The two primary correlates to congregational strength and growth ... are spiritual focus ("my congregation helps me feel closer to God") and missional clarity and brand ("my congregation has a clear sense of its mission and identity"). - Jim Lemler, Episcopal priest and consultant

Introduction

A little over a year ago, the Long-Term Financial Planning Committee began discussing the generational transition we expect at St. Paul’s within the next decade. By many measures, our church is thriving. We are financially sound and blessed with talented clergy, staff, and lay leaders. We offer an array of ministries within and beyond our walls, make transcendent music, and take good care of our beautiful buildings and grounds.

Pledges, however, are concentrated among our older members, perhaps more acutely than in other parishes. Their giving will not continue indefinitely and we have not seen proportionate giving increase among the younger generations. In order to thrive in the years ahead, St. Paul’s must learn to be the church that the moment requires, offer parishioners and neighbors what they seek and cannot find anywhere else, and more deeply engage our members at all stages of their lives.

This report discusses what the committee has learned in the past year. It explores the current church climate, stories from other similarly situated parishes, and lessons learned from our parishioners and neighbors. It also includes suggestions for next steps.

This is our church. For it to thrive will require all of us and the Spirit engaging in designing our future together.

The context

The United States is not the religious nation it once was, and its secularization has become especially pronounced in the 21st century. According to the Pew Research Center, from 2007 to 2014, the percentage of adults (18 and older) who identify themselves as Christian fell from 78.4% to 70.6%. Over the same timeframe, mainline Protestants, including Episcopalians, declined from 18.1% to 14.7%. This continues a decades-long trend in the United States.

Over the same time period, the percentage of adults who defined themselves as “Unaffiliated” – atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” – increased from 16.1% to 22.8%. The unaffiliated are also younger than their religiously affiliated counterparts – the median age of unaffiliated adults was 36 in 2014 (down from 38 in 2007), compared to 52 (up from 50) in mainline Protestantism.

The rise of the unaffiliated, or the “nones,” has been especially pronounced since the turn of the century:
In the domestic Episcopal Church, baptized members declined 19%, from 2.1 million to 1.7 million, from 2007 to 2017. In the Diocese of Ohio, over that same time frame, baptized members declined 34%, from 27,241 to 18,007.

Average Sunday attendance (ASA), admittedly a contested metric, was down 24% from 2007-2017 in the domestic Episcopal Church. In the Diocese of Ohio, the ASA was down 37% over the same time period, from ~9,000 to ~5,700.

Faith Communities Today (FACT) studies American religious life. Its 2015 study included responses from 4,436 religious congregations and similarly concluded that weekend worship attendance has been declining with median attendance going from 129 in 2005 to 105 in 2010 and 80 in 2015. Bigger is not necessarily better, but in 2015, 19% of congregations with 100 or fewer attendees were spiritually vital, as defined by FACT, compared to 37% of congregations with 100 or more attendees.

Numerical growth and spiritual vitality go together. 36% of the congregations that grew 2% or more in the past 5 years had high spiritual vitality, compared to 19% of the congregations that declined 2% or more in the past 5 years. Growing congregation also engage young adults better.

There are, as FACT notes, factors beyond a congregation’s control that can affect growth, such as geography and the health of the local economy. But congregations can control some factors that affect growth, such as having little to no internal conflict, more laity involved in recruiting new people, and a differentiated church experience. FACT notes that:
Whatever a congregation’s sense of innovation in worship, one thing has remained constant over our fifteen years of surveys—namely the strong relationship that changing worship has to both growth and spiritual vitality (as shown in Figure 24). One of the reasons for this is the relationship between innovative worship and distinguishing oneself from other congregations in one’s community. Such differentiation ... provides a notable boost in growth. (p. 10)

![Figure 24: Less Innovative in Worship, Less Growth and Vitality](image)

According to FACT, the percentage of parishes exhibiting high spiritual vitality was 27% in 2015, compared to 28% in 2010 and 43% in 2005. Despite these trends, 30% of parishes believe their congregations are thriving, while another 29% believe their congregations are “doing okay and this should continue.”

FACT’s 2018 report on vital congregations attempted to define church vitality and noted that, according to respondents, “in spiritually vital congregations, people experience the divine in ways that are transformative. The common divine purpose and transformative experience compel the people to authentically engage both within the congregation and the world around them.” The report further notes:

Low vitality congregations ... have people who participate minimally. People engaged in this way are primarily asking “How can the congregation or God help me?”. When they re-enter the world, they may feel comforted or refreshed, but their way of viewing and engaging with the world has not changed. The line between the two worlds is thick. This is the kind of experience many respondents called “inauthentic”.

In high vitality congregations ..., people are drawn deeper into their faith and/or community in ways that transform their perspective about themselves and the world around them. When they re-enter the world, they see things in a new light (some would say they see the world from God’s perspective) and this changes how they view and engage the world around them. People begin asking “How can I help God?” and they take steps to change the world around them. In
doing so, the line between the congregation and the rest of the world may be blurred if not eliminated. (p. 3)

Three things help a congregation’s vitality, as defined: relationships, leadership, and practices. In every faith tradition that participated in the report, “strong, respectful and loving relationships among members, and between leaders and members was key.” “Deeper interpersonal relationships were often described (by respondents) as an essential first component of transformation” (p. 7). While leadership roles varied across faith traditions, leaders of vital congregations had some common traits, among them the ability to share a vision, build consensus, and experiment (within the restrictions of the faith tradition).

In conjunction with FACT and using data from the 2014 Survey of Episcopal Congregations, the Episcopal Church in 2015 issued its own report, “New FACTs on Episcopal Church Growth and Decline.” The report noted some characteristics beyond the congregation’s control that affect growth, including location and racial/ethnic composition (churches that are predominantly Asian, Hispanic, or multi-racial are more likely to grow than predominantly white or African-American churches). Also, congregations with larger proportions of members 50 years or older are more likely to be in decline than churches with a smaller proportion of members in those categories.

The report noted that:

In terms of congregational identity, the most important factor was a rating of the congregation as being “spiritually vital and alive.” Vital organizations have a different sense to them, which is tangible, but hard to describe. Social theorist Randall Collins calls it “entrainment,” a process of rhythmic synchronization where actions flow into each other, heightening the shared mood, the sense of collective effervescence and excitement. There is life in vital congregations and it is contagious. Such congregations tend to be growing. (p. 29)

Further, growth also appears to be influenced by the number and variety of worship services, specifically non-typical or non-English/bilingual services, an emphasis on Sunday school, and the occurrence of more special events and fellowship activities.

St. Paul’s by the numbers

St. Paul’s is an active congregation, but we have also seen some of the same demographic changes as the broader church. From 2008 to 2018, the number of baptized members declined from 2,057 to 1,374 (-33%) while the average Sunday attendance (ASA) declined from 492 to 354 (-28%).

Looking at age demographics, the average age of all St. Paul’s members is 51; the median is 60. The average age of adult members over 24 is 63; the median is 64. By comparison, a 2014 Pew Research study reports that the median age of all adults who identify as Christian was 49 and the median age of those attending “mainline” Christian churches was 52.

Overall, 60% of St. Paul’s parishioners are over 50; 46% are over 60. This suggests that more programs may need to be offered to our older members to ensure that they find ways to be engaged beyond worship.
Giving has become more heavily concentrated among older parishioners. In 2003, parishioners aged 60 years and older accounted for 53% of total pledges. In 2018, they accounted for 83%. (See chart below.) Part of this change was driven by a cohort of parishioners in their 40s in 2003 (22% of pledges), 50s in 2011 (33%) and 60s in 2018 (31%). By 2018, parishioners in their 40s represented only 5%. Further, the contribution by parishioners in their 80s and older has increased dramatically, from 10% in 2003 to 27% in 2011 and 38% in 2018.

Of particular concern is that 18% of St. Paul’s pledge income comes from three households. It is reasonable to assume that at some point in the near to intermediate term, their giving will decline. If expenses increase at an inflation-adjusted rate, and non-renewed pledges increase as a result of our older, more generous parishioners passing away or reducing their giving, or younger members retiring and spending less time in Cleveland, the church could be facing a ~$300,000 deficit within five years.
Our process

The committee believes that the projected funding shortfall is best remedied by a focus on parish vitality and engagement, from which increased stewardship will follow. We engaged Jim Lemler to help us understand the issues and assemble and interpret the data. Lemler is the President of the Allen Whitehill Clowes Charitable Foundation; he is also a former Rector of Christ Church, Greenwich and a former Dean and President of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary.

After an initial meeting with Lemler, the committee interviewed several parish church leaders, the majority of whom were identified by Gay Jennings, President of the House of Deputies, and Jeanne Leinbach, Rector of St. Paul’s. Interviewees represented parishes that shared varying commonalities with St. Paul’s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calvary</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Jonathon Jensen</td>
<td>Rector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Church</td>
<td>Pittsford, NY</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Josh Walters</td>
<td>Rector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Church Cathedral</td>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Gail Greenwell</td>
<td>Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of the Saviour</td>
<td>Cleveland Heights, OH</td>
<td>UMC</td>
<td>Andy Call</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside Church</td>
<td>Solon, OH</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Elder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Chrysostom</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Wes Smedley</td>
<td>Rector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>Lancaster, PA</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Mike Schmid</td>
<td>Chair, Endowment Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mark’s</td>
<td>New Canann, CT</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Peter Walsh</td>
<td>Rector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Stephen’s</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Gary Jones</td>
<td>Rector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Church</td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
<td>Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Dick Burnett</td>
<td>Rector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We followed those interviews with 14 focus groups hosted in parishioner homes, 8 roundtable discussions during the 10 a.m. coffee hour, a parish survey (167 respondents), and a community survey posted to NextDoor (43 respondents).
What did we learn?

**Interviews with leaders of other congregations**

Most mainline churches are facing similar pressures of loss of membership and attendance, shifting demographics, and in many cases loss of income. There are exceptions, however, especially in the South and other regions experiencing growth. Most of our peers are considering issues of engagement, growth, and stewardship.

Interviewees recognize the importance of taking chances and trying new things, ending things that are not working, being authentic and understanding who they are, and focusing on their strengths. A key to success for all is strong programming – music/outreach/formation for all ages.

**Engagement**

Interviewees recognize the importance of engaging members more deeply in the life of the congregation, beyond just attending worship. They recognize that many come to church seeking connection and belonging. Many have started creative small group ministries like “house churches.” Many are also offering alternative services, especially in the evening (Saturday or Sunday), recognizing both the need to meet people’s varying needs including that Sunday morning does not work for all.

Communication with the congregation is critical. Leaders need to engage the congregation in conversations on visioning and how they want to be the church. They then must report back, so that members are informed and engaged.

**Visitors/new members/growth**

Interviewees recognize the importance of visitor welcome and integration. Some are using programs like Mary Parmar’s *Invite, Welcome, Connect*. The goal is not just about welcoming or being friendly but also engagement. Some churches are also exploring ways to engage non-members during the week. Many have started speaker series and strengthened music and/or arts programs. Young adult ministry is important - churches need to be creative and meet young adults where they are, including online and via mobile devices.

**Standouts**

Among the churches we spoke with, two churches stood out as being especially vital:

- One has doubled its ASA in 15 years, and the rector is constantly experimenting:
  - First they introduced a Celtic service, then a Saturday evening service, then Compline on Sunday evenings. The largest growth in attendance is at their Saturday evening services.
  - They regularly bring in well-known speakers or have programs on topics of interest to non-members.
Broadly, they speak of their church as a safe “village green” where all can feel safe and welcome. In this way, they address members’ craving for community and connection.

They have also formed “Emmaus Groups”, which include Bible study and weekly meetings. Each group includes 6-10 parishioners and meet for 10 weeks at a time. 100-200 parishioners are involved at any one time.

- Another has doubled its size and increased its pledge income by 50% after learning how to “be the church” together:
  - The parish was in sustained crisis before new rector arrived.
  - After a period of discernment, they identified the following goals:
    - a deeper life in Christ
    - more holy communion with one another
    - a greater love for the world.
  - Small group ministry in the form of “House Churches” promoted spiritual practices, Bible study, and spiritual growth. These included 12-13 parishioners and met during Lent.
  - They try to use their worship schedule to unify the congregation. They instituted the “world’s greatest coffee hour,” with the goal of keeping people in church, and together, as long as possible. The coffee hour is at 11 a.m., following their 10 a.m. (final) service. Education is at 9 a.m.
  - They eliminated programs with low attendance.

Focus Groups with St. Paul’s Parishioners

The parishioner focus groups were a highlight for many members of the committee. The opportunity to engage with church members was as valuable as the insights gained into how they perceive St. Paul’s. Parishioners had varying opinions (surprise!), but some common themes did emerge (select parishioner quotes included).

Who are we and why do we come?

- People come to St. Paul’s from a variety of spiritual backgrounds and value greatly the open, inclusive nature of the Episcopal Church generally and St. Paul’s in particular (“There is no ‘checklist’ to belong.” “Everyone is welcome in the ‘sandbox’ and we get to love each other judgment-free.”)
- People come to St. Paul’s because of our reputation and great liturgy, preaching, music, education and community. They keep coming for a variety of reasons, including:
  - St. Paul’s is an extended family/like home--“Showing up as you are is enough.”
  - Parishioners enjoy the many fun, smaller groups and relationships built therein
  - They were invited to participate in the life of the church (but some complained about the same people being in lay leadership roles year after year)
  - St. Paul’s provides opportunities for outreach--“It’s so important to look beyond the walls of the church. Outreach keeps me engaged; it is a positive feedback loop.”
St. Paul’s helps us make sense of our lives and brings peace—“St. Paul’s is a place to process all the crap going on in the world.”

Many younger families were drawn by our engaging programs for children and youth.

The way parishioners engage with St. Paul’s changes over time, especially as children grow up

**What we value:**

- The inclusive nature of the Episcopal Church and St. Paul’s
  - “There is no ‘checklist’ to belong”
  - “Everyone is welcome in the sandbox and we get to love each other judgment-free.”
- Stimulating adult forums & a culture of inquiry—St. Paul’s forums are strong, varied, and open-minded.
  - “St. Paul’s hits the right level of intellectual inquiry at the forums.” “At St. Paul’s, you are surrounded by thinkers.”
  - “Between sermons, forums and services, I’ve learned more about the Bible than [I did] growing up going to [Catholic] church.” “We are a thinking church and do not pretend to know everything.”
- Vibrant children & youth ministries— the faith grounding/education for one’s own children
  - “Where else do kids have the opportunity to talk about God?”
  - “Youth programming is the most important thing we do”
- High quality and variety of music
  - “The quality of the music is not found anywhere else. This is important history of St. Paul’s — what we are known for.”

**We keep coming for:**

- The people and community of St. Paul’s
  - “People are known here—known by name.” “I love that the church is multi-generational. I like meeting people I wouldn’t otherwise meet.” “St. Paul’s is home!”
- Preaching that speaks to us and encourages us to think
  - “The sermons make me think in a different way. They take you out of the day-to-day and remind you of what’s important.”
- Meaningful liturgy and worship experience
  - “Always fulfilled by worship, worship is most important thing.” “The service feels participatory.” “Love the outdoor service!”
- Opportunities for outreach
  - “It is so important to look beyond the walls of the church. Outreach keeps me engaged; it is a positive feedback loop.”
- St. Paul's brings us peace
  - “Life can be stressful. I love coming to a peaceful place.”
  - “I get a message of peace that you don’t get elsewhere.”
How do we think about our giving to St. Paul’s?

- Giving to the church is different. Most parishioners approach their giving differently to the church than to other charitable organizations and non-profits. They have more of a sense of ownership and responsibility. The connections are far deeper and extend to their whole family. They understand that the church is there for them when they need it at all stages of their life.
  - “You get something very different from your relationship with the church. It buries your mother, baptizes your child, marries your daughter. Your school doesn’t do that; the orchestra doesn’t do that. It’s there ALL the time and that’s important.”
  - “The church only has its members. It is our money that enables us to do what we do.”
  - “Giving to the church brings me a sense of belonging, being part of the community”
- Most members feel that their gifts are well-stewarded; there’s financial transparency. But when asked if they would like more information, many said that they would be interested in knowing more about how budgets are created and how their gifts are spent.
  - “We know how our gifts are spent. We know the programs our gifts support.”
- But there are challenges around our collective financial support of St. Paul’s. Many did not know that St. Paul’s receives no funds from other church sources like the diocese—that current members are the primary source of income (the other sources being endowment income and space use fees). Also noted were the many demands on our own resources including school tuitions, children, and other charities we support. And there is a perception for some that their smaller gifts are not needed as there are many other wealthier donors.
  - “There are so many needs out there and there seem to be more all the time. So many charities need money.”
  - “There is a mindset in the parish that there are several families that support everything, so no one else needs to.”

What makes a difference? What can we do better?

- Personal invitations to participate more deeply
  - “The invitation makes a difference. That’s how people get drawn in.”
  - “We stayed involved because someone asked us to do specific things.”
- St. Paul’s can do better at welcoming newcomers and reaching out to the community, including taking advantage of various technologies (website, podcast, streaming)
  - “All parishioners need to be the welcoming committee—not just one person or a committee.”
  - “We need to get people through the door—even if not for a service.
  - “There are lots of people who are lost and at sea; we need to let them know they are welcome here.”
- Communications, external as well as internal, are critical
  - “St Paul’s can do a better job of selling what we do here.”
  - “The website and church app need to be more user-friendly”
Parishioner ideas for reaching out and welcoming new parishioners included:
  o Offer programs and opportunities for connection that people seem to be looking for (e.g., yoga, mindfulness)
  o Offer more outreach opportunities so parishioners can feel more connected to the world
    • In particular, people are looking for one-off, low commitment outreach opportunities
  o Be strategic about identifying opportunities for growth, for instance, within the LGBT community
  o Do better communicating what we do here, internally and externally; offer more social and fellowship opportunities for both parishioners and neighbors/visitors

Survey
For the question, “How did you learn about St. Paul’s?”, the most common response was ‘family attended’ (21%), followed by ‘closest to my home’ (19%) and ‘word of mouth’ (18%). These answers reinforce the importance of community in growing the congregation. However, those who have been at St. Paul’s for less than 5 years, were significantly more likely to have found St. Paul’s through a web search (37% vs. 9% among all respondents), which argues for an improved web presence.

Respondents deemed the following categories essential or very important: quality preaching (82%), liturgy/worship experience (74%), fellowship and community (65%), and quality music (64%). This is consistent with another survey question, which asked what parishioners gain from their relationship with the parish. Responses ranked by the percentage sum of those who chose “this is why I’m at St. Paul’s,” “very true” and “often true” were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This is why</th>
<th>Very/Often True</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liturgy/worship experience is meaningful</td>
<td>20.61</td>
<td>69.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music moves me</td>
<td>19.63</td>
<td>69.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching speaks to me</td>
<td>15.24</td>
<td>63.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral care</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>39.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved by how my children have grown here</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>31.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: Parishioners with children under 18 make up only about 20% of our congregation, which may be reflected in the lower level of importance attached to the question about children.)

Parishioners were also asked what three things St. Paul’s could do to better serve parishioners and their families. There were 258 responses to this question, although (surprise!) many suggestions conflicted with each other, e.g. eliminate Morning Prayer and add more Morning Prayer. These responses, however, can be a source of programming and engagement ideas.

The survey reinforced that newer parishioners to St. Paul’s are not necessarily younger parishioners. The group of parishioners at St. Paul’s fewer than 5 years is distributed across all age segments, although the highest concentrations are in 35-44 years old (29.6%) and 45-54 years old (22.2%). When asked what they are involved in outside of worship, these parishioners were more likely to be involved in adult
education (48.2% vs. 27.9% among all respondents), a parish committee (40.7% vs. 35.2%), and child/youth programming (37.0% vs. 26.7%).

As indicated in the focus groups, parishioners come from a variety of backgrounds. Only 34.3% of respondents were raised Episcopalian, while 60.2% were raised in the Catholic Church or another Protestant tradition. This was even more pronounced for newer members. For those at St. Paul’s fewer than 5 years, 85.2% were raised Catholic or other Protestant.

Proximity is also important. Most respondents lived close to St. Paul’s, with 53.3% having travel time of less than 10 minutes and 23.0% having a travel time of 10-20 minutes. For parishioners at St. Paul’s fewer than 5 years, 66.7% had a travel time less than 10 minutes.

**Community Survey**

The committee posted a community survey to Facebook and NextDoor. There were a total of 43 responses, primarily from the following zip codes: 44106 (24 responses, or 56% of all responses), 44118 (12, 28%), and 44120 (6, 14%). 20 of the respondents (47%) were 65 years or older; 9 (21%) were 55-64.

39 of 43 respondents (91%) have been inside St. Paul’s. 49% of respondents have been to a music concert or recital, 34% to a worship service (Christmas, Easter, or other), and 32% to a wedding or funeral service. Those who’ve been inside our church feel welcome enough and the space is inviting enough for them to come inside. For the ~50% of respondents who’ve been to a concert or recital, there is a great opportunity for us to engage them more thoughtfully into the life of the church.

Respondents hear about programs at St. Paul’s via friends/word of mouth (33%), ads in Heights Observer and Cleveland.com (33%), social media (16%), and other organizations (16%). Only 3% heard about St. Paul’s events from the St. Paul’s website. 30% never hear anything about St. Paul’s. We can do better communicating what we do and who we are to our neighbors.

Respondents were most interested in hearing about concerts, gallery openings and other cultural events (74%), followed by discussions or forums (35%) and community service opportunities (33%). Only 16% were interested in worship services; only 7% were interested in spiritual guidance or support. The takeaway: most of the respondents want to come back inside! Thus, we should be host local events and ensure we communicate/promote/advertise them.

Respondents were asked what 3 words come to mind. Combining all the responses and grouping synonyms together, the most common word was “beautiful.” “Community” was the #2 choice, followed by “music” (which included bells and the organ). “Church,” “outreach,” and “peaceful” followed thereafter.

Worrisome words/phrases that respondents used to describe St. Paul’s: old, staid & bored by services, not child friendly (perhaps due to preschool closing), not meeting community needs, not neighborly, white, upper class. Any campaigns we launch must combat the implication that if you are NOT defined as white upper class, you are not welcome.
When asked what St. Paul’s can do to be a more engaged neighbor, the #1 response was to communicate better. Respondents suggested mailers, social media, and a presence at neighborhood and Cleveland Heights events. The next most popular suggestion was to host some form of event, including a Christmas concert, neighborhood Sunday brunch, church fair, coat/food drives, and coordinated offerings with other Cleveland Heights churches.

The suggestion to partner with other Cleveland Heights churches came up multiple times: "I think there should be more joint activities with other CH churches. Like share in the expense of having a speaker. invite each other to events so we can build community," And: "Collaborate with other worship communities and service organizations and publicize that collaboration." It could be very impactful for St. Paul's to lead such efforts.

Note that ~50% of respondents are older than 65 (mostly retirees, empty nesters, grandparents, etc.) This may be a segment we should focus specific communications efforts on. For example, at a recent youth drama production of "The Liar," one of our parishioners brought her teenage granddaughter to watch the play. We need more opportunities to engage those who might not necessarily be seeking church.

**Recommendations**

The committee sought to understand the current religious landscape, how some churches have learned to thrive in this environment, and the strengths and weaknesses of St. Paul’s as perceived by its parishioners and neighbors.

The constituency of St. Paul’s can be envisioned as a series of concentric circles. The “apostolic core” are the very active members who serve in leadership capacities on committees and as active volunteers. Moving out are the regular attendees, the occasional attendees, and finally neighbors and community members who use our facilities (think AA or Apostle’s Fire). The affiliation to St. Paul’s lessening the farther the circles are from the center. To grow, we must enlarge not only the apostolic core, but also the outer rings. We will also try to move St. Paul’s affiliates toward ever-increasing affiliation with the church (from vicarious to occasional, occasional to regular, and so on).
How are we to do this? First, there are some items that we can accomplish immediately. The committee recommends:

**Near-Term Actions Led by Clergy/Staff**

The following are ideas that the clergy & staff had been discussing or which are considered “low-hanging fruit”.

- Establish “House Churches” (small study/discussion groups) during Lent—both a spiritual vitality initiative as well as a small group fellowship opportunity
  - Groups of 10-12 parishioners meet weekly for 8 sessions during Lent and early Easter season
  - Groups will gather for prayer, Bible study, fellowship and discussion of faith questions
  - All groups will follow the same agenda with a facilitator and scribe
  - Most groups will meet in parishioner homes; a few may meet at St. Paul’s
- Hold an interactive forum on parish communications. The forum would begin with a presentation by Kim Fry but then would turn to a discussion with parishioners encouraging their input on ways to improve communications
- Start a yoga program open to parishioners and neighbors. The class would be free or goodwill offering only
- Institute a means for parishioners to submit hymn requests as well as suggestions for forums.
- Refocus on the “EpiscoPals” shepherding initiative to help new members feel welcomed and at home at St. Paul’s
- Work with Outreach groups to improve communication about outreach volunteer opportunities and to make these opportunities more accessible.
• Provide more transparency about parish finances; hold a forum including lots of time for Q & A, create an information booklet, have more frequent reports about where are gifts are going, what they are accomplishing.

Establish Task Forces

As growth is multi-faceted, the committee considered 6 areas on which we could focus further – Communications, Engagement, Education, Worship, Stewardship, and Outreach. We concluded that starting with Communications and Engagement was foundational. Task forces will be established to lead each of these efforts.

While these task forces will ultimately determine what their course of action, the committee has outlined several initiatives it recommends the task force target. They follow below.

Communications
• Develop mission and brand statements
• Modernize and streamline our communications, utilizing the offer of help from our youth and young adults, e.g., creating interactive calendar on website, streaming services, etc.
• Consider adopting “Invite, Welcome, Connect,” developed by Mary Parmer, the former Director of Evangelism and Adult Ministries at St. Stephen’s, Beaumont, TX.
• Update database to be more intuitive and interactive
• Develop neighborhood communication plan, including regular communications outreach to neighborhood (e.g., mailings to 44106 and 44118, postings on NextDoor, etc.)

Engagement
• Implement strategies for engaging parishioners or keeping them engaged, ranging from “pop up” random acts of kindness (like arranging meals for a family with a new baby) to running the Stewardship campaign as a form of engagement.
• Contact parishioners at “non-traditional” transition points to encourage new ways to engage with the parish
• Develop metric aside from ASA (Average Sunday Attendance) to measure engagement (perhaps Average Weekly Engagement or AWE); determine baseline and measure quarterly; communicate AWE to congregation on regular basis
• Map parishioner engagement and be intentional about moving affiliates closer to the center (apostolic core)
• Focus on some key groups, including: “nones” (people who identify with no religion), former Roman Catholics, older “spiritual but not religious”, and people who live/work/go to school in university circle. Develop offerings for these target markets.
• Expand engagement with the neighborhood. Offer space to neighborhood groups (scouts, PTA) etc. to hold lemonade stands, car washes, etc. Increase representation at neighborhood/Heights events. Invite to our annual picnic/ice cream social? Our neighbors are most interested in cultural and intellectual opportunities. We should give them those … and use those interactions to draw them in.
Sources

Episcopal Church, Parochial Report Results, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/research/parochial-report-results
Faith Communities Today, “American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving”
Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”

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