

Slide #1 Alive and Thriving

In the Gospel passage, we hear Jesus at prayer. In the parts of the prayer prior to this reading, Jesus is praying for himself as he faces the cross. Then Jesus prays for the disciples as Jesus knows that they too will face difficulties. Finally, he prays for the believers to come – that is, you and me. He prays for us because Jesus knows that we too, will face difficulties on account of our faith.

Now we aren't facing difficulties that may result in government sanctioned torture and death. Our difficulties can be generally attributed to the changes in our culture and an antipathy toward religion. We experience it in a decline in our membership and a dwindling of our resources.

Today, the parish leadership is seeking to be in dialogue with you about our future, about how we will position ourselves to participate in the continual unfolding of God's Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is in charge of whether grow – either in numbers or in faith – or whether we are a part of the vine that needs pruning. Our Vestry chooses life – to be a congregation that is Alive and Thriving.

Slide #2 Vestry Actions

In early March the Vestry went on an overnight retreat. We examined our core values as a parish community. The Vestry realized that our core values are reflected in our current mission statement and we affirmed its continued use. We then fashioned a Vision Statement. What would it look like in a perfect world, if we fully lived into our Mission Statement. That's a Vision Statement.

Before the Vestry feels comfortable in assigning priorities to any goals and objectives that moves us into fulfilling that Vision Statement, we want to be sure our Financial house is in order. For that reason, we have established a Financial Stability Task Force, consisting of our priest-in-charge, our co-treasurers Bruce Carpenter and Chuck Preston, and Ruth Barber.

At the retreat, we also listed what we thought we ought to focus on in the short term, in the midterm and in the long term.

The Financial Stability Task Force recommended that we seek your input and thoughts before we get too far along in setting our priorities and to affirm that you too choose to be a congregation that wants to be Alive and Thriving.

Slide #3 Mission Statement

Our Mission Statement is simple:

To live, to follow and to share God.

Slide #4 Vision Statement

Our Vision of what fully living into the Mission Statement looks like. It is:

“Get to know and deepen your relationship with Christ through our thriving, vibrant, worshipping community. The First time you visit you will feel at home and over time you will experience a spiritual pathway for all generations. We are also a caring community for our members, guests and neighbors.

Slide #5 Our Way Forward

The Vestry tasked the Financial Stability Task Force with recommending ways to achieve a balanced budget within 5 years. By a balanced budget we mean that the pledge income we receive, along with the interest income from our assets will pay for all our expenses. This means that we will no longer draw down the principle of our endowment assets.

Part of our challenge is an aging congregation, declining pledges, and shrinking assets.

Slide #6 Determine what we are willing to do

Today, I'm going to provide some basic facts about our life as parish both within the context of the greater Episcopal Church and within our own congregation. We then seek your thoughts over the course of the summer and fall so that we can create a strategic plan.

Slide #7 Our Context Nationally

In 2014, the national church published a report on Episcopal Church Growth and Decline. It examined the factors that lead to parish decline as well as parish growth. The full report of 32 pages is available in the parish office for anyone who wants to read it. You can also find it on the national church website.

A bulleted summary sheet is also available for your use. [Note: This summary sheet is included with this mailing.]

Slide #8 Our Context Nationally

The report notes several factors that are beyond any parish's ability to control. For example, growing churches are in cities and growing suburbs in the south and west. Churches that were growing in 2009 continued their growth trend through the date of the report.

Declining churches are rural and are located in the northeast. Churches that were declining in 2009 tended to continue their decline through the date of the report.

Slide #9 Churches that are growing have these characteristics

This slide shows some of the characteristics we CAN control that promote growth:

- A parish that is exciting and demonstrates innovation
- Parishioners that are actively involved in recruiting potential members
- A shared sense of mission among all members
- A strong sense of spiritual vitality and life and

A desire to purposefully adapt to the changes happening around them

Slide #10 Growing churches have these characteristics

Additionally, growing churches incorporated the following into their community life:

- No matter what type of music used, drums were part of the accompaniment
- The congregation stands during corporate prayer

- In addition to functioning as acolytes, children were also lay readers, eucharistic ministers, ushers, and greeters – an indispensable part of the worship leadership team.
- Coffee hour is a chaotic and vibrant time, newcomers are easily integrated into conversations – there is a palpable sense of excitement and vibrancy on the brink of being overwhelming.
- The parish website is regularly updated
- The parish uses regular electronic communications and uses web based transactions (electronic sign-up sheets, on-line banking, etc.)
- The parish intentionally has special events and activities
- There is an emphasis on Sunday School and lifelong Christian formation.

Slide #11 Declining churches have these characteristics

Declining churches have the characteristics shown on this slide. (Allow a few minutes for people to read through it.)

Our parish has attributes that appear on both lists. According to these lists, where do you see us using growth characteristics and where do you see us using declining church characteristics?

What on the growth list are you willing to try on an experimental basis? What on the declining list are you willing to do something about?

Slide #12 Defying the Odds

While the national church's FACT report suggests that it is our destiny to continue to decline our Vestry is determined that we are a parish that defies the odds. Melinda has heard a statistic that 80% of declining parishes will die.

Slide #13 Defying the Odds

Our Vestry wishes to position us to be the 20% that is alive and thriving.

Slide #14 Our Context/Our History

Here's a simple chart that provides a snapshot of our endowment assets over the last 20 years, in five year increments.

Slide #15 Our Context/Our History

The chart illustrates that we've used slightly half of the principle in our endowment assets over the last 20 years. We as a parish have heard that our money is going to run out over a 20-year span. Clearly that didn't happen. But part of the reason that didn't happen is the result of chance and good leadership. Not having to pay a full-time priest for at least 18 months was a big help. And the painful decision to share clergy with St. John Lutheran Church has staunchly stanching the bleeding. So far, this arrangement seems to be working well for all involved.

We also know that our pledge income does not support our operating costs – even with our endowment asset interest income. We currently need to use a small amount of principal to keep our doors open. You can see this information in our Annual Report (also available in the office.)

Slide #16 Moving ahead in Faith

Happily, our situation is not dire. Good stewardship of our financial resources means more than just maintaining our property. Using our financial resources to secure our family feeling, to demonstrate our compassion for those in our greater community and fostering a strong relationship with God and Jesus Christ should also be in the mix.

How do we best go about doing that? What would generate excitement for you? What would you support? What do you suggest as an audacious goal for this parish family to aim for?

Slide #17 Process

So how are we going to receive feedback and share information?

Well, this powerpoint sermon is a first step!

You will see Newsprint sheets in easily accessible places, around the church with blank post it notes. Take a post it note and give us your idea, your thought, your position and stick it back on the newsprint.

Talk to any member of the Vestry and share your feedback.

Read the eBlast (it is also printed each week for those who don't use the internet), the newsletter and the bulletin.

Slide #18 Process

Each member of the Vestry is going to host a small group of our active members beginning in the fall to talk about the ideas we have generated and to discover what we might be willing to try.

These small group meetings should be concluded by the end of October. The Vestry will consider what the results of the small group discussions are, and incorporate the results in their decisions about potential ways forward.

By the time we produce the Annual Report we should have the outlines of a game plan in place. The Annual Meeting itself can further discuss the outline and begin to flesh out details.

The Vestry is open to having more than one session of small group meetings, and we anticipate an occasional congregational gathering as well.

Slide #19 Process Feedback

As I said before, the Vestry is hopeful that the next great idea might be from a member of the congregation so we're seeking your prayerful consideration over the summer, and we seek your input prior to the small group gatherings.

What are you willing to try using methods from growing churches?

What do you see as God's will for our parish?

What do you see as an audacious goal for our parish?

Tell a Vestry member what you think!

Or jot it down!

Slide #20 Process Feedback

You can also give us your questions or concerns about any item on either the growing or declining church list.

Your participation is vital because your thoughts will inform the Vestry the direction this congregation is willing to take

Slides #21 & #22 [See Slide]

Slide #23 Thank you

We're feeling our way through this process. There is no one model that guarantees success. So, we will be refining the process for continued parish involvement and engagement.

Very truly I say to you, so that we may all be one, we need EACH of you to provide your prayers and our prayerful thoughts so that your Vestry can fully cooperate with the Holy Spirit where she may lead us.
Thank You.

