



A 10 YEAR VISION FOR EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH: 2011-2021

I worship at Epiphany Lutheran Church, a church with two campuses; one a landmark within a long established community and the other, some distance away, reaching out to serve a developing community of faith. Our purpose is to **love Jesus by serving others** and our **vision** for the next ten years can be summarized as follows:

- **Our outreach** engages members and the community to participate in ministries, missions and teams which manifest the breadth and scope of our faith and commitment to Jesus within Epiphany and beyond.
- **Our worship** renews our fellowship and faith, strengthens the bonds between us and creates a collective strength, a force for good that is palpable to all who join Epiphany and the others that we serve.
- **Our care** for all our members brings us together and enables them to love Jesus and share that love through service to others, to do so in different and meaningful ways that change people's lives in our community and beyond.
- **Our pastors and staff** provide a continuing foundation of strength that allows members and non-members to develop their faith and support them on their lifelong journey with Jesus.
- **Our physical assets** enable our members to serve the communities in which they live and to reach out beyond them to the edges of the earth, everywhere that the word of Jesus and his love bring light, overcome fear and suffering and give hope of a better future.

Our Outreach

Our outreach engages members and the community to participate in ministries, missions and teams which manifest the breadth and scope of our faith and commitment to Jesus within Epiphany and beyond.

Imagine it's May 2021. It has been a wonderful Easter season at Epiphany. Both the Far Hills and Austin campus were packed for all of the services throughout the week leading up to and including Easter Sunday. There were 1,800 in attendance across all of the services, which is 20% more than the 1,500 that normally worship each weekend. Many of our small group members make it a point to invite neighbors and friends to attend these services. **This is a consistent initiative at Epiphany** that has introduced a lot of people to our church. We are always looking for ways to reach out to and include people that are not currently members of Epiphany. As much as we all enjoy the benefits of being members of Epiphany, we understand this is not a church just for the current members.

Epiphany's purpose centers on serving others, whether they live in our community, region, synod, state, nation and beyond. **This is our heritage, what sets us apart.** Over the past decade, Epiphany has not simply continued these missions, but dramatically enhanced them through the coordinated efforts of the team of pastors and staff with volunteers from within Epiphany and outside groups. Our programs are grounded in the ELCA's accompaniment model. In this, we listen and respond to others as they define their goals and desires, and then support them in their journey of faith with Jesus.

The mission and services we deliver are reviewed with the congregation on a regular basis. Sometimes, the work of these ministries is incorporated in worship events that re-affirm the connection of their works to our purpose and the love of Jesus that brings us together in these efforts. As circumstances change, so the

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services we perform change to remain relevant to the people in the community, the world we live in and to the people that are Epiphany. We routinely share our experiences with groups within our area, at schools and social events, like the Americana Festival and Springboro Christmas parade, to talk about Jesus and demonstrate the effect of his love on others and us.

Our outreach activities are one of the primary ways that Epiphany has helped people come to know the love and grace of Jesus. In addition to traditional approaches to attracting new members to worship with us, we are learning to build new types of activities and events that provide more informal, backdoor ways of developing relationships. Specifically, these are ministries that differ from those normally offered on Sunday and they attract non-members and members alike. This intentional outreach to non-members, coupled with proactive programs and teams to nurture and develop these contacts and relationships are how we have attracted many of our new members. Each year, approximately 120 new members first came to know about Epiphany through one of our service ministries and programs.

The programs at Epiphany are as diverse as our members, their talents and interests and the communities that we serve through them. As noted, many purposefully are designed to offer "backdoor" opportunities for non-members to visit Epiphany so they can see the vibrancy of our offerings, the thoughtfulness, and the kindness and joy of our community.

- Epiphany has a very active sports ministry bringing over 750 people onto the church property each spring, summer and fall to participate in one of our many sports leagues and tournaments, including basketball, softball and sand volleyball. Epiphany also hosts basketball, soccer, lacrosse and flag football leagues for youth in our facilities. During the last five years, the sports ministry has resulted in approximately 10 - 15 new families per year becoming members of Epiphany.
- The yearly Easter picnic is always a big hit with usually 800-900 attending from all ages, attracting members and non-members alike. Now, there are two similar events in the summer and the fall (Oktoberfest), and one to complement the Nativity with live animals and actors at Austin at Christmas.
- Epiphany's drama ministry continues to offer unique opportunities for multi-generational participation that is accessible for all in the community, blending faith with commitment, fellowship and personal growth which Epiphany strives for in all its service outreach. This has been complemented by the Halloween Haunted House and Easter celebration that welcomes the whole community.
- The Pantry now operates at both campuses and continues to build on its strengths in providing families and individuals in need with food, clothing and other essentials.
- Epiphany helps its members become involved with other service organizations, like Habitat for Humanity and the Community Blood Center. Through its membership in the ELCA, we participate in their extensive global, regional and local programs.
- Epiphany continues to bring in prominent speakers and authors, and to serve as a polling place, a blood drive location, an activity and sports hub and a location for synod meetings - all these providing other ways the congregation can serve and be welcoming to the community as a whole.

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The reason Epiphany has grown in its membership is that it has intentionally invited non-members to participate in many of its activities and events, beyond those mentioned above. This approach builds relationships between non-members and Epiphany. After attending several events, non-members naturally want to join Epiphany because of its caring and energy in fulfilling its purpose to love Jesus by serving others.

The relationship between the ELCA and the Southern Ohio Synod have strengthened and grown over the past decade. To grow our mission and outreach, we established a guideline to allocate 15% of new contributions pledged in the annual stewardship campaign to the Southern Ohio Synod and an additional 10% to support outreach ministries outside the Synod's general fund. The results have been fantastic, allowing Epiphany to leverage its own efforts to reach out and make it a leader in Ohio and the ELCA for mission support and participation around the world. We create opportunities for growth experiences and the development of leaders within the synod and the ELCA that grow the church at home and abroad, and extend a helping hand to find ways to break cycles of poverty and injustice.

Our Worship

Our worship renews our fellowship and faith, strengthens the bonds between us and creates a collective strength, a force for good that is palpable to all who join Epiphany and the others that we serve.

Epiphany constantly strives to make its worship experience meaningful and relevant to the lives of its members and accessible to visitors and guests. Our senior pastor delivers the majority of our sermons and they are thought-provoking and engaging, making the gospel of Jesus come alive in our lives. The high point of each service is communion, which continues to be offered at each service. Music remains a vital component of Epiphany worship with participation by our children and adult choirs, handbells and praise teams that have all grown in members. Beyond providing worship at times and in venues that are convenient, the services offer alternatives in liturgy and content on a routine basis, interspersed with special events - cantatas, dramas and even musicals - as appropriate to highlight or underscore a particular season with varying forms of worship, a different way of attracting and connecting with those attending. These vehicles also provide an opportunity for members to serve by sharing their unique talents, and encourage others to identify and bring forward their own.

The Far Hills campus has reached near capacity for weekend worship with an average of 900 people attending the Saturday service and the four services on Sunday at (8:00, 9:00, 10:00, and 11:00.) There are two Pastors every Sunday at Far Hills now to let us accommodate the demand for services and still allow time for the Pastor to talk and mingle with visitors, guests and members between services. This also made it possible to implement the **Fellowship Café** in the gathering space outside of the offices. This area has lots of seating arranged in intimate spaces to give people a chance to sit and talk over a cup of coffee or a snack. We also added an open Wi-Fi network about eight years ago to encourage using this gathering area during the week. Most people look forward to the time before or after service. They no longer rush in and out at the beginning and end of the service they attend.

At Austin there are two Sunday morning services worshipping 600 members each weekend. There is one traditional and one contemporary service, and as at Far Hills, Sunday School offerings are available concurrently with both worship services. Having two campuses created challenges in ensuring consistency and

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comparability of worship experience. While the facilities are different, we have used improvements in communication technology to more effectively create a common, meaningful worship experience at Epiphany. This includes the beautiful outdoor chapel at Far Hills, which was upgraded with new benches and a permanent sound system and video capability.

Our Care of Members

Our care for all our members brings us together and enables them to love Jesus and share that love through service to others, to do so in different and meaningful ways that change people's lives in our community and beyond.

The Far Hills campus of Epiphany grew with the move to the southern suburbs of Dayton starting in the 1970's. The church and its leadership successfully captured Lutherans who were part of that migration, and on that foundation built a church that thrived through the 80's, 90's and early 2000's. The dissension that marked the end of the first decade of the 21st century demanded a change in outlook and a re-thinking about Epiphany's purpose and vision. This work was overdue to enable Epiphany to address the demands of a shifting demographic and the need to remain a relevant community of faith for the 21st century.

The economic buffeting that Dayton took in the 00's affected the southern suburbs that Epiphany serves and from which it draws its members. However, the region remains strong overall with growth at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and the development of the Austin Road interchange bringing new light manufacturing industries, high-tech centers of research and commercial development and related service and support businesses. Epiphany has reached out to these new members of our community with active programs of communications and mission work to make them aware of Epiphany as a venue through which their love and faith in Jesus can be fulfilled.

We are located in strong communities, with excellent schools and strong family traditions. By offering a range of programs that serve and support these communities, from the very young to the very old, we have positioned Epiphany for its own succession; but more importantly, we are able to ensure the continuing service to Jesus, to fulfill his missions, profess his faith and the good news to successive generations.

Epiphany prides itself on the hospitality it extends to members and guests. Both campuses radiate thoughtfulness, reflection, kindness and joy. This starts with the parking team. The "greet and host" teams at both campuses make sure people are welcomed as they enter the building and are provided personal assistance to get where they are going. This requires a coordinated team approach between the members stationed at each entrance to the building and the parking team. These teams, along with the Fellowship Café team, are led by the Director of Hospitality on staff to make sure people feel welcome and included on Sunday. Food service is provided at both campuses offering a light breakfast on Sunday and light snacks through the week. This provides additional opportunities for fellowship and a local vendor provides this service operating the kiosks at both campuses.

Through its staff and volunteers Epiphany has taken pains to find the most effective communication vehicles to make members and others in the community aware of worship, musicals, outreach and other events being offered. This requires a balance of printed and digital media appropriate to events and to the audience that may be interested. Epiphany constantly revisits how we are communicating to ensure we are

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taking advantage of the best forms of communication that keep all members in touch. There is free Wi-Fi at both campuses, and members can offer their giving electronically.

The goal is to make Epiphany accessible, making it easy to know what is going on and become involved, whether that is pre-school, blood drives, sports, music and drama events or worship and volunteer opportunities. Video and photos, along with testimonials from participants, reflect the vibrancy of service that is Epiphany. The technology also lets us deliver Lenten study programs, Bible studies and other educational opportunities from a distance, helping members to stay engaged from their homes, offices or even on vacation!

Epiphany recognizes that its youth are the future, and takes tremendous pride in their growth and faith development. It starts with making Epiphany a safe place for kids enabling them to grow in their faith, not only through fun fellowship activities but also through thoughtful discussions of issues and prayer. As a result, Epiphany's youth program is large, engaging elementary, middle and high school youth. They meet regularly every Wednesday. There are annual trips and other activities to nurture leadership and other important life skills. Childcare for all ages is offered at every event or service.

A critical element in developing this vital youth ministry is that it intentionally builds continuing relationships among our youth. A very strong Grade 4-6 program naturally feeds friends into the Junior High and confirmation programs. These programs further strengthen existing relationships and create new ones, so that these friends now move into high school programs and mission trips together. We know that people go to church where their friends go, which is why building these relationships at an early age is a critical focus in our youth ministry.

Preschool kids and any other kids that come to Epiphany (boy scouts, basketball, band, after school programs, 3-on-3 Basketball, Upward, etc.) are exposed to a taste of what 'Kids Time' and our youth programming offers as part of their facility use agreement. This is so dynamic they insist their parents bring them. They also bring their friends, which in turn bring in more parents. This has been vital in our growth these past ten years. Even our Middle School and High School programming is deemed 'cool' and out of the box. Word spreads in the schools and kids are curious and want to attend.

Each spring, Epiphany celebrates its youth at First Communion and Confirmation. Each child makes a faith storyboard that is displayed in the lobby. A group of people of all generations in the congregation is assigned as faith cheerleaders for each youth going through communion and confirmation, offering a special level of personal support. Pictures of the first communicants and confirmands are displayed with their faith family on the monitors. A large reception follows the service for first communicants and confirmands.

Sunday school for both youth and adults is thriving at both campuses. Though Epiphany is a large church, it has not lost its Lutheran identity, which is emphasized in Sunday School and other educational offerings. Epiphany staff uses the best Sunday School curriculum from the ELCA and other denominations closest to the Lutheran tradition. Epiphany has developed a reputation for offering a forum for thoughtful and prayerful reflection on issues.

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Our Staff

Our pastors and staff provide a continuing foundation of strength that allows members and non-members to develop their faith and support them on their lifelong journey with Jesus.

At the beginning of 2011, Epiphany's senior pastor abandoned Epiphany taking with him another pastor, a number of the staff, and valued members of the congregation, including the leaders of the Church Council. This trauma has shaped Epiphany over the past decade, resulting in a community of faith more able to fulfill its purpose of loving Jesus by serving others. The most important outcome was establishing administrative structures and relationships between the church council, pastors, staff and members that ensured continuity by stabilizing the professional leadership of the congregation. In particular, the senior pastor's role was more clearly defined so that his responsibilities were primarily the oversight of the daily operations and head of administration, looking to council for the vision and an effective policy framework in which to act.

The role and responsibility of the church council has changed dramatically from worrying over day-to-day operating issues to focusing on how Epiphany is realizing its purpose of loving Jesus by serving others. To accomplish this, council has the following six specific areas of responsibility:

- discern and oversee God's vision for Epiphany,
- define the outcomes for each ministry area,
- establish guidelines for responsibilities and authority of staff and ministry leaders,
- create an annual budget,
- evaluate the senior Pastor and
- recommend a candidate to become a senior Pastor, when necessary.

Within the framework established by Council, the senior pastor is effectively the "head coach" of a team of associate pastors and staff that have specific skills and expertise in different areas of Epiphany's interests and activities. These specialists provide the drive and necessary abilities to effectively manage and grow programs in a church as large as Epiphany, enabling members to participate, grow and succeed. Responsibilities are aligned and delegated to four core areas: Worship, Outreach, Care of Members and Administration. This breakdown underpins our strategic and annual plans. We have associate pastors who provide traditional services, but have particular areas of focus around developing membership, youth and young adult ministries and mission. Similarly, the professional staff has individuals in positions with unique strengths related to communications/marketing, hospitality and events management, member care, children and sports.

This new model has been in place for almost a decade, starting with Pastor Pete Rudowski and his successor. The renewed growth of Epiphany, reversing its decline in the late 00's, is a direct outcome of the new model. It has enabled all members to participate more fully in the life and works of Epiphany as an expression of their love of Jesus. Because of the financial challenges in the early 10's, other than youth and communications, not all of these positions have been filled over the past decade. The same was true for the assistant pastors, but we now have all positions filled. We are becoming recognized as one of the key development centers for pastoral and staff talent in the synod and the ELCA.

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Volunteers are the lifeblood of the church because our numerous ministries couldn't happen without them. I was on Epiphany's web site yesterday looking for volunteer opportunities and noticed several opportunities that looked interesting. I was able to see every ministry at Epiphany, who was involved, their purpose, needs, meeting times and main contact to get more information. Finding what I was looking for was easy because I could search on my personal gifts and other key words. The main volunteer page even had a list of immediate needs so I could find an opportunity where I knew that I could have a quick impact. There was also a connection to Epiphany's educational programs, a number of which focus on enhancing the gifts of our staff and volunteers. Such programs are essential to help people to grow in their faith, to succeed in their work at Epiphany and to successfully address the rapidly changing needs of our members and the others whom we serve.

Our Assets

Our physical assets enable our members to serve the communities in which they live and to reach out beyond them to edges of the earth, everywhere that the word of Jesus and his love bring light, overcome fear and suffering and give hope of a better future.

The church building at Far Hills Avenue is a landmark, unique and distinct, gracing a hillside that calls to mind another hillside on which Jesus was crucified. The church dominates the roadside, unmistakable and remarkable, but in its expansion in the early 2000's, it sacrificed a welcoming presence to the community from the very busy Route 48/Far Hills. There was just one small road, which was hard to turn into with no sense of the welcoming community that lay beyond. This entrance has been enlarged, far beyond a simple illuminated sign facing 48, so that Epiphany is more accessible. This has been important to our success in attracting new members over the years.

In 2009, the Austin Campus was a single, modest building that was the lone occupant of a hillside at the northern edge of Springboro. However, this location positioned Epiphany to serve the new developments being built in that area. This has been complemented by the sustained level of activity always seen in and around the church. From an attractive outdoor patio to the fields, this now decade-old facility has been supplemented by a new, larger facility to serve over 600 members. Epiphany, through its presence at the Austin location, is now an established member of a newer community, much as the Far Hills facility became as Centerville grew around it.

The Austin campus has grown to worship 600 of the 1,500 that worship at Epiphany each week. The building expansion that occurred in 2018 at the Austin campus has made this possible along with the ability to continue this growth up to 1,000 with three services. We also were able to start preschool and daycare at Austin with this building expansion. There are 100 kids currently enrolled in preschool with capacity of up to 150. The continued development of subdivisions and building of new homes within a five-mile radius of the Austin campus has made this a premium location for families looking for a church home in this area.

We use our physical assets to host large scale events, both indoors and outside, including sporting activities, educational programs and community events, like blood drives, all of which create opportunities for members of the community to spend time with us. We organize and facilitate programs and activities, like garage sales, dances, lock-ins, hosting of families for Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN), pre-school and

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daycare because we have the facilities and people who understand how to take advantage of them. While at times, we are more like an arm's length facilities provider; in many cases, we create and execute the entire program. All of these create precious opportunities to share the love of Jesus, backdoor opportunities to start a dialog about Jesus. At these events, we always have information about Epiphany available and teams to answer questions and follow up in person.

Epiphany recognizes that our buildings and other assets are very valuable resources for evangelism. When we host large groups with a specific agenda, we advertise those ministry programs that best relate to the group being hosted. For example, our coordinator of communications prepares special presentations for the monitors in the Gathering Space with brochures to match. By reaching out in this way, we give our visitors the opportunity to see how Epiphany can serve them.

In its success, Epiphany has grown to become a critical mass of assets that enable us to do things others churches only dream of doing. However, this is a double-edged sword and we have worked hard to realize the benefit of our scale, while mitigating the difficulties. We have comprehensive maintenance, asset evaluation and re-investment programs in place to ensure all of our buildings, the outdoor chapel, and parking and athletic facilities are properly cared for and routinely upgraded. These extend to the Far Hills Shoppes that we purchased in the 1990's to avoid being landlocked at that campus and to provide additional parking on particularly busy Sundays, Easter and Christmas. We are proud of these facilities and strive to ensure that their condition clearly reflects our love of Jesus.

In 2015, we were able to complete much needed renovations at Far Hills which began with the roof repairs three years before. These renovations included updates to the restroom facilities, new carpet, paint and many other cosmetic adjustments that create the best possible environment for anyone spending time with us, whether they are members or guests.

We have developed stewardship programs to ensure we can pay for the wonderful facilities that are Epiphany's. The departure of members in 2011 created real challenges, but the Council working with pastors, staff and members put a plan in place that created a financial bridge. This allowed the necessary time for the rethinking of Epiphany, its purpose and vision and successfully executing a strategic plan that restored lost membership and financial strength. In 2021, Epiphany is a stronger church, one that is better able to fulfill its purpose – to love Jesus by serving others.