

Eastside Lutheran Church Community

Frequently Asked Questions

What are we doing?

The ELCA congregations of the East King County Conference are considering a proposal to formally align our governing structures. We have been intentionally increasing our collaboration through pulpit exchanges and shared activities. Our pastors and rostered leaders meet regularly, and our lay leaders and presidents have also met regularly over the past year. Likely, any formal governing alignment would start with the Bellevue congregations: Cross of Christ, St. Andrew's, and St. Luke's. The governance structure would allow for the other congregations in our conference to participate: Mt. Si Lutheran (North Bend), Our Savior's Lutheran (Issaquah), and Sammamish Hills (Sammamish).

Why are we doing this?

Participating in this way of intentional collaboration allows us to more fully align our theology with our practice. First and foremost this is a theological endeavor. We believe we are stronger together. Building more robust relationships with others who seek to draw closer to Jesus is the right thing to do. By creating this system of congregations we are able to more fully invest in the people of the congregations, to equip and empower them, to share the good news of Jesus. This project is all about community witness and collective impact. Together we can tell a powerful story and together we can partner with our neighbors and join in God's creative work in the world.

Why are we doing this now?

We have an incredible moment in time and an incredible configuration of leaders in our conference. We are all facing the challenges of the day that all mainline denominations are facing such as: declining membership, aging facilities, and budget challenges. Yet, we believe that in creating partnerships we can find growth and vitality going forward. We can utilize efficiencies of scale to share assets and free up resources like time and money, to more intentionally spread the word and witness of God's story of salvation.

What will it look like?

In many ways church will look the same. The individual congregations will each maintain their particular identity and hold on to what makes them special and

powerful in their community. In other ways it will be very different. We will see congregations more engaged in their neighborhoods, more invested in where the Spirit is leading, with a renewed sense of vitality and mission. Pastors and rostered leaders will be anchored in congregations and will also have a sense of broader call to the larger church community on the Eastside.

Is this just a merger?

No, not really. Some things, like finances and human resources, will be done at the collective level. But each church will have its own weekly worship and presence in its community. The overall goal is not to make all the congregations the same but empower them to be as different as they need to be to meet the needs of their particular communities.

Will I lose my pastor?

No, in fact, you will not lose your pastor, but rather you will gain more pastors! You will still have your home congregation pastor to connect and relate with. And you will have more ready access to pastors with other skills and identities that may be better suited or gifted for a moment in your life. It's an exciting way to create even more access to care, support, and pastoral care. Further, the collaboration will free up pastor time from administrative, bookkeeping, and human resource tasks that are not core functions of the pastor, but take up considerable resources.

Who will be in charge?

Fundamentally, the members of the congregations who are committed to this partnership will be in charge. Each partner congregation will be represented on the Parish Board who will work on budgets, finance, personnel, facilities, and communications. The rostered leaders and the staff will work together with this governing body to move forward in mission and ministry.

Who all are in this?

In the beginning phase of this project there are three congregations in Bellevue that are going to be the initial core. St. Luke's, St. Andrew's, and Cross of Christ. Hopefully, soon the other three congregations in our conference, Mt. Si Lutheran, Our Savior's Lutheran, and Sammamish Hills, will be all participating.

What is the timeline?

This initial plan is to create a parish Board that will be funded by congregations to support common ministry activities. This Parish Board will gain trust and capacity and eventually evolve into the primary governing system for all our congregations. Until that happens it will run in parallel with each congregation's existing governance processes. The beauty of this model is that it doesn't create a binary—in or out—proposition. We can each maintain independent local autonomy as we gain experience and trust before we fully move into this vision for the future.

What are the tangible expressions of these ideas?

A few examples of what this relationship could look like. We imagine a shared Parish Administration and Communications team. This team could also include staff that would manage finances. This might include shared family and youth staff who coordinate events for all the sites. We are working to create shared devotional resources for the upcoming season of Advent. We have already seen examples of shared worship services like our recent worship in the park.

We also expect to see the coordination of pastoral care and work. We can more faithfully and fully use the gifts of our rostered leaders in their areas of passion and skill. Each site would benefit from the gifts of the team of rostered leaders.

We are struggling to find lay leaders to serve in our current Council positions. How will we

find additional people to serve on the Parish Board?

The proposed Parish Board is to be made up of the lead Pastor, Council President and one

additional representative from each participating Congregation. Each congregation would

therefore, only need to find one person outside of the pastor and president to serve on the Parish

Board.

Will funding the Parish Board cost us more money than we are already committing to our home congregations?

No, in fact the Parish Board would be looking for opportunities to better steward our

Resources and reduce costs. Where it makes sense, the Parish Board might hire a bookkeeper or administrator or contracted services to serve multiple congregations. Each congregation would be expected to allocate funding only for their portion of that cost.