

Report of Strategic Planning Sub-Committee on “How to Reinforce Mission Statement”

April 14, 2009

(Revised May 4, 2009)

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Introduction

Faithful to our Lord’s command in Matthew 28:19 and guided by the Holy Spirit the council and congregation have seen fit to approve new mission and vision statements the essence of which is to “make disciples.” All of us having agreed with the statements in principle are now confronted with the question, “Exactly, how do we do that?” How do we as a congregation “make” disciples? Or looked at from a personal point of view, how does one become a disciple?

What is Discipleship?

All of us are on a spiritual journey. All of us are at different points on that journey. Becoming a disciple and living as a disciple means living a lifestyle that is Christ centered, led by the Holy Spirit, and is marked by an attempt to live by various spiritual disciplines. At this point, we have chosen to use those disciplines identified by Mike Foss in his various books on the Six Marks of Discipleship. It is a process of continual growth and ends with our final reward when we are told “Well done thou good and faithful servant”.

What Making Disciples is Not

It may be easier to determine what Disciple Making is not than what it is:

- It is Not a program
- It is Not a production Line
- It is Not just for beginners
- It is Not just for leaders
- It is Not just for the highly literate
- It is Not for the highly structured.

It is a process where, led by the Holy Spirit, we grow into a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father and live out that relationship as we interact in the world. Living the

Great Commandments and the Great Commission. It means having a whole new world-view and adopting a whole new lifestyle and different set of values.

The First Step – Understanding God’s Call both Individually and as a Church

Our own guiding principles challenge us to create and utilize structures, models, or processes that help us live out our faith. We believe that first step in the disciple making process is God’s call. God first makes the offer of salvation; we may choose to accept or not. As Lutherans we believe God calls us from sin and death in our baptism to be God’s children. As Luther said in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed, “I can not of my own strength come to God or know him” except as God chooses us first and calls us through the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation our teens affirm God’s call and agree to begin the practices of the discipleship process. As adults Affirmation of Baptism accomplishes the same purpose.

God’s call is the first step in the process. From the time we accept God’s call, we are on a continuum of becoming more or less of a disciple – a spiritual journey to be and live more like Christ. It could be reasoned that every bible course, every good deed, every prayer, equips into becoming more and more Christ-like.

Different People - Different Places

As we are all at different points on our journey, various methods and processes need to be developed to be available to our congregation to reach them where they are. Entry or ever Re-entry points should – as the Holy Spirit directs – prompt us to new or renewed commitment to spiritual growth. The important points for us as individuals to focus on are: Where am I now along this path? and How can I deepen my relationship with God? The most important question for the church to answer is: Have we equipped our brothers and sisters with the tools they need to help them evaluate their position and move forward on the discipleship continuum?

Different Approaches for Different Folks

It is clear that some people can become disciples without any help from others simply by attending the wide array of classes, studies, programs, sermons, their own associations with others, and doing of good deeds. These persons will know from their relationship with God and their understanding of the Six Marks where they are on their journey and where growth might take them further. On the other hand for those who find it easier to work in teams of two, there Are many programs or courses of study available where two people can work together each providing accountability and encouragement to the other. A third method of discipleship development is found is

small groups. Groups are particularly adept in nurturing and inspiring discipleship among each other in a group. Lastly, the corporate Church must understand and fulfill its role in equipping us to be disciples.

Reinforcing the Mission Statement

As a result of the adoption of the vision, mission, and guiding principles, the Strategic Planning Team formed a subcommittee to make recommendations on how best to educate the congregation on the meaning, process, and practice of discipleship.

Recommendations

Developing Discipleship through Education: After much discussion, research and conversation amongst ourselves and with various clergy and scholars, we recommend the building of four different discipleship tracks along with a commitment to discerning our future plans through prayer.

(1) For those who choose to work toward discipleship on their own individual efforts, we recommend explanations as found in the books by Richard Foster, *Celebration of Disciple*, and Michael Foss's various books among others. Foster outlines twelve practices including meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Foss sees Six Marks as the minimum practices upon which discipleship is to be constructed. We would like to see these books added to our library, recommended reading lists, and at least one multi-week course offered yearly to acquaint the congregation with the practices (Six Marks) outlined in Foss's books. There are currently several classes running and planned for the future. More of these should be encouraged and created over the next year.

(2) We suggest a second track for those who wish to become disciples by working with another person in the faith. Half of the New Testament has Paul working with others like Timothy. We recommend the adoption or creation of workbook-like materials such as *One 2 Won* or materials that emphasize mutual accountability in the practices noted above and the establishment of a structure to sponsor discipleship by Twos. Materials from *Operation Timothy* also offer concepts that encourage such mentoring – mentoring that can be replicated. These materials are only suggestions and other materials are probably available.

(3) A third track is to develop discipleship in small groups which emphasize relationships while supporting prayer, worship, bible reading, etc. We're still looking for resources that may assist and support the Education Committee as they seek to re-define Small Groups at Trinity. Materials that can help us learn to identify, recruit and train small group leaders that who could in turn identify, recruit and train new small

group leaders. Materials from authors like Bill Hull and his "Complete Book of Discipleship" may provide a resource to this end.

(4) We also see the national church body as a source of discipleship education through various materials, seminars and retreats. The retreats could take a variety of forms but would focus on deepening or renewing one's faith. Our staff should also be encouraged to conduct non-lectionary sermon series based on the Foss Six Marks. We also suggest other educational methods such as a sequence of bulletin / Trinity Parish inserts be explored.

5) We believe this statement taken from our study of various readings to be true: "A congregation will move forward only as fast as it can move on its knees." In other words, ongoing intentional prayer is imperative. Put another way, "Prayerlessness will limit what God wants to do with us". Discerning and understanding God's will in our decision-making process will result in the development of God's plan for Trinity--not "our" plan. God called Trinity to be the Church in Camp Hill, and we need to allow God to tell us how He wants this to be accomplished.

We have difficult and substantive issues before us: What to do next during this time of transition, how to implement the discipleship process, and where to proceed on the Council's charge to us regarding the study of facility and space utilization in order to enhance our current and future opportunities for worship, education, fellowship, and outreach.

Therefore, the Committee recommends that our decisions regarding our next steps be taken up, with and through the Holy Spirit, in a season of prayer. To start the process we suggest that all those who attended the council retreat on March 7, along with any other interested members, be invited to pray, and discern through prayer our future path, during six weekly prayer sessions beginning June 24th and continuing every Wednesday evening at 7:00 p.m. through July 29th. People who cannot join us in these sessions should be encouraged to pray for Trinity as they are able. We encourage our pastoral staff to lead these weekly sessions, when possible. It is also our hope that, through these prayer sessions, others will be led by the Spirit to join this Committee so that ideas, thoughts and concerns from all corners of the congregation may be represented, and all our diverse gifts and talents may be employed.

Respectfully submitted,

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