

Faith Formation Task Force

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

A Faith Formation task force was created to advise Council as it works to determine the strategic direction and staffing needs for Trinity Faith Formation efforts given the resignation of staff members Kelly Falck and Peter Fox. The task force consisted of a cross-functional team representing the following areas:

Church Council - Serena Fedor
A&P - Patti Shatto
Preschool/ Elementary - Patty Comegna
Middle School, High School, College and YG - Dona Norris
Adult Education - Beth Maurer
Lead Pastor - Reverend Doctor Jack Horner

We have also consulted with the following Faith Formation leaders and experts as part of the process:

- Charlie Roberts, Director of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry, LSS ELCA
- Deacon Chelle Huth, ULC ELCA
- Pastor Drew and Pastor Melody that oversee Faith Formation in Christ Lutheran Church, Charlotte, NC

The Task Force aligned to complete the following work to help inform the future vision for Faith Formation and the needs for staffing:

- Understanding current events
- Reviewing work breakdown by staff
- Seeking feedback from congregation and pastors
- Hosting focus groups (details in later slides)
- Surveying congregation members
- Performing a competitive review
- Conducting a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

The resulting report includes our research and findings to serve as the basis for recommendations to the Trinity Lutheran Church Council to plan for the staffing needs that fulfill the vision outlined in this report.

Faith Formation is the process by which we engage our congregation and community to form fully devoted followers of Jesus. Through worship, connecting others with God and neighbor, and acts of service we become the people God intended.

AREA 1: Duties of Former Staff

Kelly Falck and Peter Fox both supplied reports outlining their major responsibilities. This task force reviewed the reports and categorized duties. The key findings by the Faith Formation Task Force based on these reports are:

- Many responsibilities could be reassigned or are already being handled by other staff and volunteers.
- Annual events present us with an opportunity to develop a “handbook” with documentation and guidelines of best practices to serve as a knowledge transfer to new volunteers or staff. It would be developed in order to provide ‘turnkey’ readiness for a program assigned to a volunteer to own for the year.
- Task Force estimated hours for remaining tasks as noted in the chart below.

Chart 1: Existing program offerings, estimated staff time involvement estimates and recategorization of duties

Area and Staff Time Allocation	Programs						
Children (birth – grade 5) Oversee Volunteers for events	Nursery Care Coordination	Praise & Play	Nursery Sunday School	Preschool Sunday School	Sunday Children’s Ministry Grade K – 5 <i>“252 Basics” from ORANGE</i>	Organize grab and go materials for virtual offerings	
Youth Confirmation and Grades 6-8 Sunday School Youth 9-college age	Confirmation Classes and Milestone	MS and HS Sunday morning classes	YG HS events (advertise and execute)	YG group events (advertise and execute)	Retreats	Organize grab and go materials for virtual offerings	Organize Classes and connections for College age group
New Adult +Adult + Family	Men’s Breakfast- Pastor Horner and Pastor Brock	Women’s Group (Beth Moore)	Pastors’ Bible Study	Sunday Morning Classes (Augsburg Fortress, Gospel Chat, Trinity Parents, By Heart, I Said This, You Heard That)	Life Groups	Wednesday Connect	Organize grab and go materials for virtual offerings

Communication	New Parent Section of Website and weekly Eblast with support, ideas, encouragement	New TRINITY AT HOME – section of the website with tools and ideas	Weekly Faith Connections Eblast with articles, support, tools, links to other content	Coordinate the virtual components of in-person offerings			
Events Volunteers	Support the development of the Maundy Thursday interactive worship service	Follow the Footsteps	Purchase, stuff, and distribute goody bags for Easter morning worship	Purchase, manage delivery help to decorate with Balloons for Easter morning worship	Christmas Pageant	Christmas Programs possibly centered around St. Nick	Purchase, stuff, and distribute goody bags for Christmas Eve worship
	Vacation Bible School (Lead receives a stipend) (Amy Koch)	End of Sunday School Breakfast Butterfly Release-sponsored by Mike Akers (Terry Turney)	Communion Milestone	Bible Milestone	Graduation Milestones		
Donate	Tracking Volunteer and Staff Clearances (Beth Maurer)	New Member Orientation- (Pastor Liz)	What is Ash Wednesday (Determined Pastors Lead and Execute)	Old Fashioned Hymn Sing (Tim Koch)			
Congregational Care (Pastor Brock)	Divorce Care (Barbara Fickel)	<i>Widow/er Group</i>	<i>Grief share</i>	<i>Single Parenting Group</i>	<i>Marriage Support</i>		

In Summary

Despite the departure of staff and the reduced services needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Trinity Lutheran Church has found a way to keep essential programs moving forward. Now is the time to assess the actual time commitments staff are expected to devote to each priority program or group of learners. We should seek to avoid simply replicating the hours and time commitments of previous staff; they may not be representative of our current and future needs.

As we see in the next two areas, there are clear needs to increase participation and explore different approaches to engagement of the congregation.

AREA 2: Youth Participation

Below is a chart of youth participation from nursery age through Grade 6. Data collected below represents participation levels pre-COVID.

Youth Participation at Trinity Lutheran Church is strongest in our preschool through elementary programs, then we start to see a drop off in participation with the transition to middle school. This drop off is not uncommon at other congregations, but we do believe it is significant enough that we have an opportunity to improve.

It must be a priority to keep our current youth programming for those pre-K through fifth with Sunday School and Faith Formation as strong or stronger than it was pre-pandemic.

As we look to the future a key area of focus needs to be put on our middle school programming and ensuring we support our youth as they make their transition from elementary programming into youth.

Chart 2: Youth Participation by Grade Level

(Note: All data is pre-covid participation levels. Categories were set to help classify participation. Regular = 3-4 Sunday's a month. Hit or Miss = 2-3 Sunday's a month. Irregular = 1 Sunday or less a month. Choir Only = did not participate in Sunday School)

Grade	Regulars	Hit or Miss	Very Irregular	Not Sure	Choir Only	Total	Rostered	
Nursery (Ages 1 & 2)	3	1				4	33	12%
Preschool (Ages 3 & 4)	16	2	3	2		23	36	64%
Kindergarten	9	1	3			13	30	43%
1	17	2	2			21	32	66%
2	6	4	2			12	24	50%
3	16	2	6		1	25	31	81%
4	13	2	3		1	19	25	76%
5	3	3	3			9	18	50%
6	17	7	4		2	30	40	75%
	100	24	26	2	4	156	269	58%
	37%	9%	10%	1%	1%	58%		

Confirmation class seems to be a difference-maker among youth programming participation in “Sunday School.” With average participation under 26%, there is wide room for growth in participation among middle school and high school age children of Trinity members.

Chart 3: Youth Participation, Grades 6-12

(Note: All data is pre-covid participation levels.)

Grade	FF	YG	Both	Total	Rostered	
6	1	2	3	6	36	17%
7	0	2	2	4	27	15%
8	0	4	1	5	23	22%
9*	7	1	7	15	28	54%
10	0	6	3	9	28	32%
11	1	5	1	7	28	25%
12	0	4	2	6	27	22%
	9	24	19	52	197	26%

* Grade 9 includes confirmation class.

Through research and conversation, we learned it is not uncommon to see such a drop off in youth participation in sixth grade. It is also not uncommon in Lutheran congregations to see confirmation serve as a means to attract youth back into structured religious education within the church.

The current attendance in our YG programs is a mix of community members that do not attend worship as well as those that do. We also have many youth that attend worship but do not participate in YG. We have an opportunity to extend and build our reach to provide an experience that will appeal to more of our youth.

Multiple congregations have connected the dots between dropoff and confirmation being an attractive draw. They have problem-solved by launching multi-year confirmation programs to encourage middle school youth to re-engage with religious education.

The task force seeks to move this from a common challenge to a unique opportunity to have a significant impact on participation among Trinity youth. Faith Formation programs can provide stronger supports to our youth in the transition from Elementary programs to Middle School.

We recommend we revamp our confirmation program in the following ways:

- In 2021, transition from a one year program to a three year program by beginning confirmation classes for all current 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grade youth members.
 - Starts with prep in 6th grade
 - Introduce major concepts during 7th grade and include participation in both worship service types (traditional and contemporary)
 - This year, provide a modified one-year program to our 8th and 9th graders. Starting in 2022, address the most challenging and complex topics during 8th grade and involve our youth in service projects directly connected to the congregation
 - For current 9th graders, complete confirmation programs as we have traditionally at Trinity
 - Starting in 2022 and for each year after, complete the 2021 8th graders confirmation during the fall of their 9th grade year, where they will be confirmed on Reformation Sunday

As we look to transition our confirmation class into a three year program we will need to identify a curriculum to support the new approach. Programs for confirmation classes such as *Faith Inkubators* - a confirmation program for Lutherans are available. These types of programs will require funding.

We believe it is the congregation's desire to make confirmation a meaningful and exciting experience in the faith journey of our youth. We have an opportunity to make confirmation full of programming that connects with our young members, demonstrating relevance, meaning, and connection to them. Our confirmation program would directly support our mission of Worship, Connect, Serve and will provide opportunities for the youth to gain hands-on experiences through service, worship leadership and connection with our congregation and community.

We believe with these changes we will be able to attract and retain our youth and develop servant leaders who are devoted followers of Jesus.

Confirmation classes are just a starting point. With the hire of staff as recommended in Area 4, we hope to work between the Faith Formation Team and the Trinity staff and pastoral leadership to revitalize and unleash the voices, energy and creativity of our post-confirmation youth into our congregation and community.

The hiring of youth group and Faith Formation staff with the energy and vision to engage our post-confirmation youth will be essential to our way forward for future success in Faith Formation programming.

AREA 3: Trinity Member Feedback via Focus Groups

A total of eleven focus group sessions were held in February and March 2021. Over 40+ members participated in sessions facilitated by members of this task force. We worked to protect the integrity and quality of these focus groups by asking the same framing questions to each group, covering the same major topic areas with each, and allowed enough free flowing conversation so as to not "push" the participants towards any predetermined conclusions.

Participants were invited by open email invitations to the congregation and personal invitations by members of the task force to participate. Conversation notes were summarized by facilitators and shared with the task force.

Input gathered from the following groups:

- Members at various life stages, ages and participation levels within faith formation activities and offerings
- Task Force Members
- Youth Group
- Elementary Kids
- Pastors
- Staff

In addition the Task Force conducted a “less formal” focus group of individuals who do not participate in Faith Formation activities. The task force had conversations with individuals they know personally that do not participate in organized religious activities.

What Are Our Greatest Treasures as a Church?

We present this word cloud to show the prevalence of themes that came up in our conversations with the focus groups when we asked, “If we awoke tomorrow and had to rebuild our congregation because the physical building was gone, what do we need to be sure we include in the ‘new’ structure and church? To ask it another way, ‘What are the greatest treasures of Trinity?’”



It is not necessary to provide the notes of every focus group conversation (there were eleven), but in summary these are the major themes that emerged from our members’ interviews.

Clear Themes Emerging from the Focus Groups

- **Deeper Connection:** People are craving connection and experiences. They want to get to know one another more deeply. We need to experiment with ways to provide these opportunities for members to build stronger relationships with each other.
- **Needs and Wants are Across the Board:** Some members want structured classes, while others want flexibility to just drop-in. Some want biblical and theological study and others are looking to understand how to apply religious teachings to their everyday life. Some members want to talk about current events and how to apply Bible teachings. Some want in-person, while others want online. Some want Sunday classes, while others want flexibility of the timeframe in which classes are being offered.

- **Kids (and Parents) are Clear About Their Wants:** Kids want fun. They don't want it to feel like school. Parents are looking for their kids to learn the foundational elements of their faith, but most importantly want them to learn how to be good and kind people. They want their children to have a faith foundation so they have a place to turn when life gets hard. They want their kids to "want to attend" so it's not another thing parents are making them attend.
- **Remove the Friction:** Make clear expectations for each session or experience. Consider shorter time commitments for programming. Ensure programs are communicated in advance. People feel like there are "too many things" they don't know about.
- **Missing Youth:** Our youth are not visible enough to our congregation. Our youth feel like they don't have a voice at the church. Under-participation and a change in staff present us with an opportunity to secure change in this area. Need to ensure youth are supported and mentored to become leaders within the church.
- **Resist Old Ways:** Members expressed a desire not to see "old ways" dictate the future planning. Members shared ideas for opportunities to have "old ideas" to be reinvented. What is old can be made new again (i.e. - name tags, camping trips for families, etc). Think of simple solutions like the name tag clips.
- **Experiences Win:** We have so many treasures and things to build from. The events and traditions that happen year over year rank the highest among the mentioned "treasures.". People are looking for things that don't feel like a class. They also don't want long drawn out classes.
- **Volunteers are Essential:** The calendar planning of events and classes shouldn't fall to one person. Members want to have input into the offerings. We need to continue to cultivate volunteers.

Following the conversations with Trinity members, pastors, and staff, the task force helped to develop a SWOT analysis about the current state of Faith Formation programming at Trinity prior to the pandemic with some inclusion of pandemic programming solutions.

Chart 4: SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis was developed based on feedback from the Faith Formation focus group participants.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Trinity offers a multitude of programs, embodying a "something for everyone" approach - Music in all its various forms, services, special programs, and the showcasing of talent of members - Marquee Events including VBS, Christmas at Trinity, Christmas services, Easter, Follow the Footsteps, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth involvement is significantly lacking, coming up during every focus group. - Youth express frustration of feeling disconnected and not 'involved' in decision-making - Trinity tends to tap the same volunteers again and again, presenting the appearance that new volunteers are not necessary since current volunteers are so dependable. To grow, we need to

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteers, staff, and pastors, who are dedicated and make events and programs enjoyable - Preschool/ Elementary programs are long-standing and have found a formula that works well for members and non-members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve new people to allow existing volunteers to be participants again - Members expressed not having enough support groups to meet the needs of members, or such groups are insufficiently publicized.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The new physical space and improvements to the building will create opportunities to explore how we use it and make the most of it - Members expressed an affinity for tradition, but also a willingness to be thoughtful and creative about what we continue to do out of tradition and what we should do to evolve and grow as a congregation. - Involve Youth - Ensure all members feel like they are part of something bigger - Redefining success of programs beyond “how many people attended” - Continuing to build virtual offering based upon the learnings of the past year - Make it easy for people to volunteer and clear what roles are needed to help make a program happen - Programming for smaller portions of the congregation to “achieve success with 20 members at a time rather than 100 at a time” - Making every gathering of members a faith formation opportunity (ie. during the prayer time at Thanks & Giving, also offering a very short mini sermon connection activity to bible). 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of the Sunday ritual due to pandemic restrictions - Many online options for worship - Scheduling challenges post-pandemic and what families make a “priority” - Looking at Faith Formation as a class versus an integrated part of lifestyle as a Lutheran member - Pulling members and youth from multiple school districts so relationships not as strong across the church among primary activity age groups - By not being united in time and place via a building each Sunday, many members feel that special something is being lost - Children-age families are proving to be less interested in organized faith and shown through the pandemic they value a paired-down family program. - People hesitating to return to in-person gatherings post pandemic

AREA 4: Hiring for the Right Role(s)

We have a unique opportunity to influence change and ensure our programs within Faith Formation are top notch to attract and retain members across all age groups. We believe that the staff will be critical to the success of our programs and outcomes. In discussions across the board the following characteristics will be important for individuals entering into these roles.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Organized- Creative- Flexible- Cheerful- Energetic- Passionate- Fresh and new- Tech Savvy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Servant leader- Team player- Organizer of volunteers- Efficient communicator- Relationship builder- Idea generator- Able to stand his or her ground- Visible and involved in the congregation
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Strains on previous roles:

As we look to the future it is important that we recognize some of the struggles the previous roles encountered to ensure we mitigate as we move forward.

- Many wants across the church can make it challenging to appeal to all. We need to look at how we measure success differently within programs.

- Various tasks were assigned that did not fall under the faith formation umbrella. We need to ensure tasks assigned to role(s) are truly faith formation

- A lot of planning was done solo. There is an opportunity to have a more collaborative approach to planning and leverage the Faith Formation Team to help plan and execute programs.

- Many programs are done year over year and do not require reinvention. We can develop templates and enable volunteers to own programs that happen every year.

Recommendation for Faith Formation Staffing:



In order to make certain we see cohesion between all of our Faith Formation programs and ensure we are selecting the best curriculum and resources, the task force is recommending we hire a full time Director of Faith Formation. The Director will be responsible for overseeing all Faith Formation programs, management of Faith Formation staff, helping to manage and recruit volunteers, management of resources and communication of programs. This position will work closely with the lead pastor to ensure all programs and topics are connected to the current worship theme. In addition, the Director of Faith Formation will also be responsible for adult education initially. As we rebuild our Faith Formation programs and assess needs, our goal is to be able to hire an Assistant Director of Faith Formation, Adult in the future. This position would be part time and help to support the Director of Faith Formation.

It is recommended that we open two part time positions under the Director of Faith Formation - Assistant Director of Faith Formation, Children and Assistant Director of Faith Formation, Youth. These positions will be responsible for the hands-on execution of their respective areas and work closely with the Director of Faith Formation to plan the programs and needed resources.

All positions will be supported by the Faith Formation Team made up of Congregational Members. The Faith Formation Team will serve as a resource for planning, input on topics, execution of programs and management of events.

In addition, the Task Force recognizes with the addition of the Faith Formation Staff and our transition to be a hybrid congregation there will be additional support required from the communications team. We are recommending an additional 10 hours per week be added to the communication staff to support the digital needs anticipated.

Below is a further breakdown of the individual position responsibilities.

Director of Faith Formation:

- Oversee all Faith Formation activities and ensure there is synergy between programs and sermon themes

- Ensure a connection between age groups so that programs build off of each other
- Ensure that all Assistant Directors have the resources (materials and volunteers) necessary to execute programs
- Execute adult faith formation efforts
- Manage Faith Formation Staff
- Plan and communicate programs to support activities

Assistant Director of Faith Formation, Children

- Develop relationships and execute programs for birth to 5th grade. This is a hands on role.
- Coordinate and organize Nursery Care and oversee Praise & Play
- Oversee Nursery Sunday School (Spark)
- Oversee Preschool Sunday School (Frolic Curriculum)
- Oversee Elementary Sunday School (Orange Curriculum)

Assistant Director of Faith Formation, Youth

- Develop relationships and execute programs for grades 6-12. This is a hands on role.
- Oversee volunteer to manage Graduation Milestone
- Develop Confirmation Classes and Oversee Milestone
- Oversee MS and HS Sunday morning classes
- Organize and execute Youth Group High School and Middle School as appropriate
- Organize and Execute Retreats

Assistant Director of Faith Formation, Adults - FUTURE ROLE

- Develop relationships and execute programs for college students, new adults, and adults. This is a hands on role. The Director of Faith Formation will be assuming these responsibilities initially such as:
 - Support Men's Breakfast- Pastor Horner and Pastor Brock
 - Support Women's Group (Beth Moore)
 - Support Pastors' Bible Study
 - Oversee Sunday Morning Classes (Augsburg Fortress, Gospel Chat, Trinity Parents, By Heart, I Said This, You Heard That)
 - Re-Launch and Support Life Groups
 - Oversee Wednesday Connect

AREA 5: Revising the Programming Calendar

In addition to the new staff positions, we also have an opportunity to revise our approach to our program planning. The task force recommends the following items be taken into consideration as we plan for the Fall of 2021 and beyond:

- Shorter semesters. 4-6 week sessions for age groups.
- Monthly event that serves as cross generational and brings family unit together. Can be a service project or one of our larger events for the month such as St. Nicolas, Follow the Footsteps, etc.
- Offer a variety of times and online/ in-person options for classes and programming

There is a need to consider a model to have grade levels build in excitement. This allows youth to gain interest in faith formation as they grow and look forward to moving up to each level.

- Preview of Youth Group- grades 4th and 5th - hear from older kids about their experiences.
- Middle School Youth Group - grades 6-8 with built in retreats
- High School Youth Group - grades 9-12th special - Beach Trip. Big service trip. Etc. Develop opportunities for this age group to mentor and volunteer with younger kids.
- Encourage youth to come back and volunteer as teachers or mentors to stay connected with Trinity.

Sunday School:

- Preschool to continue to use Frolic
- Elementary to continue to use Orange
- Confirmation Curriculum to be determined
 - Class will continue to be on Sunday AM
 - Confirmed in 9th grade on Reformation Sunday

A few additional ideas that stood out from focus groups to use this moment to be creative and inventive in our approach:

- Make Sunday School more like VBS at all age levels. Experiences win over class room style programs.
- Adults want an adult version of VBS
- Integration of our Youth into all aspects - Youth Sunday, helping with programming, seat on committees and council.
- More intentional use of space to gather and connect.
- Bring back a Myers Brigg or reinvent with Enneagram - personality quiz to help us learn more about members and where we can plug them in to groups and faith formation activities. Use it as

a way to make recommendations to members on where they can be plugged in and also pair people in small groups.

- Name Tags, Greeting center - couple or two people. Welcome people - see new people and give them new information.

In Conclusion

On behalf of the entire task force, thank you for this opportunity to perform this review and analysis of Faith Formation. Each member of the task force believes Faith Formation plays a critical role in the engagement and education of our members no matter their age.

While the pandemic presents us with more challenges than any one congregation would want to face in ten years, let alone one, we are eager to see Trinity rise to the occasion. It is unclear how much pre-pandemic worship will return to our weekly services in 2021 (or ever). As members of this task force, we are choosing to answer a different question: how much of our pre-pandemic routines and rituals in Faith Formation should return?

We see the changes and challenges of this moment as an opportunity to grow and become a better version of Trinity by 2022. We recognize that change comes slowly. However, we find it essential that our task force help to focus and reveal a number of opportunities to better worship, connect, and serve.

First, we see a number of ways our staff and volunteers can redistribute a number of responsibilities that were being taken on by the former staff. By redistributing some of these duties, we hope new staff can focus on core programs. By accurately quantifying how much of a priority these programs should be to staff on a weekly basis, we can give room for volunteers to be recruited and trusted to lead programs.

Second, Trinity has a number of strong youth programming events. VBS, pre-K, elementary, and K-5 Faith Formation and Sunday School program participation is strong. However, we have work to do in order to better engage our youth in grade six and above. Confirmation is a strong part of youth education in ninth grade today. We should expand confirmation to be a multi-year program to serve as a springboard into involvement and having a voice in our congregation.

Third, our members are eager to get back to church and to worship, connect, and serve with fellow members, but they are not certain that the congregation should just pick up where it left off with Faith Formation. Members have expressed confidence that we can innovate, improve, and imagine old traditions to make them fresh and new again. Members want meaningful and fun experiences. They want Trinity to provide an easy and attainable means to grow in their faith. All of these considerations are out of a love for Trinity and an eagerness to ensure our church connects with members ages 30-50 who will form the foundation of our church in the coming decades.

Fourth, the task force has presented a sound structure for hiring to succeed our former staff. In the plan outlined, bring more people to the table to diversify the ideas and programs, and increase our capacity for programming for our congregation in this moment of supreme challenge.

Let us go forward with these results in hand and with commitment to serving our fellow members in ways that increase their connection and understanding of God's love and Christ's message of peace.