

# Hillcrest Covenant Church

## Strategic Plan

*Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3*



Long Range Planning Committee

2011

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## Introduction

In September of 2009, the Executive Committee appointed a Long Range Planning Committee to chart a course for the future of Hillcrest Covenant Church. The Committee was instructed to develop a plan that is focused five to ten years into the future, examines both the Hillcrest congregation and the community in which we live, and provides a vision for the future of our church.

The members of the Long Range Planning Committee devoted considerable prayer, thought, time, and effort to their task, each one contributing their unique gifts and insights, and always seeking to discover God’s plan for us rather than our own plan. This document is the culmination of their collective efforts.

It is not enough, however, for the Long Range Planning Committee to adopt this plan, because the Long Range Planning Committee cannot accomplish all that this plan sets out to do. This must be the congregation’s plan and it must be approved, adopted, and acted on by the entire body of Christ at Hillcrest Covenant Church.

## Methodology

The LRPC adopted a three-step process to develop this plan:

1. Determine where we are and what we should be doing as the Body of Christ in DeKalb/Sycamore;
2. Describe what we will look like when we are living our values and accomplishing our mission; and
3. Determine how to get from where we are to where we want to be.



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In the first step, we developed a picture of where we are as a congregation and where we have been. This involved an analysis of church records, membership and attendance information, existing ministries, resources and facilities. As part of this process, we conducted a survey of the congregation to determine why people come to Hillcrest, what characteristics and ministries we consider important, how we are doing in our existing ministries, and what we think the future should look like. We also commissioned a survey of the community, through Percept Group, Inc., which provided extensive demographic data, as well as information on likely faith involvement and preferences, and concerns and needs in our community.

We also participated in a Veritas workshop, a program developed by the Evangelical Covenant Church, which asks congregations to evaluate the health of their church and determine the direction in which they want to move. Recognizing that change brings friction and conflict, Veritas also provides techniques to address conflict in a healthy manner.

The primary outputs of this step are the Core Values Statement and Mission Statement. The Core Values Statement identifies those values that we consider important and fundamental to our identity as a body of Christ. The Mission Statement tells us what we should be doing as the body of Christ.

In the second step, we drafted a Vision Statement which describes what Hillcrest Covenant Church will look like if we are living our core values and accomplishing our mission. It is our hope that as you read the Vision Statement you will recognize a church that you want to be a part of and be excited about the possibilities before us.

Finally, we looked at the Vision Statement and identified those things that we are not currently doing. These are the objectives we need to accomplish to fulfill that vision, and these objectives form the basis of our plan.

## **Where We Are**

### **Hillcrest Covenant Church**

Hillcrest Covenant Church has 147 members as of April 18, 2011, but including non-members who are regular participants, we have a constituency of 210 people. Average worship attendance is 121, and during the summer months it is 102. Membership has increased 9% over the past 3 years. Average worship attendance has increased 17.5% over the past 3 years.

Paid staff consists of a full-time pastor, full-time associate pastor, part-time minister of music, and part-time administrative assistant.

The sanctuary seats a maximum of 180 people in the pews with the potential to add some additional seats if necessary.

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## Community

### Description

Although many members live outside the DeKalb/Sycamore area, the LRPC decided to focus its analysis on the communities of DeKalb, Sycamore, Cortland, and Malta because we believe that the majority of our impact and influence will occur in those areas. This is not intended to discourage people in other communities from attending HCC or participating in our activities or to discount their contributions to the church: all are welcome.

### Demographics (from Percept Group)

Currently (2010) there are 76,074 persons residing in the community. This represents an increase of 21,581 or 39.6% since 1990. During the same period of time, the U.S. as a whole grew by 23.3%. Northern Illinois University has over 20,000 students. Nearly 1,000 of these are international students.

Between 2010 and 2015, the population is projected to increase by 10.5% or 7,983 additional persons. During the same period, the U.S. population is projected to grow by 5.1%.

The 76,074 people in the community represent 27,069 different households. 46.5% of households are married couples; 11.8% are other family types; 27.6% of households are people living alone; and 14.1% are non-family households. The average household income is \$60, 489

46.2% of residents 15 or older are married; 42.9% are single (never married); and 10.9 percent are divorced or widowed.

Three quarters of the population in our community resides in approximately 50% of the geographical area. In the U.S. as a whole and in the average community, 75% of the population resides in just 25% of the geographical area. In comparison, our community is highly dispersed within the overall area.

The lifestyle diversity in the area is extremely high with a considerable 35 of the 50 U.S. Lifestyles segments represented. Of the six major segment groupings, the largest is referred to as Middle American Families which accounts for 43.2% of households in the area. The top segment is University life representing 18.0% of all households.

Based upon the total number of different groups present, the racial/ethnic diversity in the area is very high. Among individual groups, Anglos represent 75.7% of the population and all other racial/ethnic groups make up just 24.4% which is well below the national average of 35%. The largest of these groups, Hispanics/Latinos, accounts for 10.6% of the total population.

### Needs

The primary concerns of people in our community include:

- Maintaining Personal Health
- Finding/Providing Health Insurance
- Day-to-Day Financial Worries
- Neighborhood Crime and Safety

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- Achieving Long-term Financial Security
- Finding Time for Recreation/Leisure
- Finding a Satisfying Job/Career
- Achieving a Fulfilling Marriage
- Dealing With Stress

### **Spirituality**

81.9% of people in the community would likely agree with the statement; “I believe there is a God.” 31.5% would describe themselves as strongly involved with their faith, while 31.7% would say that they are somewhat involved with their faith and 36.8% are not involved with their faith.

The most common religious preferences in our community are:

- Catholic 29.3%
- Lutheran 14.7%
- Methodist 10.9%
- Baptist 8.5%
- Not Interested 11.6%

When looking for a new church, people in our community are likely to consider the following characteristics and programs important:

- Bible Study Discussion and Prayer Groups 35.0%
- Adult Theological Discussion Groups 21.9%
- Personal or Family Counseling 24.3%
- Youth Social Programs 28.3%
- Family Activities and Outings 31.6%
- Active Retirement Programs 25.4%

People in our community are evenly split on their preference for traditional worship (23.7%), contemporary worship (27%), or a blended service (26.9%).

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## Core Values

Core Values are the “constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive the ministry.” They identify those characteristics or attributes that we consider vital to who we are as a body of Christ.

### *Loving and Learning, Sharing and Serving Together in Jesus Christ*

***Loving**--We show our love for Jesus Christ through our worship, both public and private, which includes regular prayer, praise and biblical preaching.*

***Learning**--We learn about God as we listen to Christian teaching and preaching, study the Word in Bible studies and discipleship groups, and live in obedience to Jesus Christ.*

***Sharing**--We share with others the truth of the loving God through witness and mission both locally and around the world.*

***Serving**--We serve God and each other by meeting the physical needs in our local community and around the world.*

***Together**--We live our lives and serve our Lord in community, united in purpose, caring for and encouraging each other, and using our spiritual gifts within the Church and the world.*

***Jesus Christ**--Everything we do and are as a church and as Christians is in the name of Jesus Christ and to the glory of God.*

## Mission Statement

A Mission Statement identifies what we are supposed to be doing. As we discussed the creation of a mission statement, we decided that it would be difficult to improve upon the mission that Jesus gave us in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Therefore, the Mission Statement of Hillcrest Covenant Church is:

We are united by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind; love our neighbor as ourselves; and go into all the world and make disciples.

## Where We Are Going

The Vision Statement is a narrative description of what Hillcrest Covenant Church will look like when we are living our core values and accomplishing our mission. We hope that when people read the Vision Statement, they will be excited about the potential it describes and desire to be part of this church.

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## **Vision Statement**

Hillcrest Covenant Church is a place where God is worshipped, the Bible is preached and taught, we genuinely care for each other and for those around us, and we enjoy each other's fellowship. HCC has corporately adopted this vision and is committed to working toward it. A significant proportion of the members actively serve in the church in some form: either volunteering with children and youth, teaching Sunday school, singing in choir, sitting on a committee, leading Bible studies or small groups, or in other similar ways.

### **Worship (Objectives 1 & 2)**

Worship services at Hillcrest are an inspiring experience where we sense the presence of God, hear His word, respond in joyful obedience and are drawn into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. We actively invite others to worship and are welcoming to all who attend the services. We are accepting of the diversity that exists in our community and seek to worship with others of any age, race, or social-economic status. Two worship services each weekend provide the space for our growing congregation to attend services. These services are provided in a variety of music and worship styles for people of all ages. While offering two services we take deliberate measures to foster and encourage unity and the sense of family within the congregation. The worship services are creatively planned around the morning's sermon theme, not necessarily following an identical format each Sunday and at times incorporating elements such as drama and liturgical dance. We utilize audio, visual and internet technologies to aid in our worship services as well as to provide opportunities for those who are not able to attend in person to watch or listen to portions of the worship service.

### **Service (Objectives 3 & 10 -14)**

The members of Hillcrest Covenant faithfully share their time, talents and treasures to advance God's kingdom. Eighty percent of those active in the church have completed a spiritual gift inventory identifying their spiritual gifts. As a result, most of the congregation is involved in some form of ministry using their gifts, serving needs both inside and outside the church. This is facilitated by the Board of Stewardship, which holds the records of spiritual gifts and helps people understand their gifts and match them with needs as they arise.

Members of the congregation are also generous with the financial resources that God has provided. We understand the importance of tithing as a spiritual goal and we consistently see people living and giving generously and sacrificially. The church's budget is supported in a meaningful way by a broad spectrum of people, providing the necessary resources for effective ministry within the congregation and support of missions in our community and around the world. Teaching about holistic stewardship – time, talent and treasure – occurs on a regular basis throughout the church year.

Hillcrest is actively engaged in missions, both locally and globally. Locally, Hillcrest remains an active supporter of Love INC, Network of Nations and Hope Haven. The church continues to provide a moving ministry, a kitchen supplies ministry and a gas card ministry to Love INC. We are also committed to additional ministries as needs arise in the community. At least one half of the congregation volunteers

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time in some fashion to local ministries such as Love INC, and Hope Haven. The church also supports Network of Nations in a variety of ways, with about twenty percent of the congregation serving as a “host” family for an international student. We have a significant outreach to the community, targeting an identified need that is not otherwise being fulfilled and that corresponds with our talents and gifts.

We plan at least two mission experiences each year, one of which is an international trip. Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to participate in the global dimensions of our ministry. In the last five years at least one-third of our congregation has participated in a mission trip. We continue to support both Covenant and other missionaries through prayer and financial support. Twenty percent of the church budget is dedicated to support local, national and international missions.

### ***Caring (Objectives 4 & 5)***

We are a caring congregation responsive to the many physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs within the church. Individuals take responsibility for reaching out to those who are hurting. Corporately, we create a warm and inviting culture for visitors and seek ways to assimilate them into the life of the church. Hospitality is practiced on a regular basis in the church, with people sharing meals and other forms of fellowship with each other. We are learning “to speak the truth in love,” realizing that real caring at times requires being truthful in ways that are not always comfortable. When conflicts arise, people seek to resolve them according to Biblical principles.

The above culture of warmth, caring and honesty is also supported by more structured means. An effort is made to connect every member of the church to a smaller group of people, such as small groups, Bible studies, choir or ministry teams, to help build relationships. As a way to keep their finger on the spiritual pulse of the congregation, the Deacon Board maintains care lists of families and individuals they support through prayer, correspondence and visits. They also ensure that meals are provided for those in need, and regular contact is maintained with college students and those in the military. On a regular basis, a lay visitation team visits shut-ins, those in facilities, and those with other special needs.

### ***Evangelism (Objectives 6 – 9)***

Hillcrest is a welcoming and safe place for people at any stage of their faith journey. We are burdened for the spiritual condition of those who do not yet know Christ. We have identifiable pathways for evangelism to take place in our ministries. A variety of training opportunities are provided to equip our congregation to effectively share their faith journey with those outside the church. Therefore, our people are equipped and growing in their ability to build friendships and know how to share their faith as God-given opportunities arise. We see people consistently coming to Christ and provide opportunities for them to grow in their faith through a variety of ministries such as ALPHA, Discipleship Encounter groups, basic Bible studies, small groups, and Sunday school classes.

A strategic welcoming ministry is in place to warmly greet newcomers, to get to know them personally, and to help assimilate them into the larger church body. Our website is consistently updated, providing information about Hillcrest, its people, its ministries, and its worship services. An interactive calendar is in place, and registration and sign-up for events is available on line.

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At least two special, BIG events are planned, executed, and evaluated each year. These events are specifically geared as an outreach to friends, family, and neighbors and are bathed in prayer. Because they involve the entire church, stronger relationships are built within the body as well.

We take advantage of our community-planned events to connect with the larger DeKalb/Sycamore/NIU population and to make ourselves visible. We also introduce this larger community to the Evangelical Covenant Church through brochures, periodic media coverage, and on our website.

### **Discipleship** (*Objectives 15, 16 & 17*)

Hillcrest Covenant Church provides opportunities for people of all ages and stages of spiritual maturity to continue to grow in Christ. Sunday school classes provide age-appropriate discipleship opportunities that equip students to know and share Christ. Although age-based classes are the norm, there are opportunities for intergenerational discipleship opportunities. To encourage attendance, a variety of Sunday school classes are available at any one time for adults.

Children/Youth ministries are valued and supported as a means of forming mature disciples of Christ. All of these ministries have sufficient numbers of dedicated volunteers to support their programs. They provide a strong, Christ-centered, biblically-based opportunity for our children and youth to grow in discipleship and fellowship. They also provide an opportunity for our youth to share the gospel by inviting their friends, who are accepted and loved regardless of their appearance, beliefs or background. All of Hillcrest's children and youth have an opportunity to attend a Christian camp and are encouraged to do so.

There is a vibrant and growing college/young adult program reaching out to NIU and KCC students. Students, who are away from home, many for the first time, find a home and discover a second family at Hillcrest. At least 80% of our people, from children to seniors, are involved in a Sunday school class, a small group, or a Bible study.

We believe discipleship is an individual and family, as well as a corporate, activity. Our people are devoted to family and individual Bible study and prayer.

### **Facility** (*Objectives 18 & 19*)

The facility of Hillcrest Covenant Church is maintained and used in the most effective way possible to support the various ministries of the church. The Trustees work with other committees and the Board of Stewardship to use gifts from those in the congregation to ensure the building is well-maintained. We are a fully accessible church with specific intention to anticipate and meet the needs of all people. There is no anxiety upon entering the church building because the necessary accommodations and space are available. This welcoming atmosphere contributes to a deeper worship experience for all people.

The congregation, working with the Trustees, recently completed a long-term Facilities Growth Plan to meet the myriad needs of our growing congregation. This includes expanded Sunday school rooms, an expanded narthex, increased space for AWANA and youth programs, a playground, and, in the longer term,

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plans for an expanded or new sanctuary. The Trustees have begun the initial steps of the planning process, including additional space for various Sunday school and Christian Formation activities.

## **How We Will Get There**

There are many items in the Vision Statement that do not currently exist. These “gaps” in the Vision are the objectives of the plan. We must work toward making each of these aspirations into reality.

This section identifies twenty objectives identified during the planning process and provides some guidance on how to reach them.

Each objective is broken down into four sections; Justification, Primary Responsibility, Preliminary Steps, and Comments/Courses of Action.

**Justification** identifies why the objective is important and why we should focus our energy and resources on it.

**Primary Responsibility** identifies who will be primarily responsible to develop the detailed plan to achieve each objective (generally one of the Boards), as well as any Boards or people who will have significant input and participation in developing the plan. It is important to note that those with primary responsibility are not expected to actually accomplish the objective, rather they are responsible to figure out how to do it, and provide guidance and support to the congregation (or a part of the congregation) who will do the work. Where we have identified Boards, committees or people who will have input regarding a certain objective, Boards should not feel constrained by our suggestions, but should feel free to work with whomever they determine would have a positive impact on the plan.

**Preliminary Steps** identifies things that must happen before we can begin working toward a particular objective. Not every objective has preliminary steps.

**Comments/Courses of Action** provides some preliminary analysis and thoughts about how to reach the objective. It is up to the Board or Committee with primary responsibility to develop the detailed plan for each objective, but this section should give them a good starting point to work from.

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## **Objective 1. Establish a Second Worship Service**

### **Justification:**

As the church experiences growth, average attendance will soon exceed the sanctuary's capacity. The congregational survey reveals that there is little support at this time for expanding the sanctuary. A second survey will become necessary to address capacity issues. Sunday morning worship is a vital part of our corporate existence as the body of Christ, and we must do what we can to ensure that everyone can participate in a meaningful way.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Music and Worship Board will have primary responsibility for this objective, in coordination with the Christian Formation Board as the plan will have an impact on the Sunday school schedule.

### **Preliminary Steps:**

Although planning can begin immediately on this objective, implementation will not become necessary until we see more growth.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

First, at what point do we add a second service? The sanctuary seats 180 people, and average attendance in 2009 has been 121 people (130 in non-summer months). Some services have seen attendance in excess of 200. The implementation of a second service should be based on average numbers, not maximum numbers, otherwise we will have two sparsely-attended services for most of the year to accommodate the two or three weeks when a second service is actually needed. Research suggests that when attendance reaches eighty percent of capacity, the sanctuary appears full even though there is space for more people. This has a tendency to discourage visitors. Therefore, once we approach an average attendance of 144 people, we should begin incorporating a second service. As we get closer to that target, we may try conducting two services on special occasions (i.e. Easter and Christmas) to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan.

Second, what will the second service look like? There are several important considerations in answering this question:

- Will the two services be identical or different?
- How will Sunday school fit into the new schedule?
- How will music be provided for each service?
- How will pastoral duties be assigned for each service?
- How will ushering, communion, child care, and other responsibilities be addressed?
- What can we do to promote fellowship among those who attend different services to maintain a sense of one family?

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Several options for a second service were presented to the congregation as part of the congregational survey, including:

1. Two Sunday morning worship services, with Sunday school in between;
2. Two Sunday morning worship services, with Sunday school concurrent with the first service;
3. A Saturday evening worship service, with Sunday school on Sunday morning followed by worship; and
4. A Sunday morning worship service, followed by Sunday school, and a second worship service Sunday evening.

Seventy-percent of the congregation rated option 1 as either Highly Effective or Effective. Fifty-percent rated option 3 as either Highly Effective or Effective. Options 2 and 4 received little support.

A final consideration is how to ensure that enough people attend each service to make the effort worthwhile. If only a few people attend a second service, it will not address our capacity issues and likely will not last long. Before we implement the second service, we should get approximately half of the congregation to commit to regularly attending the second service for at least six months. This will give us some consistency during the period of adjustment.

## **Objective 2. Increased Use of Audio, Video, and Internet Technology**

### **Justification:**

Increased use of audio, video, and internet technology will enable us to reach a broader audience, including shut-ins and others who are unable to attend in person, as well as those who are looking for a church.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Music and Worship Board will have primary responsibility for this objective, with the Audio/Visual team providing significant input.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

There are two potential segments to this objective. First, use more audio/visual technology in the worship service, such as short videos, slide shows, etc. These could be used for sermon illustrations, or to showcase projects that Hillcrest has been involved in or to promote upcoming opportunities.

Second, while we already put sermons and some musical performances online, we should investigate the use of streaming video and audio, which would allow people to see and hear the service as it is happening. This would provide those who cannot attend in person an opportunity to experience worship with us. Making more content available online will also assist those who are looking for a church to see what we are like.

We would need to investigate whether there are any legal issues related to streaming performances of copyrighted music. Another concern is that live streaming video of worship services may give some people

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who are able to attend in person an excuse to stay home and “watch” church rather than come and participate in worship.

Both of these items will require an investment in new equipment.

### **Objective 3. Congregation Understands the Importance of Sacrificial and Generous Giving**

#### **Justification:**

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.” 1 Corinthians 16:2. “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7.

We recognize that all that we have is a gift from God, and that we are called to be faithful stewards of everything that God has entrusted to us. Sacrificial and generous living and giving allows us to participate in the work of God’s kingdom and demonstrate trust in God.

#### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Stewardship will have primary responsibility for this objective, in coordination with Christian Formation and the pastoral staff.

**Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:** The creation of a separate Board of Stewardship is an important step toward this objective. This objective is largely about education. Financial stewardship can be an uncomfortable topic, but it must be regularly addressed in Sunday school, small groups, special programs, and biblical preaching.

### **Objective 4. Develop a Visitation Team**

#### **Justification:**

A visitation team would ensure that every person who needs a visit for whatever reason is visited regularly and therefore knows that they are not forgotten and that their concerns are important to us. The purpose of the visitation team is to complement the pastors’ visitation program not to replace it or interfere with it.

#### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Diaconate will have primary responsibility for this objective in coordination with the pastoral staff.

#### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

The size and composition of the visitation team should be determined by the Diaconate based on the number of people needing visitation and the number of people in the congregation who are gifted in this area. The responsibilities and activities of the visitation team should be coordinated with the Diaconate and pastoral staff to ensure there is no duplication of effort.

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## **Objective 5. Develop a Culture of Prayer**

### **Justification:**

Prayer is foundational in the life of a Christian. Everything we do as a church should be covered in prayer. Praying together is a vital element of a healthy missional church. A group of people dedicated to praying for our church and our community would provide support and encouragement, and help to ensure that all the prayer needs of our church are being met.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Diaconate will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

One step toward a culture of prayer could be the development of a prayer team. Those with the gift of prayer could be identified. The size and composition of the prayer team should be determined, along with a method for notification, and times to meet face to face. As the prayer team would meet to pray over our church families' concerns, needs, and wants, particular care should be taken to ensure that discretion is exercised inside and outside of the prayer meetings. This team would guarantee continuity in prayer about every issue facing Hillcrest Covenant Church. The existing prayer chain could be useful in fulfilling this objective as well, but could also be an additional part of the prayer team's duties.

## **Objective 6. Evangelism Training**

### **Justification:**

Evangelism is central to the great commission: go into the world and make disciples of all nations. We are also instructed to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 3:15. Nevertheless, many Christians have difficulty sharing their faith.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Outreach will have primary responsibility for this objective in coordination with the Board of Christian Formation.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

We should continue to use ideas developed during the Year of Evangelism (2011) to implement plans for evangelism training and opportunities for us to share our faith. Some potential courses of action include:

- Curriculum for Sunday school classes or small groups focused on evangelism;
- Periodic gatherings for people to share evangelism stories (either a time when they shared their faith with another or when someone shared faith with them);
- Praying for unsaved friends;
- Full participation in The Evangelical Covenant Church's evangelism initiative;
- Chat groups at local coffee shops/bookstores that would train and encourage participants and place them in a position to share their faith;

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- Gatherings around a work project where faith can be discussed and demonstrated in a non-threatening environment;
- Faith-themed movies with discussion to follow; and
- Friend Day at church, where people are encouraged to invite a friend to church for a service that is planned with the intent of reaching non-believers in a non-threatening manner.

## **Objective 7. Strategic Integration of Newcomers into the Church Body**

### **Justification:**

Studies have shown that the most significant factor in choosing and remaining in a church is relationships; therefore, assimilation of newcomers is particularly important. As the church grows in number, it becomes increasingly difficult for the pastor to be aware of and meet the needs of all individuals. A plan to integrate newcomers into the Hillcrest community assures that they will be cared for, introduced to the HCC body of ministries, and in turn can begin the process of loving God, loving others and making disciples. Some effort is necessary to provide opportunities to connect on a deeper level with newcomers and get them active in the body.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Outreach will have primary responsibility for this objective, in coordination with the Diaconate.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

We must develop a process that begins when a visitor is first recognized and follows them until they are fully assimilated into the life of the church. The process begins when a visitor is recognized and greeted with a warm and friendly welcome and an invitation to return for worship or an upcoming church event. As visitors return and begin to attend regularly, a process must be in place to ensure that they are provided information about the life of the church and that they are welcomed as part of our family. It may be helpful to identify current members who could serve as informal sponsors to make this initial connection to the church body. Finally, to become assimilated into the church body, newcomers should become involved in some part of the church, such as a small group or Bible study.

## **Objective 8. Increased Participation in Community Events**

### **Justification:**

We are commissioned to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Christ's ambassadors in DeKalb/Sycamore it is important for us as a church to be visible in our community. We want people to know we are concerned for our community, its people, and its needs. By participating in community events we get the opportunity to interact with large numbers of our neighbors without the burden of having to plan the event by ourselves.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Outreach will have primary responsibility for this objective in coordination with the Board of Missions.

*Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3*

**Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

Opportunities to participate in community events might include the following: setting up an information booth at Corn Fest and Pumpkin Fest, creating a float for local parades, and participating with other churches that organize and host community events. Individuals can volunteer at community events and/or wear clothing with a Hillcrest Covenant Church logo as a walking advertisement for our church.

**Objective 9. Develop a Strategic Communication Plan to Inform the Community about Hillcrest Covenant Church and the Evangelical Covenant Church****Justification:**

We can be proud of Hillcrest Covenant Church and the Evangelical Covenant Church, and should take every opportunity to communicate who we are and what we are doing in the community and the world. The congregational survey revealed that most people who come to Hillcrest were invited by a friend or family member. Increased use of strategic communication will provide a method to reach out to those we cannot personally invite and will provide tools to assist us in personally inviting others to visit Hillcrest.

**Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Outreach will have primary responsibility for this objective.

**Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

We should continue to evaluate new media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) as they develop and determine which are most appropriate to communicate to our target audiences. We may want to use some media to specifically target NIU as part of the new College/Young Adult program. In addition to informing the community about us and our denomination, we can use new technology to communicate information among the congregation. We must continue to keep the website up to date and regularly evaluate its organization, format, and content to ensure that it is easy to use.

We should develop printed materials (or update existing materials), such as brochures and handouts, to communicate who we are (as a local church and a denomination) and what we are doing in the community. These can be useful to inform the community about Hillcrest and will give us something we can use when personally inviting friends and family.

The congregational survey revealed that few people first came to Hillcrest as a result of existing advertising (Christmas and Easter newspaper ads and bus advertisement). These outlets should continue to be evaluated because the survey results in and of themselves may not be conclusive. The newspaper ads are related to two special services and may have attracted people to those services who did not become regular attendees. The bus ad may become part of an increased focus on communicating to the NIU population as part of the new College/Young Adult program.

**Objective 10. At Least Twenty-Percent of the Congregation Has a Relationship with an International Student****Justification:**

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Developing relationships with international students through ministries such as Network of Nations is a concrete way to love our neighbor and care for those new to our community and who are visiting from various countries. These relationships also allow us to be witness to others who might not know Christ and who might carry that witness with them when they return home, allowing us to make a worldwide impact from our own community.

**Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Missions will have primary responsibility for this objective.

**Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

Hillcrest already has a significant number of people involved with international students through Network of Nations and other avenues. We could provide regular opportunities for them to share their experiences. We could develop a brochure that lists the multiple ways to develop a relationship with an international student so that people are aware of the different options and what would be expected of them. There may be a concern that a relationship with an international student requires a significant investment of time and effort. We must make it clear that this is not necessarily the case. Relationships can begin small (getting together once a week or two to talk, giving students a ride to Wal-Mart, etc.) and grow naturally.

**Objective 11. Continue to Establish Community Ministries as Needs Arise**

**Justification:**

Caring for those in need in our community directly relates to our mission of loving our neighbor and fulfilling the Great Commandment. Hillcrest Covenant Church is actively involved in several local ministries, but would benefit from continuing to develop additional ministries as needs arise.

**Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Missions will have primary responsibility for this objective.

**Preliminary Steps:**

We should reach, or make significant progress toward reaching, our objectives to increase participation in mission trips and our support of other local ministries such as Love INC, Network of Nations, and Hope Haven before developing a new ministry.

**Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

The course of action adopted to reach this objective will depend largely on the nature of the ministries we establish. The community survey commissioned as part of the long range planning process identified several needs that may exist in our community. We should evaluate which of these are not being adequately met, and which of those we have the gifts to address.

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## **Objective 12. Increased Participation in Mission Trips**

### **Justification:**

Participation in mission experiences provides additional opportunities for service while helping build disciples in Christ (see objective 13 below). Greater congregational participation permits a larger percentage of the church to experience those benefits. It also develops a broader church cultural of being missional in the truest sense of the word and promotes our corporate commitment through prayer and financial support.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Missions will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

One of the most effective methods to encourage participation in mission trips is the personal testimony of those who have participated in the past. The church should provide opportunities throughout the year for mission trip participants to regularly share with the congregation how mission trips have influenced their lives, not just before and after the trip.

Past participants should also be solicited for information about what drew them to participate and what can be done to encourage others to participate. Other churches within the community and the Covenant that have experienced significant mission participation should also be contacted to determine whether they have any lessons they can share with us.

Developing a second mission experience opportunity should help to increase participation by expanding the options and removing obstacles to participation. For example, people who cannot participate in the Mexico mission trip may be able to participate in a local mission experience that does not require as much time or travel.

## **Objective 13. Establish a Second Mission Experience**

### **Justification:**

A second mission trip/experience expands the opportunities for the congregation to participate in service abroad. These experiences promote our core values in two ways. First, they allow the church to serve and love others, often those with significant needs. Second, participation on a mission trip frequently proves to be an effective discipleship tool, drawing people into a deeper relationship with Christ.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Missions will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

First, we must determine what a second mission trip would look like in terms of duration and distance. If the second mission trip is another international trip, we may need significant growth in the congregation and/or significant success in reaching objective 12 (“Increased Participation in Mission Trips”) before we

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add the second trip. If the second mission trip is local and/or a shorter duration, we should be able to begin now and possibly attract people who have been unable to participate in the international mission trip. The Central Conference and the Evangelical Covenant Church should be able to provide some guidance on mission opportunities that are available locally and around the world.

## **Objective 14. Increase Individual and Corporate Giving to Missions**

### **Justification:**

Strong financial support of missions is essential to further the mission of the church, both in proclamation of the gospel and meeting the needs of God's children around the world. Mission giving allows Hillcrest Covenant Church to participate in ministry in foreign lands, outreach on college campuses, planting new churches, and caring for those in our local community.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Missions with the help of the Executive Board will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Preliminary Steps:**

There may need to be some discussion on how we handle budgeted and non-budgeted giving from members of our congregation.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

The Mission Board and congregation members need determine how to communicate what missions or groups we as a congregation corporately will support.  
Communicate to the congregation about the new view on giving and how we can all participate.

## **Objective 15. Eighty-Percent of Congregation Involved in Sunday School, Small Group, or Bible Study**

### **Justification:**

Discipleship is a lifelong commitment and is part of the Great Commission. Foundational to the Evangelical Covenant Church is the question: "Where is it written?" We cannot answer that question unless we spend time studying the Bible. We are all responsible to learn all we can about God and his revelation to us so that we can grow to be more like Jesus.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Christian Formation will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

We should begin by compiling a list of discipleship opportunities that are available and make sure that everyone is aware of them. (i.e. what Bible study groups are available, what small groups exist, who is in them, and how to join a small group?)

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Church leadership and group members should constantly encourage participation in discipleship opportunities, and should be encouraged to invite people to attend their Sunday school class, Bible study, or small group.

Offering a variety of adult Sunday school classes (see objective 17) may increase participation by offering alternatives that may appeal to a wider base of people.

## **Objective 16. Develop Opportunities for Intergenerational Discipleship**

### **Justification:**

While age-based discipleship groups are valuable because they provide a comfortable environment for people who share similar experiences, there are also benefits to mixing age groups together. People can benefit from hearing perspectives different from their own. Youth may be encouraged to see their parents and other adults whom they respect continuing their discipleship journey beyond high school.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Christian Formation will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

This objective could be accomplished in several ways:

- Permanent combined Sunday school class (not recommended unless there is significant growth and can be offered as an alternative to adult Sunday school and youth Sunday school programs);
- Periodically combine Sunday school classes; and
- Provide opportunities outside of Sunday school for multi-generational discipleship programs (Monthly? Semi-annually? Annually?).

The existing mentorship program in use for confirmation may be a model for an expanded program.

We must also determine what age groups are appropriate to combine (i.e., Adult/Children, Adult/Jr. High, Adult/HS). This may vary depending on the particular topic or format of the program.

## **Objective 17. Add Adult Sunday School Classes**

### **Justification:**

A variety of adult classes would provide additional discipleship opportunities and may increase Sunday school attendance by offering an alternative when a particular class does not appeal to everyone.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Christian Formation will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Preliminary Steps:**

A major obstacle to this objective is the limited space available in the church for additional classes on Sunday mornings.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

*Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3*

Hillcrest Covenant Church has an effective adult Sunday school program, so this objective is not geared toward developing an adult Sunday school program, but rather toward expanding the program we have. We must determine whether to always have more than one adult Sunday school class or only when a particular class may have limited appeal or application (i.e., parenting, marriage, etc.).

As the church grows and adult Sunday school attendance grows, we may need to add additional classes. We may also explore non-traditional ideas such as scheduling additional Sunday school classes off-site or at a different time than the current schedule.

## **Objective 18. Church Facilities Are Welcoming to Individuals with Physical Disabilities**

### **Justification:**

An inviting church facility permits us to receive everyone into our church. It takes away the concerns of accommodation, giving the people an opportunity for unhindered worship and fellowship with others, as it demonstrates our love for others.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Trustees will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

We must first identify what features of our building and property present an obstacle to those with a disability. Consultation with a local agency that provides outreach and assistance to individuals with disabilities may provide some insight which we would not have on our own. In addition to accessibility issues, such as automatic door-openers and curb ramps, we must consider issues that limit participation. For example, dedicated wheelchair space in the sanctuary would make it easier for people to attend worship without worrying that they may be in others' way.

## **Objective 19. Develop Long-Term Facilities Growth Plan**

### **Justification:**

The facilities growth plan will help Hillcrest Covenant Church to strategically accomplish the mission we have set for ourselves by allowing us to reach out to our world and community with the proper-sized building and amenities to do the work God has planned for our congregation. This plan will help guide our church to effectively support the different ministries of our church now and in the future. This is a long-term plan and we will not begin to see tangible results in the near future. However, we cannot use this as an excuse not to serve God or our community, but must look for creative ways to worship, serve, and fellowship in the space that we have.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Board of Trustees will have primary responsibility for this objective in coordination with the Executive Committee.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

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Review existing or prior facilities growth plans to determine what is still feasible and what may need to be modified. Identify the space wants and needs of our various ministries and determine what can be accomplished without adding additional space. Consider requesting a budget line item to retain an architect to help achieve this objective. Determine whether any future additions can be completed incrementally or whether it makes more sense to undertake one larger project. The entire property must be considered, including future parking needs, and setback or green-space requirements that would limit where we can add on to the building.

## **Objective 20. Develop Procedure to Regularly Review and Evaluate the Strategic Plan**

### **Justification:**

The congregation has adopted this plan as its course for the future, and this plan is intended to guide the congregation for a long time. To ensure that this plan remains current and the congregation remains committed to the plan, we must periodically evaluate our progress toward the objectives we have set and whether those objectives are still realistic or desirable.

### **Primary Responsibility:**

The Long Range Planning Committee in conjunction with the Executive Committee will have primary responsibility for this objective.

### **Considerations and Potential Courses of Action:**

A smaller version of the Long Range Planning Committee should be established to monitor our progress and the plan's feasibility and suitability. Once the plan is approved, the committee can be reduced to six members. Initially, two will serve for one year, two for two years, and two for three years. This will ensure that there are always people on the committee who are familiar with the plan.

Boards and committees who are responsible for the various objectives should provide written reports prior to the semi-annual church meetings. These reports should indicate which objectives the Board is responsible for, what steps have been taken to reach each objective since the previous report, and what steps are planned for the next six months.