

DISCERNING OUR FUTURE: CHURCH FUTURES PROGRAM

Discerning the future for your congregation

This work will help your congregation make an informed decision about the future it wants to pursue as a parish. Taking hold of the church's future is a crucial step. It allows the congregation to avoid the soul-destroying experience of a long, slow decline.

What results can you expect?

OVERVIEW	The members of the congregation have an overview of all the facts of their situation and all options the congregation might pursue and what might be involved in each one.
ASSESSMENT	In light of their situation, the Steering Team will do a realistic assessment of the congregation's capacity and resources to pursue each of future pathways congregational members favour.
CLEAR PATH	The congregation will know what is required to undertake each path, including volunteer leadership, costs, timelines, and any requirements of diocesan canons and processes.
PROPOSAL	The process will lead the steering team to identify a preferred choice that they can present to the congregation and their Bishop as a proposal with an implementation plan. Once considered by the congregation and Bishop it may be presented to a congregational meeting for decision.
IMPLEMENTATION	The plan is put into effect. This may include diocesan support such as administration or ongoing facilitation.

How the process works

The project is designed to give everyone in the congregation a chance to:

1. Create a shared picture of the situation facing the congregation: membership and attendance, finances, neighbourhood/community demographics;
2. Put all options on the table;
3. Explore each so that everyone feels fully informed: all their questions are answered, and all concerns are satisfied as best we can;
4. Select the best option to be developed and where appropriate presented for decision at a congregational meeting.

The role of the congregation

Everyone in the congregation is invited to participate as fully as possible. Otherwise, conflict can emerge afterwards and undo the good work that has been done.

Everyone's voice needs to be heard – including people who are usually quiet in a group. Group sessions will be designed and facilitated so that people can reflect on what is being asked, collect their thoughts, and put them forward so they can be considered.

Some people in the parish will not be able to attend meetings. Members of the steering team will be charged with communicating regularly with these people.

People will be asked to prayerfully consider the role they will play in helping the parish or congregation achieve the future it selects. After the sessions are over and the decision made, the congregational leaders need to see the process through by implementing the decisions.

The role of the steering team

This process will need a steering team of about 5 people. The team's role is to encourage participation and keep the congregation focused and on course as it makes its way to a decision. The team will do its best to engage the congregation, communicate effectively, and help the congregation get to a place where its decisions feel authentic and can be implemented.

Meeting schedule

1. Orientation	<p>The facilitator meets with the steering team to review the process and their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>All information is put on the table regarding the finances, attendance and membership, church programs and outreach activities.</p> <p>The group also discusses the demographics of their area. Who's living in the community and how its changed over the past few years. How close or far is the church to other Anglican and mainline protestant churches.</p> <p>The team then begins to create the list of options available to the congregation or parish. Assess which are plausible and worth further investigation.</p> <p>Plan how the steering team will communicate this list to the congregation and invite more options. <i>Note: there may not be more, but it is important for the congregation to have an opportunity to consider and add to the list.</i></p> <p>For options to be investigated, assign the exploration work to steering team members with the goal of having the information for the next steering team meeting.</p>
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	<p>Prepare or choose a prayer to be included in the Prayers of the People on Sunday to uphold this process and invite the parish to keep it in their prayers.</p> <p>Schedule next meeting dates.</p>
Homework	Communicate options list with congregation and collect others.
2. Scenario preparation (this might take 2 meetings)	<p>Review the list of options generated by the congregation and assess which are plausible and worth further investigation. Assign exploration work to the steering team as necessary.</p> <p>Share exploration work already done and begin to form options into scenarios by telling the story of what would need to be done to implement each option and what the consequences would reasonably be. These should include timelines, and benchmarks and/or evaluation criteria for a process well done. These could be things like: members of the parish who are not able to make this change are offered pastoral care.</p> <p>It is important to include a 'stay the course scenario to tell the story of what will happen if the parish makes no change.</p>
3. Choosing best option	<p>The steering team, after investigating all possible options prepares to make a recommendation to the parish and Area Bishop regarding the best way forward.</p> <p>Prepare a congregational meeting to share all your work, make your recommendation and describe the next steps.</p> <p>Prepare to communicate with your Bishop and plan for next steps.</p>
Homework	Communicate the preferred option with your Bishop.
4. Congregational meeting	<p>The steering team's work is presented. This includes the option, scenario, actions and timelines for implementation. Questions and reflections are heard and answered.</p> <p>This meeting is often best facilitated by an outside facilitator so that the options can be heard from a neutral voice.</p> <p>If more than one option is put forward, the congregation will need to decide which direction it will commit itself to.</p>
	<p>There may need to be a special vestry meeting for the congregation to vote on its future.</p> <p>Once an option is decided, the steering team passes responsibility for implementation to the parish council or administrator.</p>