



Assessment Review

Summary Report compiled by the Congregational Development Officer

Congregation: North Bay – Christ Church

Deanery: Temiskaming

The church exists to live in the midst of the world as a sign, witness and foretaste of God's promised Kingdom. Together as a diocese, we are involved in a process designed to foster and form congregations that live out this vocation with fresh vision, vigour and joy!

Shaped by a Living Hope is the name we have given this process. It is promoting the development of healthy congregations across the Diocese of Algoma. Addressing the first objective named in the Strategic Plan adopted by Algoma's Synod in 2009, *Shaped by a Living Hope* is responsive to the Mission, Vision and Governing Values we share as a Diocese.

Among the various components of *Shaped by a Living Hope* is the assessment work in which your congregation has engaged. This report depends heavily upon the input you provided through that work. It was augmented by feedback from trained individuals in your deanery. Subsequent research, reflection and consultation has been carried out by the Diocesan Congregational Development Officer, particularly if your congregation engaged in the assessment work early in the process, or has recently experienced a critical shift in your circumstances.

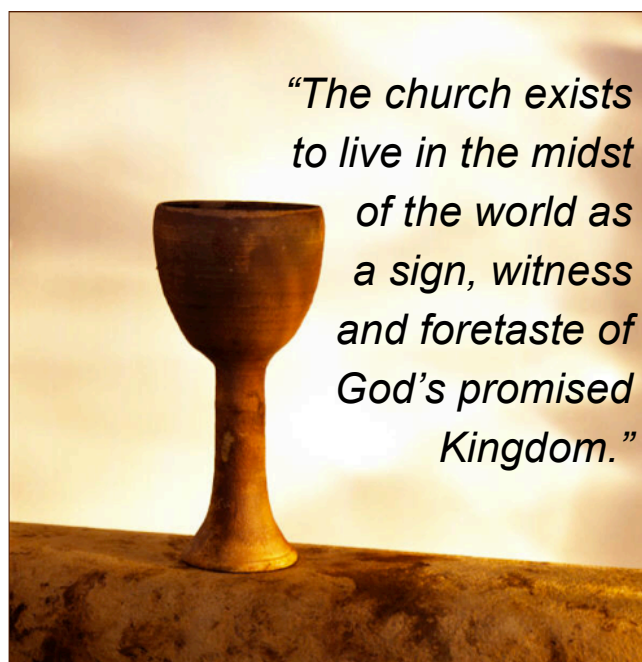
The report is provided to assist your congregation, as well as deanery and diocesan leadership, in the ongoing work of cultivating a vibrant and faithful Anglican Church in Algoma. It echoes

much of the information and insights you provided. It notes some important trends evident across the Diocese. If applicable, it suggests some possible next steps in light of the assessment findings.

Your congregation is encouraged to act upon/continue acting upon the insights provided by the assessment process – not only those voiced in this report, but also your own arising from participation in the process and related opportunities.

Benchmarks for Healthy Congregations, further information, and supportive materials related to *Shaped by a Living Hope* are posted under "Ministry Resources – Congregational Development" on our Diocesan website: www.dioceseofalgoma.com

Feel free to contact your Deanery Officials, or to arrange for a conversation with the Congregational Development Officer.



Mission and Discipleship

This section summarizes any or all of the following considerations: the congregation's vision for ministry; its missional focus; engagement in practices that foster discipleship formation and equip people for ministry; persons served in mission; direct participation in worship and missional activity.

The Diocesan Benchmarks for Healthy Congregations addressed directly in this aspect of the assessment process are those concerned with Vision, Viability-Innovation and Change, a sampling of those concerned with Vitality, and, in some instances, Viability-Communication. What do this congregation's hopes, concerns and sense of purpose reveal about its priorities and sense of mission? Is there evidence that the congregation engages practices/disciplines of Christian faith in a way that fosters the characteristics and capacities described in Algoma's Benchmarks for Healthy Congregations?

Finances

This section summarizes any or all of the following considerations: the degree to which the congregation or its leadership fosters holistic stewardship and a culture of generous giving; the trend and degree to which operational and missional funding come from the freewill financial contributions of parishioners; the allocation of operating expenses for the congregation's worship, discipleship formation, service in the world and hospitality; and if, in recent years, the congregation found it necessary to deficit finance, obtain loans or grants, or deplete capital for general operations.

The assessment process sought to discern how the congregation's financial planning, prioritizing and resource development serve or hinder mission and congregational health. The Benchmarks addressed directly in this aspect of the assessment process are those concerned with Vision and Viability-Financial Resources.

Facilities

This section summarizes any or all of the following considerations: the degree to which it is good stewardship to use the current facilities to serve healthy missional objectives of the parish, area congregations, deanery and Diocese; the quality of buildings and property, including environmental considerations; the capacity of the facilities and space to meet current and future needs reflective of the diocesan benchmarks for healthy congregations; other considerations, such as geographical visibility of the church property, accessibility to the property and building, lighting, signage, available parking and landscaping.

The assessment process sought to discern how the parish's buildings and facilities serve or hinder vibrancy and sustainability. Do the facilities serve mission or are the congregation's focus, energy and resources preoccupied with their upkeep and preservation to the detriment of vision and vitality? The Benchmarks addressed directly in this aspect of the assessment process are those concerned with Vision and Viability-Physical Resources.

Leadership

This section summarizes any or all of the following considerations: the availability, commitment and capacity of leadership to lead in the ministries of a vital parish; the scope and nature of lay leadership development in the parish; the degree to which leaders actively place priority on formation for discipleship and mission (their own and that of others); the degree to which the lay and ordained leadership work together as a team.

The assessment process sought to discern the degree to which parish leadership (not just that of clergy) fosters the characteristics and capacities described in Algoma's Benchmarks for Healthy Congregations. The Benchmarks addressed directly in this aspect of the assessment process are those concerned with Vision, Viability-Leadership and, in some instances, Viability-Innovation and Change and Viability-Communication.

North Bay – Christ Church

Mission and Ministry

- Exhibits the majority of characteristics articulated in the diocesan benchmarks for healthy congregations
- Well supported, active ministry initiatives that impact on the quality of life in the parish; lives are being transformed
- Desires to continue increasing its outward focus
- Opportunities are offered, and well attended, to support parishioners and others in their spiritual journeys and ministries
- A community of disciples following Jesus, fed by deep engagement of scripture, learning, and prayer, in a life of worship, fellowship, and missional service
- Some increase in the number of persons served in mission relative to the size of the worshipping congregation
- Some increase in the participation at Sunday liturgies over the last 4 years
- Congregation ends, revises, or initiates ministries in response to changes in the congregation or community
- Children and youth are involved in God's mission through Christ Church, though there is an expressed desire to see an increase in the numbers from this demographic category

A congregation tends to exhibit vitality and sustainability when the greater part of its membership is engaged enthusiastically in a forward-looking vision that fuels imagination. While no single factor suggests that a church will know lasting vitality and sustainability, the presence of a number of indicators can serve collectively as a good predictor of what the next decade is likely to hold for a congregation. It is an encouraging sign that many of these indicators are evident in the life of Christ Church, North Bay.

Christ Church expresses a strong sense of vision and identity as a community that nurtures and shares in Christian discipleship. While everyone in the church might not express this understanding in those terms, the assessment process and subsequent investigation reveal a congregation in which a significant and growing

percentage of the membership places priority on practices and activities aimed to help them know and make known Jesus Christ. This sense of an empowering vision in the congregation's common life indicates a substantial degree of clarity amongst congregants about who they are as a Christ-centred, faith-based community. They are intentional about discerning where God is leading them, individually and collectively, even when this means charting a new or risky course. This orientation, while allowing it to appreciate and celebrate its past, keeps the congregation focused on what God might have in store in the months and years ahead. Having and renewing such a sense of identity, vision, values and purpose in response to the extravagant nature of God's love is proven to be a chief characteristic of congregations that are vital and sustainable.

The assessment process also indicates a history of deliberately cultivating the expectation that congregants will pursue spiritual growth as disciples through worship, scripture reading and reflection, prayer, and service. This is another indicator of the likelihood of long-term vitality and sustainability. Formation of people in faith happens in community. Vital churches encourage and equip people to be committed participants in this regard.

Many of the benchmarks pertaining to *Vitality - Common Life* are evident at Christ Church. Members of the congregation provide pastoral care and lead worship services at the hospital and nearby care facilities. Many congregants participate together in local outreach initiatives including the Open Arms Café hosted at St. John's Church and the Teen Lunch Programme at St. Brice's. It is evident at social gatherings that this group of people appreciates the fellowship, mutual support and faith-sharing characteristic of the parish. Again, all of these are factors pointing to vitality and sustainability.

Some participants in the assessment process wondered if the congregation was sufficiently involved in "hands on" mission. The recent assessment process engaged by almost all parishes across the Diocese of Algoma does indicate that congregations experiencing an increase in vitality are placing greater emphasis on local missional engagement. These churches are not ignoring mission in national or global contexts. However, the degree of direct missional engagement in the neighbourhood, community or region is far more developed, involving a significant segment of the congregation. Likewise, vital churches in Algoma demonstrate an appreciation of mission as mutual and relational. They emphasize the importance of

building relationships and networks, not just performing tasks or writing cheques. No doubt, as is true for almost any congregation, this dimension of Christ Church's life could be developed further. However, it may be that a significant cross-section of members is involved in many hours of service, though not under the Christ Church banner. It may be worthwhile inquire into how congregants are living out their faith in "daily life," publishing and celebrating the stories that exemplify the vision and values of Christ Church.

There has been some increase in the participation at Sunday liturgies over the last four years. While part of this growth is attributable to people coming from other North Bay congregations, it is reported that the majority of newcomers have not been "church-goers" in recent years or at all, or have not come from an Anglican background. This trend of growth, while modest in some respects, is still an indicator that Christ Church is moving in the direction of greater vitality and sustainability. Indeed, a small upward trend in worship attendance statistics can be more significant than readily apparent. For example, it can signal a larger increase in the number of worshipers overall than the statistics imply, since we live in a generation when many "regular church-goers" no longer participate in Sunday Liturgy on a weekly basis.

The congregation engages effectively in self-reflection. It is able to distinguish the various ways practices of faith permeate the activities and projects of the congregation. This level of perception was not only apparent in the *Practicing Vitality* (book study) portion of the assessment process. Even prior to the assessment process, the congregation was engaged in discernment and reflection on its shared life. It carried out a thorough examination of all the ways in which prayer plays a role in congregational life, identifying many examples previously unrecognized.

It is important that Christ Church establish a habit of consistently reflecting upon, and reshaping how it lives out its vision. A congregation cannot assume that the vitality and sustainability it knows today will remain constant. Vision and practice must be renewed at least every five to seven years in today's rapidly changing context.

Finances

- Trends indicate that 80-85% of income for operational and missional funding comes from the free will offerings of parishioners.
- Trends during the time period considered in the assessment process indicate that the percentage of overall congregational giving provided by the top 10% of givers is declining - 42.8% in 2008; 33.28% in 2011; contributions from the remaining 90% of givers are on the rise.
- The number of members contributing more than \$1000 per year is increasing.
- The congregation is not distracted from discipleship formation and missional service by fundraising.
- Yearly donations are budgeted for ministries of the wider church and the deanery. In recent years funds have also been collected for the Elliot Lake food bank (due to the mall collapse), Trinity Church in Marathon and St. John the Evangelist Church in Schreiber.
- There is a focus on prayer when making decisions determining how to allocate funds.
- When additional dollars are requested for missional purposes, congregants provide generously.
- The move to the new building is posing financial challenges. If past trends hold, these challenges should prove to be short term.

Regarding finances, it is generally considered a healthy metric if congregations secure at least 70% of their operating revenue from free-will offerings. According to the assessment findings from across the Diocese, almost half of our congregations better this metric, with 75-85% derived from freewill offerings in 36% of congregations, and 85%+ in 12% of congregations. It is an excellent sign that, in trends indicated through the Christ Church assessment process, an average of 80-85% of parish revenue comes from the freewill offerings of parishioners.

The degree to which this metric is used to ascertain financial health needs to be considered in light a positive response to other indicators, including:

- Do you have an active stewardship team?

- Do you have a year-round approach to stewardship formation and education?
- Do you seek a pledge of time and talent in addition to treasure?
- Does the parish produce an annual narrative budget?
- Are individual givings in the parish equal to at least 2% of gross family income?
- Does the parish ask for legacy gifts from members of the congregation?
- Is parish income sufficient to provide adequately for missional vitality and congregational sustainability?

The trend at Christ Church concerning the amount of funds provided by the top 10% of identifiable contributing households seems to be moving in a healthy direction. Nevertheless, it would be wise for leadership to monitor this input. It is a disturbing pattern across the Diocese that, in almost half of our congregations, 40% or more of all giving from freewill offerings comes from the top 10% of contributing households. This demonstrates how a church can quite easily find itself in significant financial trouble when one or two top givers die, move away or experience a negative turn in their personal financial situation. Far too many congregations are dependent on the benevolence of a small cluster of faithful supporters. It can, in time, also allow for a situation in which a few individuals exercise control, even if they hold no official position in the parish.

It is a healthy sign that Christ Church does not depend upon fundraising for its financial sustainability. This is not true for 57% of Algoma's congregations. Fundraisers can be great for building a sense of community in a congregation. However, in most cases, they prove to be an ineffective way to cover the cost of parish operations and ministry without distracting attention and energy from discipleship formation and missional activity. Likewise, when parishes cross the 30% threshold for deriving funds from sources other than the collection plate, they set themselves up for a host of problems. For example, churches become too dependent on the alternative source of income to the point that, if they were to lose it, ministry would be compromised.

Christ Church's assessment process participants noted how the congregation is focused in prayer when making decisions, including the determination of how funds should be used. They report that such decisions are usually made by consensus. Likewise, they note that a large cross-section of the congregation participates in

missional work and, "when dollars are requested for mission purpose, members provide generously."

The congregation carries a debt at the present time due to the acquisition of its new facility. This is posing some cash flow difficulties. It is also prompting the congregation to raise a targeted amount of \$75,000 for capital expenditures to finish refurbishment of, and provide preventative maintenance for, the newly acquired building on Greenwood Avenue. It is anticipated that the debt situation will prove temporary and need not be a cause of concern. When debt is the result of simply trying to maintain a congregation, it tends to be a factor that accelerates decline. However, in the case of Christ Church, the present short-term debt is related to its response to the experience of growth and increasing vitality. As long as the debt situation does not linger and become a distraction, it will not undermine sustainability.

Building

- Facilities are highly flexible and adaptable; congregation maximizes these characteristics when using the space in worship, formation, social events, and missional service

Results from the assessment process from across the Diocese indicate that congregations in Algoma experiencing an increase in vitality tend to weigh the missional implications of decisions regarding the acquisition, renovation or use of church property. Christ Church serves as a prime example in this regard.

The portion of the assessment process addressing the Christ Church building benefited from significant contributions by a large cross-section of the congregation. Participants discerned that, while the facilities were flexible and well used, they were barely adequate for present needs; the congregation's growth in size and activity was stretching the facilities to their limit. In addition, the building allowed for physical accessibility to much, but not all, of its space (the upper level was not wheelchair accessible). It was clear, too, that significant maintenance work was needed to bring parts of the building up to code. Overall, the space was over utilized and was at the point of inhibiting the congregation's mission and growth. Yet, for considerable cost, the work that needed to be done to

the building might actually further limit, rather than enhance the building's support of mission and growth.

In the post-assessment consultation with the Congregational Development Officer, and in subsequent consultations, the congregation was encouraged to always view its building questions through the lens of its vision and mission – ensure vision determines decisions concerning building development, and allow questions concerning the building to help clarify vision and missional activity. The congregation was encouraged not simply to bring the current facilities up to code, but rather to ensure that work done and money spent enhanced ministry and allowed for growth and vitality to continue for many years to come. The flexibility and dynamism allowed for by the building should not be restrained. The congregation was also encouraged to consider other options, particularly to explore various emerging possibilities for the acquisition of a new space.

Through much prayer, research and discussion, the great majority of members discerned that investing significant resources into the Vimy Street facility (the building location at the time of the assessment process) would do nothing to enhance onsite ministry and did not represent good long-term stewardship. They acquired a new facility a few blocks away on Greenwood Avenue. The new building not only provides enhanced and accessible facilities for the congregation's use, it also offers an opportunity to reimagine vision and ministry.

Facilities that are in good shape, requiring only routine and expected repairs, are usually a contributing factor to long-term vitality and sustainability. The move to a new building provides another tool for Christ Church to continue growth in numbers and vibrancy.

Leadership

- Strong pool of committed and empowered people to lead in, and develop ministries of the parish
- Current leaders are engaged in their own development and new leadership is being prepared; development is offered in the congregation, and engaged in the deanery and beyond
- The Incumbent is gifted, well skilled, and dedicated to the mission of the parish and diocese; she brings great skills in teaching and discipleship formation; she focuses on how the gospel can be lived out in the church's common life and missional service, and in the lives of individual members
- Many others within the congregation exercise leadership ministries in education and formation, liturgy and music, administration, pastoral care, and other aspects of congregational life; a number of individuals also provide valued leadership in the deanery and Diocese
- Fully functioning leadership team that allows for roles that are particular and complementary

While there is no single "recipe" for growth, an extensive and growing body of research, including the recent diocesan assessment process, consistently names some ingredients that are essential to the mix. Among these is the existence of lay and clergy leadership that share a healthy vision, possess among them a wide variety of gifts and skills, and work as a well-functioning team. There is a strong correlation between growth and certain leadership qualities (ex. abilities to motivate, envision, and innovate) when these qualities are combined with vision and an intention to grow

The Incumbent of Christ Church demonstrates key qualities that were evident in the clergy of every vital congregation in Algoma. (That is not to say that there were not clergy in some struggling congregations that also share these characteristics.) She demonstrates a passion for the gospel and joy in faith, builds key relationships in the congregation, supports and engages in the mission of the parish and diocese, commits herself to ongoing education and development, and is involved in the wider community.

In the Diocesan assessment process, the quality and participation of lay leadership

was also found to be critical. Once again, we see many individuals at Christ Church exercising significant and gifted leadership in all aspects of congregational life and in the life of the Diocese. There is evidence, too, of a capacity to identify and develop the gifts God has given to individuals in the congregation. This active development and involvement of lay members throughout a congregation's ministry is a hallmark of growing churches.

What may be the greatest strength of leadership at Christ Church is its practice of explicitly seeking the Holy Spirit's direction and empowerment throughout its deliberations and work.

Possible Actions

The theme of the material presented by the Congregational Development Officer at the post-assessment consultation was "Enhance and Expand."

It was highlighted that there is excellence in most of what this congregation undertakes. The church was encouraged, therefore, to take particular steps that would enhance or expand ministry. One of the steps suggested was to develop or secure a facility able to support the vibrant and growing life of the congregation.

Succession planning for leadership was discussed, as were options for how the space might better serve ministry with children.

There was discussion on ways to enhance worship through the use of authentic symbols, less "text" oriented and more relationship oriented ritual, and "bringing their service into the Service."

Additional work has been done with some in the congregation to further develop the capacity for a deliberate and flexible process of incorporating individuals into the life of Christ through worship, formation, our common life, service and hospitality.

Finally, it was recommended that the congregation continue to foster collaboration with the other Anglican Churches of North Bay to consider how they might more effectively address the needs of the city through the gospel.

Since the post-assessment consultation, the congregation has acted upon almost all suggestions made in that gathering, and invited more suggestions and feedback as it has proceeded upon its many insights arising out of prayer, reflection, conversation and activity, both during and after its assessment work.

As the congregation embarks upon a new and promising chapter in its life, a new set of possible actions suggests itself:

A. Creatively shape the space that will shape you

- **View building matters through the lens of vision, identity and mission**
- **Experiment with configurations and use of worship space**

As the congregation settles into its new building, there will be many practicalities it will need to address. It is important, however, that decisions and actions concerning the building not be made on the basis of "practical concerns" alone. As previously suggested, the congregation would be wise to ***always view building questions through the lens of its vision and mission*** - ensure vision shapes decisions concerning building development and use, and allow questions concerning the building to help clarify vision and missional activity. How should we shape this space so that it shapes us into the kind of faith community God is calling us to become? The worship space is the easiest place to go into "default" mode when it comes to layout, design and use. However, the "default" mode can kick in as we consider other spaces, too. For example, many people still think a quasi-classroom kind of space is best for children's ministry. Research and experience are demonstrating, however, that spaces dedicated to ministry with children should encourage reflection, wonder and play. How can we provide spaces for children in which the stories and sacraments of faith shape young imaginations through play and tactile engagement? Likewise, if baptized persons are full members of the church regardless of their age, how do other spaces welcome and foster the participation of children in worship, formation, prayer and service?

It would be wise for the congregation to ***take time to experiment and reflect on various configurations of the worship space***, discerning how each may form the liturgical assembly on its notions of God, Kingdom, church, mission. One interesting formative property afforded by the Vimy Street building was that a single space

was used for worship, social gatherings and "in house" missional activity. The dynamic relationship between sacramental worship, mission and overall Christian fellowship was reinforced in congregants, even if not consciously, because various activities happened in same space. It will be important to find ways to continue to reinforce this connection now that a single space does not need to be used for this breadth of activity.

It will be very easy, even with a flexible space, to simply settle on a liturgical layout in which most of "the action" happens at the front while the majority of worshipers are lined up in rows facing forward. One of the questions inherent in Anglican tradition that needs to be addressed anew today is "how do we connect with one another and meet God in our liturgical interaction?" Another is "How does our liturgical action and space exhibit and ritually rehearse us in what life is like in the coming and near Kingdom of God?" The new building of Christ Church affords the advantage of a rather flexible space like that of the previous building and a fresh setting in which to discover and imagine.

Practical theologian Thomas G. Long suggests that there are at least three biblical models of places of worship - the tent, the temple, and the house - that can guide us in decision-making about shaping or reshaping a worship space.

He suggests "tent" is an image that arises from the wilderness period when the Israelites worshipped in a movable sanctuary. If worship space is to capture this quality, it must allow for movement within worship, reminding us that we are constantly on the move with God in the world.

The second place, the temple, reminded the people of Israel that God is an awesome and holy presence. The temple is a place of awe and sacrifice that communicated the wonder and mystery of God. This second image is one that has been emphasized in many Anglican buildings over the years, spaces commonly described as "typical" or "traditional."

After the destruction of the temple in the First Century of the Common Era, the focus of Jewish worship shifted to synagogues, and the people of the early church found themselves (before and after the Temple's destruction) worshipping in the domestic space of the house. For worship spaces to reflect this aspect of worship, they should provide space for people to gather, particularly around a table, share

mutual participation, and come to understand the act of sacramental communion as a communal action and not as a “personal” or individualistic act undertaken in the presence of others.

This suggestion on reimagining worship space is not to advocate trying something “new and creative” every week. Rather it is an encouragement to reflect upon what it means, theologically and culturally, to gather, to hear narratives that shape identity, to initiate into community with bath and oil, to touch others in order to heal or comfort, to share a sacred meal around a Table, to be sent out as Eucharist for the world. All of these actions concern more than space considerations, to be sure. However, the actions and elements of the Liturgy profoundly shape us, for better or worse. Is our space shaping us as fully as possible to be Body of Christ in this time and place? Does our space allow us to inhabit worship in such a way that ritual texts and patterns come alive for us today? It is key for congregational vitality that we allow our liturgical inheritance to take flesh in the local place, time and culture, incorporating what is good and challenging what is alien to the truth of God.

Initial exploration of such questions can happen at times other than Sunday morning. Evening services of light, Taize-style gatherings, mid-week Eucharists, the rites of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum are examples of opportunities to try on different configurations and discover what may translate to various Sundays and Seasons, opening people in new ways to the transformative presence and purposes of God.

B. Use the acquisition of a new building as an opportunity to clarify and develop outward focus through...

- **Deepening Christian identity**
- **Getting to know the new neighbourhood**
- **Taking ministry "outside the walls"**

1. The new building and deepening discipleship

One of the great strengths of Christ Church is its focus on discipleship, endeavouring to ensure all its resources and capacities serve this purpose. Building acquisition and renovation can easily become a distraction for a congregation, drawing focus and energy away from discipleship and mission. However, ***building acquisition and renovation also provide an opportunity to deepen discipleship and clarify missional purpose.***

The congregation is encouraged to play with the notion - to explore through worship, prayer, study and reflection - what it means to be the Household of God. As the congregation moves into a new building, it is clear that, as cherished as the old building may be or as exciting as the possibilities of the new are, neither structure is Christ Church; Christ Church is a community of faith, the people. As the rite for the dedication of the new building says, "...the church is not a building; it is a People. The ultimate form of Christian architecture is fashioned out of living stones rather than bricks and mortar." Explore this and related images, particularly in any meetings concerned directly with the building. (Note: "related images" refers to similar images found in Scripture and tradition, but also to images found alongside that of being a household.)

2. Getting to know your immediate context.

With a new location come new opportunities. In one sense, Christ Church remains in the same neighbourhood. Still, with a shift of a few blocks come a new perspective, a heightened community profile, and an opportunity to connect with new neighbourhood households, many of which seem delighted by the presence of Christ Church.

Bringing Clarity to Identity, Purpose & Action



Very early in the interaction between Christ Church and the CDO, the congregation was introduced to model for clarifying vision and missional activity. The most vital congregations usually attend to three key considerations in all aspects of congregational life on an ongoing basis:

- They immerse themselves in the great narratives of God and God's People as these are voiced in Scripture. To thrive, a congregation must allow its imagination to be transformed by God's character, actions and promises.
- They are mindful of the story of God at work in their congregation. To thrive, a congregation must recognize and give thanks for the gifts, assets and passions God has given to it.
- They listen attentively to the stories of the world around them. To thrive, a congregation must be aware of the needs, aspirations and opportunities of its context.

While Christ Church seems to be consistent in engaging these three considerations, now appears to be an opportune time to give special attention to the third.

Missional Clarity: Formed out of the Interaction of Narratives



Questions to ask as you concentrate on this consideration might include: What are the unique needs of the surrounding community? What special opportunities exist within our circle of influence? What has been the most significant change in the neighbourhood or city during the last five to ten years? What one change in this area would make a positive difference in people's lives? What organizations or individuals are our possible partners? As we look around, where do we see signs of care or neglect, permanence or transience, community or isolation, affluence or poverty? What are the favourite "third places" (places where people tend to go/hang out other than work or home)? Where are signs of the Kingdom? Where do we recognize God at work already? What good news will the people around us recognize and respond to first? In short, be detectives!

Continuing to host occasional social opportunities through which you can meet and mingle with neighbours is a good starting place for acquiring insight into such questions. However, there are a number of other exercises that may be helpful, too. For example, a team from the congregation might walk in different directions from the church building, observing and taking note of what they see. Some may use a van or car to drive people around the neighbourhood and surrounding area in all directions from the church building. Give everyone note cards for capturing impressions and insights. No one talks during the tour. The conversation comes after returning. As you travel through the surrounding neighborhood, use these questions to guide your impressions: What did you notice today that you overlooked in the past? What surprised you? What clues about how your church can better connect with its neighbours might these observations suggest?

You could test or build upon your conclusions by engaging leaders and/or residents in discussion about what they feel are the most pressing issues facing the community. The steps in this exercise would include, a) identifying community members you know from beyond your church - workplace, civic or community groups, community leaders or officers - and others whom you may not know personally but think would be helpful to include in a dialogue; b) inviting them into conversation about community needs, making it clear that you believe your church should be a good neighbor and that, in order to best serve the community, you look to community leaders and residents to help you identify important trends and needs.

One more possibility is to ask some people in your church to spend time in the neighbourhood and in the wider community during your worship times to see who is around and what they are doing. Who or what did you notice? What surprised you? What clues about how your church can better connect with its neighbors might these observations suggest?

3. Ministry "outside the walls"

As the congregation seeks to strengthen its outward missional focus, you are encouraged to consider a ***greater focus on taking ministry "outside the walls"***. With a wonderful, new-to-you facility, it would be easy for the congregation to limit the scope of missional possibilities to what could be done in or through the

building. Consider what opportunities might be afforded by other gathering places or in other settings in your area. Is there something that people of the congregation could offer in other institutions or neighbourhood settings? For example, one church had men whose only participation in the life of the church was to perform maintenance tasks around the church building until they began to do odd jobs and small repair work for the elderly and economically-challenged families in their community. This initiative also proved to be an entry point for newcomers to enter into the life of the congregation, as other individuals from the community shared in this work.

C. Make sure identifying how God is changing lives through your church receives greater emphasis than “counting inputs” and listing activities

Gil Rendle, consultant in the United Methodist Church, stresses that faithfulness to our purpose requires that we go beyond intentions into the hard work of purposefully making a difference. By this he means that we move our language beyond the general to include the specific, and redirect our measures to a greater emphasis on outcomes. It is the search for proximate next steps, he contends, by which a church gets clear about what its vision and faith practices might look like “on the ground.” For instance, if a congregation claims its vocation is to extend the radical hospitality of Christ, it must have both the subject of its hospitality, and the difference that its hospitality is to make, clearly in mind.

The implication of Rendle’s assertions is that we must do more than our usual counting and listing. Almost every congregation is good at counting – baptisms and burials, money collected and the degree it falls short of meeting budget are examples of counting. Active congregations are also good at listing – these are the activities and events that we did over the past year. Rendle observes that counting is giving attention to numbers. Such conversations in a time of limited resources usually hone in on scarcity. Do we have enough? How can we get more? Measuring, on the other hand, is paying attention to change. The question becomes “How far?” rather “How many?” Conversations attuned to measuring tend to focus on transformation and change that can be observed over time.

To measure, of course, a congregation has discern some sense of what it might look like for its mission to be faithful and fruitful in the “here and now,” allowing for

the possibility, of course, that God may surprise us with a different outcome than we imagined. For example, consider the mission statement of Christ Church: "Our mission is to know Jesus Christ, and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to make Him known." In light of this statement, the questions could be asked each year, "What is God wanting to make different right now in the mission field where we are placed? How is God calling us to participate, to know and make known Christ in this work?"

If part of your mission is "to know Jesus Christ," what specific characteristics or changes are you hoping to prompt in the life of the congregation and its members? For the coming year, what qualities or behaviours in the life of Christ Church and/or individual congregants would indicate that you are realizing this aspect of your mission?

Or when it comes to your mission "to make Him Known," what does it mean for Christ to be made known in this time and place? What are you hoping to see over the year or two ahead? By Vestry 2016, for example, what observable behaviours or changes in you or your neighbourhood would signal that Christ is being made known? There are various ways of measuring how faithful and fruitful a congregation is proving in relation to its specific missional aspirations and desired outcomes. At its simplest, however, whatever method of measurement the congregation employs should focus primarily on observable behaviours, not feelings or speculation. (It is planned to make various measurement available on the Diocesan website by the end of the year.)

The suggestion of this possible action does not mean to imply that no "outcome measurement" takes place at Christ Church now. However, in both the assessment process and in other forms of parish reporting (ex. Vestry Reports), there is a strong emphasis on counting and on listing activities. This is a pattern congregations have been taught to follow over the course of many decades. What would happen, however, if a compelling focus for the coming year was crafted early enough for Vestry reports and proceedings to not only outline what happened in the previous year, but also imagine what changes God might be prepared to accomplish in and through the congregation's various ministries? Not only would greater clarity for mission be prompted, but also the perception of what God is up to all around us would be sharpened in a wider portion of the congregation.

D. Ensure Christ Church's mission is always the number one agenda item

Measuring what matters also suggests that *Vestry, Advisory Board and other meetings place first on the agenda what the church exists to do*. Ask first at these gatherings, "Where have we seen God at work in our midst or community since we last met?" "How well have we done in participating in God's mission?" "How have we fostered discipleship (our own and others')?" Be as concrete and specific here as most congregations tend to be with financial and building maintenance issues. If "measuring what matters" is going to be meaningful, then it must be deliberately afforded a prominent place in the councils of the church.

E. Devote greater attention to Stewardship Formation and Development

It is evident from the assessment process that the financial trends of Christ Church have been moving in a healthy direction. This is precisely the time, then, for stewardship to be given attention. In times of crisis, a focus on stewardship can easily slip into a frantic attempt to balance the books. When considerations of mission and growth are front and centre, however, stewardship formation and development become a natural component of strengthening vitality and sustainability. This can be achieved through strategies such as:

1. *Discovering ways to allow mission to be the primary factor in shaping the congregation's budget.* It is a standard practice in congregations, even those otherwise missionally-minded, to determine a budget chiefly on the basis of what is necessary to meet increased expenses over the previous year. The congregations with the most robust vitality, like any other successful organization, craft their budget according to their purpose in order to "make good" on their vision. They make sure the budget serves, rather than decides, what is "possible."
2. *Producing an annual narrative budget.* Line-item budgets have an important place in the governance of the church. However, such a document does not provide givers with a sense of a congregation's identity and activity, or of

how lives are being changed. A narrative budget is another way of telling your story and showing how funds are really being used.

3. *Having regular testimonies.* The number one motivation for people to give generously to a congregation is belief in its mission and its ability to fulfill that mission. Simply put, they want to know that lives are being transformed. If lives are being changed, make sure those stories are being told, including by the "changed lives" themselves. If offered in worship, these testimonies only need to be two or three minutes long (in fact, it is best that they are no longer). Depending on their focus, they can take place before the Prayers of the People, after the Greeting of Peace, or in the announcement time between Communion and Dismissal. Testimonies can be offered at meetings, in short video clips on the church website, through written pieces included in the newsletter, or in mailings asking for support. The important thing is for your good news stories to get out there - be truthful, but share how God is changing lives.
4. *Encouraging legacy giving.* Many individuals who care about the life and mission of their congregation and/or the wider church would welcome a means to exercise faithful stewardship through their estate.
5. *Targeting correspondence according to a household's level of giving.* The way you address someone who tithes or who has considerable wealth should be different from the "once-a-year" or "special project" donor, which will be different from how you address the new Christian or a person who may not have much to give financially. The correspondence directed to each category of giver may not be entirely different. However, a letter to the tither may begin with a word of thanks (and it should not be the first time they receive such a word). There may be some brief teaching or exhortation in the letter to a new Christian. The person who is not giving at all may require pastoral care rather than an "ask."

F. Collaborate with the other Anglican Congregations of North Bay

This has been suggested before, and Christ Church has taken important initiatives in this regard, no doubt without need of the post-assessment suggestion. However, it is worth repeating since the recommendation has been made to the other North Bay congregations in their assessment reviews, too.

With the other Anglican Churches of North Bay, then, including Callander if possible, consider how you might partner to more effectively address the needs of the city through the gospel. This is not to suggest that there are no cooperative ventures at present. It is, however, an encouragement to look at and address the needs of the community not simply as individual congregations with some support from one another, but rather to think of the congregations together as the Anglican Church in North Bay as you engage in God's mission to the city from an Anglican ethos.

Partnering with the other Anglican congregations in a much more considered and robust way can allow all congregations to leverage human, financial and physical resources in addressing some of the needs and opportunities within North Bay. Gifts and interests lacking in one congregation can be augmented by those from other parishes in meeting needs in a particular area or with a specific demographic group. Struggling churches can be blessed by the example and support of stronger congregations. Relationships will be forged and deepened.

This latter outcome – the forging and deepening of relationships between the congregations – will prove important for the future of the Anglican Church in the city and its immediate environs. It is imperative that, while mission must be constant, it also needs to be responsive to changes in both congregational makeup and societal context. Whether it will prove necessary for the number of congregations in the city to remain the same, increase, or decrease in order to faithfully serve the gospel, working together now as much as possible will equip the Anglican Church in North Bay to be flexible and united, faithful and effective in whatever proves needful.

Comments

The congregation's engagement with the assessment process has resulted in one of the most thorough, considerate, and insightful files received to date. Particularly impressive is the number of individuals who provided leadership for various segments of the process, and the breadth of congregational participation.

The fact that this review has been edited and rewritten a few times between the assessment process and the report's distribution is a testimony to the momentum of faithful growth and change afoot amongst the people of Christ Church.



Congregational Development
The Diocese of Algoma
Anglican (Episcopal) Church of Canada
P.O. Box 1168
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
P6A 5N7 Canada
705-256-5061 x22
congdevelopment@dioceseofalgoma.com
www.dioceseofalgoma.com