



Saint Peter's Episcopal Church Cambridge, MA

Strategy 2015-2020

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Introduction

In 2010 Saint Peter's Episcopal Church in Cambridge embarked on a process of introspection and undertook the work of preparing a 'parish profile' outlining our identity as a community; our needs; and where we hoped our new Rector would lead us. That document guided our subsequent search process, and the self-knowledge we gained led us through the process of creating stability in our assets and our ways of doing business. We have made great strides together in restoring our sanctuary and getting our house in order.

This stability allows us to look forward to the next five years of our mutual ministry. While maintaining the organizational gains we have already made, it also lets us consider how we can grow in love for one another, in service to our community and as disciples of Christ. To this end, the Vestry chartered a Strategic Planning Committee in 2014 to continue the work of introspection and to provide recommendations for future growth.

The committee consists of nine parishioners who have been guided by a professional strategic planning consultant recommended and sponsored in part by our Diocese. Our work was undertaken in several phases: First, the committee sought a deep understanding of the strengths and challenges present within our community by designing and conducting a parish survey. The committee received a thorough response from a broad cross section of the congregation. We learned not just about our demographics but also about attitudes of our community and the direction we might go in the future. Second, the committee used data from the City of Cambridge, the Diocese of Massachusetts, the National Episcopal Church, and independent parties to understand the trends in our immediate area and society as a whole. These trends are summarized in Section I of this report.

This learning process gave us the ability to reflect both on whom we are as a church and on whom we, the members of the committee, hoped we could become together. Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we captured these shared values and used them to develop a collective vision and mission for our work by updating the mission articulated in the past by similar groups. It is our hope that this renewed mission statement along with the vision and core values found in Sections IIA, IIB, and IIC of this document will provide the guiding principles for all of our upcoming work together.

We then began the process of translating the core values into directed objectives, taking into account the internal and external trends illuminated in our research. To capture the thinking behind each major objective, we listed potential implementation strategies that could make each objective a reality. Our intention was not to prescribe specific actions so much as to make the objectives concrete and to establish a starting place for taking action. These suggestions are listed in Section IID.

Our final effort was to propose a process by which specific plans for implementation of the objectives could be drafted and carried out as described in Section III. With the support of the Rector and the Vestry, the work of implementing these recommendations is the responsibility of the entire congregation. It is the hope of this committee that we will work together, with knowledge gleaned from this directed reflection and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to continue to build the body of the Church in Central Square and beyond.

I. Where we are today (Current Position)

A. External Trends and their implications for SPC 2015-2020*

Trends: External to St. Peter's	Implication: St. Peter's should...
<p>1. Demographics: Dramatic increase in the percentage of young adults (ages 20-35) in Boston, Cambridge and Somerville</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to chaplaincies at MIT and Harvard as feeders to St. Peters for post graduates who stay in Cambridge. • Develop immediate access points for these parishioners in light of likely shorter tenure, e.g., biannual ministry participation outreach. • Target “nomads” (young adults who still feel they are Christian and are trying to build community in a new place). • Design communications campaign (“You are Home”) based on the idea of finding a new home and new community to plug into. • Public transit outreach campaign geared to Central Square and Cambridgeport (Red Line and buses). • Based on the message “You are Home”, foster relationships between established parishioners and new arrivals in Cambridge and at Saint Peter’s. • Provide support for the longer term parishioners to help them deal with turnover and their investment in these shorter duration relationships. • Develop explicit programs for the diaspora members (“young adults who move away”), e.g. locational groups and activities.
<p>2. Demographics: Church growth is linked to immigration patterns and especially growth in Hispanic and Asian communities in the Boston area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional community learning program about being in relationship across difference of all sorts. • Meet with Diocesan team on Hispanic Communities and learn about engagement with that program. • Consider East Cambridge connection with support of Diocesan Resources. • Connect to Diocesan or other resources on new arrivals from Asia. • Develop a “You are Home” program to help people who are a long way from home see us as their new church home.
<p>3. Neighborhood Focus: Turnover in mid-Cambridge and Cambridgeport (e.g. 427 homes sales in Cambridgeport in 2014) and expansion in Kendall Square (e.g., emergence of several thousand new residential units) offering potential for longer term engagement and stability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to the chaplaincy at MIT. • Target outreach in local and nearby neighborhoods to build a stronger base of core local members who can come to events easily • Send introductory packet to new residents in mid-Cambridge and Cambridgeport and Kendall Square. • Connect to Kendall Square community associations. • Design communications strategy for this new neighborhood.

<p>4. We will continue to draw from people living in a large, urban, densely populated community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Cambridge/Somerville and Boston. • Do concerted outreach to Afterworks families. • North Cambridge is over-served but Kendall and Cambridgeport have fewer churches so target outreach to these communities. • Design communications strategy with these patterns in mind. • Leverage the easy access to St. Peter's by public transport. • Develop a parking plan to support those who drive. • Offer St. Peter's as a welcoming personal haven in an often impersonal city.
<p>5. People are increasingly "spiritual but not religious" - not necessarily churchgoers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure out the "X" factor to reach people. • Reach out to people starting from a "spiritual not religious" perspective. • Consider more small groups: taking church to where people live. • Use our religious symbols and jargon thoughtfully. • Develop programs that provide a refuge from stress and a place to reflect.
<p>6. Decreasing church attendance nationwide driven by rise of rationalism and failure of messaging from institutional religion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on messaging: understand the truths and then work on how to convey them in ways people can hear and respect. • Actively seek to engage people who are beginning to sense the superficiality of their rejection of faith. • Seek to "shake up Central Square" by challenging assumptions about reason, faith and organized religion. • Highlight the Anglican comfort with reason. • Celebrate and highlight our heritage as a "big-tent" Episcopal parish. • Connect all of this to the young adult outreach above. • Implement forums, posters, debates, challenges and more edgy messaging. • Use our social action and expand on it as an entry point. • Expand forms of worship, especially contemplative prayer.

<p>7. Technology: our world is increasingly online.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use technology to build and sustain our community, e.g., online entrance interview, adult formation blogs or podcasts. • Balance this with the continuing need for interactions in-person. • Consider new ministry to engage people online. • Explore use of social networking (such as Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to expand reach and communicate timely messages about events, mission, and our welcoming, inclusive parish.
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***See appendix for a summary of these trends and implications**

B. Internal Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Implications: St. Peter's should:
<p>1. Our parish community: welcoming, affirming, and committed to worship, mission, diversity and spiritual growth for all ages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate and strengthen spiritual growth. • Work to deepen sense of community and personal commitment. • Encourage more participation opportunities for service in parish ministries. • Commit to greater outside community engagement by working with the City of Cambridge and other neighborhood groups.
<p>2. Our rich worship and prayer life: warm, inviting, substantive, relevant and a variety of prayer forms including Sunday and Wednesday Eucharists, Morning Prayer, Contemplative Prayer and other special prayer services offered during the year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that our worship and prayer experiences meet the contemporary needs of our community. • Celebrate and increase lay participation on Sundays and throughout the week. • Maintain scripture-based preaching by clergy and lay preachers that calls us to Christian action. • Provide inspiring music for liturgy reflective of growing needs of congregation.
<p>3. Our Christian formation: committed, substantive, and as broadly applicable as possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide varied subjects and opportunities for parishioners to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ. • Recognize and offer additional Christian formation opportunities provide at church and possibly in parishioners' homes. • Ensure financial support and work to increase it.
<p>4. Our mission and outreach: CommonCare, Afterworks, Diocese, Deanery, Episcopal City Mission, ministry partners, shelters, prison ministry and street ministry.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make mission and outreach a higher priority and involve more parishioners in these ministry opportunities. • Link/partner with other faiths and traditions; provide opportunities for interfaith dialogue. • Develop more funding sources; e.g. annual budget, grants.
<p>5. Our worship space and building: beautiful, historic, church building available for worship and outreach, maintained with environmental consciousness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and strengthen current maintenance levels throughout our physical plant. • Continue to provide space and increase use of space for concerts and other local community functions as part of the outreach of the parish into the community. • Continue to maintain and support tenant use of the parish house. • Provide necessary funding for maintenance and care of our musical instruments.

Challenges	Implications: Saint Peter's should
<p>1. Our worship attendance, parish membership and involvement are not growing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take steps to develop more effective means of telling our story; strengthen external communications. • Continue to assess how well our worship opportunities are meeting the needs of our parishioners, visitors and the changing needs of our community's demographics. • Be open to flexibility in our worship environment to meet contemporary worship needs. • Strengthen outreach to parishioners in need, visitors, and the wider community. • Strengthen hospitality ministry. • Provide more fun opportunities for greater parish fellowship. • Solve challenges of Sunday/weekday night parking.
<p>2. Our parish demographics are less reflective of the demographics of Cambridgeport and the surrounding communities than in years past thus threatening the historical diversity of the parish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure diversity and inclusiveness. • Embrace the needs of changing communities, especially the 24-40 age group. • Broaden the scope of ministries to better support youth and seniors of the parish. • Fully incorporate newcomers into parish life and celebrate what they bring to the parish.
<p>3. Our leadership needs in all areas cannot be met by the rector and the few dedicated parishioners in leadership positions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parish leadership with prayer and positive affirmation. • Identify, train and sustain more lay leaders from the community. • Develop more parish leaders to address leadership needs of the future.
<p>4. Our parish income is not keeping up with our financial needs: low percentage of pledging parishioners; overly dependent on parish house income.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow pledge base for greater parishioner commitment. • Create a better understanding that commitment includes financial support. • Provide greater transparency concerning financial needs and implications. • Explore more avenues for use of the sanctuary and the undercroft for greater income potential.

II. Where we are going (Future Position)

A. Mission

Saint Peter's Episcopal Church—Mission Statement

We are an Episcopal community of Christian disciples walking in the footsteps of Jesus to welcome all people, nurture one another, and reach out in love to Cambridge and the wider world.

B. Vision

Saint Peter's Episcopal Church-Vision Statement

With God's help we will be an ever more vibrant and joyful community, constantly guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfill Jesus Christ's call to worship God and to love and serve our neighbors as we pursue peace and justice for all.

C. Values

Saint Peter's Episcopal Church - Core Values

- **Welcoming and Affirming** We are a diverse inner city church creating a welcoming community/space for all seekers.
- **Building Community** We are a gentle community creating a home for people from Cambridge and beyond where every voice is celebrated and heard.
- **Celebrating** We celebrate the beauty of faith and the art of liturgy.
- **Seeking** We are a community which questions, grows and learns together as disciples of Christ.
- **Serving** Our community engages with Cambridge and the wider world in pursuit of social and economic justice.

D. Objectives for 2015-2020

1. Communications: Use stronger external and internal communications to build our parish community.

- a. Recruit a volunteer communications committee to develop and maintain a communications strategy.
- b. Use technology and social media to present the richness of our worship and prayer life, e.g., online interviews, adult formation blogs, or podcasts.
- c. Reach out to young/transient/seeking populations of the community by implementing a “You are Home” style communications campaign that emphasizes our inclusive values and reveals St. Peter’s as a home for those who are displaced from their communities of origin.
- d. Target communications to areas physically near the church, e.g., messages directed towards Central Square and Cambridgeport; collaboration with nearby universities; and mailings to communities along the Red Line.
- e. Target communications to populations with high potential interest, e.g., welcome packets to new residents with information specifically targeted to new families who are coming back to church.
- f. Ensure that our messages are accessible and assume little knowledge of how ‘the church world’ works or what ‘church words’ mean.

2. Outreach/In reach: Focus our ministries to serve those in need, in and outside the parish.

- a. Evaluate our outreach priorities to various groups, looking specifically at areas where Saint Peter’s is currently under-representing local demographics, e.g., the 25-40 age group and families with young children.
- b. Increase use of space for concerts and other local community functions as part of the outreach of the parish into the community. Create opportunities for non-parishioner community members to become regularly involved in these activities.
- c. Link to/partner with other faiths and traditions to provide opportunities for interfaith dialogue.
- d. Recognizing that high turnover necessitates rapid on-boarding, develop strategies to proactively engage new members in ministry, e.g., intentionally recruit for ministry participation on a quarterly basis; have a monthly ‘This is my ministry’ talk after announcements, etc.
- e. Consider the various cultural communities within Cambridge and the unique opportunities to minister to these groups, e.g., the diocesan initiative for Hispanic communities.
- f. Develop a strategic plan specific to our outreach ministries by establishing metrics and defined roles for each ministry, and defined requirements based upon funding and participation.
- g. Recognize that every activity is an opportunity for relationship building, e.g., altar service, washing dishes, etc. Structure activities to capitalize on this opportunity.
- h. Promote activities for relationship building outside of the church facility, e.g., house groups, book clubs, theology and beer, apple-picking, walks in the Fells, etc.

3. Worship: Adapt our worship (liturgy, music, preaching, lay involvement) to meet evolving parish needs.

- a. Move the early worship service to another slot (possibly Sunday evening or Saturday) to provide a different opportunity for regular worship.
- b. Support the contemplative prayer group and consider it an example to use for other places where there may be similar needs.
- c. Work to reduce the learning curve for low-familiarity participants. Increase the ease of participation in the service by building common knowledge of service elements, e.g., intentionally teach hymns through repetition, previewing tunes before the service, or distributing *YouTube* playlists of music earlier in the week.
- d. Consider home/neighborhood worship outside of regular worship times.
- e. Encourage a full participation in all the aspects of ministry by specifically inviting individuals to participate, with the expectation that participation will be term limited, e.g., “Would you consider reading two lessons over the next quarter?”
- f. Adapt the worship space (sanctuary layout and use) to make the worship more ‘communal’, e.g., move the choir into the congregation, rope off the back pews, preach from the floor, reconfigure pews to increase member ‘face to face’ interaction. Be creative with the space.
- g. Continue to make the church an emotionally safe and peaceful space that encourages connection and vulnerability.
- h. Manage, maintain and grow our high caliber music program.

4. Spiritual Formation: Adapt our formation to meet evolving parish needs.

- a. Recognize the central importance of spiritual formation as part of everything we do, both within and outside of the parish.
- b. Intentionally use formation as a way to increase our institutional capacity for ‘being in relationship across difference’, e.g., conversations with Muslim community; education around gender and race relationships; discussion of norms for promoting emotional safety; ideas on how to improve our ability to love one another in practical ways.
- c. Draw on our tradition of active questioning and investigation of theology to attract the curious.
- d. Assess existing and develop new approaches to Christian formation among each demographic group represented and desired at Saint Peter’s.
 - i. For children – survey parents to determine what they would like to see more of and their suggestions.
 - ii. For youth - work together with other Episcopal churches in Cambridge for confirmation activities and extracurricular events of social and mission interest.
 - iii. For young and middle adults – dining/bible study/conversation groups.
 - iv. For senior citizens - assess current activities and consider what could be done, e.g., monthly senior lunches.
- e. Simultaneously, promote relationship and learning across generations and demographic groups by intentionally structuring activities for inter-demographic collaboration, e.g., emphasize intergenerational participation in church decorating events; giving youth opportunities to lead their elders; working with the diocese, consider expanding our ‘ministry partnerships’ to include space for a Spanish-speaking Episcopal community.

5. Sustainability: Build our financial and leadership resources.

- a. Broaden the base of parish leadership by identifying or creating 'low barriers to entry' leadership opportunities and inviting newer congregants to take those roles. (If needed, invite older congregants to leave those roles and take on new roles!)
- b. Make and regularly evaluate a plan for parish ministry, including:
 - i. How we invite new members into ministry.
 - ii. What ministries we commit to as a parish.
 - iii. A transition plan for each ministry that facilitates handoff of responsibilities to new leaders. (This should also help with burnout).
 - iv. Ways for lay participants to relieve the burden on the rector, e.g. in management of rental space, musical events, etc.
- c. Regularly review the goals, objectives and needs of our rector. E.g. yearly mutual ministry review.
- d. Ensure financial sustainability by continuing our structured methods for evaluating our income and our existing costs and expenditures, e.g., regularly revisit paid staffing.
- e. Sustain the investment in parish facilities and extend our attention to the parish undercroft, e.g., upgrade the kitchen; assess the layout and use of the undercroft to accommodate the hordes of people who will be shortly joining us; revisit parish house rental and ensure that we are making the best use of it as an asset.
- f. Initiate a long-term property maintenance plan.
- g. Develop a parking plan.

III. Strategies for implementation.

Following the suggestions of the Strategic Planning team, it falls to the vestry to recommend a set of objectives for detailed planning and implementation by ministries or committees within the parish. To ensure that the vestry's recommendations are captured, and that the burden of planning and implementation does not fall disproportionately on a few participants, it is important that each objective or supporting objective be owned by a specific group that is charged with planning its implementation and reporting to the vestry.

Several of the objectives (Worship, Outreach) and sub objectives (Financial Sustainability, Facility Development) map well to existing parish committees (Worship and Music, Outreach, Finance, and Property, respectively). The vestry can engage with these committees to develop plans for actualizing the recommendations of the strategic planning committee.

To address the remaining components, committees will be formed (or re-formed) with the express purpose of implementing specific objectives recommended by the vestry. Namely, these could be a 'Communications Committee', and a 'Spiritual Formation Team'.

For the purposes of planning, we suggest that each group contain a 'coordinator' who is a member of vestry, and at least two non-vestry members, with membership otherwise being open. This is in part to ensure good communication between groups and with the congregation as a whole, and to develop leadership within the congregation.

We recommend forming these additional committees and soliciting additional interest in the existing committees with the presentation of this strategic plan to the congregation. To promote healthy norms for participation and to reduce the danger of burnout, we suggest communicating a six month expectation for participation clearly with the option to renew that commitment on short but regular timescales.

To ensure coordination between committees, we recommend a monthly 'committee coordinators' meeting, commensurate with vestry meetings when appropriate, but beginning during the summer to engage in action plans for the fall and beyond.