



# Seasons of Ministry: What Time Is It?

## Overview

“Seasons” have become a popular descriptor for various stages of life in which we experience transition, growth, or discovery. There is a Biblical basis for this expression: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...”  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

We experience these seasons not only in life, but in ministry. The visible church of God, even the congregations in which we serve, are “under heaven.” That’s an indication that each serves for a time to prepare people for eternity. The churches about which we read throughout the New Testament no longer exist as they once did. God worked through Word and Sacrament at each to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify His people in that season. While the congregations may not remain, the invisible church of God – His people throughout all time – remain forever.

Our emphasis, however, has too often been on “our congregation” rather than His Church. That’s understandable because He works through these congregations with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. It’s also idolatrous when our hope and comfort is found in them over Him. Though blessings from God, everything from spouses to children and churches to schools may become gods when our trust is misplaced. Even time has become a god as we use it to control others or insist on our own way. Like all of creation, time was a blessing from God, given to mark and remember His work among us: “God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Genesis 1:31

If these times of creation, even of ministry, are intended to help us see and celebrate God’s work, we must wonder about the season in which we find ourselves and to ask:

What time is it?

## “A Time to Join” (Merging One or More Partner Ministries)

<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is God doing in and through our current circumstance?</li> <li>• What assumptions do you have about a church merger?</li> <li>• What might be the advantages/disadvantages of joining with one or more congregations?</li> <li>• What are we willing to change for the sake of the mission?</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More effective with a “joining” church and a “lead” church of different sizes and cultures (as opposed to two similarly sized congregations)</li> <li>• Often involves a new pastor and a new strategic approach (and potentially a new name and property) when merging two smaller congregations</li> <li>• Might result in either single- or multi-site ministry</li> <li>• Always begins with prayer and conversation</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ, Costa Mesa and Faith, Huntington Beach</li> <li>• Holy Cross and Peace, San Diego (now Hope, Linda Vista)</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Better Together</u></a> by Jim Tomberlin &amp; Warren Bird</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Vital Merger</u></a> by Dirk Elliott</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Multi-Site Church Revolution</u></a> by Warren Bird</li> </ul>
<b>Contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. Jim Henkell, PSD Ministry Executive <a href="mailto:jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org"><u>jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org</u></a></li> <li>• Rev. Drew Ross, Pastor at Christ CM/HB <a href="mailto:drewross@christcm.org"><u>drewross@christcm.org</u></a></li> <li>• Dave Lindsey, Chair of Lutheran Mission Society SD <a href="mailto:dlindse1@san.rr.com"><u>dlindse1@san.rr.com</u></a></li> </ul>

## “A Time to Share” (Facilitating a Multi-Congregation Partnership)

<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What prevents us from calling a pastor?</li> <li>• What nearby Lutheran churches are having a similar experience?</li> <li>• What might a shared pastor or other called worker (e.g. DCE) allow us to do in ministry?</li> <li>• What sacrifices are we willing to make in sharing a pastor?</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables congregations to retain their unique identity</li> <li>• Requires closer partnership with other Lutheran ministries</li> <li>• Fosters opportunities for shared mission in the community</li> <li>• Means having a shepherd whose time and focus may be divided</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ the Cornerstone, Mira Mesa</li> <li>• Mt. Olive, Poway</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Two Churches, One Pastor: An Old Model for the Present and Future Church” by Matthew van Maastricht (Faithward article)</li> <li>• “Multi-Congregation Parishes” by Stacey Egger (Lutheran Witness article)</li> </ul>
<b>Contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. Jim Henkell, PSD Ministry Executive <a href="mailto:jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org">jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org</a></li> <li>• Rev. Quincy Koll, Pastor at Mira Mesa and Poway <a href="mailto:pastorquincysd@gmail.com">pastorquincysd@gmail.com</a></li> <li>• Rev. Tom Meyer, Pastor Emeritus <a href="mailto:tlmeyer45@att.net">tlmeyer45@att.net</a></li> </ul>

## “A Time to Renew” (Revitalizing an Existing Ministry)

<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are opportunities for witness and ministry in our neighborhood?</li> <li>• What limitations are we tempted to place on revitalization?</li> <li>• What new ministry or expression might God be guiding us to pursue?</li> <li>• What would it mean to consider “re-planting” our congregation with a new vision, culture, name, etc.?</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Means new leadership, as well as new ministry vision</li> <li>• Includes partnership with the District and/or strategic planning partners (LCEF Ministry Solutions, LiNC, Church Unique, Auxano, etc.)</li> <li>• Requires emphasis on God’s kingdom and the local community, more than the historic patterns of the congregation</li> </ul>
<b>Example</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace, Tustin</li> <li>• Holy Cross, Scottsdale</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>The Gospel-Driven Church</u></a> by Jared C. Wilson</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Small Church Essentials</u></a> by Karl Vaters</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Anatomy of a Revived Church</u></a> by Thom Rainer</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>The Great Dechurching</u></a> by Jim Davis and Michael Graham (applies to all seasons)</li> </ul>
<b>Contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. Jim Henkell, PSD Ministry Executive <a href="mailto:jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org"><u>jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org</u></a></li> <li>• Rev. Nathan Huse, Pastor at Peace Tustin <a href="mailto:nhuse@peacetustin.org"><u>nhuse@peacetustin.org</u></a></li> <li>• Rev. Jon Bjorgaard, Pastor at Holy Cross Scottsdale <a href="mailto:jonabjorgaard@gmail.com"><u>jonabjorgaard@gmail.com</u></a></li> </ul>

## “A Time to Build” (Redeveloping a Church Property)

<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What might God do with our property or facilities for the sake of the Gospel?</li> <li>• What about our current property is not being used or stewarded effectively?</li> <li>• What are the most significant needs in our community (e.g. housing, schools, etc.)?</li> <li>• What new opportunities for ministry would there be on a redeveloped site?</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires multiple acres in more valuable property areas</li> <li>• Involves relinquishing a portion of the land for development on which a church might capitalize for mission</li> <li>• Usually includes rebuilding, not just remodeling, a sanctuary and/or other ministry spaces</li> <li>• Takes multiple years to plan and execute</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redeemer, Las Vegas</li> <li>• Our Savior, Westchester</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Closing Costs</a> by Dominic Dutra</li> <li>• LCEF Real Estate Solutions (<a href="http://lcef.org">lcef.org</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>Contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. Jim Henkell, PSD Ministry Executive <a href="mailto:jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org">jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org</a></li> <li>• Mr. Jon Niederbrach, PSD Chief Operating Officer <a href="mailto:jon.niederbrach@psd-lcms.org">jon.niederbrach@psd-lcms.org</a></li> <li>• Mr. Josh Rhee, LCEF Senior Real Estate Director <a href="mailto:josh.rhee@lcef.org">josh.rhee@lcef.org</a></li> </ul>

## “A Time to Grieve” (Closing a Congregation)

<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What circumstances cause you to believe your congregation may be at the end of its ministry season?</li> <li>• What hinders you from making the decision to close?</li> <li>• What are you grieving most about the church’s closure?</li> <li>• What hope is God revealing in the midst of grief?</li> <li>• What might be the most impactful legacy of the congregation’s resources for Lutheran Gospel ministry?</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebration of God’s work through that congregation is essential and often includes a special worship service</li> <li>• Grief care should be provided for pastor and people, as well as assistance as they find new church homes</li> <li>• PSD partners with the congregation to complete a check-list related to closure which includes ecclesiastical paperwork, title transfer, financial disbursements, property assessment, archival donations, etc.</li> <li>• Assets are transferred to the PSD, per the congregation’s constitution and may be stewarded for ministry in that community</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St. John’s, Long Beach</li> <li>• St. Paul’s, Norwalk</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u><a href="#">Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations</a></u> by Beth Ann Gaede, Editor</li> <li>• <u><a href="#">Legacy Churches</a></u> by Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond</li> <li>• <u><a href="#">Season of Harvest</a></u>, by PSD Staff</li> </ul>
<b>Contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. Jim Henkell, PSD Ministry Executive <u><a href="mailto:jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org">jim.henkell@psd-lcms.org</a></u></li> <li>• Mr. Jon Niederbrach, PSD Chief Operating Officer <u><a href="mailto:jon.niederbrach@psd-lcms.org">jon.niederbrach@psd-lcms.org</a></u></li> <li>• Rev. Mike Grobelch, Former Pastor at St. John’s, LB <u><a href="mailto:mike.grobelch@intertechconsulting.net">mike.grobelch@intertechconsulting.net</a></u></li> </ul>

# Frequently Asked Questions



## ❖ What can we do to save our church?

Though a frequent question, it may not be the most helpful. Christ's mission is not to save congregations, but His Church. Local congregations are an invaluable setting for Word and Sacrament ministry yet exist for a defined time in a particular place. The questions you may want to ask include: "What are the unique needs of people in our community?", "How might the Gospel be expressed in our context?", and "What might God desire to accomplish through us and our congregation for the sake of His kingdom?"

You may be tempted to believe that a few improvements to your current ministry will return its recent success or its oft-remembered glory days. Please know that you can't go back, but you can move forward with every assurance that Jesus, who overcame death itself, goes ahead of us. The glory is His and His Day is yet to come.

## ❖ Why shouldn't we just sell our land and survive on the proceeds?

Again, because the mission is broader than your congregation. Jesus has not yet returned and that means more will come to repentance (*2 Peter 3:9*). God may work through the revitalization of your congregation, or utilize its resources in another way, as people are brought to faith. The value of land and location is such that we often prefer to retain, rather than attempt to restore, an LCMS presence in most communities.

## ❖ When should we consider merging, revitalizing, or even dis-banding?

Asking this question means you should consider it now. Many congregations wait until the retirement of a pastor or the reduction of its income to consider next steps in ministry. Pray now and actively discuss how God may be prompting something new in your congregation. The District is here to help guide those discussions.

If you believe that disbanding may be your next step, please contact the District at 949-854-3232. We will provide care and guidance throughout that process.


## ❖ What resources does the District offer?

The District offers resources and referrals for strategic planning, mentoring for pastors and church workers, training for lay leaders, grants for new mission projects, evaluation and consultation for next steps in ministry, partnership for identifying and calling church workers, connections for redeveloping congregational property, and much more. The District is not, however, able to provide funding to subsidize congregations for survival.

## ❖ Who takes the initial step?

God has already taken that step by revealing Himself through the Word and placing these concerns on your heart. You can respond by initiating conversation among yourselves, reaching out other Lutheran congregations, and contacting the District. Remember, you don't need the District's permission to reach out to partner congregations or to pursue any of the above options, but we do ask for your communication about what may be happening. We are also ready and willing to help guide, advise, walk, and pray with you.

# Review



This resource includes more than a few “What?” questions. That’s by design as we’re more often tempted to ask “Why?” Our inboxes and social media are replete with articles and surveys about the decline of congregations and the shortage of church workers. Nearly 80% of LCMS congregations now worship less than 100 people on any given Sunday, and more than 45% have fewer than 50 worshippers, which may prompt us to ask: Why are churches declining? Why is one congregation more “successful” than another? Why can’t we find just a few more people to keep the church open? Those “Why?” queries are often traps which usually lead back to us. We may feel burdened by the expectation to revitalize our churches and to accomplish more and more for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus’ disciples once asked a “Why?” question disguised as a “Who?”: “Who sinned, this man of his parents, that he was born blind?” John 9:2 They believed learning the reason for his blindness (aka the “Why?”) would affirm their behavior or enable them to prevent such difficulties. Jesus’ response changed the question: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in his life.” John 9:3 He prompted them to ask “What?”: What is God redeeming in this circumstance? What good will God bring out of an experience that seems so bad?

The move from “Why?” to “What?” is often the move from Law to Gospel. It’s the move seen in the cross of Christ as the “Why?” points directly to our shortcomings, but the “What?” reveals His redemption. That redemption emphasis is so essential in our shared ministry. The culture is different than it was in years past, but the work of God continues. He is merging, revitalizing, building, and even redeeming congregations from the remnants of closure for the sake of His Church. Gather with your brothers and sisters at the congregation to remember what God has done and to ask, “What will He do in this next season?”