

Reflections on Ministry and Context
First Evangelical Lutheran Church

Kearney, NE

Completed:



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Congregations and Organizations in the Call Process are invited to expand their Ministry Site Profile (MSP) by reflecting on the several key aspects of ministry and context given below. You are encouraged to give short, thoughtful answers (a maximum of 250 words) on at least four of the seven topics. This form is optional unless specifically requested by a synod bishop. The form is submitted electronically and becomes a part of the Ministry Site's MSP.

1. What key issues or concerns of our church and society are reflected in the ministry that is centered in your congregation or organization?

One concern of this congregation is the devotion of youth and young families. As kids become more and more involved in a variety of activities, we see church becoming less of a priority for some families. In society today, conflicts with athletics and other extracurricular activities take priority over church activities. We realize this is not unique to First Lutheran, but it is an area of concern. We seek a Sr. Pastor who can continually remind us that God is at work in every phase of our lives, and without Him, everything else seems small.

2. How do the stewardship practices and allocation of financial resources of the congregation or organization reflect your priorities for mission?

Part of our mission is to share a spirit of love and service to others. With that in mind, our congregation has been supportive of many different types of ministry and outreach. In recent years, we have made significant contributions of financial resources and volunteer hours to organizations, including the Jubilee Center, HelpCare Clinic, Campus Lutheran, Habitat For Humanity, Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries and more. We've also made contributions to organizations who help those in need beyond the borders of our state and country. We've been a very giving congregation and continually search for ways to help those in need. We seek a Senior Pastor who will continue to encourage us in this way, strengthen our spirit of giving, and continue to remind us of "why" we give.

One thing to note in this regard, is that our records show our Synod mission share has decreased over the years as we redirected part of those funds to other areas of independent giving. However, this year, the church leadership made a decision to increase our mission share for the Synod in an effort to better align with the "church together" mentality that the Synod promotes. Together, we can all work to combat poverty and hunger, eradicate malaria, and stand in support of global and state mission partners as God calls us to help.

3. In what ways is the membership of your congregation or organization similar or different from the people of the neighborhood in which you are located?

First Lutheran Church in Kearney, NE sits in the middle of a residential neighborhood. The building is adjacent to an elementary school, softball field and city park. Good Samaritan Hospital sits a few blocks to the west along with other commercial businesses. The demographics of the neighborhood consists of single-family and multi-family dwellings that include all age groups. In many ways, much of the First Lutheran congregation is similar to the demographics found in the surrounding neighborhood and community as a whole. Kearney is not an overly diverse community, but our congregation is open and accepting of all believers.

4. Identify the three most significant or formative events in the history of your congregation or organization.

It's easy to look at brick and mortar developments such as the building of a new church at the current location in 1966 or the addition of a new sanctuary in 1998. Those events were certainly significant in our church history as we



experienced growth in membership during those times.

In addition to that, there have been several events that have significantly led to spiritual growth in our church. One of these events was the addition of Wednesday evening programming in 1992. The newly developed GIFT program (Growing In Faith Together) brought the church family together with many types of activities. Now, the program has evolved to the point that there is a Wednesday evening meal called "Feeding the Flock" along with the FROG Program (Fully Rely On God) for kids age 3 through 5th grade. Additionally, the middle school students meet for confirmation while the First Lutheran Youth Group (high school age) meets in the basement area. Wednesday evening programming has added another opportunity for us to grow and learn about our faith.

Looking way back into our history, we believe the moment that our church transitioned off of mission support from the Synod was very significant. We were once a struggling church, but God's Word took hold and, with good leadership and congregational support, we were able to become self sufficient as a church organization. We have since contributed very generously to the Synod to help with other ministry efforts, including supporting other struggling churches.

In 2009, we celebrated much of our church history as part of our 125th Anniversary. The theme was "125 Years of God's Grace 1884-2009." It was a chance for us to reflect on the generations of faithful people who laid the groundwork for what we now know as our place of worship. We would be happy to share more details of our history with any pastoral candidate that is interested in learning more about the roots of our church.

5. Describe the way the congregation or organization is currently involved in community and ecumenical partnerships.

As noted in the "Mutual Expectations" section of our site profile, First Lutheran Church proudly held a joint worship service on Thanksgiving Eve, in November of 2015, with congregations from multiple churches in Kearney. As a part of this, there was tremendous collaboration between pastors and ministers at these churches. It's our hope that this type of ecumenical support and interaction can continue. This would support the new Senior Pastor by having a network of industry professionals to collaborate and interact with.

Additionally, much of our outreach in the community is a collaborative effort with other congregations. Multiple churches support the Jubilee Center, HelpCare Clinic, and other organizations along with First Lutheran. We've also been known to invite pastors from other congregations to preach, teach and lead council retreats. We hope that our next Sr. Pastor can help us search for additional ways to interact with other followers of Christ, regardless of denomination. However, staying true to our Lutheran beliefs is very important.

6. Has your congregation or organization had significant conflict in recent history and, if so, what have you learned from that experience?

Please refer to the "Commentary" section of our site profile with details on "Unhealthy Communication and Triangulation."

What we learned from that experience is that it's OK to disagree. It's OK to have conflict. What's important is HOW WE DEAL WITH IT. We've learned how to appropriately communicate when there is conflict. We learned a healthy way to address people when problems arise. We are not perfect. We are not always going to get along. We know that nearly all churches have adversity to deal with. So trusting in God and each other while promoting healthy communication is extremely important.

Also, please refer to the "Commentary" section of our site profile with details on "Pastoral Turnover at First Lutheran (2000 to 2007)."



What we learned from that experience is that it's very important to acknowledge our past while continually looking to the future. We had 2 pastors who served this congregation over a span of 46 years. Instead of trying to find a Sr. Pastor who resembles the qualities of our previous leaders, we now know that we must find a Sr. Pastor who can be him/herself and lead us according to their individual skills and abilities. In conversations among members of the congregation, we hear less and less about our past leaders, and more talk about the future. This indicates that we, as a congregation, are ready for a new brand of direction and leadership.

7. Describe your physical facilities: construction date, purpose, capacity, date of last renovation, any deferred maintenance, and any plans for upgrading.

The current church building that sits at 33rd and G. Ave in Kearney was originally built in 1966. An addition with a new multipurpose gym called Centennial Hall, along with new classroom space was added in 1983-84. Increase in membership led to a new sanctuary with a seating capacity of 700 that was completed in 1998. An interior renovation was completed in 2012. In early 2016, new carpet was laid throughout the sanctuary and narthex area.

In addition to the sanctuary and Centennial Hall, we have ample classroom and meeting space. A newly renovated coffee area is used each week for fellowship and other gatherings. There is a basement area that is designated for use by middle school and high school youth groups. It is partly finished with capabilities for further development. Part of the Old Sanctuary is a "blank slate" ready for future renovation and expansion that would make it usable space once again. Preliminary plans are drawn for another phase of renovations that include new office and meeting spaces. Timing and financial resources for this project have not yet been established, but those efforts are currently being made.

We are exploring options to move forward with plans to upgrade our office and meeting space. Our staff offices are in major need of upgrading. It's important that our pastors and administrative staff have bright and comfortable office space to conduct our day-to-day operations. We will be having conversations with the larger congregation and attempting to rally support - financially and otherwise - to get this project in motion. It's in the very early stages at this point, but the leadership group is making it a priority project.

Overall, the facility is in good condition. We are prompt to take care of any maintenance needs, big or small. As recently as this year, our congregation has voted to approve over \$180,000 in repairs to the church. We are replacing 50-year old boilers and addressing leaks in our roof and steeple. Our Property & Management Ministry Team often takes a proactive approach to maintaining the facility so that it will stand strong for future generations of worshipers in the years to come.