

# TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS PRESCRIPTIONS

## *Valley Lutheran Church*

Chagrin Falls, OH

October 5, 2008

The Consultation Team has very much appreciated the openness of the staff and members of the congregation with whom we met. We thank God for your ministry and look forward to seeing how the Lord will use your congregation in the future to touch hundreds of people in this community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The following is our report to the members of Valley Lutheran Church based on this weekend's visitation.

### Strengths

1. **The Caring committed members** – The people of VLC genuinely care about their church and one another. You welcome newcomers into your midst.
2. **Pastor Esala** – Is acknowledged as a conservative, Biblical, interesting preacher and teacher who easily connects with people.
3. **Acknowledgement of the need to change** – The leadership has expressed the need for change to insure the future vitality of the congregation. Some have displayed the passion to achieve a congregational outward focus.
4. **Christian Preschool:** Valley Lutheran Preschool and its highly competent director are well thought of in the community and provide a loving, Christian, educational environment for the children under their care.
5. **Fiscal stability and abundant resources** – The current fiscal health of the congregation is commendable. You are living within your means, you are not carrying debt, and you have money in the bank. The level of giving by the regular members is higher than normal. The God-given resources and skills in the members far surpasses the norm.

### Concerns

1. **Lack of vision** – The congregation lacks a clear, unified, compelling, God-given vision. While pastor and people have individual ideas and visions for the future there is no single vision that guides all aspects of the congregation over an extended period of time. This lack of vision has kept the congregation from reaching its full potential in fulfilling the Great Commission.
2. **Inward focus** – While there are several outreach tasks that take place, in general, the congregation is in the habit of taking care of themselves, providing for their comfort and personal preferences, instead of regularly and consistently making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. This has resulted in five consecutive years of declining worship attendance at VLC.
3. **No connections/bridges to this community** – Valley Lutheran lacks the connections and ministry staff to attract and involve the large population of families with children in the surrounding communities. The congregation has aged. The congregation has not attracted new families and made disciples through the Preschool. Quality ministry to families, youth and children is lacking.
4. **Ineffective Structure** – The present governance structure of the church divides authority from responsibility while providing no accountability. This has resulted in an ineffective system that produces few measurable results for making disciples. The current governance structure stifles creative ministry on the part of members.

5. **Lack of Leadership Development** - There is no clear process to recruit, equip and empower new leaders for the congregation. Therefore current leaders are overworked and or are working in areas for which they are not gifted nor from which gain satisfaction.

### **Prescriptions**

Upon the acceptance of the following prescriptions, the congregation will initiate a season of repentance, forgiveness and renewal for the congregation. The Congregational coach will assist Pastor Esala in leading the congregation through 4-6 weeks of teaching, prayer and fasting, leading up to a Congregational day of repentance and renewal. The purpose for the Day of Prayer and Repentance is to offer prayers of confession for:

- Idolatry connected to an inward focus on members' comfort,
- Apathy and or disregard toward those people that God misses most in this community,
- Rededication to God's mission of making disciples in this community.

The leaders and congregational members are encouraged to offer silent and public prayers asking God to forgive them personally and collectively for failing to participate in making new disciples of Jesus Christ on a regular and consistent basis. The Day of Prayer will be held no later than Good Friday, 2009.

- 1) **Vision-** In order to gain a clear, unified, compelling, God-given vision, the congregation will:
  - a) By January 15, 2009, engage, with input from the Ohio District, a facilitator who leads a visioning process. This visioning process will include community surveys and community based focus groups with the goal of understanding the needs of the community and people living within the area surrounding the church facility.
  - b) Once developed, pastor and staff will communicate the vision for ninety days throughout the congregation.
  - c) At the end of the ninety days of intentional vision casting the congregation shall meet to consider adoption of the vision. The target deadline is July 1, 2009.
  - d) Leadership will continually insure that every member knows and is committed to carrying out the vision.
  - e) All existing and new ideas, facility plans, programs and ministries must be evaluated in light of this vision and any that do not enable the congregation to move closer to achieving this vision shall be stopped or not implemented.
  
- 2) **Outward Focus** – to get the congregation off the ground and outward focused they will:
  - a) Immediately develop triads.
  - b) Host one off church campus event, connected to Christmas 2008. This outreach event will be completely focused on the needs of the people in this community. Beginning in 2009 the congregation will host at least 6 of these type events annually.
  - c) Form five Affinity (interest) Groups by June 1, 2009 and new groups will be added annually.
  - d) Pastor will preach a sermon series on the missional outward nature of God's church during the Epiphany season of 2009.
  
- 3) **Making Connections & Bridges to the community** – The congregations desires to and needs to make connections with families with children and youth in the community for the purpose of making more disciples of Jesus Christ. In order to do that the congregation will:
  - a) Immediately stop the Saturday evening service.
  - b) Design an outreach service for families with children and youth (time and day to be determined by needs). This new outreach service to be implemented by Easter 2009.

- c) Immediately initiate a feasibility study, leading to a search (call) committee to add a staff person in the area of children/youth/family life. This staff position will replace the vicarage program. Target date for adding this staff person is summer 2009.
- d) Initiate a task force to develop a written plan that effectively utilizes the preschool as a prime outreach component of the congregation's ministry. The Preschool director and staff are to be included in this task force. This plan should be implemented by January 15, 2009.

**4) Structure** - Effective with the acceptance of these prescriptions the congregation will prepare to adopt the Accountable Leadership Model.

Beginning June 1, 2009 The Congregation President (Chairperson) will lead the congregation in amending those particular bylaws that describe how the congregation functions in its ministries. *(A set of recommended Interim Bylaws is available from the District.)* The congregation will vote to amend the appropriate by-laws by adopting this report.

Once the bylaws are amended, the church will adopt an Accountable Leader model of governance. In this new model of governance, there will be a Board of Directors of no more than 7 people, including the Pastor. The qualifications for those serving on this board are as follows:

- Members who are weekly participants in worship and Bible study.
- Members who are striving to or are giving a tithe.
- Members who understand and support the mission and vision of the congregation.

This board represents an outward focused mission and the new vision when it is adopted. Their role will be to govern the church. The Pastor's role will be to lead the church. The role of staff members will be to manage the church. The role of the members will be to conduct the ministry of the church.

Upon amending the current bylaws, the existing Church Council will function as an interim Board of Directors until the new board is elected. The new Board of Directors will be elected to their offices, following the procedures outlined in the new Interim Bylaws by September 1, 2009.

The Interim Bylaws will be followed for two years. At the end of the two years, the congregation will vote to return to the original bylaws, adopt the Interim Bylaws as permanent, or write new bylaws to reflect how ministry is being done at that time.

#### **5) Leadership Development**

- a) By September 1, 2009, Pastor and Board will implement a process to equip staff members in their attempts to recruit, equip and train the future leaders of the congregation.
- b) Pastor Esala will continue participating in the Pastor's Learning Community until its completion.
- c) Upon adoption of these prescriptions, Pastor Esala shall initiate a monthly learning community of VLC leaders to begin meeting in January 2009.
- d) By April 15, 2009, a Discipleship Task Force will be implemented to develop an intentional process whereby mature Christian disciples will be grown that includes but is not limited to the expansion of current small group ministry utilizing resources such as Groups Ablaze.

- e) Host a small group ministry training workshop no later than February 1, 2009. Reintroduce small group ministries with no fewer than six new groups utilizing Groups Ablaze Material. Make Small Group Ministry a staff position.

The congregation will vote to accept or reject these prescriptions by November 16, 2008. We strongly urge a time of prayer and serious deliberation prior to making this decision. Upon acceptance of this report, the Ohio District commits to “walk along side” Valley Lutheran by providing a “coach” for a minimum of one year to help the church implement these prescriptions.

**Conclusion:** We want to thank you for the opportunity to consult with you. We believe that by God’s grace your best days as a congregation are ahead of you with the implementation of these prescriptions.

Rev. Jeffrey Stephens [stephensj@oh.lcms.org](mailto:stephensj@oh.lcms.org)

Kevin Wilson [wilsonk@oh.lcms.org](mailto:wilsonk@oh.lcms.org)

Gordon Stuckert [stuckertg@oh.lcms.org](mailto:stuckertg@oh.lcms.org)

Ron Biel [rdbmarco@aol.com](mailto:rdbmarco@aol.com)

Carl Brewer [brewer\\_cj@hotmail.com](mailto:brewer_cj@hotmail.com)

Mike Zimmer [Mike.Zimmer@MNSDISTRICT.ORG](mailto:Mike.Zimmer@MNSDISTRICT.ORG)