

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church Transition Team Report 4/13/2025

Executive Summary

This section is meant to provide a brief synopsis of the information the transition team has generated as part of its task to help initiate the transition process. The report covers the major facets of the health of CELC. We encourage you to read the entire report to get the full picture, but contained below are the key findings.

Context for the report (Section 1)

- CELC is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- Founded in 1953 in Goodyear AZ, a diverse, growing community.
- Transition Process needed upon the retirement of Pastor Jeff Gallen in 2024 who had been here since 1998.

CELC History (Section 2.1)

- Early History – Built church building. Neighborhood church with ebbs and flows. By 1998 Congregation was struggling
- Middle History – Re-invigoration of congregation. Outreach Focus started. Many new members from retirement communities including snowbirds.
- Recent History – Stabilization of congregation. Building B constructed and became sanctuary. Rental of facilities to other non-Lutheran congregations. Growth of Outreach programs. Covid Pandemic impact. Challenges to deal with: Alleluia, Solar project failure, unexpected sewer project. Pastor Jeff retires.

Makeup of Congregation (Section 2.2)

- 220 voting confirmed members, 10 non-confirmed members, 139 others in system
- Largest population of members are from Goodyear, but significant numbers from other west valley towns
- 85% of individuals likely 65 and older
- Significant number of snowbirds
- Primarily white with small number of households being non-white

Mission, Vision, Values of CELC (Section 2.3)

- **Mission:** “We are a Christian fellowship, reaching out to all people, so that all may see, know and experience God’s love for them.”
- **Vision:** "To be a Christian fellowship that is Spirit-led and engaged in participation and service to our congregation and the larger community."
- **Values:** Christ-Centered, Service, Welcoming, Community, Diversity

Fundamentals of the Congregation (Sections 2.4-2.9)

- **Constitution & Bylaws** – OK
- **Attendance** – 2024 averages - 144 Oct-April, 92 May-September. Consistent live-stream engagement each week
- **Communications** – various channels in use, Social media is weak
- **Staff, Procedures, Policies** – OK. Specific staff needs: office manager/receptionist, Social media help. Some procedures need formalization.
- **Financial** – In pretty good shape, Need to rebuild reserves/designated. Prepare for funding needs for bringing in new pastor.
- **Property Situation** – Property in reasonably good shape but prepare for surprises.

Next Steps and Challenges (section 3):

- Call Committee elected
- Ministry Site profile initiated
- Identification of Challenges moving forward:
 - Age of congregation
 - Social Media presence
 - Specific staffing needs
 - Procedure/policy formalization
 - Physical location
 - Large plant to maintain
 - Financial “set-aside”
 - Maintaining good relationships with our renters
 - Large number of “snowbirds”

1. Transition Process at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC)

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC) has been located at 918 S. Litchfield Road in Goodyear, Arizona since 1953. It was the first church to be incorporated in the City of Goodyear with the initial church sanctuary occupied in 1956. It began as a neighborhood church in the American Lutheran Church. Most of the initial members lived in the immediate area.

However, in the subsequent years it has become more of a community church with members from many different areas of the much-expanded Goodyear and the many surrounding communities in the West Valley area of Phoenix. In 2010, an additional building was built that was initially intended as an “activity/outreach” center but quickly was converted to the main Sanctuary.

CELC has a strong recent history of outreach to the community as demonstrated by our food pantry which was established in 2003 and currently serves 65-70 families weekly. In addition, we have served as a “host” church for the LSS-SW I-Help transitional living program for the last 8 years (this program was terminated 3/2025 by LSS-SW) due to funding issues.

Our two buildings are also home to 4 other churches (3 of which are Hispanic) who rent our facilities.

1.1. Introduction to Goodyear

Goodyear was established in 1917 as a “company town” associated with Goodyear Tire and Rubber company and formally incorporated in 1946. CELC was established close to the original town area which was north of Western Avenue (Yuma Avenue) and East of Litchfield Rd. The town of Goodyear was renamed as a “city” in 1985.

Goodyear and the other communities in the surrounding area of the West Valley have seen significant growth beginning in the 1990s with a mix of housing for singles, families, and a large concentration of senior and retirement housing. Goodyear currently has a population of over 100,000 with room for the significant additional growth that is projected. There are retail areas along with significant amounts of warehouse and data center facilities. Interstate 10 runs through Goodyear which gives access to downtown Phoenix for commuters. Near CELC is the Phoenix Goodyear Airport that serves private airplanes and has maintenance and storage for commercial air (but no commercial service). Luke Air Force Base is at the north edge of the city.

Goodyear has a diverse population (52% White, 31% Hispanic, 6% Black, rest being Asian or mixed). The median age in Goodyear is 40.8 years.

1.2. Need for Transition/Call Process

Pastor Jeff Gallen was initially installed at CELC in 1998 and was instrumental in the revitalization of the congregation which had been struggling. He served at CELC for 26 years from 1998-2024 and helped drive CELC’s focus on Outreach to the community. In late 2023, he announced his plan to retire at the end of October 2024 which is when he did retire. After consultation with the Grand Canyon Synod, the transition/call process was initiated thus providing the need for this report.

2. Transition Team Tasks

The CELC Transition Team was initially formed in March of 2024 with an initial meeting with the coach from the Grand Canyon synod. The Transition Team members are:

Ann Bruce – Chair	Olga Blanchard	Patsy Blankenship	Jim Erickson
Stevie Henderson	Karen Olson	Les Stubbs	

Grand Canyon Synod Coach – Pastor Phil Gustafson

Over the summer of 2024, the team got organized, did some initial work related to history and demographics including an effort to clean-up our church membership information and our church directory. The Transition team has a page on the church website and puts out periodic email updates to the congregation using the same tool as the church’s weekly newsletter.

2.1. CELC History

The team did research on church history and hosted a session before and after the service on September 29, 2024, to solicit input from the congregation on our history. What follows is a synopsis of the key events in our history with a focus on the more recent history.

Early History (1953 through 1998):

- 1953 – CELC founded as a member of the ALC (first church incorporated in Goodyear. They originally worshipped at the Goodyear Boy Scout Lodge.
 - Mission congregation of Alzona Evangelical Lutheran Church, Phoenix
- 1956 – Building A finished – Sanctuary, small office area, attached parsonage area
- 1964 – House purchased to use as parsonage but later sold
- 1980 – Fellowship Hall added to Building A. Parsonage area converted to offices
- 1980’s-1998 -- Preschool in Building A – started in 1980s, ended 1998
- Served by a number of different pastors from 1953-1998
- By mid-to-late 1990s, congregation was shrinking and struggling
 - The average weekly attendance by end of 1998 was 35
 - Dissolution of Pre-school in 1998 caused serious division in congregation

Middle History (1998 through 2009)

- 1998 – Pastor Jeff Gallen called and installed.
- 2000-2009 – Initial re-growth of congregation
 - Growth of congregation – numbers of new members with focus on retirement communities including “snowbirds”
 - Programs Added – Book Club, Quilters, Health Ministry
- 2003 – Celebration of 50 Years
- 2003 – Second service initiated
- 2003 – Outreach program (food pantry) adopted and reorganized by church members
- 2003 – Harriet Stubbs hired as Director of Music
- 2003-2004 – Shared Facilities with a Reformed Catholic Church
- 2005 – Adopt-A-Cop program started
- 2009 – Groundbreaking for Building B (was going to be Open Arms Center)

Recent History (2010 through 2025)

- 2010 – Building B opened as “open arms center” which was to be an activity center
 - Initially there was a Hispanic congregation who used Bldg B as worship space
 - Shortly after opening, the Building B main room converted to Sanctuary and CELC worship moved there as the sanctuary in Building A had been outgrown.
- 2010-2020 – growth and stabilization of congregation continued
 - Membership began skewing to an older population with fewer young families
 - 3 churches started renting our facilities – Vida Nueva (2011), Hope Alive (2012-2013) , and Casa Del Rey (about 2015).
 - Space provided for many support organizations – AA, Duet, etc.
 - Continued growth of Outreach programs – food pantry, I-Help (about 2016)
- 2016 – Miloy Canete hired as Director of Music and Worship
- 2020-2022 – Covid shutdown and “restart”
 - In person Services shutdown from March – October 2020
 - Recorded services on YouTube with Sunday Drive-up communion – March 29, 2020
 - Rented AM Transmitter for Easter Sunday Parking Lot Service – April 12, 2020
 - Started live streaming services with drive-up communion - August 2020
 - Social Distance in-person services started (with drive-up communion) - October 2020
 - Added FM Radio Transmission option to Parking lot – January 2021
 - Attendance has not fully recovered since the shutdown
 - Second service never resumed
- 2021-2022 – Intern Dan W. was shared with Alleluia Lutheran Church in Phoenix
- 2021-2023 – Discussions of Merger with Alleluia undertaken (Alleluia withdrew from discussion)
- 2023-2024 – Solar Project undertaken. Failure due to firm going out of business due to unlawful practices and fraud. Financial Loss from designated funds.
- 2023-2024 – Major sewer project required for Building A. Significant financial impact on Designated funds.
- 2024 – Fourth church renting our facilities for their services - Iglesias Cristiana Valle De Beraca
- 2024 – Pastor Jeff Gallen retires, and Transition/Call process initiated.

2.2. Identity of Congregation

2.2.1. Membership

CELC keeps its official membership roster using the Servant Keeper software tool. A significant effort was made in 2024 to “clean-up” our membership roster to improve it’s accuracy. This continues to be an ongoing effort. After that cleanup, here is the makeup of our congregation which includes all 359 “active” profiles in the tool (does not include archived profiles):

- Active Members: 171 Confirmed, 10 Non-confirmed
 - Includes full-time AZ residents
 - Includes “snowbirds” where CELC is their **primary** church home, but they may not live in AZ full-time
 - These are voting members with full “privileges”
- Seasonal Members : 40 Confirmed
 - These are “snowbirds” whose primary relationship is with a different home church

- They also have a committed relationship to CELC when in AZ
- Voting members but the constitution specifies limits on their privileges and duties
- Homebound Members: 9 Confirmed
 - These are Active Members of CELC but are limited to their homes
 - They generally are not available to vote in congregational meetings
- Attendees/Prospects/Visitors/Inactive/Staff: 139
 - These have recent interactions with CELC but are not active members
 - When inactive for a long enough period of time, their profiles are archived

This means we have a voting membership of 220.

2.2.2. Geographic Area Represented by Congregation

As noted previously, CELC started out as a local neighborhood church. However, that has changed as CELC’s congregation now draws from a number of communities in the West Valley region of Phoenix. Here is a breakdown of the West Valley communities represented by our membership:

- Goodyear - 214
 - Goodyear membership is focused in the Pebble Creek, Estrella, and Centerra subdivisions
- Buckeye - 41
- Litchfield Park - 24
- Surprise – 15
- Avondale – 13
- Phoenix - 13
- Scattering of other communities - 39

The streaming of services has also led to relationships with individuals in other parts of the country.

2.2.3. Current makeup of CELC congregation and church council

Our membership skews to the older age range with a majority of its members being retired. While we don’t have good numbers from our church records on ages, occupations, and life situation, the following approximates the breakdown of the age of our households:

- Age 75+ and retired – 55%
- Age 65-75 and retired – 30%
- Age 50-65 – Working, empty nest – 10%
- Age 35-45 – Working, teens in family – 2.5%
- Ages 25-35 – Working, young children – 2.5%

Our congregation is primarily white with a small number of households being non-white.

Unsurprisingly, our congregation has a significant number of “snowbirds” who are vital to the health and community of CELC but are only here for part of the year.

The makeup of our church council pretty well matches the makeup of our congregation although seasonal members are not eligible to be on church council.

2.3. Mission, Vision, Values Conversations with Congregation

The transition team held a series of meetings with congregation members in February and March 2025 where CELC’s mission, vision, and values were discussed in a small group format. The Transition Team has taken that input and has proposed to the church council a modified mission statement, a proposed vision statement, and a set of values for CELC. **The church council has accepted the proposals and voted to adopt the updated mission statement, proposed mission statement, and proposed values.**

2.3.1. Mission Statement

The transition team began with the Mission Statement since CELC already had one, most congregation members are familiar with it, and the team believed that it was already a pretty good statement of who CELC is and how the members already see CELC. The current mission statement is:

“We are a Christian fellowship reaching out to all people, so they might experience God’s love for them.”

The small group discussions indicated that the congregation members do align with the ideas in this mission statement and felt that it accurately reflects who CELC is. However, there were suggestions made on how to make it an even better mission statement. The transition team has proposed the following be adopted as CELC’s **updated mission statement**:

“We are a Christian fellowship, reaching out to all people, so that all may see, know and experience God’s love for them.”

The rationale for the changes are as follows: replacing the “they” with “all” to make it more inclusive of both our internal congregation along with the outside community; replacing the “might” with “may” to make it more definitive; and replacing “experience” with “see, know, and experience” to make it more actionable.

2.3.2. Vision Statement

Our second set of small group discussions with the congregation members focused on Vision and what direction the congregation members felt we should go. It was a productive discussion that had a pretty good consensus on a number of items. The key comments that came out of this discussion were as follows:

- Desire to see younger more diverse families with children
- Better “advertising” including social media
- A wider variety of activities for children, youth, and seniors
- Children’s sermons if we can build our youth population
- Increased Adult Education Opportunities
- Community participation and continue to build our outreach programs
- Maintain music focus
- Resume second more contemporary service when possible
- Tolerance and acceptance of all people
- Seek younger, experienced, bilingual pastor

The small groups felt this was completely consistent with our proposed mission statement.

The transition team took this input from the congregation and proposed the following vision statement to the church council:

"To be a Christian fellowship that is Spirit-led and engaged in participation and service to our congregation and the larger community."

2.3.3. Values

Our final set of small group discussion with congregation members was to discuss values. In the small groups, we had individuals use Post-it notes to identify the 5 values that they felt were important to CELC as a congregation. The groups then integrated those values by doing an affinity grouping to develop a set of “themes” for those key values.

The transition team then looked at these set of themes and came up with the following 5 key values as the synthesis of the small group’s ideas:

- **Christ-Centered**
 - Through **Worship, Teaching, Learning, Interactions** with each other
- **Service**
 - By **Outreach** to both our larger **Community** and our **Congregation**
- **Welcoming**
 - By being **Accepting** and **Inclusive**, and showing **Tolerance** for our differences
- **Community**
 - Through our **Relationships, Fellowship, Support** of each other
- **Diversity**
 - Embracing differences in **Ethnicity, Age, Life Experience**

2.4. Review of constitution and bylaws

The Constitution and Bylaws were last updated in 2023-2024 to be consistent with the most recent model constitution from the ELCA. The transition team does not feel there are any items in the constitution or bylaws that currently need attention.

2.5. Attendance at Worship Services

Our weekly attendance during 2024 worship services varied depending on the time of the year due to the impact of our “snowbirds”. During the months of October – April our weekly average attendance was 144. For the months of May – September, when our “snowbirds” are not in AZ, our weekly average attendance dropped to 92. During the summer months, even many of our full-time AZ residents do extensive traveling which also impacts attendance.

This lower attendance during the hotter months is also reflected in a reduced availability of volunteers for some of our programs (like the food pantry).

Our attendance was impacted during the Covid period. We did shut down services for a period of time, we initially began making recorded services available online and then started streaming services online with Pastor Jeff and a small number of musicians at church and provided drive-up communion. Once we opened up in-person services again (with social distancing, transmitting audio to attendee’s cars in parking lot. and continued drive-up communion) we

continued to live-stream the services for those who were not comfortable with gathering in a group.

Our live streaming of services has continued after Covid. In 2024, we had approximately 20 live viewers and 26 replay viewers each week. This has proven valuable to our homebound members and our snowbirds, has introduced some people to CELC, and has given us some regular participants from other parts of the county.

2.6. Communications

The primary communication mechanisms used by CELC to our members are:

- Key announcements displayed on our screens before service begins
- Key verbal announcements at the beginning of each service (try to limit these)
- Weekly email newsletter (using Constant Contact)
- Special Transition Team emails (using Constant Contact)
- Online Church Directory using Instant Church Directory
- Web site that is actively updated
- Limited social media presence (a formal Facebook page but it only really contains notification of our live-stream services and could be more effective)

2.7. Staff, procedures, and policies

Our current paid staff consists of:

- Interim Pastor Kim Sterner
- Director of Worship and Music: Miloy Canete
- Facilities Manager: Jonathan Gonzalez

We currently do not have a paid office manager/receptionist to cover our office hours of M-Thurs 9:00am – noon. It is currently covered by volunteers when possible. This is something that the church council needs to consider when looking at the needs of a new pastor.

Additional regular volunteer staff consists of:

- Administrator for rentals, contracts, incorporation: John Brown
- Finance Team: Sharoll Blodgett, Ann Bruce, John Brown
- IT and Technology: Jim Erickson (also currently serving as Building and Grounds coordinator)

Also, if we are serious about wanting to have a better presence on social media and additional advertising, we either need to find a volunteer with the right skills or hire some outside help.

We recommend that effort be applied to improving some of our procedures around tracking of visitors, prospects and maintaining the accuracy of our member records. It will also be helpful to a new pastor to capture our “informal policies” into a written policy notebook.

2.8 Financial realities

CELC has a history of managing its finances such that we are close every year in balancing income versus operating expenses at the end of the year. CELC budgeted income for 2025 is \$417,100. CELC budgeted expenses for 2025 is \$385,814. The excess income needs to be

banked for covering expenses for bringing in a new pastor and rebuilding our reserves. CELC has not utilized pledges or having big “stewardship” campaigns for upcoming years in the recent past although special campaigns for specific projects have sometimes been used.

We previously had a sizable set of “designated” and “reserve” funds. These have been significantly depleted the last couple of years with the unexpected large sewer project for Building A and our unfortunate experience of fraud on our failed solar project. Our Designated fund was at \$47,904 and our Reserves at about \$30,000 at the end of 2024.

The church council will need to stay on top of finances as bringing in a new pastor may have significant additional expenses to deal with (such as salary, benefits, or moving expenses).

2.8. Property situation

While we have a fairly large plant to administer, Building A and Building B are in reasonably good shape for their ages as far as we know. However, we can always get surprised by something in our facilities (such as the Bldg A Sewer issue we faced in 2023/2024).

Some key property challenges that will need to be addressed are whether we are going to do anything more with Solar after our unfortunate past experience, addressing issues with the asphalt in the parking lot, some landscaping challenges, and potential large painting projects. We are also faced with some difficulties finding volunteers due to our ageing congregation.

3. Next steps and Challenges

3.1. Call Committee

The church council identified people to be nominated to the Call Committee and held a special congregational meeting to elect them on April 6. The members of the call committee are:

Jennifer Cole	Kathy Coyle	Jim Erickson	Tony Fabrello
Connie Sornsin	Rae Valabek	Fred Wordell	

Jim Erickson is expected to provide continuity with the Transition Team.

The transition team recommends that the Call Committee continue to regularly communicate progress to the congregation using email, the web site, and announcements at services.

3.2. Ministry Site Profile

The transition team will begin to populate the Ministry Site Profile with information from this report with the expectation that the Call Committee will finalize it for submission.

3.3. Challenges moving forward

Finally, the transition team sees a number of challenges the council, congregation, call committee, and a new pastor will face. These are summarized below:

Age of the congregation: The congregation has clearly stated they want to be looking for a pastor who can help bring in younger families. The congregation, while active and relatively stable, is aging. This presents a number of challenges for the Church Council, the Call Committee, and any pastor that we call. Because we have a relatively small

base of younger families, how do we draw more to the congregation? Age is also becoming more of a challenge to find volunteers for things like our outreach programs and help in maintaining our plant.

Social Media Presence: The congregation has stated they would like to see more advertising and social media presence (not just Facebook). They saw this also as part of how CELC can address drawing a younger set of families. We either need to find a volunteer who is comfortable taking this on or potentially look at finding and paying a specialist for this.

Staffing: As noted previously, the Church council should consider bringing in a part-time receptionist/office manager before a new pastor comes in to help support the needs of that pastor in coming on board.

Procedures/Policies: CELC has lots of relatively “informal” policies on lots of things (parking lot usage, record keeping, volunteer position descriptions, etc). We need to continue to clean up and maintain our membership record-keeping and procedures. The transition team believes it would be helpful to a new pastor coming in to have these more formalized and written down to help the transition to a pastor go more smoothly.

Physical Location: While CELC was initially at the edge of the original residential area of Goodyear, it is now in more of a warehouse/data center area as the residential growth of Goodyear has not been in the immediate area.

Large Plant to Maintain: While the two buildings are in reasonably good shape, it is still a large plant to maintain with some known big-ticket needs (parking lot, landscape, painting). As the buildings continue to age, there is potential for “surprises”.

Financial “set aside” – The transition team recommends that the council work to build up some additional financial cushion to prepare for the expenses of bringing a new pastor online (salary expectations, moving expenses, start-up expenses, etc.). CELC also needs to rebuild some of the congregation’s reserves and designated funds for “surprises”.

Maintaining good relationships with our renting congregations – A significant portion of our income comes from the other congregations who are renting our facilities. We need to continue to maintain good relationships with them moving forward.

Large Number of Snowbirds – This puts strain on the availability of our volunteer resources during the summer months which impacts our volunteer coordinators.

Submitted by the CELC Transition Team

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