

Silverdale Lutheran Church “Break the Barrier” Strategic Plan Report September 07, 2017

Introduction

At the 2016 annual meeting the Silverdale Lutheran Church congregation supported the notion of developing a strategy to connect more people to Jesus Christ and grow average worship attendance numbers. The need to provide financial support for this “break the barrier” strategy was also approved.

In March of 2017 the SLC Council commissioned a “Break the Barrier” team (hereafter referred to as the Team) to develop a strategic plan for pursuing two main goals: connecting more people to Jesus Christ and breaking through the barrier of our current worship attendance plateau. The strategy that emerged focuses primarily on our Lord Jesus Christ and what we can do together to share the good news of forgiveness, life, and salvation, i.e., connecting more people to Christ.

It is anticipated that a strategy to connect more people to Jesus Christ strengthens SLC’s ongoing wider church mission and that “sharing the good news” will ultimately help break SLC’s current barrier plateau for average worship attendance numbers.

To develop a meaningful strategy the Team assessed the current environment at SLC and identified what we do very well and what may need attention as it pertains to achieving our break the barrier goals. The Team also identified possible internal and external influences on SLC that may be capable of contributing to or hindering the attainment of these goals. The actions derived from these strategies are designed to leverage what we do well and improve upon what we do not as we combine our efforts to enrich SLC and connect more people to Jesus Christ.

SLC “Break the Barrier” Team Members:

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Background

By all the major indicators used to judge congregational health, Silverdale Lutheran is a healthy congregation. The quality of the staff is very high and committed to the mission of SLC. The congregation is very happy with how attending SLC affects their spiritual lives positively. SLC’s physical plant and property are very attractive and well maintained. Weekly worship attendance averaged 390 in 2015 and remained steady in 2016 and 2017. The 2017 budget is \$740,030.

In April of 2016, John Wimberly (professional church growth consultant), visited SLC to assist in the analysis of our current “growth plateau.” A growth plateau is a period in the life of a congregation when it reaches a certain level of church attendees but stops growing. For SLC this growth plateau is currently at or below 400 congregants and SLC has been on this plateau for a decade. We are pursuing a strategic process because we believe we can improve and “break the barrier” with continued growth.

John Wimberly met with SLC staff, congregational leadership and membership. He provided information regarding the macro environment in which all congregations are ministering today; led conversations about what the congregants love about their congregation; asked about congregational priorities; and pushed for answers as to why the congregation has remained on a plateau. A full report

on the John Wimberly assessment was provide to SLC leadership. This report identified three key elements for breaking the current growth plateau:

1. Make an explicit strategic commitment to the numerical growth of worship attendance, viewing the growth as our effort to share the wonderful sense of belonging that current members experience. If the goal is growth for the sake of growth, the growth strategy will be difficult.
2. Increase staffing levels in preparation for growth. The congregation currently is under-staffed for a worshipping community of 390. It doesn't feel under-staffed because the staff is very talented, efficient and hard-working. But the staff could be in a burn-out situation if it isn't increased. If the church wants to grow, it should consider what staff functions need to be expanded or added to empower getting off the plateau.
3. SLC's budget is \$740,030 (2017) and adding staff means adding expense. To get off the plateau, SLC will need to increase its financial contributions to support growth.

The Strategic Planning Process

The Team assessed the current environment at SLC utilizing existing data sources in addition to their own assessment to identify what we do well at SLC and what we could do better. The Team also identified what SLC opportunities we could leverage to help this strategic plan succeed, as well as weakness and challenges which might inhibit success. The data collected was categorized as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges. To prioritize the data for these categories the team discussed, defined and reached consensus on the most important data points for each category. The team then identified actions to align SLC staff and lay leadership, programs and general activity to achieve the stated goals of this plan: **Connect more people to Jesus Christ and break the barrier of our current worship attendance plateau.** The analysis of this data gives us a fairly good idea of the "current state" (environment) of SLC. Knowing where we are gives us a leg up on selecting strategies for getting us to where we want to be.

Data Sources:

Wimberly Report (Consultation)
Natural Church Development Survey
Summer Survey and Discussions
Council Discussions
Break the Barrier Team Input/Discussions
Pastors' Input

Based on the above data sources, our **Strengths**, the things we do well at SLC include:

- Education – people appreciate and are enriched by the classes and Bible studies offered. This strength was further clarified as congregants who attend classes such as Sunday School (adult and youth), Basics class, Bible Studies (Manna/PB Thursday), Community Groups, Circles, Lay School, Marriage Classes, Mom's Circle, Book Clubs, Movies with Pastor, Mandate and Ladies' Night Out state they feel spiritually enriched by participating in these classes.
- Multi-generational - SLC is a multi-generational church; we are not a church of just one generation, we have many generations represented. We are not just a church of "young" or "older" people.

- Worship Experience - High level of appreciation for the experience of worship especially the gospel focus, music and Sacraments.
- Service Opportunities - Hearty meals, Prayer Shawls, Central Kitsap Foodbank, Support for Benevolences, Back Packs for Kids, Lutheran World Relief, Refugee Project, etc.

In the category of **Weakness**, the things we could improve on include:

- Personal Outreach—our desire, confidence, and ability, to articulate and share our faith with other people. This sharing includes not just knowing how to tell our story but when, i.e. where there is a relationship of trust and respect. At a more basic level, this term would also include our ability to invite others to SLC worship, venues, events, ministries, etc. where people can encounter the Gospel. In other words, personal Outreach includes our ability to invite people to “come and see.” It is important to note that the target of our Outreach is not just the non-believer or unchurched but also everyone in our congregation. We are talking here about sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people both inside and outside of our church.
- SLC Outreach—lacking programs designed to share the Gospel with the unbeliever and the unchurched. This could also include using our existing ministries as places where we can be equipped with tools to share our faith. SLC Outreach are the efforts we do together to reach out to our community; new neighborhoods and people new to the surrounding community, with the Gospel.
- Millennial Outreach - A lack of focus on and participation of “Millennials” (20-30s age group)—lacking programs to specifically encounter and promote the participation of SLC congregants (or potential congregants) in the 20 to 30 year old demographic.

In the category of **Opportunities**, the things most likely to contribute to the success of this plan include:

- Alliances with other churches/organizations—Help connect people to a church even if it is not SLC.
- Community Programs - Address specific needs in our surrounding community. For example, these programs may target school support for youth.
- High Population of “Unchurched” - Kitsap County has a high population of those who are unchurched or “non-religious”.

In the category of **Challenges**, the things most likely to detract from the success of this plan include:

- Ambivalence to grow Our numbers—The congregation being comfortable with current service attendance numbers and the need to grow numbers for numbers sake is viewed with disfavor.
- Staff and Core Volunteer/Lay Leadership Burn Out—A tendency for the same folks participating in any or all of our program ministries to eventually be unable (for a variety of reasons) to continue their service.
- Poor Image of Christian Churches—A lack of trust in institutions in general.

Break the Barrier Plan

I. Use our education strength to make community outreach a priority of our ministry and improve evangelism. Community outreach can contribute significantly in our efforts to become a more visible and effective presence for serving the needs of our surrounding communities and provides opportunities for sharing our story (also known as evangelism).

- Equip SLC to share its faith story and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Help people know the appropriate times for faith conversation and to be aware of when people are open to hearing and sharing. This “equipping” becomes a part of everything we do: sermons, classes, Sunday School, fellowship events, service groups, ministries and staff duties and responsibilities.
- Implement a project to meet a specific need in our surrounding community. The project could be unique to SLC or coordinated with another group such as Martha and Mary, Alpha Program or local school districts, for example.
- Create a safe place for people in our surrounding community to engage with SLC to learn more about the faith and encourage participation in worship. The “safe place” would be for those who are unchurched, non-believers or just curious about the faith..
- Provide a tool for SLC to help explain to church newcomers why we do what we do.
- Provide an SLC entry point for millennials (20-30 year old demographic) that attracts and promotes their participation in worship.

Actions

- Install a Small Group Leader/Coordinator position who will work with existing small groups, pastors and lay leaders to help identify effective ways to invite new members and share their faith story as part of their group activity. This leader/coordinator will also assist SLC to “break the barrier” by identifying and assisting in the establishment of new small groups for SLC. Initial installation of this position is through stipend. (This will be the 1st position funded by the Break the Barrier fund as necessary funds become available)
- Install a project manager to identify specific community needs and methods for reaching out to the community to serve those needs. This project manager will focus on SLC becoming a more visible and effective presence for serving the needs of our surrounding community. Initial installation of this position is through stipend. (This will be the 2nd position funded by the Break the Barrier fund as necessary funds become available)
- Implement a specific class, program and/or event for sharing the good news with the unchurched, non-believer or those curious about the faith. The intent is to create a safe place to engage in conversation or ask questions about the Lutheran faith and SLC.
- Develop a glossary that identifies the key elements of our worship and to help explain why these elements are important to our worship.
- Invite Silverdale Lutheran Youth (SLY) and current SLC millennials to create a community group that will identify methods to attract millennials to SLC. Integrate these methods into the current SLC worship structure..

II. Address the risk of staff and lay leadership burnout. Avoiding burnout is critical for the effectiveness of our ministries and our efforts to “break the barrier.” Ensuring SLC staff and lay leadership are postured for growth will also be necessary.

- Restructure administrative staff and lay leadership responsibilities to improve administrative effectiveness. Expand the responsibilities of the current SLC support staff to include administrative/clerical responsibilities currently managed by our Office Manager.
- Determine the need to install a full-time executive assistant position with the primary responsibility of managing Pastoral Staff calendar/meeting schedules and other duties as assigned to allow our pastors to primarily focus on their pastoral duties: pastoral care, teaching,

preaching, leadership development, student/youth programs, pastoral youth care and spiritual development and program effectiveness.

Actions

- Fully transfer Beacon/Bulletin production and other clerical duties currently performed by the Office Manager to staff assistants.
- Shift responsibilities of the Office Manager to be more in-line with the position of Office Administrator or Head of Staff to oversee routine administrative duties impacting the effectiveness of our pastors.
- Hire an Executive Assistant responsible to our Pastoral Staff. This assistant would specifically manage calendars, appointments, routine and emerging pastoral administrative needs. (This will be the 3rd position funded by the Break the Barrier fund as necessary funds become available.)

Strategy Deployment

Turning this strategic plan into action requires commitment and resources. The Break the Barrier Team recommends the effectiveness of this plan be reviewed at some point in the future, annually at a minimum. Coinciding plan review with the 2018 budget setting process would be ideal. It is important to note funds for new positions identified in this plan will be based on the results of our Break the Barrier targeted giving. The proposed new positions identified in the above actions will be installed as Break the Barrier funds become available. Conducting a plan review coincident with the budget setting cycle provides additional information for including the new positions called for in this plan as a budget line item.

Measuring Success

How will we know if we were successful with this plan? Actions undertaken to support this plan must have a way of measuring success and these metrics will and should evolve as we have a sense of how we are performing relative to our goals. The roll out of these metrics will be challenging to refine and specify.

Metrics for consideration should include:

- Connect more people to Jesus Christ—Evidence (subjective) indicating our efforts to improve evangelism and reach out to our surrounding community are connecting more people to Jesus Christ. This connection may also occur within SLC.
- Increase average worship attendance—Evidence (objective) indicating our outreach efforts are bringing more of our surrounding community to attend services at SLC. An attribute of this metric can be evidence of millennial participation in service.
- Grow more small cell groups—Evidence (objective) indicating our outreach efforts are effective at the small group/cell level
- Targeted Giving—Evidence (objective) indicating our financial support to break the barrier through the creation of a specific fund outside of the current budget. This metric underpins our strategy.; The actions we can achieve will be in direct proportion to the amount of giving.

The effectiveness of this plan will be reevaluated in the future (a one year cycle is considered appropriate). During reevaluation, strategy deployment decisions supported by these metrics will transition from our targeted “Break the Barrier” fund to budgetary line items as appropriate.

Summary

The Break the Barrier Team thanks SLC for the opportunity to develop this plan. Our planning process was disciplined and vibrant in discussion. The commitment of the team to “connect more people to Christ Jesus” was evident in their recommendations and consensus.

“Now may the God of Peace, who brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever, Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-21