

# Children and Youth Vision Group

## Report and Visioning Worksheet

2007



Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
St. Paul, Minnesota

## Introduction

In the past six years, Pilgrim Lutheran Church has been blessed with a significant increase in the number of families with babies and young children. The addition of these families and children (of all ages) has been a wonderful gift to Pilgrim. Pilgrim has been responding to this growth through the efforts and care of individuals and groups; from that emerged a desire to have a plan in place and a vision to work from and toward.

In October of 2006, the Vestry determined that consideration of the future of children's and youth ministry at Pilgrim was needed and thus recommended that a task force be organized to look into this. It was to be a short-term project, not an extended study, to take a focused look at children's and youth ministry, to help us to understand the possibilities, and to provide some direction for the Vestry and for the congregation as a whole.

A group of Pilgrims met over a three-month period, from November 2006 to January 2007, with breaks for holidays. The name *Children and Youth Vision Group* was chosen because the group felt called to take a long-term view of this project. The long-term view was important for two reasons. First, since the duration of the project was to be limited, it did not reasonably allow for the in-depth planning or scope that would be required to develop and detail an immediately implementable action plan. Even more so, however, the broader view was important because Pilgrim *needed* a vision. As a community of faith, we needed an idea of where we might like to be down the road with children's and youth ministry, a bigger picture which looked at the whole faith life of the child. That is, Pilgrim needed a vision which considered how we as a church and congregation can minister to an infant through to his or her young adulthood – and how that child will minister to us.

## Vision Question

During the first meeting, the Children and Youth Vision Group sought to define the question that would guide our task. The question is provided below, parsed out in part for readability, but more to highlight each of the phrases.

How can Pilgrim intentionally nurture our young people – infants to young adults –  
 such that they grow into adulthood in grace  
 prepared, enabled, and inclined  
 to live out Christian values following Jesus' example?

The wording of the question was considered at length, each piece meaningful. The first phrase -- *How can Pilgrim intentionally nurture our young people – infants to young adult* -- includes several key words. By *nurture* we mean to clarify that the vision is about nurturing children and youth and not simply about the organizing of programs or other planning. And we want to do this *intentionally*, with children and youth being purposely included in Pilgrim's planning and decision-making in all areas. We also wish to define young people to include the range *from infant to young adult*, which is a broader range than what has traditionally been considered in definitions of youth in churches.

By growing into adulthood *in grace*, we express our hope that young Pilgrims will grow knowing the blessings of our faith; that they will know the love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, and acceptance that are the gifts promised by God.

The phrase *prepared, enabled, and inclined* conveys ways that the Pilgrim community can help children and youth to live a life in Christ in its fullness. Preparation means to make ready and brings them to the point where they can continue on their own. Enable means to make possible so that the various preparations can be brought to fruition. Inclination—being naturally drawn toward—is a condition of the heart. The example set by Jesus becomes a part of who they are as people in the world.

The pattern or ideal towards which these efforts are directed is *to live out Christian values following Jesus' example*. The intention is not to indoctrinate but, through story, example, and experience, present the values and priorities of Jesus' ministry and mission so as to inspire and encourage children and youth to make them their own.

## Resources

To help us in our task, the group drew on our own experiences with and as young people. Comments informally shared by Pilgrim members regarding children and youth also helped shape the discussion. In addition, we were eager to learn more about what was happening in children's and youth ministry in the wider church. We began by consulting some of

the materials made available by the ELCA regarding children's and youth ministry. We discovered that although much of the material could be extended to children's ministry, the majority of information available was focused on youth (defined by the ELCA as early adolescent years through young adult).

The limited timeframe of the task did not allow for us to undertake extensive research, so we sought to invite someone from outside of Pilgrim with expertise in this area to come to speak with us. In doing this, Professor Jeremy Myers emerged as one who was recognized and respected for his expertise in the field. Professor Myers is an Associate Professor of Religion in Children and Youth Ministry at Augsburg College. He is also a doctoral candidate in this field at Luther Seminary. Professor Myers spent hours talking with the group, excited about our project and Pilgrim's interest in developing this ministry. (He also spoke as a guest presenter at the Vision Group's adult forum presentation in February of 2007.)

Of particular benefit was Professor Myers' affirmation of the complexity of the task. The group had struggled with the layers of variables to be considered in a visioning process such as this. We found it enormously challenging to consider a vision for children and youth that would integrate all of the key areas of our church's life (worship and music, education, fellowship, stewardship, missions, properties, congregational life and care, and evangelism), and particularly as they would then each apply across all ages from birth to young adult. Although it did not make the task any simpler, it was reassuring to learn from him that, indeed, the task *was* complex and that the group's realization of that was a reflection of the level of thoughtfulness we were putting into the task. Too often, he cautioned, churches try to fit a complex organism like children's and youth ministry into a simple and tidy or one-size-fits-all plan.

## Vision

The vision that the Children and Youth Vision Group is offering to Pilgrim is the vision formulated by a passionate group of individuals who were willing to invest their time and energy to undertake this task. As such, it is clear that it is only *a* vision and not necessarily *the* vision for Pilgrim. Moreover, the vision presented here is not exhaustive. We do not even hope to have considered or included everything. And, as written above, the limited timeframe of the task allowed for neither great detail nor profound scope. In addition, it is important that the vision be regarded as flexible, that it be fluid enough to adapt to future changes and growth that will inevitably occur at Pilgrim.

That said, it also must be stated that there are aspects of the vision that the group holds to be very important. Regardless of the diverse experiences of and views held by the individuals who made up the group, a number of elements, it was agreed, were vital.

### *The vision will take time.*

Inherent in vision is the notion of a destination, a place one seeks to arrive at. As such, there is no expectation that all facets of the vision presented here are immediately implementable. In fact, as an 18+ year plan (reflecting the birth to young adult range of the vision), it is understood that it may take many years to fully realize the vision. While some aspects may be implemented immediately, others may take two or three years to be incorporated, and still others may take an extended period of many years to be fully realized. Even so, the vision can play an immediate role in nearly every area. The value of the vision is its role as a guide to our on-going decision-making and planning over time so that Pilgrim may gradually and intentionally move toward its realization.

### *The vision is not prescriptive.*

The vision for children's and youth ministry at Pilgrim presented here is not prescriptive. It does not provide a to-do list of tasks to be completed and checked off by the leaders of the congregation. More important, it is not about outlining a set of competencies that the young people of Pilgrim are expected to meet. Although one of the group's recommendations is that means of assessment be established to monitor our progress in the various plans and projects that may arise from the vision, we do not suggest that a checklist of expectations (for adults or young people) be imposed. Again, the vision is intended to provide direction in decision-making and planning. On a personal level, it is about the development of sensibilities, inclination, and faith.

### *The vision reflects Pilgrim's mission and values.*

Pilgrim's mission to be *a home for hungry minds and souls* should extend to all members of our community, regardless of age. If we expand the mission to touch even the youngest among us, children will be able to "feel" the values long before they are able to understand or articulate them.

The vision for children's and youth ministry for the community of Pilgrim Lutheran Church includes vision statements divided into the following areas: *Belonging*, *Celebrating*, *Nurturing*, and *Living Faith*.<sup>1</sup> Each broad vision statement is followed by a number of more specific vision statements. The reader is reminded of the broad view inherent in *vision*. Some statements are reflections of what is already happening at Pilgrim. They are naturally included to help ensure their continuation and perhaps betterment. Other statements may seem out of reach from where we are today. They serve as goals we can strive to reach as soon as we are reasonably able.

The vision statements are intended to give guidance and to offer standards. Below each set of statements, space is provided for notes as well as additional ideas and examples of how to carry out the vision. It is hoped that, in committees or small groups or through individual reflection, Pilgrims will use this vision report as a working document. In this way it can serve as a bridge to draw Pilgrims into the development and implementation of a fuller ministry to our children and youth.

## **Belonging**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church is a community and place where young people feel a true sense of belonging – where they feel genuinely welcome, at home and comfortable, and fully integrated. Pilgrim's *Reconciling in Christ* (RIC) commitment must be extended to people of all ages.

Pilgrim can take tangible steps toward providing a sense of belonging by being a place of worship where children and youth (and their caregivers):

--can sense immediately by the programming offered, the facilities, general environment, and most importantly, by the words and expressions of those they meet that Pilgrim is a child-friendly place of worship.

--know that they are welcome at worship services at every age.

--feel comfortable in the building so that Pilgrim feels like another home, a warm and familiar place that may bring joy, comfort, and peace.

--can make and foster relationships with each other, with adult members of the congregation, and with the larger community, such that they can be and grow into themselves with others in Christian community.

--are viewed as full participants in our faith community. Their needs are considered at all levels of decision-making. In all committee planning (beyond Children, Youth, and Family), the question is asked: "How might children and youth contribute to or benefit from this plan?"

--are supported through adequate funding for the resources required by this ministry.

--enjoy space in Pilgrim's facilities that are adequate in size and purpose, where their needs and their voice have been genuinely considered in the short- and long-term planning of the relevant committees and the Vestry.

## **Celebrating**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church celebrates with children and youth so that with festivity, joy, and sacraments, they will be able to mark special events and occasions as well as the ordinary. We seek to engage them in worship and rituals and encourage their personal contributions.

Children and youth:

--are not only welcome but encouraged to attend worship services (the babies and children themselves are always welcome, regardless of caregivers' decisions about tending to disruptions).

--are enabled to participate in worship services as readers of texts and prayers, ushers, acolytes, communion assistants, and other appropriate roles.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted above, the Children and Youth Vision Group examined materials provided by the ELCA as a resource for their task. The terms chosen for this report also appear in the ELCA materials; however, they are defined and employed differently here.

--are drawn into worship experiences through regular opportunities for more active participation (e.g., children's lessons such as Point for Pilgrims, invitation to observe baptisms from near the baptismal font, messages from youth).

--are encouraged and enabled to share their musical gifts during worship services (e.g., through choirs, individual and group vocal and instrumental pieces, and by leading as cantors).

--learn hymns and liturgies in order to enhance participation in worship and to become familiar with (and perhaps drawn to and comforted by) Pilgrim's Lutheran traditions.

--are encouraged and provided inspiration and opportunity to express or seek to understand their faith through creative acts (e.g., art, dance, poetry, church seasonal planning, bulletin boards/displays, newsletter/website submissions).

--are baptized during the worship service in the presence of the Pilgrim community which also makes a commitment to them.

--are offered first communion preparation in the second grade, or earlier as agreed by the pastor and family.

--receive an individual blessing by the pastor or other sacrament-giver during communion if first communion has not yet been taken.

--learn to see the value of simple events such as conversation, meals together, sharing stories, etc. and are encouraged to take an active part in these.

Examples of how to carry out the vision of *Celebrating*, other ideas, comments:

--*Children and youth included on Worship Team lists*

### **Nurturing**

By fostering their gifts and with acceptance of their individuality, and by being good mentors, Pilgrim Lutheran Church nourishes the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional life of our young people. We guide children and youth to become their best selves. We seek also to always be mindful that adults can learn and grow in their faith from the gifts of children and youth, as much as the children and youth learn from the adults.

The Pilgrim community:

--teaches and models the values of being caretakers of self, of each other and of neighbors near and far, of animals, of property, and of the earth.

--fosters mutual respect and love for one another among the children and youth. As they grow in care and kindness for each other, they also become inclined toward welcome, openness, and tolerance at Pilgrim and in the world.

--is one where the adults learn the names of the children and youth, greet them by name, engage them, and seek to learn who they are as individual people and members of this faith community.

--recognizes that each young person has his or her distinct personal gifts and strives find ways to nurture those gifts.

--is mindful that some children and youth may face rejection elsewhere in their lives and responds to them with a special message of welcome and openness.

--explores ways in which intergenerational relationships can be established and nourished. Such relationships provide opportunities for mutual spiritual and personal growth, as children and adults care for and learn from each other.

--feeds the hungry minds and souls of our young people by offering ongoing Christian education opportunities (i.e., Sunday School, confirmation classes, Vacation Bible School, and other teaching formats). Adequate training, materials, good communication channels, and support are provided to teachers. Curricula are researched, reflect Pilgrim's commitments (RIC, concern for creation, etc.), and use unbiased language.

--allows for both spiritual wonder and spiritual wondering. Adults reflect on their own faith and beliefs while sharing the joy and contemplating the questions of children and youth. Questions, doubts, and searching are accepted and even encouraged as a natural part of the spiritual journey, beginning at early childhood.

--provides ways for older children and youth to gain an awareness of other religions so that they might better live in harmony with their neighbors.

--examines with children and youth the role of the Church in fighting hunger and injustice, and striving for peace.

--cares for children and youth by providing inspiration, resources, programming, and guidance in helping parents and other caregivers to carry out faith formation at home beginning at a child's birth and continuing through teen years (e.g., new baby outreach, cradle roll, written materials, parent time, workshops).

--organizes meaningful opportunities for spiritual retreat and growth in faith, both for youth and for families of all shapes (e.g., camps, pilgrimages, retreats).

--offers reliable nursery care for young children during all worship services and scheduled church meetings/events. The nursery area is adequate in size, regularly cleaned and inspected for safety, and welcoming to all. The physical space and staff are warm and welcoming so that parents and others feel comfortable leaving their children in our care.

--faithfully invests in our children and youth by hiring staff who have a genuine desire to work in the areas of children's and youth ministries and who have the experience and/or qualifications to do so. Staff is hired at fair pay, with appropriate benefits, and for a number of hours that is reasonable for their responsibilities. Both Pilgrim and potential staff are intentional about maintaining continuity through longer-term commitments for these positions.

--makes ongoing efforts to make Pilgrim a safe environment for children and youth. This includes requiring background and reference checks on all staff, two adults tending the nursery at all times, at least two adult lay leaders for all activities, and a procedure in place for the reporting of concerns. More broadly, Pilgrim leadership receives ongoing education/training in the arena of the safety and protection of children. A safe environment also includes child-safe physical space.

Examples of how to carry out the vision of *Nurturing*, other ideas, comments:

--*Mentoring/Support: parent partner support, caregiver prayer support, "Church Moms/Dads," response to research showing that children benefit greatly from having personal relationships with at least five adults outside of their immediate family*

--*Youth as mentors: leading Point for Pilgrims, mentoring younger youth*

--*Guidance and support for godparents*

## **Living Faith**

The children and youth of Pilgrim Lutheran Church each has his or her own gifts and interests, and desires to use them in service to the church and to the world. Each needs opportunity to put the lessons of Jesus into their own individual actions – stewardship, leadership, service, and witness – and Pilgrim prepares and enables them to discover and engage in their personal ministries. Children and youth are encouraged in *acting upon* the values of being caretakers of self, of each other and of neighbors near and far, and of creation. They go out into the world serving in such a way that brings them joy and fulfillment.

The Pilgrim community:

--in discussion and action, works with children and youth to find ways to explore the tangible and everyday ways in which faith can be realized.

--creates time, place, and emotional space for youth to openly discuss faith, witness, doubts and hopes, service, etc. It guides youth to gain a better understanding of their vocation, or calling, in how to live out their faith in ways that matter to them in their day-to-day lives.

--recognizes that faith formation begins in infancy and continues throughout life. It also recognizes that faith grows through both learning and doing, and that education, service activities, and fellowship are not independent of each other. Pilgrim's church structure reflects these understandings.

- is mindful that the adults are the models for the children and youth of this community and, therefore, act as Jesus would have them act.
- makes the efforts of the Pilgrim members who model values demonstrated by Jesus (care for our neighbors as ourselves, sabbath, compassion for the vulnerable, inclusiveness, peace and non-violence, justice, etc.) visible to the children and youth of the congregation.
- provides education and accurate information about peace and justice issues, as well as training and opportunities for both active participation and leadership in these areas.
- actively involves children and youth in congregational efforts to better care for God's creation.
- uses care and discernment in choosing children and youth fellowship and service activities so that unintended harm to the earth or to others has been thoroughly considered.
- seeks possible additional benefits of mission or ministry in all children and youth fellowship activities.
- encourages youth to express their faith through leadership.
- organizes and supports trips for youth of various kinds that are consistent with Pilgrim's values, well planned, and led by qualified adults.
- seeks to recognize the passions and gifts of its adult members in the area of children's and youth ministry and finds ways to enable them to be involved. This includes accommodating busy schedules with roles that require only limited time commitments.
- introduces the discipline of stewardship such that children and youth may find joy in all kinds of giving, including financial.

Examples of how to carry out the vision of *Living Faith*, other ideas, comments:

- Church structure includes broader Faith Formation committee*
- *Ministry teams*
- Intentionally inviting youth (and including them) in relevant "Adult" Forums (reconsider this name)*
- Create varied opportunities to live out faith/witness, especially where youth might lead: organized volunteering for ministry in the community, donating to others, attending protests or writing letters, making and distributing cards or gift packages, etc.*
- Learning to give - give or help children create something to give and then bring them to a place where they can give it (e.g., nursing home, shelter, homebound)*

## Concluding Comments

The purpose of this report has been to present a vision for children's and youth ministry at Pilgrim Lutheran Church. At its core is the vision of children and youth – infants to young adults – becoming increasingly integrated as members of the Pilgrim community. This entails genuinely valuing young people as the blessings they are to our community, where their individual and collective gifts and needs are viewed as priorities in terms of attitude, participation, funding, staffing, and space. We are affirmed in this by the ELCA, which also advocates this view. The support from the wider church is important, yet it is the "customization" of the vision that makes it consequential for Pilgrim. The vision for Pilgrim's children's and youth ministry has been developed for the specific context of the Pilgrim community, by members of that community, with the intention of embracing Pilgrim's values and capturing its uniqueness.

An aspiration of the vision is that Pilgrim Lutheran Church more fully live out its mission by being a "home" for children and youth, these hungriest of minds and souls. Each will feel loved, cared for, and accepted. Children and youth will feel comfortable spiritually and physically at Pilgrim such that they will *want* to be here. They will participate in the life of the congregation in large and small ways, their individual gifts appreciated. They will be supported in their intellectual and emotional growth, as well as in their spiritual journey where they are free to express the wonder and doubts afforded all on spiritual pilgrimage. What they learn and do at and through Pilgrim will be meaningful to them, and they will come

to be prepared, enabled, and naturally inclined to live their lives, both in their day-to-day and in their life's ministry, following Jesus' loving example.

The vision – organized through the broad themes of *Belonging*, *Celebrating*, *Nurturing*, and *Living Faith* – suggests standards and direction intended for the long view of children's and youth ministry at Pilgrim, some aspects of which can be implemented or reinforced immediately, others of which will take greater time and effort. As emphasized above, the vision is not complete. Indeed, it is just the beginning. This report is intended to be a working document through which Pilgrims will sustain the vitality of and add momentum to children's and youth ministry – and this vision – by sharing their own thoughts and ideas in all committees, smaller groups, and individually. It is the vision group's profound hope that this report will not be simply filed away or forgotten on a shelf. It will find its greatest value by remaining a living document, one that is regularly considered in our on-going decision-making and planning in all areas, where benchmarks for measurement and accountability are developed, and where modifications can be made when needed to continue to reflect the values and uniqueness of Pilgrim and to adapt to changes in our world.

*The Children and Youth Vision Group was a passionate, hard-working, and good-humored group of Pilgrims that included Karen Hedenstrom, Kurt Schultz, Lisa Berg, Sheila Hoffman, Kent Miller, Janet Anderson, and Kate Drexler Booth. Report submitted by Sheila Hoffman (facilitator).*