

## ST. JAMES' VISION 2010

The Vestry and clergy of St. James' Episcopal Church spend a significant portion of their time together discerning God's call for our parish community. Through Vestry meetings, prayer, parish surveys, forums, and conversation, we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, asking, "Where is God calling us to go?"

This process of prayerfully listening to God and one another has served us well in the past. In just the last ten years, these are some of the things we've heard God calling us to do, and then started praying for:

- retain newcomers,
- improve stewardship,
- grow our youth group,
- plant a daughter church,
- hire a full-time youth pastor,
- grow outreach opportunities and budgets,
- grow Christian Formation opportunities, and
- prepare for the future through acquisitions, renovations, and expansion of property.

God has answered those prayers, for a simple reason: the prayers were rooted in what we perceived as God's will for us. As the saying goes, "Prayer is finding out what God wants to do, and then asking him to do it."

And so, over the past year or so, your Vestry and clergy leadership has been asking "What does it seem God wants to do in and through St. James' over the *next* five years?"

In order to answer those questions faithfully, our planning process consists of three steps:

First, we take an honest look at the present, asking, "What are we doing well now?" and "What can we improve upon?" Since we do not minister in a vacuum, but in the midst of a wider culture, we also ask, "What is our cultural situation now?" and "What are the implications for our ministry?"

We then consider where God is calling us in the future. Well aware of the fact that we are beneficiaries of the vision and generosity of people living a hundred years ago, we make it a priority to wrestle with the question, "What kind of decisions are we making now, for which people 50 to 100 years from now will be grateful?"

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Finally, we seek to build upon and systemically revisit a five-year plan with goals and objectives that will move us to the future that we believe God envisions for us.

What has this time of prayerful listening taught us?

- 1) God seems to be grounding, or rooting us. Over the past several years, we have been pulled away from the complexities of designing and building a new Fellowship Hall; the difficult economic times have grounded us in a stronger sense of expectations; we have been awed by the strengthening of our outreach and mission; our investments for the future have challenged us to find ways to face and deal with our debt, bringing our focus back to our parish as a whole; and, in regard to property, we are now focusing more attention on caring for what we already have rather than trying to seek more or bigger.
- 2) There's strong agreement that two of our existing (2006 Vision Document) goals – “to **inspire, equip, and empower** parishioners to serve as active disciples of Christ” and “to encourage each parishioner to become involved in **hands-on service projects**” have been successful so far, continue to be important, and **should continue as high priorities**.
- 3) Regarding our third existing goal – a **mission-driven expansion and renovation** – there seems to have been a significant shift in thinking since 2006, *away* from a desire to expand or build new structures *toward* a desire to renovate or re-use current facilities (such as we did in converting the former Rectory into our current Parish House). There's a concurrent strong desire to **pay off current debt**, and to do a better job of **taking care** of what we already own.
- 4) We are not being called, at this time, to go in an entirely new direction, but rather to do a better job at coordinating, communicating, and increasing opportunities to participate in the ministries we're already engaged in. As we engage that task, three words or concepts that keep coming back to us are “simplify,” “connect,” and “care.” Specifically, we feel called to:
  - a. **simplify** all aspects of our parish and personal life,
  - b. increase opportunities to **connect** with God and one another, and
  - c. take good **care** of what God has entrusted to us: our facilities, and one another.

More details about each of our three goals for the next five years follow. We offer this Vision to you, realizing that the work of discerning God's will is ongoing.

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Please read this document prayerfully and carefully. Give us your opinion. We continue to listen and pray, and we ask you to do the same, so, “that all our works, begun, continued, and ended in God, may glorify his Holy Name.”

**Goal 1:** With God’s help, we will **challenge each parishioner of St. James’ to deepen his or her relationship with Christ and with one another within the context of our Christian community.**

**Why:** St. James’ parishioners are profoundly nourished and nurtured by the connections they make within our Christian community.

Our faith community is truly living into its purpose when the church is our center of celebration in times of joy, our support in times of sorrow, and our source of peace in times of anxiety; the wellspring for our spiritual growth; and an avenue through which we contribute to the world around us. The values that Jesus taught and lived are timeless, yet again and again they comfort and challenge us anew.

Christian community often finds its fullest expression in corporate worship, and we are committed to maintaining our current array of worship services in our beautiful Sanctuary. However, we recognize that a balanced spiritual life includes fellowship and study in small group settings as well as a personal devotional life. Small groups listen to God, are caring places, relate to the church, and welcome the stranger. Equally important is private prayer, contemplation, and reflection, for it is in solitude that we are freed to love God and know compassion for others. We can be more effective at helping parishioners engage more deeply in all of these areas.

**How:** As a community that models and practices a life filled with prayer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and centered on the Word of God, we will deepen our relationships with one another and with God, transforming the lives of others as we ourselves are transformed. Over the next five years, we will seek to build on the strengths of our current worship, outreach, discipleship and pastoral care programs to provide opportunities for spiritual growth and development. We will simplify our worship, pastoral care, and Christian formation ministries, increasing participation in each, encouraging common experiences and more opportunities for sharing in the work God has given us to do, and we will encourage individuals to strengthen their connection with God and with one another through a renewed focus on daily Bible reading and prayer.

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**Goal 2:** With God’s help, we will **further extend Christ’s love to the world by enabling and encouraging each parishioner to become involved in hands-on service projects in the local community, the nation, and the world.**

**Why:** Parishioners extend themselves beyond their own concerns and transform their own lives by being good news to the poor and to others in need. Nearly all participants in the survey agreed that this goal should be continued, and the goal was personally important to a significant majority of them. We hope to help them use their gifts of time and talent to love and serve God as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. Because “love manifests itself in deeds more than in words”, we cannot separate love and service. To love God is to serve him, and to serve him is to love him.

Just under half of the survey participants indicated they are currently engaged or extremely engaged in outreach ministries. The age span of outreach participants is well over 60 years. Some of the ministries have been in existence for some time, such as Kids With Purpose, Prison Ministry, mission trips to the Gulf, West Virginia, and Appalachian North Carolina, and The Woods. Other ministries have blossomed since our last Vision, such as the thousands of meals for the needy provided regularly through Grace to Go, the dozens of children and their families in Leesburg and in Liberia whose present and future are benefitting from our Literacy camps and programs, and the parents and children in Honduras who now enjoy clean water delivered to their homes. The depth of transformation of the members of the congregation who have participated in each of the many efforts has often been life changing.

**How:** A gap remains between those who believe this goal is important, and those who describe themselves as engaged in outreach ministries. Our goal is to increase the percent of the congregation that is engaged or very engaged to over 75% of our members. Current outreach programs should be continued and expanded (for instance, expanding Grace to Go to a weekly ministry), and new areas of exploration encouraged. To promote higher engagement, we will seek ways to expand new ministries in the local community that can facilitate regular participation. We will also seek to integrate and create bridges between existing ministries that could naturally work together, e.g., some Literacy Program effort combined with Grace to Go., or financial ministry combined with the Caregivers ministry. We will nurture consideration of new services to care and connect with one another, such as those assisting seniors and Latinos, or providing home repair, or expanding outreach through music. We will also participate with other organizations or congregations to meet the social needs of the community, and better connect existing ministries and their beneficiaries.

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**Goal 3:** With God’s help, we will provide for the **better care of our church facilities** while creating **additional uses for existing spaces**, and we will **reduce the financial burden of our existing debt**.

**Why:** Thanks be to God, we are blessed with the results of the generosity and forward thinking of past generations. During the last Vision process, we sought to pay that generosity forward by engaging in a mission-driven expansion and renovation of our facilities. While we initially thought accomplishing this part of our Vision would necessitate new construction, we were led in another direction: the acquisition of the neighboring “Seccombe House” property and the conversion of that property into our new Rectory, thus freeing up the old rectory for adaptive re-use as our new Parish House. We now have physical facilities containing over 50,000 square feet of space providing a base for a wide range of activities supporting the work God has given us to do.

Our facilities have naturally deteriorated over time, but due to budget constraints and other priorities, our actions to address the numerous repair issues have either been postponed or temporarily patched. These issues must be addressed, as well as the eventual need to replace major building components, such as the organ, roof, and heating and cooling systems. In addition, the facilities themselves must be brought up to today’s standards in terms of accessibility and safety so all parishioners can fully and safely participate in church activities, functions, and ministries.

**How:** Over the next five years, we will develop a schedule for immediate, short term, and long term maintenance needs, with a funding program to match these needs. We will develop a process for the scheduling and tracking of all repairs and replacements, as well as coordinating the work performed by a combination of parishioners and outside contractors. We will revise the Property Committee in order to encourage greater participation from parishioner volunteers and to provide the leadership necessary to maintain the premises. Mindful that every dollar that does not need to be spent on our current mortgages is a dollar freed for mission and ministry, we will continue to make the retirement of debt a high priority for the parish.

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**Some key dates:**

- ☑ May, 2010: Parish Survey distributed, congregational participation in survey
- ☑ June, 2010 Vestry-sponsored focus groups
- ☑ July 29, 2010: Letter to congregation sharing preliminary results of survey, inviting additional viewpoints and feedback.
- ☑ August 17, 2010: Draft of Vision document to Vestry. Feedback, edits through
- ☑ August 22, 2010: Draft shared with Ministry Heads. Feedback, edits through
- ☑ August 26, 2010: Letter to congregation sharing draft vision, inviting additional viewpoints and feedback.

August 26-September 6: Continue polishing, editing, finalizing.

By September 6: Final Vestry approval in time for copying

September 12: Release (as introduction to *Guide to St. James* ') as part of Ministry Fair.

To provide feedback to clergy and Vestry members, or for more information, please contact the Church Office at (703)777-1124 or [info@stjamesleesburg.org](mailto:info@stjamesleesburg.org).