

The Emerging Identity of Lynnwood Reformed Church Guilderland, New York

Lynnwood Reformed Church is a mid-sized congregation of the Reformed Church in America, located in a vibrant suburban community in New York State's Capital Region. With God's guidance, we seek the next pastor to lead us forward in our service to God's Kingdom.

Where We Have Come From

Lynnwood Reformed Church was founded in 1954 in the then rural community of Guilderland, New York, part of the great American post-war suburban migration. Begun by the joint efforts of two established Reformed churches within the Classis of Schenectady, one of the oldest classes in the denomination, Lynnwood is a young tree with very deep roots.

Beginning in a borrowed barn, Lynnwood grew along with the community, first building a modest sanctuary, then adding classrooms, a beautiful new sanctuary in the 1960s, and a spacious Fellowship Center in the '90s. Centrally located and active in the community, Lynnwood quickly became an important Guilderland presence.

Amidst many changes in the nation and world during its history, Lynnwood has been marked by significant periods of stability. It has been shepherded by just three installed ministers, the second of whom was Will deForest who enjoyed a pastorate of more than 30 years.

The ministry of the Rev. Stan Craig followed that of the Rev. deForest, and lasted slightly more than four years. His departure in late 2006 ushered in a time of thoughtful self-study by the Lynnwood congregation. This Church Profile reflects the current results of that self-study with respect to the search for a new pastor.

Who We Are Today

Since its founding, Lynnwood Reformed Church has been closely intertwined with the surrounding community of Guilderland, New York. Guilderland is a residential, middle-class community on the outskirts of the cities of Albany, New York's capital, and Schenectady. Originally a rural area, Guilderland is now solidly suburban, with significant rural areas, and continues to grow today. The residents are mostly college-educated professionals and executives working in state government, private industry, and the many colleges and universities in the area. The area schools are of a high quality, with excellent academics, arts, and extracurricular activities.

The Lynnwood congregation largely reflects its surrounding community. About 2/3 of its adult membership is college-educated, with half of them having graduate degrees. The population of Lynnwood skews older than Guilderland as a whole, which is typical of comparable churches in the area. Lynnwood's congregants are heavily engaged in their communities as members of service groups, community organizations, fraternal organizations and clubs, athletic and outdoor clubs, historical societies, hobby and arts groups, associations supporting education, and veterans' organizations.

Lynnwood is an active congregation. We have adult education, women's and men's fellowship groups, and service groups. In addition to services of worship on Sundays and special holy days, we have numerous fellowship and mission opportunities during the year, such as our harvest bazaar, rummage sale, talent show, and silent auction. Our Sunday School meets after church and has classes covering the full K-12 spectrum. We currently have one youth group for grades 7-12.

Worship is, of course, at the heart of our life at Lynnwood. Our service follows a traditional order, but incorporates contemporary elements, as well, and we have active lay participation. We have a full choir and an organist, augmented once a month by a youth-oriented praise band. Communion is normally held once a month, and we have an ongoing service bringing communion to the homebound.

Lynnwood's property is one of its noteworthy assets. Church grounds incorporate over thirteen acres of both open fields and woods threaded with nature trails. Parking is ample and can easily be expanded. A master plan exists to help guide exterior improvements. The sanctuary is contemporary in style. There is a Fellowship Center off the sanctuary, and the original sanctuary and fellowship hall have been converted to classrooms. The building is used by both church and community groups throughout the week.

If there is one word that describes the Lynnwood community it would have to be friendliness. This is a congregation where it often seems as if everyone knows everyone, and yet there is always a welcome to newcomers. Many members express a great fondness for this aspect of Lynnwood and a desire to see it strengthened.

Who We Are Becoming

If there is one overarching theme for the future of Lynnwood it would be growth: growth in membership, growth in our service to the community, and growth in our unity with one another.

By far, the most repeated call among members is for spiritual growth resulting in increased numbers and diversity of membership. There is an almost unanimous agreement that Lynnwood needs more families, more young people and more members in general. Many congregants have suggested that we need to strengthen from within in order to become more attractive to potential members. There is optimism that this has already begun, with a realization that more needs to happen.

Many members have also expressed a wish for our service to the community to grow, both as individuals and as a congregation. Though Lynnwood is already active in the community, more can be done.

Many members look for the church to build on recent progress made with our interim pastors to grow together under new pastoral leadership.

Lynnwood has taken initiatives to promote better communication and openness in the operation of the church. This is being achieved through town hall meetings, clear mission and vision statements, and a recent study of the long term vision of LRC.

Many congregants want to see our ministry to the young grow stronger, particularly in providing attractive opportunities for youth involvement. Some suggest that the music needs to relate more to young people and that strong youth fellowship offerings are ways to better engage young people. Several members have stressed the importance of getting youth involved and keeping them involved with relevant programs.

There is widespread recognition among members of the necessity for providing pastoral visitation and calling on those in need. As a church with a large and growing elderly population, the importance of pastoral calling and keeping in touch with church members who are challenged by various limitations may be expected to grow in the years ahead.

What We Are Seeking In Our Next Pastor

Though it is impossible at this point to create a detailed portrait of our next pastor, during the course of surveying the congregation the following has emerged.

We seek an inspirational worship leader who can make the sacramental and Biblical life of the church increasingly meaningful to the whole congregation. Preaching is very important to us; many members desire preaching that is biblically based and relevant to our lives today. We are not looking for a solo act, however; we want a minister comfortable with involving the congregation, corporately and individually, in the worship service. For example, many members specifically desire to see greater use of our young people in worship.

In addition to being a worship leader, our next pastor must have recognizable relationship skills. Members have indicated a hope that he or she will be “personable,” “a people-person,” and “have a good sense of humor.” We are not looking for a best buddy, but someone with whom we can have a genuine pastoral relationship, who will be part of our lives on more than just Sunday morning. Our next pastor must be comfortable with visitation work, both in homes and care facilities, and be available for pastoral counseling.

We also look to our next pastor to help us deepen our faith through education and introspection. He or she must be a resource for our Sunday School and comfortable leading us in classes, Bible studies, and opportunities for spiritual growth.

Our next pastor will need good administrative and organizational skills. He or she must be able to work with the existing leadership of the church, but also be adept at cultivating new leaders in the congregation. The next pastor is expected to engage in ministry with all our members and help us to unify around a common vision of ourselves as a community of Christ.

There is a great deal of openness to innovation in the congregation. Lynnwood regards its long, stable history as a strong foundation on which to build our future. However, it is a congregation that wishes to be guided to the new, not driven to it. A pastor who approaches innovation as a process, who will explain new ideas and different approaches, gather support for them, and allow congregational feedback to continue to shape changes, will find an energizing home in Lynnwood.

Our pastor will need to be comfortable leading the congregation as it engages in the community around us. This will mean not only finding new ways for Lynnwood to serve God's Kingdom beyond our walls, but finding his or her *own* place in the wider community, as well. We would expect our next pastor to be well-educated and show an active interest in continuing his or her education. We believe that no child of God is a finished project, and therefore, we would look forward to helping our next pastor grow as a person even as he or she does the same for us.

Conclusion

Believing that God will be calling the person to be our next pastor, we prayerfully share this Church Profile as a signpost along the path leading that Minister of Word and Sacrament into our midst.