

Case Study: Edmonds-Lynwood Lutheran Parish, Washington

Edmonds and Lynnwood are suburbs of Seattle with a combined population just under 80,000. Several years ago Edmonds had 4 small ELCA churches and Lynnwood had one big church. These churches were only 3-4 miles apart. Trinity in Lynnwood was strong, but the 4 Edmonds churches faced varying degrees of aging and declining membership and turnover in pastors and staff. One closed, one had a pastor who announced that he was gay and divorcing his wife, and a third was in interim. This interim pastor started conversations about collaboration, which resulted in a team comprised of leaders from the 3 remaining Edmonds churches plus Trinity in Lynnwood. This team started in mid-2003 and birthed the Parish.

The process from 2003 to now was complicated and sometimes messy:

- The churches incorporated the Edmonds-Lynwood Lutheran Parish as a 501.c.3. The Parish started joint youth programming with a full time youth minister who turned out to be very capable. Some of the leaders and pastors had a dream that the Parish would become a multi-site congregation, but they took it one step at a time.
- At about the same time, some of the lay leaders in the strongest Edmonds church started talking about consolidation in Edmonds. They approached the idea with a clear willingness to give up their building, and talked about giving up all 3 buildings for a new structure. One of the 3 churches got a new interim with experience in consolidation, and the talks took hold. In 2005 the 3 churches dissolved and formed Edmonds Lutheran Church. The Parish then became a 2-church collaboration.
- As this was going on the Parish youth program took off, and some of the kids started advocating for a community youth center. One of the three Edmonds church buildings was a block from the high school on a major transit route. Edmonds Lutheran Church turned this building over to the Parish for the youth center called the Jeremiah Center. Jeremiah Center is the site of confirmation, Christian education, and programs for middle school and high school kids from the two Parish churches. It is also a community youth center with a rec room, coffee shop, etc. for kids from the community. Each of the churches pays \$80,000 a year to support the youth ministry and Jeremiah Center. Jeremiah also gets outside funding and some grants. It seems to be consistently faith-based.
- The Edmonds-Lynnwood Parish also sponsors Living Water, a program to bring water to third world villages and support some local hunger efforts. Living Water has sponsored water projects

in Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Honduras and Uganda and supports a housing program and food banks in Washington. Living Water recently collected \$445,000 toward a \$500,000 special appeal goal. Most of this money comes from the two churches.

- Edmonds Lutheran has gone through the typical consolidation shake-up as it moved from 3 very inward-oriented churches into one much more externally-oriented congregation. It lost 30-40 members due to consolidation, but in the past year has started growing significantly. The church just started long-range facility planning and is now calling a new associate pastor.
- The Parish seems to have hit a stride with the youth and Living Waters programs. Jeremiah seems to be highly successful, but I heard some concern because a key staff member is moving out of state. Some members complain that the high school kids from the church are active in Jeremiah instead of regularly attending their church, but most realize that the kids wouldn't be in church anyway. As you might expect, there are issues related to the size disparity between the two churches that they are just starting to address.
- Trinity has a very interesting program called The Mustard Seed. I don't know much about it, but it sounds something like an approach that Bethlehem-Minneapolis is starting to take.

Here are some links:

<http://www.edmondslutheran.org/index.html>

<http://trinitylutheranchurch.com/>

<http://www.parishthethought.org/>

<http://www.jeremiahcenter.net/>

<http://www.trinitymustardseed.com/lifegroups>

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