



Goals for Nokomis Heights Lutheran Church



OUR MAIN OBJECTIVE:

Centered in the radically inclusive love of Jesus, Nokomis Heights Lutheran Church is called to be a multicultural and beautifully diverse congregation.

OUR MAIN OBJECTIVE IS SUPPORTED BY THESE THREE PRIMARY GOALS:

- 1. Connecting People to People** – We will intentionally connect with each other across multiple languages and cultures, working together to alleviate isolation and celebrate God's gift of diversity.
- 2. Sharing Food** – We will invite people to address food insecurity at both the personal and systemic level, with a growing awareness of diverse cultures, diverse foods, and diverse relationships.
- 3. Accompanying Immigrants** – We will become a haven for people who were not born in the United States.

God continues to pull us forward into more expansive inclusivity, generosity, creativity and collaboration. We will respond by continuing to move out of our comfort zones, finding ways to learn more about each other, and sharing our lives together.

We will become a multicultural and beautifully diverse congregation.



This is an all-encompassing goal that shapes our full vision for creating a culture of understanding and heartfelt love for our neighbors. **We want to move out of our comfort zones to know and love each other individually as God knows and loves each of us.** This means finding ways to truly learn about each other and share experiences together, crossing cultures and worldviews in ways we have not yet imagined.

We will accomplish this by experimenting with multicultural activities for the congregation and the neighborhood. This may include multicultural movie nights with popcorn and subtitles, diverse music, celebrating feast days and traditions from other cultures, partnering with other churches for multicultural festivals, etc. We have already started down this path, and now we will prioritize these events. We will draw on our neighbors and other organizations to partner with us in these efforts.

We understand that we will not be perfect at embodying this vision. **We will continually make changes that are needed to help all people feel a sense of belonging.** This means the following:

- We will have to examine the existing governance structures (Council, the constitution, the decision-making process) to accomplish true multiculturalism.
- We will have to confront systemic racism or unhealthy power structures that are embedded in the foundation of our congregation.
- We will examine our concept of membership, recognizing that fully celebrating diversity and creating a safe place for belonging means that our current definitions will not serve us.
- All leadership, including staff, Council, and teams, will reflect our multicultural community.

GROUNDING IN OUR FAITH: 1 Corinthians 12

*“For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body –
Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”*

Jesus constantly pushed the margins of culture, class, gender and ethnicity, challenging all of us to step outside the comfort of our world views, our homes, and our sanctuaries in order to live, worship, work and play alongside people of wildly diverse backgrounds. This passage reminds us that we are incomplete without one another. Our calling toward multiculturalism brings us one step closer to God’s vision of diverse community.

METRICS:

Culture change can be challenging to measure. By paying attention to the diversity of leadership, the congregation’s response to change, and the quality of relationships, we will be able to learn, adjust, and experiment into a new future.

We will know we have achieved our vision when our leadership and worship life reflect the diversity of our congregation and community. We will know we have achieved our vision when resistance to inclusion is low, and advocacy for diversity is high.

Goal 1: Connecting People to People



Connecting with other people is essential after years of increasing isolation. The vision team's congregational and community interviews showed extensive patterns of loneliness. Many people expressed concerns about mental health issues. **We want Nokomis Heights to be a well of fresh water in the community where people can feel known, safe, and connected.** Our goal is to become a place of welcome where everyone feels a sense of safety, belonging, and home.

There are already many ways to get involved at Nokomis Heights: community groups, pop-up choirs, worship assistance, book clubs, volunteer opportunities, Racial Justice and Creation Care teams, and more. But for newcomers these things may be intimidating or difficult to find. **How do we make engagement easier and more welcoming for people who want to participate but aren't sure how to begin?**

OUR GOAL IS TO DESIGN NEW WAYS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS:

- **Mi Casa es Tu Casa.** We'll invite people to host shared meals, on a rotating basis, for six to eight people they don't already know well. We'll focus on cultural diversity during these events by exploring co-hosting options and finding a way around or through the language barrier. We'll strengthen our bonds with each other by stepping out of our comfort zones and breaking bread with new people.
- **Focusing on newcomers.** We'll be intentional about creating a pathway to belonging for new people at Nokomis Heights. This could mean sponsorship for new members, launching an ambassador program to equip people to connect with visitors, initiating a newcomer's lunch, and personal invitations to Mi Casa es Tu Casa and other Nokomis Heights activities.
- **Begin Spanish/English language classes and other language immersion experiences.** The ability to communicate with everyone at Nokomis Heights will increase our connection.

GROUNDING IN OUR FAITH – Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Community has always been important. The early followers of Jesus attended temple together, ate together in their homes, shared their lives and possessions with one another.

We have heard from so many people who long for connection but do not know how to find their way back to one another. As we foster deeper connections in our congregation and in our community, our hope is that God will work through us to alleviate isolation and help us find each other again.

METRICS:

Attendance is only one value for an engaged community. We will pay attention to the number of people participating in activities like Mi Casa es Tu Casa, and we'll notice relational engagement. We'll also make sure that experiences at Nokomis Heights are meaningful and hospitable to those who don't attend regularly.

- We will know we have achieved this goal when people connected to Nokomis Heights report authentic relationships and activities that are meaningful to their faith and well-being.
- We will make sure that people new to our community have opportunities for leadership.
- We will notice which activities generate repeated engagement and be curious about why.
- We will notice who is missing from our congregational community and be curious about why.

A CONNECTING PEOPLE TEAM WILL:

- Offer immersion experiences like Spanish/English language lessons, conversation groups, and more.
- Launch Mi Casa es Tu Casa for the congregation and neighborhood.
- Experiment with new and creative ways to deepen connections across language and culture.
- Equip group leaders to engage new people, help new people feel like they belong, and extend leadership opportunities to those who have shown an interest in the community.

Goal 2: Share Food



Providing quality, reliable food for our community has been a calling at Nokomis Heights for a long time.

We currently engage in delivering food for Community Emergency Service, preparing shelter meals for Our Saviour's Housing, delivering meals for South Minneapolis Meals on Wheels, volunteering to distribute food at New Creations Foodshelf, and preparing community meals in our newly-renovated kitchen through Loaves & Fishes. As we focus on the needs of new immigrants, we are learning the importance of providing food that reflects diverse ethnicity and culture.

Our goal is to increase participation and cultural competency in existing food ministries. We will:

- **Learn about those who come to share food.** Who uses these services? How do they use them, and why? Answers to these questions could affect the way we proceed and inform the diversity of the food we offer. We want to be sure we're offering something that meets people's needs.
- **Learn about our volunteer community.** Who volunteers? Why do people volunteer? What kind of support is needed? How can we make volunteer experiences meaningful? By learning more about our current volunteer community, we can determine ways to expand it. Inspired, passionate volunteers spread enthusiasm to those around them. In order to expand our volunteer base, we'll need to create a volunteer experience that people want to share with their friends and family.
- **Continue to experiment with multicultural meals.** We've had great experiences with ethnically diverse meals. We'll look for ways to expand that concept, drawing in more participants and volunteers.
- **Tell our story and engage the community in food sharing and community meals.** Through social media, our website, direct mail, community events, signage on our property, word of mouth, etc., we'll find multiple ways to communicate why we're passionate about this work and inspire others to join us.

GROUNDING IN OUR FAITH: Matthew 25:37-40

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'"

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'"

When we share food with our neighbors, particularly those experiencing hunger, we share food with Jesus. We have always been, and continue to be, called into this kind of community.

METRICS:

We will work systematically and passionately to share food as a way of being in relationship with all people. This includes all our meals, from a cup of coffee to communion.

- We will know we have accomplished this goal when the food we serve reflects the diversity of those coming to eat.
- We will know we have accomplished this goal when we are actively learning together about food insecurity and the systemic injustices that cause people to be hungry in our area. This includes planning and executing a response to this serious injustice.
- We will know we have accomplished this goal when we have reduced volunteer turnover with a plan for recruiting and equipping new people to serve, and when we know how many people we serve, how many volunteers are doing the work, and how many new people are brought in.
- We will know we have accomplished this goal when we have a communication plan to share the stories of our volunteers, the congregation's commitment to culturally diverse meals, and the quality of service people receive when they come for a meal.

A SHARING FOOD TEAM WILL:

- Strategize how we can introduce ethnically diverse food into all of our food-based ministries.
- Track and increase volunteer engagement across all of our food ministries.
- Support the Mi Casa es Tu Casa meal efforts.

Goal 3: Accompany Immigrants



Many immigrants arrive in the United States without connections. **Newcomers to this country are faced with many challenges, and one of the most pressing needs is safe housing.** Nokomis Heights has the capacity to create a safe space for an immigrant family with nowhere else to turn. This is a solid first step into a calling we hope will expand to help more families as we learn and grow.

Our goal is to become a sanctuary church. We will accomplish this through research that informs decisions about our property and our practices of hospitality that:

- **Embark on a journey of learning and commitment.** For this to work, we all need to learn what asylum means, how immigration law works, what our rights are, what immigrants' rights are, and the best practices for keeping immigrant families safe. This step includes networking and connecting with other people and congregations who have already done this.
- **Define what being a sanctuary church means for Nokomis Heights.** Based on what is learned in the research phase, the congregation will have an opportunity to better understand the opportunities we have to accompany immigrants.
- **Show intentional hospitality.** Being a community that honors the experience of immigrants will become part of our DNA. When newcomers to this country walk in the doors of this church, they will know that they belong here and that their gifts and experiences are valued.
- **Explore housing for immigrant families.** We will evaluate the need and opportunity to renovate our church building or to buy a house in the neighborhood to serve as a sanctuary for immigrants.

GROUNDING IN OUR FAITH: Exodus 23:9

"You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

All of scripture is an immigrant story. God's people have been on the move from the minute Adam and Eve leave the garden. The Israelites fled Egypt in search of a more just and peaceful life. Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt in order to keep Jesus safe from Herod. Within all of our histories is a story of ancestors seeking safety, freedom, prosperity, and home in a new land. Scripture is constantly reminding us that "we, too, were once strangers."

We proclaim the love of God through Jesus Christ for all people. It is our call to help ensure a safe and loving passage for people seeking safety, belonging, and a new home. All people deserve to be safe from oppression and violence, from poverty and corrupt governments, from ways of life that crush bodies and spirits. Nokomis Heights seeks to accompany immigrants with respect, dignity, and love.

METRICS:

How are we best able to accompany the needs of immigrants in our community? This goal has several phases with learning as the primary task.

PHASE ONE: Learn from other churches and organizations who effectively and respectfully accompany immigrant communities in Minnesota. We'll know we've accomplished the learning phase when we have a deep understanding of what others have discovered when they've offered resources such as housing, childcare, legal advice, and essential services to immigrants.

PHASE TWO: Discern the best response for Nokomis Heights based on what we learn, aligning with our purpose and values. We'll know we've accomplished the discernment phase when we have a series of experiments we're willing to try that will help us thoughtfully accompany immigrants.

PHASE THREE: Engage the congregation in learning what it means to be a sanctuary church. We'll know we've accomplished the engagement phase when the majority of people in the Nokomis Heights community can talk about the role and function of a sanctuary church.

PHASE FOUR: Launch a series of experiments as we learn to be a sanctuary church. We'll know we've accomplished the launch phase when we have tried many new ways for immigrants to connect to the Nokomis Heights congregation.

AN ACCOMPANYING IMMIGRANTS TEAM WILL:

- Learn what it means to be recognized as a sanctuary church.
- Research congregations and communities that support immigrants for a full understanding and a plan that will be brought to the Council and congregation for implementation.

CREATING MOMENTUM

Our timeline is fluid because we expect the unexpected and we understand that these relationships will evolve as we go through the process.

Listed below are milestones designed to help us know we're on track.

	2024 MILESTONE	2025 MILESTONE	2026 MILESTONE
GOAL: We will become a multicultural and beautifully diverse congregation.	Complete a year of cultural competency workshops and training with JUSTmove.	Analyze the constitution, membership practices, and leadership in order to identify best practices for a multicultural community.	Update membership, leadership, staff, board, constitution, governing documents, etc., to show that we have integrated multicultural competency into our life together.
GOAL: We will intentionally connect people to people.	Form a Connecting People Team to focus on deepening relationships in the congregation, especially with visitors and new members, through shared experiences.	Implement a path to membership that's not led by staff and communicate clear ways for new people to connect in our community.	Evaluate programs and pathways that have been put in place over the past two years and make changes as needed.
GOAL: We will invite people to share food.	Form a Sharing Food Team to build a volunteer base in our congregation and neighborhood so that our sharing food ministries are sustainable.	Increase volunteer base and have processes in place to engage volunteerism on a broad level. Integrate our cultural competencies into our food ministries.	Involve all people at Nokomis Heights in sharing food, so that they are able to identify one way that they have shared food in the last year.
GOAL: We will become a place of sanctuary.	Form an Accompanying Immigrants Team that will research and learn from other sanctuary organizations.	Develop a well-formed plan for a ministry of accompanying immigrants that is in line with best practices and unique to Nokomis Heights.	Become known in the our neighborhood and in the immigrant community as a congregation that accompanies immigrants.

Calling and Learning as a Team

LISTENING TO GOD IN THE CONGREGATION AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Vision Team designed questions and a process to listen to God's voice in the congregation and community. These listening sessions provided the wisdom needed to form our goals for Nokomis Heights.

The congregational listening was done by surveying and engaging the congregation in focus groups. Community listening included conversations with neighbors, local legislators, BLC parents, and leaders of schools and social service organizations. This listening brought clarity and perspective to the ways Nokomis Heights is uniquely positioned to engage. **This intentional listening provided the focus we need to plan for the future.**

This document reflects the team's discernment about objectives that are aligned with our congregation's values. We anticipate that new ways of engaging with the neighborhood will continue to unfold. A congregation can't respond to every single need that arises, so clarity and direction will guide decisions and actions in the years ahead.

The top three themes that emerged over and over in listening sessions:

1. Nokomis Heights is known for vibrant worship, music, affirming all people, and a progressive spirit. There is not a clear understanding of our identity within the congregation or the neighborhood.
2. Nokomis Heights is passionate about welcoming people, social justice, and diversity.
3. The immediate neighborhood surrounding Nokomis Heights is a historically white neighborhood, and one of the original red-lined neighborhoods in Minneapolis. This dynamic brings its own challenges of systemic racism as the neighborhood becomes more diverse over time. The community within 1.5 miles is a diverse community where people struggle with food insecurity, mental health, wellness, isolation, immigration, housing, and more.

Please ask for original listening session documents for more details about the themes that emerged from the congregation, the neighborhood groups we interviewed, and our reflections.

After listening, we discerned some short-term ideas that could be implemented right away:

- Inclusive language with Spanish/English worship services, website communications, and more.
- Partnerships with Majestic Ministries, New Creations, and LK Arts Academy.
- Congregational Forum led by Pastor Louise Johnson to validate the emerging goals.
- Multi-congregational worship services in the summer and on Good Friday.
- "Sponsoring" families by unofficially offering sanctuary care without on-site housing.
- Learning about people seeking asylum in Minnesota.
- Removing the racial covenant language from the Nokomis Heights deed.

The Nokomis Heights Vision Team has been called by the congregation to build the path from our past to our future. Over the last 18 months the team has committed themselves to engaging scripture and prayer for personal and shared reflection. The following people have faithfully served on this team:

Sue Bretheim | Kristen Capel, Pastor | Kevin Dumke | Sara Funk | Stephanie Korchik
 Mark Lofthus, Congregation President | Yesenia Morales-Bahenia | Blanca Raniolo | Amy Snetting
 Holly Welch | Mary Wilkening | Deacon Peggy Hahn, LEAD Consultant