

The St. Aidan's Visioning Team Report and Presentation to the Congregation June 3, 2012



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Presentation of Purpose, Mission Statement, Core Values, and Vision Statement

The Visioning Team humbly presents to you the Vestry for your consideration the following documents which represent the collective work of our Team over the past year. We have engaged members of our congregation in “holy conversations” and thus hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as we have gone through this process. We realize that all such documents are grounded in a certain point in time, and we can only hope that they will be useful for the Vestry as it looks out at the next three to five year horizon. Our proposed Vision Statement is constructed in such a way that goals and objectives can be formulated if that is your desire.

As a Team and individually, we have profited from this experience. We have gotten to know each other quite well, and have a chance to see the workings of the Holy Spirit in our Team and our Congregation. We thank the Vestry for the opportunity to work on this sacred charge.

Why did we need to do this?

A little over two years ago the vestry began to read a book entitled *Changing the Conversation*. The book focused on the radical changes in our society today and their impact on churches. The vestry realized as they worked their way through this book that we needed to step back and look at who we are and why we exist. In addition to the new reality of today’s world, we have to face the reality of changes resulting in the retirement of Peter as the rector for 26 years. Any parish transitioning from a long rectorship needs to spend time discerning who they are when that rector is no longer serving the parish.

The vestry invited The Rev. Rick Willis to lead a vestry retreat and made the decision to move forward in a discernment process. The goal of the vestry was the development of purpose, mission, and vision statements as well as a list of core values. Ultimately this work will guide the vestry and congregation in setting of appropriate goals and objectives.

Planning as a Process of Discernment

Our consultant asked that our team read and use two books in our process: *Changing the Conversation* by Tony Robinson and *Holy Conversations--Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*. We came to realize that while many of the corporate methods for data collection and analysis and strategic planning were useful and would need to be used, ours was a decidedly different endeavor. Ours was not to develop consensus and chart a plan for growth and stability, but to try and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit in us and our community so that we could set a Vision that we could discern to be part of God’s plan. All Team meetings commenced with prayer and devotional readings, and ended with prayer. All of our data collection and analysis, gatherings for Lenten meetings and History Night, were attempts to allow the “Holy

Conversations” to occur, and for our Team to hear and process. We bring to the Vestry this Report, hopefully infused with this discernment.

Team vs. Committee

Our group had its initial meeting at the home of our Rector. We then attended a retreat on May 21, 2011, at St. Aidan’s facilitated by our consultant, Rick Willis. Team building exercises were performed, and the group realized that we were indeed a mutually supportive team instead of a committee in the usual sense. Early on we realized that we needed to choose a unique name to reflect what we saw as our charge from the Vestry and our purpose. The Visioning Team was thus brought into existence. By July, we had developed a Charter, in which we reiterated our Purpose. Our Scope was defined. Membership roles were enumerated. Scott Miller was chosen as Team Leader. Mark Wilkinson was chosen as the Team Chaplain. Peggy Fanney was the Vestry Liaison. Mark Buckner was our Notetaker and recording Secretary, and his assistance and faithfulness to that task was invaluable. Bill Dempsey was chosen to be our Communications Coordinator. Team norms were clarified. Milestones and schedules were addressed. We very much wanted to have our work completed for presentation to the congregation by Trinity Sunday of 2012.

Adoption of “Look Back, Look Around, Look Inward, Look Forward” as planning approach.

The Vestry had met with Rick Willis in May of 2010 to discuss the discernment process. At that meeting, a structure was applied to the discernment process which was set out in Fred Parkinson’s Senior Warden’s Newsletter in June of 2010. Our Team then adopted this approach.

Look back—we needed to review the people, events, and core values and beliefs that have shaped us through our nearly 50 year history of our congregation.

Look Around—we felt the need to know something about the community in which we exist and are called to serve.

Look Inward—we needed to see what the Holy Spirit has given to us individually and corporately as we determine our strengths and opportunities for furthering God’s plan.

Look Forward—the truly difficult job of visioning, discerning what God would have us do moving forward.

Each of these four areas was addressed by the Visioning Team in Parish in activities that were designed to capture the essence of our congregation. The specifics of these will be detailed below.

Look Back

The looking back portion started with a Saturday Social in November of 2011 that focused on the history of St. Aidan’s. One of the activities was to put up a timeline on the wall and ask the various members to put important events in the world, the church and the life of St. Aidan’s. There were over 70 people who attended and gave valuable

input that we used as the basis for our Lenten programs. The second portion of the look back we focused on two core questions about why we exist and also did a reflection entitled the Smell of Onions. This reflection helped us explore what may or may not hold us back in the process of discerning a mission and vision. The results of the table discussions made it abundantly clear that while there will always be nostalgia for the good old days, we as a congregation know that we must move forward.

Look Around

After exploring St. Aidan's history, the Visioning Team invited the congregation to examine our community, in order to get a better sense of the neighborhood that we are called to serve. In conjunction with the "Look Inward" phase, the congregation was invited to bring photographs of their neighborhood that were combined into a visual collage. To get an outside perspective of our immediate surroundings, the Visioning Team interviewed a prominent realtor in the Kings Grant community. She shared her view of the surrounding neighborhood, along with emerging trends. Lastly, the team was provided with some detailed demographic data from the Diocese. These reports provided insight into how the immediate vicinity surrounding St. Aidan's is projected to change over the next five years, in terms of age, gender, race, income, educational background, marital status, and a number of other attributes. This information was shared with the congregation during a Lenten program meeting. A greater awareness of the surrounding community and its inhabitants, allowed the Visioning Team and the congregation at large to "Look Forward".

Look Inward

This activity referenced several pieces of data that were presented including a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, information garnered from history night, and the cottage meetings from 2010. Participants were future-oriented, positive and forward moving in their responses, including older congregants. There was a discussion initiated about what is guiding us, the Holy Spirit or consensus. Another person began a discussion regarding the hope that we are moving toward being more accepting toward all. The evening concluded with an exercise that asked people to select a hymn that represents this congregation today. The hymns selected in the exercise mostly emphasized God, God's Call and Faith.

Look Forward

The purpose of this evening was to engage the congregation through a meditative reading and visioning exercise to help discover the core values, "portable treasures of faith" that St. Aidan's would like to take into the future.

The reading that was used was Exodus 25:10-22, The Ark of the Covenant. After reading this passage, attendees were asked to think about their "portable treasures of faith". They were given the scenario of a hurricane with time to gather only 3 items, tangible or intangible. They were asked to write these 3 items down and talk

with the others at the table to explain what these items were and why they were important to St. Aidan's. The participants were asked to cross items off their lists until they had the 1 most important "portable treasure of faith" they found necessary for St. Aidan's future. There was then discussion at each table as to what was most important to each member.

The attendees were then given the opportunity to craft their "portable treasure of faith" to place in the ark that had been created by St. Aidan's youth. During this crafting period there was much discussion amongst all members as to their "portable treasures of faith" and why they were so important for the growth of St. Aidan's. A chart was created which included current core values and aspirational core values. This gave the visioning team a look into what is important to the members of St. Aidan's as we move into the future.

FINAL STEP

The material from the three evenings, especially the Look Ahead evening, were then used to draft the statement of Core Values. Once these Core Values were established, the team then drafted the Mission, Purpose and Vision Statements that reflect these values.

CONCLUSION

The team appreciates the vestry's trust and faith in us. We humbly present this document to assist in St. Aidan's continuous growth into the parish that God desires us to be. We stand ready to help the vestry in our journey forward.

The Team would like to express our gratitude for the efforts of our consultant The Rev. Rick Willis. His input and leadership have been invaluable.

Faithfully Submitted, Scott Miller, The Rev. Mark Wilkinson, Mark Buckner, Peggy Fanny, Ginger Gray, Nina Rodriguez, Edie Barnett, Amelia Knight and Bill Dempsey

A PRAYER OF SELF-DEDICATION

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

CORE VALUES

By our baptism we are all called as ministers in the name of Jesus Christ. In order to live out our baptismal vows we strive to live into these core values with God's help:

WE ARE WELCOMING

With God's help, we accept all whom God has created, respecting the dignity of every human being and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

WE LIVE IN COMMUNITY

With God's help, we love and care for one another.

WE WORSHIP

With God's help, we celebrate God's gift of love for all creation through worship that strengthens and sustains our faith, feeds our hunger for God and unifies our gathered community.

WE ARE DISCIPLES

With God's help, we equip our community to carry out the work to which God calls us. We pray that all are transformed from seekers (and believers) into disciples.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

St. Aidan's: Christ's beacon to all seeking God.
Matthew 5:14-16 You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Aidan's mission is to serve as Christ's beacon to all who are drawn to our door and all whose paths we cross.

VISION STATEMENT

St. Aidan's vision is to provide a safe and supportive environment for people of all backgrounds and interests to develop and strengthen their personal and communal relationship with God. God's loving Spirit beckons us to become the body of Christ. Striving for justice and peace in our community and in the world at large, we seek to serve God in all our daily interactions.

To fulfill our vision, St. Aidan's strives to:

- be an open, inclusive and supportive community of Christians;
- provide a wide variety of meaningful worship opportunities grounded in the Episcopal tradition;
- create an environment for vibrant spiritual development and Christian formation to promote discipleship, through a variety of programs that include prayer, study, and reflection for all ages
- seek active engagement with our local and extended communities and the world at large to act as God's hands in the world. We have been blessed by God with many gifts and seek to share those gifts in partnership with a variety of community organizations both secular and sacred;
- support an active youth organization offering age-relevant worship, outreach, and fellowship opportunities.

APPENDIX ITEMS: SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) ANALYSIS

Internal Perspective	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faithful congregation • Respond well in emergencies • Good worship environment • Neighborhood church • Enthusiastic clergy • Christian formation • Music programs • Social activities • Outreach opportunities • Welcoming congregation • Pastoral care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population • Lack of financial resources / rainy-day fund • Stewardship commitment undervalued • Discomfort with evangelism • Lack of diversity • Small cadre of active members • No succession plan / leadership development • Geographic location • Small staff • Lack of small group ministry • Politics / cliques • Change-resistant
External Perspective	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood under-served for Christian formation • Spiritual development • Wellness center offerings • Connection with the Mission of the Holy Spirit • HeadStart • Seton House • Stronger connection with diocese • Contact / learning from other churches and temples (St. Aidan's in Alexandria) • Singles ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy • Secularism • Bias against organized religion (Irrelevance) • Time compression • Prevalence of "church shopping" mindset • Strong sense of individualism with less dependence on community

Evaluation of Table Responses from “Look Around” Program March 4, 2012

Group Bible Study – “Third Reflection: The Smell of Onions”

The following common themes emerged from the six tables regarding the four questions from the Bible study:

1. Bible passage Numbers 11: 4-9 why do you think this passage talks about food in such detail?
 - Food equals comfort, familiarity, security, there was plenty of food in Egypt.
 - We take it for granted until we don't have it.

2. Can you imagine yourself wanting to go back to Egypt? Why or why not?
 - Egypt is known and familiar.
 - People don't like change, even if their present situation is less than desirable.
 - The people had to leave what was known for the unknown.

3. As your church considers issues of size transition, what do you already miss that might be comparable to the Israelite's longing for savory smells from their kitchens in Egypt?
 - Our church dinners- important social events for our church family.
 - Loss of intimacy as the church grows, loss of familiar ways.

4. If your congregation moved solidly into program size, what do you imagine to be the greatest loss you personally would have to deal with?
 - As church grows, may become more impersonal.
 - Loss of intimacy.
 - Unable to know everyone in a larger organization.

Some participants turned question 4 around and made it a positive:

- As we grow, the additional members we gain create a larger pool of talent
- The family aspect of the church can still be maintained.
- Some things may be lost or left behind in the transition, but St. Aidan's also stands to gain from positive growth.

Seven Questions Every Church Should Ask: Questions 1 and 2

Common themes from the table responses for questions 1 and 2:

1. What would be lost, and how would the world be worse off, if our church ceased to exist?

- Ministries, all the great commission work we do in the community (outreach).
- Our church family, relationships, social interaction at church as well as with the community.
- Youth and children programs- EYC, mission trips, Christian formation, and friendships/ relationships that develop from these activities.
- Meeting place and support for organizations such as Head Start, AA, Boy Scouts, Seton House.
- Spiritual growth.

2. How does St. Aidan's add value to people's lives?

- Provides sense of community/ family.
- Provides spiritual development and Christian formation for both adults and youth.
- The Liturgy
- Bible School, EYC.
- Traditions

Look Inward Statements

The congregation will be asked to react to the following statements using these six categories:

SA= Strongly Agree **A** = Agree **SLA** = Slightly Agree
SLD= Slightly Disagree **D**= Disagree **SD**= Strongly Disagree

1. The three (3) top opportunities for St. Aidan's going forward are: (SWOT Analysis)
 - a. Neighborhood under-served for Christian formation
 - b. Spiritual development
 - c. Expand wellness center offerings
2. The top core strengths and talents of St. Aidan's congregation include: (Cottage Meetings)
 - a. A welcoming and friendly attitude
 - b. The variety of programs and ministry opportunities offered is large in relation to the congregation's size
 - c. High quality of worship
 - d. Well grounded Christian education in traditional Protestant theology
 - e. Variety and quality of music programs
3. The most influential factors that inhibit St. Aidan's from realizing its potential as a congregation include: (Cottage Meetings)
 - a. Time pressures / scarcity
 - b. Complacency / established patterns / self-absorption / fear of change
 - c. Lack of unity, (split congregation & generational differences)
 - d. Lack of shared vision and direction
 - e. General discomfort with evangelism
4. St. Aidan's provides high quality Christian Formation for all ages.
5. St Aidan's looks to new families for "what we have to offer them" not "what can they offer us".
6. St. Aidan's serves its parish members and the surrounding community well in times of need.
7. A hope for St. Aidan's is that we are ready to welcome those who may not resemble our traditional membership (ethnicity, economic background sexual orientation). (Looking Forward)
8. We would like to expand our Outreach Programs. (Looking Forward)
9. St. Aidan's is ready to get out of its comfort zone and grow spiritually. (Looking Forward)

Question #	SA	A	SLA	SLD	D	SD
1	4	14	9	9		
2	8	19	3	3	1	1
3	7	12	7	5		1
4	6	8	15	2	2	
5	1	11	14	5	4	
6	10	18	6			
7	27	3	4		1	1
8	15	20	1			
9	17	12	4	1		

Comments on Look Inward Statements

Questions:

1. None
2. Protestant theology? or rather Anglican...?
3. Too many statements for one question...agree with some not necessity of others-8 responded to this statement-suggest these be prioritized then discussed
4. A. Quality yes, days and time often a problem
B. I'm not sure we're addressing as many of the needs of the congregation as we can
C. Not for lack of trying
5. None
6. None
7. A. I believe we should be an "all inclusive church"...God loves everyone no exceptions
B. I believe we have already made great strides in this area
C. I think the responses to this maybe confused in that it is unclear to me if (a) we think we already do this or (b) if we realize we do not do as well as we could and hope to do better- I responded as if to (a)
8. None
9. None

Summary of table sheets from night 3

What are the treasures we would put in the ark.

Table 1.

Bible (2 people)

Music

This loving family (the special people we are to one another

- Mutual Support group/family/love/tolerance

Hunger for Spiritual Growth (becoming a disciple of Christ)

Table 2

Holy eucharist: Each person would show up and each would know a part. The essence of who we are and the church community

Trust in God

Out reach missions

Christian formation bible lessons/faith

EfM community

Learning in community (yarn and needles)

Baptismal Covenant: respecting the dignity of every human being

Discernment a description of what it means to be a Christian

Table 3

Communion

Christ

Holy Spirit

Love

Faith

Tradition

Table 4

Hymnal (music)

Vestments (symbols of the Eucharist as a central part of community)

Fellowship

Memories

Cross

Prayer book (Liturgy)

Prayer

Table 5

Fellowship/relationships x3

Youth education materials

3 legged stool of Scripture tradition and reason.

Community distillation of Core Values

1. Fellowship/Relationships
2. Eucharist/ liturgy/ worship/ music
3. Outreach/active faith/ great Commission
4. Education/Christian Formation/ encouraging and feeding Hunger for God

Aspirational Values

1. Inclusion
2. Spiritual Development
3. Evangelism
4. Apprenticing new members
5. Eliminate Summer blues (this needs to be fleshed out this is a problem not a value)

OUR LEARNINGS

From the Lenten series

- Awareness that we were a social organization first and Church second – now reversed!
 - o Focus had been heavily on social for the sake of being social.
 - o A shift has been occurring that puts more of the focus on God, Christ and being a church first.
- Awareness of action of Holy Spirit at St. Aidan's – may have been covered up or not apparent before!
- People were channels of the Holy Spirit (hunger for spiritual growth)
- Status quo not good enough anymore
 - o Less inertia about changing
 - o Greater awareness and acceptance that we must move forward
- Sense that there was a 'hollowness' "before/tradition clique" – people want to move on
- People at St. Aidan's are truly committed to church/community and its future (larger group than thought)
- Not a clinging to the past that once existed at St. Aidan's
- People willing to be real (not 'Southern politeness')
- Aha moment: bought spiritual growth elsewhere; went elsewhere. Felt connected with groups; willing to engage
- Now seeking at St. Aidan's what sought elsewhere
- Status, "boring" character of 3 mile radius.
 - o Neighborhood is not turning over very rapidly
- Stable disparity
 - o The lack of diversity both income and racial are static and not showing many signs of changing.
- What are demographics beyond 3 mile radius
- "Long way to go to be an accepting church toward gays and others"
- Where do we go with concept of "not accepting"
- People beginning to understand what Vision team is, what team is all about – and to be excited
- Vestry very supportive!