

Outline for Discernment Meetings with Our Congregation

Church of the Good Shepherd

September 2022

Questions to Keep in Mind throughout the Discernment Process

- What is God calling us to do next?
- Are we focused on & faithful to our reason for being?
- Are we sustainable in mission & ministry?
- Are we connected to & expressive of our ecclesial traditions, ethos, & character?
- Are we self-renewing & responsive to the challenges and opportunities before us?
- Are we sustainable or working toward sustainability in terms of fit between vision of ministry, leadership, culture, size, property, finances, etc.?

People Resources

Here we considered the health of the church. We looked at financial support and congregational participation. In the past ten years, average Sunday attendance has declined while total pledges have remained stable. The average pledge has increased. The average in 2010 was 1300.00, the average pledge in 2021 was 1600.00.

We do not rely on bequest and gifts to meet operational expenses. These moneys are used for capital improvements and to grow the Unit fund. The current level of financial giving allows us to pay our bills but to some extent we rely on grants and in kind giving to support outreach. We do budget some money for outreach. Prior to COVID, fundraising was done to support outreach.

The age demographic is over 60 years of age. The feeding program is our outreach ministry. Currently, we have sufficient numbers of people who are active and committed to the work of the congregation and fulfill the mission.

We do rely on people to take on multiple roles. We do offer Christian formation in the form of bible study, book study, and participation in diocesan sponsored activities... Sacred Ground. The pledge drive is very low key. It last for three weeks with various members of the congregation giving short testimonials about why they pledge. Steward formation does not exist.

Physical Plant Needs

Church

1. Ice build-up in the valley between the shallow roof and the roof over the driveway exit.
2. Several windows have bad latches and don't close properly.
3. Moisture in the undercroft. Windows need to be painted and/or replaced.
4. Replace screws on exterior side stairs.

Parish Hall

1. Roof shingles will need replacement in a few years.
2. During the past year the furnace has required maintenance several times and is 25 years old.
3. Algae growth on one side of the foundation and windowsills, rotting clapboard was removed but not replaced.
4. Carpeting is worn and dirty.
5. Back door is rusty, needs a new sweep and leaks cold air.

Garden and Grounds

1. Granite retaining wall on Spaulding Street side needs a safety evaluation.

Rectory

The rectory is old (built in 1890) and in addition to several concerns about the physical structure itself - shingles, peeling wallpaper, porch rot, exterior needs to be painted, windows and storm windows are not in great shape, window boxes need to be removed, driveway is not level and needs more gravel - the home is extremely dated and would need extensive interior work in addition to the items already listed to turn it into a selling point for future clergy.

Mission Statement

mis·sion state·ment
/'miSHən 'stātəmənt/
noun

1. a formal summary of the aims and values of a company, organization, or individual.

“A church mission statement defines the leadership’s vision of congregational purpose and tells you if their vision is in line with God’s purposes for your life.”

https://www.missionstatements.com/church_mission_statements.html

Our current Mission Statement:

The Church of the Good Shepherd is a community gathered by God through Jesus Christ to witness to the presence of God in our lives, to teach and to learn the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to care for others in and out of God's church.

Points of Discussion:

- Does our mission statement accurately reflect our current understanding of ourselves?
- How is the congregation living out our current mission statement?
- What barriers exist that hinder the fulfillment of the stated mission of our congregation?
- Imagine and share how those barriers might be overcome.

Samples of mission statements from other churches in our Diocese:

All Saints is called by God to be an inviting, welcoming and supportive Christian community to all people seeking to grow in faith and do God's work in the world.

—All Saints, South Burlington

To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

—Saint John's in the Mountains, Stowe

To be an inclusive community awake to God in worship, learning and service.

—Saint Stephen's, Middlebury

Demographics of Our Community

Between 2010 and 2020:

☒ The population of Barre City has shrunk by around 500 and the population of Barre Town and Washington County has remained approximately the same.

☒ The age demographic has remained the same: 62% of the population is between the ages of 0 and 49, while 38% of the population is 50 and over.

☐ The ethnicity of the population has changed very little in Washington County: in 2020, 94 % of the population is White, a change of 2% from 2010, while .8% is Black, .8% is Asian, mixed race is 1.8%, almost unchanged from 2010. The greatest change is 1.7% Hispanic, an ethnicity that was not mentioned in the 2010 Census.

Community Needs

What challenges/ needs do we see in the community?

- Housing for both homeless community as well as a lack of affordable housing for renters and middle-income residents
- Economic Development in the area to bring in more jobs and would need housing for people in those jobs
- Isolation
- Opioid and illegal drug use continues to be a problem

What changes has the community seen in the last year? 5 years? 10 years?

2022 compared to 2021:

- Community is opening back up: library programs, Senior Center programs, more opportunities to be with people at performances, community gatherings and at church,

5 years ago:

- Congregation's numbers dropped off as people moved away, became homebound or died. Recently people from outside Washington County have moved to the community as population areas to the north and south have become more expensive.

What would the community miss most if the congregation was no longer present?

- Public witness at vigils
- Community feeding programs at the Good Samaritan Haven (twice a month) and the breakfast and lunch program for food insecure people
- Meeting spaces, performance space

Discerning Our Plan for Good Shepherd for the Next Five Years

- What is God calling us to do next?

- Note: The Diocese would like all congregations to be working toward having a full-time clergy connection in place within the next 3 to 5 years in order to best foster sustainability & vitality. This needs to be considered as we assess our model going forward.
- Where did our discussion, data collection, & research lead us regarding ongoing sustainability & vitality for Good Shepherd?
- Structural Models to consider as our Next Step:
 - Constellation (Shared clergy leadership and/or shared mission work, spiritual formation options, joint fellowship events, etc.)
 - Merging with another church
 - Maintaining part-time clergy as we focus on growth
 - Our own self-determined plan with congregation-based leadership
 - Other?
- What do we anticipate that our church would look like in 5 years with the model we have chosen?
 - People/Growth/Finances
 - Public Witness/Mission
 - Physical Plant