



ELCA

Future Church: God's Love Made Real
Project Summary

In partnership with:



Overview

The vision of the ELCA is a world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation. We want others to know the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Our priority areas [are](#):

1. **A Welcoming Church:** Engaging new, younger, and more diverse people. *"Your young...shall see visions, and your old...shall dream dreams."* Acts 2:17
2. **A Thriving Church:** Rooted in tradition and radically relevant. *"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?...You are the light of the world."* Matthew 5:13-14
3. **A Connected, Sustainable Church:** Raising the bar together. *"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."* John 15:5

The ELCA set a goal to engage with new people who are younger and more diverse as a part of our Future Church initiative. Our focus on young and diverse people is not exclusive but an acknowledgment that younger and more diverse people are disproportionately missing from our pews and gatherings. Our purpose – "to activate each of us so that more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice, and love" - is an expression of our calling as followers of Jesus and our longing as the people of God for others to know the love of God in Christ Jesus. We are challenging each other to reach out across differences of all sorts to meet our neighbors - to be a faith community that is welcoming to all people and creation. While we have a goal of engaging with one million new, younger and more diverse people, our aim is not simply to reach a goal and check it off a list. Our aim is to grow in faithfulness to the calling of the gospel.

We recognize there is a need to become a place where all people feel welcomed. We know there are voices across the denomination with experiences and influence who can speak into this work. We need to join together as leaders in our communities to discern the movement of the Spirit and discover how we are to engage new people. Our desire is to make this a movement, not just a Churchwide Organization (CWO) initiative. This is an all-of-us initiative. The opportunity to be faithful to our calling is before us and will require all of us doing our part.

If we are to fully realize the future God has for us, we need to make love real to all people—including and especially those who are younger and more diverse.

Our Partners

The work will also require help from others outside the denomination - people and organizations who are deeply committed to the Christian faith. With this perspective in mind and with the support of a donor, we have enlisted the help of two organizations with a long history of

researching and serving the Christian community and beyond: Barna Group and Fuller Seminary.

Over the past few months, the Barna and Fuller teams have been working with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It has been highly productive and joy-filled for our teams! Each of our organizations believe deeply in the work of local congregations, pastoral leaders and the larger Body of Christ to bring about transformative and positive change in the lives of individuals, families, communities and overall culture. While we are not ignorant of the deep challenges present within the ELCA, we maintain a deep hope that the future of the denomination can be faithful to its witness of the gospel by activating its membership to reach out to new people with the way of Jesus, especially those who are new, younger, and more diverse than its past. Reaching one million new, younger, and more diverse people is possible and can happen as the ELCA “activates each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love” (the ELCA’s purpose). This leads to “a world experiencing the difference God’s grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation (the ELCA’s vision).” We’re honored to be partners on this journey.

Get Involved

What lies before us will require honoring our history while also embracing new ways of thinking and adapting - both can exist together. This movement is guided by three phases:

1. Initial Exploration and Design (completed in early 2023)
2. Research, Listening, and Strategy Creation (currently in process through the end of 2023)
3. Strategy Implementation and Evaluation (begins in early 2024)

If you are asking, “How can I be involved?” we invite you into this listening journey. There will be opportunities to share, learn and provide perspective through various avenues over the next several months.

- **Pray** - Pray for the present and future of the ELCA, thanking God for its current mission and impact. Ask for wisdom and the resolve for our church to move forward with courage and clarity.
- **Respond** - In the coming months, you will have an opportunity to give feedback, sharing your insight and perspective. We ask that you would respond to those opportunities.
- **Engage** - Engage in a posture of listening. It is challenging to listen to our neighbors and those who are different from us. Start in your community - listen and learn.
- **Share** - There will be opportunity to share what you are doing and what is working well to grow and strengthen your community. Share with others.

In all of this, we want to be a church that listens, hears, and is moved to action to become a thriving faith community for people from all walks of life. To be a place where people can find a home.