

# **A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

**Saints Peter & Paul Lutheran Church**

**Houghton/Hancock, MI**

June 24, 2009  
The Rev. Dr. Peter Larsen

# SETTING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

## WELL DONE, SS PETER AND PAUL

No doubt these past 2 years have been both exciting and a bit scary. You have taken a big leap of faith in your relocation. Before that, you have introduced many new ministries which have resulted in significant growth. Of note is the fact that one-third of your membership has joined since 2000. Your relocation and construction have been critical as your average worship attendance had flattened out due to “physical strangulation.” It can be said that you have reinvented yourself as a church. This report is offered to give you things to consider as you move forward.

## COMPARING YOURSELVES TO OTHER CHURCHES

Well, of course, that can be dangerous! It could lead to pride. It could also lead to discouragement. Yet it has some value in just knowing some things about yourself as a result of all that has happened in the last 10 years. Hopefully it gives a perspective from which you can make future decisions. For example, did you know that:

1. Your membership of 486 is larger than the average LCMS congregation which numbers 394.
2. Your average attendance of 231 is just a bit above the average for congregations in the Michigan District of 228 (we lack the average for North Wisconsin churches, but the Michigan District has the largest average in the Synod).
3. Of those who worship with you on a given Sunday
  - a. 25% are visitors (probably many from MTU)
  - b. 30% joined in the last 5 years
  - c. 20% are 18 or younger
  - d. 38% are between the ages of 26 and 56
  - e. The average age of those in worship is approximately the same as the average age of your membership (very unusual as the average worshiper in most LCMS churches is older than the average age of members)
  - f. The average age of your members is about 33 years old (compared to the average in your community of 38).

- g. Your giving average per worshiper to the General Fund of about \$1100 is a bit lower than the Synodical average of about \$1500
- h. Of your offerings to the General Fund, about 80% comes from 36% of your membership with is much better than the general rule of 80%-20%.

### **YET WITH GROWTH COMES CHANGE**

We surely noticed that in our personal growth stages in life from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood to middle age to old age. Churches are no different. Generally here are some observations:

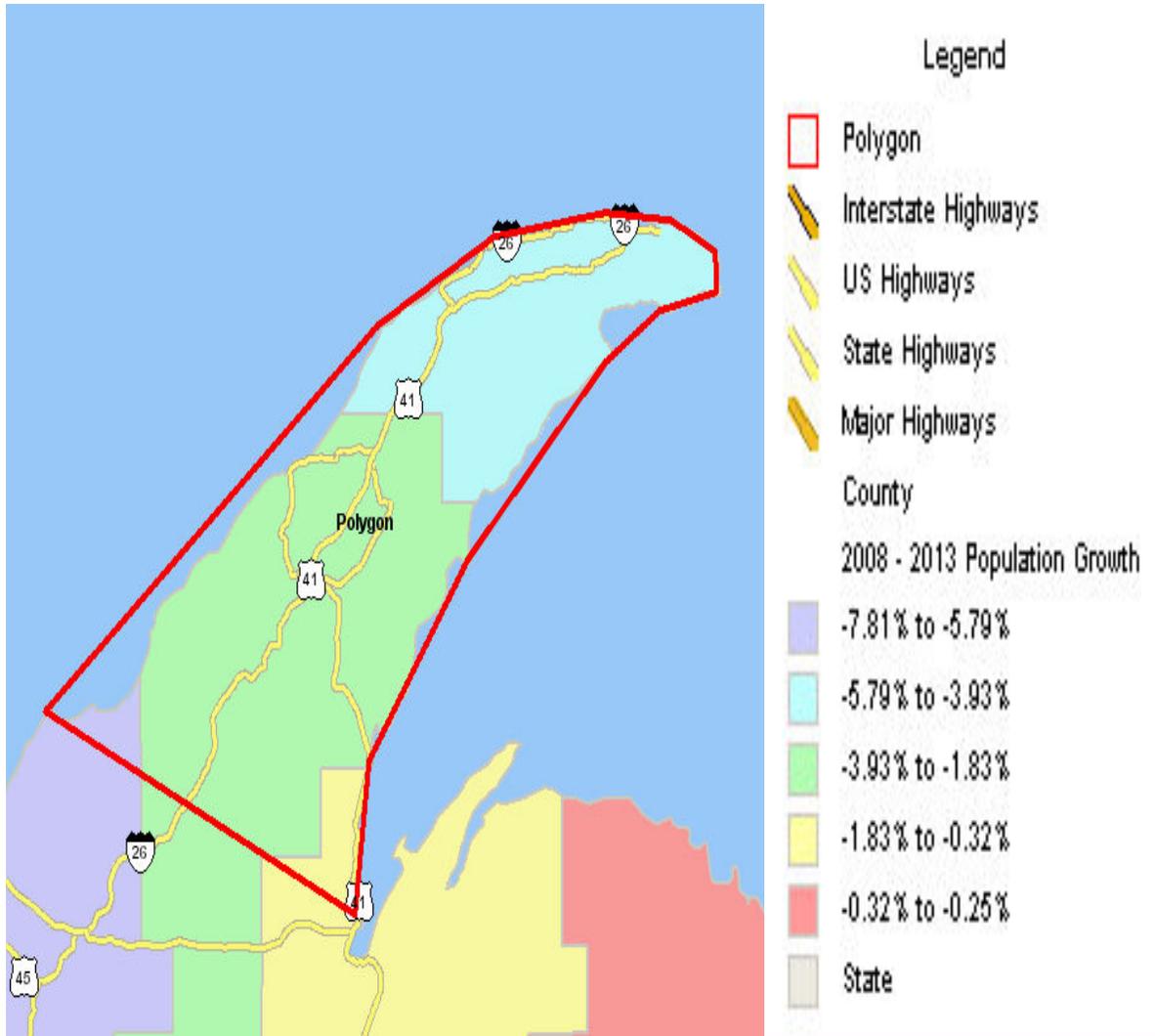
1. As churches grow, leadership comes from a smaller group and especially from staff.
2. The role of the pastor changes from shepherd to manager.
3. People need small groups to experience fellowship.
4. We can't know everyone.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Attached you will find a demographic study we did of the region you can reasonably be expected to serve. You will note a few things:

1. Houghton/Hancock has about 12,000 people, 4,000 of whom are students
2. Your 5 mile radius region in the next 5 years is expected to decline in population by about -2.6% from 37,854 to 36,884 compared to the national growth rate of 4.9%. The average age of your area is 38 compared to the national average of about 37. Your average income per household is to grow from \$44,749 to \$49,811 compared to the national growth of \$67,918 to \$75,864.
3. The "Smart Zone" is working here better than most places in Michigan which should give you some demographic stability but not overall growth.
4. We calculate that SS Peter & Paul might grow to a membership of about 800 with about 400 in worship each weekend if she were to reach 2% of her area.
5. 400 in worship will take a full time staff equivalent of 3 persons supported by another 1.5 persons in support roles.

Following is a demographic map of the region we studied.



## **SURVEY RESULTS**

51 persons completed the survey.

The most frequent POSITIVES mentioned were:

1. A sense of warmth and community among members (36 persons)
2. The pastor (35 persons)
3. The clear proclamation of the Gospel (11 persons)
4. The new facility (11 persons)

The most frequent CHALLENGES mentioned were:

1. The need to reach out to others (25 persons)
2. Finding staff to help Pastor and to expand ministry (21 persons)

3. Finances (16 persons)
4. Nurturing the spiritual growth of members (13 persons)
5. Getting involvement and leadership for ministry (13 persons)

## **ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **I. STAFFING**

#### Observations

Over and over in interviews as well as on the survey, there was a deep recognition that Pastor Weber is stretched thin. People quickly recognize the significant contributions he has made to the church, especially in his love and concern for people and in his excellent pastoral care of members. People are concerned that he is overworked. They are concerned about what happens when he retires in the not too distant future. They are concerned about his health. Some feel the church relies too heavily on him for guidance and leadership. Everyone wants to keep Pastor Weber doing what he is so gifted to do: care for people.

There is also the recognition that to expand ministry it takes more staff. There is also the recognition that youth ministry is lacking. Campus ministry is vital but people know that it relies on students. Although mentioned by only a few, we feel ministry to children needs improvement. Some also mentioned their desire for deeper studies in their faith and in Lutheran and Biblical theology.

It is simply time to add staff. It is not just a suggestion—it is critical, and the time is NOW. Buildings are important. Staff is critical.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Begin immediately the call process for an Associate Pastor
  - a. By fall develop the following job description for the Associate Pastor
    - i. working with junior & senior high youth
    - ii. leading the adult education program
    - iii. working with MTU ministry
    - iv. shared pastoral responsibilities of preaching, worship, and pastoral visitations yet retaining Pastor Weber as the primary pastoral care provided
  - b. Contact your District President late fall asking for a call list for pastors who meet your job description and who

- i. Have no more than 5 years experience
    - ii. Are no older than 30 years old
    - iii. Are strong in relationships
  - c. Contact the seminaries asking to interview the 2010 graduates who fit your job and personal descriptions and conduct interviews in January 2010
  - d. If you find an appropriate candidate from your District President's list, issue a call no later than February 2010 so you have a decision by mid March 2010.
  - e. If you do not find a candidate in the field or do not have your call accepted, call a graduate from the seminary in Spring of 2010.
  - f. If you cannot find a seminary candidate who is appropriate or are not assigned one, continue the call process from the field.
2. As the congregation grows, the next staff person should be a director of children's ministries with responsibilities for kids birth through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

## **II. FINANCES**

### Observations

The building program brings many financial challenges including mortgage payments and increased operating costs. People are concerned about that. Yet the truth is that SS Peter and Paul has experienced financial blessings almost unheard of in churches. The gifts you have received have enabled you to build a \$4,000,000 facility with very little debt. God has something in mind for you beyond a building!

While we fully understand the financial challenges you face, we must add that from our perspective you must add staff immediately. Keeping the debt low by paying off your bridge and short term loans, while understandable, is of secondary importance to adding staff. We offer 3 rationales for that:

1. Pastor Weber is overworked and needs help immediately
2. SS Peter and Paul cannot expand ministry without added staff
3. SS Peter and Paul needs a 2<sup>nd</sup> pastor to provide for future transitions

You also have a number of assets which make it possible:

1. Your people recognize both the need to add staff and the financial challenges of debt and staffing
2. Your pledges for the next 17 months to "On Holy Ground"
3. The sale of both your former church and the home you own

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To accomplish this we recommend:

1. Immediately roll into the Long Term debt the \$300,000 balance on the Bridge Loan.
2. Roll into the Long Term debt the \$250,000 of the Short Term Loan minus the proceeds from the sale of your former church and of the home.
3. Use the proceeds of "On Holy Ground" between now and December 2010 to make payments on your Long Term Debt of about \$6500 per month and save the rest to cover the expenses of calling and moving your Associate Pastor and about 1.5 years' cost of position.
4. Enter into a Second Effort Campaign beginning in fall 2010 with giving to begin in January 2011 to continue debt support and the costs of the Associate Pastor position. It is realistic to project this campaign could raise about \$400,000.
5. We also recommend an expansion of your Foundation by contacting the Lutheran Church Foundation to help you conduct Wills' Awareness Seminars to sensitize your people to the blessings of deferred giving which has been such a blessing to you in your building campaign.

## **III. LEADERSHIP**

### Observations

In any growing organization, leadership is always key. Leadership is not only responsible for getting things done but also to know what needs to get done. It also sets the direction of the organization. In smaller churches, leadership often comes from the entire group. As churches grow, leadership comes from identifiable leaders. Yet while the gift of leadership may be even identified as a spiritual gift, the practice of leadership requires training. Without that, leaders can lead in wrong directions. We have noted several things about the leadership at SS Peter and Paul:

1. A significant part of your leadership has come from Pastor Weber. While this is both understandable and even desirable, it needs to expand to others.
2. While blessed with many willing workers, SS Peter and Paul has struggled at times to find leaders.
3. Those who occupy the positions of leadership are in need of training for their roles.

4. There is also the need to better identify proper candidates for some offices.
5. Some work is needed in your constitution to prevent problems in the future in identifying the relationships of the Voters' Assembly to the Council and of the Council to boards.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Within the next year, the Constitution needs review clearly stating what matters are reserved for the Voters' Assembly leaving all other decisions to the Council.
2. Within that same time frame, the Council needs to develop a Council Policy Manual which identifies:
  - a. The Responsibilities of Council members
  - b. The Relationship of Council to the boards
  - c. Operating policies in such areas as:
    - i. Finances
    - ii. Handling donations
    - iii. Asset Protection and Security
    - iv. Treatment of staff
    - v. Conflict of interest
3. At the beginnings of both Council and Elders meetings, a growth time of no less than 20 minutes should focus, on an alternating basis, on personal spiritual growth and church management.
4. An annual Leadership Institute should be held for current and potential officers focusing on:
  - a. The Biblical concept of servant leadership
  - b. Giftedness for ministry
  - c. The structure and policies of SS Peter and Paul

## **IV. DISCIPLESHIP**

### Observations

Jesus taught us that the mission of the church is to grow disciples not make church members. Many people commented to us about their growth in their personal relationship to Jesus through the ministries of SS Peter and Paul and through its worship life. We noted especially in that regard:

1. Your small group ministry
2. Stephen Ministry
3. The addition of the Bethel Bible series to begin soon

Yet there is the need to grow the people of SS Peter and Paul. We feel opportunities for that can be found in:

1. The expansion of your Sunday school for junior high and senior high students
2. Changing the format of Sunday school to a more contemporary and spirited experience
3. The Pastor's membership class
4. Deepening members' understanding of the Scriptures and of Lutheran theology

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. After the new pastor arrives, begin a program of adult instruction focusing on:
  - a. Studies of books of the Bible
  - b. Studies of Lutheran theological history and of the Lutheran Confessions
2. Intensify the expansion of your small group ministry by regularly beginning new small groups from those who join the church
3. Expand the number of hours used in the New Members' Class focusing on the 6 Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism and encourage current members to attend.
4. By fall 2010, revamp your Sunday school to make it more focused on student involvement using a more contemporary curriculum.

## **V. OUTREACH**

### Observations

There is little doubt that God has blessed SS Peter and Paul with significant growth. Your outreach to your community has been blessed! The church is very open and inviting to its community and sees itself as a positive part of the Houghton/Hancock communities. You are to be commended for that. People have a great excitement to see how your new facilities can continue that outreach and serve the needs of your area. You are definitely not an "island to itself."

We do have some thoughts and suggestions in this area. They center around:

1. "Parents' Day Out"
2. Your nursery
3. Student leadership at MTU
4. The potential for beginning a preschool or day care center

5. Other ministries which can expand reaching others for Christ

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. It has been a struggle to find volunteers for your nursery during worship which is potentially why it has little use. We suggest you study the potential of having Children's Church during worship in which the kids are released after the children's lesson to have their own worship time during the sermon and during the distribution of Communion returning to worship near its end.
2. This fall, Parents' Day Out needs to add a Christian curriculum of Bible stories and songs to its regular activities
3. When the new Associate Pastor arrives, he should assume responsibility for providing leadership and general oversight to the ministry at MTU.
4. This fall appoint a task force to study the possibility for either preschool or day care in the following order:
  - a. Have at least 2 directors of area day care centers visit and comment on the potential use of your facility for either day care or preschool
  - b. Have licensing people from the State visit and comment on whether your building would meet State requirements for early childhood care.
  - c. Do a survey of churches in your area asking parents their interest in a Christian preschool or day care center.
5. Within the next year or two, conduct a Witness Workshop to train people in sharing their faith in Christ with others.
6. Appoint a task force of 3 or more persons to improve the church's website using it to acquaint non members with your ministries and as a tool to communicate with members. Study other church's websites to gain ideas.
7. Put a site sign on the corner of Memorial and Sharon to direct people to your church.
8. Provide handicapped parking closer to your main entrance.
9. Add hearing assistance for the hard of hearing by adding a direct signal from your audio system to their receivers.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

What a thrill it has been to see how God has blessed your church! There is a spirit of excitement and anticipation. Members are living in harmony and support of each other. The pastor is deeply loved and respected, and he loves serving his people. A positive momentum exists. The relocation of your church has given a sense of a new tomorrow.

Yet this momentum must continue. With all the growth have come new challenges. Churches do not exist because of their buildings. God's people have often lived without buildings. It is the

Gospel and mission which keep churches alive. It is always a bit scary to move into uncharted waters—especially when finances are involved. We pray that SS Peter and Paul will continue to be led by the Spirit of Christ and not give in to a spirit of timidity. It is time to seize the moment and to continue to be open to the Spirit's leading as you serve Christ.