

Reflections on Ministry and Context

First Lutheran Church

Lincoln, NE

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?

FLC is actively and prayerfully engaged in addressing social concerns in our community.

Our location in a refugee resettlement city has led us to welcome our immigrant community into our congregation. We provide space in our building for a South Sudanese congregation to hold services in Nuer. Our efforts to help resettle two new Afghan immigrant families, and our recent gift of financial support for Ukrainian refugees, are further responses to this need in our community.

Poverty remains a troubling presence in Lincoln, and FLC provides support to a wide range of programs for people in need. This includes assistance for students at several local elementary schools through the Backpack Program and Kicks for Kids, regular collection of food donations for the Lutheran Food Pantry, supporting Matt Talbot Kitchen, where members, including our youth, regularly volunteer to serve meals, and assisting with Meals on Wheels deliveries.

Beyond these social concerns, we are aware of ongoing burdens that individuals in our congregation and community are carrying, and which in some cases have become weightier during the pandemic. FLC has long supported the training of Stephen Ministers, and currently several of our members serve in this capacity. In recognition of the particular stresses caused by COVID, this past Lenten season the congregation was asked to tell their pandemic stories—of grief, hardships, challenges, and joys—in visual form. Individuals created over 150 small canvasses, which now are on display in our main gathering area outside the sanctuary.

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

First Lutheran operates an annual campaign that asks members to commit to financial support as well as develop individual plans for service and discipleship in the coming year. The congregation has invested significant funds in the past five years through a capital campaign and by taking on a mortgage. Both financial vehicles funded upgrades to the church building to make it more welcoming and more accommodating to differently-abled persons.

FLC places a high priority on benevolence, and for years has targeted a level of 20% of its budget (“double tithing”) for this purpose, supporting a variety of local and worldwide ministries, in addition to providing a generous contribution to the ELCA and the Nebraska Synod. In order to accommodate the costs of the recent renovation project, we have lowered the budgeted benevolence percentage somewhat, but are following a plan to return to the 20% target as soon as feasible. Beyond budgeted benevolences, many FLC members make individual, designated contributions to a variety of ministries through their church offerings. On one Sunday each month our children make a “noisy offering,” helped by adults emptying their purses and pockets of change. These offerings



are designated for a special concern in the community or the world, and they help educate our children in the practice of giving to those in need. FLC stands out as one of the most benevolently focused congregations in the state.

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.

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

In its effort to serve those in need here in Lincoln and around the world, FLC partners with local, national, and international programs run both by church and non-church organizations. On the national and international level, we support both Lutheran and ecumenical aid organizations, including Lutheran World Hunger, Lutheran World Relief, Global Mission in Action, Bread for the World, and Crop Walk. On the local level, we support Lutheran organizations such as Lutheran Family Services, Tabitha Health (a Lincoln-based senior care facility), the Lutheran Metro Food Pantry (joint venture between ELCA and LCMS congregations), the University of Nebraska's Lutheran Center, as well as a wide range of non-church agencies and programs, including Matt Talbot Kitchen, the Backpack Program, Kicks for Kids, Meals on Wheels, Fresh Start (a home for women who have been abused), and Bridges to Hope (a program that assists formerly incarcerated individuals in transitioning back into the community). Our church building is available for community groups, notably AA.

FLC partners with other churches in offering a Vacation Bible School program and holds an ecumenical service each Thanksgiving with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Our confirmation instruction includes visits to various places of worship in Lincoln.

FLC has a spirit of engaged learning about different organizations in our city and beyond. Adult Forum plays an important role here in inviting representatives from these organizations to the meeting hour between services. Our youth gain insights into local and national needs through volunteering in Lincoln, and through their mission/service trips.

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

First Lutheran has been very fortunate in not having had many conflicts within our congregation over the years. However, there has been significant disagreement over our response to the Covid 19 pandemic. FLC followed CDC guidelines and took a very conservative approach to the pandemic. For months at a time we closed our newly renovated building to services, meetings, and any other gatherings. Conflict arose over these measures, which some members believed were too strict. In the meantime, we have reopened the church building (while continuing to use live-stream and Zoom to reach those still unable to attend in person) and have worked diligently to retain members. Unfortunately, though, we have lost some members due to our Covid policy.

A compounding area of concern arose in the wake of losing several staff members in quick succession, albeit not due to any conflicts or ill-will, but because new opportunities opened for them. Unfortunately, these losses occurred during the height of the pandemic. As a congregation, we have worked hard to provide interim solutions to help FLC maintain its well-earned reputation of being a great place to worship in community and grow in faith. We have had outstanding interim pastors and lay leaders who have done a fantastic job. In both of the situations described here, we have gotten stronger as a congregation. We choose to look upon them as growth opportunities that have strengthened our overall resolve.



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