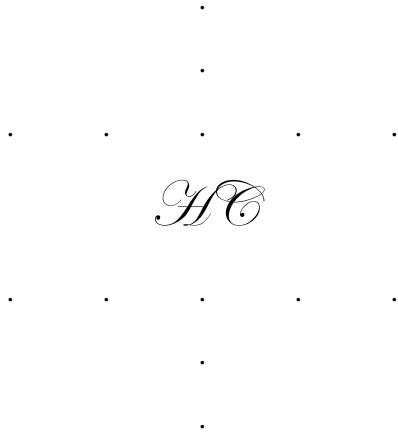


**HOLY CONVERSATIONS/STRATEGIC PLAN
PHASE I**



JANUARY 2012

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
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INTRODUCTION

A dedicated group of people in our parish embarked on a journey 18 months ago. One of their accomplishments is the many “holy conversations” they have had with individuals and groups in our church. As a result, we have carefully listened to and recorded each other’s stories and what we believe is important to do. There have been conversations which have strengthened and transformed us. This parish has taken risks being truthful about our feelings. It has been a rich journey for us all.

The conversations have pointed us to a reality that if we do not change, we will not flourish. The preface to this Holy Conversations report describes more detail on this.

The Holy Conversations Team used the book *Holy Conversation: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* as a guide in their work over this past year. St. Paul’s is now at the stage in this process where we require even more conversations “to develop consensus and a commitment to act.” Here is an excerpt from that book.

“Conversation is holy because, at its best, it is about a people’s understanding of their identity as a faith community, their sense of purpose, and their relationship with God. Though the holy conversation may take a multitude of shapes and directions, at its heart that conversation centers around three critical formation questions:

- Who are we?
- What has God called us to do or be?
- Who is our neighbor?

Congregations need structured ways to talk about their identity, purpose, and future, and they need a path to develop consensus and a commitment to act.”

Gil Rendle, and Alice Mann, The Alban Institute

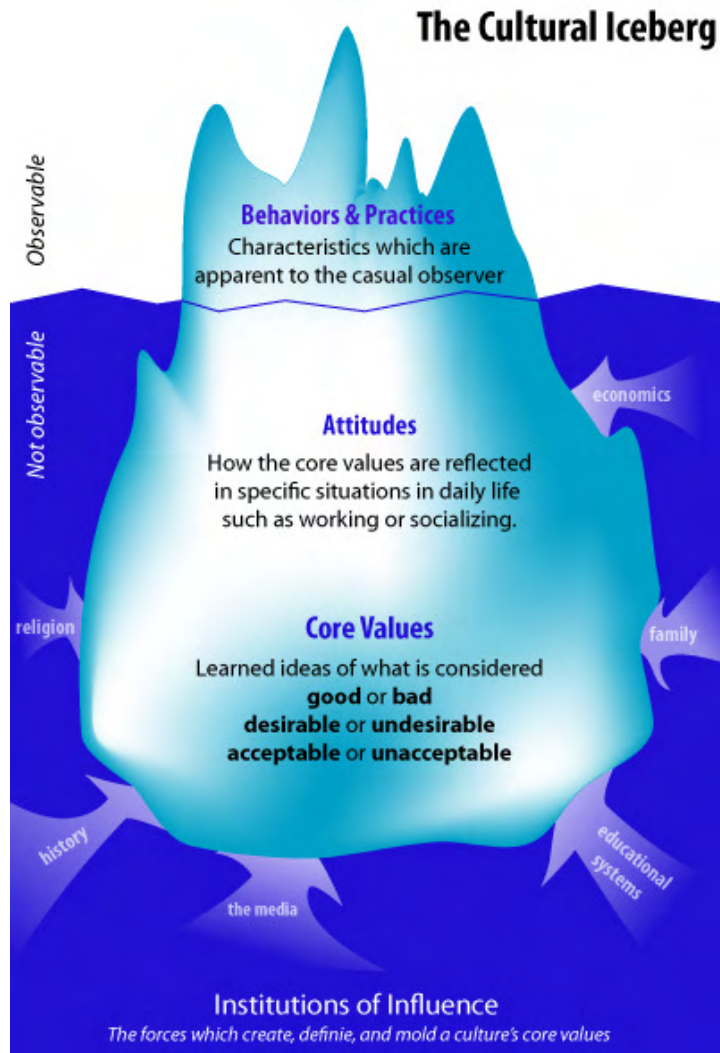
Continuing our conversations about what is important to us will be a priority this year with the Vestry. Watch for opportunities to have more holy conversations where we will dig deeper into just what this report means in the life of our parish.

The Vestry has adopted a new structure which will make natural groupings of the six new focus areas within the church. You may see this in more detail at the end of this report. Vestry is planning quarterly meetings to bring together committees and groups related to each focus area for people to share stories and common resources. The Vestry is seeking to be deliberate in this process and to hear as many voices as possible

Out of our fruitful conversations over the past year, we have developed appropriate expectations, and obtainable goals. This document contains a report on just three of the six areas (Worship, Sending & Serving, and Communication) which the Vestry has adopted as its new structure for shepherding church leaders and groups. On Sunday, May 20, we will hold another special parish meeting to share the other areas of the Strategic Plan: Learning and Formation, Church Community, and Development. Our Outreach Ministry is now

being called Sending and Serving. The Outreach Committee will retain its title and sit under the Sending and Serving focus area.

After good counsel from Martha, and materials provided on Eric Law's descriptions of *navigating healthy change in a parish*, we are agreed that any change which takes place will happen slowly. The graphic below describes Law's concept of cultural icebergs which effects how simple, or complicated change may be in a parish.



CHANGE

With the image of our parish's cultural iceberg in mind, Law encourages us to remember that we can be working on change on two levels, the level of external culture (the part of the iceberg above the waterline) and the level of internal culture (the part of the iceberg below the water line).

Eric Law quotes Peter Senge as saying, "Profound Change is, 'organizational change that combines inner shifts in people's values, aspirations, and behaviors with outer shifts in processes, strategies, practices and systems.'" In our work toward a strategic plan based on the Holy Conversations Report, we needed to keep these two sorts of change in mind, as we will probably be engaging in both.

We have begun to identify whether we think the various actions proposed in this report are External Culture/ technical changes, or

Internal Culture/profound changes. This will aid us in determining what pace and what sort of broader consultations we need to take.

We welcome your voice at any time to share your insights, ideas, concerns and celebrations. Please contact clergy, wardens, or a vestry person to talk with you.

Sharon Clark, Sr. Warden
Patsy Brown, Jr. Warden

January 2012

HOLY CONVERSATIONS TEAM REPORT

PREFACE

This committee was charged with discerning a strategic plan for the parish and making recommendations to the vestry. We were asked to focus on two major areas of concern: worship and spiritual formation. Within these areas, we were asked to assess the evolving needs of the parish, a vision for ministry and to identify specific changes in priorities, resources, structure, and staffing. As a guide, we read the *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* put out by the Alban Institute, an ecumenical, interfaith organization that supports congregations through a variety of services.

Since our first meeting on September 9, 2010, we have looked at the centrality of worship at St. Paul's and the various forms it takes in church life. We have also looked at the existing opportunities for spiritual formation or Christian education that exist at St. Paul's for all age groups, the outreach efforts the church is making locally and internationally, and the quality of communication that binds us together as a community. An important question we explored was our status as a pastoral church vs. a program church, the need for developmental planning vs. raising frame-bending questions.

In doing so, we have reviewed the comments from the Day of Holy Conversations held on May 1, 2010, and reports from the Involvement Team and Communication Team. Discussion groups were held with Among Friends volunteers, the Afternoon Guild, Edie-Ellen Knitters, and the music choir. Lastly, we conducted an anonymous internet survey with questions about the strengths and unspoken needs of the parish with opportunities for recommendations. Despite some internet survey glitches, we received 64 responses filled with rich comments. Individual parish members were approached as much as possible to engage in the dialog described above.

We learned that there are a total of 36 different activities or groups occurring at St. Paul's. Most activities or groups have between 1-10 people and at least nine activities have over 10 people involved in each of them. Some activities such as the Annual Fair and Among Friends have well over 15 people involved to sustain the work. A core group of people serves on multiple activities.

We reviewed numerical church attendance data nationally, within the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts and St. Paul's Church from 2000 to 2010. Not surprisingly, attendance in traditional denominations has declined steadily; within

the Episcopal Diocese, attendance peaked in 2002 and has declined slowly since then. Similarly, St. Paul's attendance peaked in 2002 to a low in 2006, with moderate gains since that time.

What did surprise us was the fact that St. Paul's attendance, despite declines, has had a lower rate of decline than the Diocese and other national denominations (excluding Evangelical churches) and showed modest gains in 2010.

We broke our discussion of church life into five sections: Learning and Formation, Worship, Outreach, Communication and the Church Community. Each section has a goal, strengths, needs, and recommendations by the Holy Conversations Work Group. It was our intention to "bundle" parishioners' comments, positive and negative, into themes that reflected general sentiments. Although we involved a majority of parishioners directly in various surveys or groups, it was neither possible or our intention to ensure we had feedback from every church member, but rather to provide multiple opportunities and engage in a listening process through which we could discern, by faith, direction.

We offer this report to the congregation as a reflection of what we heard and look to the congregation for further conversation. The recommendations are based on recurrent themes for change that surfaced in these Holy Conversations. The challenging work of implementation we rightly leave to the vestry as the governing body of the church in consultation with the rector.

**HOLY CONVERSATIONS TEAM
MISSION STATEMENT**

In this time of cultural transition, we believe God is calling us to ensure the sustainability of our parish as a witness to God's grace. As a parish actively engaged in the world we are called to live our Christian faith in our daily lives, through worship, and local and global ministries of service. We hold deep reverence for our history; we embrace with joy the increasing diversity of our membership; we are confident in the Spirit showing us the way forward.

September 2010

**VESTRY PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN
BASED ON THE HOLY CONVERSATIONS REPORT**

REPORT ON WORSHIP

Goal: To provide worship opportunities that are engaging as well as spiritually enriching and transformative for our diverse congregation.

Strengths:

1. The parish is recognized as warm, welcoming, inclusive, and accepting.
2. There is a popular, effective, and open-minded worship leader and a well-liked and effective assistant.
3. The music director is a skillful musician and successful choir leader, who conceives of his job as a ministry.
4. The children's program includes some successful avenues for children to participate in the service.

Needs:

1. Many feel the 10:15 service needs to be shortened and simplified.
2. Many long for a more "spiritual" service.
3. The music is felt by many to be "outdated," not joyous or uplifting enough.
4. There is an expressed desire for a music program for children and youth.
5. There need to be more regular roles for children and youth in our services.

Recommendations:

1. The 10:15 am service should be shortened.
2. Explore further the stated desire to have a more "contemplative" service. Perhaps St. Anna's Chapel could be used for this purpose.
3. Continue the process already begun of updating the music repertoire. Actively foster participation of various groups and musicians.
4. Create more opportunities for children and youth regularly to participate musically and in liturgical roles in worship.
5. The Worship Committee is encouraged to explore various styles of worship for leading us forward.

Actions:

I. Worship Development & Planning:

1. A Worship Committee will be established. This Committee will be advisory to the Rector and will include those who have planning and scheduling duties with regard to worship (coordinators of Acolytes, Altar Guild, LEMs, Lectors, and Ushers) and other members of the congregation who are interested in development and planning of worship. This

- Committee will have several subgroups to address the various action items of this plan, but will also meet in plenary periodically. The Rector will establish this Committee with the assistance of the two Vestry Worship Shepherds by the end of April.
2. In Fall of 2012, the Vestry Worship Shepherds will lead the Worship Committee in reviewing the strategic plan and in charting the course for the next 2 ½ years of work on the worship goal, recommendations and actions outlined by this plan. In January of each year, the Worship Committee will report progress through a written annual report to be included in the annual report of the parish.

II. Shape & Length of Worship Services

1. In 2012, this subgroup of the Worship Committee will spend some time in the first year talking about how to keep the 10:15 service to a manageable length without sacrificing meaningful content. Already steps have been taken to pare time off the service, but further conversations especially with younger families could be fruitful here.
2. Also in 2012 this group could consider how music and liturgical forms can be more tightly woven together to provide a cohesion to our Eucharists.
3. In 2013, this subgroup could turn its attention to the exploration of various styles/genres/types of liturgy that can be used within the larger Eucharistic framework of our worship, to engage and draw participants into a fuller and more transformative experience.
4. This subgroup could visit other congregations to experience these other forms of worship and report back to the larger committee.
5. Someone from this subgroup could also accompany the Rector and Music Director to Continuing Education to learn more about new liturgy and music.
6. This subgroup should also be aware of the workings of the Lower Merrimack collaborative of Episcopal Churches when it comes to the development of shared worship services.

II. Expansion of Music Repertoire

1. In November 2011, a Music Advisory Group was established to expand the music planning to include some lay input. The group currently consists of the Rector, Music Director and Nancy Jukins and Brian Raiche. Within the first year of this plan, this team can be expanded and will become a subgroup of the Worship Committee.
2. The Music Advisory Group will meet regularly to plan music for our worship services. In 2012, the music library was expanded to include a number of copies of “Gather” hymnal, a Roman Catholic resource that

- offers a deep variety of more contemporary music. This resource alongside our own 1982 hymnal, Wonder Love and Praise, and Lift Every Voice and Sing, gives the group a good variety to draw music selections from.
3. As newer music is introduced our Music Director and other musicians will get out in front of the congregation more often and in a variety of ways:
 - Before the service begins to teach/review newer music.
 - Through periodic forums or other formation events to engage parishioners in more discussion and learning around our music.
 - Through an annual sermon on music ministry.

III. Children & Youth in Worship

1. The Holy Conversations Process revealed the desire for more regular opportunities for our children and youth to be involved musically and in liturgical roles in our worship. Therefore, both subgroups of the Worship Committee are charged with keeping that desire central to their discussions and courses of action going forward. Some specific possibilities suggested through the Holy Conversations survey were:
 - Children/Youth Choir
 - Children/Youth serving as LEMs, Lectors, Ushers, Altar Guild, etc.
 - Reinstitute a regular Family Service
 - Have periodic Youth Sunday services
2. Careful and continuing consultation with the CGS and Youth Forum leadership will be important in this work.

**VESTRY PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN
BASED ON THE HOLY CONVERSATIONS REPORT**

REPORT ON SENDING AND SERVING

Goal: To provide opportunities for parishioners to grow spiritually by serving the needs of our parish community, our local community, and the global community, for the life of the world.

Strengths:

1. Many opportunities to serve our parish community, such as LEMs to homebound parishioners, hospital visitation, meals to parishioners in crisis, healing services, prayer shawl ministry, etc.
2. Opportunities to serve our local community include a very successful meals program (Among Friends), donations to the Pettengill House food pantry, the Pajama Girl project, Bishop's summer program field day, support of the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, hosting various community groups.
3. There have been global partnership trips to El Salvador and Haiti. Through our mission Reserve Fund and church fund raising events, we continue to support our partners in both countries.

Needs:

1. There is a need for better coordination and focus of local outreach instead of multiple, and sometimes, overlapping efforts. Some people feel overwhelmed by so many different calls to serve.
2. There is a need to deepen our identity as a strong sending and serving parish, by extending to our global serving efforts the same strong commitment that we already give to our local serving efforts.

Recommendations:

1. Emphasize at all times, through worship and scripture, the Christian values inherent in service to others.
2. Create a coherent, shared, inviting vision of sending and serving ministries.
3. Communicate on a regular basis to the parish at large about our sending and serving ministries.
4. Include in the weekly bulletin how many Among Friends meals were served in the previous week.
5. Continue to involve children and youth in opportunities to serve others locally and globally on a routine basis. Communicate what the youth are doing in this vein to the whole parish.

6. Incorporate our partnership in El Salvador into a widely shared vision of our sending and serving ministry. Continue to offer witness to the parish by our El Salvador travelers.

Actions:

1. Clergy and Vestry emphasize the Christian values inherent in serving others especially through worship and scripture study opportunities.
2. Add a cycle of prayer for our sending and serving ministries to the weekly bulletin.
3. Through preaching, Bible Study and worship answer the question, “How do I live as a Christian in the 21st century?”
4. Gather together periodically, those leaders already involved in the various facets of our sending and serving ministries to discuss communicating the needs of this part of our parish ministry.
5. Put together a calendar of specific communications around the needs, so people will not feel overwhelmed by many needs being communicated at once.
6. Consider hosting an annual sending and serving ministries dinner to foster this ongoing discussion
7. Use bulletin boards to showcase what the various sending and serving ministries are doing.
8. Office Manager includes in the weekly bulletin how many Among Friends meals are served each week.
9. Find an annual Sending & Serving project for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd children to be involved with. Examples: the 2009 El Salvador suitcase project; the 2011 local outreach challenges
10. Support the youth group in their annual talent show to support Global partnerships.

**VESTRY PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN
BASED ON THE HOLY CONVERSATIONS REPORT**

REPORT ON COMMUNICATION

Goal: To facilitate the information sharing that is essential for a healthy and cohesive parish life. To develop more extensive and regularly occurring communication methods to reach the larger communities in which we live and work (greater Newburyport, Diocese, Global, etc.) in order to fulfill our spiritual mission of engaging others in a deeper relationship with God.

Strengths:

1. There is a Vestry Communication Shepherd.
2. Over the last 2 years much study and evaluation of our communication tools has taken place and the Vestry has received recommendations to take forward.
3. The Vestry is active in forming a Communications Team.
4. The website has been revamped and continues to be updated regularly.
5. The electronic communications to parish list has been improved and increased through use of Constant Contact.

Needs:

1. We need a more regular system of communicating to the larger community (Newburyport, Diocese, etc.)
2. A virtual presence of our parish would extend our reach and make us more accessible.
3. A more user-friendly format for our website would ease use for members and visitors.

Recommendations:

1. Develop congruence between website, bulletin boards, Newsletters, and service bulletins to deliver consistency and clarity of message. Update various parish brochures and flyers.
2. Maintain and update media contacts list (email, newspaper, diocese, virtual, etc.) to distribute relevant information. Encourage parish leaders to contribute articles (human-interest stories with spiritual content/meaning that could serve to attract others to St. Paul's). This form of communication can be based upon attraction OR promotion & advertising.
3. Focus on creatively updating the church bulletin boards and establishing guidelines for content publication and ongoing updates and maintenance.

4. Recruit and establish a group of parish volunteers who will meet regularly to focus on the ongoing work and actions required to fulfill the strategic goals of the Communication plans. Positions to include:
 - a. An editor for publication of the Weathervane (& Labyrinth)
 - b. External Media Coordinator – Public relations specialist, media contact list, media channels (newspaper & print, local cable TV, etc.)
 - c. Internal Media Coordinator – Bulletin boards, service bulletins, brochures, Google calendar, etc.
 - d. Digital Media Coordinator – website, Facebook, Twitter, blogs etc.
 - e. Two reporters who will gather information from Vestry, shepherds, committee chairpersons, and create content for publication.
5. Develop avenues to draw members and newcomers together via the internet, (website, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for spiritual enrichment and fellowship. A virtual presence of our parish would extend our reach and make us more accessible. Develop a “Virtual Communications Policy/Plan” and present to Rector, Wardens, and Vestry (and in collaboration with Diocese) for evaluation and approval. Plan to include provisions for privacy, safety, and security concerns of the parish as a whole.
6. Publish an article once per quarter based upon parish life and the people of St. Paul’s that makes the connection between a spiritual life and the secular world. Submissions will be offered to local news media.
7. Fine-tune the website for user friendliness by asking users for feedback. (Done, 2011)
8. Propagate the use of a parish wide Google calendaring system that will allow committee chairs, vestry, wardens, office staff and rector to expediently schedule and communicate significant parish events and allocate parish resources for scheduling ease, such as conference rooms, etc. (Ongoing)
9. Capture the spiritual essence and the life and wisdom of parishioners in a “Story Corps,” oral history archive to preserve the unique talents and character of the parish life and people of St. Paul’s.

HOLY CONVERSATIONS REPORT

IN SUMMARY

Almost everyone consulted agrees that St. Paul's is a rich spiritual and temporal environment. Most of our recommendations have to do with reorganizing and recombining what can sometimes be felt as an overwhelming plethora of possibilities found in an active church such as ours, coupled with not-quite adequate membership and financial resources. In addition, St. Paul's, like many other churches, is in the throes of transition. We are no longer the homogenous Episcopal church of yesteryear, but what we will become is not yet completely clear. Many of the demands placed on the church in 2011 are new to us and must be met with imaginative thinking and prayer.

We hope that by using the five categories of Learning, Worship, Outreach, Community and Communication as a guide, the church leadership can re-envision our church life, during what is clearly an exciting time of transition in traditional churches everywhere, as more accessible, more comprehensible, more inclusive, and more manageable. We offer our recommendations as reflection of what we heard from the congregation and from each other, and we look to the congregation for the furthering of this holy conversation.

Faithfully submitted by members of the Holy Conversations Work Group:

Bronson de Stadler (Chairman)

Carole Bishop

Trudi Holder

Emily Russin

Paula Potvin

Jane Niebling

Martha Hubbard (Rector)

Note: The following two pages represent the new structure for organizing our Vestry and the parish groups they will be supporting. It is in draft stage. The report on areas in "Phase II" will be presented on May 20, 2012 after a single service. Have we missed anything on the lists below in our life together here in this parish? We welcome your input.

SIX FOCUS AREAS FOR LIFE TOGETHER AT ST. PAUL'S CHURCH

WORSHIP

SENDING AND SERVING

COMMUNICATION

LEARNING & FORMATION

COMMUNITY LIFE

DEVELOPMENT

I. WORSHIP

Goal: To provide worship opportunities that are spiritually satisfying for our diverse congregation.

Liturgy

Music

Rector

Assistant Rector

Music Director

Choir-Adult and Children's

Altar Guild

Lectors

Ushers

Acolytes

LEMs

Healing Partners

II. SENDING & SERVING

Goal: To provide opportunities for parishioners to grow spiritually by serving the needs of our parish community, our local community, and the global community, for the life of the world.

Outreach Committee

Among Friends

Rector's Discretionary Fund

Food Voucher Program

Special Efforts – Pettengill House Food Pantry, Pajama Girl, Mitten Tree,

Walk for Hunger, Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center Walk

New Diocesan Initiative: Senior Citizen Outreach

III. COMMUNICATION

Goal: To facilitate the information sharing that is essential for a healthy and cohesive parish life.

Staff

Parish

Vestry Clerk

Social Media

Weathervane Newsletter

Sunday leaflet

External Media

Sermon Podcasts

Information Technology

Note: A report on the following areas will be presented to the parish in a few months.

VI. LEARNING AND FORMATION

Goal: To insure that all members of our community have opportunities for spiritual growth and Christian formation.

Children: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program

Youth: Sunday Forum, Confirmation

Adults: Sunday Adult Forum, Lenten Programs

Safe Church

Social Media

V. CHURCH COMMUNITY

Goal: To nurture and build fellowship among all church members.

Membership Committee

Safe Church

Radical Hospitality

Buildings & Grounds

Community Groups

St. Anna's Chapel, use of

Woman's Guilds

Talent Show by the Youth

GLBT Pride Parade

Diocesan Relationships

Newburyport Ecumenical

Community

Lower Merrimac Valley

Deanery Cooperative

Harborside Adult Day Care

Social Media

VI. DEVELOPMENT

Goal: To be developed...

Treasurer

Bookkeeper

Stewardship Committee

Finance Committee

Development

Grants

Planned Giving

Fundraising

Fall Fair and Silent Auction