

Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church

Transcript of March 30, 2020 online congregational meeting with Bishop Ann Svennungsen

Subject: Review of Ministry Site Profile to move forward with the New Pastor Call Process

The Bishop was introduced by our member, Steve Schou.

Bishop: I'm thrilled to be here with you in this weird space (a Zoom meeting). I'm grateful we can make technology be helpful to us in this time. Do you have a copy of the ministry site profile? Please let me know immediately if you can't hear me. We share the internet with everyone in a condominium, and sometimes it gets a little overloaded.

I will say that this is one of my favorite things to do as a bishop. We in our staff believe that congregations and supporting the vitality of congregations is the most important thing we do. Helping congregations in times of transition to find good leaders that are faithful and a good fit for them. So I appreciate having a chance to sit with you, to talk about what your hopes and dreams are for this congregation. To learn what you believe God is calling you to do and to be in the next chapter of your life together and what kind of leader could be helpful in that.

Even though it's an awkward thing to try to do in this format, I'd like to begin with a kind of brainstorming; to invite people to imagine that I am a candidate looking at Lake Nokomis. I'm thinking, "Hmm, maybe I'd like to be a pastor there." Could you tell me a dozen or more things about why it would be a great thing to come as a pastor to LNL? **What are your gifts, strengths?**

This might be a time when being a shy Lutheran kind of helps us so we don't all jump in at once, but please jump in at some point, or I can call on you. How about you, Erica, let's start with you.

Erica: One of the things that is pretty constant across our congregation is a lot of very warm and kind people. I know it took me about a week to feel like I had a place at this congregation because people were very warm and welcoming. We can't say 100% of the time that we are able to do that. But I think that it is one of the strongest things. We are just very down to earth, salt of the earth people who are loving and kind and truly try to help people.

Bishop: Someone in the chat said neighborhood church, small church in a big city.

Comment: Strong leaders.

Bishop: Is that lay and ordained or lay and rostered?

Answer: I guess so, looking through the strong roster, we have strong members.

Comment: I think building on that, too, there is a good balance of people who have been in the congregation a long time, but also an interest in doing church differently.

Bishop: So, an openness to innovation.

Comment: Yes, but a combination of historical legacy members as well as fresh, new members.

Bishop: That comes out in your site profile nicely. That's sometimes difficult to articulate in the profile, and the written words, but you do.

Member: I would like to say that I think one time I was trying to think of more people to help with a certain project. I realized that there aren't very many people who don't participate. I looked down the list and I could find many people that are involved in this program, that program, that activity. I could not think of a lot of people that were not involved in some way.

Bishop: That's actually a really great thing to emphasize. Sometimes, in congregations, one of the concerns is that a small group of people do all the work, right? So, when you say, you look at the list and you see that participation is across the board. That's pretty powerful.

Erica: I've been at the congregation for about nine and a half years and rarely have I had anyone say to me, "we can't do that," or, "no, we shouldn't try that." Whatever new ideas that I have—a new way of doing things, a change in format or whatever. People are always like, "Here we go, ok?" Which is pretty tremendous. So, as much as I think there is some fear about building changes, big, sweeping changes, that this will change everything. I think in terms of ministry, people are pretty open to a lot of things.

Bishop: From the chat, Mark and Ruth – you mention mature leadership. Do you want to talk about what you mean?

Mark: Well, the experienced lay leadership, the leaders in the congregation who have been pastors and the people who who've been through a lot. We came from a very young church in Chicago, and many people there were new to the faith. In contrast to Lake Nokomis, which is people who have seen a lot of life and know what's important, so that's what I mean by true leaders.

Member: I think Lake Nokomis has been open to letting people come in and participate in leadership. Quite a number of people have come in and been on church council who haven't been here very long.

Ruth: I wanted to say that we came from Chicago—a church with a lot of art, poetry, a lot of stuff. And it's been amazing for me to come into a group of people who appreciate art and the different church seasons. I've been a part of it, and things that connect us to whatever season you're in. A lot of thought and a lot of practical work goes into it, and that's just fantastic. And you can see during the online service that the camera was going over the picture of some of the different installations. It's an attitude that it's very meaningful to everyone who's involved, and for the congregation. You can get people to do almost anything.

Bishop: From the chat, I see: Music. Amazing choir, robust youth programs, I appreciate the thoughtful, always challenging Adult ed. Hour. Also, there is a big interest in justice, especially social justice. Children and youth involved, from childhood through graduation. You should put that on a poster in front of the church. A rare thing to be able to say.

Peg Ihinger: What was so striking for me, the first time I attended, was not only that I was welcomed the first time I attended, but the pastor introduced me to someone so they could sit with me so I wouldn't be there alone.

Member: One thing that I would like to say is that we made an investment in our youth. Our child has been involved since she was five. This is pretty much a second home and now she is a young adult and feels comfortable. It's amazing to see her feel so comfortable. Even the youth group, doing what they're doing. It's obvious they are very comfortable with each other.

John W: One thing to add: the intergenerational cooperation. I know the kids by name. They are great kids. We, as a congregation, go out of our way to get to know them. Erica is very helpful with that. It might be because I've been involved with some of the programs as well.

Peg Ihinger: I appreciate the always thoughtful, often challenging adult education hour.

Member: A little more context: Welcoming, kind, engaged. I've been to church where we've lived in different cities. I've attended 9 to 12 months, had smiles, but not had any honest conversations. At Lake Nokomis it took about half a worship service. New faces can't worship with us and get out of the door without at least one person welcoming them, introducing them to one or two other people. To say we're welcoming is probably an understatement.

Bishop: That's a great illustration. I mean, almost all congregations I deal with say they are welcoming, and I now will say, "Can anyone make it through half the service without anyone engaging with them?" That's a good barometer. I recently was at a church, went through the whole service, and not one person greeted me. I had my collar on and at the end of the service they were talking about how welcoming they were.

Faith: I'm probably one of the oldest ones on this chat. I would say, we've belonged to LNL for 18 years, and my situation has changed. I still have felt welcoming. People call me – do you need anything. Need a ride or something like that. I appreciate that kind of interaction with the congregation when I'm not doing much anymore, with my husband in long-term care. So, I attend service with him at his location, but I still come once a month when my daughter takes him to church. When we joined, we came on our bicycles in our shorts. We thought we kind of put up barriers in our shorts, but we were welcomed.

Bishop: I think we're learning more about the gift of the telephone now. We, in the synod office, calling every single church, talking to the lay pastor and just connect. Have more time, human voice even if it's not right in person. So I'm glad to know that this calling is happening in your life, too.

Comment: From the chat, some references to diversity.

Linda Ojeda: And as someone who had initially visited a number of congregations in the area, people definitely had comments directed to us about our ethnicity. LNL instead welcomed us. At times, racial comments have been made to us, but we are mostly very welcomed as a family. And I still feel there's openness at LNL that I don't feel in other congregations. Even Derek, even he has felt more welcome than when he went to Calvary.

Bishop: that is significant. Our neighborhoods are becoming more diverse. 15% Latino and 10% Americans. 5% Asia and Pacific Islander.

Bishop: What about challenges and weaknesses, someone just chatted. Recognizing we have to talk about challenges and weaknesses. We can't just talk about gifts. I do want to take some time to talk about this ecumenical interest in becoming a 3-church. Where are you in that process? How far along?

John Becker: We are currently in the stage where we have 3 churches identified: LNL, Living Table UCC, and Spirit of St. Stephen's, which is loosely associated with the Catholic church. Once our discernment group (consisting of a few members of each church) has settled on what we think will work, then we will pass that on to the members. We don't want to do that yet, because we don't want to give them the idea that we have made up our minds. Hoping in the next month or so, the congregations can vote.

Bishop: Is everyone clear that if this happens the building would be LNL? Yes? Ok, that's usually the hardest thing to get by.

Pastor Chris: Not sure that's right. The building would be shared.

Bishop: So you would go into this, where you would have joint ownership of the newly remodeled building, but the location would be the current LNL location. I'm hoping you've conversed with Springhouse and Salem Lutheran church. They have become a model around here and across the country. How that can work and yet it requires so much on the front end, so you try to work and anticipate things before they happen.

Laurie Z: I am an office person at Salem, also a member at LNL. I can offer perspective. I have seen how it works. It's a challenge as with roommates, but it's working really well. Very hopeful. The sign has three churches' names. Sign on building – says Springhouse, and then congregations listed.

Comment: Is the Catholic community a not for profit?

Pastor Chris: This question has not been asked. I don't know, but it is not affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church.

Bishop: Sounds like their membership is more liberal? Interesting. I don't think our ecumenical relationships would be stretched in that way. Somehow, you're going to own this together, but each be a separate entity.

Peg Ihinger: I will say that the whole three church process has been discussed and is moving forward in a very clear and deliberate way. I have appreciated the task force's clarity on this.

Bishop: Now, let's move to **what you're looking for in your next pastor**. One of the hardest things is to narrow it from about 30 high-priority tasks to about 5. I'm going to name all these things, and I want you to think about words. When I'm done, if there's a sense that you think there's something missing –ask why it's there or why it isn't.

Bishop read the lists from our Ministry Site Profile:

Top five: Innovation/Creativity; Pastoral Care and Visitation; Preaching and Worship; Ecumenical Work; Ministry in Daily Life; Administration

Top gifts: Help people develop their spiritual life; Build a sense of community among the people with whom he/she works; Be an effective communicator; Be active in ecumenical relationships; Be creative and innovative about his/her tasks.

Bishop asks for Comments

John Becker: I think a candidate that can assist with training and mentoring new lay leaders is very important for us at this time.

Jodi Gustafson: Music director here. I would love a creative partner in creation of meaningful worship experiences!

Keith Atkinson: Neighborhood leader/outreach.

Member: Ministry in daily life. How do you live out your faith in daily life? It's what I do. How does my faith walk out the door and into the world?

Erica: if you think about who your current staff is, is there a different set of gifts that you want to be looking for?

Member: There is one other question. As the call committee we really have a concern around administration of the congregation and the office staff. Someone who, in addition to the sermons, would also do that as well. Since the sermons are to the congregation, someone who could do that reflection was important as well.

Member: I'm also on the call committee. I know that we are thinking about someone who is relating to what is going on in the world. Someone who can bring that scripture and make those connections I think is huge and to really feel that we are engaging in that worship service together and growing that way.

Bishop: You've got those 15 categories; you don't repeat yourself - tasks. Yet, you only have 15 of these, so try to be strategic, so you want to think about whether you want to include administration? Also, with 3 churches, different administrative staff.

Erica: Is it administrative that we are looking for? All my time at the church, we really have not had any envisioning, forward thinking, and strategic planning. So we don't really have functioning ministry

teams. We get things done, but our leadership isn't really functioning in those ways. Not like when I came. So we really need leadership that has some gifts to lead us – on how we can work together efficiently, and meaningfully to respond to the needs in our community and bring out the gifts in our community and in our congregation.

I think it's really important to be thinking about how we will bring to life the 3-church initiative. Focus on what's the ministry that we offer the community and how do we do that in partnership with others.

John B. An extrovert. Someone who asks, "Hey how are things going?"

Member: I think there are too many categories: We want Spiritual leaders. Not in there much. A number of people in our older generation think we used to have very active bible studies, and we don't now. We have younger people coming in now, and I think they lack that. I think we don't hear that in the site profile. I think that's important.

Bishop: Another thing – leading a community in relationships and neighborhood relationships. It's one of the more important things for congregational vitality. Is there anything else that you would like me to hear? Or, I can move on to next steps?

Pastor Chris: Can you explain about ministry readiness?

Bishop: This speaks to a lot of the talk on preparing members—ministry on their personal life. Has to do with being aware of what are the community needs for people who are not members in your neighborhood, what their struggles are and how much can the church be available to them. Not necessarily planning ahead but being aware and thinking about how they might respond.

It has a lot to do with ministry life.

Bishop: Here's how candidates' names will come before me to be given to you:

First, once the opening is made, well, everybody knows. People can look at the opening, and, "I would like to nominate myself as a potential candidate."

Second, the congregation is invited to suggest names of pastors who might be a good fit for LNL. This is important, especially in your congregation. You have a lot of people who are aware of the larger church. They might have ideas, someone who might be a good candidate. You can use email or whatever means you have to contact your congregation to invite people to suggest names of who might be a good pastor at LNL.

Third, and this is one of our highest priorities, the synod staff is always thinking of who might be a good fit.

All of those names have to come to the synod first, before going somewhere else. It is part of being churched together and our policy. Someone from out of state, for example, I would have to reach out to their Bishop and ask if I can reach out. They almost always say go ahead. The one time they would object is if the candidate has served a place 3 years or less. You don't want to be doing this again in two or three years. Or, if the bishop has information, or if there's some problem that no one knows about. If the bishop says yes, I call that person to ask interest. They have a few days to think about it. If a candidate is from our synod, I talk to them myself and we're fine.

Then we come together and come up with a list of maybe four, five, or six. Depends on what you're looking for in a candidate. We give the list to your call committee; they look through and decide if they want more candidates. Our job is to support, not be a gatekeeper, we want to support you.

If there's a candidate not on the list, come and talk to us about it. We want to send candidates who we could imagine would be a good candidate.

Bishop: (continued) Years ago, we would send all the nominees to call committees to read through papers, even though they're not all the right fit, so we try to be supportive. Then the call committee does one interview, maybe a second interview, and then listens to the person preach.

So, the one thing I would say to the call committee is, don't just listen to sermons online. If you have the chance to listen in person, it's different. (She then realized how that sounded and gave her example of having her engagement in an Iowa church – being seen in person meant a lot.)

Confidentiality is very important for the sake of all congregations. If your call committee can't answer your questions, just say, "OK I'll pray for you."

Member: How does this call process merge with the 3-church situation?

Bishop: I guess if you are 3 distinct congregations, it seems like you call your own pastor.

Member: Do we call a pastor before we complete this process of working out the arrangement with the other 2 congregations, or do we make sure the arrangement is in place before we call a pastor?

John W. That may reveal itself as time goes on.

Bishop: Yes, as you reveal yourself in this process. I think there will be more insight.

John W. That might not happen right away. There is this big challenge of not being able to go to a congregation to hear a sermon. It's a big deal. I've heard that other churches are in the process of this calling and they have put it off. Not saying we should. If we stay in place for a couple of months, do some sermon hunting, but weed out top 3 or top 5.

Bishop: Yes, like I said, it does take some time.

Pastor Chris: The call process is an LNL and synod process, not the 3 Churches. But the candidate or called pastor has to understand they are coming into this ecumenical relationship and have to get along. Keep in mind that, if LNL decides to go forward with the 3 Churches, the process will take couple of years. So the candidate will have to understand that it would take work on their part and lead the congregation in the coming years on this.

Bishop: To some candidates, that challenge that will be very appealing. It's not always interesting to go into a perfect congregation. Some may want to come with vision, meet challenges: how can our community be stretched and grow? This could be exciting.

Member observation: Under the present online circumstances, we can all now participate and go and watch these services, and it won't be overwhelming or giving us away. Conversation outside of going to their church. See how pastors are dealing with that, too.

Bishop: There's a lot of creativity online. Amazing to me, especially during Holy Week. For example, giving out care packages. Now there are some aspects of a pastor that you wouldn't otherwise see.

Bishop's final remarks: This went well, a lot of patience.

Erica: Do you have any questions for us?

Bishop: Not that I haven't asked. And Craig will have those notes. This has been good. It was fun to hear you talking to one another when I got online—Laughing, etc. I have to be done, because every day I have to face time with my 3-week-old grandson. Let's end in prayer.