

Plan History

Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

In 2001, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson initiated the process now called "Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan For Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." Components of the process included developing mission, vision, and values statements for the ELCA, and identifying strategic directions to provide specific focus for the churchwide organization through 2012, strategies to carry out the directions, and subsequent implications for budget and structure of the churchwide organization.

Six theses about planning have informed this strategic planning endeavor from the outset.

1. Strategic planning is a vehicle to shape ELCA discipleship and stewardship, so that we may participate more fully, boldly, and humbly in God's mission in the world.
2. Strategic planning is a way of organically and continuously connecting the nature and purpose of this church with the needs of the world into which this church is sent and with the resources this church has or can develop.
3. Strategic planning is creative, dynamic, prophetic, objective, analytical, and intuitive.
4. Strategic planning is a means to evaluate and nurture the continued organizational effectiveness and vitality of this church.
5. Strategic planning is communal. It connects all dimensions of the ELCA—particularly all components of the churchwide organization—both with each other and with the larger purposes that they all serve.
6. Strategic planning provides for common understanding and ownership of the following major aspects of our life together: this church's mission, vision, values, environmental factors, strategic directions, strategies, and implications for structure and budget.

The churchwide Cabinet of Executives began work on mission, vision, and values statements in the fall of 2001. All 2002 synod assemblies were invited into the process by naming concerns for the ELCA according to their context and naming areas where the synod assembly voting members and visitors saw the need for the ELCA to focus its efforts. This collective effort was reported to the ELCA Church Council in July 2002. The council edited the preliminary work of the cabinet, and requested review and input from a wide sampling of key stakeholders and various groups within the ELCA.

From September through January 2002, various facilitators from the Cabinet of Executives, Office of the Bishop, and the Department for Research and Evaluation met with dozens of groups of stakeholders. The facilitators presented for review and comment three preliminary draft mission statements, two vision statements, and a set of operational

values. Groups were also encouraged to develop strategic directions—areas where the stakeholders believed the churchwide office ought to focus its human and financial resources over the next ten years (2002–2012). This data was analyzed and presented to the Planning and Evaluation Committee of the Church Council during the council's November 2002 meeting. The Planning and Evaluation Committee also invited the whole Church Council into the process of reviewing and analyzing the strategic directions. Subsequently, the Planning and Evaluation Committee reviewed the summary of the council's analysis of strategic directions and designated a subcommittee to refine the emerging planning material, especially strategic directions, and to direct the writing process for mission, vision, and values statements.

From this point, facilitators continued to meet with stakeholders and requested responses on the work done by the Church Council on strategic directions. Facilitators asked for stakeholders' comments about the proposed list, including the areas they could champion and those which needed more work or could be eliminated from the list. This data was reported to the Planning and Evaluation subcommittee on January 2, 2003. Two other key documents sent to the subcommittee included theological reflections prepared by Lutheran theologians Mark Powell, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and Martha Stortz, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Powell and Stortz had delivered the papers in person to the December 2002 Cabinet of Executives meeting. The Planning and Evaluation subcommittee reviewed the material to date, gave direction to a strategic planning creative writing team, and further refined the strategic direction material. The subcommittee also recommended that the values statements be directed back to the Cabinet of Executives and removed from the larger strategic planning process. This latter decision was reached with the knowledge and affirmation of the organizational values already existing in the ELCA Constitution, Chapter 5.01, Principles of Organization.

The Planning and Evaluation Committee met as a whole February 14–15, 2003, to finalize recommended mission and vision statements and language for strategic directions. The committee made recommendations informed by the work of the creative writing team, and also received papers from three other ELCA theologians to help ground the work in Lutheran tradition and scholarship. The committee's recommendations were reviewed by the churchwide boards, steering committees and advisory committees, the Conference of Bishops, assistants to synodical bishops, 400 ELCA congregations, and churchwide office staff. Further, the material was posted on-line for public comment.

After reviewing the feedback from these constituents and considering revisions to the February 14–15, 2003, document, the Planning and Evaluation Committee's recommendations were presented to the Church Council on April 4–7, 2003, for formal action. The Church Council approved the proposed mission statement, vision statement and strategic directions on April 6, 2003.