

Lent Series – “Check up”

Introduction

The purpose of this study series is to take us through a journey of self-evaluation as a community at Immanuel. It aims to provide a means for us as individuals and as groups to share some of our thoughts and feelings about what has been, what is and what could be for our congregation. This is a particularly important process as we come to terms with the loss of our pastor and look ahead to who we would like to lead us in the future. Please keep praying for our community, especially at this time, and ask God to reveal in each of our hearts a unified hope and vision.

For those participating in these studies who do not consider themselves part of the Immanuel community we hope you will still feel a part of this process, will contribute your ideas and can take away something from the discussions.

Blessings

Weeks 1 (28th February – 8th March)

Where have we come from? - Our history at Immanuel

Ice Breaker: Before you start, share your **highs and lows** for the week.

Opening Prayer:

Lord we thank you for the opportunity to come together in this small group. Please be with our discussions today as we share our thoughts and feelings about our church community.

AMEN

So we lost our Pastor. "Oh no, our Shepherd is gone, who will help us grow, who will feed us?"

The loss of a Pastor may create lots of different feelings. We may feel:

- fear and apprehension
- grief and loss
- anger or frustration
- happiness or relief
- abandonment
- confusion

and questions may start to arise:

- Where are we going as a community?
- What do I want from my next Pastor?
- When are we calling the next Pastor?
- Am I still called to worship here?

- Study the Bible.
- Support the pastor in his work.
- Help members witness to their personal faith in their daily lives.
- Improve the quality of family life within our congregation.
- Assist youth to identify with the Christian community.
- Help older adults to find fellowship and ways to serve.
- Increase the giving of our members.

List here any other purposes or tasks which are important to you but which are not in the above list:

- Increase the membership of our congregation.
- Provide quality Christian education for our members (adults, youth, and children).
- Improve the combined Christian witness of congregations in our community.
- Provide more adequate facilities for our program and community.
- Activate inactive members.
- Work for the renewal of our congregation.
- Improve the quality of fellowship in our congregation.
- Find ways to worship God more meaningfully.
- Bring the congregation's power to bear in community decisions.
- Identify and meet the contemporary issues of our community and world.
- Learn to appreciate God's creation and use natural resources responsibly.
- Improve our awareness of the church beyond our congregation.
- Emphasize the teachings and heritage of the Lutheran church.
- Emphasize world missions.

In all of this, it is extremely important that we properly mourn our loss, and celebrate what has happened at Immanuel.

God is about celebrating the past. We see an example of this in the Bible's account of the creation. (See Genesis 1:3-13, 31).

After each day, God stood back and admired the work He had completed. But it didn't stop there, He continued each new day with a new task.

Another example is the tradition of Passover. Each year the Jewish people celebrate this time and remember how God saved them in Egypt. (See Exodus 13:3).

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 we read:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (NIV)

Again we see how God encourages us to remember and celebrate things of importance.

Two years ago Immanuel congregation celebrated its 40th anniversary. During the celebrations we got to hear people

share many stories of this place, the people who have impacted it and the laughter and tears of friends moving on.

Are there any stories or experiences at Immanuel that you remember? There may be a particular Pastor or sermon you heard or an event that you took part in or helped run. What memories stand out for you?

Why is it important to share these stories?

When you talk about Immanuel, how do you refer to it? Is it:

- That place on I go to on Sunday?
- Where I get fed?
- My home
- Where I feel God has called me or my family?

We **all** have something that connects us to this community. We **all** come from different places but we **all** become one family at this place.

It's important to celebrate our past because it reminds us that God is with us, that He has been faithful to us in the journey up to this point, and that He will lead us into the future. We can trust in Him.

Appendix 3 THINGS WE OUGHT TO BE DOING AS A CONGREGATION

This sheet is intended to help you think about, and to make some judgments about the work of the church, specifically our congregation.

PROCEDURE:

1. Read all 27 statements.
2. Go back and select the nine you think are **most** important. Mark an **M** before each of these nine.
3. Then select the nine you think are **least** important. Mark an **L** before each of these nine.

- Work for human reconciliation (employed/unemployed, rich/poor) in our own community and in the world.
- Deal with the ethical questions of Christian faith.
- Help persons deal with the pressures and problems of life.
- Help to bridge generation gaps.
- Give material help to the poor and needy of our community and our world.
- Train, equip, and support our congregational leaders.

22. The church council is a rubber stamp group for the pastor.
23. I feel we should give more support (financial and personal) to the pastor.
24. We should seek closer relationships with other congregations for planning and implementing ecumenical activities.
25. We should continue to seek new ideas and programs in worship.
26. I would be willing to devote more of my time and abilities to meaningful work in the church.
27. Conflict within the congregation is suppressed or ignored.
28. The goals of our congregation are known and understood by the membership.
29. The church council should pay more attention to the opinions and feelings of the members of the congregation.
30. During the next five years our membership will probably increase.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, Thank you for blessing us with this community for the last 40 years.

Thank you for the stories that were shared and that in it all you have being in the centre of it. Be with us as we go and keep doing your will and allow us to see this community as our home.

AMEN

(Home work for next week - fill out Appendix 1- *SWOT analysis*)

Weeks 2 (14th March – 20th March)

Where are we at? Immanuel here and now

Ice Breaker: Share your *highs and lows* for the week

Opening Prayer:

Lord, you know all things; you know our situations and you know our hearts. Open our ears to discern your voice, open our eyes to see our community as you see it and open our hearts to understand each other, and you, better.

AMEN

Share your homework from last week. What stood out in the SWOT analysis?

The word the Bible uses for 'church' has the basic meaning of 'called out' or 'chosen'. The church is called out, set apart, just like God's people of Old Testament times, so that, as Moses said, **God's presence with us can distinguish us from every other group.**

Look at 1 Peter 2:9-10

Who is the 'you' in verse 9?

What are we called or chosen to do?

We are called and chosen to 'declare', to 'proclaim' the wonderful acts of God, to bring blessing to others.

Look at Ephesians 3:10

What do you think this verse means?

11. We are doing as much as we should to help solve problems such as drug abuse, racial problems, poverty, the aging, etc.
12. The church should stick to religion and not concern itself with social and economic problems.
13. Our congregation manages its money well.
14. Lay people should be permitted to exercise more leadership.
15. Our congregation has not allowed women to be meaningfully involved in the church.
16. Communication between the leaders and congregational members is as good as could be expected in a church this size.
17. I have received adequate assistance from the church in time of need.
18. I would contact the church if I needed advice on personal problems.
19. I would contact the church if I needed advice on spiritual problems.
20. The worship services are inspiring and helpful to me.
21. We should give greater financial support to the church.

Appendix 2 CONGREGATIONAL RATING FORM

How do you see yourself as a congregation? To help you with this, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Slightly Agree
- 3 Slightly Disagree
- 4 Strongly Disagree

1. Our church is warm and friendly.
2. I feel needed here.
3. Our church is important to me.
4. Our church is important to our community.
5. Our congregation is spiritually dead.
6. We should do more to get new members.
7. Our congregation has changed to keep up with the community.
8. We are a united congregation.
9. Our congregation should be more concerned about its own members and less concerned about community problems.
10. Our Sunday School program is effective.

Paul is saying that the bringing of the gospel to 'other people' – in this case, the Gentiles – was always part of God's plan. Until then it had been hidden. But now it is revealed. And how is it revealed? ***By means of the church.*** The heavenly rulers and powers look at earth to see what God is doing; what happens on earth is like a drama acted out with the heavenly beings as the audience. And the script being acted out is, as Paul says in verse 6, that ***by means of the gospel the Gentiles have a part, with the Jews, of God's blessings.*** And who is acting out this script? It is the church.

That is why we are 'called out': to let 'others' see what it's like when God gets to work with a group of people. We exist for others!

Do you know Immanuel's mission statement or vision statement?

Our Mission Statement is *'Growing together in God's grace to connect all people to Jesus and make disciples who make disciples'*

Our Vision for this community is:

- Celebrate and share Jesus through culturally relevant worship form.
- Disciple people of all ages towards maturity in Christ
- Equip people to share the love and good news of Jesus in every facet of life
- Help people to develop and use their gifts to serve others in both church and community
- An open, caring and hospitable people who seek to engage with the local community

(taken from the mission and vision statement)

What do they mean for us as a church? What do they mean to you personally?

If you look at our community what demographics stand out?

Why is it important to know where we are at, before we decided to know where we are going?

Read
Mark 1:35 and Luke 22:39

Both of these passages talk about Jesus spending time in prayer seeking his father's will before he decides what is to be done next.

So prayer is key to understanding God's will. Another important tool is understanding where people are at.

Read: John 4:1-14 'Woman at the well'

What does this tell you about Jesus' approach to understanding people's needs?

Jesus saw this Samaritan woman as an equal. Even though she was someone to be avoided in public, Jesus validated her as a child of God by sharing His offer of a life without thirst.

Reflect on this statement:
The church exists primarily for others. The worship and nurturing and participating in the sacraments and all the

- What opportunities for mission are available to us or may arise this year?
- **Threats:**
 - What are the external conditions which could do damage to our mission? (Political, financial, social, cultural, technological, environmental, legal)
 - What are some possible things that could threaten the mission we are doing or might do this year?

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Appendix 1 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is a way of capturing the key factors of an organisation's current situation while also gaining a sense of what is on the horizon. It involves identifying the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieving the organisations objective. For Immanuel, we are particularly interested in factors which will affect our ability to carry out our mission.

Please list as many points as you can for each category; the questions below will help direct your thinking. Feel free to think as creatively as you can, the wide variety of views will help your group, and our church, develop the most comprehensive picture.

- **Strengths:**
 - What attributes does our community have that will help us carry out our mission?
 - What resources do we have at our disposal?
 - What are we good at?
- **Weaknesses:**
 - What attributes do we have that are harmful and hindering to our mission?
 - What resources do we lack?
 - What ongoing problems do we have?
- **Opportunities:**
 - What are the external conditions that are helpful to our mission?
(Political, financial, social, cultural, technological, environmental, legal)

activities we are involved in from week to week are primarily to equip us to be more effective in carrying out our prime task: to bring blessing to others and to proclaim the wonderful acts of God to others.

Is that your/our current mindset?

List the things our church currently does which open the door to 'others' or close the door to 'others'.

Jesus shows us that by seeking God first and understanding what is needed at the present time, the Holy Spirit will be with us and we will be able to do his work.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, we thank you for bringing us to this current season at Immanuel, we pray that as we look at our homework as we continue to pray for our new Pastor, you reveal to us our place and our purpose here in Canberra.

AMEN

(Homework for next week fill out Appendix 2 - 'Congregational Rating Form')

Week 3 (14th March – 20th March)

Where are we going? Our vision for Immanuel

Ice Breaker: Share your *highs and lows* for the week

Opening Prayer:

Lord we thank you for the opportunity to come together again to talk about our Church. As we talk about our dreams and visions for this community, remind us that we all have something to offer and share.

AMEN

Share your homework from last week. What stood out in the 'Congregational Rating Form'?

If you had a dream for this particular community what would it be? If you had the resources to do it what would it look like?

No matter where we come from, most of us have dreams or a 'vision' for our church. There is something in us that is created to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

God has always had a vision and a plan for his people. Scripture records the repeated expression of that vision.

Read Nehemiah 2:17-18

Nehemiah didn't rebuild the wall by himself. He cast and maintained the vision of the rebuilt wall, and the significance of that wall, in front of the community of God's people; and he led decisively, courageously and hopefully toward the completion of that vision.

What stood out in this passage?

In this passage Jesus sends them out two by two ahead of him. When they returned there was much rejoicing and stories to share. We too are not alone; we are in a church family to support and nurture each other.

What is one thing you can do, big or small, seen or unseen, as a follow on from this 'church check up'? Perhaps there is something you can do together as a group.

Whatever the results of your discussions, please be encouraged to share them with the church leadership and the call committee. It is hoped that, through these groups, every member will contribute to the future path of the Immanuel congregation.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, Thank you again for another lent season. As we approach Easter, remind us of who you are what you can offer. Thank you for this Small Group and we pray that we continue to share with and support one another in this community.

AMEN

How do you see it fulfilled at Immanuel?

What from this passage would you like to see more of in your community?

This does not have to be the end of the sharing. Everyone is called for a reason: God wants you to be a part of his master plan. He wants to share it with you because he loves you; he wants to enjoy working alongside of you.

There are opportunities for you to be part of something here:

- First, continue to be part of a Small Group. Small Groups are a place where you can share your heart, you can encourage and pastorally support one another.
- Continue to pray for the leadership and call committee as they talk about which Pastor we should look at calling.
- Starting on May the 4th and running over 3 weeks is a course called 'Network'; which helps you to discover your spiritual gifts and opportunities to use them in serving God.
- If you need someone to encourage and help you grow a mentor could be an option. We read in the letters to Timothy that Paul kept encouraging him and supporting him in the church plant in Ephesus.

Read
Luke 10:1-21

God's plan moves through all of history but uniquely through Jesus Christ. Today this plan is carried out by the Holy Spirit through each of his baptized people and the congregations of his church.

Read
Ephesians 1:4
Psalms 33:11
Acts 1:8
Jeremiah 29:11
Matthew 28:18-20

What do these passages say regarding God's big plan for us?

When Jesus ascended, did the disciples look at each other thinking: 'Well that was fun' and go back to their old life? No, they knew their calling and realised what they needed to do to birth this Church.

What things do you think should be our focus in the year ahead?

From the homework assignments have you noticed any key themes emerge?

What are your hopes and expectations for what our new Pastor might be like?

In reality, a Pastor cannot be all things to all people. We are limited in our resources and we lack some demographics

within our community, but hopefully these studies are helping to reveal our strengths and how we might build on them.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven (NIV)

What do you think our 'season' is? If you struggle to answer this question, then perhaps Appendix 3 will help.

Closing Prayer: Lord, thank you for giving us the ability to dream and vision. Be with us as we continue to share our ideas in this group and keep us guided to your plan and purpose.

AMEN

(Homework for next week: please fill out Appendix 3 'Things we ought to be doing as a congregation')

Week 4 (21st March – 27th March)

Where to now? Stepping forward together

Ice Breaker: Share your **highs and lows** for the week

Opening Prayer:

Thank you for this Easter season and for this time together. Bless our conversations as we consider how we will use and apply what we've discussed these past weeks.

Share your homework from last week. What stood from the 'Things we ought to be doing as a congregation' form?

Over the last couple of weeks we have shared our hearts for Immanuel Lutheran Church.

What in your groups discussions has been a surprise for you?

Hopefully, each of you have felt free to contribute and felt part of this process of reflection and analysis. You may have also learned new things about the members of your group; things they are interested in, things that they care about or things that they're good at.

Spend some time encouraging each other as a group by sharing some of the positive things you have noticed about your members in the past weeks.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

How do you see this passage fulfilled in your small group?