

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 2012 Vision Statement

History and Process

St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Cary was founded in June 1958 and remains a thriving, dynamic church in the Diocese of North Carolina. We have grown rapidly over the past decade, growth for which we planned and prepared. Our growth is supported by strong leadership by our clergy and laity; vibrant worship services; excellent programs for children and youth; an award-winning preschool and a generous congregation that seeks engagement throughout our community. In 2007, St. Paul's developed a five-year plan to guide the mission of our church. The 2012 vestry agreed to update the plan after developing a process to engage as many parishioners as possible.

A three-member subcommittee of the vestry guided the visioning process in frequent consultation with the vestry and the rector. The process began with the recruitment of church leaders, many of them former wardens and vestry members, to facilitate 'listening circles' of approximately 10 parishioners each. The facilitators participated in a joint training session and listening circle where they were able to share their concerns and vision for St. Paul's. Over several weeks in October, these facilitators conducted roughly 15 additional listening circles with nearly 150 participants who were encouraged to share their thoughts about a vision and plan for the future of St. Paul's. Notes were kept of each meeting and used to develop an extensive survey.

The survey questions reflected the interests and concerns shared in the listening circles. They were divided into 10 sections: Outreach; Worship; Youth; Children; Adult Education and Spiritual Growth; All Are Welcome; Music; Fellowship; Facilities and Resources; and Giving. Each section contained specific ideas and recommendations presented in the listening circles. All adult and youth parishioners were asked to rank their enthusiasm for each item on a scale of 1-5 in three different categories – My Time and Talent; St. Paul's Time and Talent, and St. Paul's Treasure. These categories were selected in order to determine where support was indicated through direct involvement versus where support was indicated through financial investment. In addition to the rankings, parishioners were also asked to provide additional comments to provide detail and flavor to their responses.

The survey data was compiled and used to develop the following vision for St. Paul's. All responses were thoroughly and prayerfully analyzed and considered by visioning committee and both the statistical data and comments are being made available to clergy, staff, and ministry leaders as appropriate for their own review and use. This vision is intended to guide the activities of the church through 2017, at which time it is expected the leadership of St. Paul's will revisit it.

Our church has enjoyed many successes in recent years as our programs improve and expand. We have largely weathered the financial challenges of a poor national economy through careful management of our resources, and making difficult choices. We are optimistic, enthusiastically supportive, and poised for continued success.

Vision Statement

St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Cary aspires to be a caring faith community where all are welcome. We value a vibrant celebration of the Eucharist that engages our congregants through words and song. We support the spiritual and moral development of our children and youth through programs that fully integrate them into the life of our church. We encourage the generous spirit that moves our members to reach out directly to those in need in our community. We will continue our faith journey together in fellowship, providing our members spiritual education to enhance their worship experience, while managing our resources responsibly.

Vision Statement Area Detail

Outreach

Outreach is an important component to our identity, both individually and corporately. We see outreach as more than simply collecting and making charitable donations through the church. We appreciate and desire greater opportunities for individuals and families to connect spiritually with the community at large, through active involvement in good works and personal relationship building. This is not to say that we are not a church willing to give of its treasure, but we prefer to give financial outreach at a personal level, rather than a corporate level.

Worship

Our worship services, specifically the homilies by the clergy, continue to be a widely identified strength of the church. Multiple ideas were submitted for possible changes to the timing, quantity, and format of the services, but there is a consensus that any changes should supplement, not replace, what we are doing today. New services or changes to existing times and formats should be considered carefully; balancing the desire to provide greater opportunities for participation against the possibility of simply breaking up current attendees into more insulated groups.

Youth

Serving the Youth of our parish and community is area of joint strength and commitment. St. Paul's investment in a clergy member with direct responsibilities in the Youth program has been a good investment. We have the strong desire for the church to serve – and be served by – our Youth community but we also recognize that we do not have the skills, time, or enthusiasm in volunteer lay leadership to make this a reality without professional support.

Children

Children's Ministries are another large component to our church identity. Across the board, our parishioners identified a willingness and desire to give of their own time and talent, St. Paul's time and talent, and our collective treasure to serve our Children. Not only do we have a strong desire to serve our children, but we are very pleased with how we are doing it, today. We must continue to work to keep this a core strength of our church.

Adult Education and Spiritual Growth

We are not currently meeting our parish's needs or desires in the area of Adult Education and Spiritual Growth. Specifically, we want more small-group study opportunities and the ability to schedule Adult Education and Spiritual Growth classes into our calendars. We want to interact conversationally, and learn from other's personal experiences. Our clergy is widely praised and identified as great spiritual leaders, but parishioners are asking for more adult education opportunities. St. Paul's needs to find a way to greater utilize our clergy's and lay leaders' talents for meeting this need.

All are Welcome

"All are Welcome" has become a core value – if not the primary core value – in allowing St. Paul's to accomplish its mission. However, care needs to be taken that "All are Welcome" retains its meaning as both an invitation to all to be served by St. Paul's, *and* for St. Paul's to be served by all who come. Our success in living into "All are Welcome" must be measured not only by Sunday attendance, but also by our willingness to grow through new ideas and new ways of doing things.

The visioning process has clarified that we do not desire a dedicated "All are Welcome" outreach program as much as we desire for this value to pervade every existing program, ministry, and service. Toward this end we need to remain diligent in fostering invitation, inclusiveness, and acceptance throughout all areas of church ministry.

Music

Through the quantity and quality of responses, it is clear that St. Paul's remains passionate about music. An underlying theme that came out of the visioning process is that we desire the music of our services to be more participatory in form and format. Although we recognize that we have a very diverse level of musical talent within our ranks, we want to be able to collectively participate in 'making a joyful sound'. We need to find a way to allow each parishioner to participate at his or her desired level, whether that means finding a place within a choir, participating in the service music from the pew, or simply enjoying the sound of the organ playing hymns.

Fellowship

As with "All are Welcome", we see fellowship as being a core value to be lived into, as opposed to being simply a program or ministry. We expect all our gatherings to contain an element of fellowship, and generally are pleased with the mix of work/prayer/fellowship in our programs and ministries. On the other hand, we would like to have more fellowship-specific events at the parish level – such as church picnics – as well as more fellowship events that include the community at large – such as Lobsterfest. Fellowship events are a primary way for newcomers to become comfortable with, and invested in, the St. Paul's family.

Facilities and Resources

There is consistent support for improvement of St. Paul's facilities and resources subject to two limitations:

1. A specific and immediate need or purpose in the improvement must be identified.
2. Any improvements must be funded with minimal impact to the normal operating budget.

This is not surprising given the recent economic climate, and meets normal thresholds of being good stewards of the church's resources. The highest priority identified is a strong desire to find ways to fund a dedicated sexton position within the operating budget – due to unhappiness with the condition and cleanliness of the facilities as well as a desire to have a more flexible and capable facilities support staff.

Giving

There was a tremendous positive response with regard to

1. "Creating a culture of giving, as a spiritual practice, to encourage stewardship," and
2. "Commitment toward providing clergy and staff with appropriate compensation"

The feedback from the survey participants indicates a great love for St. Paul's and a desire to keeping it vibrant and thriving through a planned stewardship program of parishioner giving. A caveat, however, is that virtually all of the survey respondents identified themselves as currently pledging to St. Paul's operating budget.

Greater efforts are desired in educating the parish of the spiritual benefits of practicing giving by including the subject of pledging to the church in bigger conversation about giving in general. Pledging must be seen as an investment in becoming a more enlightened individual and less as the cost of attending Sunday services.

Simultaneously, a greater effort is also needed to educate the parish about how St. Paul's treasure is used, at various times and across various levels of detail. Reviewing the budget numbers at the annual meeting is insufficient. While we engage our vestry to work out the numbers, we also want updates from the vestry about the financial state of the church throughout the year and via multiple communications mechanisms.