

BETTER TOGETHER

A Church Merger Proposal

DIVINE PEACE



GOOD SHEPHERD'S



JORDAN



WOODLAWN



This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:3-4

■ INTRODUCTION

There are just some things that seem like a match made in heaven. A list might include chocolate and peanut butter, Aaron Rodgers and Davante Adams, and movies and popcorn. Some things are just better together.

Many churches have also found that they are better together. A recent movement of mission-driven mergers has led to two or more churches uniting behind a new vision to proclaim the gospel in their community. These churches have found that a merger enabled them to shift from decline and financial struggle to growth and sustainability. A new focus on pursuing the mission of the church together enabled them to reach more people for Christ and grow deeper in faith. Many of these new church mergers are leading to greater impact for God's kingdom than these congregations were accomplishing alone.

For the past few years discussions about merging have been taking place between representatives from Divine Peace, Good Shepherd's, Jordan, and Woodlawn WELS congregations. Feedback from the members of our congregations in the fall of 2019 showed very strong support for this merger idea and led to a significant effort to further develop the concept. This booklet shares the outcome of those discussions.

The merger proposal provides a bold, new direction for our ministries. It challenges us to rethink some of the ways we might be used to doing ministry. It includes some things that are difficult for our individual congregations to do alone. It invites our congregations to combine people, assets, and resources to reinvest in something new and exciting as we seek to be faithful and more effective in our mission to the glory of God.

The idea of any church merger can certainly bring anxiety and heart-felt concern within a congregation. We worry that this somehow means we failed. We fear what we might lose.

But a merger is also an opportunity to ask – what might we gain? Could God use us in a new way to better carry out his purposes? Might this be a way to not just survive, but to thrive? What if we could be better together?

We encourage you to reflect on this proposal and engage in the upcoming opportunities to give your input. Pray that God would give us all wisdom and guidance in this important decision. And most of all, pray that God in his grace would fill us all with a heart for the lost and for one another – a heart ready to do whatever it takes, “so that by all possible means we might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

“NEW” LUTHERAN CHURCH

West Allis, Wisconsin

■ OUR MISSION

To personally and collectively lead all people to know Jesus and grow in a relationship with God.

■ OUR VALUES

Gospel-centered Biblical Truth

We faithfully proclaim the uncompromised Word of God and point people to the forgiving grace of God that is found in Jesus. We place our trust in the power of the gospel to change hearts and change lives.

Courageous Evangelism

We actively build relationships and seek opportunities to share the gospel with those within our reach.

Engaging Worship

We provide meaningful worship experiences that speak to the head and the heart and encourage participation in the praise of God through excellence in preaching and music.

Intentional Discipleship

We continually grow at all stages of life and faith to be more like Christ in knowledge of Scripture (head), love for God and neighbor (heart), and Christian living (hands).

Welcoming Christian Community

We are a community of believers that loves, encourages, respects, serves, and sacrifices for one another. We develop meaningful relationships and expect and prepare to welcome others.

Impactful Service

We equip and empower people to make a difference in the church, family, workplace and community through acts of Christian love and generously giving of time, talent, and treasure.

■ OUR MINISTRY VISION BETTER TOGETHER

We dream of a thriving, mission-minded church that is taking bold steps in faith to do something new and different to be faithful in our mission and more effective for God's kingdom. We dream of a church that is:

Reaching many new people for Christ through relational evangelism and strategic outreach.

- In community where Christianity has been losing ground for decades, we dream of a church that is outreach-minded, prioritizes evangelism, and is passionately driven to reach as many as possible with the message of the gospel.
- We dream of a church that encourages and equips people to courageously invest in relationships with the unchurched, sharing the gospel with them, and inviting them to church.
- We dream of strategic outreach and digital marketing that connects new people to opportunities to have their faith questions answered, know the beauty of God's grace and truth, and discover the value of the church.
- We dream of a place where people who are hurting and in crisis find love, acceptance, guidance and healing that is found in Jesus.

Worshipping God together through excellent, engaging, blended worship.

- In a time when many find church unengaging and irrelevant, we dream of a worship experience that people love to attend and regularly invite others to come with them. We dream of worship that connects with young and old, the regular attender and the guest.
- We dream of worship that connects people to Word and sacrament and to a message that is understandable and relevant to their life. It is the dream of providing worship that facilitates participation through the best of traditional hymns, contemporary songs, service variety, modern instrumental music, and supportive visual media.

Leading more people toward spiritual growth and maturity through intentional and transformational discipleship.

- We dream of a church that draws people into an intentional discipleship pathway where they take steps to find God's grace, grow deeper in Biblical truth, discover purpose for their life, and connect with ways to make a difference in the lives of others through Bible study groups, workshops, retreats, and personal devotional resources.

Connecting with one another in meaningful relationships.

- In a world of loneliness, we dream of a church where people find a welcoming Christian community, value encouraging and supportive relationships, and expand their friendships. We dream of people connecting in gathering spaces, Bible study, and service groups as we do life and faith together.

Telling the next generation through dynamic children's ministries.

- In a world where many youth face spiritual and emotional struggles, we dream of a dynamic ministry to children and teens where they experience love, connection, and the guidance of God's Word for a life of Christian service and defense of the faith.
- We dream of fantastic Sunday school and teen ministries that kids love to attend, learn to love God and develop Christian character, building a foundation for a life and faith dedicated to the Lord.
- We dream of partnering with parents to provide a Lutheran school that is the preferred choice of families because of excellence in education, an amazing staff, and quality extra curriculars, all provided in a safe, loving, Christian environment.
- We dream of expanded childcare that serves more unchurched families with children and opens the door to involvement in faith, church, and Lutheran education.

Championing the family by helping marriages thrive and equipping parents.

- In a society where traditional family is under attack and marriages struggle, we dream of helping marriages thrive and equipping parents to raise their children in Christian homes.

To pursue this dream we envision a church that is:

Engaging people to serve church and community through volunteer opportunities and leadership development.

- We dream of involving men and women in the use of time and talents to serve the Lord in ways that connect with their personal gifts and passions.
- In a world where many view the church as only serving itself, we dream of a church that meets needs in our community in meaningful ways out of Christian love.

Inspiring generosity that honors God and supports Christ's mission.

- We dream of people growing in generosity as they learn to manage their God-given resources to financially support our mission. We dream of supporting the world-wide mission of the church through larger financial support, involvement in missions, and the encouragement to consider public ministry.

Learning new and more effective ways to function as a church and fulfill our mission.

- We dream of a ministry that embraces best practices for a large church including a staff-led, member-driven ministry model that empowers leaders to lead and equips people to be involved in ministry and service. We envision the pursuit of effective communication and the use of technology to facilitate outreach, discipleship and the management of the church.
- We dream of a dedicated ministry staff of pastors, teachers, and lay people working together as a team, engaged in participatory decision-making, equipped to do ministry in a new context, and honored with appropriate salary and benefits.

Gathering people at a new or renovated campus.

- We dream of an attractive new or renovated single, 5-acre campus in a visible and accessible location in West Allis hosting a 400-500 flexible-seating sanctuary, a large gathering and hospitality space, and safe, individual-grade school and childcare facilities.

■ MERGER GUIDELINES

To guide our next steps in strategic planning
(adapted from the book *Vital Mergers*)

- 1. View ourselves as a new church.** By viewing the merger as a new church, and incorporating techniques and approaches used in starting new churches, the merger is more likely to be effective in reaching unchurched people. Some patterns and traditions may be similar to previous church experiences. But the new church will remain focused on providing a church experience that meets the needs and preferences of the unchurched which may differ from those of some members.
- 2. Unify all ministry around the new mission and vision to reach more people for Christ.** The primary motivation and driving force for the merger is to reach more people for Christ. All involved will pursue unity around the new vision and values as we design a new church strategy rather than press for the new church to inherit old priorities and programs or satisfy personal preferences.
- 3. Eliminate turf issues.** We will pursue ways to eliminate turf issues and provide an equal voice and new sense of ownership. For the new church to come together in unity, the church must shift its allegiance from tangible buildings, church names, programs, and traditions to the new mission and vision to reach more people in our community.
- 4. Sell all facilities and relocate to a new neutral location OR significantly redevelop a current site.** The new church and school location(s) will be in western West Allis and will take into consideration high-traffic, accessibility, visibility, location of current membership, ministry opportunities, and proximity to other WELS or predominate congregations in the area.
- 5. Worship in a neutral location from the day of the official merger.** It could take several years to plan and build a new sanctuary in a new location or on a current site. Temporarily worship could be held in a rented space such as the Nathan Hale High School Auditorium, the WLHS auditorium, or one of the school gyms.

- 6. Be led by strong pastoral leadership.** Pastoral staff will include those who possess the skill, heart, and vision to keep the church focused on its pursuit of kingdom growth. We desire that this includes the abilities to bring the churches together, make disciples of new people, cast vision for the future, and help the church live into their new identity. Lay leadership will work hand-in-hand with pastoral leadership to assure that voices are heard, issues are addressed, dreams are shared, and transitions are made with God's guidance and grace.
- 7. Chose a new name that is not part of any of the merging churches.** A new name will be chosen that can connect with our community and have branding potential aligned with our focus.
- 8. Prevent majority ruling post-merger.** In order to maintain a sense of unity, no church involved in the merger should have a majority voice after the merger. We will pursue equal distribution in leadership such as two representatives from each church being appointed to the church council for the first two years.
- 9. Organize the new structure with a team-based, mission-driven format.** We will shift away from the 1950s business-style organizational structure in church that has often proved dysfunctional and often hinders rather than furthers the mission effectively. A merger is a prime time to change the course and establish a new structure and process of operating and decision-making - one that is leaner, more effective, and more responsive to the needs of the congregation and community and appropriate for a large church by empowering leaders to lead.
- 10. Make room for guests.** We will practice radical hospitality. This means designing ministries, environments and experiences that welcome the unchurched and connect with younger generations.
- 11. Provide adequate staffing for growth.** This merger will create a much larger church. It must be staffed to provide adequate leadership, pastoral care, community outreach, and equipping of members for ministry. In addition to pastors, the new church will likely be served best by lay staff focused on ministry areas such as worship, marketing/communications, accounting/facilities management, and children's ministry.
- 12. Pray intensely about this opportunity.** We will ask God to help us discern his will for our future ministry and pray that he empowers in response to his grace toward a unity guided by humility, trust, courage, and a love for the lost and one another.