

Veritas Outcomes
Report to the Congregation (August, 2010)

We began the *Veritas* process in our church in January, 2009. Over the succeeding eighteen months we held some twenty-one sessions, in the course of which well over one hundred parishioners discussed and gained a renewed vision regarding most of the major areas of our church's life and ministry -- fellowship, worship, and mission. The fourth area needing attention, Christian formation, has been introduced and will be pursued more fully in the fall under the direction of the Christian Formation Board.

The *Veritas* program itself is now concluding. Peter Sjoblom, who has given direction and leadership to this process in our church, and in a number of other congregations, as well, indicates that the process here has lasted longer and been more extensive than in any other church with which he is familiar.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this process has been the opportunity provided for all participants to share their perspectives on our life together as a congregation. But this has not been just "talk for talk's sake." The process has, as intended, also produced some specific outcomes. These have taken the form of action steps which participants have established as priorities. Those outcomes commanding the greatest amount of support and commitment are summarized in the remainder of this report.

I. Our Church Fellowship

Priorities established by *Veritas* participants

- A. The adoption of "A Covenant for Our Life Together" as a commitment to how we, as a Christian fellowship, can consider with honesty -- and in a spirit of mutual regard -- the sometimes difficult issues that confront a congregation.

- B. The creation of an effective church web site & upgrading of electronic communications
Status: The necessary supporting technology -- and web site -- are now in place. The web site can potentially be an effective means of outreach to those outside who might be interested in our church and provide better communication within our congregation.

- C. The All-Church Retreat -- a time for everyone to get to know each other better.
Status: Our first ever retreat was held in early March at Covenant Harbor, with about 100 persons participating. It was judged by all to have been a very successful -- & needed -- occasion. Plans are underway to hold another retreat next year.

- D. The need to do a better job of welcoming and getting to know newcomers.
Status: The "Bridgebuilders" group of 22 persons has been formed, with the specific purpose of spotting newcomers, engaging them personally, introducing them to others, and following up with other appropriate contacts. Name tags have also been introduced as a way for everyone to become better acquainted with both newcomers and our own church members.

- E. The need to do a better job helping newcomers to feel they genuinely "belong" in our church fellowship.
Status: No specific follow-up except as noted in "D" above.

Other possible courses of action have also generated substantial support -- and hopefully can be pursued as time, energy, and resources permit.

II. Our Church at Worship

Priorities established by *Veritas* participants:

- A. More active involvement in worship by children and youth.

- B. Greater diversity in music styles & instruments in worship.

- C. Use of individual talents in worship -- but maintaining both high quality and a primary focus on worship, not on showcasing individual performance.
- D. Integration of music and other aspects of worship around the appointed texts and central theme of each service.
- E. Retain the practice of laypersons reading scripture lessons -- with adequate preparation for effective reading -- and use of a variety of modes of communication for both scripture lessons and sermons (dialog, antiphonal readings, or drama).
- F. Freedom to depart occasionally from assigned lectionary texts when another emphasis is more appropriate.
- G. Provision of more information re. worship practices and symbols that may not be understood by everyone.
- H. Use of spaces other than the church chancel for some aspects of worship (the aisles, transepts, balconies, etc.)
- I. More direct congregational involvement in prayers during worship.

Status: Creation of a Worship Task Force, which, working with the pastor and church musicians, has implemented all of the above priorities that have not already been part of our worship experience. This group continues to give attention to these priorities.

III. Mission, Service, & Outreach

Priorities

Action steps are less clear regarding this topic than the previous two. A list of existing and potential programs & initiatives was presented to Veritas participants, but, recognizing that no new initiatives could be implemented without persons willing to commit to them, participants were not asked to vote for specific options, but, instead, to offer their own service in areas of their choice. Those choices would then determine which possible new initiatives might realistically go forward. In the absence, however, of explicit instructions, few sign-ups occurred.

But, in fact, potential new outreach and service initiatives are, in other contexts, under discussion within the congregation and its leadership. While no final decisions have been made, these will be actively considered in the months ahead.

The current status of these possible initiatives can be summarized as follows.

A. A New Outreach Initiative Already Going Forward:

- The community garden adjacent to the 5234 N. Christiana building -- with its produce designated for Friendship Center distribution.

B. Outreach Initiatives Soon to be Implemented:

1. "Dine with Nine" -- a slightly revised version of the former "Dinner for Eight" gatherings in homes.
2. A Hospitality Center, with coffee, every weekday morning for those (Preschool parents & others) coming into our building (will begin in Sept.).
3. "Open Church": The church sanctuary will be open to all for prayer during specific hours each week, with someone always present for support as needed.
4. Foreign Missions: A month of emphasis in October to increase awareness, support, & involvement.

C. Outreach Initiatives under Active Consideration:

1. "Umbrella of Health": Using our congregation's medical expertise & other health services to provide some health services to those in our community who need them.
2. Intentional outreach initiatives directed toward NPU & NPTS students.
3. Outreach directed toward the diverse ethnic groups and other faith communities within our community, including opening up conversations with their leaders.
4. Specific efforts to encourage volunteers for outreach initiatives.
5. Greater outreach to parents of children & youth involved in church-sponsored programs.

6. Creation of small group opportunities to help integrate newcomers into our fellowship.
7. Involvement (along with the Albany Park Neighborhood Council & North River Commission) in foreclosure and immigration reform issues.

D. Ideas Presented, but Not at Present under Active Consideration:

1. A "Taste of North Park" occasion in our South Garden.
2. A revival of our former "Fifty Plus" program for seniors.
3. A "Carpenter's Place" (a group of people able to meet "fix it" needs in the community).
4. Teaching ESL classes in our church.
5. Closer ties with the AA group & others utilizing our church facilities.
6. Camp scholarships for non-church children in the community.
7. A weekday program for elementary age children.

E. Support for Existing Ministries of Service & Outreach:

In focusing on possible new directions, we need also to stress the importance of what we are doing already. That includes:

1. Youth groups
2. All children's programs, particularly VBS
3. The North Park Preschool
4. The Tutoring Program for Peterson School students
5. The Friendship Center (not operated, but strongly supported by, the church)
6. The "More for Moms" Program
7. The "School's Out" Program (if it continues)

F. Volunteers for Existing Service & Outreach Ministries:

About 15 *Veritas* participants did offer -- and have been contacted -- re. specific help in existing or prospective service and outreach ministries. These include the community garden, outreach to college & seminary students, VBS, small groups, Rainbow Readers, and "Little Women."

G. Evaluation of Existing & Potential New Programs:

Finally, we recognize that not every existing or future program will -- or should -- continue in perpetuity. With limited human and financial resources, we need to regularly evaluate all of our ministries to determine whether they are continuing to meet a genuine need.

IV. Christian Formation

The one remaining area of our church life & mission identified for attention in the *Veritas* process is "Christian Formation." However, since much of that has already been covered in other areas, and the *Veritas* process in our church has already continued for one and a half years, and, given the willingness of the Christian Formation Board to direct congregational attention to this area in the fall, this topic will be turned over to them. The formal *Veritas* process will therefore conclude.

In concluding, we express our profound gratitude to Peter Sjoblom, whose able leadership has been crucial to the *Veritas* process in our church. While Peter is providing this support in many churches, we are particularly fortunate that he is a member of our congregation -- and therefore personally familiar with our church's own particular character -- and potential. But the best leadership in the world will be unproductive without the active support of others. We therefore offer a special word of gratitude to those many members of our congregation who have faithfully participated in and supported the *Veritas* process over these past eighteen months. Without this kind of sustained congregational interest and support, the *Veritas* process could not have been as productive as it has been.

While the formal *Veritas* process is now ending, we do urge the church to plan at least one or two occasions each year in which the congregation can come together informally to consider and re-evaluate what we are doing -- and how we can better understand and respond to God's call for our church life and ministry.

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