

Action Plan

From Survive to Thrive



April 8, 2016

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Overview

During the last part of 2015, Holy Cross Episcopal Church began a discernment process to determine the status of living into our stated mission, vision, and values. Consultant Mike Bonem was retained to facilitate this effort and input was gathered from the congregation. The vestry identified three major priorities, one of which included a comprehensive land-use planning strategy that provided for better stewardship of the physical resources of the church and included the sale of 4.5 acres to a nursing home developer. The other two priorities focused on expanding mission/outreach and youth ministries with a focus on community engagement and relationship.

As a result of this process, we determined that investment in ministry resources and human capacity were necessary to move the church from survive to thrive and to more fully live into our mission and core values. Holy Cross utilized some of the proceeds, as suggested in David Fisher's November 30, 2015 letter, to develop a business plan or what we are calling an Action Plan that details how the proceeds of the sale can be used to increase our capacity for mission. Through the Diocese of Texas, consultants were hired to assess children's and youth ministry and a congregational coach was retained to assess the invite/welcome/connect (IWC) ministry as well as staffing and organizational needs.

Our plan defines what we believe is our calling as a church; our response to that calling; our mission for action; and the expected fruit of our labor. It is organized by:

- The Calling
- The Response
- The Mission
- The Harvest

The resulting evaluation calls for the hiring of additional staff positions as well as specific changes to provide new vision and direction for the youth, stewardship, mission/outreach, and invite/welcome/connect ministries. The actions outlined in this document support the expected fruit of our labors: vitality in mission and financial stability.

The Calling

Holy Cross is at a tipping point. The congregation is on the path to rebuilding its membership but needs infrastructure to grow beyond a pastoral congregation. While the facilities could use some renovation to serve the congregation better, the primary factor limiting our growth is the **capacity for ministry and mission**.

As the leadership considers living into the values of worship, fellowship, spiritual growth and serving others, it is apparent that worship is the only value that is fully realized. Additionally, our vision of being an inspirational, worshipful, and educational church has come to fruition but being a ministerial and youthful community is still in progress.

Feedback from the congregation indicates a desire for deeper relationship with each other; increased connection to the community; and a vibrant youth identity. Of those that regularly attend worship, 85% are serving in ministry. What is missing to increase the capability for mission and ministry is leadership development. The best person to provide this mentoring and inspiration is Fr. Thompson but due to the current organizational structure, he must spend a significant amount of his attention on administrative tasks.

The active ministries could be grouped in the following categories (examples):

- Worship (musicians, ushers, lectors, altar guild)
- Invite/Welcome/Connect or IWC (greeters, hospitality)
- Children's & Youth Ministries (preschool, youth group, VBS)
- Outreach (Lord of the Streets, Attack Poverty)
- Adult Fellowship (Men's & Women's Groups)
- Education (Adult, Children and Youth)

Currently, Fr. Thompson coordinates pastoral care and stewardship. The preschool is at capacity with a lengthy waiting list. All of these ministries make an impact in their current configuration. However, to build these ministries to a consistently transformational level, lay ministry leaders need more mentoring, training, and support. Additionally, the high engagement of the congregation is admirable but may be difficult to sustain without support and thus risking "volunteer burnout."

The Response

To respond to our calling, Holy Cross set out to dive into the church structure, finances, and ministry to determine the actions need to move from survival mode to a thriving community, as mentioned in the Strategic Plan previously presented to Church Corp. To begin, a task force was created consisting of the rector, immediate past and present senior wardens, one vestry member, and one staff member. Each member assumed ownership of a part of the requested business plan. The task force agreed to pursue outside assistance in the development of the business plan as recommended by Church Corp.

At Mary MacGregor's recommendation, the task force retained a congregational coach (Molly Carnes) to manage this process of discernment and preparation of the final plan. This consultant was also responsible for conducting an assessment of the invite/welcome/connect ministry, developing job descriptions for additional staff, and functioning as a liaison between the church and Diocesan resources. Additionally, the task force retained consultants through the Diocese (Molly Carr and Holly Kight) to conduct an assessment of children and youth ministries.

The process to create the final Action Plan for Holy Cross included:

- Interviewing leaders and members about their experience with invite/welcome/connect
- Reviewing all processes related to invite/welcome/connect to determine gaps
- Evaluating the responsibilities of staff members
- Determining the staff responsibilities still to be filled
- Reviewing current staff compensation
- Identifying activities that could be delegated to allow Fr. Thompson more ministry time
- Creating job descriptions that support infrastructure needs as well as ministry/mission
- Holding listening groups of various stakeholders related to children and youth
- Assessing the congregation's engagement
- Comparing stewardship and growth statistics of similar congregations
- Reviewed demographics of the area surrounding the church
- Analyzing all projections of expenses and revenue

The Mission

As a result of this process, we determined that fully living into our vision and values required addressing 1) staffing needs and 2) leadership development.

Staffing Recommendations

These positions address the gaps in administrative functions as well as provide leadership for ministry. The position of Administration Manager in particular is designed to free up Fr. Thompson's time for more direct ministry.

1. Administration Manager (part-time) – This position would work closely with the rector and with an eye on the “big picture,” and manage the administrative operations of the church.

2. Youth & Child Minister (full-time) –This leader would create a ministry that meets the educational and spiritual growth needs of children/youth aged nursery through 12th grade as well as working with the preschool and parents to create enriching partnerships. This will relieve the preschool director of the Christian Formation duties in anticipation of increased enrollment.

3. Invite/Welcome/Connect Leader (part-time) – This leader would be responsible for developing a ministry that responds to the connection needs of newcomers as well as members.

4. Mission & Outreach Coordinator (part-time) – This leader would identify and organize opportunities for the church to serve and build relationships outside of the church walls.

5. Communications Coordinator (part-time) – This position would report to the Administration Manager and would be responsible for all communication for the church and preschool – both internal and external.

Current Staff Compensation – Additionally, we will review the current staff compensation to ensure compensation is equitable and comparable to similar positions in other churches.

Relational Leadership Development

These actions are designed to build leadership within the ministries and empower new members for ministry. Along with the additions to staff, these actions are part of creating new vision and direction for our youth, mission/outreach, and invite/welcome/connect, and stewardship ministries.

- Fr. Thompson to meet monthly with a rotating group of the ministry leaders to ensure a theological foundation for each ministry and to teach pastoral skills.
- Build on the clergy mentoring ministry with the younger men of the church to develop new leaders.
- Coach the new staff ministry leaders (Children/Youth, IWC, Mission); hold them accountable to implement the recommendations of the youth and IWC assessments.
- Work with the Administration Manager to develop ministry descriptions for each ministry so that expectations and time commitments are widely known. Set an expectation of ministry leaders serving for three years with the last year mentoring his/her replacement.
- Call an individual to lead the Stewardship Ministry. This leader will be sent to The Episcopal Network for Stewardship conference in June, 2016 for training. Clergy will assist in guiding this leader and team for the 2016 stewardship mission.
- Send either a volunteer team or the IWC staff person to the Invite/Welcome/Connect Summit at Camp Allen in April, 2016 for training.
- As leaders are empowered from the congregation, they will hold at least annual training for their ministry to continue the development of their teams.
- Leadership will intentionally recognize ministry efforts year round and especially at the Annual Parish Meeting which will become a celebration of mission and ministry for the church.

The Harvest

If we follow our calling as we have discerned, the expected fruit of our labors will be vitality in mission and financial stability.

Vitality in Mission

By Year 4 of the Action Plan, we expect to be **fully living into Holy Cross' mission**, vision, and values. This would manifest itself by not only growth in worship attendance, but by making disciples. **By 2019, we expect:**

- deeper connection to each other through intentional welcome and shepherding;
- relational impact within the community through long term relationships
- expand our preschool to better serve our neighbors;
- our facilities to be utilized by the community on a regular basis;
- a spirit-led stewardship ministry built on the theology of tithing;
- the children and youth to be more fully integrated into the life of Holy Cross;
- our rector to spend the majority of his time in direct ministry and mentoring.

Financial Stability

We will begin **implementation of this Action Plan in July, 2016**. This would make 2016 Year 1 since we would be utilizing some of the land sale proceeds in that last half of 2016. Some staff may be hired prior to July but for ease of illustration, we estimate July. **By Year 7 (2022), we expect:**

- to independently support the church's operations with annual pledges, other giving, and preschool income totaling \$748,664 with a \$50,000 surplus
- 95 pledges with an average pledge of \$5,845
- Average Sunday Attendance of 226
- Preschool enrollment increased by 50%

Notes regarding assumptions:

- *As the parish adds new members, we estimate these new members may likely pledge at less than our average amount which is reflected in the flat and lower projections in Years 3 and 4.*
- *The increase in pre-school net income in 2018 reflects an expected increase in enrollment following the renovation of the facilities.*
- *The decrease in net income for the preschool in 2016 is due to one-time expenses relating to accreditation.*

This plan is based on God's calling for the future combined with a pragmatic view of the Sugar Land area and its potential. Demographically, the population of the area surrounding the church is well educated at levels above the state average. Income wise, the average household income is \$130,400 and is estimated to increase to \$141,400 by 2019 with 57% of households earning over \$100,000/year. The largest jump in household income is estimated to be with those making \$200,000 or more. Households in the area give to religious institutions at amounts well above the state average.¹

These economic factors, combined with a culture of tithing at Holy Cross, may explain why the church is blessed with a higher than usual Average Pledge Amount when compared to similar suburban churches in the Diocese.

The projected 2022 figures in the Financial Plan closely resemble the 2013 Membership and Financial Report for St. Cuthbert's Houston, a suburban congregation in northwest Houston which, like Holy Cross, also has a preschool. They reported 244 ASA, 106 pledging units, and a total operating revenue of \$752,505. The staff positions at St. Cuthbert's are very similar to the plan for Holy Cross.

Closing

As we look ahead to the coming years, we are filled with enthusiasm and hope. Where we may have been marching with a flashlight before, we now have a laser beam focus for our future. We learned the value of outside input and will continue to seek guidance from those with valuable experience.

We are confident in our calling to expand our capacity for ministry and mission in order to serve others in Sugar Land and beyond. Our commitment to being good stewards of God's blessings has been strengthened. Most importantly, we know we are on a path that will create transformational relationships within our congregation and with those outside our church walls.

Thank you for your support of Holy Cross. We appreciate your contributions to this journey.

Note: This plan was approved by Holy Cross Vestry on April 8, 2016.

¹ The Executive Insite Report from the Episcopal Church of the USA, 2014.