

Recommendations & Learnings from Transition Consultation

A Report to the People of St. Andrew Lutheran Church

12405 SW Butner Rd, Beaverton, OR 97005

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Prepared by: Pr. Julia Nielsen, Oregon Synod Transition Consultant

I. Thank You & Rationale

A Witness to Discipleship

It has been a privilege to serve as a guest and partner in your midst during this 9 month consulting term. The depth of Christian discipleship at St. Andrew is a vibrant, lived reality. I have witnessed this directly in the deep love you hold for one another and in your fierce, long-term commitment to Earth Care, justice, and hospitality.

A Moment of Grace: I was particularly moved during our initial Listening Season work in December when I saw long-time members intentionally set aside their own preferences for 'how things used to be' to truly listen to the fears and hopes of the younger generation. That moment of sacred listening - where institutional pride was replaced by a genuine, mutual curiosity for the neighbor - is exactly what the Resurrected Christ calls us toward as an Easter people.

Navigating the St. Andrew Reality

Your congregation does not exist in a vacuum. We are navigating what historians and theologians call a '**Polycrisis**' - the convergence of multiple, interconnected global and societal crises that pile onto each other and reverberate within our local faith communities. For St. Andrew, this manifests as well in the wider Church landscape:

- The 'demographic cliff' and median age shift being experienced across American Lutheranism;
- The widespread erosion of institutional trust across all sectors of society;
- The residual broken hearts and institutional drift left by the deep isolation of the pandemic.

You have felt these external pressures surface in church budget tremors, the transition of beloved, multi-decade staff, and the natural systemic tension between maintaining a beautiful physical building and resourcing your public mission. The pandemic did not just change *how* you gather for worship; it accelerated urgent, adaptive challenges ahead of you. It calls St. Andrew - and all congregations - to move away from an obsolete model where a majority of members passively consume church and into a future where we are all called, active, interconnected participants in all parts of parish life.

Grounding Our Shared Language

The terms we have used throughout this consultation are the direct fruits of our shared labor over the past nine months:

- **Relational Organizing:** This methodology, grounded in your historic relationship with MACG (Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good) views community organizing - intentionally building relational power and public relationship - as a primary way to put love into action so that all Creation can thrive. It moves us from a transactional church framework (paying staff for services rendered) to a relational church framework (building a collective movement together).

- **Isolation to Interdependence:** This core theme emerged directly from our Listening Season data. When analyzing the intersection of your community stories, we heard older generations confessing to a deep loneliness and desire for purpose and younger generations craving raw authenticity and sharing. The systemic cure for both is the same: shifting toward an interdependent system where everyone is structurally needed by one another.
- **The 'Missing Middle':** This concept grew from our Sustainability Assessment. We observed that St. Andrew has a category of adults who may be working or newly retired (ages 50–65) who have capacity, energy, and seek spiritual connection, but who are not receiving the discipleship attention essential to undergirding their full weaving into the life of St. Andrew's programming, leadership, and spiritual presence. We have referred to them elsewhere as being in their 'Third Quarter' of life.

II. Consulting Process & Tasks Accomplished

To achieve the primary outcomes of our original agreement - assessing long-term sustainability, evaluating affordability, and aligning your staffing matrix with your mission - we engaged in a thorough, multi-phase discernment roadmap.

Consultation Timeline & Methodology

Phase 1: →	Phase 2: →	Phase 3:
Foundation & Assessment (Months 1-2)	Learning & Listening (Months 3-6)	Discernment & Redesign (Months 7-9)

Some tools that will help you understand our work together over the last 9 months include:

- For a bird's eye, one-page overview of outcomes and goals, you may visit my Annual Congregational Meeting update, provided to the parish in June, 2026.
- This Comprehensive Sustainability Assessment: I partnered with an ad hoc sustainability investigation & data-gathering team (Chuck Weswig, Mary Smith, Pat Christiansen, Cindy Stadel, and Pr. Allison) to systematically audit financial records, giving trends, demographic shifts, facility usage patterns, and volunteer bandwidth.
- We hosted a parish-wide Listening Season, which included an Outcomes Integration Session for the parish to further distill community themes, analyze organizational anxiety, and process data.
- During multiple All-Staff Inservices and trainings, your staff worked with intercultural humility, conflict transformation styles, power dynamics, and the collaborative design of a healthy supervision framework. We also co-created a 'Staff Covenant' to enhance communication, relationships, and ongoing healthy conflict engagement.

III. General Observations

Learnings from the Listening Season: The Interdependence Mandate

Our comprehensive synthesis of congregational feedback reveals a clear 'Banner of Overlap' across generational cohorts:

- **Older Generations** are deeply seeking *Agency and Legacy*. They possess time, wisdom, and resources, and they hunger to be highly useful contributors rather than mere recipients of programmatic care.
 - **Caution:** While this cohort hungers for this opportunity, the structure in which they are currently sitting has not allowed them to practice these skills or understand how to offer these contributions easily. Transition to putting their time, wisdom, and resources to work will require organizational effort and patience, as people will need to be patient accompaniment into new systems for sharing/learning.
 - **Solution:** I recommended a Pastor of Lifelong Formation & Congregational Care position as an essential solution to supporting this transition. My recommendations regarding this position continue throughout this report.
- **Younger Generations** are seeking *Authenticity and Spaciousness*. They crave a progressive, public faith they can be proud of, but they refuse a model of church that feels like an exhausting chore on an already overloaded calendar.
 - **Caution:** Efforts to 'put younger people into leadership' will not succeed, especially if they appear to have an ulterior motive of filling pews or roles on committees. Invitations to 'change the system' from the inside are not attractive to this cohort.
 - **Solution:** Create and permit affinity spaces for this cohort (and all cohorts) to find belonging within St. Andrew on their own terms, before attempting to force integration into 'intergenerational' spaces. Be prepared for small attendance, be patient, and celebrate small wins.

IV. Factors Needing Care at St. Andrew

A note before continuing:

Congregations always read the 'factors needing care' portion of my reports and feel a pinch. This is understandable. But please remember: **this is why you hired a consultant**. Like therapy, you hire new eyes to see into the 'family system' of your beloved community, to say what may not have been said aloud in committee meetings (but has been probably been shared in the parking lot), and to connect patterns present or arising in the previous seasons of the congregation's life together. This is a snapshot of where I have witnessed St. Andrew's current reality, from the perch I've been provided.

It is not the entire story, nor is it the final say. However, it does come from real conversations and observations. So while I prayerfully offer it informed by on-the-ground experience from your members - and hope you'll resonate with it - I also hope you'll remember human psychology tends toward a negativity bias, in which we are more strongly affected by negative information than positive. Remember to reflect just as deeply on the Superpowers shared as the Care factors. Both are essential to the evolution of Spirit's work within St. Andrew.

Additionally, **the church is a family system**, and just as with a family, **no one person or group holds total sway over its formation, especially over the course of years**. It takes an entire system to create itself. Thankfully, the same is not true for transformation and change. **When only a few members of a system choose to change direction, that decision can powerfully direct the entire body toward growth.**

To step boldly into your future, St. Andrew must look honestly at the pinch points currently draining your parish's vitality:

1. Theological Identity vs. Conflict Avoidance

While St. Andrew proudly proclaims a progressive theological mission, there remains a structural 'theological muddiness' in real-life application. Your parish culture demonstrates a persistent, conflict-avoidant nature. Out of a desire to maintain relational politeness, you avoid making clear, courageous corporate decisions on pressing public social issues, leaving a meaningful cohort of your members feeling that your progressive missional stance is 'on the surface' rather than fully realized. **It is possible to be a vibrant, politically and generationally diverse parish while also being clear on how your values inform your practices.**

2. Worship Perfectionism and Generational Friction

There is a subtle undercurrent of aesthetic perfectionism in worship that can inadvertently choke dynamic, authentic connection. This is symbolized by the ongoing, internal debate surrounding the installation of projection screens in the sanctuary, a conflict I was shocked to hear arise in half of my parish interviews. This hidden friction point splits generations: younger cohorts view modern technology as an assumed, uncontroversial baseline of welcome and cultural accessibility, while a small but loud legacy cohort views it as a threat to liturgical purity. **This results in muddy liturgical compromises rather than a clear, modern commitment to intergenerational space, and it makes some members feel their input is honored only if it doesn't truly rub up against something that 'really' matters, such as worship.**

V. Superpowers of St. Andrew

The incredible truth is that St. Andrew is not operating from a posture of scarcity; you have shaken the dust of deficit thinking off your feet and are positioned to lead from immense abundance. I cannot stress enough how much *much-ness* lives at St. Andrew in people-power, untapped financial support, and physical (building and land) resources.

1. True Lay Leader-Fullness

Your greatest super-power is the sheer 'leader-fullness' of your people. Your congregation is packed with highly (sometimes secretly) competent and fiercely dedicated people who possess massive capacity for social justice, earth stewardship, and mutual care.

Where this power remains untapped, it is not due to a lack of will, but rather to a lack of clear invitation structures and an inherited model of 'death by committee'. **With a clearly designed and supported discipleship and leadership pipeline to grow and accompany laity in your giftedness, this congregation will not only remain strong, it will grow and thrive.**

2. Radical Resource Abundance

While the system initially experienced high anxiety regarding an \$80,000 budget deficit, your empirical financial data completely refutes a narrative of scarcity. Your recent financial recap shows that 'Special Offerings' and 'Other Offerings' are excessively generous and, indeed, are an opportunity for you to lead in creative ministry imagination not only in St. Andrew or Beaverton, but in the Oregon Synod.

Beyond financial capital, St. Andrew holds a magnificent physical asset: 7.5 acres of dedicated forest and wetlands. **This community has zero technical excuses for a lack of missional courage; you possess the tangible resources required to fully invest in a 'future and a hope'.** If you find the determination to create a pathway toward supportive staffing with a vision of growth, and can articulate that vision to one another, you are equipped to meet that goal.

VI. Recommendations & the Road Ahead

To support you, I have provided your Church Council an extensive and detailed roadmap to implement a plan to allow you to move ahead with integrity, clarity, and missional alignment. However, below I have shared the heart of my recommendations, as this is the piece of the work that will be most immediately visible to the congregation.

I strongly suggest you call a full-time **Pastor of Lifelong Formation & Congregational Care** to support your existing staffing. Your future will be strengthened if you build a structured, supportive pipeline of volunteer development and discipling for the whole parish. The Sustainability Assessment demonstrates that, with meaningful stewardship planning, St. Andrew possesses the financial capacity to allocate **1.0 to 1.5 FTE** of additional staffing resources over the next 1 to 3 years to support your missional priorities.

Not only will this build meaningful bridge toward 'interdependence,' as well as fill the gaps of care and development you named for very young people and the Missing Middle cohort, but it will also create a ready-bench of new lay leaders who feel they are noticed, named, known, and needed in various roles that are currently filled by folk who are either aging out or would like to serve in new ways. Additionally, I cannot stress *enough* that when you build discipleship pathways that truly focus on leadership, spiritual gifts, and belonging, parishes become more alive in every way. This is an investment in St. Andrew, but it is also an investment in the kin-dom's presence in Beaverton and the Oregon Synod.

A word of warning of course: no one position can fulfill this expectation, which is why they and your current staff must be supported by strategic planning that includes attending to the Factors Needing Care and the Strength Factors I've named above, as well as attention to my additional observations. As I mentioned, I've provided your Council and staff with numerous recommendations to support that additional planning and work.

VII. Conclusion & Blessing

St. Andrew has shaken the dust of deficit, survival thinking off your feet. You have entered a season of **sacred stewardship**. By fiercely prioritizing relational connection and missional strategy, you ensure the 2045 horizon of St. Andrew Lutheran is one of community continuity, intergenerational connection, and spiritual formation.

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' - Jeremiah 29:11

Shared with deep faith in the work of the Creator, Resurrected Christ, and Transforming Spirit, alive and active in your midst,



Pastor Julia Nielsen

Transition Consultant, Oregon Synod (ELCA)