

A Mutual Covenant Between
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Forest City, Iowa
and
Bethany Lutheran Church, Thompson, Iowa

2020

The primary goal of this relationship:

We sojourn together as sister congregations, caring for each other and the world around us; walking in the posture of openness to the transforming and reforming power of God to become the church for future generations.

Rationale for this relationship:

- 1) Immanuel and Bethany are and have been sister congregations in the ELCA and predecessor denominations.
- 2) Our congregations and our members are neighbors in Winnebago County and the North Iowa area.
- 3) Both congregation's members primarily travel in the direction of Mason City for health care and other services.
- 4) We believe both congregations can be strengthened for mission through this relationship.
- 5) We believe lay ministry can and will be enhanced through this relationship.

The Nature of this relationship:

- 1) This relationship is based on covenant promises and commitment rather than contract.
- 2) This is a covenant of accompaniment. Each congregation will maintain its individual identity and its unique mission.
- 3) The root of accompaniment is "companion". The Immanuel and Bethany congregations are companions in the overarching mission of Jesus Christ. Our relationship exists as member congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA); the Western Iowa Synod; and the Seeds of Faith Conference.
- 4) As companions we commit to accompanying each other in ways that make us better able to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ more faithfully together than we can individually.
- 5) We recognize that for the best of the relationship to emerge some sacrifices will be required by both congregations from time to time just as sacrifice is required in any family or relationship.

Structure:

- 1) Each congregation will continue to have its own name, constitution, unique identity, church council, officers and/or governing structure, and programs independent of the other.
- 2) A Health and Vitality Team (HVT) of three members from each congregation will be established.
- 3) The members of the HVT will be chosen by whatever manner each congregation's council chooses and in consultation with the pastoral team.
- 4) Terms will be three years and no more than two terms in succession may be served.
- 5) The work of the HVT includes:
 - a. Listening to members joys and concerns regarding the fulfillment of this covenant.

- b. Being advocates for healthy expectations, communication, dialogue, and attitudes among members, leaders, and staff.
 - c. Meeting together at least quarterly as a committee and quarterly with pastoral and lay leadership to share what's being heard and for dialogue around challenges and solutions.
- 6) Times of pastoral vacancy:
- a. When a pastoral or lay staff leadership resignation is announced, Immanuel's Council President or Lead Pastor will immediately notify Bethany's Council President.
 - b. It will be the responsibility of Immanuel's Council and lead pastor to fill that vacancy with supply pastors, an interim pastor, or lay ministers as availability dictates.
 - c. The HVT will be convened to help find positive and satisfactory solutions to issues that arise during the interim period.
 - d. Together the Councils from both congregations or their appointed representatives will revisit financial responsibilities during these times to find appropriate balance.

Duration of this relationship:

- 1) It is the desire of both congregations that this be an on-going relationship for as long as it satisfies for both congregations the intended rationale, nature, and goals as stated in this covenant or as they evolve over time.
- 2) Each congregation commits to a minimum duration of three years. This means that we will call upon God's power and presence to be our power and strength and in that strength we commit to doing everything in our ability to enrich, bless, sustain, and support prayerfully and financially the needs anticipated and that arise.
- 3) Termination of this covenant before the agreed upon three-year commitment must be given nine months prior to the separation date.
- 4) Termination of this covenant after the agreed upon three-year commitment should be six months prior to the separation date.

Transactional Aspects of this agreement:

- 1) Immanuel will provide pastoral staff for preaching and presiding at
 - i. Sunday worship
 - ii. Holy week and Easter (will collaborate with Bethany's laity for mid-week Lent)
 - iii. Christmas
 - iv. Funerals
 - v. Weddings
 - vi. Other times as mutually agreed upon
- 2) The pastoral team, in partnership with lay visitors from Bethany, will meet the needs of the home-bound to the best of their ability (a goal to make a pastoral visit once per quarter if desired by home-bound).
- 3) Hospital and 24 hour per day emergency coverage will be provided by the pastoral and lay staff.
- 4) The pastoral team, in cooperation with lay leadership, will seek to build relationships with congregational members and the community that strengthen the fabric of who we are together and build trust.

- 5) Bethany will pay to Immanuel the sum of \$31,000 divided equally by twelve months to be paid on the 15th day of each month. Total compensation for the next fiscal year will be negotiated each year during budget preparations.
- 6) Bethany will pay directly to pastors each month, IRS mileage reimbursement rates for miles driven.
- 7) The pastoral team will offer approximately 16 weeks of educational classes each year at Bethany and will seek to empower lay leadership to teach at other times.
- 8) Bethany will raise up a group of lay assisting ministers to lead the congregation's liturgy.
- 9) Bethany and Immanuel may make attempts from time to time to experiment with video streaming portions of the service.
- 10) Bethany and Immanuel's leadership may choose to collaborate on shared youth ministry experiences, children's education opportunities, service/learning trips, and other ministries as beneficial for both groups.