

# Covenant for Merger of The Lutheran Church of Concord and Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church

August 22, 2018

## 1. Introduction

The Lutheran Church of Concord (Concord) and Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church (Messiah) have a long history of worship and service together. In 1958, Concord members led the effort to establish Messiah in order to expand the worship and service opportunities for Lutherans in Greece. Over the years we have shared many services together. This has increased in recent years, particularly with our combined Lenten and Advent services. We have increasingly participated in and supported the ministries of each church, and we have joined together in God's Work, Our Hands. Thus, when Concord began to experience decreasing membership, deficit budgets, and a resulting emphasis on maintenance rather than mission, it was natural for the two congregations to look to each other for a new future.

Options for partnering together were explored, with particular emphasis on merging or consolidating the congregations. There was a consensus among members that formally merging with some elements of consolidation made the most sense, and work toward this goal began. A Transition Team, comprised of members from each congregation, was established to facilitate the process.

Concord's mission statement "Gathering, growing, going, for the glory of God" and Messiah's mission statement "Called into community, gifted to serve; Glorifying God through love in action!" express a common desire to equip our members to proclaim the good news of Christ's love for all of creation. We quickly realized that coming together into a blended faith community would offer many opportunities to more effectively engage in God's mission through outreach and be a voice of hope and peace for the world. This is what we plan to do beginning in the fall of 2018.

This covenant declares our intention to merge and describes our shared vision for worship and ministry together as a blended community. It is intended to outline opportunities to honor and celebrate the unique gifts and traditions that are present in each congregation, while emphasizing our common vision and enduring strength and vitality as we come together. It is our hope that distinctions between those elements that originated in each congregation will diminish over time, and that we will become a truly blended community blessed with our own shared gifts and traditions that serve to glorify God and proclaim the Gospel.

## **2. Role of the Transition Team**

The work of merging two congregations is a multi-step process, aided by input and effort from every member of the faith community. To facilitate the work of gathering opinions from all members who wish to be heard, and carefully considering each step of the process from many sides, a transition team was formed. The Team has worked to draft and monitor a plan for transitioning from two congregations into one. The Transition Team is not a decision making body. Its role is to faithfully discern the best path forward and offer this information to those in position to make decisions. The Transition Team developed the following Mission Statement to guide them during the discussions of the blending of the congregations of Concord and Messiah:

The Transition Team's mission is to make specific recommendations to the councils and ministry teams to support the health of our combined congregation and members by listening intentionally to one another and by encouraging communication and input. We will meet regularly to draft and monitor a transition plan.

We anticipate that there will be occasions going forward where the guidance of the Transition Team will be helpful. Therefore, the Transition Team will continue to meet regularly for one year after the merger is complete. The benefits will be evaluated at the end of the year to assess the need for further guidance into the future.

### **3. Mission for the Combined Community of Faith**

The present Mission Statements of Concord and Messiah demonstrate a commitment to the Gospel as our foundation. We are gathered by the Holy Spirit to hear God's word which inspires us to love one another and the world God made. We are then sent out into the world to serve; ultimately calling others into the community of beloved children of God. A new statement, expressing this common mission will be developed after completion of the merger.

### **4. Vision for Combined Community of Faith**

After more than a year and a half of conversation, combined worship services, and sharing fellowship and mission, we are seeing God's purpose for us as a combined community of faith. Together, we will be a stronger Lutheran witness and more fully equipped to fulfill God's mission through new opportunities in worship, service, and fellowship. As we grow in relationship with one another we will build trust, become more visible in the Greece community, and have a greater impact on the world around us.

As we participate more fully in God's mission for the world and better care for one another, we trust that, through the Holy Spirit, we will grow as disciples of Christ. Our common values of building relationships between each other and with God will guide this blended community of faith, as will our common understanding of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

We will continue our service to others through our current ministries such as the Thanksgiving Baskets, Souper Saturday, Backpack Program, Loop Ministries, Shepherds Program, MAD Camp, Angel Tree Ministry, and others. We will also look to initiate new ministries as inspired by the Spirit.

### **5. Statement of Intent to Merge**

As stated above, we believe that together we will strengthen our faith community so that we can do God's will. Our unity will enable more hands

and feet to do God's work, fostering long-term sustainability to strengthen and develop resources to grow in faith and stewardship. Therefore we agree that Concord and Messiah will merge to become one congregation for the purpose of being a strong Lutheran witness, extending the gospel message of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

## **6. Facility Plan and Property**

Concord's church property at 485 and 505 Holmes Road, Greece, New York, will be sold and a Service of Closure will be held on September 14, 2018. A portion of the proceeds from the sale will be designated to specific outreach, local charities, and charities of the Upstate New York Synod as legacy gifts approved by Concord's Council and congregation, with the balance of Concord's funds to be brought to Messiah (see Section 11 below).

Messiah's church property at 4301 Mt. Read Boulevard, Greece, New York, will be utilized as the primary worship, education, and fellowship space for the combined community of faith.

## **7. Staffing**

The Mutual Ministry Team, with representation from both congregations, carefully and prayerfully considered staffing needs of our merged congregation and made the following recommendations that have been affirmed by the Concord Council and Messiah HUB.

### Pastoral:

Pastor Aileen Robbins, as pastor of Messiah, entered into a Covenant with Concord in May 2017 to also fulfill the role of pastor at Concord during the period of discernment. Pastor Aileen Robbins will continue as the called pastor/rostered minister of the newly merged congregation.

As new worship opportunities arise and new worship services are considered, and our programming expands, we will explore options for calling an associate pastor or providing a learning opportunity for an intern within the next two years.

Office Manager:

Jennie Bowker currently serves as Office Manager at Concord and will continue until the completion of the Concord church property sale. Cathy Coe currently serves as Office Manager at Messiah. She will continue as the Office Manager of the newly merged congregation.

Music Director/Organist

Robert Neusatz currently serves as Music Director/Organist at Concord and will continue through Concord's Service of Closure. Bob will be added to the current list of possible supply organists for Messiah and his services will be utilized as needed and as his schedule permits.

Willie La Favor currently serves as Music Director/Organist at Messiah and will continue to fulfill that role in the newly merged congregation.

**8. Council/HUB Governance**

The governance of the combined congregation will transition in three stages.

Stage One - First Interim Period. The first interim period begins when both congregations have voted to approve the merger and continues until the merger is approved by the court. During this time, both the Concord Council and the Messiah HUB will continue to operate. Joint meetings of the Concord Council and Messiah HUB will be held, with the Messiah HUB meeting first with voice but not vote of Concord Council members. Concord input will be given due consideration. When the Messiah HUB adjourns, the Concord Council will open its meeting for any business needed. HUB members will be encouraged to stay, with voice but not vote, until the adjournment of the Concord meeting.

Stage Two - Second Interim Period. The second interim period begins when the merger is officially approved by the court and continues until the January 2019 Annual Congregation Meeting. With the court approval, the congregations are officially merged, and the Concord Council ceases to have legal authority. Therefore, beginning with its first meeting following the court approval of the merger, the Messiah HUB will consist of those persons

designated in the Agreement of Merger who will serve until the conclusion of the January 2019 Annual Congregation Meeting. This “interim” HUB will consist of Pastor Aileen Robbins, the nine current Messiah HUB members, and six Concord Council members (selected by the Concord Council). Former Concord Council members not formally part of the “interim” HUB will continue to be invited to participate in HUB meetings, with voice but not vote.

Stage Three - New Council: At the October HUB meeting, all current members of the Messiah HUB will resign; resignations will be effective at the conclusion of the January 2019 Annual Congregation Meeting. A Nominating Committee will be formed in late September/early October consisting of Pastor Aileen and 6 members of the combined congregation, with at least two representatives from each of the originating congregations. Members of the Nominating Committee will not be eligible for election to the new council.

The Nominating Committee will identify candidates for nine HUB seats to be elected at the January 2019 Annual Congregation Meeting. Multiple candidates for each position are expected to be identified, prioritized, and presented to the Council/HUB meeting in November. While normal terms on the new council are expected to be 3 years in length (see section 12), for the January 2019 election, three seats will be for a one-year term (class of 2020), three seats will be for a two-year term (class of 2021), and three seats will be for a three-year term (class of 2022). For each class of council members elected at the 2019 to 2021 Annual Congregation Meetings, the goal will be to have at least one representative from each of the originating congregations. Term limits of 6 years will be considered (but not rigorously adhered to) when current Concord Council or Messiah HUB members are nominated for the new council.

Note that Messiah’s current constitution provides for 2-year council terms. The elections held in January 2019 will initially be limited to that duration, with the expectation that the three members designated as the class of 2022 will have their terms extended from 2 years to 3 years by congregation vote once the new constitution is adopted. See section 12 for further information.

## **9. Worship**

Given the central role of worship in our life together, a combined Music and Worship Team has been created. The Worship and Music team will pay particular attention to creating experiences that balance the new and the familiar in all elements of our worship. Each experience will contain opportunities for the gathered community of faith to praise God, participate in music, partake in Word and Sacrament, engage in prayer, hear a message of grace and forgiveness, and find opportunity to give of ourselves. The Worship and Music Team will be intentional in utilizing traditions of both former congregations, and will explore creative new uses of the gifts and talents of all members.

Representatives from Messiah and Concord will gather communion ware, paraments, and other worship objects from both congregations and determine how and when they will be used in worship, or if any of these items can be gifted to another congregation in need. Efforts will be made to utilize items from both congregations.

## **10. Program Ministries**

Beginning in 2007 Concord and Messiah began sharing worship for Ash Wednesday and Holy Week. The positive experience of our worship together led to combined efforts on service projects that reached out into the neighborhood as well as educational programming that was attended by members of both congregations. Through service, education and fellowship we were strengthened as disciples of Christ.

In the blended congregation we hope for increased participation in service, fellowship, and education activities as a way to build friendships and grow as disciples of Christ. As a combined congregation we will become stronger and more vibrant in testifying to our faith to one another, our neighbors and the world.

## 11. Financial Plan

The following information is an overview of the finances of Concord and Messiah. More detailed information is available on request from the Finance Directors of each congregation.

### Concord Asset Summary:

Concord is selling their property on Holmes Road for \$352,000. After paying sales commission, other bills, balance of budgeted benevolence gifts, and staff severance, as well as making legacy gifts as designated by Concord's congregation, and including other bank account assets on hand, Concord expects to bring assets to the merged congregation of about \$275,000 to \$295,000. Concord has suggested use of these funds as follows (listed in order of what the Concord congregation sees as priorities):

- Contribution towards new chairs for the sanctuary (rough, preliminary estimate of \$30,000 to \$40,000).
- Funding toward ministry costs for possible additional service time, and/or added worship element at Soup-er Saturday, and/or cost for adding an intern or other increased staffing for our merged congregation (up to \$100,000).
- Debt reduction of all or a portion of Messiah's mortgage and/or roof loan debt (amount to be determined with input from Messiah's Finance Team).
- Contribution to Endowment Fund to reach \$100,000 in assets (approximately \$15,000).
- Contribution for possible purchase of a new keyboard in memory of Roy Renfer (from prior gift made to Concord).
- Contribution toward youth program (approximately \$1000).
- Funding for ongoing or new ministries, including the Backpack Program.
- Other needs, as they may arise.

Note: The amounts above may change and final values may be recommended by the council(s).



In addition, Concord's Memorial Fund, which has a balance as of June 30, 2018 of \$7,396.60, less Council authorized expenditures for memorial plaques, will be transferred and combined with Messiah's Memorial Fund.

Messiah Asset and Liability Summary:

Excluding the church property, as of July 31, 2018, Messiah has the following liquid assets:

Greater Messiah Fund	\$35,840
Current Fund Carryover	\$30,730
Memorial Fund	\$7,104
Capital Fund	\$200,605
Endowment Fund	\$84,063
Other designated funds	\$20,826
<u>Undesignated</u>	<u>\$38,019</u>
Total Liquid Assets	\$417,187

Messiah has two loans, with balances as of July 31, 2018 as follows:

Mortgage	\$35,290
<u>Roof Loan</u>	<u>\$85,316</u>
Total Liabilities	\$120,606

Combined Operation:

Messiah's 2018 annual operating budget totals \$278,000 and we do not anticipate any significant changes in 2019 with the merged congregation, with the possible exception of adding a part-time pastoral position or internship. A combined budget for 2019 will be formulated by the interim HUB and presented for review at the January 2019 Annual Congregation Meeting. As required by our constitution, the budget must be balanced, and any change in staffing would need to meet this balanced budget requirement. For 2019, pledges of both Concord and Messiah members will be made to the 2019 combined congregation budget.

Contributions made by Concord members following the court approval of the merger will be made to Messiah and a separate tax statement will be provided at year end 2018.

## **12. Constitution and Bylaws**

The current Messiah Constitution will be updated to bring it into conformity with the current ELCA Model Constitution. A committee to do this has started meeting and has been made open to Concord members to participate. The bylaws and continuing resolutions will be updated concurrently with the constitution. It is our goal that the new constitution will reflect all of the organizational and procedural changes resulting from merging our congregations and that the new constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolution(s) be submitted to the Upstate New York Synod for approval prior to the January 2019 Annual Congregation Meeting.

Constitutional changes needed in support of this covenant are:

- Change council member election terms from 2 years to 3 years
- Change council member term limits from 3 terms to 2 terms

The following change to the Continuing Resolutions will be made by the Messiah HUB in support of this covenant:

- Change the rules for the 2018/2019 Nominating Committee to have six members (plus the Pastor), with at least two representatives from each of the originating congregations.

## **13. Approval Process**

1. Both Congregations vote to approve both the Merger Agreement and this Covenant on September 9, 2018. Concord's congregation will also vote on the legacy gifts.
2. If the Merger Agreement is not approved by a 2/3 majority and the Covenant by a simple majority of both congregations, additional input from the Transition Team and congregation will be sought.
3. If the Merger Agreement and Covenant are approved by both congregations, the Concord Council and Messiah HUB will execute the Merger Agreement which then will be submitted to Synod for its approval.
4. Once Synod approval is received, our attorney will prepare petitions by each congregation to submit to the New York State Supreme Court for approval of the merger (expected to take 60-90 days).

#### **14. Process of Discovering Our New Identity Following Merger.**

We are aware that the approvals of the Merger Agreement and this covenant on September 9<sup>th</sup> do not complete the work of blending our two communities of faith into one. This covenant is a statement of our current intentions and is subject to change as we are guided by the Holy Spirit through this process. Pastor Robbins, with the help of the joint council/HUB and with the participation of the whole congregation, will implement a process of solidifying our identity as a new creation in Christ and a unified community of faith set apart to do God's work in our neighborhood and the wider world. This process will include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Transition Updates will be held each month following morning worship on the third Sunday of the month.
2. A retreat at Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center to be held the weekend of October 27-28. Time will be taken to envision the future of our faith community and start to develop a strategic mission plan that will help to guide us on our way forward.
3. A Celebration of Unity through worship and fellowship will be scheduled following court approval of the merger.
4. We will convene small groups, encouraging all members' participation, to listen for what is working well and what needs more attention. We would look to conduct these meetings in January to March, 2019.
5. A One-Year Anniversary event will be held in the fall of 2019.