



Covenant Lutheran Oklahoma City Churches

FUTURES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

June 11, 2020

The Futures Task Force of the Covenant Lutheran Congregations recommends that the congregations of Ascension, Redeemer, and St. Mark develop a shared plan of consolidation. This plan of consolidation shall include:

- *Guidance for worship life that honors and includes elements of worship from all three congregations*
- *An equitable agreement for a percentage of the dissolution of each congregation's net assets to go to the emerging congregation*
- *Provision of a business/ministry plan for the emerging congregation*

If this recommendation is adopted by the required majority vote of each congregation, the process of consolidation should proceed in a stepwise method:

Step 1:

- A. Each congregation selects members to serve on a task force to develop the shared plan of consolidation.
- B. Each congregation votes to develop a plan of dissolution which includes transfer of assets that are not included in the plan of consolidation

Step 2:

- A. Each congregation votes to enact the shared plan of consolidation
- B. Each congregation votes to accept its plan of dissolution

Step 3:

Members of the emerging congregation formally incorporate the new congregation.



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BACKGROUND FOR THE FUTURES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION

Members of the three Covenant congregations met with Bishop Girlinghouse on July 24, 2019 at Ascension Lutheran Church to discuss possible steps toward combining the congregations. Each congregation agreed to call a meeting of the voters to determine whether the congregation wished to be represented in a Task Force to discuss a means of blending the three congregations.

Result: The majority vote of each congregation was to participate in the work of the Task Force.

As part of the July 24 meeting, an informal poll was conducted. Participants were asked whether a blended congregation should be located at one of the existing properties, or at a different site.

Result: The majority of those present favored a new, independent site (a “consolidation”), so that all members of the blending congregations start fresh, not as guests entering an existing congregation (a “merger”).

Covenant Congregations Status (March, 2020 – Before COVID-19 Measures)

Ascension: The congregation has experienced a significant loss of members; and is drawing heavily on savings to continue the Covenant agreement. Because less than 20 typically attend worship services, Ascension may no longer have a critical mass for continued services, and is considering sale of the property.

Redeemer: Participating membership is relatively stable, but contributions meet only about 85% of operational needs. With no change in contributions or cost, existing savings are expected to be exhausted in 2021.

St. Mark: Participating membership is relatively stable. Contributions are generally sufficient to meet the current operational needs and pay ahead on the mortgage.

Current Analysis: Both Ascension and Redeemer may be forced to close within the next 18 months. However, St. Mark would not be able to maintain their financial status if either Ascension or Redeemer were to withdraw from the Covenant agreement. For these reasons, it is critical that each congregation vote on a proposal for blending as soon as possible.



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FUTURES TASK FORCE SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROPOSAL

Shared Plan for Consolidation

This process shall be guided by the provisions discussed in the ELCA guidebook, “Together in Mission: The Blending of Ministries Through Merger or Consolidation”. The Futures Task Force recommends consideration of the following issues:

- a. All three congregations should begin worshipping together at one location as soon as is practical (suggested target date of September 1, 2020). This will encourage fellowship among the members of the emerging congregation, allow for introduction of various liturgical styles, and reduce costs associated with services at three separate locations.
- b. This emerging congregation should be temporarily organized as a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC), according to the ELCA Constitution and Bylaws for a SAWC.
- c. The St. Mark campus should be the site of the emerging congregation. The Futures Task Force recommends St. Mark because it appears to have the best combination of facilities, location for community outreach, and current financial stability.
- d. A formal name (Covenant Lutheran, for example) should be adopted by the members of the blending congregations as part of the consolidation plan.
- e. All individuals who choose to join the emerging congregation should be formally received as new members of the congregation.
- f. Sunday worship should consist of an early service and a late service. One of these services will feature contemporary or Gospel music, and the other will feature traditional music.
- g. Both services should be broadcast live (Zoom or Facebook, for example), so that homebound members can participate in the worship services. The pastor will be supported in this effort by a committee with the skills to facilitate the broadcast.
- h. The call of Pastor Campbell should be modified to that of a “SAWC Leader”, with responsibilities as generally defined in the constitution for SAWC congregations.
- i. The SAWC membership will elect officers and members of a SAWC Steering Committee (analogous to a Congregation Council).
- j. Both Ascension and Redeemer Lutheran Churches should make an initial contribution of \$6,000 to establish reserve funding for the emerging congregation. This amount is one-third of the estimated balance (\$18,000) of the mortgage on the St. Mark facility on the target start date of September 1, 2020, and represents a good faith “buy-in” of the shared ministry of the emerging congregation.
- k. The voters of St. Mark should transfer the mortgage/title of the property to the emerging congregation.
- l. The blending congregations should formalize a Memo of Understanding that a major proportion of net proceeds from the sale of property and/or major equipment in the dissolution plan will be designated for the long term support of the emerging congregation. (A minimum of 75% is suggested by the Futures Task Force.)



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Plans of Dissolution

This process shall be guided by the ELCA resource, “Leaving a Legacy of Mission and Ministry; A Resource for the Closing of a Congregation”, and through consultation with the Bishop of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod.

Legacy Directives: “Each congregation will approve legacy directives that will direct the disbursement of the mission assets of the congregation in a fashion that will honor the legacy of the saints who have gone before, prosper the church, and advance the kingdom of God” (from “Leaving a Legacy of Mission and Ministry” of the ELCA).

Examples of steps that will be necessary are briefly described below:

1. Celebrate the history and ministry of the congregation.
2. Provide for the orderly transfer of members to the emerging congregation, or to another church body of their choice.
3. Provide for the transfer of historically significant items to the emerging congregation, so that the history of each blending congregation can be maintained.
4. Close all congregational accounts and make final settlement of any balances due.
5. Transfer office equipment, audio-visual equipment, worship supplies, etc. to the emerging congregation if these items can be used effectively.
6. Dispose of other unneeded equipment, books, supplies, etc. in an orderly fashion.
7. Provide for the sale or donation of the property and any major equipment not required by the emerging congregation. These steps might include donation of property to the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, or establishing trust funds to be managed by the Synod for later distribution of assets.

Business/Ministry Plan

- a. The SAWC Steering Committee will be responsible for administering the affairs of the emerging congregation. These responsibilities include the salary and benefits for the pastor, musician(s), worship resources, and the costs of maintaining the St. Mark facility. The current St. Mark accounts established for mortgage of the church property, electricity, internet, telephone, water, etc. should be transferred to the emerging congregation.
- b. Contributions received during worship must be used exclusively to support the emerging congregation.

Incorporation of the Emerging Congregation

If the efforts to establish a financially stable SAWC congregation are successful, the voters should then decide on the future ministry of the permanent congregation. This may involve a number of decisions:

- a. The site of the congregation: Maintain the St. Mark location or move to a new location that may be more suitable for growth and ministry.
- b. Constitution and bylaws that define the Council and shape the ministry of the congregation.
- c. The mission statement of the congregation.
- d. Formalize a call to a pastor.