

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

CHURCH PROFILE

For reader convenience, the following is the text information provided in our *LCMC Open Positions* posting. Photos are inserted to help visualize our facility.

HISTORY

Chartered in 1968, our first building was dedicated in 1970. The current expansion was dedicated in 1999. We joined LCMC in 2006. Membership has ranged from 120± to 20±, currently 35±. Pastors since 1999: Mike Fish, Michael Bonham, Nedra Merriman, Perry Toso, Carl Gebhardt (interim), Brandon Scroggins, Lanier Nail (current interim).

FACILITY

Located at an arterial intersection in an established middle-class neighborhood and insured for \$1.4M, the 10,500 sf. structure can seat 160 in the 3,000 sf. sanctuary with connectable cushioned chair seating (currently arranged for 112). It has an 1800 sf. octagonal fellowship hall, a kitchen, 2 offices, 4 classrooms, 4 restrooms, nursery and cry room, choir room (all handicapped accessible), and a 1500 sf. second floor multi-purpose room. There is striped paved parking for 88 vehicles. There is no parsonage.

*Sanctuary Front
facing the Cloyd
Boulevard – Darby
Drive intersection.*



*Church from parking lot. Entry
Portico is at center. Right
dormer is in the upstairs multi-
purpose room. The three
dormers to the left side are in the
Sanctuary.*

FINANCIAL

<u>Year</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual Income</u>	<u>Actual Expenses</u>
2019	\$ 97,000	\$106,397	\$111,534*
		* Includes \$6,300 unbudgeted audio-visual items bought from our departing tenant.	
2020	\$100,000	\$132,237	\$105,050
2021	\$114,000	\$115,267	\$108,750
2022	\$117,000	In 2021 we donated over \$7,000 “outside of budget” cash and over \$3,000 in “Gifts in Kind” to several local charities.	

Good Shepherd has a history of share-leasing to theologically like-minded, start-up congregations of other denominations. Of four previous tenants, three went on to their own facilities. We currently lease to three smaller congregations.



Portico Entry



Octagonal Fellowship Hall: Double doors lead to Sanctuary, Serving Counter opens to Kitchen

The octagonal Fellowship Hall, above, was the Sanctuary before the 1999 addition.

The Wall in the center photo, above, and closeup, right, is opposite the Narthex entry (from which the three photos were taken) and serves as a focal point with the addition of a TV monitor.



We’ve never had a pledge drive in over two decades. Some attendees are good donors, but for personal reasons they refuse to become official members or to make pledges. What we have done is determine necessary cash-out expenses and develop a budget that will generate that amount of income, and so far, we’ve been successful.

ORGANIZATION

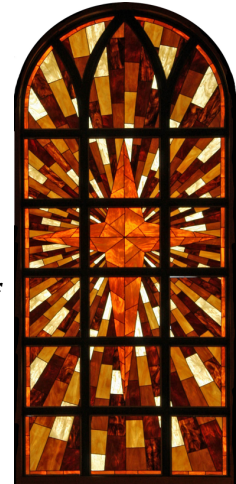
Nine-member Council: Treasurer is elected by the Congregation at its Annual Meeting; all other officers are elected by the Council. Pastor is an *ex-officio* non-voting Council member and is welcome to attend all committee meetings.

WORSHIP

Traditional Lutheran liturgy, hymns, weekly communion. Live-streamed service. We worshipped every Sunday in our parking lot, during the Coronavirus shutdown.



Sanctuary interior.



Close-up of stained-glass window.

COMMUNITY

The east-west Tennessee River separates Florence (41,000) north of it, from: Muscle Shoals (15,000), Sheffield (9,000), Tuscumbia (8,500), collectively known as “The Shoals.” The Greater Shoals Area population approaches 150,000. In topography and land use, this area is more akin to Tennessee than to the rest of Alabama. Because of numerous small hamlets outside city limits, county population within 20 minutes’ drive of Good Shepherd exceeds 70,000.

Florence has the *University of North Alabama* (~7,500 students). *Northwest Shoals Community College* (~3,500 students) is in Muscle Shoals. There are outstanding private K-12 schools in the Florence area. Florence public schools are rated the highest in Alabama, as are several in surrounding communities.

Medical facilities are excellent, the largest being the *North Alabama Medical Center* (Florence) and *Helen Keller Hospital* (Sheffield). Medical facilities in Birmingham and Nashville are world class.

There are ~80 churches in Florence, of numerous denominations, mostly *Baptist* and *Church of Christ*, some non-denominational. Most major denominations have at least one church in Florence. The two other Shoals

Lutheran churches are both LCMS. Two other Alabama LCMC churches are in the Birmingham area, and near the Gulf.

The metro area is mostly conservative, mixed political views. Per 2019 census estimates, Florence is 78% Caucasian, 19% African-American.

The Shoals Cost of Living Index at 88.1 is among the lowest of all U.S. MSAs and in Alabama. Shoals Area community total sales taxes range from 7.5% to 9.5%. County taxes are 6.0%. All defined benefit retirement plans (Social Security and pensions) are exempt from state income tax.

The area is known for its golfing opportunities, excellent lake and river fishing, and hunting. The Gulf is a 5-hour drive south, mostly on interstate and divided highways. Per the Shoals Economic Development Authority, Distances and driving times: Huntsville: 63 miles, 1 hour. Birmingham: 117 miles, 2 hours. Nashville: 120 miles, 2 hours. Memphis: 150 miles, 2 1/2 hours. Atlanta: 250 miles, 4 hours.

OTHER

Pastor Brandon Scroggins returned to Arizona due to family considerations. After ten years without a full-time pastor, he healed our congregation and refocused us from a survival mode to a healthy outreach and service approach.

During the process he grew as a preacher and progressed in his MDiv. studies. Despite our grieving at losing him, we fully support his decision, and we trust the Holy Spirit will send us a new pastor, to organize and lead this congregation in serving the LORD as instruments of His will.

We remain focused on service to the community, instead of reverting to survival mode. Last year our cash outlays for benevolence outside our Annual Budget exceeded seven percent (7%). When three percent (3%) “Gifts in Kind” (direct gifts of items) are considered, we were over ten percent (10%).

Our part-time Interim Pastor, Rev. Lanier Nail preaches two Sundays a month and handles pastoral duties for our congregation. This permits us to consider calling a full-time pastor who may not be immediately available.

DESIRED PASTOR PROFILE

A theologically conservative pastor comfortable with “Law and Gospel,” having a high energy level, organizational ability, and internet/electronics savvy will be looked on favorably. We aren’t looking for the perfect Pastor. Instead, we’re praying that the Holy Spirit will send us the Pastor he decides is perfect to lead us in the direction the Lord has in mind for *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, and that we recognize each other.*

THOUGHTS FOR A PASTOR LOOKING INTO GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

These are merely **personal thoughts** as a Lutheran convert going back over 70 years and based on active leadership positions in five congregations of more than a dozen attended over the years, plus having worked closely with several pastors.

The goal for writing this is to provide total disclosure, so Good Shepherd won't be accused of enticing someone to come here under false Good Shepherd colors.

The right pastor for *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church* will be part of God's plan to grow this flock. We can't expect a pastor to grow us without a strenuous effort on our part. Meanwhile, we are growing. Slowly, but growing. We will continue to give generously of our time, energy, and funds to help our pastor lead us.

GOOD SHEPHERD WEAKNESSES

Size. Given our small size, there is little to attract younger families with children. There aren't enough members for many traditional church activities: Not enough children, yet, for Sunday School, nor a choir director. We do have a few members who have given period small group performances. Though few in size — at least we're growing.

Ageing. Age may be just a number. However, it reduces one's energy level. We're an old congregation, most in our late 60s, 70s, even 80s. The majority of us were Lutherans when we moved here. Four council members are in or approaching their 80s. Two are under 70. We're in fairly good health. We look forward to changing that age mix for the better. Fortunately, we've attracted a few younger families.

Community Culture. This IS the "Bible Belt." Most churches here are evangelical. Lutherans are few; most of us are transplants. Alabamians are friendly, helpful, and warm. The reputed "Southern hospitality" IS for real.

GOOD SHEPHERD STRENGTHS

Community. The *University of North Alabama* (UNA) (~7,500 students) with numerous majors is in Florence and hosts the *Shoals Symphony*. The *Northwest Shoals Community College* (~3,500 students) is located across the river. The *Alabama Music Hall of Fame* is in Tusculumbia. There is an active recording studio in Muscle Shoals.

The Shoals area has experienced five years of sustained growth. There are numerous sites on both sides of the river where subdivisions and commercial retail and office projects are in the process of planning, being built, or leasing.

Facility. Our primary asset is a 10,500 sf, \$1.4M building that is attractive, efficient, and handicapped accessible. Add a *Baldwin* grand piano with superb

sound, and a great audio-visual system. It's in a good location at the intersection of arterial street *Darby Drive* and collector street *Cloyd Boulevard*.

The large stained-glass window with contemporary crucifix motif is a landmark. Folks who don't recall hearing of Good Shepherd, immediately know at least where we are, when they hear, "The church on *Darby Drive* with the big stained-glass window."

Hospitality. We are hospitable in welcoming visitors, without pouncing on them. Newcomers tell us they feel a genuinely warm welcome, something they don't experience in many other churches. That has helped us grow slowly.

Attitude. What we lack in numbers, we seem to compensate with a caring attitude for each other, that newcomers tell us is unique and genuine. This congregation is NOT resistant to new worship ideas or change.

Perseverance. Between Perry Toso and Brandon Scroggins, we went a decade without a called pastor, five years without an interim. Our arrangement with retired *Disciples of Christ* Pastor Carl Gebhardt was preach two Sundays a month and take care of individuals' counseling and spiritual needs. No other participation in worship nor evangelizing. Our lay worship leader handles Holy Communion, and Laity members including him preach the other Sundays.

Our arrangement with *Anglican* Pastor Lanier Nail is similar, except that he is invited to visit our Council meetings.

We are retaining our outreach and service mode Pr. Scroggins helped us with. Meanwhile, we have upgraded our A/V system, and our services are live-streamed with previous ones available on our website.

Ecumenical History. We have hosted new congregations in our facility for more than a decade. It helps financially, but we also feel strongly that our facility is too valuable to be used only the few hours a week that Good Shepherd now requires.

The Holy Spirit's plan for us seems to be: serve as an incubator for new churches. In 2006, we welcomed start-up *Grace Bible Church*. Within two years, they were able to build their own facility in north Florence. In 2010, we rented to *Church of the Shoals*. Unfortunately, that church folded early 2015.

In mid-2015, we entered into a 3-year share-lease with *Ransomed Community Church*, affiliated with the *Acts 29 Church Planting Network*. We enjoyed a delightful working relationship with this young and vibrant congregation. In 2019, they moved into an edge of town facility of a Baptist congregation that was withering.

Later, we share-leased to *St. David's Anglican Church*, a small group who left for a store-front location when their sponsor's subsidy ended. They've returned here, on an interim status, as *Shoals Anglican Mission*, while deciding their future. We pray the Holy Spirit assists them in their decision.

Two other small congregations are a *New Life in Christ Fellowship*, in their third year here, and a slightly larger and growing African-American congregation, *The Worship Church*, in their second year here. It began in a store-front facility a few years back.

CURRENT GOOD SHEPHERD SITUATION

We're about 35± congregants now, growing slowly. The faithful core is sincere, dedicated and hard working. Some drive 25 miles one-way to attend.

Council is evaluating various approaches for worship during the interim until a new pastor is hired.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We're eager to have our new pastor involved in shaping a new detailed vision.

DETAILS THE PROSPECTIVE PASTOR NEEDS TO KNOW

Church Staff. In addition to our salaried pastor and numerous volunteers, we have three part-time paid staff: church secretary, pianist, audio-visual/cleaning person — all classified as “contractors” versus “employees” for tax purposes. Everyone on staff invests an inordinate amount of time, supported by dedicated volunteers who also give generously of their time and funds.

Church Leadership. The congregation delegates leadership to the council, on which good people are working in Christian harmony and good faith. Given our size, the council reflects congregational attitudes, if only because a high percentage of our members are on it. Council has historical memory, community knowledge and local contacts to draw on. There is a cadre of conscientious hard-working individuals able and willing to assist.

We consider a pastor to be sort of an ecclesiastical CEO, with the council a board of directors whose historical memory, community knowledge and contacts are there to be drawn on. Active congregation members (including council members) wear two hats: worker-bee and shareholder.

A pastor's suggestions will carry great weight, though our congregation has final say. Council and staff execute congregation decisions and run things. This lets the pastor concentrate on being (no pun intended) a “Good Shepherd.”

For years, the congregation has approved all council actions, budgets, etc. From past unfortunate experience, we are hyper-sensitive to pastoral control. A pastor with ideas, suggestions, and tact will be listened to and probably followed. However, a dictatorial, controlling pastor would not work out.

Our by-laws prelude a council succession of chairs. Members are elected for staggered three-year terms, with a two-term limit. A member may serve no more than two terms in any position — except the Treasurer, who is elected annually by the congregation.

Given our small size, term and service limits are waived for the foreseeable future. Council elects its other officers annually from among its members. That may sound weird, but council members know who among them is best qualified for a given position. It works well! Present council has eight members.

Congregational Politics. We don't have warring factions, as unhappy folks left long ago. We're so small, no one bothers to be political on church matters. Most of the congregation is politically conservative.

Many congregation members constitute a close-knit core that hosts numerous social events open to all. Everyone is truly welcome, including non-members from other churches. There are no hard feelings against folks disinterested in social activities.

When we grow, we may need those core members to start different shepherding groups to have manageable sizes for social activities.

Name Change? Under Pr. Mike Fish, the congregation changed its name to *Church of the Good Shepherd* and grew to 120±. After he left, we had a succession of pastors. Along the way, there was a movement to retain our Lutheran Roots, in our name. We reverted to *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church*. There are two problems with that approach: 1) numerous southern folks are not versed in church history and think Lutherans are a "cult," and 2) not aware of what LCMC stands for, they confuse us with the ELCA and same-sex attitude toward leadership, they want no part of.

At this point, the die-hards are gone; we may be willing to return to *Church of the Good Shepherd*.

Uniqueness of the Tennessee Valley. The Tennessee river bisects the two northern tiers of counties. The "Valley," particularly Florence in the northwest Lauderdale County, differs greatly from the rest of Alabama. Our ambiance reminds one of an outer Nashville suburb, largely due to the presence of UNA. There's a small-town feel, with larger cities easily accessible. Topography is gently rolling, forested with an abundance of hardwoods and conifers, and interspersed with farm fields on most level terrain. For the outdoors set, there are opportunities for golfing, hiking, fishing, and hunting. Sadly, the area isn't cyclist-friendly, except for a few streets close to UNA.

This is the best kept retirement secret ever: low property taxes, low cost of living, benign climate, convenient shopping, entertainment venues, good schools, a great university, excellent medical facilities, and effective police and sheriff departments.

Market Opportunities. The Greater Shoals Area has 150,000± persons, over half living south of the Tennessee River. There are three Lutheran churches: Good Shepherd and two LCMS, one on either side of the river. With only three Lutheran churches in this population, the possibilities are obvious.

Approximately three-fourths of the 80 or so Florence churches are evangelical: *Church of Christ*, several *Baptist* sects, etc. There are a few liturgical churches, including us.

There are professional opportunities in Florence: UNA and some high-tech firms. Growth in aerospace-oriented Huntsville (now Alabama's largest city) 60 or so miles east, is putting commuter housing pressure on our area.

Most manufacturing is south of the river. With three convenient bridges, the river doesn't present as much of a crossing barrier as in many river towns.

Opportunities for Growth. This congregation was once 120±. It isn't unreasonable to assume that under a good leader, we can grow substantially over time. For our pastor to succeed, we have to offer something to attract individuals and make them want to keep coming. "Come worship with us ..." isn't as effective as, "Come, worship, participate in family activities, serve the community, bring the little ones ..."

We're thinking of introducing other worship styles, particularly instruments: guitars, violins, flutes (NO loud drums) and a few contemporary hymns — in a way that won't drive members off in the process.

Ideas under consideration: additional services, having one contemporary service a month, introducing a few short contemporary performances in our regular service now and then, etc. Whatever we do, pastor, council, and congregation must be united in that approach. Implementation will need to be incremental.

We're currently providing support to a different local charity each month — totally outside of our budget. This has resulted in community recognition, but our primary reason is to serve others, and we are tithing as a church.

Our leaders feel service to others is something many new individuals would want to join in. This appears to be more effective in growing this church than advertising or an evangelizing campaign, at least now.

It is worth mentioning that the Sanctuary has excellent acoustics, so it is often a venue for community musical events, such as the *Camerata* and UNA music major performances. It's also ideal for weddings or funerals, with the Fellowship Hall available for refreshments or potlucks afterward.

The Florence Mayor hosts a quarterly noon prayer lunch for pastors and worship leaders, at which time information on civic matters is presented, ideas for coordination between the city and the religious community are discussed, concerns are addressed, and there is a prayerful closing. We participate. Our pastor has also hosted monthly meetings of local pastors with social distancing in Fellowship Hall.

LITURGY AND EXPECTATIONS

Our Altar Guild places correct liturgical paraments on the altar, and prepares Communion trays with bread, wine, and grape juice.

During worship, we expect our pastor to look the part: alb with proper stole at least one service monthly and on significant church days; wearing the clerical collar with appropriate attire at other worship services and when representing Good Shepherd at functions; business casual at church, unless the situation suggests otherwise.

The first Sunday of the month, we recite the *Nicene Creed*, other Sundays the *Apostles Creed*. The *Athanasian Creed* is recited annually.

We've grown accustomed to the *New Living Translation* for the three-year cycle of readings, as it is easier for new Christians to understand. We will accept whatever translation our pastor selects — so long as it isn't Latin.

Given our small size, we view visitations, counseling, new-member orientation, teaching Catechism, and conducting Bible studies — as significant pastor responsibilities, in addition to preaching.

OTHER THOUGHTS

We'll give our pastor prayerful support, strenuous membership effort, and a salary increase commensurate with growth and giving.

Any salary offer represents a leap of faith — for both parties. Initial salary will be negotiated with the thought of increasing as we experience sufficient growth. Though this obviously cannot be guaranteed, through salary increases and perquisites, the increase in our pastor's effective income over two-years, exceeded 25%.

The new pastor needs self-confidence in being able to grow the congregation, obviously under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If he or she succeeds, salary will rise as well. No growth, no raise, but we aren't talking about a starvation salary. That situation is still far better than contending with fires of dissent, discord, or complacency found in some places.

If someone feels led by the Holy Spirit, this IS the place to be — particularly if that someone has confidence in his or her ability to grow Good Shepherd through pastoral leadership, preaching, visitation, and counseling.

Pray earnestly that you are being led by the Holy Spirit and that God grants you discernment to follow His plan for your career, regardless of where it leads.

Pray also for His plan for *Good Shepherd Lutheran Church* to work according to **HIS** will! If you're a part of it — better yet.

Yours in Christ,

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