

A Brief History of Celebration Lutheran

Out of a desire to gather for informal and community building worship, several families started meeting in their homes during Advent 1993 on Wednesday nights. We found each other one by one, sharing the news of the Advent gatherings with friends and neighbors. We celebrated the Advent season with prayer and the Holden Village liturgies on cassette player. Soon the Wednesday night meetings filled homes to overflowing, with 30-40 people in attendance. As January 1994 approached the consensus of the group was that we could continue meeting and explore our ministry and worship options together. And so, in the winter of 1994 we started to meet on Sunday evenings for a simple service, led by laypeople and resources like the Holden Village liturgy tapes.

While many of our families were worshipping at other congregations on Sunday mornings, we were also welcoming new people to the community who were interested in a small group centered, creative, and informal worship life.

In March 1994 a group of Celebration folks met with ELCA representatives and were encouraged to begin the process of "growing a church."



We started out on our path to become an "Authorized Worshipping Community," recognized by the Synod. We started to grow as an active lively gathering of folks, joining together for Lutheran worship, service, outreach and fellowship. We were led in worship by neighboring pastors and ELCA leaders. At the end of summer 1994 we met with Pastor Larry Olsen and joyfully made arrangements for his part-time service to our group as pastor and worship leader. Some of our activities included family camp weekends, participation with local Habitat for Humanity projects and support for the local Hispanic Ministries. We joined with Anacortes Lutheran Church for Vacation Bible School programs and shared Lenten worship events. During this time we really appreciated the support of Cluster congregations, joining with

us for retreats and educational opportunities and including our youth on special events, as well as offering guidance and prayer as we looked ahead to mission possibilities.

In January 1996 Mission Director Lud Siqueland gathered together a meeting of Skagit County Lutheran leaders to explore mission planning in our area. Support for Celebration Lutheran's movement towards Mission congregation status was affirmed by the representatives there. We have moved steadily towards full congregational status since that time, with the strong support of the Synod Outreach Board and the Bishop's office, and in June of 1997 rejoiced at the arrival of our first full-time Mission pastor.

In June of 1997, Pastor Terry Kylo joined Celebration as our mission developer under the supervision of Pastor Dick Wendt, Mission Director. After meetings with the leaders, Celebration adopted the mission statement: Inviting all to share Christ's love. While mission statements are helpful, hospitality and invitation have been the hallmarks of this community of faith since its beginning. In 1997-1998 we changed our worship service to better welcome those who haven't been to church before. Roughly one-third of our folks were formerly unchurched, one-third hadn't been to church in 5 years, with the remainder with more recent church experience. We are still seeking to be church for unchurched. We still have much to learn, but we are dedicated to being a community of faith in which people can follow Jesus while being themselves.

Each year since then has brought, through a lot of hard work and prayer, many changes to our congregation. Every year the involvement of people in ministry has increased, with people serving God in our commu-

nity in many ways. We participate in a Sunday evening meal program, weekly worship at a retirement center, a game and reading ministry at a nursing home, roadside pickup, occasional ministry with the Compass Center in Seattle, and support of the local food banks. In 1999, we moved Sunday school to Thursday nights and saw our attendance triple. This year we have an abundance of teachers, and people doing special projects.

In 2000, we engaged in a lot of conversation about our vision for ministry. We believe that God is committed to the world, and that the church is a community called to celebrate God's commitment, and to join God in commitment to the world. To reflect God's commitment we have dedicated ourselves to giving away 25% of our local income. In the summer of 2000, in preparation for our charter membership and our new members process, we adopted a membership covenant to help describe what it means to be a Christian.

Due to two factors, Celebration became a lot smaller in 2002. We had almost 50 people leave town because the internet boom went bust. Celebration also chose to talk about the War in Iraq - in conversations and a potluck, and as well as in the pastor's sermons. Several families left because they were uncomfortable with those conversations and are now participating in other congregations in the community.

In August of 2002, Celebration was invited to join in a partnership with 3 Episcopalian Congregations in the Skagit Valley called the Komo Kulshan Cluster. This was not an invitation to a merger, but into a partnership in which the unique ministry of each congregation is developed by the leadership of the pastoral staff and lay leadership.



After a year of consideration by Celebration's Pastor and the congregation's Leadership Team, the congregation participated in a discernment process for the congregation about that invitation. The congregation had a special meeting in November of 2003. Celebration voted decisively but not unanimously to explore cluster ministry for two years.

Terry Kyлло and Vicki Wesen, an Episcopal Priest, are now the pastors of the cluster and its congregations including Celebration. When asked how they provide pastoral leadership to 4 congregations, they say that the key to the whole thing is helping people see the role they can play in the ministry of the congregations. Wesen and Kyлло spend a lot of time in conversation with leaders and in equipping the congregation's members for ministry. Several key ministries make this possible. First, all the congregations have an active CARE Team Ministry that help the congregations be intentional about pastoral care. Second, there are currently 36 people who are enrolled in what is called Education For Ministry (EFM). EFM is a four-year process with a year to focus on the Hebrew Scripture, New Testament, Church History and Theology, and the fourth year on Ministry Discernment. These classes take place in small groups led by trained leaders and meet once per week for 36 weeks a year.

Now Celebration has been in the cluster ministry for two and a half years. While there are challenges in doing ministry this way, there are many benefits in sharing resources, ideas, and other resources between the congregations.

Celebration continues to change. With each new person we change. But the vision to be a church together with those who have had no church that we might celebrate God's commitment and, in a small way, join God in commitment to the world.

