

Reflections on Ministry and Context  
Trinity Lutheran Church of Stillwater, MN

Stillwater, MN

Completed:



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

*Congregations and Organizations in the Call Process are invited to expand their Ministry Site Profile (MSP) by reflecting on the several key aspects of ministry and context given below. You are encouraged to give short, thoughtful answers (a maximum of 250 words) on at least four of the seven topics. This form is optional unless specifically requested by a synod bishop. The form is submitted electronically and becomes a part of the Ministry Site's MSP.*

1. What key issues or concerns of our church and society are reflected in the ministry that is centered in your congregation or organization?

**Our congregation is concerned with social justice in our world. We address hunger needs by participating in several community outreach programs, such as Last Sunday Supper, Valley Outreach Food Shelf, and, community meal packing events. Trinity holds a lutefisk dinner and a golf tournament annually to raise money for hunger ministries. Our realm of service includes our congregation, our community and the globe.**

**Trinity is deeply committed to communicating that all are welcome and all are children of God. We have chosen to be an open, affirming community accepting of all people. Trinity is a community that honors who you are and what you bring – a place of acceptance and welcome.**

2. How do the stewardship practices and allocation of financial resources of the congregation or organization reflect your priorities for mission?

**Stewardship has many faces. Although some think of stewardship as only a financial response to God's love, stewardship encompasses so much more than money. It is about how we use all that God has entrusted to our care -- our time, our talents and our treasures -- to love God and our neighbors, both within and outside of the church walls and our homes. Trinity balanced its 2015 fiscal year budget through a special summer appeal. Nearly 320 members and friends of Trinity gave gifts totaling \$276,728. Approximately \$350,000 of Trinity's two million dollar annual budget is made up of "in and out" revenues and expenses related to missions trips and programs. As members of the ELCA, we believe Christians are called to understand stewardship as an expression of their faith. Continued stewardship allows us to sustain our ongoing ministries and programs.**

**Prior to 2015, Trinity made a number of real estate and program decisions that have impacted our financial resources by adding significantly to the church's debt. The loss of lease revenue from St Croix Academy, coupled with reduced giving during the great recession, contributed to a series of difficult fiscal years during which a combination of cuts and borrowing were utilized in an attempt to balance the budget. The difficulty in forecasting giving, coupled with an overly optimistic view of future events, contributed to the utilization of our credit line to meet obligations. In the last two years budgets have been constructed more conservatively and tracked more carefully. The congregation is making its payments on our mortgage and is also paying down the principal on our credit line as part of an ongoing commitment to get our financial house in order.**

3. In what ways is the membership of your congregation or organization similar or different from the people of the neighborhood in which you are located?

4. Identify the three most significant or formative events in the history of your congregation or organization.  
**It is difficult to pinpoint three significant or formative events in the history of our church since it was established**



nearly 150 years ago. However, there are three significant types of events that have always offered pivotal moments of growth, community and inspiration to our congregation.

1) Building and property decisions were undertaken on many occasions in our history. Our church was first built in its present location in 1883. Remodeling and additions were completed over the years, including a major addition dedicated in 1983, that serves today as our current sanctuary. This building project generated a sense of unity and community because it was completed with donated funds and hands-on construction work by many church members. All construction projects, including our decision not to build the recent planned addition, required the congregation to discern, support and work together to move forward with a decision.

2) Pastoral changes have been significant in the life of the congregation. Lead pastors at Trinity have typically had long tenures. In the past 70 years, our church has called only five lead pastors. With so few changes in leadership, the transitions have always created adjustment periods that included feelings of uncertainty as well as anticipation for the future.

3) Mission and Outreach have always played an important role at Trinity through financial support of global needs. The focus expanded to include the service aspect of missions and outreach in 1985 with the first annual Mexico mission trip, offering high school students the opportunity to work in a Mexican community to improve homes. Service opportunities have expanded to Tanzania, with many groups traveling there to help the community build a system to bring water to their village, and to Louisiana to assist following Hurricane Katrina. Mission work plays a major role in the vision for our church to love, transform and serve as followers of Jesus in the world.

5. Describe the way the congregation or organization is currently involved in community and ecumenical partnerships.

6. Has your congregation or organization had significant conflict in recent history and, if so, what have you learned from that experience?

Trinity has experienced some significant conflict recently and has learned important lessons. Conflict is an uncomfortable but normal and potentially constructive part of community life. It comes from our individual uniqueness, expressed as diverse perspectives on various issues. Honoring all perspectives makes us a stronger and healthier community.

First, Trinity is a resilient congregation and despite a number of challenges over the past 18 months, the majority of the congregation has remained true to its mission and its hope for the future. There have been losses, which seem to stem from several factors, including unhappiness about Trinity's financial woes and past budget decisions, disappointment at the departure of the prior lead pastor, and a feeling by some that they were not welcome in the congregation because their views did not mesh with those of the pastoral leadership. We have continued to foster gratitude and are thankful for the gifts that we have had the past year.

Secondly, we have been reminded that all perspectives are important and that each should be heard and carefully considered, rather than marginalized. Great damage can be done by being dismissive, both because we can miss important and needed messages, and because it is essential that each person know that they have been heard even if their position ultimately doesn't gain broad support. We learned that at times it is difficult to listen because there are more powerful voices offering a different message. And we learned that sometimes a single voice may not reflect the perspective of most of the congregation. We have learned that in all instances, both listening and discerning are essential.

Thirdly, we have learned that conflict is destructive rather than constructive when communication is careless or breaks down. Focusing conflict on individuals rather than ideas, and forming alliances of the like-minded in



**opposition to other groups, leads to fractionalization and erosion of our sense of community. When we acknowledge our uniqueness, honor diverse views, listen to one another, and focus together on the essentials of faith that bind us together, we are able to function as a healthy faith community. We will be prepared to welcome people at any point in their journey with God, and to love, transform, and serve.**

7. Describe your physical facilities: construction date, purpose, capacity, date of last renovation, any deferred maintenance, and any plans for upgrading.

**Trinity's building is located at 115 North Fourth Street, Stillwater, and was constructed in several phases over the last 150 years. The building, in its present configuration, is an expanded and significantly modified version of the original Swedish immigrant church. The last major expansion was completed in 1983.**

**Trinity's worship center is 7,200 square feet in size and comfortably seats 550 people. The facility also includes a sizable narthex, gathering/commons area, gymnasium, fellowship/meeting space (Garden Room), kitchen, smaller meeting rooms and classrooms to serve groups of various sizes, offices, conference room, and a historic Heritage Chapel. The overall square footage is 40,500.**

**Trinity is fortunate to own properties surrounding its current facility, including a large parcel adjacent to the church at the NW quadrant of Myrtle and Third Street, a parcel across the street from the church at the NW quadrant of Myrtle and Fourth, and a smaller parcel at the NE quadrant of Myrtle and Third Street. Trinity also owns a former drive-in theater across the St Croix River, just up the hill from Stillwater, in Wisconsin. The drive-in is a venue for summer worship and is one of the most unusual and most loved aspects of Trinity's worship life, drawing 300-400 people on a Sunday morning.**

**A significant expansion to the church facility was planned between 2012 and 2014 that would have added a new main entry, gathering space, large-group meeting rooms, and a multi-purpose worship space (the River Room) for up to 150 persons. The project was set aside when the capital campaign titled 'Opening Doors' fell short of the funding needed to construct the addition.**

**Some funds raised during Opening Doors were directed, with the permission of those who provided them, to deferred maintenance at the church. A facilities team is currently in place, which has evaluated the condition of the facility, generated and prioritized a list of present and future maintenance items.**