

Learning to Listen to God:

The Vision 40 Process

Normandale Lutheran Church

Introduction

Planning for the future is done by individuals, families, businesses and institutions. Churches should do the same. Normandale Lutheran Church has long had an effective Long-Range Planning Committee to advise the Church Council on steps to take in the future.

A few years ago, the Committee, with the approval of the Council, established a group to take a long look ahead; forty years to be precise. Forty is Biblically-based, with that number occurring repeatedly in God's work throughout history. Also, the 100th anniversary of the Church would occur in a little over 40 years -- 2050. So it seemed appropriate to invest the time, energy and wisdom of current congregation members in such a forward vision.

The Forty-Year Vision Task Force was assigned this challenging task. Over the next two years, the Task Force worked hard to produce many findings, with the hope that this work will help make Normandale more effective in its role of carrying out Christ's commands to all who follow Him.

The Vision 40 process identified several emergent themes, seen in past congregational ministries and as a key part of the future of Normandale: **[1] Depth** -- Going deep in our spiritual lives, in our involvement at church. Not just "skimming the surface." **[2] Relationships** -- People want to really know each other here, develop relationships with each other. **[3] Connections** -- Connected to each other, the ministries of this church and to the world around through local and international outreach. **[4] Roots** -- Deeply connected to Scripture and to Lutheran traditions and theology. **[5] Family** -- A congregation with a "family feeling." People take care of each other, are there for each other.

Listening was a key ingredient of the Task Force's efforts. From that came the action word of **discernment** for current visioning and for future decisions by our congregation leaders.

Spiritual discernment is:

Scripture-based
Led by the Holy Spirit
Inclusive--encouraging all to participate

Prayerful
Practiced in a community
Focused on silence and listening

Why a 40-year vision?

The Long-Range Planning Committee, together with Senior Pastor Holm, began a discussion in 2005 about the need to look farther into Normandale's future than the 5-10 year plans that the group had been completing. The committee wanted to explore issues and concerns that typically don't get examined in shorter term plans. In addition, they wanted there to be more conversation about the development of "grand ideas" related to Normandale's future. Pastor Holm said he thought the church needed something between the "now" and the "not yet." The 40-year vision would be a bridge between the two.

Influenced by St. John's Abbey, which has a 100-year plan, the Long-Range Planning Committee initially advocated for a 50-year vision. Eventually, 40 years was settled on, because of the significance of the number 40 in Biblical events.

The Long-Range Planning Committee worked over an extended period to find a consultant to facilitate the process. At least seven consultants were interviewed before Joy Skjegstad was selected as the consultant on the project in mid-2007.

The agreed-upon outcomes of the process:

- Develop a clearer sense of Normandale's identity, and the implications of that identity for the future
- Build the capacity of the congregation to practice spiritual discernment
- Develop an intergenerational model for planning and decision-making
- Develop a vision for the future of Normandale based on strong involvement of the congregation
- Engage a greater percentage of the congregation in the church as they feel more invested in Normandale's future

Discernment

vs. Corporate Planning

Normandale is a planful church--programs are scheduled well in advance, expenditures are weighed carefully, and a long-range plan is in place. The congregation has a number of people who have strong planning skills because of their professional backgrounds--business owners and executives, for example, consultants and nonprofit leaders.

The idea of a long-range vision was hard to grasp for many people at Normandale, because it seemed counter-intuitive to their own experiences with planning. Plans should be: concrete and specific, with timeframes and budgets.

But there wasn't a way to make something 40 years in the future concrete or specific. Timeframes and budgets clearly wouldn't be a part of this process.

But this wasn't a planning process at all--this was about spiritual discernment.

Spiritual discernment is:

- Scripture-based
- Prayerful
- Led by the Holy Spirit
- Practiced in a community
- Inclusive--encouraging all to participate
- Focused on silence and listening

"There is a corporate model for visioning and a discernment model. A corporate model seeks the bottom line, answers and priorities. The discernment model is contemplative. We are practicing the discernment model and listening for the voices that will emerge.

We need to get ourselves out of the way. We will be practicing prayerful listening and must be humble enough to listen. The Word is our compass."
--Senior Pastor Holm

A Frame and Some Threads

The image of a **picture frame** is a helpful way to think about a vision that is this long-range.

The 40-year vision is the frame for the future work of the church.

The frame is open-ended.

It does not prejudice outcomes.

It is filled with ambiguity and risk and the joy of the Spirit's wind and fire

The four sides of the frame are:

Identity

Word

Visions/dreams

and Prayer/discernment

What's in the middle of the frame?

A tactical master plan not yet in existence

A stewardship model that cares for all three areas of Normandale's life together: Our base (general fund), Marching off the Maps (outreach), The Foundation (endowment)

Key words for inside the frame:

Endowments/staffing

Core ministry/mission

Satellites

and Building/grounds



Future generations will fill in the details of what is in the middle of the frame: specific programs, budgets, staff, facilities.

But the frame is there to guide decision-making about all of those things.

Another image that was useful: a piece of beautiful cloth with very colorful threads running through it.

If Normandale's history and present were a tapestry

we should look for the themes or the threads

running all the way through the piece of cloth.



Formation of the Task Force

The planning team for Vision 40 discussed the importance of having a diversity of ages on the committee, but also people from a varied group of professions. Recruiting both new and long-time members was also identified as a priority. The task force wouldn't just be composed of people with a professional planning background--business owners and corporate leaders, for example. This task force would truly represent "the community of the baptized."

The planning team, composed of Bob Fransen, Lois Nordling, Senior Pastor Holm and Joy Skjegstad met in the Summer of 2007 to put together a list of the kinds of people who would be helpful to have on the task force:

- A charter member of the church
- A person who is 20-something
- A person who is 30-50 years old
- A teacher
- A pastor
- A stay-at-home mom
- A working mom
- Youth ages 15-17
- A 50-65 year-old
- A 65-80 year-old
- An 80+ year-old

The initial thought was that people would be hand-picked to serve on the task force, recruited to meet one or more of the categories on the list above. However, as the planning team members talked, the idea of sending a letter to the entire congregation, offering everyone the possibility of participating, was embraced. Pastor Holm kept stating that we needed to trust the Holy Spirit to draw the right people out of the congregation and on to the task force.

A letter was sent in August (not the optimal time to be recruiting people for anything), and 32 responses were received! The planning team met and chose 14 people from that list, working hard to include people who represented the categories above. An effort to include people who had been at Normandale for a variety of time periods was also made. The Task Force included newer members, long-time members (including one charter member), and a number of people "in-between."

Vision 40 Task Force Members

Dick Anderson
Dentist

Mandy Blizzard
Stay-at-home mom

Janna (Larson) Bross
Financial Analyst

Nancy Chesser
Branding and Marketing Communications

Dottie Dahlquist
Co-founder and owner of Nordicware, charter member

Chuck Devries
Retired business executive

Jenny Emery-Bock
Stay-at-home mom

Leah Kuck
High School student

Tim Maudlin
Business Executive

Andrew Mowbray
6th grader

Gerri Nelson
Retired pediatric nurse

Lois Nordling
School principal
Member of the Long-Range Planning Committee

Andy Stotts
IT specialist

Clay West
High School student

Getting Started

The Task Force had its first meeting in October of 2007, with two regular meetings each month--one shorter meeting on a Wednesday night focused on Scripture study and a longer (3-hour) meeting on a Saturday morning to build community and "do the work" of the Vision 40 process.

The Task Force met a total of 26 times between October of 2007 and May of 2009.

The longer meetings on Saturdays typically included the following elements:

- Prayer

- Teaching on key Scripture texts related to the Vision 40 process (see page 8 for these texts)

- Review of the process so far

- Discussion with the larger group about key aspects of the work, for example:
 - Emerging themes about Normandale's history and ministry
 - Reporting back on interviews and research
 - Planning for discernment weekends

- Sharing of prayer requests and a closing prayer circle at the end of the meeting

The Task Force developed a strong sense of community as a group--people got to know each other, sometimes connecting outside of Task Force meetings. The longer meetings and the focus on sharing concerns helped group members to develop relationships with each other.

Key Scriptures in the Process

The role of Scripture in the Vision 40 process cannot be overstated. Biblical teaching was a key part of almost every meeting of the Vision 40 Task Force. Saturday morning meetings included a full 45 minutes to one-hour of teaching. The Wednesday night meetings were solely focused on scriptural reflection.

These are the Scriptures that were key to the process, helping the Task Force members understand:

--How God speaks

--How we can listen to God

--The importance of involving "all" in the discernment process

Joel 2:10-32

"...Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; you sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit...."

Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost. Peter recites the passage from Joel 2.

Acts 2: 42-47

Normandale's mission statement is based on this passage. Key characteristics of the early church: fellowship, prayer, teaching, devotion.

Numbers 11

The story of Eldad and Medad. How can we listen to people who usually aren't listened to? People outside of our group? "...Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!..."

I Samuel 17

David and Goliath. A great 40-year vision story--David knew that God was the deliverer.

Who are the Goliaths in our lives and in the 40-year vision process?

Pentad of Prayers

Fiat Mihi Mary's	Me	Luke 1:38
Magnificat	World and the Poor	Luke 1:46-55
Benedictus	Community	Luke 1:68-79
Gloria in Excelsis	Family/Flesh	Luke 2:14
Nunc Dimittis	Complete Life	Luke 2:29-32

Romans 8:5, 8:11

God lives in each one of us. God lives in you. God's spirit is speaking and moving.

Romans 11

Romans 12:1-3

Don't be conformed to this world, make your lives an offering to God.

Looking back at Normandale's history

The Vision 40 process was more focused on the future of Normandale than its past. However, the task force decided that looking at key themes from the congregation's history would help identify long-term ministry priorities for the church. The group would be looking for "threads" woven through Normandale from the very beginning.

Interviewing the still-living charter members of the congregation was a key activity during this phase. Some of the charter members were adults when they helped form the congregation and are now quite elderly. Other charter members are now in middle age, having been children when the church was begun.

The charter members interviewed were (with task force member who interviewed them in parentheses):

- Corrine Lynch (Tim Maudlin)
- Lucille/Glenn Carlson (Nancy Chesser/Lois Nordling)
- Ina Nelson (Andy Stotts)
- Marie Carlson (Mandy Blizzard/Janna Larson)
- Ruth Anderson (Chuck DeVries/Andrew Mobray)
- Mark Peterson (Dick Anderson)
- Mary Fenlason (Jenny Emery-Bock/Geraldine Nelson)

Questions asked of the charter members included:

- Why was Normandale founded?
- What was your role?
- What are some of your earliest memories of attending church at Normandale?
- What was the focus of the church's earliest ministry work?
- In your opinion, how has the ministry of the church changed over the past 57 years?
- What makes Normandale unique as compared to other congregations?
- In your time at Normandale, what would you say was the most "remarkable ministry moment"—when the congregation heard God's call and responded with amazing ministry?

Charter members shared many memories from the early days of the church. Almost all remembered details about Grange Hall, where the Normandale congregation first met. Many charter members "pitched in" in some way to help with those early services, setting up chairs or folding bulletins, for example. People reminisced about the music, having Sunday School in Pastor Carlson's basement, and church picnics. Several charter members (or their family members) were directly involved in constructing "Phase I" of Normandale's first facility, and there were stories shared about that as well.

Themes from the Charter Member interviews:

Several key themes about Normandale emerged from the charter member interviews.

A vision for reaching the young families that were building new homes in Edina
--an evangelistic focus

The "family feeling" of the early church, that many thought still continued today

A desire to go to church close to home

Everyone was willing to pitch in and help

An international focus from the very beginning

- o --one church member had African exchange students, also the church "adopted" two German families that had come to the U.S.

A focus on quality programs for children

The Holy Spirit was at work at Normandale from the very beginning

Key quotes from the interviews:

"At the beginning you were needed. You needed to show up or no one would be there!"

"We got the list of new houses being built, and visited those families to invite them to church. We brought fresh bread to give to the people we visited."

"We are a 'we' not a 'me' church."

Emergent Themes about the ministry of Normandale

After completing the charter member interviews and doing some reflecting on their own, task force members identified five key words that they thought described the ministry of Normandale over the years:

Depth

Going deep in our spiritual lives, in our involvement at church.

Not just "skimming the surface."

Relationships

**People want to really know each other here, develop relationships
with each other.**

Connections

**Connected to each other, the ministries of this church and to the world
around through local and international outreach**

Roots

Deeply connected to Scripture and to Lutheran traditions and theology.

Family

**A congregation with a "family feeling." People take care of each other,
are there for each other.**

Characteristics of Normandale ministries--as seen by Task Force members

Drawing off the five major themes, task force members saw these characteristics in both the past and present at Normandale

The Word of God is central to every ministry

- --strong teaching on God's Word permeates the church
- --everyone is expected to read, study and apply the Word

A passion for connecting with the disconnected and marginalized

- --physically going to where they are
- --building relationships

Rooted in Lutheran tradition

Strong Lay Leadership

- --lay leaders equipped and given authority to lead
- --pastors willing to share authority

Asks for a commitment

- --committed spiritually
- --committing time
- --not "watered-down" or shortened for convenience

Intergenerational

A focus on developing deep, personal relationships

Valuing youth

- --strong confirmation program with investment by senior pastor
- --youth have input into church decision-making

Generous giving

- --giving financially above and beyond

Normandale's size contributes to the "family" feel of the church

- --don't want to be an "industrial" or "mega" church

Partnerships with other churches, especially cross-denominationally

Well-thought out plans

Inclusiveness

- --welcoming everyone
- --a leader in encouraging women in leadership

Identifying and nurturing people heading into full-time ministry

Pastors know and care for congregants

Not engaged in political "hot button" issues

Staff Interviews

During the Vision 40 process, 21 Normandale staff members were interviewed one-on-one by three members of the Task force and Joy Skjegstad.

What staff members saw as key characteristics of Normandale:

- Scripture is the center of worship and programs
- Traditional in worship, Lutheran in its identity
- Ministry is well-planned and well-communicated
- A strong focus on missions and outreach
- The church has a "family" feeling, people are connected to each other
- High quality worship experience
- Involving children and youth in all aspects of the church
- Affluent, success-oriented congregation
- Low tolerance for failure

Successes/Need for Improvement

Marching Off the Maps was cited by a number of staff as the "most remarkable ministry moment" at Normandale in recent years.

Staff said that Normandale needs to do more to build the young adult ministry

Future of Normandale

Staff see the Normandale of the future as needing to be more receptive to change, in order to respond to the changing demographics of the community around the church. They see a church that is more diverse and multicultural and that has become a training center, sharing ministry models with other congregations. Technology will need to be incorporated into worship in the future. Many said that the church should grow to be a larger congregation. They want to preserve strong pastoral leadership and a focus on the Word.

Bringing Vision 40 to the whole congregation

The next step was to figure out how the Vision 40 process could be brought to the congregation as a whole. The work done to date had been within the task force and with the charter members. How could the process encourage the participation of a broad group of Normandale members? There were extensive discussions (at a number of Task Force meetings) about this.

The Questions:

The group spent quite a bit of time developing questions to ask in group settings, related to the ministry and mission of Normandale and how congregation members saw the future of the church. There was an effort to keep the questions open-ended, in order to encourage discussion, and also to focus on the long-term, so groups wouldn't get "bogged down" in the details of the present.

The first list of questions was long (it ended up being too long) and included the following:

- What do you see God doing at Normandale?
- How has your life been affected and changed by the ministry of Normandale Lutheran Church?
- What about Normandale do you want to be preserved for future generations?
- What are your hopes and dreams for Normandale Lutheran Church?
- What are we called to become as a church?
- What are your greatest concerns about the future of this church?
- In the future, what will Normandale need to do to respond to our changing culture?
- How can Normandale help members deepen their spiritual lives?
- In the future, how can Normandale work to spread God's Word?
- How can we engage and empower you to lend your voice to the future of Normandale?
- What is important to the 40-year vision that we have forgotten to ask?
- Are there any additional comments you would like to share?

Groups to Involve

Initially, the task force focused energy on how to connect with groupings of people that already existed within Normandale--groups of program participants, and committees of the church, for example.

At one point, the Task Force generated this list of specific kinds of people and existing groups at Normandale to involve in the process:

Specific kinds of people to involve in the Vision 40 process

- Children (Club 56, children's choirs)
- Teenagers (confirmation group, youth choir grades 7-12)
- People who are ill and dying
- Parents (Caribou and Christ, other groups?)
- Pre-School parents
- Grandparents
- College Students who came from Normandale, are now away at school
- Young Adults
- Married a Long Time
- Pre-marital
- Other ethnicities/nationalities
- Disenfranchised (ex: someone from Normandale who is in prison)
- Committees of the church
- New members
- The Gathering (ages 40-100)
- Normandale House/Elliott residents
- Single and Re-singled
- Ages 40-60
- Women's Circles
- "Shut-ins"—The Colony
- Participants/partners at the Center for Healing and Wholeness
- Missionaries
- Residents in the area around the church—Edina, or a broader area?
- People who are away part of the year

Piloting three discernment groups

Out of this long list of who should participate, the Task Force decided to pilot the process with three existing groups within the church:

The 9th grade confirmation class

A 3rd grade Sunday School class

The Worship Commission of the church

9th Grade Confirmation Class

The following questions were given to 9th grade confirmation class members in writing, to complete during one of their confirmation classes. The process was introduced by Pastor Chris Enstad, and then participants were given the list of questions:

- What do you see God doing at Normandale?
- How has your life been affected and changed by the ministry of Normandale Lutheran Church?
- What about Normandale do you want to be preserved for future generations?
- What are your hopes and dreams for Normandale Lutheran Church?
- What are we called to become as a church?
- What are your greatest concerns about the future of this church?
- In the future, what will Normandale need to do to respond to our changing culture
- How can Normandale help members deepen their spiritual lives?
- In the future, how can Normandale work to spread God's Word?
- How can we engage and empower you to lend your voice to the future of Normandale?
- What is important to the 40-year vision that we have forgotten to ask?
- Are there any additional comments you would like to share?

The facilitators reflected afterwards that the list of questions needed to be shortened, probably significantly. The youth found the 40-year aspect of the process difficult and a number of them seemed reluctant to speak.

Some of the themes from the 9th grade confirmation group:

- Youth said that Normandale staff and members have cared for them during difficult times
- They have learned a great deal about their faith while at Normandale
- They like the traditional music and liturgy, want to avoid "technologizing" the worship services
- They want Normandale to expand it's focus on outreach
- And to listen to members and the community
- They want the church to be accepting of all, welcoming to everyone

3rd Grade Sunday School class

All of the third graders met with three facilitators from the Vision 40 Task Force as part of Sunday School one Sunday. The group met in the Sanctuary near the stained glass windows, which are 40 years old.

Facilitators asked the children three questions:

- How does coming to church make you feel?
- What about Normandale should stay the same?
- What would you invent for the future of Normandale?

The facilitators reflected that the children had very creative answers and weren't afraid to talk. The context of being near the stained glass window helped, as did using visual aids from 40 years ago like a rotary telephone, then comparing it to what we have today (a cell phone).

Some themes from the 3rd grade pilot group:

3rd graders see a future full of technology for Normandale--video screens and helmets, robots serving communion, and possibly a church on Jupiter.

They like the stories and the music and hearing about God and Jesus.

What is God doing at Normandale?:

"Healing people"

"Taking away sins"

Worship and Music Committee

The Worship and Music Committee met in a small group facilitated by Dick Anderson, a member of the Vision 40 Task Force. Committee members were asked the same questions as the 9th Grade Confirmation Class (see previous page).

Facilitators said they felt the questions were too general and that the committee members struggled with the concept of a 40-year vision.

Themes from the Worship Committee focus group:

- Want to remain a close-knit church, avoid becoming a mega-church
- Want to keep a focus on outreach
- Normandale will need to change as the community around it changes
- Worship and music ministries as very strong
- Retain strong emphasis on God's Word

Deciding on Next Steps

After the three pilot groups in the Spring of 2008, the Task Force decided on a number of key elements that they wanted to be present in the Vision 40 process as it was rolled out to the entire congregation:

To use intergenerational groups in the practice of discernment, rather than using existing groups at Normandale or age-specific programs.

Task Force members felt that the intergenerational nature of the Task Force itself and the value of that had been one of the key discoveries of the Vision 40 process. Why not bring that into the work with the congregation?

To keep discernment groups small

The pilot demonstrated that small groups are best, allowing all members time to offer their opinions and reflections.

To shorten the list of questions

The list of questions used in the pilot was simply too long and took too long to complete in a group setting

To open the process to the entire congregation

Rather than recruiting a "sample" of people from the church, the Task Force decided that it was important to invite everyone to participate. This went along with the Biblical passages that became a strong theme in the process, that "all" should be listened to and valued.

To focus on The Word

Scripture had been so key to the Task Force members' understanding of discernment, so the group decided that reading and reflecting on Biblical passages needed to be part of the congregational process as well.

To use a set format for the discernment groups

A format was developed for discernment groups that would be used in every setting, and with every participant and facilitator. This simplified the process, and ensured that everyone would have the same exposure to Scripture, reflection, and questions about Normandale.

Learning from the Abbot

The Abbot of St. John's, John Klassen, provided training in spiritual discernment to facilitators for the Vision 40 discernment groups. Many Vision 40 facilitators said later that the training was a high point for them in the process and that it helped them more fully understand the discernment process.

Pastor Holm, Joy Skjegstad and Dottie Dalquist, a member of the Task Force, met with the Abbot in October of 2008 to discuss the format for the training. The Abbot was very willing to tailor his approach to the Vision 40 process, and agreed to come to Normandale on November 8th.

The Abbot shared about the process of spiritual discernment at the abbey, emphasizing the importance of silence, and how easy it is to become distracted by our obligations, the world around us, even our own bodies. He instructed the group in the process of Lectio Divina, a particular way of reading and reflecting on scripture. By re-reading Scripture passages, reflecting in silence and sharing in a small group, people are more able to truly hear what the Word is saying.

Facilitators then broke into small groups and practiced Lectio Divina with each other. Three Scripture passages were used in these "practices." The length of time it took to go through each passage convinced the Task Force that there should be just two passages for the congregational process.

The exercise given by the Abbot:

We will use our groups for the process of holy reading.

1. One person reads aloud the passage of Scripture while others are attentive for a word or phrase that is especially meaningful to them.
2. Silence for 1-2 minutes. Focus on the word or phrase that has caught your attention.
3. Share the word or phrase with other members of the group--without elaboration.

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4. A second reading of the same passage by another person
 5. Silence for 2-3 minutes--Reflect on the question: "Where does the content of the reading touch my life today?"
 6. Share briefly, "I hear, I see...."

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7. A third reading of the same passage by another person
 8. Silence for 2-3 minutes--what is God calling Normandale Lutheran to do in this passage? What is God calling me to do?
 9. Sharing at greater length the focus of reflection and here record ideas on the paper provided.

Four Discernment Weekends

Pilot Weekend November 13-16

The "discernment weekend" concept was piloted in November of 2008, with a randomly selected group of Normandale members. Letters were sent to a diverse cross-section of the congregation, inviting them to participate in one of four 90-minute "discernment groups" during the weekend of November 13-16. Groups were scheduled for Thursday evening, two times on Saturday morning, and on Sunday evening.

A number of people responded to the letters, and follow-up calling secured a few more participants. Thursday evening proved to be the most popular time to attend.

Ten discernment groups were held during the November weekend, with 56 participants overall

The discernment groups included people of many different ages, though overall, more middle-aged and older people participated. Where possible, groups were organized to create intergenerational opportunities--couples and families were split up, for example, and youth who participated were spread out among the groups.

Group sessions were held in quiet, comfortable meeting spaces. The lights were turned low and candles were used to create a feeling of warmth and intimacy.

Format for the sessions

Everyone attending the discernment groups, including the facilitators, gathered in the Fireside Room for an introduction to the Vision 40 process and for instructions on the schedule for the small group sessions. Then each facilitator took a group of five to 10 people to a different room to reflect on scripture and the future of Normandale Church.

Lectio Divina

Each group session started with the Lectio Divina process (described on page 14), with small group members reflecting on two passages of scripture:

Joel 2:28-32

Acts 2:1-21

Some facilitators noted that there wasn't time to complete the process with both scripture passages, so some groups practiced Lectio Divina with the Joel passage and simply read the Acts passage aloud.

Six Questions about Normandale

Then small group members reflected on the following questions about Normandale Church:

What do you see God doing at Normandale?

In the future, what will Normandale need to do to respond to our changing culture?

What are your hopes and dreams for Normandale Lutheran Church?

What are we called to become as a church?

How has your life been affected and changed by the ministry of Normandale Lutheran Church?

What about Normandale do you want to be preserved for future generations?

Three more discernment weekends

Building on the success of the first discernment weekend, Task Force members decided that the format should be offered additional times to anyone from the congregation who wanted to participate. Letters were sent to everyone from the congregation and the discernment weekends were advertised in the bulletin and the church newsletter. Pulpit announcements were also made to encourage participation.

Additional discernment weekends were held in

- **January (3 groups)**
- **February (4 groups)**
- **March (4 groups)**

In all, 126 people participated in 21 different discernment groups during the four discernment weekends

Feedback from discernment group participants

Participants expressed genuine appreciation for being invited into the Vision 40 process. Staff and Task Force members received many of the following kinds of comments from group members:

- Group members said they enjoyed listening to the perspectives of others from the congregation
- The small group format made people feel comfortable in expressing their views
- Some of the most positive comments were about the intergenerational aspect of the groups. Older group members were "wowed" by the contributions of the youth who participated, and appreciated being able to hear what younger people thought about the future of the church
- Group members liked that their opinions were valued
- This was the first time that participants had practiced Lectio Divina. Many were intrigued that each person in a group would pick up on different words in the Scripture passage.

Major Themes from the Discernment Groups

Though a variety of perspectives were expressed in the discernment groups, some definite themes or "threads" ran throughout.

Group members had a strong sense of Normandale's identity, and could clearly describe the characteristics of the church.

Identifying Characteristics of Normandale:

- Excellence in Worship and Music
- Normandale is focused in its ministry
 - in what it chooses to do and how it chooses to do it
- Holy Spirit is invited in and is active
- Strong teaching ministry
- Strong pastoral care
- Strong children and youth ministries
- Qualified and hard-working staff
- Focus on the Word of God
- Church members feel very connected to programs
 - participate in them, volunteer their time
- Normandale people give generously
- Emphasis on fellowship, building relationships with others
- Focus on outreach
 - not just money, but involvement
 - reaching out to the most disenfranchised people and places
- Involvement of children and youth in all aspects of church life
 - ex: Sunday School children involved in world missions focus
- Traditional, liturgical worship service

Though participants in the groups were very satisfied with their experience at Normandale (on the whole), many saw that the church will need to change to meet a changing community and world.

In the future, this church will need to:

- Embrace change
 - be more welcoming, invite people with little experience in the church
 - find a way to reach people from other cultures and language groups who are moving into this community
 - consider developing new worship styles and services to reach a greater diversity of people
- Be willing to fail
- Expand ministries for young adults and singles
- Find creative ways to use technology
- Develop new ministries for an aging population
- Listen to the community more
- Create more intergenerational opportunities
 - including ministries that involve the entire family
- Make discernment a way of life for the congregation
- Respond to secular views about science vs. religion
 - perceived tension keeps many people out of the church

Themes from the Entire Process--Implications for the Future

Overall, when comparing responses from the Task Force, charter members, discernment groups and staff, the following themes about Normandale emerge:

Outreach Ministries are Key to the Life of the Congregation

The most consistent theme throughout all of the interviews and groups was how strongly the outreach ministries, including Normandale House, the Center for Healing and Wholeness and Bangladesh, are embraced by the people at Normandale. People know about the ministries, support them with their money and time, and feel a sense of ownership for them. This focus has been present throughout the life of Normandale and is one of the key identifying characteristics of the congregation. Moving forward, the church should continue to offer focused outreach opportunities--places for Normandale members to invest their money, but also their time.

Members, Lay Leaders and Staff Don't Want Normandale to Become a "Mega-Church"

Over-and-over again, people expressed that they like the size of Normandale and believe that growing into a much larger congregation would compromise the sense of family and community at the church. This has implications for how future growth might be handled. Rather than having one very large congregation, Normandale might consider developing satellite locations or planting new churches.

The Word of God is Central

Normandale is a Scripture-centric church, with a focus on the Bible throughout all ministries. The people in the congregation see learning about the Bible as a priority, and expect there to be plenty of opportunities for them to do so. For many people in the process, a key part of Normandale's future will be to retain this focus on Scripture.

Pastoral Care Has Been Done Well and is Important to the Congregation

Pastoral care has been done with excellence at Normandale over an extended period of years. Many people in the process described how one or more of the pastors walked with them through a difficult time. Future pastors should be people who engage with the congregation, rather than being distant from it.

Normandale is a Relational Church With a "Family" Feel

Participants in Vision 40 described Normandale as a "family" and a place where people develop deep personal relationships with each other. People want to see Normandale continue to be a place where people can connect on more than a "surface" level.

Members Embrace the Traditional, But See the Need for Change

Many people expressed how much they enjoy the traditional worship at Normandale--the liturgy, the music and the lack of a "big screen" in the front of the sanctuary. However, many participants in the process also noted that the church will need to be open to change, if it wants to have a vital outreach to future generations and more diverse groups of people. People noted that worship styles may need to change in the future to accommodate younger generations and people from other cultures. Also, the church will need to discern how best to use technology in getting the word out and perhaps even in worship.

There is a Hunger For More Intergenerational Opportunities

People in the Vision 40 process enjoyed the intergenerational aspect of it and expressed interest in seeing more multi-age opportunities throughout the church's ministries.

There is a Hunger to Learn More About Discernment

Vision 40 helped a number of people at Normandale experience spiritual discernment first hand. People said that the process has equipped them with new skills that enable them to focus on listening to God. They are interested in learning more.

In the future, the congregation will need to continue to try new approaches and become more comfortable with failure

To reach future generations and more diverse groups of people, the Normandale congregation may need to be more comfortable with failure than it has been up to this point. In the future, Normandale will have to be willing to try many diverse approaches to worship, evangelism, outreach, and discipleship. Being open to creative, new approaches will be essential, and to be willing to fail, evaluate and try again will be key.

Reflections of the Task Force

After "phase I" of the Vision 40 process was complete in May of 2009, Task Force members were asked to reflect on their participation in the process and its impact on Normandale church.

What was your experience of the Vision 40 process?

- "Amazing to hear the perspectives of different age groups."
- "Being a high school kid, I had never been on a committee before. It was surprising to have my opinion count!"
- "I learned about complete relinquishment--letting God do it."
- "One of the most exciting groups I have ever been in."
- "I have really grown--become more of a futurist, thinking more about our legacy."
- "I have become more analytical and gained confidence in stating my views."
- "My prayer life has improved. I have a new perspective on the Holy Spirit. I am listening more in prayer, talking less."
- "The Body of Believers is important to me now. We need all parts of the Body."
- "The listening aspect of the process was important to me, seeing the potential in every person."
- "The process we went through was unexpected for me. The group evolved through the process --got stronger."
- "I really looked forward to the group meetings. Once I found this community and process, I didn't realize what I had been missing."

The long-term impact of the process on Normandale Church

- Seeing groups within the church starting to refer to the process as they are doing their work-- this is creating a new style of "doing church."
- Hope we've learned a new way of listening to each other and God.
- Invitation to everyone in the congregation to participate was important.
- Helps us focus on the goals and legacy of the church, not get lost in the details
- Created an openness to improvement
- Not sure we know yet!
- Equipped leaders who can carry the discernment process forward.

Strongest aspects of the process

- Intergenerational makeup of Task Force
- Holy Spirit-centered
- Having longer meetings led to deep discussions
- The instruction and guidance of the Abbot from St. John's
- Community that developed within the Task Force
- The study of discernment
- Being open to changing the process as we went along
 - constant evaluation and "tweaking" happening
- Teaching on Scripture passages
- Strong facilitator/consultant

What people would change about the process

The group could only identify that there might have been communication to the congregation earlier in the Vision 40 process.

--but it was noted that it would have been difficult to communicate about something so fluid.

Next Steps

The goals of the Vision 40 process had been realized, but Task Force members felt that it couldn't stop there. So much had been learned in the process that needed to be carried into the future of Normandale.

The Long-Range Planning committee decided to extend the process into the Fall of 2009, allowing members of the Task Force to continue meeting, this time about the future of discernment at Normandale and how intergenerational opportunities could be further developed in the ministries of the church.

The continuation of Vision 40 had the following goals:

- Identify additional intergenerational opportunities that could be added to congregational life.
- Establish a model for educating the congregation about discernment
- Identify ways to imbed discernment into the life of the congregation
- How the congregation can embrace discernment as it looks at its past, present and future.
- Identify ways that discernment processes can be imbedded in long-range planning processes.

Recommendations to Keep Vision 40 Alive

The small group that met during the Summer of 2009 wanted to be sure that Vision 40 isn't just a report left lying on a shelf--it needs to be kept alive, as an ongoing process in the life of the church. The group developed the following recommendations as concrete ways that Vision 40 could be kept alive, allowing discernment to become a "living and breathing entity" at Normandale.

- # 1** Committee chairs will be trained in discernment at the initial meeting of new committee chairs/members in February.

Chairs will be asked to incorporate the Lectio Divina process in at least one meeting (preferably at the beginning of the year as part of planning yearly activities).

- # 2** Five discernment weekends for the congregation will be held during the year. Each weekend will focus on one of the five themes identified by the congregation as significant in the life of Normandale

- Depth
- Relationships
- Connections
- Roots
- Family

- # 3** The Vision 40 committee will continue to meet during the year. The group will:

- Facilitate discernment groups
- Identify Biblical texts
- Develop questions regarding the 5 themes

"Going forward, to be the church, it would be a good idea
to continue to practice discernment in this place.
To ask what God is doing among us.
To listen, to pray,
to meditate on the Scriptures.
And to hear one another's voices, for through
our voices God speaks to us.
...May this be a congregation
of discernment,
of silence,
of the Word."

Pastor David Morris Holm

Final Sermon before the congregation

May 31, 2009

Appendices

Letter sent to congregation to recruit Vision 40 Task Force members

Invitations sent to congregation to participate in the four Discernment Weekends

Pages from the congregational catalog describing Vision 40

- Letter from the Senior Pastor

- Articles from Lois Nordling, Task Force Chair, and Joy Skjegstad, consultant