Christ Lutheran Church in 2018

Describing this congregation in a nutshell, we are people who value being with those who are different than ourselves. We are a small, vibrant community, worshiping 80 on a typical Sunday. The congregation has grown more visibly diverse in the last 12 years. It includes people of various ethnicities and races, ages and sexual orientations. There is a mix of single people and families. Increasingly, more people are coming from the surrounding neighborhood, which includes upper middle class as well as those of more modest means. It is not uncommon for ten children to come forward for the Young People’s Message. The longer term members are thrilled with this new life.

In 1989, the congregation voted to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation, explicitly welcoming people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This is seen as an extension of the congregation’s particular charism of welcoming and including all. Many visitors comment how they sense there is a real community at CLC. There is a high value placed on caring for each other. One expression of this care is Stephen Ministry, where trained lay leaders offer care to people who are going through a difficult time.

Worship is at the heart of this community’s life, with many members preparing for and participating in the liturgy. The liturgy style is fairly “high church” without being rigid, and music is extremely important, with most members appreciating a wide range of styles. The choir is a small (total 12-15) talented group, anchored by 4 paid section leaders. The organ, a von Beckerath is a source of great pride for many in the congregation.

The congregation has a sincere concern for social ministry. In 1990 it voted to use a bequest to begin Transitional Housing Corporation (now Housing Up, a major provider of housing services in DC). We currently house their main office and serve as board members and volunteers. We began a Food & Hygiene Pantry in 2016 which delivers food, household and personal care products to 27 Housing Up families each month. We have an annual Yard Sale whose proceeds (this year totaling $33,000) go to various social ministry organizations. A special focus has been HIV/AIDS. We initiated two efforts, “God’s People Are Tested” and “Lutheran GrACE” (Growing AIDS Compassion Everywhere), which brought together a number congregations working to overcome stigma.

We have identified three foci that guide our ministry: Faith Formation, Faith in Action, and Faith Transformation. We struggle to find ways to connect with ever busier people who are also looking for a community of faith. Our Sunday School and Confirmation programs are small but important to those who come. Vacation Bible School is lively. Since 2012, we have partnered in VBS with a Latino Pentecostal congregation, Body of Christ, who shares our space. Berea Seventh Day Adventist (Ethiopian) worships here on Saturdays. In 2008, we undertook a major renovation that updated our HVAC, and brought accessibility, better lighting and beautified spaces to our first floor.

CLC has served as an internship site for more than 50 vicars/interns and we value the ministry of preparing pastors, as well as receiving the particular gifts and fresh energy that comes from each new intern.

In our 125th year as a congregation (2016-17), we undertook a congregation-wide visioning process. The vision statement that emerged is: “A faith-rooted community with no walls; always learning, always serving.” Youth ministry rose to the top of our list of priorities—particularly as a way of serving the community around us, hopefully in combination with music and the arts. We are committed to developing and strengthening the youth who are currently connected to the congregation. Over the past year, a group of a dozen teens, approximately evenly split between the congregation and the community, have gathered monthly for a meal and other activities, including serving at a food ministry for people who are unhoused. We identified the need for a staff person—a Youth Ministry Developer—to move this new emphasis forward.