Early Childhood Ministry Exploratory Report

Prepared for: Ascension Lutheran Church

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## Objectives

The objectives of the committee were to determine whether beginning an early childhood ministry was the next step for Ascension’s ministry. We evaluated the following areas:

* Assess the current and future status of the congregation’s ministry.
* Assess the current and future of the immediate community in which the church is located.

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* Review and understand the planning process for beginning an early childhood ministry.
* Prepare a recommendation to continue or discontinue the process of planning for beginning an early childhood ministry program.
* Communicate the recommendation to the appropriate constituencies within the congregation.

## Evaluation

| Strengths  | Weaknesses  | Opportunities |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Building/Location | Not enough people | Educate the congregation around outreach  |
| People inside the building | Number of adults in Bible Study | Relationship building |
| Close knit group of members | Increasing spiritual maturity | Events structured specifically towards building relationships within and outside the congregation |
| Financial foundation and the support of the mission board | Too much focus today on service inside the congregation = “getting here vs. going from here” mentality  | How do we earn the right to build relationships and trust |

This presents us an opportunity to revisit the congregation’s mission statement. Specifically, do we have a vision statement that describes the why? Do the members of Ascension know the why? What does it mean for the congregation and members?

Since Ascension’s relocation to Clinton Township in 2007, the history of ministry directly to children has not been strong. At no time in its history, beginning in the 1920’s, has Ascension operated either a preschool or a Lutheran elementary school. For the first five years of the period from 2007-20012 there was no Sunday School provided by Ascension to member children, due largely to the small number of children of that age. What the history of a Sunday School at Ascension is before that time we do not know.

In the fall of 2013 a Sunday School program was started and has continued to the present, growing modestly over the three years it has been offered. Pre-2013 history of Ascension Lutheran Church does not indicate a strong commitment to and support of children’s ministry. This is likely the case for two reasons: 1) Ascension’s membership numbers and demographics did not make such program a priority in serving its membership, and 2) there was likely some inertia involved in seeing children’s ministry as a means for reaching out to and serving non-member children.

That was then, what about now? Ascension currently has 39 households represented in its membership. Of those 39 households, only three (?) would have children below the age of 5 at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. Of those three, one family lives in Casco, one in Holly, and one in St. Clair Shores. That would make two of the three unlikely prospects for enrollment in a preschool program at Ascension. Any decision made regarding an early childhood program to serve our own member family needs at this time does not seem warranted.

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However, Ascension’s mission statement says: “Ascension exists to proclaim the joy of Jesus Christ in the Macomb County area by gathering to grow in the timeless truth of the Bible and by scattering to share the hope of heaven with everyone we meet. “ An early childhood ministry program in the form of a preschool program would provide a way to live our mission statement to preschool aged children in our area and, by extension, to their families. The idea of an early childhood ministry program at Ascension has merit for the following reasons:

1. If Ascension’s mission statement is to be an accurate statement of what we actually do rather than an aspirational statement about what we hope to do, taking concrete actions to serve children in our area is one way to do what we say we do.
2. A preschool could be an effective way of initiating a relationship with young families in our immediate area. That relationship should be initiated in the context of a clear harvest strategy for drawing families we serve into an active and healthy means of grace relationship with the Savior.
3. The absence of a strong emphasis on children’s ministry in the history of Ascension would be an argument to give this a strong effort. To continue not doing what Ascension has historically not done much of in this regard is likely to produce little change in growth through outreach.
4. God has blessed Ascension with a facility that could, at full capacity, serve 25 children at one time. Offering multiple sessions could increase this number to well over 50 students. For the first time in its history, Ascension has the space for meaningful early childhood ministry.

## The Early Childhood Ministry Opportunity Case Study

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The committee set out to conduct a case study of both the immediate early childhood programs and the demographics of the community surrounding Ascension.

| Facility  | Tuition | Size | Program Details |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| North brook | Childcare = $53/dayPreschool = $3,750 | Licensed for 4068 currently enrolled with 15-20 on the waiting list | Open year round offering daycare, latch key, toddler and traditional preschool programs |
| Little Turtle | 2 days per week =$1,3053 days per week = $1,818Separate daycare fees | 700 currently enrolled with overflow at Mohawk Elementary | Childcare for 6 weeks through 3 yearsInfant and Toddler ProgramPreschool half daysYoung 5sExtended Care |
| St. Peter Lutheran | Shining Stars 1 day = $4953 Year Old Preschool2 day = $9453 day = $1,1704 Year Old3 day = $1,2604 day = $1,710Young 5s5 day = $2,250 | 219 enrolled with a waiting list | Shining Stars (Toddlers)Preschool programs for children ages 3 and 4 Young 5s program |
| Immanuel Lutheran  | 3 Year Old Preschool2 days per week = $1,0264 Year Old Preschool3 day = $1,3595 day = $2,097Fee for all programs = $140Young 3s 1 day = $486Fee = $65 | 320 enrolled with a waiting list | Young 3s Preschool programs for children ages 3 and 4Young 5s program |

## Community Potential for Early Childhood Ministry

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The potential for enrollment in a preschool program appears promising in view of the demographics of the area. The chart below provides statistics for children under the age of five in zip codes within an approximately 3 miles radius of Ascension.

| Zip Code | Area | # of Children under Age 5 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 48042 | Hayes to Fairchild, 23 Mile to 26 Mile | 1,664 |
| 48044 | Hayes to North Ave., M-59 to 23 Mile Road | 3,999 |
| 48047 | I-94 to Anchor Bay, M-59 to 26 Mile | 2,538 |
| 48051 | Fairchild to I-94, M-59 to 26 Mile | 1,200 |
|  |  |  |

Total in the four zip codes around us: 9,401

## Recommendation

After careful evaluation, it is abundantly apparent to the exploratory committee that now is the time for Ascension to take this next step. The opportunity is extensive and the need is abundant. The opportunity before us is to create, execute and capitalize on an intentional outreach strategy. Ascension Church Council agrees with the Committee and recommends the following to the congregation:

**Ascension Church Council recommends that the congregation through its voters authorize Ascension Church Council to establish an early childhood ministry planning group to develop the parameters of the program and to bring a recommendation to the congregation through the Church Council for implementation.**