

**A Pastoral Challenge  
for  
Bethel Lutheran Church and School**

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**A Biblical Perspective:** *“He (Jesus) replied, ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”* (Acts 1:7a, 8)

**Bethel Lutheran Church and School Translation:** *“He (Jesus) replied, ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in **Cupertino**, in all of **West San Jose**, and **Saratoga**, in **Sunnyvale**, and to the ends of the earth.’”*

One of the most quoted Biblical texts for the role of Christians and the church is Matthew 28:19, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,…”* Too often this understanding of evangelism is too narrowly defined by numbers (how many members can we draw into our congregations) and conversionism (the task getting others to believe what you believe the way you believe it). True evangelism begins with service and relationship, articulated well in Acts 1:7a & 8. Making disciples is the product of bearing witness. . Service in Jesus’ name reaches out to make a difference in people’s lives for their sake and not the sake of the church. To serve means being in relationship to others in a manner that opens us to know the needs and hopes of those served.

**The Challenge:** *“That Bethel Lutheran Church and School refocus every aspect of its ministry and work to reach out and more effectively serve the multi-cultural community in which it is located in the name of Jesus Christ.”*

The *vision* for ministry is to become a two site congregation that is more reflective of the multi-culture and multi-ethnic community in which we serve. The plan is to develop a two-site ministry in partnership with the Synod and ELCA with the Stelling site more focused on Asian Ministries. We see the Stelling site as a “birthing center” for new ethnic and racially diverse ministries.

**The Approach:**

**Stelling Site:**

1. Work with the Sierra Pacific Synod and ELCA to seek appropriate Pastoral leadership to develop and grow the ministry.
2. Work in close partnership to share resources that will enhance and grow this ministry.
3. Develop shared opportunities for fellowship and service to the community in ways that will enhance both sites.

**Bethel School:**

1. Discover new and important ways to connect with and get to know the families of our school.
2. Include them as part of the Bethel Community no matter what their faith or church background.
3. Learn more about how we can serve them as a vital part of our community.
4. Where appropriate, explore ways to invite school families to be a strong part of Bethel’s ministry.

**Finch Site:**

1. Get to know our neighbors and the community we serve (especially those people whose cultural heritage and background is different from our own).
2. Work to discover the needs of our community and how we can better respond to those needs.
3. Establish a stronger relationship with our neighbors and community through service and welcome.
4. Discover ways to more effectively invite our neighbors to become participants in our ministry.

**The Focus:** *“To redirect Bethel’s primary focus in all aspects of our work and ministry toward those who are not here!”*

## **The Method: (to include both sites as the appropriate Pastoral leadership is secured)**

**1a.** Establish a Task Force whose primary objective is to network within this community with community leaders, other faith communities, service organizations, local schools, community organizations, etc. to better define and understand both the needs and the challenges in this rapidly changing multi-cultural environment.

**1b.** As an outgrowth of our faith in God's Holy Spirit to empower us to be witnesses in this place and time, begin a process of ongoing education using available resources to help Bethel participants to better understand the cultures and people who live all around us.

**2.** Develop action plans in all aspects of our ministry to respond to the needs and concerns of this community.

**3.** Be more intentional in inviting neighbors and friends to be a part of our mission toward developing disciples of Jesus Christ.

## **The Tools:**

Using the "Up, Out, and In" of our present Mission Statement, structure all aspects of our ministry to use this triadic formula to develop and measure our progress toward becoming a multi-cultural congregation.

### **"UP" - Our Mission is to GROW & EQUIP one another as devoted followers of Jesus Christ,**

Our responsibility to be WITNESSES for Jesus always begins with growing in our relationship to God. If we are to be that place of witness and service in Jesus name where we can be about inviting people into a relationship with God through Jesus and help guide others toward the experience of the life-changing power of God's Spirit that changes us from the inside out, we must be committed to growing our relationship to God. To assume that being a follower and disciple of Jesus means worshipping on Sunday morning alone is not enough. Worship is important. But to be a disciple – a follower of Jesus means that our relationship with God is central to all that we are, everyday, every minute of our lives.

The GROW & EQUIP aspect of our Mission is about making our relationship to God our number one priority. Christianity is the life-long process of allowing God to graciously transform us into the people we are meant to be. Discipleship means daily prayer and Bible reading, as well as ongoing reflection and listening for God. Discipleship means being a part of a Bible study where spiritual growth can happen in community. Discipleship means growing towards the discipline of tithing (dollars, energy and time). Discipleship means ongoing commitment to the use our gifts to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

**"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2 NRSV)**

### **"OUT" - Our Mission is to CARE FOR & SERVE others through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Not only did Jesus leave us with his Great Commission, but also in Matthew 22:34-40, he gave us the Great Commandment. When Jesus was asked what was the most important of all God's commandments, he answered, *"you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And a second is like it, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

The first commandment relates to the first part of our Mission as described above. It is this second commandment, however, that moves us into the next aspect of our Mission: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* As we learn to love those around us we discover a natural desire to use our gifts to serve others.

The crucial importance of this part of our Mission is underlined by Jesus' own example. Jesus not only proclaimed the Good News and challenged people into a life of discipleship, but wherever he saw hurting people or people in need, he responded in love by serving them. Jesus demonstrated to his disciples when he washed their feet that if they were to be his followers they would follow his example of being a servant. We cannot claim to be fulfilling the Mission of Jesus if we are not focused on serving others in love.

This is not a serving that grows out of guilt or obligation or that looks for reward or recognition. Rather, it is a natural response to God's grace that is motivated by gratitude, characterized by love, and results in a life lived more as God intended. There is no greater opportunity in life than using your God-given gifts to serve others in response to the grace and love of God.

**“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15 NRSV)**

**“You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” (John 13:13-17 NRSV)**

**“IN” - Our Mission is to INVITE & WELCOME people into a relationship with God through Jesus,**

The INVITE & WELCOME portion of our Mission is a response to Jesus' answer to those disciples just before he ascended into heaven in Acts 1:8b, “...and you will be my witnesses...” When Jesus first launched his ministry he began by proclaiming the Good News to those who were without hope. From the beginning of Christianity, being messengers of the Gospel has been at the heart of God's calling for God's people.

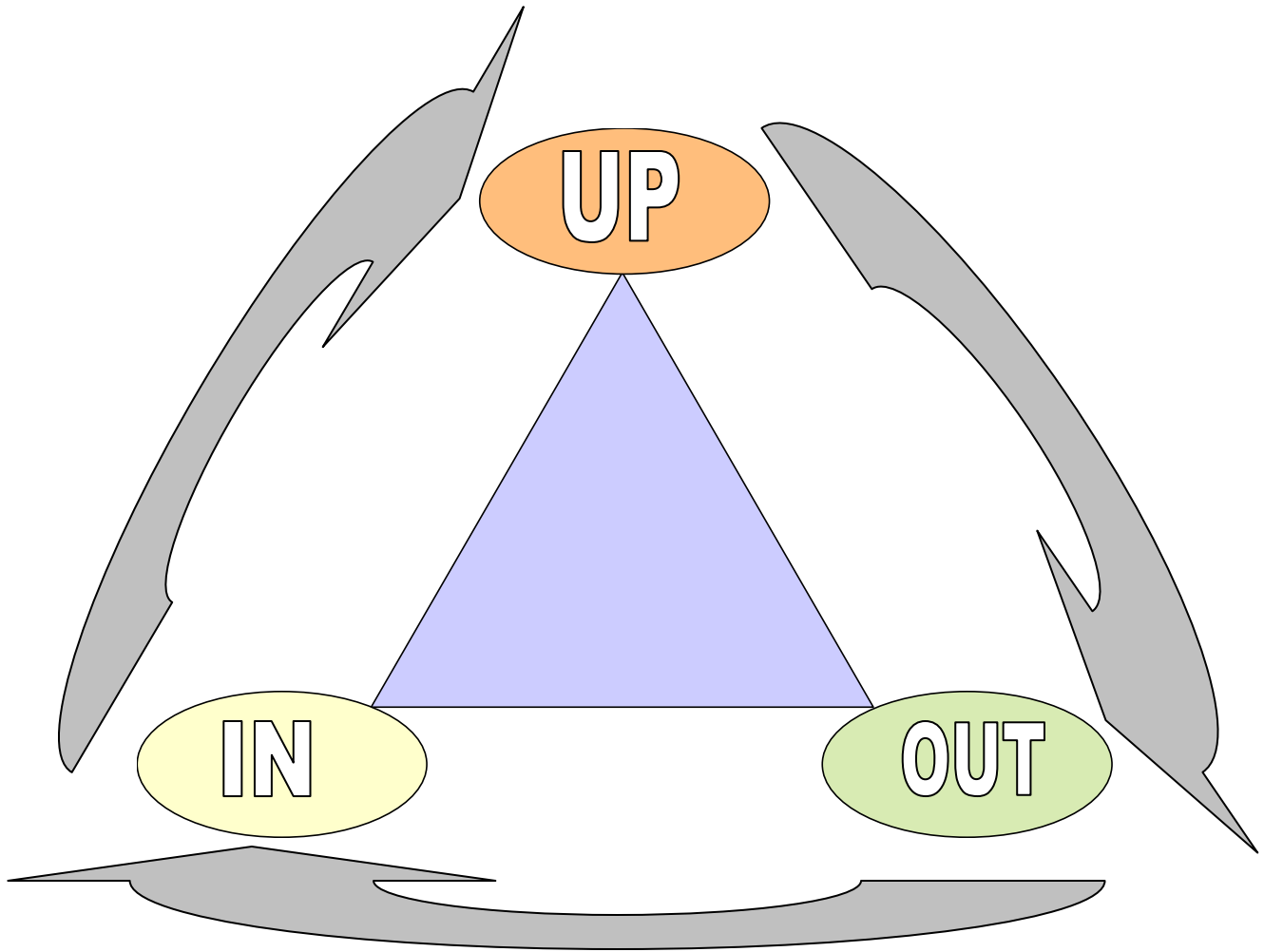
The “IN” of our mission is not to “turn inward.” Congregations that are focused inwardly too easily lose sight of Jesus' call. Too often congregations slip into a “club” mentality rather than seeing themselves as “mission partners” with Jesus. In a “club,” the institution exists exclusively for the benefit of its members. By contrast “Mission Partners” exist to fulfill the mission. Rather concern for the context, culture, and needs of those outside the institution guide the methods and efforts of those inside the institution. The defining question is “How can we more effectively reach those who are all around us and in need of the Gospel?”

The INVITE & WELCOME portion of our Mission statement reminds us of this crucial focus. It moves us beyond just our own preferences and needs to focus on how we can be more effective reach that growing segment of our population that is outside the Church and for whom the Gospel may be like a foreign language. Part of fulfilling this aspect of our Mission is to discover how we can translate the language of the Gospel into forms of ministry that are relevant in our rapidly changing culture.

In a culture where institutions are suspect and the majority of people are unfamiliar with the Church, personal invitation is the crucial vehicle by which we can carry out this aspect of our Mission. By building authentic relationships with those around us – both church and unchurched, we have the opportunity to share our faith and invite others to join us in an experience of worship and service that is meaningful and life changing.

*John 1:45-46 Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." <sup>46</sup> Nathaniel said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."*

Notice, the “UP, OUT, IN” cycle becomes a circle – each part feeding to the next part – each one nourishing and leading to the next.



Imagine with me, if you will, a place whose table is filled with people who truly represent this community in its diversity united not in ethnicity, nor in appearance, nor culture, nor even in agreement on the many challenges and issues of the day. But rather united in the body and blood of the one who suffered and died so that we maybe one in him, Jesus Christ himself.