



# Where Should We Begin?

Exploring new strategies for faithful property stewardship

*Together in Mission, February 7, 2026*

*Greater Milwaukee Synod*

# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod meet and worship on the ancestral lands of the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Odawa (Ottawa), Fox, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk, and Oneida people. We also acknowledge that the legacies of violence, displacement, dispossession, migration, and trauma still impact these communities, and we invite all our congregations and leaders to learn more about this painful history and to explore ways to bring about justice, even as we strive to be respectful stewards of this land.



# Goals for our time together

1. Introduce the CPRH
2. Explore church property journeys together
3. Share resources available to you
4. Update on upcoming webinars and opportunities to collaborate



# Introductions



Pastor Sarah  
Jones

**Program  
Director**



Deacon  
Sarah Kretschmann

**Digital  
Communications  
Manager**



Pastor Tim  
Brown

**Director  
for Congregational  
Stewardship**



# Why is the CPRH being developed?

The Church Property Resource Hub (CPRH) is being created in **response to the questions and needs voiced by synods** & congregations regarding the use, management and support of church-held property.



# What the Church Property Resource Hub is **NOT**...

... an attempt by the churchwide organization to take control of congregations' property or to bypass synods' relationships with their congregations.



# Resources Available Now

- Space Sharing
- Community Engagement
- Legal Information
- Mission Exploration
- Property Management
- Property Development
- Holy Closure



# Communal Learning Opportunities



- Monthly webinars
- Visits, workshops, presentations
- Online support forum
- Communities of collaboration & commiseration

# Share with your neighbor:

What are some of the ways your land/buildings support your church's ministry?

What are the "pain points" in using and managing your church's property?

# Faithful Property Stewardship

## The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30

"Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, 'Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven't sown. You gather crops where you haven't spread seed. So, I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground.' "

## The land and buildings ultimately belong to God, but we are charged with:

- **Using the resources** we have to embody the Gospel message
- **Managing our assets** with faith-driven strategy towards the future of both church and community
- **Supporting our physical places** in a collaborative and sustainable way



# St. John's Lutheran Church - Melrose Park, PA

- Established in 1902 with first building erected in 1904
- Campus includes a sanctuary building, education wing, parsonage, and parking lot
- 100 members on the rolls, about 30 active members
- In 2023 the church had about 4 years left before they depleted their reserves

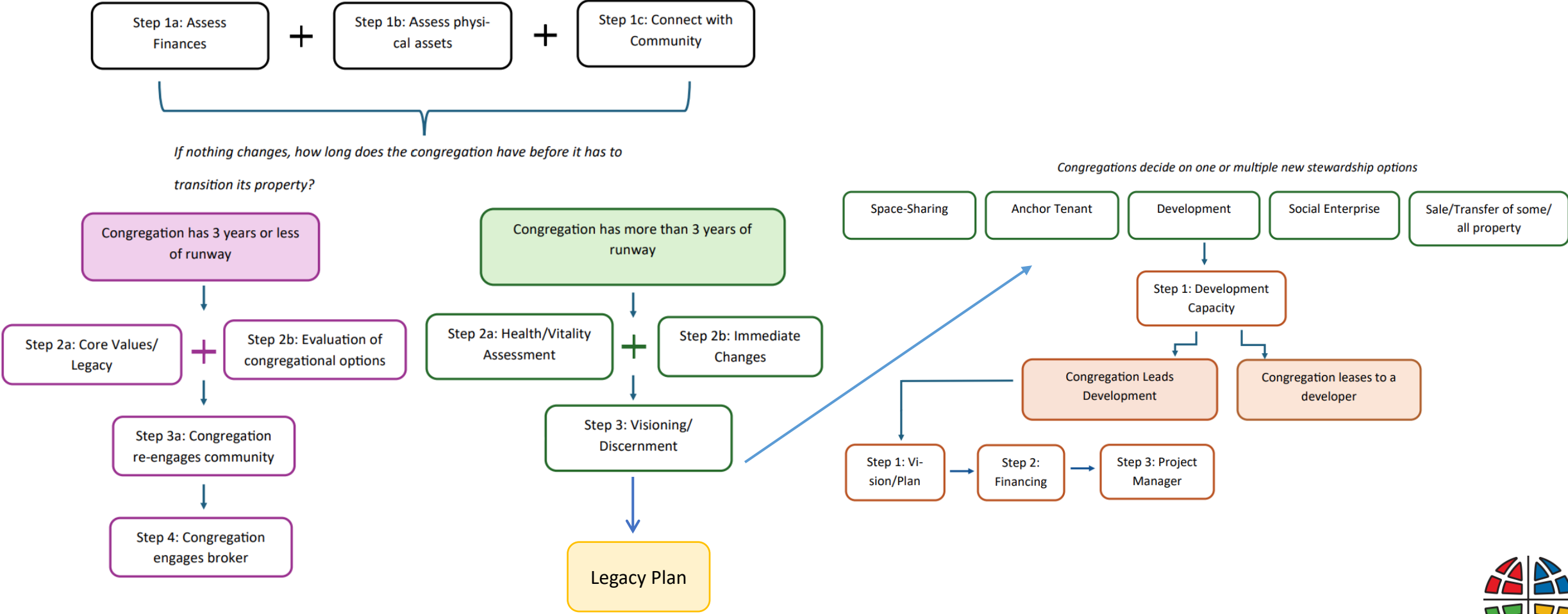


# St. John's Lutheran Church - Melrose Park, PA

- Re-assessed their physical assets to determine what the congregation needed for programming and imagine different uses
- Consulted with larger community to identify new opportunities for the campus to benefit Montgomery County
- Created a property mission statement to guide stewardship decisions
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# Property Stewardship Journey



# Phase 1: Re-Discovery

- Assessing Church Finances - how long is your financial runway before you'd have to transition out of the building?
- Exploring Physical Assets - What opportunities and amenities does your physical space provide?
- (Re)Connecting with the Community - What are your neighbors' hopes, needs, and dreams for your property?



# (Re)Connecting with the Community

- Who uses the facilities? Who benefits from the facilities?
- Engage current and potential stakeholders
- Invite conversation partners into the physical space

*What community needs and desires could this place help fulfill?*

*Who can be our partners on the journey?*



# (Re)Connecting with the Community



CHURCH PROPERTY  
RESOURCE HUB

## MESSAGING YOUR MISSION

### Introduction

Every church has a mission statement; many are beautifully worded and well-thought-out. However, these mission statements are written for a very specific audience — church members or people who are looking for a new church to join. To the wider community, especially your neighbors who aren't active in a church, church mission statements often sound obscure and exclusive. Every church needs to be able to talk about itself and what it cares about in a way that is accessible and inspiring to a diverse audience of community members, especially those neighbors with whom the church would like to work.

Finding an accessible way to talk about your church is even more important when you are seeking community partners to use your space. Everyone who uses your building will be associated with you, and vice versa — mission alignment is one of the most important factors for a successful and mutually beneficial space-sharing initiative. You should be able to see your church's values reflected in all the activities your building hosts, whether or not those are religious activities.

This exercise will help your church council, staff or outreach team articulate key messaging points for talking about your congregation and facilities with a wide range of neighbors, leaders and stakeholders. This activity is meant to be conducted with clergy and lay leaders who have a good understanding of your congregation's sense of mission and who are or will be doing outreach to find more space users. Each part of the activity should take about 15 minutes, so budget about an hour for this discussion.

This is not an activity to help you write a new mission statement! This is an activity to help you talk about your church with your neighbors and local stakeholders.

Avoid religious language! We have an amazing vocabulary of faith, but not everyone has the same understanding of those words (or even knows what they mean). Finding different language can unlock creative ways to think and talk about your mission, vision and values.

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## CAMPUS TOURS

### Introduction

Your church campus — its buildings and green space — provides countless opportunities for programming, activities and ministry. Tell community members about the outstanding resources your campus offers to make these opportunities possible! This exercise will help your church's staff and leadership develop a tour that highlights campus amenities and possibilities, inspiring new ideas and collaborations among your church members and the wider community.

### STEP 1 List Your Amenities

Tour the entirety of your facilities and grounds and list the amenities for each usable space, regardless of what it's being used for now. Make sure you bring along staff or lay leaders who are familiar with the day-to-day workings of your property: a sexton, property manager, administrator or trustee. Use the "Amenities Checklist" to identify amenities and features for each usable space on your property. Be sure to catalog all your usable spaces, even if you don't have plans to open them for community use. Include staff offices, sacristies, etc. You can skip the boiler room.

You will end up with a comprehensive inventory of all the usable spaces on your campus, with their amenities and defining features. This information will help you develop an exciting and informative tour, and it will help your church advertise your spaces on your website as well as calculate rental rates.

### STEP 2 Plan Your Route

Working with staff and leaders who have a detailed knowledge of the campus, define a logical route through the campus to show off all your usable spaces. With the goal of leading a 45-minute (maximum) tour, determine which spaces you want to stop in, which spaces you can pass through and which spaces you may not choose to show (e.g., administrative offices). Prioritize spaces that you are most interested in sharing with outside users and spaces that hold significance for the congregation (e.g., the sanctuary), and identify "blocks" of similar classrooms (e.g., an education wing with several classrooms) that you can describe together.

Once you have your tour route, list, in order, the spaces you will show and three or four talking points about each space. These talking points should highlight the key amenities of the space as well as how and when the space is currently being used. You might want to include interesting architectural or historical information about some of the more unique spaces, but keep this minimal; **these tours should focus on future use and partnerships.** Anyone can use this route and talking points as they show the building to community partners, potential space users or new members.

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## BUILDING/COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

### Introduction

Your church — the congregation and the building — has a valuable role to play in the life of your community. There are people, groups and organizations that would love to work with you and use your space; they just don't know about you yet!

Unless they belong to your congregation, community leaders may not realize that you have attractive space and amenities, and they probably don't know much about who you are or what you care about. This activity will help your church bridge that gap by inviting key stakeholders into your building and engaging them in a conversation to surface new ideas and opportunities for your church to collaborate with community partners.

For a successful conversation, make sure that your church has:

- Reviewed all the spaces your building(s) offer and inventoried their **amenities** (see "Mission: Rediscovery," "Amenities Checklist" and "Campus Tours").
- Articulated **key talking points** about your values, mission and vision that can resonate with a variety of people (see "Messaging Your Mission").

### STEP 1 Convene Your Outreach Team

Your outreach team will consist of three to five volunteers from the staff and congregation. A pastor should be part of this team because they are often a de facto community liaison for your church, but ideally a layperson should lead the team. Volunteers can expect to put in one to three hours of work every week for six to eight weeks. Members who are natural connectors (and widely connected) are great folks to tap for this. The team should plan to touch base for 30-60 minutes in every week leading up to the conversation.

Decide on a couple of days and times to host the conversation, and budget about two hours for the event. Each community is different, but generally weekday late afternoons are a sweet spot — your guests can leave their workplace early, participate in the conversation and still get home in time for dinner. First thing in the morning (after school drop-off) can also work; your invitees could come to the church on their way to work.

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# Exploring Physical Assets

- Inventory amenities of land and buildings
- Explore physical opportunities for community partnership
- Gather real-estate data on property (zoning, acreage, etc.)
- Identify deferred maintenance needs and repair costs

*What are the limitations and opportunities presented by the physical property?*



# Exploring Physical Assets



## MISSION: REDISCOVERY

### Introduction

This activity is about rediscovering the resources and gifts that your facilities could offer to the wider community and to help you envision your sacred place as a vibrant hub of new activity. Through it, you can learn more about the "good soil" in which you are planted by noticing opportunities and imagining new possibilities for your property. It may have been a while since you walked through your building(s); what will God show you this time?

### Directions

Gather a small group of six to eight leaders/members to tour the facilities together.\* Give each participant a copy of the "Mission: Rediscovery" worksheet (page 2) and a pen. Once everyone is ready, begin together with Step 1 of the activity.

### STEP 1 Go on a Walk

This activity is about **noticing**. With the entire group, tour the facilities, stopping in each individual space (halls, classrooms, offices, even garden space). Open the closets and peek into the maintenance rooms.

As you go through the facilities, each person should fill out the "Mission: Rediscovery" worksheet with their own observations. Remind participants that this activity is about noticing and wondering. There will be group conversation as you review each of the spaces, but each person should fill out their own worksheet.

*\*If you have members with mobility restrictions, work out a route they can navigate. If some of your spaces are inaccessible, take multiple pictures of the spaces and lay them out on a table for folks with mobility restrictions to review.*



## AMENITIES CHECKLIST

### Introduction

Help your church compile and list all your amenities for each of the spaces that you'd like to share or lease. Highlight attractive features of the spaces you're interested in leasing or sharing, to help potential space users imagine themselves in the space.

### Facility Amenities:

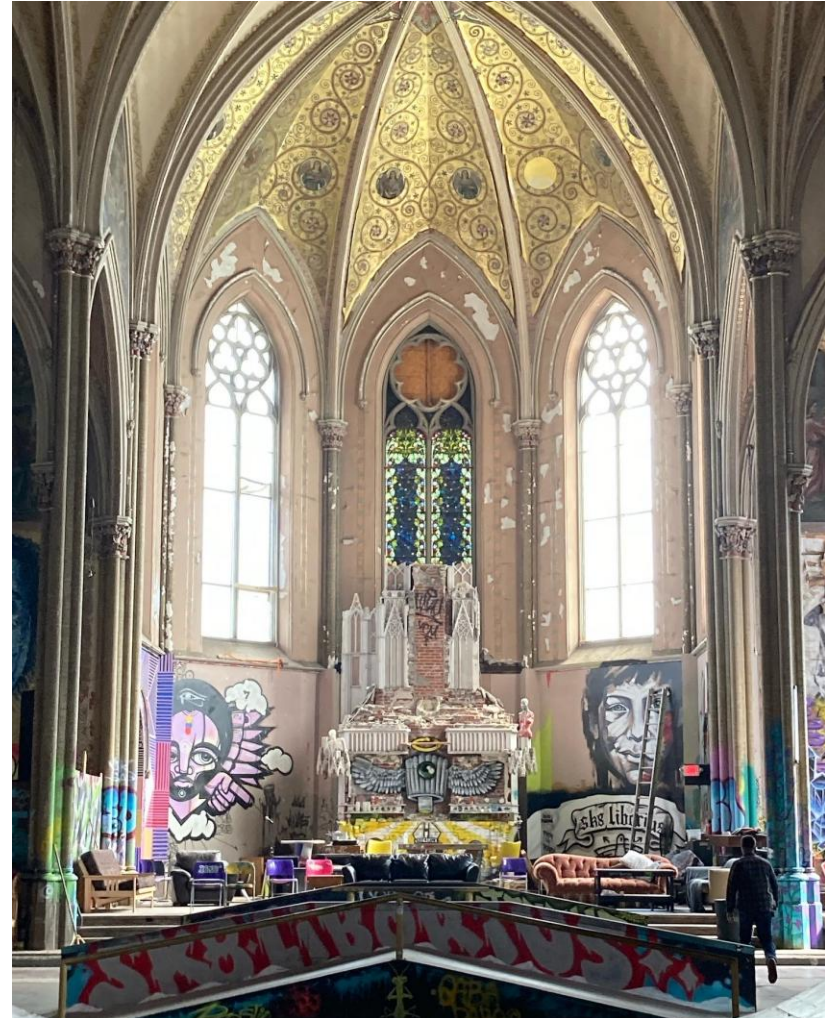
- How extensive is your Wi-Fi network? Does the whole campus have access?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How many kitchens/kitchenettes do you have?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Are any of your kitchens commercially certified?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What kind of climate control does your building have?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How many restrooms do you have? How many are ADA-accessible (Americans with Disabilities Act)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which spaces are ADA-accessible?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How many tables and chairs do you have that can be used in any space?  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Assessing Church Finances

- What runway do you have to try something different?
  - Annual income and expenses
  - Cash reserves and investments/savings
  - Outstanding debt

*How long does the church have before the only choice is to move out of the property?*



# Assessing Church Finances

## Property Transition Runway Assessment Tool

This worksheet should be completed by church leaders who have a detailed knowledge of the church's finances. This worksheet should be completed as a group. The whole group can work through each section, or they can assign individual members to complete different sections of "Resilience and Risk Factors" independently before the group reviews the findings and discusses "Runway Calculation" and "Next Steps" together.

### Resilience and Risk Factors Section 1: Annual Revenue

Understanding larger trends of past income generation is crucial to projecting future income. Complete this section using your annual budgets and end-of-year financial statements from the last 5 years. Different congregations may have different sources of income – fill in all items that apply to your church.



Section 1: Annual Revenue		
Assessment Question	Church Answer	Considerations
<p><b>How has your total income changed over the past 5 years?</b></p> <p>List the year-end income totals for the past five years. Identify changes between the years to identify patterns.</p>		<p>If your income remains steady, or you see consistent decline over five years, your church may need to explore options to increase annual revenue.</p>
<p><b>How accurate have your revenue projections been over the past 5 years?</b></p> <p>Compare the total income you projected at the beginning of each fiscal year and the income you <u>took in</u> by the end of the year.</p>		<p>If your projected and actual end-of-year income is the same or close every year, your church has a good sense of what it can expect to take in annually.</p> <p>If your projected and actual end-of-year <u>income is</u> very different, you may need to revisit your budgeting process.</p>



# Runways and Trajectories

- Your property transition runway is **not** the remaining lifespan of the congregation.
- Property transition vs. Holy Closure



# Runway: 3 Years or Less



- Faithful property transition is the focus
- Next steps for the congregation (talk to your synod)
- *How can your property generate a missional legacy?*



# Runway: 4 Years or More

- Make immediate changes to help increase your runway
  - E.g., increase space-sharing partnerships
- Explore new models of property stewardship
  - Anchor tenants, social enterprise, development, ground-lease
- Property/Mission discernment
  - *How can your land and buildings continue to facilitate God's love in your community?*



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# Legacy Planning

- It is never too early to plan for your property's future. It's possible to be too late.
- Review your congregation's constitution
- Develop missional priorities for the property
- What are the trip-wires for a deeper discussion?
- Talk to your synod!





# Q & A



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



# Upcoming Webinars

- February 12: **Development 101 for Synods**
- March: **Full ELCA Town Halls**
- April: **Church Property Insurance**
- May: **Real Estate Fundamentals**



# Join the CPRH Community!

Connect with fellow rostered leaders through a virtual support forum.



A screenshot of the ELCA Church Property Resource Hub forum page. The browser address bar shows the URL: https://leadership.elca.org/topics/45412/forum. The page header includes the ELCA logo and navigation links: Home, Groups, Opportunities, Connect, Organizations, and Admin Panel. Below the header is a banner image of a church service with a 'Manage group' button. The main content area is titled 'Church Property Resource Hub' and shows 3 members. A search bar and filter options are visible on the left. The search results show two posts by Deacon Sarah Kretschmann, both from 20 days ago. The first post is titled '"How can I help our congregation have a better grasp of how stewarding our building and even..."' and the second is '"What options do congregations have for using their property?'"



# Take this time to register for LeadNet

If you are already signed up, post one question or respond to one question in the forum.



# Get connected!

Sign up to receive the latest updates, resources and webinar invitations:

Email us at  
**CPRH@elca.org**

**[www.ELCA.org/CPRH](http://www.ELCA.org/CPRH)**

