

8/11/2021: Below you will find the original minutes with further clarifications from our joint Task Force, Pastor Wilck, and Pastor Imani.

Lutheran Church of Our Saviour (LCOS) Congregational Meeting Agenda:

Questions regarding Evangelical Church of the Reformation (RLC) or possible merger.

Date | time Sunday, July 25, 2021, 11:15 a.m. | *Meeting called to order by* Cindy Borzilleri

In Attendance

Pastor Wilck (meeting lead/facilitator), Pastor Imani Olear, the Task Force (TF), and LCOS Congregation.

1. Role of the Joint Task Force

- Pastor Wilck advised that the TF is using the ELCA “*Together in Mission*” (TIM) document as a *guidebook for the blending of ministries through merger or consolidation.*
- Pastor introduced the members of the TF: From LCOS - Pastor Wilck, Simone Harter (recording secretary), Cindy Borzilleri, Dick Ransom, and Ken Keller. From RLC - Pastor Imani, Steve Brady, Robin Spindler, and Hans DeBruyn.
- Pastor read the role of the TF from the TIM - *The work of the task force is to assist the congregations in making a decision. In ELCA polity, the congregation is the only entity empowered to make decisions of this magnitude. It is recommended that the Task Force or Congregation Councils bring forth a recommendation about consolidation or merger. Activities that the task force may use to involve the congregations are many. Forums and cottage meetings are helpful. At times the task force may want the congregations to help them in their deliberations. One early discussion might be around the advantages and disadvantages of merger and consolidation. (See definitions from the Office of the Secretary.) The task force could hold a meeting for each of the congregations where members are given the opportunity to list their questions, concerns and/or opinions on newsprint or with sticky notes or note cards. A key question for the Task Force throughout the process is “How can we assist our congregations to make this decision?”*

The task force has several options that it may propose:

- *To recommend merger or consolidation*
- *To recommend the development of an agreement for merger or consolidation by a task force for future consideration of the congregations*
- *To recommend the end of the process*
- *To recommend some other option such as the formation of a multiple point parish*
- *or the closure of one or more congregations*

*If merger or consolidation is recommended, **the task force will develop enabling resolutions to be voted by each of the congregations.***

When the congregations are presented with an option they have the option to approve or disapprove merger or consolidation or approve or disapprove to discuss further development of a different agreement.

If the vote is to move forward, options for continuing the process at this point are as follows:

- *Appoint a new task force.*
- *Request the old task force to continue working.*
- *Use the congregational councils as the task force.*
- *If the decision is made to move forward, a budget should be approved for the task force*
- *to cover the services of an attorney.*

- The TF has met 3 times. They are meeting weekly.
- The 1st meeting was basically a meet, greet, and get-to-know each other's congregations.
- In the 2nd meeting we began to look at some of the demographic data of our community in which this congregation resides (Chili, Gates, and the 19th Ward.) We are looking at opportunities for missions, ministries, and the demographics in those areas.
- We have discussed the following programs: Worship and Music, and Stewardship.
- Upcoming programs for discussion are Program, Evangelism Outreach, Staffing, Community Service, and Fellowship and Community Building.
- The best way to describe the JTF is like a pyramid. The JTF is at the top of the pyramid; they are information gatherers about both congregations (where they're working together, can work together or cannot work together.) As these things come together, a **Recommendation** will be brought forth to the two church Councils. The Councils will deliberate on how to proceed with the merger (if that is the course we want to undertake.) And then it is brought to each of the congregations. Ultimately the congregations make the decisions for merger (a vote to be taken for a merger or not.)
- *MERGER: A "merger" is defined here, for ecclesiastical purposes, as involving a congregation giving up its separate identity and uniting with an already existing congregation (one congregation merges into another, continuing congregation). RLC will merge with LCOS. LCOS will not lose our name or identity. It is RLC that will be dissolved.*
- *CONSOLIDATION: A "consolidation" is defined here, for ecclesiastical purposes, as involving two or more congregations that join together to become a new entity with a new name and a new congregation-identification number (as assigned by the Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). This is not what we are discussing at this point.*

2. Question(s) submitted: Will our schedule of church services change because another church is coming in? Will there be two pastors?

- Initially we discussed the worship schedule with RLC that our fall schedule will be at 9:00 a.m. and 11:15 a.m., and RLC will worship at 10:00 a.m. Our Sunday School will be downstairs.
- Regarding the pastors, it is a staffing question that we cannot address until it is discussed with the Synod/Bishop.
- Staffing that involves the organist will be discussed in the future. We have no distinct answer currently. At present, we will be maintaining the substitute organists for services. We will look at hiring a full-time Music Director.

3. Question(s) submitted: A) How is it that if nothing or congregation has decided to merge, that the German School is moving in and measurements for items have been taken? According to the newsletter it sounds like a done deal!! B) I read about the German church being held at our church in the newspaper. Can we be INFORMED. There were many pages included in the newsletter to register and inform us of what was happening after the fact. Can we be INFORMED.

- Yes, the German School has moved in. Classes will begin in September. It was an action/vote taken by the Council Meeting in June. The school will meet on Saturday only for 4 hours. They are renting space from us and will be utilizing the following rooms: Nursery, Pre-school, Augsburg, Youth, and Narthex. Those rooms will be available to us on Sundays.
- If we need the Augsburg Room for an event, they are willing to adjust.
- **German School clarification:** The GS is a separate entity from RLC. They contracted with RLC in the past, due to RLC being the only German speaking congregation in UPNYS. However, GS makes independent decisions regarding creating contracts with space rental. They have created an MOU with LCOS. They are simply building users.
- **Clarification #2:** The relationship with RLC and what the JTF will recommend is not a done deal.
- **Clarification #3:** "I read about the German Church being held at our church." The German Church is a part of RLC however, no decision about their worship has been determined due to the size of that congregation. The German School - a separate institution, will be at LCOS.

4. Question(s) submitted: If the two congregations merge, are there any rules established by the Synod that will require we handle the merger in certain ways? I.e., personnel, finances, building, etc. What decisions are we allowed to make in the handling of a merger?

- As explained, please refer to Section 1. As we talk about the merger along the way, we will determine what that is going to look like and how it is going to play out.
- **Clarification:** Merger has not been decided - it is one of many options as indicated above. In regards to any option, both congregations have equal voice and vote.
- **Clarification #2:** No change in legal entities, can be a "done deal" without Attorney General and Legal representation approval.

5. Question(s) submitted: Will we have a new election of church officers, or will we continue as is?

Both congregations are operating under the ELCA Constitution, however, we will be looking at the Bylaws to decide how we will merge our Bylaws. We will decide on what the Council will look like, members on the Council, and who will be on the Council. We would have members from each congregation to form the new Council. **This will be looked at down the road.**

6. Question(s) submitted: Will the large Meeting Room remain a Chapel or go back to being a meeting room as it was meant to be?

It will probably remain as a Chapel. It is a very functional room. It can be opened up, and meetings can be held there (tables can be set up rather quickly.) Having a Chapel can allow smaller services to take place there or choose to do something else.

Clarification: Depending on the decisions of the congregations involved, will determine what that will look like. However, even though there is chapel furniture and set up, it doesn't mean that you can't hold meetings there.

7. Question(s) submitted: A) I know that the members of the Council are elected by the congregation to represent us, but do you think that perhaps the issue of opening our doors to another church would have been presented to the congregation in another way rather than reading the minutes of a meeting sent to us in a newsletter? Perhaps a congregation wide email (mailings are certainly done for other reasons.) Can we be INFORMED. I am in favor of welcoming anyone to worship with us and I am sure the members of LCOS feel the same way. But can we be INFORMED. B) Why hasn't the congregation been informed right from the get-go of all decisions made about any & all discussions of this? Emails don't do it!

That was a way to inform you. We were indeed opening the door to RLC as they needed a **place to pause** and consider where they wanted to do next. We hoped to have made that as clear as possible to the congregation. There is no under-handedness. **There should not be shame and blame of secrecy as it was not our intent.**

We will communicate further via Temple Talks before or after service on a Sunday morning regarding the progress with the TF. Remember, the TF is gathering information and will make a recommendation.

Clarification: We will also communicate updates in the following ways: Newsletter, Website, Video played on repeat in the Narthex television. If you have suggestions on other ways you would like to be updated, please let us know.

8. Question(s) submitted: I feel the merger has already been decided. Reformation has been invited to move their physical property as well as their congregation to LCOS. How do you tell them to take their stuff and leave? Again, I welcome anyone to worship with us.

Again, the congregation can decide to tell RLC to take their stuff and leave. We do not think that is the mood of the congregation or is it the mood of the person who wrote this? We opened our hearts to say to RLC, **“Here is an opportunity for you to pause, reflect, and relax.”** It is also an opportunity whether that moves into a merger. We need to rejoice and thank God that we have that “one-body image” as we become one.

Clarification: Pause, Reflect and Relax - RLC sold their building and is experiencing different levels of grief. The Pausing is allowing them to figure out next steps. The two pastors discussed giving RLC a home temporarily and how we can develop continued relationships between our two congregations.

Clarification #2: Reflection for RLC and LCOS is being done by the JTF to see what they can imagine and present to our congregations.

Clarification #3: It's hard to relax if you don't have a place to put your stuff, however, even though RLC is utilizing space at LCOS they have also placed several items in storage at an offsite location.

9. Question from the floor: In September, we will have services at 9:00 and 11:15, and RLC at 10:00. If we merge and get to know each other, why are we not worshipping together, like today?

This is something that we can move toward. The TF can make that recommendation. We do not have a distinct answer currently, but it is something to explore and discuss. If the congregation votes for merger, this is a conversation to have. We are hoping by the end of August/early September, we will have a fairly good idea if both congregations want to proceed with merger.

Clarification: Because RLC is grieving and looking at their own systems as well as their own staffing, it's important for them to maintain some autonomy in worship. However, joint worship opportunities allow us to be together as the body of Christ.

Clarification #2: The JTF is working on ways for the two congregations to have joint fellowship opportunities that are outside of worship. This includes options for Sunday School, Bible Study and good ol' ice cream and other opportunities.

10. Question from the floor: Are merger or consolidation our only choices?

There is also another option for two congregations to operate under the same building.

Question: Can we offer them a choice of joining our church? That is what a merger is. Not sure what is being asked behind this question. RLC will become the members of LCOS (**Clarification:** if we choose the option to merge)

Clarification #2: IF we choose merger, our (LCOS) name does not change. They become part of LCOS.

Clarification #3: "Joining our church" is a different process that skips the legal steps that need to be taken for financial and state processes.

Clarification #4: Because we are separate entities/corporations we have to follow the legal steps.

11. Question from the floor: Is there a way we can maintain a name for RLC to have some identity if a merger should take place?

We do not think we would be called "LCOS/RLC." We may identify the Chapel as RLC's Chapel to lift up some identity that they can hold on to.

Pastor Imani asked for clarification - if the person can say more about their question. Is there more behind the question regarding why couldn't RLC just join? Is there another thought underneath that? We just want to get to the heart of everything.

The person's reply was, "No, they just wanted to understand all the definitions." Pastor Imani advised we will provide that information (reference Section 1 above.)

12. Question from the floor: Is there another Congregational Meeting scheduled?

The Council will be meeting on August 16th, at which point the TF hopes to have a recommendation. If not, no later than September.

Following that Council Meeting is a Congregational Meeting. Also, along the way, we will have Temple Talks as mentioned earlier.

Given RLC's experience with the sale of their property (from December 2020 and just ended this month), one piece of advice is to conduct Town Hall Meeting/Temple Talk...communicate, communicate, communicate.

Question 13: (Please note this was not submitted during the Congregation Meeting on July 25th but came to the Task Force.) “I have heard that Pastor Wilck will retire in October and that Pastor Olear will take over LCOS. Do either or both congregations know this?”

There has been no conversation around retirement, “taking over” or change in staffing of either congregation. If any statements are made about the process that anyone is in question of, we recommend that you reach out to the JTF or the pastors. We will always be transparent with LCOS and RLC regarding staff or procedures that need congregation votes.

Also, according to UPNYS and Model Constitution, **Chapter 9.**

***C9.01.** Authority to call a pastor shall be in this congregation by at least a two-thirds vote of voting members present and voting at a meeting legally called for that purpose. Before a call is issued, the officers, or a committee elected by [this congregation][the Congregation Council] to recommend the call, shall seek the advice and help of the bishop of the synod.

Question 14: If we merge, does this mean we will be having two ministers? How will that work?

Please refer to question #2.

Question 15: Will Pastor Imani and Pablo Bustos have a position on staff?

Pr. Imani and Pablo Bustos are currently called to RLC. Any discussion around staffing will be after further discussion and recommendation of the JTF. Also, refer to question #2.

Question 16: What room will the German School take over? When and how will this take place?

Please refer to question #3.

COMMENTS:

- I do not think LCOS/RLC members know each other well enough to consider a merger! Both councils have had several meetings and have gotten to know each other, but average members have not had that privilege. Social events are necessary!

Please refer to the above questions - but we are working on social events for both congregations and no recommendations have been made for any decisions around merger.

- LOVE, LOVE, LOVE
- I love the reports from Council meetings being included in the newsletter.
- Please continue to keep us informed.

Meeting Adjourned

The congregation is encouraged to ask questions or bring their concerns to Pastor or the TF. Again, the TF meets every week and will review your questions or concerns. Communication is a two-way street. We will keep you informed in the various forum.

The meeting minutes will be postal mailed to the congregation.

The meeting ended at approximately 27 minutes.

~~Meeting Minutes submitted by Simone Harter
(Task Force Recording Secretary, Council Financial Secretary, and Office Manager)