

**To:** Star of Bethlehem members

Date: March 20, 2017

**From:** Expansion Feasibility Committee

**Subject: Final Report:** Recommendation for expanding our building

The Expansion Feasibility Committee (EFC) was formed to review and evaluate the Bd. of Education's request to expand our building to accommodate the growth of our entire educational program – Early Learning Center (ELC), Preschool, and K-8. The EFC members were chosen to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives of our church membership.

The EFC members are the following: Nathan Koepke, Kim Peck, and Katie Wegehaupt (parents of school children); Dan Ott, Brad Reinhardt, and Larry Schaefer (Bd. of Ed., Bd. of Elders, and Bd. of Trustees representatives respectively); Betty Bilitz and Darnell Anthony, and Principal Tim Mueller, (called school staff members); Church President, Gene Szaj, Pastors Nitz and Schwartz, and Lee Westphal, chairman. The committee met 8 times starting in Sept. 2016 and finished its work on Jan. 25, 2017. In addition, numerous hours were spent gathering, organizing and reviewing the information outside of the meetings.

The committee gathered information and data from the following sources:

\* ***Star of Bethlehem mission statements and Vision Plan***

\* ***Star of Bethlehem historical data:***

Church membership, school historical enrollment data for both K-8 and ELC/Preschool, tuition data, parent surveys, and staff interviews.

\* ***Information and perspective provided by the Star of Bethlehem Bd. of Education.***

\* ***Surveys of Star of Bethlehem organizations that use space in our church and school***

\* ***ELC/Preschool written surveys of seven WELS congregations.***

The churches were chosen because they were known to have excellent programs, were close to us geographically or similar to Star in size of program and membership. Most were chosen because they fit the criteria in multiple ways. The churches are Trinity, Waukesha, St. Paul's, Muskego, St. John's, Wauwatosa, Christ, Pewaukee, St. John's, S. 68st., Mt. Calvary, Waukesha and Good Shepherd, West Bend.

\* ***Surveys of Preschools in the City of New Berlin.***

Besides the information above from WELS churches, information was gathered from 6 public, private and secular Preschool programs. They are the New Berlin School District, Blessed Savior Lutheran Church, Little Lambs (Peace Lutheran Church), Holy Apostles Catholic Church, Heritage Christian, and Apple Ridge Academy

\* ***Personal interviews with Principals of WELS Schools of similar size.***

Those schools were St. Paul's, Muskego, St. John's, Wauwatosa, Trinity Lutheran, Waukesha, Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Bethlehem Lutheran, Menomonee Falls, and Good Shepherd, West Bend.

\* ***City of New Berlin Planning Department***

\* ***Percept Group*** – a private organization specializing in data gathering for religious groups and organizations. The Percept Group provided a written, multipage report highlighting data and information relevant to our assignment.

As we reviewed the above we evaluated the data and information with **the most important overarching reason in mind – the mission and ministry of Star of Bethlehem. As a response to a loving God, we can only offer our best – excellence in all that we do. To God be the praise and glory.**

**The mission of Star of Bethlehem:**

**Grow** in faith through the Word of God for a lifetime  
**Go** with the Gospel from backyard to community to the world  
**Glow** through weekly worship and in daily lives to God's glory

**The mission and vision of Star of Bethlehem School:**

**Grow:** In faith through the Word of God for a lifetime  
As we strive for academic excellence  
In the assistance given to families in the Christian upbringing of their children  
As we encourage students and families to live according to Christ's example  
**Go:** With the Gospel from backyard to community to the world  
**Glow:** Through weekly worship and chapel services in daily religion classes and in daily lives

Being mindful of our mission statements, the Expansion Feasibility Committee carefully reviewed and discussed the sited information above. After much candid and thorough evaluation by the EFC members, the **Expansion Feasibility Committee makes the following seven recommendations:**

1. **Add a minimum of four new classrooms on grade** for the K-8 educational program.
2. **Add two classrooms at grade level** for the ELC/Preschool program. We further support that the classrooms should be adjacent. (Note: The ELC/Preschool program currently occupies two classrooms on grade level and one in the lower level.)
3. **Additional bathrooms** should be included in the new construction.
4. **Adding a small bathroom inside one or more of the Preschool classrooms** should be evaluated.
5. **A full basement is constructed under all or most of the new construction.**
6. **More office space is developed in the project.** The committee recognizes the need to plan for future potential personnel additions (additional Pastoral staff, Business Manager, school personnel, etc.). The Bd. of Ed. has suggested that the movement of the school office to the gym entrance area would facilitate this recommendation. Note: **If the school office is moved to the gym entrance, the movement will displace a classroom which will need to be replaced.** We believe this idea should be evaluated.
7. **Additional storage space** has been requested by both the church and school programs. The committee concurs that it is needed.

**Note:** The Expansion Feasibility Committee is not recommending any significant modification to classroom space in the existing lower level. After the school classrooms and ELC vacate the space, the classroom spaces will be well utilized by existing church and school programs.

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The **RATIONALE** for our recommendations follows. The following statements are a listing of the **MAJOR** supporting reasons for our recommendations.

**General information relevant to all of the recommendations:**

- \* Star of Bethlehem church membership has grown steadily over the last 20 years from 767 baptized souls in 1996 to 1,263 in 2016. This is a growth of 65% (average annual growth of 2-3%). The last five years, we have averaged a growth rate of 2%. Using a 2.5% growth rate, we will likely have 2,000+ members in 20 yrs.

- \* Star of Bethlehem currently is limited in space available to expand. Depending on a number of factors, the proposed expansion may be the last one possible.
- \* With God's expected blessing, the recent addition of a 3<sup>rd</sup> Pastor will bear fruit for our ministry. Exactly how this will be evidenced is unknown but we are confident it will be seen in all aspects of our ministry, including increased membership and school enrollment.
- \* *"Planning for expansion of staff and facilities to meet our growing K-8 educational needs, to enable increased Preschool programs and to grow Star ministries"* is one of the goals of our current Vision Plan.
- \* We have an excellent school. Our school has received "Exemplary Accreditation" status from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran School Accreditation. The Accreditation Visiting Team Captain said in his summary report, *"I have never done a visit that has had that high of a percentage of standards met."* Within a meeting with the principal, the captain stated, *"This is the highest score I have ever seen."* Excellence in Christian education requires excellence in the facility itself. While "making do" may be necessary at times, it should not be satisfactory if we are capable of doing more. Thank and praise our God for our excellent school ministry.

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #1: Add a minimum of four new classrooms on grade for the K-8 educational program.**

- \* The use of lower-level space by the school has gradually displaced uses by the other programs of our ministry. Specifically, adult Bible study, teen Bible study, a "teen" gathering area, and a storage room have been displaced. None of the lower level spaces now being used for four classrooms was intended for that purpose. When the church was built in 2004, the Master Site Plan anticipated school growth and designated space for four additional classrooms on the west end of our school building. Variances for the additional space were granted by the city and cost estimates were obtained. However, they were not built at that time because of lack of funding.
- \* Movement to grade level of the 4 classrooms currently in the lower level will have benefits to other programs, both church and school related:
  - The current 7<sup>th</sup> grade room will be available for small group bible study room, a meeting and conference room and wedding preparation room as it originally was intended.
  - A large Bible study room (the "blue" room) will again be returned to its initially planned use.
  - The Extended Learning Department (now serving 24 students throughout the day) will be able to move out of the library into space on the lower level.
  - Lower level classrooms will be available for music rehearsal (adult and student) and instruction which currently takes place all over our building.
- \* The current 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom (located in the lower level) is the smallest in square footage at 546 square feet compared to the next smallest at 823 and the average of approximately 870 square feet. This size enables the current class of 12 students to use it as their homeroom, but not the 23 and 20 students that will use that room as a homeroom over the next two years.
- \* Collaboration is also difficult among the faculty and staff. Currently grade 7 is separated from the rest of the middle school grades (5, 6, and 8). The elementary grades (2-4) are

separated from the primary grades (K-1). The separation is caused by the related classrooms being on different floors.

- \* Parents have stated that they would prefer not to have their children in a lower-level (basement) classroom. In addition, grade level classrooms will provide natural light and ventilation to the rooms.
- \* In the last five years, Star of Bethlehem church membership has averaged a growth rate of 2%. In comparison, our K-8 enrollment has grown by 3% per year in those same 5 years.
- \* The School Board has projected an enrollment of 216 by the year 2026. The projection was based on a class size of 24 students in all grades and an attrition rate matching additional students coming into the grade levels. On average we may expect to lose 2-3 students from the Kindergarten class by the time they reach 8<sup>th</sup> grade. However, it should be noted that in the last 5 years, particularly in the primary grades, our retention rate has been excellent, thus partially explaining our growing enrollment.
- \* The current cradle roll indicates we will likely have Kindergarten classes in the low to mid-20's in the next 4 years.
- \* Tuition: In 2004, we began charging "tuition" in addition to "fees". Previously we had charged member families "fees" to help cover the cost of operating a school. In 2004, the tuition for the 1<sup>st</sup> child was \$280 with a fee of \$215. Our current tuition for the first child is \$1,511 with a fee of \$325. After "tuition" was added, our enrollment steadily declined. From 2004 -2012, our enrollment steadily dropped (with exceptions) from the 160's to the 140's. Since 2012, however, our enrollment has steadily increased from 145 to 166, despite the significant cost. Our members value the importance of a Christian education for their children.
- \* We currently are enrolling (and have for the last 5 years) approximately 75% of our member's children. The school staff is working diligently to maintain and even increase this percentage.
- \* In the last 5 years, our non-member tuition students (both WELS and non-WELS) consistently make up 15%, on average, of our student body - range is from 10-16%. There is no known reason to expect it to change.

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #2: Add two classrooms for the ELC/Preschool program at grade level in addition to the two existing classrooms:**

- \* Our Preschool enrollment is currently 61, the highest on record. We are expanding our ELC to include Pre-3 for next year (using existing 3-classroom facility) which will likely result in further growth. If a 4<sup>th</sup> classroom space is available, early learning will be offered to 2-yr. olds – a program which is expected to be valuable to and utilized by our parents.
- \* Our ELC/Preschool has demonstrated that it is an effective outreach program. Because of additional Pastoral help, outreach will receive additional attention in the future. We can expect the Lord to bless this program even more.
  - Primarily due to the increase in the preschool enrollment over the last 5 years, there have been a total of 46 prospective families for church membership. The 5 years prior to that there were a total of 17
  - Also, primarily due to the increase in the Preschool enrollment over the last 5 years, there have been a total of 15 prospects that have joined the church through the school. The 5 years prior to that there were a total of 7.

- It should be noted that some surrounding cities provide free Pre – 4K programs (Waukesha, Muskego, Menomonee Falls, and West Bend). No noted city offers Pre-3K. The city of New Berlin currently charges for Pre-4K. Trinity, St, Paul’s. Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls and Good Shepherd, West Bend suffered losses in their Pre-4K programs when the free city programs opened.
- \* The use of lower-level space currently used by the ELC has eliminated a teen room. The room was originally intended for teen ministry. Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Pastor has been called to focus on teen ministry. Returning the use of the space back to its original purpose will aid him in his work.
- \* Parents have stated that they would prefer not to have their children in a lower-level (basement) classroom.
- \* The current cradle roll (0 to 5yr. olds) indicates that we will have a steady supply of potential users of the ELC and PreK programs. Except for one year (0-1yr. old with 17 children), all other age groups have 20-25 children in them.
- \* Our ELC/Preschool program has an excellent reputation in the New Berlin community.
- \* Placing all four classroom spaces for the ELC/Preschool program at grade and adjacent to one another will result in better oversight and collaboration by the staff. With all spaces at grade level, more exposure and convenience would be provided to parents during drop-off and pick-up.

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #3: *Additional bathrooms should be included in the new construction.***

- \* Additional bathrooms in the new construction is strongly recommended by the staff
- \* Existing bathrooms are already heavily utilized by the current student body. With the projected growth of enrollment, bathroom use will be further strained.
- \* It is noted that the lower level bathrooms will no longer be regularly used – ushering classes down the stairs would be time consuming and inconvenient.
- \* With the new classrooms, longer walks to the rest rooms, “emergency” issues and rotation of use by classrooms will be problematic without new ones.

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #4: *Adding a small bathroom inside one or more of the Preschool classrooms should be evaluated.***

- \* Use of the bathroom is particularly challenging for Preschool class supervision. “Near-by and convenient” facilities are very important for these children. Less classroom disruption will be the benefit. The current staff would appreciate this consideration.

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #5: *A full basement is constructed under all or most of the new construction.***

- \* Previous building additions have taught us that not fully utilizing building options (constructing basements under them) causes regrets.
- \* The uses could be numerous – storage, “mechanicals” placement, various program uses (Pioneers, Dartball team, etc.)
- \* Estimated cost of basement construction is approximately 1/3 of grade level space.

- \* The Food Committee has requested space (separate from the existing kitchen) to prepare for some church functions that require food. Use of this space for another kitchen may be questionable. More discussion would be necessary to determine the feasibility and wisdom of using the space for this purpose. A Building Committee will need to explore this further.
- \* “Raising the ceiling” of the basement to allow for glass windows (natural light) should be explored. This idea might make the construction of classrooms in this space (should they be needed for further growth in student enrollment beyond the projected new addition capacity of 216) more appropriate.
- \* Space could be used for a lunch room for the school. There are differing opinions between parents and school staff on the use for a lunch room— numerous parents have stated support for it but our staff currently has mixed opinions about it. Previous experience with “out-of-classroom” lunch has sometimes been negative. The Expansion Feasibility Committee believes this use should be explored further.

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #6: *More office space is developed in the project.***

- \* More office and storage space for records is already needed without consideration of future needs; i.e., displaced nursing program, storage of office records (including secure storage for personnel records), etc.
- \* In addition, more office space will be needed to accommodate future growth in personnel and programs; i.e., business manager (already being discussed by the Finance Team), more pastoral staff, etc.
- \* Movement of the school office out of its current location may assist in the above matter. The School Board anticipates the need for additional office space and has requested an upgrade to the school entrance. Both may be accomplished by moving the school office to the gym entrance area. This move, however, might result in the loss of classroom space (current Kindergarten room).

**Regarding RECOMMENDATION #7: *Additional storage space be provided***

- \* More storage has been requested by representatives of both the church and school programs.
- \* The trustees noted that we have violated fire codes in the past because of “filling our storage rooms beyond capacity, thus blocking access to an electrical panel.”
- \* The computer classroom currently occupies space that originally was used for storage. This storage room was never replaced.

**An historical time-line:**

- In 1997 a 4-classroom and gymnasium addition was made to our school facility.
- No classrooms were in the lower-level at this time. In fact, use of the lower-level for school activities was discouraged by policy directive of the church council. There was concern that the school would gradually usurp the space – the “slippery-slope” theory.
- Preschool was begun in 1997 with 12 children.
- As school enrollment grew (both in Preschool and K-8), use of the lower-level began. The school began to use the “blue” adult Bible study room part-time.
- In 2001, the “blue” room was turned into a full-time classroom. As a result, it was no longer suitable for use as an adult Bible study room.

- In 2004 (the same year that the new church was built), a second classroom was constructed adjacent to the “blue room”.
- Eight years ago, our school moved to a departmentalized, “middle-school” format. Grades 5-8 move from room to room in keeping with current school modeling.
- In 2015, more classrooms were added in the lower level. Because of the growing preschool, 12 children in 1997 to 53 in 2015, the 1<sup>st</sup> grade room (on grade level) was moved across the hall to the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade room. A new 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom was constructed in the lower level displacing the computer classroom. A new computer classroom was then created by using the “art room” space (originally a storage room) and the lower level kitchen. Both of these displaced spaces were not replaced anywhere.
- In 2016, the space in the lower level previously used for the teen Bible class, was turned into a permanent classroom because of the growing K-8 student enrollment.

Our current K-8 enrollment is 166. The highest K-8 enrollment has been 173 in the 2002-3 school year. Our Preschool enrollment is currently 61, the highest on record. Total Preschool through grade 8 enrollment is 229, also the highest on record.