

CHAPTER 4

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH 2001-2005: YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION

In light of these four primary transforming transitions, First Lutheran Church underwent a four-year implementation process of strategic change initiatives. These initiatives determined the immediate context and the preferred future necessary in order to establish the theological and biblical foundations that frame the holistic strategic plan for FLC's future.

Figure 6, derived by FLC's Communications Director from FLC's NCD data, illustrates the fruit of FLC's focus and labor as these transitions have improved the church's two minimum factors. From January 2001 to the latest survey of June 2004, FLC's perceived health as a church has demonstrated a move from a plateaued or declining church to a healthier and more active church. It should be noted, however, that the recent survey also indicates several potentially concerning downward trends. Loving Relationships and Need-oriented Evangelism have declined since 2003 which indicates that the holistic strategy ought to integrate FLC's perceived greatest strength of small group discipleship.

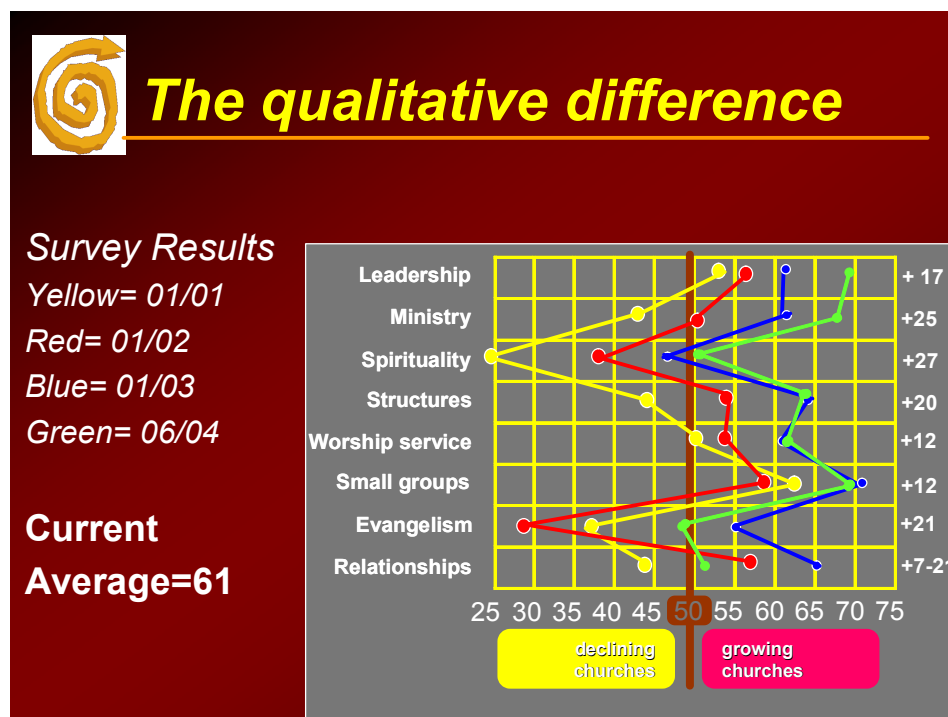


Figure 6

Current Vision, Mission, and Core Values of FLC

In 2001-2002, the congregation council, staff, and ministry leaders revisited the current mission statement and created a new vision to guide FLC's goals and objectives through 2008. The abbreviated Mission Statement, "To know Christ and make Him Known,"¹ summarizes the two primary foci of discipleship or "passionate spirituality" and evangelism. FLC's biblically-based and theological informed foundations needed to be revisited in order to begin a new era of multiple initiatives for increased health.

A detailed analysis demonstrates that FLC's dream could be made possible through the successful implementation of the church's broader vision (Appendix 1,

¹ Daniel Kolander, "Looking Toward 2008: A Vision for First Lutheran Church" (Cedar Rapids, IA: First Lutheran Church, January 2002), 1.

FLC's Vision, Mission, and Core Values). The Vision communicates a circular motion with three primary arrows indicating, "Bring them in, Turn them on, and Send them out!" Bringing them in does not necessarily refer to the building itself, but expresses the desire to connect people to the Christian community through an entry point such as a small group, the Alpha Course, worship, an outreach event, or a public community-service opportunity. Relational interface development is necessary in fulfilling the church's mission.

This Vision has inspired FLC with ideas and honed the focus in setting objectives and planning. FLC has sought to transition from a barn-mentality to a harvest heart where congregants are required to take part in active discipleship. In order to "bring them in," then, the congregation governing council, staff, and ministry leaders compiled the following list of goals:

"Putting our money where our mission is" and commit at least 15% of our budget toward "seeking the lost" (evangelism). (The average Christian church in the U.S. spends 2% of its annual budget on evangelism. Successful evangelistic churches spend 10-20%. We currently spend less than 1%.; making evangelism a priority in our preaching and teaching in order to raise the "evangelistic temperature" of our congregation.); teaching the Contagious Christian course to at least 75% of our membership; adding a part-time evangelistic "point person" to our staff who will partner with the pastors in championing the evangelism cause; holding at least three major "outreach events" each year (big-name Christian band concert or evangelistic speaker; fine arts Christmas and/or Easter event for the community); adding a second "seeker" worship service, or find another location (Coe College Sinclair Auditorium), or build an auditorium/gymnasium on-site which could be used for this purpose; and establishing a "Matthew's Café" Coffee House (named after Matthew 9:9-10) where local Christian talent performs.²

² Ibid., 2.

This vision is admittedly extensive and bold, but these ambitious goals shape the church's mindset and propel it forward in its thinking and implementation.

FLC's next intention is to "turn them on" to Jesus once people become connected to the church relationally, and this is the move towards a passionate spirituality.

Ultimately, this passion helps individuals mature in knowing Christ. Pastor Dan Kolander articulates:

Since discipleship is the primary thrust of the commission we've been given, it must function as the heart of our congregation's ministry. In fact, most existing programs should be evaluated in light of whether or not they are in some way contributing toward developing disciples. Not only is it our task to grow the new members we "bring in" to maturity, but faith maturity should be the goal for each and every existing member of our congregation as well.³

The following ideas from the second brainstorming session focused upon turning people on:

[O]ffering the Alpha course on an annual basis as a way of teaching the basics of Christianity to seekers; creating a "discipleship profile" or "covenant" outlining the faith habits expected of members that indicate a vibrant relationship with God; establishing a "Lay School of Discipleship" to help members and seekers to grow spiritually into that vibrant relationship; adding a Spiritual Director to the church staff to mentor growing disciples; offering regular "Prayer Seminars" to help people grow in their prayer life; reaching the point where small groups are no longer a "program" but a way of understanding the way our congregation is organized. We look forward to at least 75% of our members being in some kind of small group by 2008.⁴

Finally, FLC's mission is to "send them out!" This formal, extended mission statement defines making Christ known through "share[ing] the good news of God's love

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Ibid.

by word and deed with people everywhere,” which is best demonstrated by the fulfilling of the command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” If people are indeed apostolically “sent out” into the world, the following is possible:

[G]rowing our Stephen Ministry program to at least 200 trainees; establishing a Parish Nurse Ministry; reaching a goal of 75% of our members discovering their spiritual gifts and using them in some way in ministry; developing an assisted living center for lower income persons in cooperation with St. Luke’s Hospital or some other organization; establishing a center of healing for youth hurt emotionally or chemically; providing an annual short-term mission trip to a third world country; providing annual youth mission and service trips to needy areas of our country; planting a new mission in the Cedar Rapids area (possibly a “satellite” ministry of our congregation or a new mission congregation).

In order to focus FLC’s energy towards these goals, the leadership needed to define its core values which are summarized here:

As members of First Lutheran Church, we value a commitment: to be deeply rooted in the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible; to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ; to stay connected to God through daily worship and prayer; to live out our faith in relevant Biblical community; to cultivating a Christ-like and loving atmosphere within the body of Christ; to multiply ministers for God’s work in the world; to reach out to the unchurched in meaningful ways; to generously share the resources God has given us; to creativity, innovation, and excellence in all that we do.⁵

It is clear that the initial four transforming transitions are aligned with FLC’s mission statement, core values, and vision to “bring them in, turn them on, and send them out.”

Much like guiding principles, the particular language of the core values guides the church’s thought processes and has ultimately formed a healthier church culture. At one time, when the church culture had just begun to show signs of fulfilling the values, they

⁵ Ibid., 6.

were merely considered “preferred values.” More recently, however, the evidence supports the conclusion that a significant portion of the congregation and leaders actually live these values out.

First Lutheran Church’s Recent Transformation Process

First Lutheran Church adopted the NCD language and its process to initiate the transforming transitions necessary to become a healthier, more fruitful church. In order to give structure to the communication of the overall health of FLC, Kotter’s change process⁶ has been instrumental to progress and will provide an ongoing framework to engage with the Natural Church Development process⁷.

The catalyst towards successful transformation of First Lutheran’s church culture became the continuous evaluation of the church’s health through the implementation of the Natural Church Development Survey (a regular 12-18 month-long process), which began in January 2001 and involves five stages. Beginning with the Preparation Stage, booklets on the structure of NCD to all current leadership were distributed, and a NCD PowerPoint presentation was made for the January Leadership Retreat. The second NCD stage is called Survey. In this stage, the survey itself was distributed, completed by thirty people connected in the life of the congregation (must be in a small group), and then scored.

⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 33-158.

⁷ Robert E. Logan, ed., *Minimum Factor Manual* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2000), 1-27.

The third NCD stage is Analysis, in which the results of the survey are reflected upon. Through a Post-it Note Analysis (people quietly brainstorm obstacles, write them on Post-it notes, and together in silence, place them into groupings that seem to go together), various themes emerged as to why the minimum factor is the weakest link. Typically the leadership narrows it down to four major themes to address. This exercise led to an in-depth Strengths, Weaknesses, Obstacles, Threats Analysis (S.W.O.T.) of the minimum factor(s).

The fourth step in the NCD process is to develop an action plan based upon the group's self-analysis and resources. The following nine major themes and goals emerged from the process of analysis and include details on FLC's action thus far:

1. FLC must establish a sense of urgency.⁸ Once FLC identified specific issues, it became possible to promote the need to grow in the areas of passionate spirituality, need-oriented evangelism, identification of crises, and becoming aware of major opportunities for positive change. The whole congregation must be aware of FLC's weaknesses and/or growth areas, so the sense of urgency has since been implemented through constant communication by sermons, newsletter articles, adult forums, and other promotional programs and materials.

2. FLC must create a guiding coalition⁹ of people (The Ministry Development Team and Staff Vision Team). The Ministry Development Team (MDT) is made up of the Senior Pastor, Pastor of Small Groups, Business Administrator, Vice President Elect

⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 35-49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-66.

of Council and one ad hoc Council member, which has the authority to lead the change. The Staff Vision Team (SVT) consists of the Sr. Pastor, Associate/Executive Pastor, Director of Spiritual Formation, Director of Equipping Ministries, and the Director of Small Groups and Discipleship Ministries. These smaller teams are detail-oriented in creating, advancing, refining, and executing goals to address the minimum factor(s). FLC created a S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Related to minimum factor, Timeline) goal template (Appendix 2) that considers the objectives, how it will address the minimum factor(s), and a timeline to implement action. Each staff member is required to submit three to five personal SMART goals each year in the Annual Performance Review. Here also the biotic principle language is elevated so that ministry can be impacted exponentially.

3. During the years of 2002-2004 FLC had concentrated on the development of an overall vision and strategy for the church's mission.¹⁰ A Discipleship Journey process and Equipping Ministry timeline were created as part of this process.

4. In addition to addressing concerns regarding FLC's mission, it was also necessary to consider alternative scenarios.¹¹ FLC has since revised these plans and overall strategy. This will be presented in the third section of the paper and is the ultimate purpose for writing the ministry focus paper.

¹⁰ Ibid., 67-83.

¹¹ Handy, *The Age of Paradox*, 66.

5. This new change vision, then, must be communicated¹² on all micro and macro levels to connect all people and inspire them to participate in these initiatives. Effective communication was achieved through sermon series, leadership sessions, staff and council meetings, retreats, newsletter articles, and ministry teams. Generally, a positive spirit is evident, although, some late adopters are still hesitant and leery. Communicating this change vision with a complete strategic plan will be the next major step. Nonetheless, each year will involve a clearer visioning process explained in detail in section three of this paper.

6. By casting the vision and naming the obstacles, FLC continuously moved in empowering broad-based action.¹³ It is necessary to alter systems and structures that undermine the change vision. Concentration is invested in creating a new culture that encourages risk taking with non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions in order to build this empowerment mentality. It is critical for leaders to be qualified and possess positive attitudes to feel empowered. Multiple staff, council, and congregation leaders, therefore, have regularly been sent to a variety of conferences to be equipped in bold, risk-taking visions that bear much fruit. Finally, information and personnel systems must be aligned to encourage empowerment. FLC has empowered teams to facilitate the yearly visioning process. The next proposed step is to transition the author of this paper to serve as the facilitator of this process functioning in the role of Executive Pastor. The Executive Pastor would administrate through day to day guidance of the process with the leaders,

¹² Kotter, *Leading Change*, 85-100.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 101-115.

serve as a catalyst to invigorate various ministries, set the ethos for the church, mentor or coach staff to fruitful ministry, minister in pastoral functions, and be a strong overseer to ensure the church's alignment with the vision of the senior pastor and council.

7. FLC must also acknowledge positive short-term successes¹⁴ (see Appendix 3 for a detailed layout of FLC Initiatives from 2000-2005). These new projects have included men's and women's ministry events, a small group ministry vision-casting dinner, the initial Alpha Course, spiritual direction groups, and other positive group-oriented initiatives. Each experiment has proved vital to inspire FLC to take more risks and step outside of the box of traditional approaches to discipleship and church community. As the NCD process significantly helped FLC plan for these goals, it also facilitated one "win" after another. These achievements were celebrated with dinners, recognition of people through gifts, and public acknowledgements to affirm and stimulate the continuously growing leadership base. These positive experiences helped fine-tune FLC's vision and strategies while building momentum to establish the ultimate strategic plan.

8. With a foundation of several short-term achievements, FLC sought to consolidate gains and continue to build upon the momentum and produce more change.¹⁵ This led the leadership to re-define staff and ministry team roles and job descriptions. For increased credibility, leadership was challenged to change several systems, structures, and policies that did not fit together at the time and needed adjustment for the sake of the

¹⁴ Ibid., 117-130.

¹⁵ Ibid., 131-144.

transformation vision. God also provided key people who were hired/called, promoted, and developed to be catalyst-organizers in propelling the change vision. One example is the Spiritual Formation Director, Marcie Watson. Her presence and spiritual gifts have catapulted FLC's efforts in addressing passionate spirituality and need-oriented evangelism as the minimum factors from the NCD survey results. FLC is continually developing new projects, themes, and change agents to bring about the deep and wide transformation of the church culture.

9. Finally, FLC must anchor new approaches in the culture¹⁶ as a primary focus. FLC is beginning to anchor such approaches as the establishment of the Alpha Course as the primary entry point before becoming a new member and a small-group based discipleship model called the Circle of Life. This ministry is also working to properly equip church members through appropriate job descriptions and evaluation tools to ensure that people serving in a particular area are right for the job, based upon the individual's spiritual gifts, abilities, and passions.

Although, the final formal Holistic Strategic Plan, or final phase five of the NCD process, will be established completely in the fall of 2005, a yearly visioning process will continue to fine-tune and create culture shifts year after year.

None of these changes are easy or simple and transition is a constant challenge to push FLC from its comfort zone. As seeds must fall to the ground and die to bring forth bountiful life, some of the church's unproductive ways must die to bring in the bountiful harvest.

¹⁶ Ibid., 145-158.

First Lutheran's Present Situation and Preferred Future

Logan impressed upon his students a vision for evaluating the present situation and desired future. Key questions included: "If God could have his way in my life and ministry . . . What would *look* different? What would *feel* different? What would *be* different?"¹⁷ There are some preferred scenarios necessary for strategic growth when these questions are applied to the context of First Lutheran Church.

Present Situation	Preferred Future
<i>Alpha Course</i> - optional entry point	<i>Alpha Course</i> - everyone completes
Lots of Groups- no Coaches	Every Group has a Coach
Reactive mode to change	Proactive, anticipatory mode
Lingering Modern Worldview	Understanding Postmodernism
Club Membership	Covenant Partnership
Relationships are wide, few deep	Invested in 6-12 deep, our circle
Barn Mentality- "me first"	Harvest Heart- "others first"
Scattered, no plan	Focused, energized, diligent
In the barn too much	Immersed into the harvest more
Addition of disciples, leaders, groups...	Multiplication of disciples, leaders...
Few know their Spiritual Gifts	Every member knows their gifts
20% do ministry/mission	Every member a minister/missionary

Figure 7

In examining the transforming transitions from passive membership to passionate spirituality and a move from a barn mentality to a harvest heart of need-oriented evangelism,¹⁸ it is evident that many have participated in corporate and personal spiritual disciplines including reading through the whole New Testament, reading *The Purpose Driven Life*, and other various sermon series and/or study opportunities. Nonetheless,

¹⁷ Robert E. Logan, "Present Situation and Preferred Future," (OD 725 Raising and Multiplying Leaders in Your Ministry, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 27-November 7, 2003).

¹⁸ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 15-48.

over sixty-five percent of First Lutheran members still worship infrequently, often lacking any regular practice of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines or contagious faith. In fact, over half of FLC's 2800 member congregation would be described as being nominal Christians, or being Christian "in name only."¹⁹ Only a few hundred have been adequately edified and equipped as apostolic disciples. On a brighter note, however, in the last three years, there have been an increased number of people receptive to growing in grace particularly through small groups and through the Alpha Course. In December of 2000, for example, there were about ten discipleship-based groups; now there are over sixty such groups (over 650 people) varying from smaller gender-based accountability groups like Neil Cole's *Life Transformation Groups*²⁰ and Greg Ogden's *Discipleship Triads*²¹ to larger *Renovare*²² spiritual direction groups and various home, workplace, and restaurant groups. *40 Days of Purpose* became a catalyst for significant growth during Lent of 2004, as FLC went from forty to one hundred groups and three hundred to nine hundred participants in groups at that time. In a four-year period, FLC has experienced rapid growth in participation in some form of authentic biblical community. Hence, *Holistic Small Groups* continues to be FLC's greatest strength of the eight quality

¹⁹ Eddie Gibbs, *In Name Only: Tackling the Problem of Nominal Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 2000), 13.

²⁰ Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 63-65..

²¹ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 9-16.

²² James Bryan Smith and Lynda Graybeal, *Renovare: A Spiritual Formation Workbook* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1993).

characteristics of a healthy church and has been instrumental in addressing FLC's two minimum factors.

Currently, however, the small group expansion is experiencing a plateau. Like the S-curve (Sigmoid Curve), FLC's momentum of growth and expansion in the small group ministry has leveled off. The current plateau is due in part to ever-expanding ministries of outreach to meet the needs of people typically neglected in the past, as well as increased investment in building upon the three *Alpha* Courses offered yearly, exploring alternative coaching approaches for small group facilitators, and energy in preparing to launch this new strategic plan.

The multiplication of servant leadership is critical to the maturation and momentum of transforming this church culture. FLC is seeing an increase in leadership and more effective management or coaching. A clearer leadership development and training plan, however, has yet to be formalized. FLC is in a creation stage of a quarterly rhythm of a Leadership Core Community Culture. The leadership believes this will be pivotal for the acceleration of growth, both qualitatively and quantitatively for this congregation.

Although on a growth plateau for decades, it is fair to say that FLC continues to receive substantial new membership growth thereby continuing its stability in numbers. Church leadership, however, is eager to move beyond that plateau and grow both numerically and spiritually so as to extend a wider, more impacting ministry to and with the community. It seems as though the church will experience overall growth if individuals are connected into significant relationship building opportunities that are

spiritually satisfying and linked to vital ministry and mission outreach participation. The opportunity for exponential growth or multiplication has its greatest capacity as FLC small groups are linked with the growing network of service-minded congregations.

Consideration of FLC's health based on NCD and particularly *Empowering Leadership*, the present situation may be summarized as follows: several established and new ministries lack clear unifying directives, goals or action plans; the current system for equipping leaders is weak or non-existent in some areas; coaching strategies in which equipping staff come alongside current ministry leaders will need to be in place in order to bear adequate fruit; a quarterly Leadership Launch visioning and equipping session is essential to achieve culture shifts; an overall yearly vision and strategic planning process for the multiple ministries must be solidified; a process for spiritual maturation has been created and advanced through vision-casting to ministry leaders, yet a more refined plan should be written, cast to the congregation, and executed; ground has been made by forming an Equipping Ministry Team, a vision and timeline created and implemented; and now FLC must prepare the congregation with a process that can assess and equip multitudes in an intentional mobilization effort of the masses to be moved out into the mission fields. Biblically-based, theological reflections of FLC's core values that inform the church's purpose for this holistic plan are the foundations in supporting strategic planning and will lead the church to the next step in ministry and growth.