**DISCERNMENT PLAN**

**CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**BARRE, VT**

**JANUARY 2023**

A black and white photo of a church

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**DISCERNMENT PLAN**

**Church of the Good Shepherd**

**Barre, VT**

**January 2023**

**DISCERNMENT TEAM PROCESS**

* Our Spiritual Anchor throughout the discernment process:

**“Step out of the boat and go closer to Jesus.”**

**Vestry Actions**

* **April 4, 2022:** At the April 4th Vestry meeting, the Rev. Earl Kooperkamp introduced the discernment process being requested by Bishop Shannon. He noted a manual would be forthcoming for all of us to read and determine how Good Shepherd would proceed with the discernment process. Details would be addressed in our next meeting. This is a congregation-based process & he would serve in an advisory capacity as needed. This is an excellent opportunity for us to look at direction of the church post-pandemic, especially since we were already starting to look at church growth, new mission outreach, and preparing for any future search activity for priests, as needed.
* **May 16, 2022:** A letter from Bishop Shannon requesting congregations to join in a discernment process was reviewed at this Vestry meeting. The purpose is to look at what God is calling us to do next at Good Shepherd, with emphasis on sustainability of our church going forward and status of our mission vitality in serving our community. Decision was made to establish a team to coordinate the discernment process, noting that it would be best for the team to be comprised of members from both the Vestry and the church at large. Three were elected from the Vestry and three members were nominated from the church. Vestry members included Phil Moros, Marjorie Strong, & Linda Webster. Outreach would be made to Cindy Cobb, Amy Eschelbach, & Felicia Martineau as congregant members. All members were chosen by Vestry vote based on their long history of involvement in the church and/or more recent investment/leadership in church activity. Phil Moros will be team leader as Senior Warden.
* At the request of Phil Moros, Linda Webster compiled a summary of The Manual for Congregations in Discernment presented by The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. The goal of the summary was to provide a working format as partner to the full manual to facilitate the discernment process. The draft was reviewed by Phil Moros & the Rev. Kooperkamp for approval (See Appendix A).
* Discernment Team updates were provided at all Vestry meetings **June 13, July 11, September 12, October 10, November 14, & December 12, 2022.**
* **December 12, 2022:** The Proposed Discernment Plan for Submission to the Diocese was reviewed for any final input from the Vestry. The plan was approved for submission and it was decided to send the plan to the Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal, Canon for Mission Vitality, as our point of contact. We also discussed the process of sign-off and timing/process for submission, aiming for January 2023. A cover letter will be added and all members of the Discernment Team will sign off on the plan.

**Discernment Team Actions**

* All proposed Discernment Team members were contacted and agreed to prayerfully join in this discernment process. All members of the team were requested to read the full manual and summary in preparation for the first team meeting scheduled for July 5, 2022. Phil Moros asked Linda Webster to co-lead the team with him. Linda accepted this role and confirmed plans with Cindy Willis, clerk of the Vestry, to take minutes for the Discernment Team as well.
* All meetings started with The Prayer for Discernment with wording adapted to fit the phase we were in and the subsequent tasks we were focusing on. Minutes were taken for all team meetings and made available on the church website for all congregants to access along with The Manual for Congregations in Discernment, summary of the manual, meeting agendas, and other related documents. The Vestry was kept apprised as well at each Vestry meeting.
* All meetings also started by reviewing the “Questions to Keep in Mind throughout Our Discernment”:
* What is God calling us to do next?
* Are we focused on and faithful to our mission?
* Are we sustainable in mission & ministry?
* Are we connected to and expressive of our ecclesial tradition, ethos, and character?
* Are we self-renewing and responsive to 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.?
* **July 5, 2022**: Agenda of the first Discernment Team meeting focused on an overview of why we were meeting, what we were looking to accomplish, the spiritual foundation for discernment, how we wanted to accomplish our task, timeframe, structure, legal parameters & policy awareness. We started the process of assessing the status of Good Shepherd by reviewing the Life Cycle of a Congregation. The team felt Good Shepherd fell in the Stable category with some elements being healthy & some stagnant, especially because of the pandemic. Emphasis going forward was on renewal and revitalization. Schedule for future meetings was set & research assignments were made to gather information on church & community demographics (current & last 10 years), state of physical plant, our current mission outreach, community needs, people resources, & finances. Resources for possible shared ministry were to be assessed by the team together as needed. Goal of the research was to look at our strengths, weaknesses, stagnant areas, barriers, and insights from church history to determine how best to revitalize going forward. We also discussed the recommendation that all parishes have access to full-time clergy & reviewed the models of Constellation & Merging. This recommendation was continually assessed as we generated our plan.
* **July 26, August 9, and August 23, 2022**: Team meetings were held on these dates to continue our discussion process and review data collected. We also decided to look at the current list of congregants, compared to those who regularly attend, to update the list, better understand why some are not attending, assess outreach that may be needed, and possible mission needs for those homebound or in care centers. Emphasis was also on how to help our community know us better – who we are, what we offer, and how we address community needs. How do we differentiate who we are from the negative views of Christians in some political circles throughout the country today? We continued to look at plans/options for full time clergy in the future. The Rev. Kooperkamp joined in the meeting on August 23. He received all prior minutes and ongoing updates from Phil Moros & Linda Webster prior to August 23rd.
* **September 6, 2022**: The team reviewed information from the Diocese regarding THRIVE and how we can learn from their process to help us as we assess our direction – experimentation and “out of the box” thinking, importance of communication & collaboration, various models for constellation, having representation on the new Committee on Congregational Development and Formation, and strengthening ties with our community to demonstrate relevancy of church in people’s lives. We also established the structure to update the congregation and get their input for the Discernment Plan. A series of small group meetings were to be offered in person and on zoom from September 18 through September 21, 2022. Phil Moros updated the congregation to such on September 11 and an email outlining the meeting options (4 in person meetings and 2 on Zoom) was also sent to all parishioners that morning. Attendance at the meetings was kept and outreach was made to those who were not able to attend the designated meetings.
* **September 27, 2022**: During this meeting, we started to outline the congregation’s input regarding sustainability & mission vitality along with any other matters they presented. We identified themes and areas of consensus so we could begin to formulate a specific plan at our next meeting.
* **October 11, 2022**: We continued to look at information gathered in individual follow-up interviews with those parishioners who could not make it to the small group discussions. Given the information gathered from the small group meetings and interviews, we started to formulate a structure for the Discernment Plan. This included our process, identified goal(s), overall timeframe for the plan, steps to be taken to accomplish goals, how to evaluate progress, how to communicate progress with the Vestry, congregation, and Diocese, and finally, anticipated support we would need from the Diocese to accomplish our plan.
* **October 25, 2022**: Having identified the primary goals as strengthening sustainability & enhancing mission vitality, we started to break down the information from our data collection & congregational input into specific objectives. Starting with sustainability, we looked at items related to growth of our congregation, clergy structure, communication/interface with our community, increased lay leadership, and expanded church revenue. For mission vitality, we felt we were already strong in many outreach areas and wanted to continue much of what was already in place. We would look at ways we could improve what was in place & assess gaps where there may be need for new programming.
* **November 7, 2022**: We continued to work on the structure of our plan. Starting with Growth, we determined it would be best to break this section into 3 subsections -- actions that would make us more welcoming, programs we could put in place to attract more parishioners, and financial factors to be considered to foster growth. We combined some items to eliminate redundancy and clarified wording in communicating our message. We also focused on the model for evaluation which would include timelines, leadership, costs, checkpoints, and plan if not meeting objectives of each task. Additionally, we outlined a timeline for reporting progress to the Vestry and a communication plan to keep the congregation & Diocese current. We will continue to polish this structure and plan overall by email in prep for a final review with the congregation on December 4th. Our goal is to finalize the plan at our next meeting on December 6th.
* **December 6, 2022**: We were pleased that the congregation gave the plan a strong vote of confidence at the review meeting on December 4th**.** Parishioners did request a stronger emphasis on the importance of Good Shepherd to the Barre community. This was voiced very strongly by the congregation overall. We also had discussed the level of investment needed from the congregation to make this plan successful, both financially & level of leadership. The congregation confirmed understanding and a desire to invest in the plan. More detailed assignments will be outlined once the plan is approved. The final draft was adapted to include input from the congregation regarding the strong connection with Barre, financial projections, researching grants for fiscal and mission support, and structure for implementation with timelines and key leaders to be identified.

**Communication with the Congregation**

* **June 9, 2022**: Phil Moros provided an overview of the discernment process for Good Shepherd during the Announcement section of the church service so all congregants were advised of what was happening and why, noting that updates would be forthcoming throughout the Discernment Team process. The congregation was also kept current through the church’s weekly newsletter and encouraged to ask questions and provide input at any time during the discernment process. The Rev. Kooperkamp also noted the same message from the pulpit each Sunday starting June 26 and a Discernment Tab was established on the church website where all Discernment Team- related documents were housed.
* **August 21, 2022**: Linda Webster presented an update to the congregation during the Announcement time of the church service. The goal was to review the Discernment Team’s process thus far and inform parishioners that the team would return in a few weeks with meeting opportunities to get their input for the plan for Good Shepherd. They were also reminded about the Discernment Team information on the church website under the Discernment Tab. They were asked to review and come prepared with their thoughts, recommendations, and questions so we had everyone’s input for the discernment plan to be developed.
* **September 11, 2022**: Phil Moros addressed the congregation to describe an upcoming series of small group meeting opportunities for parishioners to review the Discernment Plan thus far and provide feedback. An email (See Appendix B) was sent to all congregants this morning as well, stressing the importance of this process and their involvement. Again, all discernment-related documents were available for all parishioners on the church website.
* Small group meetings were held with parishioners on the dates below to get their input regarding what they would like to see in the Discernment Plan:
* **September 18 at 8:30 am** – In person prior to church service with team members Amy Eschelbach & Felicia Martineau
* **September 18 at 10:30 am** – In person following church service with team members Phil Moros & Marjorie Strong
* **September 19 at 1:00 pm** – On Zoom with team member Cindy Cobb (Link was listed in the Church Newsletter)
* **September 19 at 6:00 pm** – On Zoom with team member Marjorie Strong (Link was listed in the Church Newsletter)
* **September 21 at 1:00 pm** – In person at Good Shepherd with team member Linda Webster
* **September 21 at 6:00 pm** – In person at Good Shepherd with team member Cindy Cobb
* Individual interviews were also conducted with seven parishioners who were not able to attend any of the small group meetings noted above.
* **December 4, 2022:** Phil Moros, Chair of the Discernment Team, reviewed the Final Draft of the team’s work on the Discernment Plan with the congregation. The goal was to:
  + Ensure everyone had read the latest draft of the Discernment Plan in preparation for it to be submitted to the Diocese in the near future (plan along with all discernment-related documents was available to all on the Church website)
  + Provide a brief overview of the plan.
  + Address any questions or concerns regarding the team’s work on the plan.
  + Gather feedback for any additions, changes, or other recommendations for the plan.
  + Emphasize what would be required of the congregation to ensure success when implementing the plan.

**Communication with the Diocese**

* **July 13, 2022:**  Phil Moros contacted the Canon for Mission Vitality at the Diocese, the Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal, to alert the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee (DCDC) to the start of our discernment process. Canon Susan noted that Sarah Cowen from the DCDC would be Good Shepherd’s contact person and she would be notified to reach out to us shortly.
* **September 2022:** The Rev. Kooperkamp provided an update regarding the Discernment Team’s progress to the Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal.

**Summary of the Discernment Process**

The Discernment Team held 10 meetings, conducted research in 6 areas of church and community life, sought input of the congregation through 6 meetings and 7 individual contacts with parishioners, updated the congregation four times in person, twice by email, and weekly by church newsletter since June 2022, and established access to all Discernment Team documents & processes on the church website. Final review of the plan was completed with the congregation on December 4, 2022 and the Vestry on December 12, 2022. In stepping out of the boat and identifying our strengths, weaknesses, historical insights, and stronger understanding of our community together, we have gone closer to Jesus and prayerfully asked “What is God calling us to do next?”

**PLAN: WHAT IS GOD CALLING US TO DO NEXT AT GOOD SHEPHERD?**

We are ready to renew and grow at the Church of the Good Shepherd. There is excitement and new energy as we come out of the pandemic to get back to many mission and growth projects that we already had planned but had to put on hold due to the pandemic. We have an exceptional clergy leader to guide us and expressed desire from many parishioners to grow more lay leaders. From our research and many conversations with congregants throughout the discernment process, we confirmed that we have committed people resources, a sound financial picture, a beautiful physical plant that has been well-maintained, a solid connection to our community that we can continue to build on, and initiative to excel as a parish when we come together to accomplish major tasks -- like recent fundraising for our new organ. We are grateful for this discernment opportunity and look forward to ensuring our sustainability and enhancing mission vitality for Good Shepherd and the communities we serve as we move forward, continuing our walk with Jesus. Given such, we submit the following plan for the DCDC’s approval and support.

**GOALS:** To strengthen sustainability and enhance mission vitality of the Church of the Good Shepherd

**TIMEFRAME**: 3 to 6 years

**STRATEGIES**:

**SUSTAINABILITY**

* GROWTH: Increase the size and stewardship involvement of the congregation and assess options to increase revenue and decrease expenditures
* Welcome
* Upgrade the quality of our Zoom system so it is more user friendly to new and current congregants and explore projecting worship materials for the church service
* Establish a regular system of greeters for Sunday services as well as other programs held at the church
* Develop a “buddy system” to help newcomers understand the flow of the worship service and introduce them to parishioners at Coffee Hour if they would like
* Provide Christian Spiritual Formation-based childcare during worship services & work toward establishing a Sunday School program as the number of children warrants
* Develop a brochure of programs offered at Good Shepherd, list of contacts, etc. that can be given to people new to the church and help them assess how they might be involved in programs at Good Shepherd
* Increase community awareness that transportation to church services can be arranged
* Expand our definition of community by reaching beyond Barre to nearby communities that don’t have an Episcopal Church (Berlin, Orange, Plainfield, etc.) & support each town to find ways of Beloved Community through their connection at Good Shepherd
* Program
* Offer opportunities that address family needs to promote growth of a younger congregant population (partnering with community resources to offer pre-school, childcare, after school programing, vacation Bible School, etc. at the church per rental of space)
* Visit the Unitarian Universalist Church in Montpelier and the Baptist Church in Websterville who have had great success with growth by family programming and see what we can learn from them
* Emphasize more holy/feast days with special programming & educate to the beauty of our spiritual traditions and images. Reestablish services that would be visible to the community like the Good Friday Procession and Blessing of Pets in the park on the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi
* Finances
* Explore solar power, heat pumps, increased insulation, weatherization grants, etc. to decrease heating costs – and demonstrate we are good stewards of creation care for our community
* Increase rental of our church space
* Strengthen parishioner education regarding stewardship, estate planning, and bequests
* Support mission programs as noted in the Mission Vitality section (page 11) that will both serve the community and attract new congregants
* Explore grant opportunities to support both sustainability matters and mission outreach needs
* CLERGY: Work toward securing and sustaining a full-time clergy
* Complete financial projections & research the process for securing full-time clergy
* Research opportunities for federal student loan forgiveness to facilitate securing a full-time clergy, meeting the requirements as a professional serving a rural, non-profit community entity for a designated amount of time
* Upgrade the Rectory to be a point of attraction to an incoming priest
* Explore options for constellation with the Diocese as an interim measure, if needed
* COMMUNICATION/INTERFACE WITH THE COMMUNITY: Enhance community understanding of who we are at Good Shepherd and how we serve the community
* Strengthen our website to communicate more about who we are & what we offer
* Clarify our values as a church to emphasize an inclusive message that “All are welcome at Good Shepherd,” dispelling any concerns that we might be elitist or part of the negative extremist religious segment in our country
* Conduct Community Service Days to actively meet an identified need in our community
* Continue participation in the Barre Heritage Festival
* Increase church visibility & hospitality by holding some regularly scheduled events like concerts, movie nights, church suppers, bake sales, pie days, seasonal events, etc. to promote a strong connection with Good Shepherd
* Use our new organ to offer organ lessons for children and adults
* LAY LEADERSHIP: Engage members of the congregation to take on specific areas of leadership within the church, emphasizing a stronger sense of ownership within Good Shepherd and the broader church overall
* Utilize Diocesan opportunities for education & spiritual formation of Lay Leaders to strengthen leadership skills
* Establish training program for church volunteers re: mission projects, coffee hour, etc.
* Create a parishioner-led pastoral care team to respond to parishioners in times of need
* Increase opportunities for fellowship activities to strengthen parishioner connections, i.e., luncheons, craft groups, holiday gift-making for charity, etc. to reduce isolation & engender a sense of belonging & leadership in the parish
* Partner with other nearby Episcopal churches for shared spiritual formation programming
* Support individuals who are interested in becoming a Deacon
* Increase number of acolytes

**MISSION VITAILITY**

* CONTINUE CURRENT MISSION PROGRAMS:
* Breakfasts twice a week through Enough Ministries for those facing food insecurity
* Provision of clothes to Enough Ministries to address seasonal clothing needs of the homeless, i.e., coats, shoes, hats, gloves, scarfs, socks, etc.
* Dinner meal for the Good Samaritan Haven once a month
* Worship service & lunch for residents of The Hilltop (temporary housing for the homeless) as needed
* Support of Vermont Interfaith Action’s housing initiatives for the homeless & affordable housing, lobbying action for Proposition 2 Constitutional revision to eliminate all exceptions regarding slavery, and other matters of social justice overall
* Participation on the Creative Housing Solutions Task Force to address more affordable housing in the Barre area
* Support of those parishioners participating in community programs such as Rock City Choral Group whose proceeds go to various designated charities, Restorative Justice programming and Circles of Support and Accountability for those transitioning from prison, Camp Agape for children of incarcerated parents, and Pet Food Pantry which assists the homeless in maintaining the important support of their pets by providing food for their dogs & cats
* DEVELOP NEW MISSION OPPORTUNTIES:
* Reestablish breakfast programs directly at Good Shepherd for those experiencing food insecurity
* Establish a support program for those who are addressing Substance Use Disorder
* Initiate Service Days in the Community aimed at special needs of identified populations, i.e., yard care for seniors & homebound, help with Habitat for Humanity program, upkeep needs at the Haven, etc.
* Explore creation care programs and opportunities to worship at Mission Farm
* Conduct periodic plate offerings for the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund & various local charities, highlighted on related spiritual Feast Days
* Develop outreach to parishioners who are homebound or otherwise unable to attend church
* Partner with community resources to provide support for parishioners who need assistance dealing with hardships from the pandemic
* Partner with other nearby Episcopal churches for shared mission projects

**ANTICIPATED SUPPORT NEEDED FROM THE DIOCESE TO IMPLEMENT OUR DISCERNMENT PLAN**

* Programming for lay leader development
* Support in exploring student loan forgiveness to attract priest candidates
* Regular updates from the Committee on Congregational Development & Formation
* Guidance from the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee (DCDC) as questions may arise during implementation of our plan
* Educational programming to assist in grant writing and identifying philanthropic resources
* Coordination with the Diocesan Clergy Recruiter as needed

**MODEL FOR EVALUATION DURING DISCERNMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

* Spreadsheet format outlining items below: (See Appendix C)
* Goal
* Overall timeframe
* Subsequent strategies & tasks
* Timeline for each task
* Designated leaders
* Status of cost factors
* Checkpoints & plan if not meeting specified timelines
* Timeline for reporting to the Vestry

**COMMUNICATION PROCESS FOR UPDATING THE VESTRY, CONGREGATION, AND DIOCESE REGARDING DISCERNMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION/PROGRESS**

* Leaders will be designated for specific sections of the plan. Each leader will outline short-and long-term goals for their section, utilizing the Evaluation Tool format. They will review such with the Vestry and subsequently update the Vestry on a quarterly basis. The leader may request an earlier meeting if Vestry support is needed. Vestry consultation will be provided throughout the implementation process.
* Section leaders will update the congregation quarterly. Vestry minutes will also be posted on the church website so the congregation will have the updated plan information available for their review through this access point as well. Parishioners will be encouraged to ask questions and provide input throughout the implementation process.
* An outline of the short-and long-term goals of each section will be shared with the Diocese (DCDC) to clarify details of the start-up strategies and projected five-year plan. Status of the Discernment Plan Evaluation will then be reviewed with the Diocese (DCDC) annually or earlier as needed.

**APPENDICES**

1. **Summary of The Manual for Congregations in Discernment**
2. **Discernment Team Letter to the Congregation, September 11, 2022**
3. **Evaluation Tool: Sample Spreadsheet for Tracking Progress of Each Strategy**

**Appendix A**:

SUMMARY: A Manual for Congregations in Discernment\*

A Resource for Congregations Facing an Uncertain Future:

procedures for renewing, combining, and closing congregations

**Setting the Stage**: Introductory Comments from Bishop Shannon

“The Church as an institution is bound by tradition, and we have lived for generations thinking that part of our mission is to protect the Church from change. However, we must no longer deny that constant change is part of our tradition.” I said these words at our Diocesan Convention in November 2021.

As we consider how new models of ministry and new collaborative relationships might offer our Diocese new ways in our future, I call upon all of our congregations to also enter discernment. I ask that you consider your current ways of life as God’s gathered people in your local communities and how—and whether—these ways of life will continue into our future.

This process of discernment of vitality and sustainability is a way for you to ask timely and critical questions about the future of our congregations… It is a time for us to “step out of the boat and go closer to Jesus. Let us answer Jesus’ call to step outside with hope and an openness to all things new.”

\* This summary is adapted by The Church of the Good Shepherd from The Manual for Congregations in Discernment by The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, January 2022. The goal is to provide a working format as a partner to the full manual to facilitate the discernment process.

**PREFACE: Finding a New Way**

**Spiritual Reflection**

Be strong and courageous. God has led you this far, and God will never forsake you. (Manual p.4)

**Key Points of Focus**

* Discernment is a prayerful process. It helps us ask critical questions regarding our congregation’s needs, direction, and future sustainability to ensure our foundation as a faithful, healthy, and effective community of faith. The manual is to encourage the discernment process in examining all options to determine the best fit for each congregation at this time.
* The first three chapters of the manual invite reflection on and inquiry about our congregation’s spiritual journey and how we have evolved to where we are today.
* The next 4 chapters look toward our current and future needs. Models of revitalization, restructuring, and closure are outlined as possible steps pending outcome of our discernment. Tools are offered in the appendices to help in planning these steps.
* Once we are ready to start the discernment process, we need to contact the Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal, Canon for Mission Vitality.
* Requested timeline to complete our discernment is the end of 2022. A team from the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee will be available to assist us as needed.

**Questions to Keep in Mind throughout Our Discernment**:

* What is God calling us to do next?
* Are we focused on and faithful to our reason for being?
* Are we sustainable in mission and ministry?
* Are we connected to and expressive of our ecclesial tradition, ethos, and character?
* Are we self-renewing and responsive to 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.?

**Prayer Offered for Our Discernment Journey**

Ever-present God, you call us on a journey to a place we do not know. We are not where we started. We have not reached our destination. We are not sure where we are or who we are. This is not a comfortable place to be. Be among us, we pray. Calm our fears and save us from discouragement and help us stay on course. Open our hearts to your guidance so that our journey to this unknown place continues as a journey of trust. Amen.

The Rev. Canon Kristi Philip, from “Women’s Uncommon Payers”

**CHAPTER 1: Called to a New Life**

**Spiritual Reflection**

Change can be hard, but take heart, God is faithful, and God is always with us!

(Manual p.4)

**Key Points of Focus**

* Be brutality honest in discernment. As God’s people, we have great responsibilities and need to be reality focused.
* Resist longing for the “good old days.” Don’t live in the past. Prepare for the future and move on.

**Questions for Discussion**

* Share a time when the congregation experienced the most joy with fellow congregants.
* Tell a story when you think our congregation was/is most alive.
* Tell a story of a time when our congregation faced a great challenge. How did we meet that challenge?
* Consider the story of Moses, Joshua, and the Promised Land.
* Who do you most identify with in the story & why?
* Where do you see the story of our life as a congregation intersect with the larger narrative – still in Egypt, in the wilderness, about to cross the Jordan? Describe how it feels to be in the place you have identified – struggling, frustrated, overwhelmed? Fearful you might perish, wandering without a purpose, relieved at reaching the Promised Land?
* Think about the story of Abraham. What about it speaks to you today? What captures your imagination?
* As you ponder the story of the Israelites, where do you feel your congregation is – in exile or returning to Jerusalem after a long captivity?
* As you think about the disciples, how does their call speak to you? If you were to pick a biblical story that seems to speak best about our congregation, what story would it be?

**Notes: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**CHAPTER 2: The Life Cycle of a Congregation**

**Spiritual Reflection**

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1-2)

**Key Points of Focus:**

* God’s kingdom lasts forever, but individual congregations may not. This is normal. Stages of a congregation’s life cycle include birth, formation/identity, stability (healthy & stagnant), decline, disintegration, and death. (Manual p.11)

A schematic of the life cycle is provided on page 13 of the manual which illustrates the flow of different life stages and subsequent development activity needed.

* Healthy stability allows for fruitful and sustainable ministry, institutionally and spiritually. Elements of organizational life fit together (money, vision, people, property, etc.).
* Stability can become stagnant or stale, causing growth to stall and new opportunities to be missed. The further down the path a congregation goes in declining numbers, finances, energy, and flexibility, the more costly it becomes for the congregation to activate what it will take to return to healthy stability. Dying may be a more faithful response to God’s call than stubborn survival.
* Prayer is crucial in helping to determine our congregation’s new direction, sense of focus, and purpose.
* It is important to be proactive and start this discernment process before a congregation is in decline. Transition processes can take time, so it is wise to plan ahead.
* Throughout discernment, options to be considered may include congregational development, a shared leadership model or constellation with another congregation, or a call to close which may also include establishing an Episcopal community for worship or mission (still connected to the Diocese but not set in an established church).

**Questions for Discussion**

* Tell a story about the birth of our congregation. Identify places of stability in the past and current life of the congregation. What key elements were/are present? What did stability look and feel like?
* Where do you believe the congregation is on the life cycle? Explain your rationale.
* Describe past times of renewal/revitalization/redevelopment in our congregation. How did we experience those times?
* Discuss the challenges that hinder renewal/revitalization/redevelopment from happening in our congregation.
* What are the tensions in our congregation that take up energy and focus that could be spent on ministry with our community?

**Notes: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**CHAPTER 3: The Discernment Process – What is God Calling our Congregation to Do?**

**Spiritual Reflection**

What is God calling us to do, at this particular time and place? What is our purpose? Why are we here? (Manual p.11)

**Key Points of Focus**

* Discernment is the way we try to seek and discover God’s call, God’s will, for our life as individuals and as communities. It involves reflecting on the deep questions of baptism, prayer, self-exploration, and awareness of circumstances of our life, our gifts, and our abilities. (Manual p.16)
* In discernment, it is helpful to prayerfully stop and look at what we know about ourselves as a congregation -- who are we, where have we been and how we have grown, what are our strengths, what are our barriers. From this and other critical questions, we can look to the future and assess new possibilities for growth. Chapter 3 outlines key questions to facilitate this process.
* All need to pray for grace to practice openness and listen to God’s voice to foster being at peace with whatever comes from the sifting, sorting, praying, studying, and choosing in the discernment process. In Christian discernment, the outcome is in God’s hands.
* Good discernment takes all the facts and practical issues into consideration. It does not go on forever. At some point we need to make a choice and take action, not procrastinate.
* Prayerful questions to guide our discernment:
* Lord, who are we? What are the strengths that you have gifted us with?
* Lord, who are our neighbors? What are their needs and gifts?
* Lord, after listening to your voice, how shall we respond?

**Questions for Discussion**

* **Mission Statement**
* Does our mission statement accurately reflect our current understanding of ourselves? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* How is the congregation living our current mission statement?

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* What barriers exist that hinder the fulfillment of the stated mission of our congregation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Imagine and share how those barriers might be overcome.

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* **Demographics of Our Community & Congregation**:
* In the past 10 years, what has happened to the demographics of our town and surrounding area?

1. Has the population grown, shrunk, stayed the same?  
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2. What is the ethnic and age demographic in our community and how has it changed?

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1. Is our school district growing or shrinking? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* What has happened in our congregation with respect to membership?

1. List our congregation’s average Sunday attendance for the past 10 years. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. List our congregation’s financial giving average for the last 10 years. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the age demographic of the congregation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the ethnic demographic of the congregation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Given the trends of the above questions, what predictions can you make, or hunches do you have, regarding the demographics of your community and your congregation in the future? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* **Our Town**
* What are the greatest needs/challenges currently in our town?

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* What changes have we seen in our town in the past year?

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5 years?

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10 years? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* If someone were to ask at a local gas station for directions to our church,

would the clerk be familiar with or know our church in order to give them directions?

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* What would our town miss the most if our church was no longer present?

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* **Resources Available if We Were to Share Ministry**
* How close is the next Episcopal congregation?

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* Do we have a relationship, formal or informal, with any other congregation in the community/area?

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* Has the congregation ever been in a shared ministry setting in the past? What are the stories from that time?

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* **Physical Plant Resources**
* Describe the condition of our physical plant (in detail).

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* Is there deferred maintenance?

1. If yes, list items & estimated cost.

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1. Can we afford to make the needed repairs or upgrades?

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* Age of current furnace & air conditioner

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* Age of roof

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* Date of last building audit

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* Is there a loan on the building? If yes, how much remains?

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* Is the facility physically adaptable for use? Accessible to those with physical disabilities?

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* Is the building used by other organizations during the week? List organizations & how often they are in the building per week.

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* How often are other people (in addition to the list of organizations) in the building during the week?

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* **People Resources**
* Do we believe we have a sufficient number of people, who are active and committed to the work of the congregation, that we can meet our mission?

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* Do we offer regular Christian formation programs?

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* What are our current outreach ministries? Do we have sufficient funds & interested members to do the work of outreach? Explain.

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* Does the financial giving of current members meet the needs of the congregation, or do we need to rely on bequests, special gifts, investments and/or loans, to pay expenses?

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* Does the current level of financial giving allow us to do anything new or is it merely enough to maintain what we are already doing? Explain.

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* Percentage of active membership that pledge

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* Congregation’s average pledge

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* Number of members who tithe

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* Describe pledge drive.

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* Describe stewardship formation.

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* **Naming the Reality & Choosing the Next Steps**

After prayerfully completing the questions above, consider these next questions:

1. Do we have the people & finances to realistically commit to the work of renewal/revitalization/redevelopment?

* If yes, see Chapter 4: “Deciding for and Steps in Renewing/Revitalizing/Redeveloping Your Congregation” to review expectations/requisites for moving forward with this model.

1. Would we consider entering a relationship with another congregation such as shared leadership, constellation, or merging?

* If yes, see Chapter 5: “Deciding for and Steps in Joining Another Congregation – Constellations, Plus!” to review expectations/requisites for moving forward with these models.

1. Has the time come for us to accept the reality that we are being invited to close the congregation? Do we have a vibrant enough mission and ministry that we should/can consider becoming an Episcopal community?

* If yes, see Chapter 6: “Deciding to Close and Steps in Closing a Congregation” and Chapter 7: “Making Closure, Ending in Hope: Planning a Final Service.”

At this time, it is important to communicate with the Canon for Missional Vitality regarding our next steps and discuss a possible request for a Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee Team to assist us if needed. See Appendix A in the manual for more details.

**CHAPTER 4: Deciding for and Steps in “Renewing/Revitalizing/Redeveloping” Our Congregation**

**Spiritual Reflection**

What have we discerned as the most empowering aspect of God’s call for our ministry? (Manual p.22)

* **Exploring Next Steps per Outcome of Discernment**
* Are we ready for the expectations of Chapter 4 as outlined below?
* Ensure we have the finances to give 3 to 5 years of focused and sustained effort.
* Ready to Renew/Revitalize/Redevelop by investing in one of the following:

1. Work with the Canon for Cultural Transformation to start a new and innovative ministry responsive to our community and focused on mission beyond what we are already doing.
2. Have a congregational team participate in a two-year program at the College for Congregational Development.
3. Restructure our own Clergy Leadership model to ensure full time clergy availability to promote sustainability and sound stewardship for long term vibrancy. Note: “Time has proven that part-time clergy leadership is not the answer to being a thriving and vibrant church in today’s unchurched society… continuing to act as though part-time leadership will save us is simply managing decline.” (Manual p. 22)
4. Create a model per our own unique focus for renewal and revitalization. This must be approved by the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee.

* If ready for this model, our congregation needs to develop a working plan in partnership with Diocesan staff and a team from the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee for approval.
* Some reimbursement may be needed for the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee team as they assist us in determining and carrying out our plan.

**CHAPTER 5: Deciding for and Steps in Joining Another Congregation – Constellations, Plus!**

* **Spiritual Reflection**

God wants us to prepare for the future that we cannot see or yet imagine. (Manual p.8)

* **Exploring Next Steps per Outcome of Discernment**
* Do we have another congregation that is willing and interested in working with us or are we interested in finding a congregation with which to work? Per Chapter 5, there are a few different models we could look at:

1. Constellations
2. Two or more congregations, in geographic proximity, enter into a formal agreement of collaboration. At the very least, clergy leadership would be shared. Other things such as resources, programming, ministries, etc. may be included.
3. Two congregations, in geographic proximity, formally affiliate themselves in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). They agree to share financial resources in order to support a clergyperson or persons. Although affiliated, the congregations maintain their own identity. Facilities, budget, etc. are typically separate but sometimes vestries decide to merge. The covenant between congregations would clearly designate expectations, tasks, roles, etc. as agreed upon.
4. Merging
5. A union of congregations wherein the original congregations are dissolved & a newly named congregation is established.
6. Decision may be made to retain one of the church buildings for ongoing services. If it is too emotional for a congregation to be at home in another congregation’s church, consideration may be given to dissolving ties with both church buildings and finding another neutral site to start over as a new and unified congregation.

1. Worship/Mission Community

A congregation, or part thereof, would meet for worship and mission activity outside of an established church and still be connected to the Diocese. This would mean meeting in private homes, public places, other non-church facilities, online, etc. as orchestrated by members of the group. This would be a community grounded in faith and guided by love to assess God’s call for the group’s ministry.

* General Considerations for Restructuring
* The Canon for Missional Vitality needs to be notified before we pursue any activity, formal or informal, to explore possible options with another congregation. There are Diocesan policies to be followed if we are interested in exploring such options. There must be a record of all meetings, including minutes. No final decisions can be made without input from the Bishop, Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee, Canon for Missional Vitality, and others identified per the circumstances. The Diocese has final legal approval of any type of cooperative activity.
* Restructuring can be with another Episcopal Church or church of another denomination.
* When considering restructuring with a possible congregation, it is important to develop an exploratory experience that allows us to see how the congregations work together.
* It is imperative that members of the congregations involved in restructuring see the effort as a cooperative and faithful response to God’s call to service in order for the union to be successful. All members must acknowledge and own this understanding to enhance cooperative identity as the Body of Christ and act as such in the wider community.
* Cooperation between denominations should consider theology, worship style, mission commitment, sharing of clergy, availability/schedule of building, standing of the clergy, scheduling of worship, openness to Christian formation and music, housing for clergy, etc. A detailed plan of action will be required in writing as a starting point for Diocesan consideration before moving further in the exploration process.
* If any sale or acquisition of property is involved in any of these proceedings, we must follow Diocesan policy in having a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee in concert with the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee be involved in any decision-making.
* If moving forward in restructuring with another congregation, a transition team of members from both congregations should meet to work out the details. It is critical to keep both congregations and the Diocese informed as that process progresses. It is also important to continue to find ways for the congregations to get to know each other.
* If final approval is given for restructuring with another congregation, the decision should be celebrated with a special liturgical service.

**CHAPTER 6: Deciding to Close and Steps in Closing a Congregation**

**Spiritual Reflection**

Closing the doors does not stop God’s plan. God can use the seed found within a closing to produce more fruit and enable one’s church to provide an eternal legacy.

(Manual p.30)

**Exploring Next Steps per Outcome of Discernment**

* The decision to close a congregation is not easy and it does not signify failure. If you are called to this decision, please contact the Canon for Mission Vitality immediately.
* It is important to remember that for Christians, dying is not the end.
* It is normal to grieve. Grieving evokes a wide range of emotions including feelings of denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. It is a process over time, unique for each person.
* A Chaplain may be assigned by the Bishop to assist members with any pastoral care needs regarding closure of the congregation.
* It can be helpful to look at how to leave a congregational legacy, and in so doing, provide for the start of a new life in closing. If it involves items/property of the church, the Dioceses needs to be part of the decision.
* A closing liturgy of celebration should be held. Details for such are outlined in Chapter 7: “Making Closure, Ending in Hope: Planning a Final Service.”
* Good communication regarding the closure process is important. It must be clear and allow all to be heard. Minutes should be kept for any discussions/meetings regarding such. Key decisions about when to close, what to do with property, who needs to be notified of the closure and how, etc. must be determined & coordinated with the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee before taking any action.
* Matters regarding the physical plant, records, leases of equipment, etc. will need to be addressed. A Diocesan checklist for such is provided in Appendix B of the manual.
* To best accommodate the closure activities, it is recommended that a small team from the congregation be identified to work with the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee.
* In the Episcopal Church, the Diocese has ownership of and control over all assets. The Board of Trustees and the Chancellor of the Diocese have oversight of the sale of any Diocesan property. Generally, proceeds from the sale of a building is funneled into Diocesan investments to supply grants and loans to further the mission of our congregations across the state, spiritual formation for congregations, congregational development, and lay leader development. Congregations that are closing are invited to share ideas regarding disbursement of remaining congregational funds that would continue the mission and legacy of the congregation.

**Information Provided in the Appendices**

* Appendix A
* Description of the Diocesan Congregational Committee/Teams
* Appendix B
* Checklist for Steps in Closing a Congregation
* Appendix C
* Diocesan Support for Dissolution of Congregations by the Diocesan Congregational Discernment Committee

**Appendix B:** Discernment Team Letter to the Congregation, September 11, 2022

How many Discernment Team members does it take to screw in a light bulb?????

Come to one of the sharing groups

below and find out!!!

Hello fellow parishioners!! As we have discussed over the last few months, Bishop Shannon has requested that all churches in the Diocese embark on a journey of discernment to assess the future of each church, with emphasis on sustainability and mission vitality. In response, the Good Shepherd Discernment Team has collected data (Finances, Mission, Demographics, Community Needs, Physical Plant, Pastoral Response, etc.) and reviewed possible models of church life in line with some expectations of the Diocese.

NOW, we need to share what we have learned and get EVERYONE’S input as we all make some very important decisions shaping the future of Good Shepherd!! We need your experience, thoughts, perspectives, & expertise to solidify this critical process. To facilitate your input, we have established a series of meetings as outlined below. Please choose to attend one or more of the meeting opportunities that best meets your schedule. The more we have in attendance, the greater the representation of who we are and the stronger the outcome of our decision-making!!

All documents related to the discernment process at Good Shepherd (manual, meeting agendas, minutes, etc.) are on the church website under the “Discernment Documents” Tab. Please review as you are able so it will prepare you for the discussions and choices to be made. Thank you to those of you who have already raised questions and submitted ideas. It is a great start to this important process. Let us all join together in prayer throughout this decision-making time, asking God for clarity in our discernment as we finalize a plan for Good Shepherd going forward.

Thank you for your investment in Good Shepherd!! If you have any questions about this process, please contact any of the team members as noted below. We look forward to meeting with you!!

Peace be with you.

Your Discernment Team

Phil Moros, Marjorie Strong, The Rev. Earl Kooperkamp, Amy Eschelbach, Felicia Martineau, Cindy Cobb, and Linda Webster

**Meeting Options:**

* **September 18 at 8:30 am** – In person prior to church service with team members Amy Eschelbach & Felicia Martineau
* **September 18 at 10:30 am** – In person following church service with team members Phil Moros & Marjorie Strong
* **September 19 at 1:00 pm** – On Zoom with team member Cindy Cobb (Link will be listed in the Church Newsletter)
* **September 19 at 6:00 pm** – On Zoom with team member Marjorie Strong (Link will be listed in the Church Newsletter)
* **September 21 at 1:00 pm** – In person at Good Shepherd with team member Linda Webster
* **September 21 at 6:00 pm** – In person at Good Shepherd with team member Cindy Cobb

**Appendix C:** Evaluation Tool – Sample Spreadsheet for Tracking Progress of Each Strategy

See separate attachment.

Prayerfully submitted to the Rev. Canon Susan Ohlidal, Canon for Missional Vitality, Diocese of

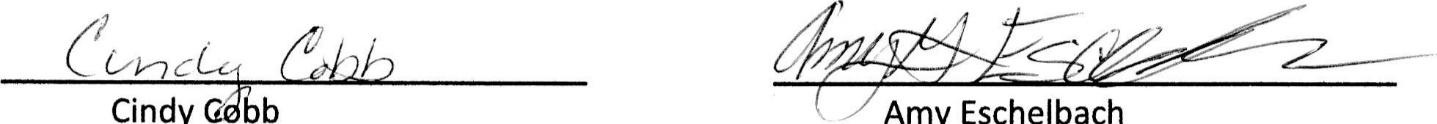
Vermont by the Discernment Team, Clergy, Vestry & Congregation of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Barre, VT.

# Discernment Team

Shape

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PhiI Moros, Chair | Linda Webster, Co-Chair |



Amy

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|  | Marjorie Strong | |

Felicia Martineau