



*SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH*

STRATEGIC PLAN, PRIORITIES, AND GOALS

OCTOBER 2014

OUR MISSION—The Collect of Saint John’s

“Gracious God, by your love you have called us to proclaim with joy the good news of your Son. So build us up in the knowledge and love of Him that we may welcome all people into this community of faith and show forth our service to you in our service to others.”

OUR VISION

At Saint John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, we pride ourselves on being more than simply a church building or even a worshipping congregation. We will be a thriving and nurturing community that cares about its members and serves Christ in the world. In the years ahead, we will build on our strong foundation. We will offer vibrant and meaningful worship, music, programs, and faith formation opportunities. We will cultivate innovative partnerships in the city around us, responding to our evolving community’s needs. We will serve as an inclusive cultural center in our neighborhood, nurturing and welcoming both longtime members and visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and experiences.

INTRODUCTION

To better understand where God is leading us as a faith community and respond with a plan for how to get there, Saint John’s Episcopal Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota entered a two phase twenty month-long strategic planning process in January 2013. Supported by prayer and surrounded by a spirit of discernment, a Strategic Planning team, and later the parish vestry with a consultant, utilizing monthly meetings, and incorporating many voices from our congregation and wider community, developed a framework and, ultimately, a vision for our future.

Strategic Framework – Over the course of 2013, the Strategic Planning team conducted an internal and external assessment - gathering information about the Saint John’s community, programs, and surrounding environment. The group identified both strengths and opportunities for growth. After reviewing the data, the team discerned key priorities and developed recommendations in six distinct areas: faith formation, liturgy and music, programming, member integration, building and infrastructure, and financial sustainability. The entire congregation was updated on the process – and often participated in it – through Evangelist summary updates, stakeholder interviews, Sunday conversations, surveys and discussion groups.

Strategic Plan – At the Annual Meeting in January 2014, the congregation was presented with the framework, and the vestry was tasked with bringing it through a second phase to a final plan for the years ahead. Using the framework, they, along with the help of a consultant, walked the parish through a process of further data gathering, distilling the findings down into specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound goals. This process included a number of “all-parish” meetings with robust attendance as well as a few smaller vestry/stakeholder meetings to further refine the feedback.

With so many opportunities for our members to provide ideas, reflection and feedback, the strategic planning process – the conversations about our community’s direction and future – was as valuable as the final results.

The following findings, recommendations, and specific work plans will shape and support our community as we respond to God’s call and move together with the Holy Spirit into the future.

RESULTS

The strategic planning commission identified the following six priority areas, each with its own distinct vision, current context and goals. Each goal is linked to the Saint John’s mission statement. The Vestry identified specific tasks emerging from the community-wide process and the Vestry working sessions to enable us to accomplish our goals.

I. FAITH FORMATION: *“Build us up in the knowledge and love of Him....”*

Vision

Faith formation involves nourishing our spiritual development so that we are prepared to live out the Saint John’s mission and identify strongly as committed Christians. Everything, from our worship and Faith in Action service work, to our community life and welcome ministries, should contribute to this effort. Saint John’s will support Christian formation for members of all ages through new and existing programs and through external partnerships. Our programs will include existing and new formation and instruction, and will seek to infuse all of our gatherings with intentional spiritual practice. We will emphasize building healthy and strong relationships among members and the leaders who serve them and invite all to walk together with us, learning and growing in our journey of faith and discovery.

Priorities

Provide access to education related to our worship and theology, e.g., online, in-person, etc. (Mark McInroy, Patrick Schmidt, Jered Weber-Johnson)

- ◆ Offer Sunday morning forums in two eight weeks series twice annually covering ‘the basics’ of Anglicanism, Christianity, Bible, and Discipleship.
- ◆ Promote and encourage participation in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota (ECMN) School for Formation classes, and at least three other regional diocesan and regional formation opportunities like the East Metro Mission Area (EMMA) Lenten program
- ◆ Create additional opportunities for Bible study including a weekly Sunday morning “café”, at least two new discipleship groups, and access to online scripture resources.

Engage, educate, and foster a greater sense of community across generations and families. (Jean Hansen, Cammie Beattie)

- ◆ Create a minimum of three new opportunities for parent/family formation that provide practical, theologically grounded resources, e.g., online materials, Sunday morning classes, support groups etc.
- ◆ Offer four intergeneration gatherings seasonally that are project-based, e.g., advent wreaths, small service projects, oral history, etc.

Identify and encourage the spiritual gifts of individual members for the purpose of personal, church, and community development. (Kate Bradtmiller, Sarah Dull)

- ◆ Develop and offer an annual course and assessment tool for the identification of spiritual gifts.
- ◆ Create a mechanism (e.g., pledge card, survey, etc.) for parishioners to pledge and offer talents/skills for the benefit of the parish.
- ◆ Develop and provide once monthly opportunities for parish leadership to offer thanks to those who offer their talents and skills.

II. WORSHIP: *“Proclaim with joy the good news of your Son....”*

Vision

We aim to engage a diverse community of faith and enrich each member’s spiritual development through our worship. Our liturgical practice, highlighted by excellence in preaching, will draw from both traditional and contemporary Anglican practices. Our music program, with opportunities for participation from parishioners, will provide a broad repertoire and facilitate other special visual and performing arts events.

Priorities:

Establish a sustainable alternative weekly service. (Craig Lemming, Bob Baumann, and Lynn Hertz)

- ◆ Develop sustainable sources of income and identify at least three new volunteers to enable expansion of the service to a weekly offering.
- ◆ Explore the timing and expand the service to a weekly offering by 2015.
- ◆ Establish a communication and promotion plan to a diverse population, i.e., different groups, different parishioners, etc.

Improve architectural space for worship, e.g., lighting, acoustic, heat/cool. (George Power, John MacBain, and Jered Weber-Johnson)

- ◆ Conduct at least 10 site visits to other Episcopal and non-Episcopal worship venues of comparable size to St. John’s to benchmark their worship spaces.
- ◆ Survey the congregation regarding specific issues relating to the building, property, lighting, acoustics, etc. Moreover, explore the feasibility of making some pews movable to provide flexibility of use and the feasibility of developing a quiet room for parents with young children in the back of the church to be able to still view and hear worship.
- ◆ Source and vet at least three professional consultants in the area of lighting, audio, architecture, heating, and cooling.

Maintain our rich tradition of Anglican music, while integrating additional musical traditions, communities, and musicians into our worship. (Jayson Engquist, Marilyn Conklin, and Kevin Wall)

- ◆ Establish at least four days within the liturgical year that include different music traditions into our worship, e.g., jazz, newly commissioned works, music of different cultures, bluegrass, etc.
- ◆ Attract sacred music students and local music groups to use our space in exchange for performance within the context of worship, as space and calendar allow.
- ◆ Explore the feasibility of a choir exchange, i.e. invite choir from Holy Apostles or elsewhere to sing with St. John’s.

Increase access and explore alternatives within the context of worship. (Bob Linehan, Bill Plummer, and Jered Weber-Johnson)

- ◆ Benchmark the worship activities of at least 10 other churches, through site visits, interviews, and worship materials.
- ◆ Survey the congregation to ascertain what is needed in terms of accessing worship, e.g., inclusive language, handicap accessibility, digital streaming, timing and length of service, etc.
- ◆ Invite a greater diversity of parishioners to liturgical leadership roles to give visible expression in worship of the diverse population that constitutes St. John’s as a community, e.g. as lay preachers, readers, Eucharistic ministers, etc.
- ◆ Define consistent worship at St. John’s that reflects the diverse composition of our community and deepens community connection and expression of faith.

III. PROGRAMMING & PARTNERSHIPS: *"Our service to You in our service to others..."*

Vision

We will be a parish that seeks to understand the issues in our community. We will provide opportunities for meaningful involvement, from social activities to outreach beyond our walls. We will pursue partnerships with others in our community, using our shared assets to develop collaborative programming. This sustainable programming, along with thriving fellowship groups and volunteer opportunities – supported and led by staff and church members – will be available to parishioners. Service to community and pastoral care will be hallmarks, their comforting resources integrated into everything that we do.

Priorities

Expand pastoral care beyond clergy and create and train a lay pastoral care team. (Kate Bradtmiller and Mary Gilbertson)

- ◆ Offer an all-parish gifts assessment tool to identify gifts for training in pastoral care and other areas (See formation).
- ◆ Offer annual training and cultivate a team of eight to twelve for Lay Eucharistic Visitation ministry.
- ◆ Provide annual pastoral care training to create a mutually supportive lay pastoral care team.
- ◆ Develop by the end of the first quarter in 2015 a roster of practical/pastoral providers for sustainable meal, ride, and other ministries.

Expand current programming related to Healthcare, Hunger, and Housing/Homelessness, e.g., Hearts to Homes & Project Home, Fields to Families, and Kayoro, etc. (Margaret Thor, Colleen Swope, and Holly Weinkauff)

- ◆ Utilize the parish-wide Gifts Assessment to recruit volunteers with gifts for, and a calling to serve in, housing/homeless, food access, and Kayoro ministries.
- ◆ Develop and implement an annual program/ministry assessment, i.e., Is the program meeting the metric set for it or does it need to be reformed, dropped, or better supported?
- ◆ Explore existing and new means of promoting these ministries with the aim of identifying and thanking existing leaders and recruiting new volunteers, e.g. creating Sunday services dedicated to housing/homelessness, food access, Kayoro, parish publications, volunteer commissioning, etc.
- ◆ Cultivate a parish culture of advocacy by offering community organizing and advocacy training, annually.

Clarify existing partnerships and continue to develop connections with local organizations, e.g., collaboration with other churches (Becky Garthofner & Jerry Woelfel)

- ◆ Define our commitment to the East Metro Mission Area (EMMA) and the Episcopal Church in Minnesota (ECMN) – hosting, participating, resourcing, communicating, etc.
- ◆ Formalize and better define our relationship, next steps, and goals with Holy Apostles through joint parish meetings and worship.
- ◆ Annually assess and determine if our existing partnerships are meeting the goals and fulfilling the mission set for them. (See program/ministry assessment above)

IV. MEMBER INTEGRATION: *“Welcome all people into this community of faith...”*

Vision

We will thrive as “the church of the open door,” and we will be known across the community for our inviting spirit. We will welcome visitors, Project Home guests, concert attendees, neighborhood partners, and diocesan event participants. We will nurture a growing congregation and invite visitors to consider making Saint John’s their spiritual home; and we will also welcome every person who enters our building, whether he or she is a longtime parishioner or a first-time visitor. We will cherish a community that is diverse in all ways.

Priorities

Increase commitment to and participation in the life of our faith community by providing members with opportunities to connect and serve. (Lea Anne Schmidt, Kate Bradtmiller, Judy Southwick, Dean and Marie Henderson)

- ◆ Establish a clear process for and expectations of membership at St. John’s (time, treasure, talent, confirmation, reception, transfer, baptisms, etc.).
- ◆ Create a method(s) to invite and connect parishioners to opportunities within the parish for prayer, worship, service, and fellowship. Methods might include: website, rotating ministry fair at coffee hour, ministry commissioning during worship, etc.
- ◆ Cultivate through formation and spiritual life curricula, and the establishment of an annual servant leader award, the understanding that to be a Christian is to strive to be a servant leader.

Establish and strengthen St. John’s ‘Identity’ (Sarah Dull and Suzanne McInroy)

- ◆ Facilitate discussions with at least four PR firms, consultants, and/or parishioners to establish initiatives, and explore what makes St. John’s unique, i.e., establish and communicate a clear identity.
- ◆ Visit approximately 10 houses of worship of comparable size to St. John’s and benchmark their websites to explore their identity and the things they do to illuminate their identity.
- ◆ Identify a variety of new ways to improve and communicate our existing identity, e.g., paper, YouTube, etc.

Increase presence in the surrounding community. (Libby Snelson and Keith Davis)

- ◆ Create opportunities to have conversations with approximately 100 of our neighbors for the purpose of expanding our capacity to serve the community around us, e.g., block party, prayer canvassing, outdoor services.
- ◆ Evaluate existing, and create new, means of visibility in the community, e.g., bells, farmer’s market, signs, little free library, etc.
- ◆ Deepen relationships with community partners, e.g., Crocus Hill preschool, YWCA, Ramsey Hill Neighborhood Association, etc. (See programming and partnership.)

Cultivate a sense of welcome and hospitality in the church. (Phyllis Goff, Jerry Woelfel, and Kate Bradtmiller)

- ◆ Establish an umbrella commission that includes existing greeters, ushers, new member incorporation, special events, and fellowship, as well as potential new welcome/hospitality ministries. e.g., host family program, meal train, ride ministry,
- ◆ Enhance the new visitor/parishioner experience by evaluating and improving signage, website, bulletin boards, brochure racks, print materials with an eye towards visits and new members.
- ◆ Establish a ‘Move Over’ initiative to educate members to sit in the center of pews in order to make it easier for visitors to sit on the end, i.e., it is sometimes difficult for new people to find an ‘easy’ place to sit.

V. BUILDING AND INFRASTRUCTURE: *(Our tools for mission/vision fulfillment)*

Vision

Our beautiful building in the heart of a vibrant neighborhood is an historic landmark and one of Saint John's many treasures; it is a resource to be well-maintained and used faithfully for ministry. Our vision is to maintain and regularly update a building that serves our mission and community, a space that draws hearts and minds toward God.

Findings

For being more than 110 years old, our building is in great shape. However, there are many potential projects not currently prioritized and no long-term plan for capital funding. Building projects are funded currently from the operating budget and some designated funds. Despite our physical plant providing capacity (a valuable asset as new partnerships are considered), funds for ongoing maintenance are inadequate. Our current annual budget, funded largely by our pledge drive and endowment revenue, does not support developing extensive building renovations. There is ongoing tension between our community's wishes and the funds available in our annual budget.

In summary, neither the current budget nor the endowment provides for a way to fully fund both expected and unexpected maintenance. For example, when the 100-year-old roof needed to be replaced, we borrowed money. A better and more thoughtful approach could be to provide a sinking fund that could be built up for both anticipated and unanticipated capital needs.

Priorities (Gary Hagstrom, Vern Kassekert, Don Postema)

- ◆ Determine the best way to plan and fund our ongoing and future capital needs.
- ◆ Develop and implement strategies to make the most efficient and effective use of our physical space.
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive facility use policy and guidelines along with supporting documents, such as template contracts.

VI. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: *(Our tools for mission/vision fulfillment)*

Vision

Generosity, gratitude, hope and charity are at the core of Saint John's, and those values must translate to our community's financial practices too. We strive to make stewardship part of the fabric of our daily life together. This includes engaging our members to take ownership in our church's programs and its future by pledging toward our annual campaign and considering planned giving options. We will use our endowment judiciously and evaluate our plans for the future through an ongoing appraisal of our current resources and program impacts. Because we are a church whose members believe in our mission to serve, we envision that Saint John's will continue to thrive both programmatically and financially.

Findings

In its early days in the late 1800s, Saint John's was considered a wealthy parish in a newly rich community, thanks to the booming railroad business in town. By World War II though, the neighborhood was in decline, with many families moving to the suburbs and the business community's focus shifting westward. By the 1960-70s, the Church also started to experience declining revenues. We are extremely fortunate that the neighborhood has been revitalized, with the parish today composed increasingly of young professional families. The Saint John's parish is becoming younger as a congregation and has a growing community presence.

There may be an assumption that Saint John's is still a wealthy parish that does not need participation from all members. We are a congregation seeking to grow, yet our current budget is stretched to meet the needs of our existing congregation. Our financial model may not be sustainable in the future as the age and economic demographics of our membership change. We need broader and deeper participation in our stewardship and planned giving programs, as well as a standing committee focused on planned giving.

With a few exceptions, early members and their families did not provide for a parish endowment. The endowment grew gradually through modest bequests, and the earlier draws were larger than could be sustained and provided no real growth. In 2008, the Cornerstone Trust was created, providing a vehicle to contribute funds in. This change was followed by a major gift, then by two generous bequests from leading parishioners.

Today, income from the endowment provides for maintenance of the physical plant and some programming. As stated earlier however, neither the current budget nor the endowment provides for a way to fully fund both expected and unexpected building maintenance.

Similarly, current pledges and Sunday offerings from the congregation tend to support the majority of church programming, but not all. Finally, the annual endowment draw of slightly more than 5% may exceed what is prudent to preserve long-term the value of the endowment principal. It would be desirable to reduce the draw to 3.5%-4%, and have programming supported by pledges, offering, and other revenue sources. A preferred approach would also be to budget and make annual contributions to a sinking fund or reserve that could be built up to fund periodic anticipated major replacements and unanticipated capital needs.

Priorities (Rick Rinkoff, Jim Johnson, Tom Baxter)

- ◆ Create and deepen a culture and expectation of stewardship, and develop that value across all aspects of what we do, including new and existing member integration, programming and faith formation.
- ◆ Develop a financial plan that provides adequately for ongoing facility maintenance and replacement, funding from reserves for periodic capital replacement, and long term preservation of endowment principal.
- ◆ Increase the endowment and planned giving program.
- ◆ Determine strategic ways to use our physical plant's assets to generate additional revenue.

NEXT STEPS

Parish leadership with the support and actions of the Vestry and key stakeholders will implement the action plans, along with tactics and specific measurements for ensuring vision achievement and success. The overall alignment of the mission, the vision, the strategic framework, and resulting action plan implementation will create and nurture a dynamic, vibrant future for Saint John the Evangelist Episcopal Church. The Executive Committee of the Vestry will be responsible for general oversight and support for achievement of the strategic plan.