

Executive Summary

Transition Team Final Report, January 2019

OUR PRESENT

- *Our Neighborhood:* Within approximately three miles of Holy Shepherd, there are 83 faith-based organizations. There are nine Title I elementary schools within the same area.
- *Our Members:* Holy Shepherd has a mature membership. In January 2019, 251 of the 445 active members are over 60 years old (57%).
- *Our Worship Services:* Average attendance at weekly services in 2018 was 46 for Saturday night, 93 for 8 a.m. on Sundays, and 85 for 10:45 a.m. on Sundays.
- *Our Church Activities:* Holy Shepherd is an active congregation that offers 48 different interest groups to engage members. As of October 2018, 292 members participated in these small groups, and 196 members participated in more than one group.
- *Our Service in the Community:* Holy Shepherd is involved in many community activities, such as Eiber Elementary School, The Action Center, Family Promise, Lutheran World Relief, Warm Hearts/Warm Babies, and Habitat for Humanity. In addition, we volunteer at a variety of places.
- *Our Members Spoke:* The Transition Team team personally interviewed 41 members, performed a Congregational Vitality Survey, spoke with members of the City of Lakewood government, held 12 listening sessions before or after church services, invited millennials to speak about their views of religion, invited members to contribute to a timeline, searched the church archives for relevant information, and invited Bishop Jim Gonia and Director of Evangelical Mission Matt Barnhouse as well as other church-wide representatives to speak to the congregation.

OUR FUTURE

Holy Shepherd's strengths include its central value on worship, its dedication to service, the location of its sanctuary and the care taken for the property, its financial stability, and the personal care of members in small groups and through pastoral care. In our future, we can

- Strengthen the church's emphasis on the message it has to share, the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Strengthen its ability to have courageous conversations about difficult subjects.
- Develop lay-leadership to help us move forward in these current times.
- Build partnerships with other churches and with community leaders who share common values.
- Envision our under-utilized church buildings as a gathering place for the people who live and work in the neighborhood.
- Design an internal structure of leadership and staffing that supports outreach and mission as well as maintains the care and healing in congregational life, including aging members.
- Continue to cultivate a culture of learning.

This is a critical time. The congregation has a choice in the kind of future it embraces, in the conversations it has as it chooses its leadership, and the ways it collaborates with its leadership in the future. The Transition Team hopes that Holy Shepherd is guided by God's Spirit and can trust in the steadfast care of God, who continues to create, redeem, and unite this church and this world.

Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church Transition Team Report January 2019

In June 2018, the Transition Team began meeting to develop a profile of Holy Shepherd for use in calling a new pastor after Pastor Rick Thompson retired in December 2017. In the following months, the seven members of the team personally interviewed 41 members, performed a Congregational Vitality Survey, spoke with members of the City of Lakewood government, held 12 listening sessions before or after church services, invited millennials to speak about their views of religion, invited members to contribute to a timeline, searched the church archives for relevant information, and invited Bishop Jim Gonia and Director of Evangelical Mission Matt Barnhouse as well as other church-wide representatives to speak to the congregation.

From this information, we have developed this report and a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). Holy Shepherd has many strengths to nourish, but it must also prepare for the future.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Transition Team:

- Pastor Kari Reiquam
- Shirley Bradsby
- Denise Ikenberry
- Joan Meister-Bridges
- Carol Rossini
- Paul Thomas
- Don Threlkeld



OUR PAST

Holy Shepherd Lutheran church was formed as a mission church in 1954 with 245 baptized members. After meeting in the Masonic Temple and Eiber Elementary School, the church was built at 9th and Kipling in 1956, a semi-rural farming area at the time. (The City of Lakewood was incorporated in 1969 with a population exceeding 90,000.) Over the years, the sanctuary was expanded twice (1963 and 1999), a fellowship hall (1983) and educational rooms were added (1958 and 1963), and in 2016 a solar array was erected.

Six senior pastors and seven associate pastors have served Holy Shepherd from 1954 until 2017.

Some significant dates in the church's history include

- 1955 Charter signed by 109 people
- 1956 First Sunday School class, first Communion, and first Confirmation vows held
- 1979 Sunday Morning Fellowship began
- 1987 ALC, ELC, and LCA merged to become the ELCA
- 1988 Saturday evening worship service added
- 1992 Prime Timers and Prime Time Choir formed
- 1995 Columbarium built
- 1996 Wednesday Night Life program begun
- 2002 Hosting of Interfaith Hospitality Network (Family Promise) begun
- 2013 Solar panels and electronic outdoor sign installed

OUR PRESENT

Holy Shepherd is an active church that offers numerous ways to engage its members and to reach out to support the needs of the community.

Our Neighborhood

Within approximately three miles of Holy Shepherd, there are 83 faith-based organizations. These include Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, Christian Science, Church of Christ LDS, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Science of the Mind, and non-denominational organizations.

There are nine Title I elementary schools within the same area. These schools offer free or reduced-fee lunches to their students. Within one block is Lakewood Senior High, which is designated an international baccalaureate school. In addition, Colorado Christian University and Red Rocks Community College are nearby.

There are also a number of businesses, ranging from banks to garden centers to commercial stores, as well as a variety of non-profits, including the Federal Center, The Action Center, Lakewood Library, and Metro West Housing Solutions.

Our Members

Holy Shepherd has a mature membership. In January 2019, 264 of the 445 active members are over 60 years old (59%). Worries about this surfaced during our personal interviews, with many members expressing concern about the lack of younger families.

Membership and average church attendance grew steadily until 1995, when a slow decline began in both.

Year	Baptized Members	Confirmed Members	Average Service Attendance
1955	243	130	134
1963	1012	638	452
1975	938	642	307
1985	1070	839	453
1995	1256*	831	369
2005	917	736	342
2015	798	630	235
2018	449*	405	213

* 149 members were moved to inactive status in 1996, 149 were moved in 2013, and 382 were moved in 2019. According to Holy Shepherd’s constitution, an active member communes or gives financially within a two year period.

The majority of members are White (346 in 2017), but Asian/Pacific Islanders (13) and Latino/Hispanic (11) groups are also represented (ELCA Annual Congregational Reports).

Most of the members live in Lakewood (323 of 553 total), but 50 members live in Golden, 44 in Littleton, 41 in Arvada, and 25 in Denver. The rest of the members live in surrounding suburbs.

Of the current members, many have been active in Holy Shepherd for a long time. The following is a breakdown by decade when members joined:

- 1950s: 6 members
- 1960s: 43
- 1970s: 30
- 1980s: 64
- 1990s: 111
- 2000s: 143
- 2010s: 144

Our Mission Statement: “Worshipping and Growing Together in Christ, Serving and Reaching Out Joyfully to All.” How do members fulfill this mission?

Through Our Worship Services

Holy Shepherd offers three worship services each week, two traditional and one contemporary. A traditional Saturday evening service was begun in 1988, and the Sunday services include a traditional at 8 a.m. and a contemporary at 10:45 a.m. Weekly average attendance at these services in 2018 was 46 for Saturday night, 93 for 8 AM on Sundays and 85 for 10:45 on Sundays.

Through Our Church Activities

Holy Shepherd is an active congregation that offers 48 different interest groups to engage members. As of October 2018, 292 members participated in these small groups, and 196 members participated in more than one group. These groups range from choirs to the prayer shawl ministry to the Writers’ Group. In addition, there are four Bible study groups that focus on our understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

Through Our Service in the Community

Holy Shepherd is involved in many activities in the broader community.

- We support groups such as Eiber Elementary School and The Action Center with financial donations and volunteering.
- We host Family Promise for two weeks each quarter, pairing with Christ on the Mountain Catholic Church to staff these gatherings.
- We volunteer at Habitat for Humanity, Denver Indian Center, Sky Ranch, the Urban Servant Core, Rainbow Trail, Second Wind, West Metro Fire Rescue, the Lakewood Heritage and Cultural Center, Clements Center, Eaton Senior Community, Villa Manor Care Center, and the St. Francis Center.
- We support Lutheran World Relief, Warm Heart/Warm Babies, and people throughout the United States with handmade gifts.
- We write Thrivent grants for community projects.
- From 1975 to 1981, we supported 35 Southeast Asian refugees.
- In 1982, “In Jesus’ Name” shelter for the homeless was started by the Social Concerns Committee.
- In 1985, members went to Galeana, Mexico, to build a small chapel in this town.
- From 1986 to 1992, we held a daycare center and pre-school at church.
- From 2001-03, 9 Health Fairs were held at Holy Shepherd.

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

From our one-on-one interviews with members, the Ministry Review Report of February 2015, a Writing Group exercise in spring 2018, a Health Ministry Discussion in August 2018, Pastor Kari’s listening notes about the proposal for one worship service in spring 2018, and other sources, the Transition Team developed the following SWOT analysis.

Strengths

- Vibrant community with lots of activities and many different interest groups.
- A welcoming, comfortable home
- Choice in worship: Times (Saturday and Sunday) and types of services
- Meaningful worship practices: Music: choirs, praise team, Dana and organ music
- Facility: Beautiful, sacred space, well maintained and managed
- Welcoming, comfortable, inclusive and caring: Greeters at each service, engagement of visitors and new members, prayer life of church, and Health Ministry
- Involvement with larger community: 10% Mission budget, Family Promise, Action Center, Eiber Elementary, Christ Aid
- Church fellowship: Wednesday Night Life meal and classes, senior luncheon
- Adult faith formation: Great teaching and learning opportunities like multiple Bible studies, outside speakers
- Pastors with different strengths; work collaboratively
- Stable length of tenure of pastors and administrators

Weaknesses

- Lack of children and youth along with programs for them
- Lack of collaboration with other churches
- Sermons do not make a connection to daily life or passionately involve parishioners
- Good in crisis (illness and death), but support disappears after
- Lack of social gatherings: Potlucks, ethnic events, fun and social times
- Volunteer/lay leader burn out and discouragement due to lack of participation
- Reaching out and talking about Jesus
- Don't know people in neighborhood
- Takes lots of energy and a lot of time to build up connections
- Fear of change
- Varying political views results in people not feeling included when their political view is not honored.

Opportunities

- Expand opportunities for youth and families
- Build relationship with community and other churches and advertise our commitment to them
- Improve communication within church and to larger community through technology and social media
- Focus on faith formation; learn how to share stories; personally invite people from the community to worship
- Engage new pastor who can work across the demographics of the congregation
- Better use of facility by congregation and larger community; outreach to users of facility
- Show agape love in all aspects of larger community including all races, atheists, LGBTQ and the homeless

- Create more seminars on current topics such as opioid abuse and suicide prevention; seminars on well-being such as mindful eating during the holidays and vision goals
- Grow ministry to seniors in larger community

Threats

- Demographics of the congregation; continual decline that leads to shutting down
- Changing too fast with too little input from members
- Future finances
- Mega-churches
- Less denominational loyalty

Congregational Vitality Survey

In addition to conducting listening sessions, the Transition Team administered a Congregational Vitality Survey to determine who the members are and what they value. This survey was developed by Linda Bobbit, Vice President of the Rocky Mountain Synod from 2005-2013, who felt there was no efficient way to measure the health and vitality of congregations. In contrast to merely measuring growth, this survey looks at vitality since a congregation may be the right size and growth would be counterproductive (Congregational Vitality Project Background, p. 1). Thus, this survey looks for “a collective commitment to God’s presence and purpose, relationships that encourage faith seeking and using the gifts of all, a congregation that is an important part of the local community, and one that trusts in God’s promised future” (ibid).

This survey was offered three weekends to Holy Shepherd people at all three services, beginning on August 18-19. A total of 158 people took part, of whom 33% were males and 65% females. Age of respondents was higher than the average age of the congregation: 111 were age 65 or older (70% of respondents vs. an average of 45% of the total membership).

The God Scale score of 4.2 indicates that Holy Shepherd feels it is encouraged to grow in faith and is connected with God’s mission. A slightly lower score for helping children grow in faith may be the result of having few children in the congregation. There were also slightly lower scores for excitement about the future and being willing to try new things.

Faith in Action scores show how individuals’ spirituality is practiced and nurtured. Our people use prayer, devotions, and study to further their faith, and the majority engage in meaningful spiritual conversations in the congregation.

Connecting with Each Other score of 4.1 indicates that we feel we are doing well at connecting with other members. Members have a strong sense of belonging and commitment, and while 40 people found tension in the social climate, this is typical of congregations in transition.

Connecting with the World score of 4.0 indicates that members feel they share their faith in the larger community through words and deeds. This includes interacting with and being a positive force in the local community, as well as advocating for social justice and addressing social concerns.

God's Active Presence scores show that members feel directly engaged with God in their personal lives and in the congregation's life.

Overall, the Vitality Survey shows that our congregation is vital (4.0 when 4.0 indicates vitality) and almost sustainable (2.9 when 3.0 is sustainable).

The Timeline Project

When approximately 100 members met on January 6, 2019, to discuss the timeline project, the following attributes of Holy Shepherd were mentioned:

- Friendliness
- Music
- Variety of worship services
- Fellowship
- Sense of community
- Variety of ways to become involved in the church (small groups for everyone, for example)
- Community outreach opportunities (Action Center, for example)
- Happy place
- Familiar, stable, safe, and secure place
- A welcoming family of faith
- A place for rites of passage (birth, marriage, death)
- Inclusiveness (a place that welcomes everyone without condemnation)
- Supportive
- Emphasis on education and Bible studies
- Traditions
- Small enough that everyone is listened to
- Prayer is emphasized

Members were also asked to identify Holy Shepherd's values. The top five values of the 56 respondents were Music, Community Service, Service, Learning and Teamwork (tied), and Tradition.

After the services on the weekend of January 12-13, 2019, members were asked about their dream or vision for Holy Shepherd in the future. The top four responses were to be a welcoming place, to be open to all, to serve our community, and to promote Christian education.

OUR FUTURE

Holy Shepherd can build on its strengths, which include its central value on worship, its dedication to service, the location of its sanctuary and the care taken for the property, its financial stability, and the personal care of members in small groups and through pastoral care.

In this time of strength, it is important for the congregation to consider its options for the future. With a mature congregation and a changing context, Holy Shepherd has the opportunity to situate itself for the days ahead, stewarding its great resources and gifts to continue to be a center for God's abundant life and love in Christ in the future.

How can this happen? First, by putting the role and purpose of the church central. The church serves in the neighborhood, but it is more than a service organization. The church offers fun and welcoming relationships but it is more than a social group. The church offers learning opportunities and is a place of beauty and music and tradition, but its central call is to witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and to call people to faith. The church doesn't belong to us. We belong to the church.

This perspective changes our orientation in the future because the purpose of the church is not simply to serve its membership; the church is called to be a witness to the rule of God in the community. The church is a training ground for disciples who are sent to serve.

So how could Holy Shepherd move towards its future with hope?

- 1) Strengthen its emphasis on the message it has to share, the good news of Jesus Christ: this needs to be done by people who are invigorated in faith and able to tell the story of God's love in their lives. It also comes with clarifying the needs around us and how we communicate the gospel in this place at this time in order to "speak" to the culture.
- 2) Strengthen its ability to have courageous conversations about difficult subjects in order to be a place for people who are struggling with hard realities.
- 3) Develop lay-leadership to help us move forward in these current times.
- 4) Build partnerships with other churches and with community leaders who share common values.
- 5) Envision our under-utilized church buildings as a gathering place for the people who live and work in the neighborhood.

6) Design an internal structure of leadership and staffing that supports outreach and mission as well as maintains the care and healing in congregational life, including aging members.

7) Continue to cultivate a culture of learning in order to be mindful of the challenges of being church today.

This is a critical time. The congregation has a choice in the kind of future it embraces, in the conversations it has as it chooses its leadership, and the ways it collaborates with its leadership in the future. The Transition Team hopes that Holy Shepherd is guided by God's Spirit and can trust in the steadfast care of God, who continues to create, redeem, and unite this church and this world.

GREAT IDEAS WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE FOR THE FUTURE

Holy Shepherd is a vibrant church serving an aging area of Lakewood. During our conversations with members, several suggestions arose about the path Holy Shepherd could take in the future.

Maintain the strengths that make Holy Shepherd a welcoming and comfortable church home.

- Meaningful worship practices.
- Choice of worship formats.
- Inspirational music.
- Sacred and beautiful sanctuary.
- Private communion for shut-ins.
- Fellowship at events such as Wednesday Night Life, classes, and the summer senior luncheon.
- Opportunities to grow in faith.
- Support during challenging times such as illness or death.
- Hospitality extended to all.

However, there are many signs that Holy Shepherd needs to focus energies on renewal.

While Holy Shepherd has maintained a respectable membership base, some of this is the result of two Lutheran churches closing in the past ten years (American Lutheran Memorial in around 1998 and Resurrection in 2015). Our mature membership, as well as the aging in our neighborhood, make sustainability a major concern. Can Holy Shepherd buck the national trend of all mainline Protestant and Catholic churches and increase its membership? Attract a more youthful membership? A few ideas surfaced.

- Use social media. Hire a staff member who can publicize Holy Shepherd on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, for instance.
- Improve the structure of communication within the congregation
- Build relationships with the community and other churches. For instance, can we build a stronger relationship with Lakewood Senior High School?
- Improve relationship connections within the church...we have gotten into silos and have lost a sense of common purpose
- Advertise our presence at places like Eiber Elementary School.
- Have someone greet outside groups that use our facility and let them know that we are here if they have other personal needs.
- Investigate what other churches are doing to bring in children and younger members.
- Expand opportunities for youth and their families such as using Holy Shepherd as a venue for concerts that would attract young people.

- Accommodate young people who are looking for their “tribe,” a community, and those who are seeking spirituality but not in a traditional manner. They may want to do church as volunteering, not weekly attendance.

Holy Shepherd has a building that is under-utilized. While 26 outside groups use it, we could accommodate more and we could take initiative to ask groups who share our values to use the building to increase our networking and learning.

- Contact local organizations and people like Reg Cox, Director of Lakewood Connects, to let them know that Holy Shepherd is available as a meeting place or a resource center for groups that share our values.
- Have Lakewood High School students give performances at Holy Shepherd.
- Sponsor parenting classes and provide babysitting, for example, on Friday nights.

Find new ways to connect newcomers and make them feel a part of our church.

- Assemble various groups together for events.

Provide more spiritual, physical, emotional, and social support for mature members.

- Continue to emphasize the role of pastors as chaplains that provide personal, pastoral care.
- Revive Prime Timers group that used to offer social activities.
- Create a place to belong for elder orphans (those without close-by family).
- Provide exercise classes for the aging.
- Ensure that transportation needs are met for church events.
- Hire a new parish nurse

Improve inter-generational communication to allow effective goal setting.

- Call a pastor who is adept at communicating with people of all ages, someone who could unite rather than divide the church.
- Encourage groups to interact with each other, such as having the knitting and crocheting groups teach younger children or parents how to pursue these activities.
- Pursue training in how to have courageous conversations.
- Improve communication within the church
- Use social media to reach out and tell the story

Improve our connection with other faith-based organizations within our area so we can pair with them to meet the needs of people suffering from homelessness, hunger, and addiction, the three primary concerns identified by Lakewood city officials.

- Hire a staff member whose primary responsibility is to coordinate these efforts

SOURCES

- Congregational Vitality Study
- One-on-One Conversations, Summer 2018
- Conversations with members, December 8-9, 2018
- Holy Shepherd Volunteer Activities
- Church Timeline and “Ah Ha” Revelation of Timeline on January 6, 2019
- Conversation with millennials about religious practices
- Holy Shepherd archives
- “Shepherd Lead Us,” a booklet in celebration of Holy Shepherd’s Fiftieth Anniversary, June 2005.
- City of Lakewood Statistics
- ELCA Congregational Trend Report, 2017