

*... springboards for
the future ...*

REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH

“Prioritizing Identified Vision Paths”

***We are moving ahead
with the help of God***

“Commit to the Lord
whatever you do, and
your plans will succeed”
(Proverbs 16:3)

Prepared by: Vision Path Development Team

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Executive Summary:

In keeping with the spirit and intent of the Synod's Vision Path Experience, the Redeemer Vision Path Development Team moved forward in its quest to create an "organic vision" for the congregation. Building upon the congregation's response to the open-ended LCEF survey, seven vision paths were established from the massive amount of written responses. In order to propose the specific priorities and needs of the congregation, a shorter and more concise survey was developed and validated. The congregation was asked to rank the identified vision paths as to highest to lowest priority or need. The surveys were mailed to the congregation during October-November, 2013. As a result of two individual mailings, a statistical acceptable and a majority of the congregation responses were achieved.

The findings revealed that the highest priority ranked vision path was "a fostering of the needs of congregational younger families", and the lowest priority ranked was "a feasibility study for an elementary school". The data also indicated that the vision path of "an expansion of our youth development programs" was the second highest ranked along with the vision path of "the initiation of a campaign to replace the child care building with a permanent structure" found to be the third highest ranked priority or need.

In conclusion, the vision paths of "a fostering of the needs of congregational younger families" and "an expansion of our youth development programs" were clearly ranked as the two highest of the seven identified vision paths. The data also indicated that the vision path of "a feasibility study for an elementary school" was not a pressing priority at this point in time. It should also be noted that the vision paths of "the initiation of a campaign to replace the child care building with a permanent structure", "a strengthening of congregational assimilation and relationships", and "an exploration of a multi-faceted outreach effort" received respectable priority rankings and should not be discarded, but considered appropriately. Based on the results and drawn conclusions, it is recommended to the Church Council that the top three emerging vision paths be considered for further development in collaboration with the appropriate Church Council Standing Boards and the Vision Path Development Team hopefully yielding strategic plans for future action.

The Backdrop

During mid-2007 a Long Range Planning Committee was appointed to explore the vision and mission of the Church. A working document was produced identifying long range goals and specific strategic plans. This document contained action recipes reflecting vision paths. Early during 2013 the Church Council re-visited the working document of the Long Range Planning Committee to consider whether the goals and action paths of the congregation were valid today. The Council used a tool offered through the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) to give guidance to the realization of a future “organic vision” for the Church. An “organic vision” is one that surfaces from the congregation rather than being sent down from the Church Council. An LCEF Vision Path Experience open-ended survey was designed to tease out and isolate an “organic vision.” The congregation participated in the open-ended survey and a half-day Saturday Vision Path Experience workshop (August, 2013). As a result a Vision Path Development Team was created as an ad hoc arm of the Church Council.

A major task was to determine whether an “organic vision” existed in the responses to the LCEF Vision Path Experience open-ended survey conducted during August, 2013. A concern was the response rate of 20% which translated into 1 out of 5 congregation member response to the survey. This raised questions about the validity of the responses. Also, the outcome reflected a somewhat blurred vision of what might be appearing to emerge. Team members had to conceptually process the massive information gathered by the LCEF open-ended survey. This intensive information synthesis process involved massaging the data, clustering the responses, and identifying the concerns most pressing to the congregation. As a result of the content analysis and further cross-validation, the Team produced a shorter (less time consuming) and more specific rank-order survey (APPENDIX A). In keeping with the spirit and intent of the LCEF’s Vision Path Experience, the Team moved forward in its quest to create an “organic vision” for the congregation. Building upon the congregation’s responses to the open-ended LCEF’s survey, seven vision paths emerged from the massive amount of written responses (TABLE 1 or APPENDIX A).

Methods and Procedures

In order to propose the specific and implementable priorities and needs of the congregation, a shorter and more concise seven rank-order and optional comments survey was developed and validated from the synthesized results of the LCEF open-ended survey (APPENDIX A). The congregation was asked to review and assess the seven possible identified vision paths, and then rank them as a 7 (highest), 6 (next

highest), etc. to 1 (lowest) by placing the number/rank on the line provided in front of each vision path, making sure that each vision path has number in front of it. Also, noted was that there should be no ties, and not to use the same ranking more than once. If the respondent felt that he/she were not in a position to validly respond to the survey, then it should be returned blank. Space was also provided for any optional written comments (APPENDIX A).

The optional written verbatim comments from the members are presented in conventional readable format (APPENDIX B). The intent is to preserve as much of the “flavor” of the commentary and allow as many inferences as possible on the part of the reader. The comments are grouped into the broad category labelled “Non-Vision Path Optional Comments” and then each of the given vision paths receiving specific responses. Please NOTE that three dots ... mean a change in respondent (person).

The surveys were mailed to the congregation during October, 2013 (1st mailing) and November, 2013 (2nd mailing). The respondents were asked to return the completed or blank surveys in an enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope by specified return dates. Once returned, each survey was given a sequence number in order to tabulate the quantitative results and document the written open-ended commentary.

Results/Findings

The first mailing resulted in 203 returned surveys (59% response rate) and the second mailing yielded 69 more surveys (19% response rate) culminating in a overall response rate of 78%. As a result of the two separate mailings, a statistically acceptable and a majority of the congregation response were achieved. The response ratings (priorities 7 to 1) were tabulated for each returned survey resulting in a rank-order score (ROS). The total ROS for each identified vision path and the priority of need (PON) are displayed in TABLE 1.

The findings revealed that the highest rank vision path was “a fostering of the needs of congregational younger families” (PON = 1st; ROS = 1,102), and the lowest priority ranked vision path was “a feasibility study for an elementary school” (PON = 7th; ROS = 623). The data also indicated (TABLE 1) that the vision path of “an expansion of our youth development programs” (PON = 2nd; ROS = 1,027) was the second highest ranked along with the vision path of “an initiation of a campaign to

TABLE 1

PRIORITY RANKING AND NEED IDENTIFICATION OF VISION PATHS

Identified Vision Paths	Priority of Need (PON)	Rank of Score (ROS)	Needs to be Addressed
A Fostering of the Needs of Congregational Younger Families	1 st	1,102	*
A Feasibility Study for an Elementary School	7 th	623	
A Strengthening of Congregational Assimilation and Relationships	4 th	856	
An Exploration of a Multi-faceted Outreach Effort	5 th	828	
An Enhancement of Elderly Care and Spirituality	6 th	797	
An Expansion of Our Youth Development Programs	2 nd	1,027	*
The Initiation of a Campaign to Replace the Child Care Building with a Permanent Structure	3 rd	876	*

78% Return Rate

Replace the child care building with a permanent structure” (PON = 3rd; ROS = 876) found to be the third highest ranked priority or need. The data displayed in TABLE 1 also reflected that the vision paths receiving the three highest ROS and PON need to be addressed.

Although optional written comments were not the emphasis of the survey, an anticipated number of comments were captured in verbatim for the enrichment of the quantitative findings (APPENDIX B). The comments have been grouped according to non-vision path and vision-path-specific. The vision path related comments included: (1) needs of congregational younger families, (2) replace child care building, (3) elementary school study, (4) multi-faceted outreach effort, and (5) youth development programs. The written comments found under the rubric of no-specific-vision path-related ran the gambit from A to Z or from one end of the spectrum to the other. General concerns were for the: (1) well-being of the Church, (2) where to go next with the survey results, and (3) suggestions on non-traditional worship services. The commentary on “needs of younger families” vigorously supported the need, and yielded suggestion for action plans and their implementation. Comments on “replace child care building” were somewhat to the point reflecting on and questioning the present need for a building replacement. Congregation members expressed spiritual support concerning “an elementary school study,” but were doubtful about the feasibility in terms of pupil availability and parental costs. Only one comment was received under “multi-faceted outreach effort” which was very lengthy, quite provocative, somewhat spiritual, and very profound; this “essay” contained an important message. The basic concern expressed in reference to “youth development programs” centered on the future human survival of the Church along with suggestions on how to address these needs. The 37 written optional comments (APPENDIX B), representing only 11% congregational response rate or 14% of those returned surveys, have potentially shed light on whether to pursue or not pursue a given vision path. Whether validity on the remarks is an issue or not, the respondents’ perceptions mean reality to them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This exploratory endeavor was intended to serve as an initial effort to more formally identify valid vision paths based upon past and present, and perceived future priorities and needs of our congregation. It is hoped by the Team that this overall effort would lead to further and refined inquiry studies. It has been assumed that the responses to the survey (78% response rate) are valid representing the majority of the members and lending to the notion that the “congregation has spoken.”

In conclusion, the vision paths of “a fostering of the needs of congregational younger families” and “an expansion of our youth development programs” were clearly ranked as the two highest of the seven identified vision paths (TABLE 1). The data also indicated that the vision path of “a feasibility study for an elementary school” was not a pressing priority at this point in time. It should also be noted that the vision path of “the initiation of a campaign to replace the child care building with a permanent structure,” “a strengthening of congregational assimilation and relationships,” and “an exploration of a multi-faceted outreach effort” received respectable priority rankings and should not be discarded, but considered appropriately.

Given the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendation is tendered for thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the Church Council:

- **The emerging vision paths of “needs of younger families,” “youth development programs,” and “child care building replacement” be addressed as soon as possible in accord with the appropriate Church Council Standing Boards. With the assistance of the Vision Path Development Team strategic plans for action need to be developed and approved by the Church Council and the Voter’s Assembly.**

It is also recommended that the remaining four identified vision paths (TABLE 1 or APPENDIX A) not be forgotten; these still are needs or priorities and warrant the attention of the Church Council.

The data collected from the survey (both rank-order and optional comments) represent perceived priorities, needs, values, opinions, and attitudes of the congregation. Although the respondents’ perceptions may not correspond to those intentions or perceptions of the Team or the Church Council, they do, however, represent what the congregation perceives as happening. These perceptions represent reality to the respondents, and may be more important than what is actually or supposed to be happening.

APPENDIX A

“Cover Letter and Survey Instrument”

1st Mailing: October, 2013
Return Rate = 59%

2nd Mailing: November, 2013
Return Rate = 19%

Overall Return Rate = 78%

APPENDIX B

“Verbatim Comments from Respondents”

- *Non – Vision Path Related Comments*
- *Vision Path Related Comments*
 - Needs of Congregational Younger Families
 - Replace Child Care Building
 - Elementary School Study
 - Multi – Faceted Outreach Effort
 - Youth Development Programs

*... raw comments from
returned surveys ...*

Note:

Three Dotes ... Mean
- a change in respondent -

General Comments – No Vision Path Related:

... more focus needs to be placed on those ranging in age of the youth to 50 years old to ensure a strong continuation of the church ... do not adopt any program or course of action that causes members to leave the congregation in anger ... The national attack on Christianity in general should be seriously considered ... need more peppier music in church, maybe a guitar group or something ... how about a senior housing facility ... since we are not members of this church, we do not feel we should comment on your vision path ... it seems like they are all important, think you need someone who has children to give you answers, not an elderly person ... let us be creative in carrying out Redeemer's mission. Let us apply the meaning of Jesus' word ... need a film or video showing the whole worship service ... do not go into debt ... we should encourage all congregational members to join one of the Bible studies, especially the elected positions ... should consider having two services during months of January – April only ... maybe some guitar playing in church on occasion – some peppy Christian songs ... what will you do with the results now, take the top four and see where the priorities lie with other options off the table ... enjoy the church ... feel honored to be considered and have prayerfully answered the questions to the best of our knowledge knowing the importance and need ...

Vision Path – Needs of Congregational Younger Families:

... we need to focus on the younger part of the congregation and what will bring more people to the Church and its future ... need to bring in more young families ... would love to give elderly care a higher rating number, but I had to put the children and families first ... I feel a contemporary service would be beneficial to our younger families ... it is a must to reach out and get younger people involved, especially in an area where there are so many elderly congregants ... church needs young families to take on the work done by elder members ... modern homes teach very little religion ...

Vision Path – Replace Child Care Building:

... combine Vision Path if possible into one building to accommodate both school and child care ... child care needs to be self – sustaining ... child care helps the younger families and brings new faces to our church ... a new child care building is not needed, not ready for it at this time ... do not know what current needs are regarding the child care building, if situation is critical I would give it a higher number ...

Vision Path – Elementary School Study:

... Development of cooperative relations with other local Christian churches might be helpful in this regard ... believe the creation of an elementary school; but without improvement of the national feeder (our child care) it is less likely to happen ... would combine 7 and 6 to include a couple rooms for lower elementary ... child care and elementary school should be considered in any new construction ... a study at this time for an elementary school is not needed ... would love to see an elementary school, but do not think we have the finances or active young families to warrant a school ... parochial schools are costly for families ...

Vision Path – Multifaceted Outreach Effort:

... it is in response to the Great Commission, given the state of the secular effort to take God out of our lives, we must be dedicated to keep Him in everyone's lives. Given acceptance that this is our highest priority, then it follows we believe, all other options should be measured as how they contribute to the accomplishments of this our highest goal. This outreach effort should include an appropriate broader Christian involvement than we LCMS Lutherans usually seek to involve ourselves. We do not have to "join" in their beliefs but I do believe we need to support other Christians in their effort to bring God back to the country ...

Vision Path: Youth Development Program:

... start with a strong children's program which will lead to strong family involvement, family friends and neighbors. No strong program for children to bring in younger generation leads to a dying church of the future ... to attract and retain youth, we may want to consider a less formal liturgical service with contemporary instruments possibly on a Saturday evening ... it is an honor to become elderly, our youth are the elderly of tomorrow ... the youth are main concern and need our help drastically ...