through us would be helpful and important to their lives.

- Look at the timing of our learning programs – it's not possible for younger people.
- Develop our use of social media to support teaching and learning programming.