

**LISTENING REPORT**

***Christ Lutheran Church***

***Visalia, CA (Sierra Pacific Synod - ELCA)***

**THE CONTEXT**

**The Congregation**

Christ Lutheran Church was founded as a mission church on October 5, 1958 and currently draws from Visalia, Tulare, Woodlake, Exeter and a number of other communities.

Like many mainline denominational churches, CLC has experienced somewhat of a decline in membership over these past few years but remains strong and vibrant. The church campus is well planned out and in excellent condition. The congregation is strong financially with very common budget challenges.

CLC is currently addressing the reality of its long tenured Senior Pastor’s impending retirement. Having served the congregation for 34 years, this presents some very unique and exciting challenges discerning what will be next for this congregation.

**The Community**

Located in the Central Valley of California, Visalia is a growing community of 136,000 residents nestled in the foothills below the majestic Sierra Nevada. Visalia is the Gateway to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and is 148 miles from the beaches of the Pacific Ocean. The Central Valley of California produces a significant percentage of produce for the United States with crops ranging from citrus to nuts to grapes. Visalia assets are:

* Industries/businesses focused on agriculture and health care
* Cost of living index that is about average for the United States but significantly lower than most of the California coastal areas
* Somewhat diverse with a strong Hispanic population and significant homelessness
* Known for having strong schools with a diversity of options between, public, Christian and charter, including a Community College
* Politically leans slightly conservative

**THE PROCESS**

There were four major components to this Listening Process

**Leadership Engagement**

The consultants first met with key leaders and staff to get a deeper understanding of CLC’s ministry and the perceived needs and concerns regarding Senior Pastor leadership transition. In addition, the forming of a Leadership Transition Team was completed to help implement this process.

**Conducting the MAP**

With the help of the Transition Team, the MAP was implemented with 182 CLC members participating. This level of participation provided high confidence in the data’s reliability. The interpretation of the MAP was presented to the congregation on Sunday, June 5th. A separate report of the MAP results is available in the church office, as well as a recording of the interpretation.

**M-CODE Assessment with Staff**

As a part of the development of a Senior Pastor Profile, Rick Heltne conducted several M-CODE assessments with existing staff, including Pastor Brian. Rick held both individual interpretations as well as a debriefing session with all participants. This process was done to give insight to current staff assets and those that might be needed in a new leader.

**Deep Listening**

The consultants conducted both individual interviews and listening group sessions from August 21-25. Specific criteria were established to invite as many members as possible from as wide a range of involvement, age, gender, and perspective as possible. This was done to ensure diversity and broad-based input. Over 100 individuals were involved in this phase.

**LISTENING PROCESS DISCOVERIES**

**CLC’s DNA**

**The Mission**
 *“In learning to love like Jesus, we are becoming a community transformed by grace.”*

**Shared Vision**

* We are committed to gathering in worship as a community which will inspire us to have a deeper connection to Christ and to be transformed by His presence.
* We will have a deeply connected, active, and engaged membership – one that is called and empowered by Christ to give and receive support to one another at every stage in life.
* We want everybody in our community to know that Christ is open, welcoming, and accepting of all people, which inspires us to be a church that is open, welcoming, and accepting of all people.
* We will discover how Christ is calling us to act beyond ourselves in our community.
* We will be a church investing in children and youth where they will be spiritually and relationally connected because of the message of Christ’s indispensable grace.
* We will be a church that experiences and becomes the peace of Christ so that we can enter into the suffering of an often-chaotic world to bring hope.

### The Core Values

* Connects courageously;
* Grows spiritually;
* Serves selflessly;
* Accepts boldly;
* Gives freely

**Defining Attributes**

* A very accepting, warm, and welcoming people marked by a deep sense of community, fellowship, and sense of belonging. This spirit has been consistently present throughout its history.
* A church with a big heart where people are not afraid to start things and step up to the plate to utilize their gifts and talents; a generous and giving church.
* Progressive, forward-thinking theologically and socially in a more conservative context; non-judgmental and committed to diversity, openness and inclusion while valuing Lutheran tradition
* Trending toward an aging demographic, but the church remains strong with a deep desire to engage younger families.
* A very strong youth ministry attracting not only young people from the congregation but the broader community as well.
* Engaged in a myriad of service and outreach in the community addressing the social needs; see themselves as the hands and feet of Jesus.
* Well educated members and known as a thinking person’s church where people are well read and thoughtful marked by excellent preaching and teaching.
* A church that is well run and structured without being rigid.
* Offers a strong pre-school with a great reputation in the community.
* Currently offers two Sunday morning worship experiences at 8:00 and 9:30 with a mix of traditional and contemporary music
* Home to a Lahu ministry with culturally relevant worship experience for Lahu members of the community, rooted in the theology of the Lutheran tradition.

**MAP INSIGHTS**

As indicated, the MAP was implemented with 182 responses. The following are highlights from the data.

* CLC is a highly educated culture. This is a strength for deep discernment but challenging for timely decision making.
* Nearly 20% of respondents have become a part of CLC in the last 6 years. This is a positive sign of health and growth potential
* Less than 16% of households have children under the age of 18. Obviously, a critical area for growth.
* CLC is in the Possibility Landscape with a pull towards the Nostalgic. This indicates that the church is in a healthy place but has a tendency to look backwards in reflecting on the congregation’s strengths and successes.
* Overall, the respondents have a very positive feeling about CLC and the impact it is making
* There are indicators that sharing different opinions and offering new ideas are not fully embraced or welcomed
* Implementing change is seen more as a stress factor, or being unnecessary, then a way of learning and growing
* Clear communication regarding decision making and planning need to be improved
* Generosity is a strength with significant room for growth

**MCODE INSIGHTS**

Motivationally, the staff is heavily weighted toward being team players, collaborating and serving one another and the CLC congregation. In addition, a significant number of the staff are motivationally designed to achieve by completing tasks or endeavors and meeting challenges along the way.

While this ‘team motivational design’ is good, we would love to see a greater presence of individuals who are motivated as visionary. People motivated in this way see ideas, ideals and potential and are able to make those things real and concrete in order to make a significant impact.

**AREAS FOR GROWTH & OPPORTUNITIES**

**Growth Areas**

* Giving more resources and priority to children’s ministry
* Engaging families with children more intentionally, with special attention given to nurturing those adult relationships
* More effectively inviting people into leadership roles, including training and equipping
* Putting great ideas into action and working to bring them to fruition
* Understanding its DNA outside of Pastor Brian’s role and influence
* Drawing people into a deeper ownership and participation of the various ministry opportunities that are provided
* Model the need for change as growth and learning potential vs. loss and failure

**Opportunities**

* Leveraging the fact that CLC is seen as a more progressive faith community with a focus on social action and impact
* Work towards a newly articulated missional narrative/identity that reflects the whole of CLC as well as what it imagines for its future
* Work to discover more collaborative opportunities for living out your mission
* Embrace this moment as an opportunity to see how God is going to work in and through you in new and bold ways

**IDENTENIFYING THE NEXT SENIOR PASTOR**

It is into this context that Christ Lutheran is seeking to call a new Senior Pastor. The current Senior Pastor, Brian Malison has served at CLC for 34 years. Brian came to the church right out of seminary as an Associate Pastor and shortly after was called as Senior Pastor. Brian has recently announced his intent to retire, and the congregation is planning for a new Senior Pastor to be called shortly before Brian’s retirement as there is not a plan for an Interim Pastor.

The primary focus for the future is to build on the strengths of the congregation established under Brian’s leadership but with need to establish and embrace a new and more missional direction. In a changed and changing cultural landscape, it is no longer viable to ‘do business as usual’. To this end, Christ Lutheran has engaged The Joshua Group to guide them toward identifying and embracing their core identity and discovering a preferred future. It is upon and in concert with this work that the new Senior Pastor will be able to inject their vision for where the church will go in the years ahead. It is especially important that the future includes successful efforts to engage younger people and families while crafting a more focused and well-integrated missional engagement with the broader community.

Therefore the next Senior Pastor at Christ Lutheran Church of Visalia will be:

* Highly relational, initiating connections and coming to know people personally, extending love, care and grace.
* A biblically centered preacher who is relevant, engaging, personable and theologically articulate and astute.
* Able to bridge the gap between the conservative and more progressive realities of the congregation and the community
* Forward looking and imaginative but also aware of the correct pace of change for the organization.
* Motivated and skilled at empowering the people for ministry including staff, lay leadership and members.
* Committed to doing all things with excellence.

The next Senior Pastor is the one who….

‘Seeks after God’s leading and effectively communicates that to the congregation.’

‘Loves deeply and cares but is driven and courageous in shaping the future.’

**NEXT STEPS**

**Launch Call Committee**

* Work with Rick Heltne on Candidate & Opportunity Profile
* Work with the SPS to fulfill guidelines and expectations
* Rick Heltne does Candidate Search
* Candidates Vetted
* Finalists are Presented to Call Committee
* Candidate Identified
* Call Process Implemented

**Launch Mission Narrative Initiative w/ Leadership Transition Team**

* Host Community Panels
* Host CLC Brain Storm Gathering
* Host Mission/Vision Workshop
* Develop Mission Narrative w/ Ministry Plan
* Roll Out Newly Formed Mission & Vision Narrative