

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church
6004 Waterloo Rd., Columbia, MD 21045
www.stjohnmd.org

St. John Lutheran Church will be transitioning leadership as our lead pastor retires later this year. We are confident that the Holy Spirit is preparing a call to our new leader, and we have already committed to pray for that person.

This document was prepared based on questions from the ELCA Ministry Site Profile to provide interested candidates with an initial understanding of who we are as a faith community. We hope it leads to discerning conversations and preparation for God's next season at St. John.

If you are not on the roster of our denomination, please contact us for more information about potential next steps and possibilities.

Question 8 Summary Description

We have invested heavily (financially, emotionally, spiritually) in moving from an institutional model of managed ministry toward a culture that makes disciples of Jesus who can make disciples. When Jesus said, "You will do greater things than me" he meant everyone, especially an Empowered Laity who know how to preach, teach, and heal in the name of Jesus and can do so walking in step with the Holy Spirit.

Question 5 Characteristics Write a description of your community in terms of socio-economic status, demographics, primary areas of employment and lifestyle.

- Work settings and schools in this community are racially and culturally diverse. Religious settings in this community tend to gather as ethnically and culturally segregated populations, rather than blended.
- Routinely in the top 5 wealthiest counties in America. There are still the poor and homeless, and more apparent because of wealth and a high standard of living. Debt can be a factor for many, even the wealthy.
- Highly educated, many with advanced degrees
- Education is a primary draw for families to Howard County with some of the best schools in the nation. This drives housing prices up. Usually a 2 parent, 2 career household to afford living here for the children's schools.
- Many are employed by the federal government, as well as military members and contractors who support it. Many have a challenging commute into government complexes in MD, DC, and VA.
- Family life circles around children's school and extra activities, especially team sports. Many sports and marching band groups have travel team schedules that take the family away for the weekend.
- The surrounding community is 90% unchurched as a lifestyle choice.
- Primary zip codes: Columbia 21045, Ellicott City 21043, plus Elkridge 21075, & north of Laurel

Context List 3 ways that the community in which you are located has been challenged by change and transition in the last 3-5 years.

1. Increased stress in family life from over-bearing work, school and activity scheduling
2. Single (or divorced parents) often can not remain in the area due to cost of living
3. Increased demand from coaches and leaders for children and teens. The young people are often told they must give “100%” to their extra-curricular activity or not be allowed to participate. As these opportunities are prized for a college-prep resume, they usually comply.

Trends List 3 changes or trends within the congregation which have occurred in the last 3-5 years

1. An established discipleship culture: disciples have the character and competency to coach others as disciples. People have become disciples and naturally reach out to neighbors, friends, co-workers, family with the Gospel.
2. There is a deeply reflective time in worship every Sunday: the Lord’s Supper, laying on of hands, prayer, candle lighting at the altar. This is unhurried and organic. Active and personal engagement in worship and seeking God.
3. As the discipleship movement has taken hold, the classic metrics of a congregation (members & dollars) has decreased. While that decrease is going on nationally in most mainline congregations, there has also been some opting out by those who do not want to be in a discipleship culture. On the other hand, our metrics of success are now lives transformed and stories shared -- we have many and our congregation gains inspiration as these are shared.
4. Change in understanding of what is “regular worship”, less participation in structured events like Sunday School and Bible studies. Discipleship takes place life on life, and in scheduled *huddle* time.
5. Ministry partnerships: We offer free space to ethnically, economically and denominational diversity diverse congregations because *we will all share heaven together*. We look for ways to partner together to reach our surrounding community. We also dedicate human, financial, and space resources for the county’s cold weather shelter, meals for food vulnerable students from the elementary school next door, a large home school co-op, and a summer camp for special needs children. For more than a decade, our global partnership with Good Samaritan Orphanage in Mbeya, Tanzania has enhanced the lives of AIDS orphans and their surrounding village.

Programs Describe your congregation’s current programs for mission and ministry

We are not a program focused congregation. Instead, we focus on values, summarized as follows:

- We are in step with what the Holy Spirit is doing
- We are a healthy environment for spiritual growth
- We are a discipling culture
- We are families on mission

These values are woven into all aspects of congregational and community life resulting in a distinct and unique culture; the way we follow Jesus.

As we are a mission-focused community, we are not program-centric, but we do support regular and on-going activities that align with our mission. We are continually learning and determining how we can

best express our unique discipling and missional culture, committed to be fruitful in the way God has called us.

Goals [What are the primary goals to which you are committed?](#)

Our primary goal is to live out our calling as empowered disciples of Jesus, accepting Him into all aspects of our lives by inspiring, equipping and coaching our people to live this mission. In our surrounding community, our neighbors, co-workers and friends have predominantly never experienced a relationship with Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are the priesthood of all believers, empowered to take the Good News to people of peace, the people whom the Spirit has prepared for us.

We have begun to resource other congregations and individual leaders (both clergy and laity) to create a discipling culture that empowers each person to God's fullness.

Energy [What is your congregation really excited about now?](#)

We know who God has called us to be. While we are not large, we continually witness the Spirit's transformative power as we follow Him. We see lives changed, people healed, and hope restored. We see people who once felt intimidated by sharing the Gospel, now naturally reaching out and connecting with others in confidence and wonder. We see disciples of Jesus who know how to make more disciples. The Spirit is moving! We listen, follow, and celebrate, telling the stories of what He is doing in and through us.

Partnership [How does the congregation see itself as a member of the ELCA?](#)

We orbit with a network of national and global ministry leaders, such as Mike Breen, Paul Maconochie and others of 3DM, as well as Rich Melheim of Faith Incubators. Our leadership staff has been coached by them, and in turn coaches the people of St John. Leaders from our congregation have participated as trainers and coaches for other congregations within the discipleship movement.

Question 7 Purpose [How does this congregation understand its reason for being in the light of God's call to mission and service? What are you? Why are you here? See ENERGY \(above\)](#)

Giftedness [What are your gifts and resource for fulfilling this purpose? What are the congregation's top 3 assets and how are they being used? Are there obstacles that must be overcome to be able to use these gifts and accomplish the mission?](#)

Top Assets:

1. **Empowered disciples:** We have disciples who know how to make disciples, and some are very skilled coaches. Our 25 lay pastors offer healing prayer and anointing in every worship service. Some of them have preached and shared ministry experience from the pulpit. Five of our lay pastors preside over the Lord's Supper in worship services. Other lay pastors offer the Lord's Supper in retreat and missional community settings, as to those who are hospitalized or housebound.
2. **Moving worship:** We have excellent worship music leadership for both traditional and contemporary worship styles. Each leader has developed an impressive team of musicians and singers. They truly lead the congregation into the worship experience, rather than perform.
3. **Sacred reflection:** As the people of St John have grown in prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit, it has become natural to allow time for sacred, personal reflection through lighting candles at

the altar, healing prayer, and anointing of individuals and families. This time is reverent and relaxed, never rushed. Primarily this happens during worship services, but as it has become part of our identity, we have found it ministers during funerals and other special occasions.

Obstacles:

It is difficult to reach new people with the Gospel. We have strong discipleship, and now need to grow in evangelism. We see declining participation in Sunday worship and Sunday School activities as the community uses their precious weekend time for other activities. This requires ways of taking the Gospel to them, perhaps through missional communities on the soccer field, or offering something they deeply need, such as quiet and reflection time to escape their harried lives.

Our VBS typically has 60-70% of children from outside our congregation. Many return summer after summer, but aren't coming to worship or events during the year. We have been holding Messy Church once a month as an alternative setting for fellowship and sharing Jesus. (Our first Messy Baptism occurred in March!) We have tried neighborhood missional communities with mixed success. Our outreaches to care for the children in need at the elementary school next door have been warmly received, but not led to sharing the Gospel. We have over 10 years of experience providing a county homeless shelter during the week of Christmas, engaging 300 volunteers, people well beyond our congregation. And yet outreach is slow. We long to lever our gifts to bring new believers to Christ.

Mission In light of the way you have described your ministry context, what are the top 3 mission priorities which hold the most promise for the continued development of this ministry?

1. Equipping young people and young families in a world that does not know Christ, that they will be His light into it. (This is true for any age group, however, strengthening young disciples will especially build the Kingdom into the future.)
2. Deepen the competence and empowerment of disciples to plant ministry in their own context.
3. Explore how this faith community might be called to be an equipping center for other ministries.

Question 13 Mutual Expectations

5 primary areas of activity or focus for incoming leader in the first year.

- A. Preaching and vision casting for the future
- B. Understanding our discipleship culture; Acclimate to an empowered laity
- C. Lead next steps in empowerment, discipleship, healing prayer, outreach...
- D. Invest in young leaders/families. Develop Missional Communities.
- E. Build on opportunities to be an equipping center for other congregations

5 ways the congregation will support and encourage this leader in the first year

- A. As a community open to the Holy Spirit's prompting, we will welcome a visionary leader.
- B. We are already praying for this person and their household. We are preparing our hearts for new leadership and we will gratefully welcome and celebrate the new leader God is calling to us. Welcome and support the leader and their household in this new setting, community, & schools.
- C. Surround this leader with empowered, passionate disciples of Jesus, lay leaders who understand the mission, and an experienced skilled staff of high character.
- D. We are willing to invest in this person's leadership journey.
- E. Explore the possibility of a temporary parsonage to ease the transition.