



### Church Growth and Vitality Through Communication and Evangelism

Lack of church growth is a critical issue throughout the Episcopal Church USA and the Diocese of Maryland. Both have experienced a drop of 25% in average Sunday attendance over the last ten years. Middleham and St. Peter's project is about taking on the issue of its' own lack of church growth in a very specific and intentional way. By addressing the challenge of growth through the goals of improving evangelism (telling our story), social media and communication, and how we welcome (and retain) people into our church community, our expectation is to grow in average Sunday attendance. We made the decision to undertake the writing of this project throughout as a case study, so that our experience can be shared with other parishes in the Diocese and Southern Maryland that are experiencing lack of growth. Too often rural and small town Episcopal churches face the challenge of long histories, old buildings, aging congregations, but a real commitment to serving their communities. Reversing the trend of dropping Sunday attendance and moving to new growth and vitality will not be easy, but taking a focused and long term approach offers the best chance of success. The project began with an application submitted to the Maryland Diocesan Endowment Grant for Ministry in April 2016. The response pertaining to our grant application was to offer us \$6,000 rather than the \$10,000 requested, and to be part of a program with other Episcopal churches jointly with a consultant firm *Blue Horizons*.

The approach as set forth with Blue Horizons would have us address issues that we had already spent three years working on our five year strategic plan. The other churches that were apparently included in the arrangement were urban and suburban churches from Baltimore City and county. We are in rural Southern Maryland – 70 miles away from the other churches in the Blue Horizons arrangement.

So, we respectfully requested that they reconsider our inclusion with the Blue Horizons program and fund our grant request as presented. We were respectively granted the request by August 9, 2016 and the amount of \$6,000, in addition to \$2,000 support from Middleham and St. Peter's Endowment Fund. We began this journey with the selection of a consulting firm that was recommended by other churches, and in March of 2017 submitted another Grant request for \$10,000 to continue the project. The following is what evolved in the past two years, our overarching goal, supporting sub goals, tasks, timelines, research, committee findings, what we learned, what we achieved, what barriers or challenges we faced, and our next steps where we go from here.

## **Case Study ~ Sample of Content Items:**

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- † **Diocesan 1<sup>st</sup> Year Grant Submission and Changes April - August 2016**
- † **Steps forward in Selecting Consulting Firm – Griffith Coaching Fall 2016**
- † **Clericus Presentation October 2016**
- † **Social Media Audit Griffith Coaching Step – Ryan Carrell 2016**
- † **Diocesan Mid-Year Grant Report 1<sup>st</sup> year January 2017**
- † **Planning and implementation “How To Reach New People” Workshop March 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> 2017**
- † **Compiling all input from Parish at “How to Reach New People” workshop**
- † **Diocesan 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Grant Submission March 31, 2017**
- † **Work and Support with Paul Nickerson and setup of Vitality Team March and April 2017**
- † **Steering Committee and Vitality Team Long Range Planning**
- † **Listening Sessions Summer of 2017\_Middle Service & Chapels**
- † **Launching of community events, “Welcome\*Connect\*Strengthen” Fall 2017**
- † **Griffith Coaching Hospitality Audit, implementing recommendations at Middle Service**
- † **Vitality Team sub-committee Social Media Analysis October 2017**
- † **Progressive Presentation Vitality Team November 2017**
- † **Diocesan End of 1<sup>st</sup> Year Grant Report November 2017**
- † **Diocesan Mid-Year Grant Report 2<sup>nd</sup> year January 2018**
- † **Vitality Team Retreat March 2018**
- † **Joint Vestry and Vitality Team Meeting 2018**
- † **WCS Parish Summer Events 2018**
- † **3 Sub Committees Formed from Vitality Team - Marketing Analysis**
- † **Reports of Sub Committees at Vitality Team Meeting August 2018**
- † **Rectors Report on support calls with Consultant Paul Nickerson 2017-2018**
- † **Steering Committee & Vitality Team Direction after Phase I October 2018**
- † **Diocesan End of Grant Report 2<sup>nd</sup> year November 2018**
- † **Case Study submitted to Diocesan December 22, 2018**