

KAIROS

Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence
Burke, Virginia
Sept. 19/20, 2009
Pastor Renee LiaBraaten, Consultant

RESOURCE ASSESSMENT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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PROCESS

In preparation for launching a Capital Campaign, Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence engaged Kairos and Associates to conduct a Resource Assessment during the summer of 2009, with Pastor Renee LiaBraaten serving as the consultant. A planning team, referred to throughout as the Resource Assessment Advisory Council (RAAC), was convened to chart a course for the process, provide for all logistical arrangements, and to strategize with Pastor LiaBraaten to achieve the maximum participation of representative individuals and groups within the congregation. The members of the RAAC included Dick Bowes, Jane Curtis, Monique Fraedrich, Ben Glass, Lynne Imre, Ivan Ives, Linda Liptak, David Steiner, Bob Vitter and Pastor Brent Thalacker. The objectives of the Resource Assessment were as follows:

- Discern how the proposed Sanctuary/Narthex Remodeling Project supports and enhances the mission of the congregation.
- Determine the current level of awareness and understanding of the proposed project present within the congregation.
- Assist congregational leaders in how to communicate the proposed project and the goals of the campaign in an effective and timely manner to build agreement and excitement.
- Identify leadership and key financial supporters, whose involvement is crucial in raising the necessary enthusiasm and resources to carry out the goals of the campaign.

Interviews and Focus Groups

To implement the assessment, Pastor LiaBraaten was at Abiding Presence on July 18-20 to conduct 29 confidential interviews and two focus groups. A total of 41 people participated in the interviews (representing 29 households) and 11 people participated in the focus groups. A specific format was followed for each interview and focus group to gather quantifiable and comparable data in the form of advice, perceptions, opinions and other pertinent information. To insure confidentiality, raw data for the interviews and focus groups will remain in the Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence file at the Kairos corporate office.

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

(The first number on the right indicates how many of those interviewed responded with this answer. The second **bold** number indicates the number of Focus Groups that responded with this answer.)

1. How long have you been involved with Abiding Presence?

Length of attendance ranged from a few months to 31 years.

Less than 2 years	1	16-20 yrs.	9
2-5 yrs.	2	21-31 yrs.	8
6-10 yrs.	3	(2 Charter Members)	
11-15 yrs.	6		

2. The top six things that initially attracted people to Abiding Presence:

1. Location 14 **2**
2. Friendly, welcoming, genuine, accepting people 12 **2**
3. Lutheran 11 **2**
4. Liked the smaller size 8 **2**
5. Welcoming pastor 7 **2**
6. Informal, relaxed atmosphere 6

† *“This church passed the sweater test—everyone was not in suits and fancy dresses. It was very relaxed and welcoming.”*

† *“Our children loved the puppets and begged us to come back.”*

3. The top five most meaningful aspects of the congregation:

1. Fellowship / Sense of Family 14 **2**
2. Genuinely caring people 11 **2**
3. Great music 9 **2**
4. Opportunities for involvement in meaningful ministries 9 **2**
5. Strong ministry to children and youth / Puppet Ministry 7 **2**

† *“The most meaningful things to us are the relationships we have formed here and the way the programs enrich us in our individual faith journeys.”*

† *“People here have servant’s hearts and they are very responsive to need.”*

† *“Our interim pastor is a shot in the arm and has given us a lot of good insights. I love the way our church is so active in such a variety of ways. This place is alive!”*

† *“We have a great music ministry here. It really is a ministry and not just a program. Our choir is a very spiritual group, and a very supportive group.”*

4. How would you articulate the mission of Abiding Presence?

1. Serve our members and reach out to community 13 **2**
2. Nurture spiritual growth 10 **2**
3. Need to strengthen our outreach to others 9
4. Help others 7 **2**
5. Pass on faith to children 7

6. Support each other 7
7. Teach/Share Word of God 7

† *“In a changing world, we are called to be an ‘abiding presence’ reflecting our faith in Christ. Our faith needs to be strong enough to preserve itself and to adapt so that it can be passed on to future generations. We need to offer something that will help our grandchildren face their challenges.”*

† *“Our mission is to show the love of Christ through our actions and in how we interact with each other, the community and the world.”*

† *“We are here to provide a genuine sense of community—an oasis.”*

† *“We are here to strengthen the family of God—to grow and become an anchor for those in our community.”*

† *“Our mission is to be a place where people can find refuge and guidance—a place where Christ comes to us—where we can deepen our faith and also impart this faith to others.”*

† *“There needs to be an inward and outward focus in our mission. We have to offer our people ways to develop their faith and we have to offer ways to outwardly express our faith.”*

† *“It is great that we enjoy our life together here at church, but we need to realize that we are a piece of something bigger. It is not always about us, but about how we can help others.”*

† *“We are very effective at ministering to those who walk in the door, but not very motivated to go out into the neighborhood. We need to do both. The ‘born Lutheran’ attitude can make others feel second class. There is not as much denominational loyalty as there used to be, so we need to be careful about this language. We are called to reach out to a very diverse area in terms of religious background.”*

† *“The community around us continues to change and this creates new opportunities for us to shift from an inward to an outward focus.”*

† *“I want our church to become known for its service outside these walls—for being the hands and feet of Christ in the world.”*

† *“We are here to provide a ministry of love and hospitality for the community, especially for the many military families who move in and out. This place provides a real haven and a chance to connect and be fed.”*

† *“There is a lot going on here, but there is not a central vision that ties it all together. We do not have a sense of ‘OK—Here’s where we are going.’”*

† *“Everything is a little muddled right now. We don’t really have a focus in our mission. We are in a sort of pause.”*

5. In what ways do you feel the proposed sanctuary / narthex design will strengthen the ministry and outreach of the congregation?

1. Improve worship experience through better sound and lighting 19 2
2. Create a more inviting, inspiring worship space 13 2
3. Provide better support for various worship styles 8 2
4. Create a better first impression for visitors 7 1
5. It will not make much difference 7

6. Create closer sense of connection in worship 6 1

† *“The remodeling of our sanctuary will communicate vibrancy, energy and beauty and encourage people to invite others.”*

† *“People who come in are hit with the visuals. The carpet has been there for 25 years. This sends a message. The aesthetics are not as important as what is going on among the people. Our church has always been kind of utilitarian—the soul of the church is the people. But when the aesthetics interfere with some people’s ability to worship, then we have an issue.”*

† *“It will be an invigorating start to helping things feel fresh and well maintained. It is a way to relight the fire.”*

† *“So much of this needs to be done just to preserve what we have, and it is wise to address the aesthetics rather than just do the repairs.”*

† *“It will definitely make our worship service more inspiring. I have never liked the fact that we worship in what feels like a gym.”*

† *“It is about time we do something. We’ve been reconfiguring forever! It doesn’t work in all the odd configurations. We are not a mission church anymore. We do not have to live with cement block walls. We’re 30 years old and we need to move past this.”*

6. Top suggested changes to the proposed goals:

1. No changes 11 1
2. Prioritize the plan and address essential maintenance first 10 1
3. Do not feel we need to do such an extensive make over 8
4. Altar area needs to remain flexible 7
5. Do not like choir shell 5
6. Altar area needs to be more inspiring 5
7. Need more details about components and costs 5 1

† *“We need to keep up with the times and address maintenance issues, but we don’t need all the extra stuff. The top priorities should be to improve the sound and lighting.”*

† *“We need to keep our worship space as flexible as possible. We don’t know what shape worship will take in ten years, so we need to keep the space open for future changes. Have we made sure that our space is handicapped accessible?”*

† *“We need to see more details in terms of the various components and related costs so that we have a chance to set priorities if we can’t do it all. We also need to see an artist’s rendering so that this feels more compelling”.*

† *“It seems as if there is not much room to make changes. Things have already been watered down a lot to reach a consensus. It has taken a long time to get the dreamers and the practical people to meet.”*

† *“We are on the cusp of growing or shrinking. An updated sanctuary may help us to grow. I’m open to the project but concerned about the expense. The sanctuary renovation is not our only need. The parsonage also needs some major work. Is the entire modification necessary?”*

† *“We simply have to improve the acoustics because we can’t hear. And we need to make sure that the lights are easy to change and energy efficient.”*

7. How do you feel about the timing of launching a capital campaign this fall?

1. Concerned about the economy 12
2. Need new pastor on board first 11 1
3. We should start campaign this fall 7 2
4. Concerned that people may not be able to give more right now 6
5. Mixed feelings—Can see pros and cons 3 1

† *“You have to make the best of whatever time you are in. There is never a perfect time. If we wait for the new pastor, it just puts things off again. Launching a campaign shows a new pastor that we are on the move.”*

† *“If this is truly where God is calling our church to go, God will provide. It will happen in spite of the recession.”*

† *“The economy is creating pros and cons. We may be able to get lower costs and get a little more bang for our buck. But the uncertainty of where things are going will create hesitation when it comes to how much people are willing to commit.”*

† *“The critical masses of our congregation are much more concerned about the new pastor than the renovation. I think it would be a mistake to move forward without our new pastor in place.”*

† *“We think the plan is beautiful, but we are very worried about the timing. We don’t have a new pastor to be the dynamic leader we need to see us through this process.”*

† *“The cart is before a number of horses. To actually commit to saying this is what we are going to do and to start gathering money for this project before we have a new pastor seems nonsensical. The current state of the economy is going to make it more difficult to secure the funds we need as people’s ability to commit is compromised right now.”*

† *“The economy is a big issue for those of us on fixed incomes. The cost of everything seems to be going up—gas, utilities, taxes, and now we are concerned about our health care costs. There are so many unknowns in our lives when it comes to finances that for the first time ever we did not make a commitment for the pledge drive in case something unexpected happened. We were afraid we would not be able to keep our obligation.”*

† *“We have too much transition going on right now in the economy and in our congregation to be successful in a fall campaign. The economy is definitely going to hamper how much we can raise and I feel that things would go better if our new pastor had a chance to be a part of this endeavor.”*

† *“We are very concerned about the economy and the transitional nature of those who come to this church. To do the whole project will involve taking on a huge amount of debt. Do we have a committed core willing to make the long-term investment? Will people give to this project who know that they are going to be transferred or plan to retire out of the area in the next couple of years?”*

† *“Our annual stewardship pledges are down due to the economy and we have not met our expenses, let alone our budget. I do not feel we need a totally new*

sanctuary right now. Many of us are anxious about our jobs and personal finances and it does not seem right to raise money to do all the extra stuff at this time.”

† “What is the rush? Let’s get some of the uncertainty out of the air and then proceed on a more solid footing.”

† “We can move forward this fall, but I think we will all be very disappointed in the results.”

8. Is it feasible to raise \$1 million over the next three years?

1. Not sure in the current economy 12 2
2. Yes, if congregation is really committed to it 8
3. No 6
4. Doubtful 3

† “I don’t know because I’ve heard from folks that their economic situation is tenuous or that they are going to be moving. Also, if the church makes decisions on the sexuality issue that don’t agree with their position, they may leave. What if they don’t like the new pastor? I just don’t know if it is feasible with all these unknowns.”

† “I think we can do it. In our congregation’s culture we meet or exceed the need. This is a great time for rejuvenation. We have lots of young people, lots of new babies. This can be a great new beginning for us.”

† “I do not think it is feasible and I do not think it is wise to finance this amount of money. This is not the time to get everyone stressed out over finances. There are so many more urgent needs. We need additional staff more than we need all these extra things in the sanctuary.”

9. Willingness to be involved in an upcoming Campaign:

24 out of 29 households interviewed (83%) are willing to serve as leaders or members of teams in an upcoming Capital Campaign. 3 more are willing to help if the campaign is not in the fall.

10. Willingness to commit financial support to an upcoming campaign:

23 out of 29 households interviewed (79%) will support the Campaign financially.

Gift Ranges over three years:

\$1,500-\$3,000	4	\$10,000-\$12,000	1
\$3,500-\$5,000	7	\$15,000-\$20,000	3
\$6,000-\$7,800	5		

We will contribute, but unable to designate an amount 3

Unable to support at this time due to economic hardships 3

Do not support this project 3

11. What additional information do you need to fully support the campaign?

1. An artist’s rendering 12 1
2. Do not need any more information 9 1
3. A prioritized list of what is essential 8 1
4. More details on components and costs 8
5. Is the majority of the congregation behind this project? 6

- † *“I cannot look at these plans and get a sense of what the new sanctuary would look like, so it is hard to get very excited about it.”*
- † *I would like to know that this project is supported by the whole congregation before we move forward. I don’t want people to feel pushed or forced. I don’t want to turn people off.”*
- † *“The building is a tool, but a tool to what end? What are we going to do with this renovated sanctuary? What is the vision? How are we going to use this space to address needs? We give wonderfully to our members, but we are not offering a lot to the greater community. Is this renovated space going to help us accept the challenges of growing our congregation and inviting and welcoming different ethnic groups? I need to see the rate of return of this investment in terms of promoting our core values and meeting the needs of our changing neighborhood.”*

12. Concerns for the future of Abiding Presence:

1. Finding the right new pastor 13 1
2. No concerns 11
3. Lack of connection due to three services 7
4. Lingering dissatisfaction over worship schedule/decision process 7

- † *“I am concerned that we are trying to do something for everyone and it is going to be impossible to please everyone.”*
- † *“I do not have any concerns. Pastor Brent is very committed to us and our youth. He knows that we need to keep growing and he has done a great job at bringing in new families. I see signs of growth and new opportunities.”*
- † *“The contemporary and traditional service debates are still an issue and we need to find a way to accommodate both and restore a sense of unity.”*
- † *“Our church is very comfortable and that can lead to complacency. I don’t want people to come here because it is comfortable, I want them to come here because they are challenged to grow deeper in their faith.”*

13. Greatest hopes for the future of Abiding Presence:

1. Continued growth in numbers, vitality and service 20
2. Find an inspiring, dynamic new pastor 10
3. To be known for helping others in Christ’s name 7
4. Find new ways to reach out to neighborhood 5

- † *“My greatest hope is that we find a pastor who can help us define and live out our vision.”*
- † *“I’m hoping for an uplifting pastor who preaches the gospel and has a heart for our people.”*
- † *“I am very excited about getting our new pastor and having a chance to expand our horizons and take a new look at our vision. Where are we headed? There are so many folks right outside our doors. The mission field is right here! What*

opportunities are we missing during the week? I hope we can find new ways to connect to those who do not have a church home.”

† *“I would love to see lots of energy and lots of people inspired by their time here so that they go out ready to serve. I want us to be a mission led church that is known for our service.”*

† *“There is so much potential for ministry here and so many gifted people. My greatest hope is to find ways to make use of all these gifts.”*

† *“I hope that our renovations will create the kind of space that reflects to others how special this place is to us.”*

14. Should additional needs such as parsonage renovations, technological upgrades or sign replacement be included in the goals of the proposed capital campaign?

1. No 21
2. Yes 5 1
3. Could go either way 2 1

† *“These things should not be included in the campaign because we need to address these things whether the campaign happens or not.”*

† *“I think these things should be kept separate because they are needed right away in order to keep the church growing and functioning properly. Isn’t there money set aside for repairs and maintenance?”*

† *“These things should be included in our annual budget rather than in a capital campaign. These are short-term goals and we need to think about the life of the enhancement. I wouldn’t buy a car with a 30-year loan.”*

SUMMARY

STRENGTHS

† The five core values of the congregation that emerged in this study are:

1. A commitment to fostering a strong sense of community / connection among members and a warm welcome to all who visit.
2. A commitment to offering inspiring and varied styles of worship, enhanced with excellent music.
3. A commitment to helping people of all ages grow in their faith and live out their faith.
4. A commitment to offering meaningful and varied opportunities to serve and put faith into action.
5. A commitment to offering vibrant children and youth ministries, and strengthening and supporting families.

- † There is much appreciation for the dedication, enthusiasm and insights of the Interim Pastor, Rev. Brent Thalacker.
- † There is a high level of gratitude for all the excellent and diligent work of the Sanctuary Design Group and the Sanctuary Remodeling Committee.
- † There is appreciation for the Sunday School Program, the Puppet Ministry, the Youth Program, the Music Program, and the wide variety of outreach ministries of the congregation.
- † There is a great spirit of volunteerism and a willingness to work together even in the midst of differing points of view.
- † The membership of Abiding Presence consists of many exemplary people of faith who bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and gifts to this community, including strong and committed lay leadership.
- † There is strong support and consensus for addressing the maintenance issues such as carpeting, sound, lighting, etc. in order to be responsible stewards of the building and to make certain that people are able to hear the spoken word and the music.
- † There are many dedicated and talented people who are willing to serve as volunteers in the Capital Campaign.
- † 83% of those interviewed are willing to volunteer time to work on one of the Capital Campaign Teams.
- † 79% of those interviewed are willing to make a financial commitment to the Capital Campaign.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- † There is a great deal of support for moving forward with necessary maintenance and much needed sound and lighting updates. There is less support for moving forward with the entire project and taking on substantially more debt at this time in the life of the congregation.
- † There is a need for an artist's rendering of the proposed renovation in order to enable people to visualize the aesthetic enhancements.

- † There is a strong desire for a prioritized list (including a break down of costs) beginning with the most urgent maintenance components of the project.
- † There is a desire for more clarity and specifics on how a newly remodeled sanctuary would be used to strengthen outreach and encourage the growth of the congregation.
- † There is a significant level of uncertainty and anxiety present due to the lack of a permanent pastor and the economic recession. These two factors negatively impacted how much people felt they were willing or able to commit to a campaign at this time.
- † 21 out of 29 households interviewed (72%) either opposed or had reservations about moving forward with the campaign this fall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the information gathered through this assessment, Kairos recommends the following:

1. Delay moving forward with a capital campaign until a new pastor is in place.
2. Focus on strengthening annual stewardship this fall.
3. Explore ways to address immediate needs such as the sound issues in the sanctuary, renovations to the parsonage, technological upgrades to the computers and server, and improved signage.
4. Create an artist's rendering and prioritized list of project components and related costs to be presented at Sunday forums to encourage discussion, comments and questions.