



Middleham and St. Peter's Episcopal Church

**Case Study - Church Growth and Vitality Through
Communication and Evangelism**

10210 H.G. TRUEMAN RD
LUSBY, MD 20657

410-326-4948
Mail Address – P.O Box 277
Lusby, MD 20657

OFFICE@MIDDLEHAMANDSTPETERS.ORG
WWW.MIDDLEHAMANDSTPETERS.ORG

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.

PROGRAM AREAS

Congregational Development – The overarching goal of the grant was to grow the parish. In doing so, our intention was to prepare the whole congregation to be comfortable with telling their story and welcoming their neighbors and friends into our church community.

Ministry of the Laity - To be successful, the laity of the parish must understand and accept their role in ministering to the community in a manner that welcomes them into our church community. Lay ministry in evangelism is at the heart of the project.

Social and Outreach Ministry - Our grant application described Middleham and St. Peter's extensive outreach activities. However, we are not effective in using this community interaction to invite and welcome outsiders into our church community. Our goal then would be to strengthen the opportunity to welcome the community we serve through outreach, into our parish community. Social media is an ongoing important part of the project and a fundamental part of social and outreach ministry.

PROJECT GOALS YEAR 1 2016 - 2017

Our overarching goal is the growth and vitality of the parish - not simply saying we want to grow but undertaking very specific steps to do so.

The specific sub-goals to accomplish the above at the onset of the project included:

- † Evangelism - telling our story. Preparing the congregation to tell our story and being comfortable with our baptismal covenant of "proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ."
- † Social Media and Communication. Reviewing and assessing the current social media assets to determine if there is a strong online presence, and engagement with parishioners and the community, and then revising or revamping these forms of communication.
- † Welcoming people into our community. Learning and applying how to effectively welcome people into our church community, and how to retain them at all ages and stages

in life. This would include establishing a welcoming committee.

Ultimately, if we were fully committed to the above, our parish should realize growth. The publication "New Facts on Episcopal Church Growth and Decline - 2014" is an excellent source of information on this challenge. They note the following factors that reflect the least growth in Episcopal churches - rural, old churches, white (lack of diversity), older parishioners, few adults under 35, reverend worship. Middleham and St. Peter's is all of those, so we know that this is going to be an ongoing challenge.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project is designed to engage the whole parish - clergy, staff, lay leadership, and the entire congregation - in a commitment to living into our baptismal covenant: As we recite "Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?" and answer "I will with God's help", the parish and its individual members need to act on this commitment in a very specific and intentional way. This project is about doing so.

Middleham and St. Peter's undertook the development of a five-year strategic plan in 2013, setting a new mission, vision, and values, and forming new committees to move the parish forward. The communications and technology committee was formed, with goals and objectives. While the committee had accomplished many objectives, they still needed to address their following strategic goals.

- ✠ The Spoken Word. Being able to express our parish vision, beliefs, and who we are, wherever, whenever, and to whomever the opportunity presents itself.
- ✠ Informing ourselves about who we are in order to enhance our individual evangelism.
- ✠ Prepare the vestry and then all parishioners to tell our story.
- ✠ Continue being in conversation with our community around areas of common concern - using opportunities such as the "Big Conversation", (Annual event to provide an opportunity for both parishioners and the broader community to become informed on topics of interest) and topics such as, Health Issues, Hunger, and Employment, that move our ministries to offer annual health fairs, food distribution, and promotion of the county Job Source Van.
- ✠ Update and improve how we welcome newcomers.

Structuring this submitted project in an intentional manner to accomplish our original strategic goals and objectives, and elaborate on an effective plan to implement the original intent was our focus.

We believe that all of these steps noted are essential for effective progress. General commitments regarding growth have not worked for us. A detailed structure and the true long term commitment of clergy, staff, lay leadership and the whole congregation are needed.

Securing the support of a consultant / coach we felt would provide us with the guidance we needed to accelerate progress.

One final but very important consideration. Throughout the grant period, both first and second year and beyond we planned to incorporate periods of learning and discovery which may provide for an "unknown action". There is much where we simply do not know the answer, but we may discover it if we take the time to listen, pray, and have faith that the Holy Spirit will guide us. This speaks loudly to our strength of being willing to try new things.

Church Growth and Vitality Project – gathering ideas at the onset

During our work developing the beginning stages of our first-year Diocesan grant proposal and the overall “Church Growth and Vitality Project”, we consulted with several resources, some which were provided by Griffith Consulting. This was in response to our question to Jim Griffith after giving us a general outline for what they would do, but not addressing our question - “We are particularly interested to know your experience and success in assisting churches like ours, with our being rural, being dynamic and successful in many respects, but needing to grow.”

At the October vestry meeting, the vestry was briefed on the project. While they had approved the grant application in April 2016, the meeting was an opportunity to review the plan and to guide the implementation. As may often be the case, our vestry has been very committed to the work and ministries of the parish but voiced some skepticism about the project. They were concerned that it would be just the same core of people involved, and more work for them. Two key points were made by the Vestry. First that it would be very important to involve a broader set of parishioners than those that typically support the work of the parish. Secondly, we needed

to set specific expectations for the consultant in assisting us in addressing this to ensure the positive outcome for the project.

Steering Committee contacted Paul Nickerson, with Griffith Coaching in an email with specific questions we needed addressed during our video conference call.

We asked to speak with Paul about:

- † **How can we get our vestry on board?**
- † **Are there a set of steps we should take initially? What are they?**
- † **How do we best engage the whole parish?**
- † **How and when do we establish the “Vitality Committee”?**

Paul noted that the key is investments in the community. He would be glad to speak directly with the vestry. “You must remember that this is a long-term process”. He stated that he understands the challenge of few people – often on the vestry – carrying the load with both the ministries and work of the church, and the finances. It is the “pareto 80-20 principal” (20% of the people do 80% of the work).

Paul suggested three books for us to read in advance of the onsite parish workshop:

- † **Getting Their Name – by Bob Farr**
- † **Lasting Impact – Seven Powerful Conversations – Carey Niewhof**
- † **The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Fears – Mark Batterson**

Paul also suggested prayer walks. Getting out and seeing the community with fresh eyes. He provided a webinar for us to preview.

It will help that our parish will be one on one with the coaching team during the workshop. We will want to make personal invitations and provide child care where needed. The more people the better at the workshop. Our planning for the workshop event and then after needs to get people involved.

We talked about the range of outreach activities, many right here on our Middleham campus. He spoke about seeing/working together – parishioners and community members – as a really good opportunity to show the community what we are about.

Vitality committee – the committee to guide the action plan coming out of the workshop eventually was referred to as the “Vitality Team” in addition to members of the steering committee. We discussed how to form the “committee”. What we can do right away is to start to brainstorm who we want on the committee. We need to get more people on board now – a transition group – then form the vitality committee coming out of the workshop. Paul suggested an optimal size of 8-10. He suggested that the transition group be reading the books above, and other resources that we come up with. The more we prepare for the workshop, the more we will get out of it.

Later in the case study will be an elaboration on the suggested process by the consultant. We did not have a transition group, only those on the steering committee.

We received support with the above questions and other questions, church contacts, that have worked with Griffith Coaching that have experienced similar hurdles and resources to utilize.

Rev. Jason Shank, Resurrection Church in Hermitage, Pennsylvania and Rev. Erin Shank, Vicar at Trinity Church, New Castle, Pennsylvania (they use Griffith Consulting)

Rev. Erin Shank was a previous Assistant Rector with Middleham and St. Peter’s Parish. They were both very positive about their working relation with Griffith Consulting. Jason’s coach was Jim Griffith whose specialty is Church Plant/Startup and Erin’s coach was Paul Nickerson whose specialty is “Reaching New People”. With the support of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania, they continued to receive coaching. They believed that Griffith Consulting would be extremely helpful to us and our project.

Feedback from churches that have used Griffith Consulting:

Rev. Suzanne Katschke of Crosswinds United Methodist Church, Madison, Alabama

Rev. Suzanne has been involved with projects using Jim Griffith Coaching for eight years. She wanted to assure us that he does excellent work, he is highly qualified, and has a broad theological outlook. We talked about helping established churches versus church planting. She made the point that there are many similarities. In certain respects, we could benefit from looking at ourselves as a "relaunch".

Rev. Ruth E. Gallot, Pastor of Longmeadow Congregational in Auburn, New Hampshire

1. Try to assemble a team from the different constituencies of your congregation and, if possible, include newcomers who can help you see things with new eyes. Every church in the country will describe themselves as a "friendly" church, but newcomers can help you really understand how some practices can be unintentionally exclusive. Listen to your new comers, they are an invaluable resource.

2. Support your Pastor, that person will need to be out in the community. Make sure that your congregation understands that this is part of their ministry, part of what you have called her/him to do. Help him/her to create spaces with their schedule for these added duties, don't just add on extra duties.
3. Include the entire congregation, make sure this committee has a voice in your regular church meetings (vestry?) so that they can help the entire church to be involved.
4. I would recommend reading the book "Real Good Church" by Molly Phinney Baskette. The demographics of her church are very different than mine but I found the general topics very helpful in focusing our efforts.
5. Own who you are in all your wonderful quirky ways and be the best you can be. Don't compare your church to others in your cohort, thinking... "we could never do that we are too small/rural/urban/poor/reserved/etc. If you hear an idea that sounds fun, ask not Can we do that? But rather how could we modify that to who we are and give it a shot.
6. Be not afraid!! Take risks, don't be afraid to fail.
7. Trust the Spirit who led you to look at this and then follow.

Rev. Emily Moore of United Methodist from Warsaw, Virginia

"If your church leadership and congregation are on board, I would recommend investing in this approach. We did not see noticeable fruit until sometime in the second year, and we are grateful we stuck with it for the long term. Continuing the coaching for the past three years has helped the Vitality Team stay energized, maintain focus, and have additional support and resources. If your church is willing to commit to this approach long term, that will make a difference."

From our potential coach Paul Nickerson in Fall 2016 Pertaining to Onsite Workshop

"How will we work with you to customize our workshop to meet our needs?" Throughout the workshop there will be action steps. At the end of the workshop, all those action steps will be organized into an Action Plan). Everything we train you in will be customized to fit your church and your communities. My work as Coach will then be to help you implement that Plan and add many resources as we go through the process. There will be monthly coaching calls as well as unlimited email coaching in between the calls. My role as Coach is to encourage you, point you to resources and hold you accountable. I am looking forward to walking with you. And anything else that you think we should know about or be doing. Because I have worked with hundreds of churches across the country, I will be regularly sharing with you the "best practices" of others. You will not need to "reinvent the wheel".

Other Southern Maryland Episcopal Parishes – Clericus Meeting October 12, 2016– Middleham and St. Peter’s, and Trinity St. Mary’s, St. George Valley Lee, Christ Church Port Republic, St. Paul’s Baden

Joan Shisler, Senior Warden, Karen Timmons, Communications Asst. and Hugh Davies, Project Leader presented what Middleham and St. Peter’s would be doing, in the proposed project after securing Griffith Consulting, with attendees offering the following:

- ✠ “Silver Tsunami” – congregation getting older
- ✠ Make sure there is a visual invitation and presentation of your church around as much as possible for everyone entering the building to see.
- ✠ Target people who are on the fringe. They might have something to offer.
- ✠ Growing churches in Southern Maryland may not be through Sunday services.
- ✠ Church Health is important to recognize
- ✠ Economic model being stretched – smaller & older
- ✠ People touched by the outreach of the church but don’t want to join it.
- ✠ It’s living out the gospel – pull them in ultimately by reaching them spiritually – Jesus’ ministry of feeding the people
- ✠ Touching and influencing people through relationship with Jesus Christ
- ✠ Problem - when the economic contributors to the church decline, there is no church to provide ministries to reach and or meet the needs of the community
- ✠ Texting is the current wave of communication
- ✠ All expressed an interest in our project and want to stay informed and contribute as they can.

Receiving the input from the Clericus Group was beneficial at the onset, but in retrospect, presenting our overall project may have been too early on in our own movement forward, after securing the consulting firm, with only beginning knowledge of where we were headed.



Financial dimension in choosing Griffith Consulting Fall 2016

Can we afford what Griffith is proposing?

- † We had \$5000 in hand, \$3,000 from the Diocese and \$2,000 from Middleham and St. Peter's Endowment Grant Fund with \$3,000 coming in January from the Diocese after our mid-year report. We had the possibility of an additional \$2,000 in 2017 from our endowment grant. There was the possibility of requesting a second year on our Diocesan grant.
- † Griffith total for one year including coaching \$7,750 plus travel costs for 2 people coming to the workshop (air, lodging, meals) was approximately \$1,000 to \$1,500 as an estimate at that time.

Setting our expectations for Griffith Coaching in an Agreement for Services_– To assure a clear understanding of the services to be provided by Griffith Coaching and documentation for the Diocesan Grant, an “Agreement for Services” was executed in December 2016.

Once you make a decision on investing on a consulting firm, make sure there is an agreement of services, with specific details and which fees are due when. If your project is supported by grant funds they are disbursed at specific times.



Project schedule – revising the schedule from our proposal – both in terms of modifying the steps and timing after initial Consultant support.

Griffith Coaches— We were to be supported by both coaches, Jim Griffith and Paul Nickerson. Jim Griffith’s specialty is “Church Plants, and Paul Nickerson’s is “How to Reach New People”. We would have the expertise of both and at the workshop but would be working more closely with Paul Nickerson. We had an extended conference call with him in the fall of 2016, receiving considerable information and valuable resources as we began the project.

On January 3rd we held a video conference call, with Paul Nickerson for clarification on our upcoming weekend workshop to be held March 3rd thru March 5th, at Middleham. The steering committee then scheduled meetings every two weeks up to the workshop event with two of those meetings as video conferences with Paul Nickerson. Jim Griffith forwarded the materials we needed to proceed in our planning process.

Support Dialogue between Fr. David Showers and Paul Nickerson

- † Fr. David asked about a study book for the vestry. Paul suggested “Get Their Name”. (we ordered three sets of the three books recommended books).
- † Paul suggested that the committee meet out in the community – not in the same place in the parish hall. To get our focus out. Need to engage with people across the community. Lots of folks who don’t attend church out there – nationally, less than 19% attend church.
- † Father David spoke about our church family – all are welcome, progressive Christianity.
- † Paul reassured us that we will find a lot of ready reception to our message.
- † Part of our work will be getting people to get beyond the stereotypes they have of us – traditional, prayer book, old.
- † Paul Nickerson offered a preview webinar with us to get us ready for the workshop
- † We talked about doing focus groups – Paul thought that would be excellent preparation. Unfortunately, we were unable to follow through with this.
- † He advised us that we need to be “light on our feet”. We need to reach people where they are in their busy lives and schedules. That goes for our own congregation as well as the community. Could even have informal community focus groups.

- † Paul emphasized that he is here to help us, to walk beside us. So, fire away with questions and requests for resources.
- † Our initial responses in selecting Griffith Consulting after that call, were very positive, after speaking with our coach Paul Nickerson.
- † By November 2016 it was an unexpected insight that became apparent to the steering committee of the increased workload and time commitment on the steps needed to implement the plan of the two-day parish workshop in the spring of 2017, “How to Reach New People”. Despite the guidance and support of the coach Paul Nickerson.

It is important to realize the amount of initial time in meetings and the leg work involved in the first few months. In addition, we hired a new Assistant Rector in June, and our rector left on Sabbatical in September of 2016 for a month and again two months in 2017. The coach reminds you throughout the process the importance of the ongoing support and initiative of clergy leadership.



One of those items listed in the **Griffith Coaching** Proposal was the following:

“Griffith Coaching has an associate who, off-site, would audit your current social media and make recommendations and adjustments to bring you up to speed in this area. This would not necessitate a site visit. Our associate would interface, train, and coach the church’s designated person in charge of social media.”

We received a response from Jim Griffith that we could move ahead and contact Ryan Carrell, prior to signed “Agreement of Services”.

Proceeding with the Social Media Audit– Ryan Carrell is the consultant from Griffith Coaching who did the social media audit, in November 2016. He undertook a comprehensive review of our website and Facebook and briefed us on his findings and made initial recommendations.

Below are some very simple initial steps from the Social Media coaching call on November 15, 2016. This was the very basic beginning that would assist us as we created a social media plan and strategy, for best utilizing both content creation and paid advertising via Facebook and Instagram.

- ✝ We need to focus on what is unique about us (our history, our openness, our outreach) and create an offer of engagement through our social media.
- ✝ We need to reach out through our ministries to engage the broader community.
- ✝ Our website needs to be outward focused, with pictures that will allow outsiders to see themselves at MSP.
- ✝ We need to have an outsider assess our website.
- ✝ “Outward Focus”, people considering coming to our parish, the first door they enter is the website Homepage
- ✝ Website layout should be similar to an “offramp on a highway, pull off get gas, food and back on the road
- ✝ Website’s navigation and layout should be easy to follow
- ✝ Website should only need to be updated every 2 – 3 months.
- ✝ Events on the website should be posted quarterly.
- ✝ People who visit don’t care about daily or weekly events – they don’t want too much information
- ✝ Our website needs to make it easy for a first-time visitor to be able to understand how to experience us.
- ✝ Our Facebook page needs to do the same. We need to double attendance. Get people who love our church to review the Facebook page.
- ✝ We should turn back on the Facebook review feature, plan in place first and hire professional reviews
- ✝ We need to have a plan – why are we unique? How do you get there? What to expect?
- ✝ Our history is extremely valuable.
- ✝ Our content needs to feature an “image” of us. Our thirsty theology is a good example.
- ✝ Celebrate what’s happening. Get a logo – the branding thing.
- ✝ Promote Facebook page to friends, family and others to achieve 200 likes.
- ✝ Begin process of hiring a graphic designer to create a unique logo. This should not be a member of the church or friend of a member.
- ✝ Have a professional photographer capture images that reflect the identity and life of the church. Do not share these pictures on social media. As a team, you will choose 10-12 of the best high-quality images to utilize on the website and Facebook.

- † Develop a Social Media Plan with goals and strategy to implement, content on website and Facebook about who you are should match
- † Signup for Instagram utilizing same username as on Facebook - middlehamandstpeters

*What we found was that this assessment was a one-time analysis and voice conference call. What we thought was ongoing support was not an accurate interpretation of what we expected. We did not have the funds for a professional photographer or graphic designer. We did through connections from the project leader get a designer to create our "Welcome*Connect*Strengthen" logo to use in marketing our project.*



1st Year Mid-Year Grant Report to MD Diocese January 30, 2017



Our first-year grant mid-year report to the Diocese in January 2017, began to reflect the changes and priorities with the infusion of the layout of the Griffith Consulting firm and our personal coach Paul Nickerson. We responded to, "What barriers or problems have you encountered and how have you met them?" up to that point, in addition to what our next steps were.

So, in January 2017 our next steps began to progress. Through the workshop in March presented by both Jim Griffith and Paul Nickerson, the intent was to provide all of us with a wealth of information and practical training. Learning about best practices for reaching and welcoming our neighbors and developing plans that would guide us in carrying out our project over the next months and years ahead. The "Invite Letter", on January 9th to all parishioners explaining the two-day workshop with Jim Griffith and Paul Nickerson, asking everyone to invest their time and wisdom in actively participating in developing the action steps in the plans and in the future of our church was mailed.

Our dates were firmed up for Friday, March 3rd and 4th with the coaches also attending Sunday services with a “hospitality” audit and giving us an analysis Sunday afternoon before their departure.







We now had two months to get everything in order for this event.

We received from Griffith Coaching;

-  Griffith Coaching Instructions – for hosting the event
-  Griffith Coaching Workshop Manual – **“How to Reach New People”**

Scheduled meetings for Project Team every two weeks were set, with two Video Conferences with our coach, Paul Nickerson. These phone calls and emails would be Griffith Coaching support in preparation for the workshop event March 3rd through March 5th.

Steering committee began to review and initiate the suggestions provided in the Griffith Coaching, “Instructions to Host a Griffith Coaching Event”.

-  Publicity
-  Purchase of Event Materials and Copying of Workshop Manual for parishioners
-  Facility sound equipment and visual equipment needed for speakers and presentation
-  Before The Event Facility Setup, Ordering of Food, Childcare, & any needed transportation needs for parishioners to event
-  Registration
-  Logistics Checklist for Speakers

The purpose of the workshop is to develop a comprehensive plan for reaching out and welcoming our Southern Maryland neighbors, connecting them with our parish community, including them in our ministries, and strengthening our parish family. The real work for the project will be during the implementation phase. This will take place for a year or longer after the workshop. During this time, we will implement our workshop plans, and continue to use the coaching services of Griffith Consulting. In addition, continue to document for our future a case study, in order to use as a tool for ourselves and share our findings with other parishes in Southern Maryland, and of course with the Diocese of Maryland.



About the workshop "How To Reach New People":

The workshop consisted of nine sequential sessions. Participants ideally would attend the whole workshop as each session built on the previous one and involved setting action steps.

Our objective for the overall project was to improve the ways in which we connect with our Southern Maryland neighbors, welcome them into our parish community, include them in our ministries, and strengthen our parish family. We were hoping the outcome of the workshop would be the springboard to assist us in moving forward on our project.

The workshop was guided by Griffith Coaching, but the planning and action steps would be ours. They provided the framework and our next step would be "**Set The Plan**".

The very specific focus of the workshop was **reaching new people**. Over the course of 8-10 hours, we covered nine sessions:

Session One – It's not 1955 anymore, but most churches are stuck doing the same things they did in 1955 to reach new people. What's been the result?

Session Two – Where are we at Middleham and St. Peter's now in terms of reaching new people – programs, clergy

Session Three – Committing to a guided process – the only way change comes

Session Four – Reintroducing ourselves to the community

Session Five – Getting the clergy out into the community

Session Six – Clergy networking strategies

Session Seven – Creating a culture of invitation

Session Eight – Structuring member-guest activities that provide opportunities for invitation

Session Nine – Developing our plan and sticking to it – setting a six-month schedule – then refining it for the next six months – getting coaching guidance at every step along the way

The Round Table Discussions that resulted in content on post it notes and organized on Flip Charts revolved around the following;

- ☩ Pastor Getting out of the “Castle”, the office and into the community
- ☩ Parish Meetings – what to move outside the Community and where – ex. Restaurants
- ☩ Events to Move or Export or relocate different venue– i.e. Annual Big Conversation
- ☩ What Events/Fundraisers to Stop/Eliminate
- ☩ “Ponds” of Opportunity To Engage with Community/Community Events to Participate in or Support
- ☩ What New Things Did We Learn Today?

The outcome for us was a very specific action plan to reach new people, with steps to follow, an organizational structure to manage it, and expert coaches to guide the clergy and committee in implementing it. This action plan, tasks and timeline would be developed by the newly formed Vitality Team with the inclusion of parishioner input from the two-day workshop.

*A reminder from the consultants, and our own intuitive knowledge became even more clear on our journey a year later, pertaining to increase in Average Sunday Attendance.
You may increase by one or two people per year.*







Our “Welcome-Connect-Strengthen” project started with the March 3rd -5th, “How to Reach New People” workshop. The nearly 60 attendees learned a great deal and generated ideas for what we needed to do as a parish. Consultants stated the importance of parishioners committing to both days in order to have the content needed for the action plan. Both days were well attended, but some that didn’t attend Friday evening attended on Saturday and vice versa. Volunteers were sought to form a “Vitality Team” to take the ideas and develop and guide an action plan. The 17-member team is representative from all three worship sites and the steering committee.

The vitality team would be charged with the following:

1. Review all the post-it notes that the parishioners created in their individual round table discussions, compile them into categories and prioritize the suggestions.
2. Develop an action plan that will dictate how we can implement the recommendations on reaching new people.
3. Oversee the implementation of the action plan, which will be an ongoing project for many months.
4. Meet via video conference calls on a monthly basis with Paul Nickerson, one of the workshop presenters, who will be our coach throughout the ongoing process of implementing our action plan and provide us with updated advice and resources to promote our success at reaching new people.
5. Communicate with the congregation on a regular basis of the successes we encounter and recruit parishioners to participate in ongoing activities defined in the action plan.

Paul Nickerson suggested the following for the Vitality Team:

-  A "heart" for reaching new people. The Team is to be the catalyst for getting the congregation out of the "castle" and meeting new people. So the Team needs folk who are passionate about this work and their energy will help to excite others.
-  Team players who can work well together with other members of the team and the staff.
-  People who are open to trying new things and changing the way things are done. Flexibility is needed.
-  People of faith who are attending regularly and are invested in and want a bright future for Middleham and St. Peter's.

How much time commitment for team?

Substantial time for first meeting – the sorting out and organizing of the post-it notes. Then probably need to meet every other week – likely in the evening to accommodate folks who work during the day. The first meeting was on Tuesday evening April 4, 2017 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, with a pot luck supper to start.

Taking the recommendations of the March workshop and preparing a six-month action plan to reintroduce the church to the community, redirect activities to provide opportunities for inviting the community, and getting all our ministries to have an outward focus.

As our coach Paul Nickerson advised us, the team's long-term goals are:

- ☪ For our team to be the “catalyst” to involve all the parish in reaching new people.
- ☪ To make reaching new people a permanent ministry of the parish
- ☪ To focus on getting out in the community, meeting people, building relationships, and inviting and bringing new folk. This is a long-term culture change for us.
- ☪ To see lives changed and communities transformed.

During the March workshop Paul Nickerson and Jim Griffith did a hospitality audit of each of the worship spaces on Sunday March 5. They provided a set of recommendations for us, for the clergy and team to work on.

Sunday Hospitality Feedback from Jim and Paul – March 5, 2017

- ☪ Chapels appear historic, but don't “say church”
- ☪ No effective signage at the parish hall
- ☪ No welcoming outside of the great hall
- ☪ Consider arranging back of hall with space for welcoming, and time set aside before the service for welcoming and fellowship
- ☪ Further involvement of children
- ☪ Problem of hearing and seeing in the middle service
- ☪ Service is confusing, even with books – project it! Hard to get people engaged in service who don't have a background.

- ⦿ No one outside Middleham
- ⦿ Is accessibility clear?
- ⦿ Remember its really about the “bring”
- ⦿ Need a designated guide to help the walk-ins
- ⦿ Kids part time at middle service? This is also the “nursery” issue
- ⦿ Say “guest”, not visitor
- ⦿ Dealing with what do we eliminate when we add
- ⦿ Getting more people committed
- ⦿ Continually informing the parish

One immediate step was to get new signs for the Middleham campus and parish hall.

Between the workshop “How to Reach New People”, follow up from recommendations from the attendees and establishing a Vitality Team, we decided to submit a second-year grant request to the Diocese in order to continue to fund and support the project.

Project Goals In Second-Year Grant Funding Request 2017-2018

What specifically do you hope to accomplish with this project (or expansion)?

During the first year of the grant and project, we set the overall design and framework for the project. This has included setting out an overall vision and design, securing the funds for it from the Diocese and our own parish, obtaining the support of an excellent consulting/coaching firm to guide us, informing the parish and securing their support, convening nearly 60 parishioners in a weekend long training and planning session, setting the plan and organizing a “vitality team” to guide the process.

Now in this second year of the project, our work is focused on implementing the plan, which will include:

- ⦿ Having as many parishioners understand and undertake the process of a) looking outward to their community and neighbors, b) involving them in activities that include church members, c) inviting them to participate in church activities or ministries, and d) eventually and at the right time bring them to church for worship.
- ⦿ Getting clergy out into the community, so that they better understand the community, and the community knows them.
- ⦿ Have meetings and ministries take place in the community, rather than always within the church building.
- ⦿ Create activities that provide good opportunities for welcoming new people.

- ☪ Include church in community events and activities. Reintroduce the church to the community.
- ☪ Transform our church buildings and Sunday worship to make it much more welcoming.
- ☪ Substantially improve our social media to bring to the attention of the community the work of our church in bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to them through word and example.

Rather than going straight to the action plan, the team spent time reflecting on two questions:

What gets you excited about the Welcome Connect Strengthen project?

- ☪ It gives me the opportunity to do my part in helping the church to grow.
- ☪ We do so many good things that the community doesn't know about. The project provides the opportunity to share what our church is about: kindness / service / faith / open mindedness / everyone is welcome / teaches our children
- ☪ Spent 20 years trying to grow a parish. Am interested in how this process is going to work.
- ☪ It is a great opportunity to grow.
- ☪ Have been looking for this opportunity for years. The church needs to grow and needs many ages.
- ☪ Other organization that I am a part of is too inward focused, too. The importance of the outward focus.
- ☪ As a church, we have tried things in the past to grow, but this is different and finally being intentional.
- ☪ The non-traditional approach with a focus on outreach.
- ☪ Taking a long-range perspective, with room to grow, and asking us to get out of our comfort zone.

What are your expectations for the Vitality Team?

- ☪ To grow the church
- ☪ Bring in younger people, as there is a disproportionate share of older people
- ☪ With a balance across ages, we can benefit from a multi-generational church
- ☪ To be open minded and actively listen during the process

- ☦ The process can have us appreciate our rich tradition
- ☦ Have really good options for the church going forward
- ☦ Invite baby-boomers, especially as they are seeking a spiritual dimension in their lives, and invite their adult children
- ☦ To lead the church, and raise the energy level
- ☦ To spread the importance of the personal invitation and bringing people to the parish
- ☦ To develop both an outside and an inside aspect of growth. We need to reach out and bring people, but we also need to be prepared to welcome and involve people once they are here
- ☦ We need the mechanics and structure to reach out and welcome people, but we also need

Vitality Team's First Meeting April 4, 2017

Our agenda had us focusing on activities that have been drawn from the post-it notes prepared during the March 3-4 workshop. But there were other important aspects that we needed to be working on in the coming meetings. These include:

- ☦ Communication – getting information to the parish and community
- ☦ Education – having the parish more fully understand why we are doing the project, and what we are doing. That our purpose is not to do everything, but to encourage the parish to support the new direction.
- ☦ Hospitality – a number of actions were suggested in the hospitality audit to which we need to respond. Much of this has to do with how welcoming we are in the worship spaces. Clergy is committed to follow up on these. There is real interest on the part of the team on this part, especially for the middle service. Team members want to be a part of this, especially in pointing toward new systems being in place for the fall, including a nursery.
- ☦ Metrics – We need to develop objective measures of how well we are doing.

Recognize when reviewing a case study, that it is one church's journey. Throughout this document are the thoughts paraphrased, the specific input and contributions of the staff, consultants and most importantly the parishioners. If your church ventures out to explore a similar task, remember to actively listen, document and follow up. If leadership and committees do not follow up and periodically let the parish know what is being done, there will be a disconnect. It's imperative that they know they have been heard and are active participants of the project.



The following comments are paraphrased thoughts of the Vitality Team after the first two meetings.

- ④ Our committee needs to have the strategic vision to articulate who we are, why we are great (what are we selling? Can we articulate it?)
- ④ Share that within our parish first, equip members with information and then encourage others to share beyond the parish.
- ④ Sharing beyond the parish requires the tactical planning that we have been focused on thus far.
- ④ We need to wrestle with some of the big picture issues first.
- ④ The consultants work for us not vice versa their guidance is appreciated but we need to lead.
- ④ Accountability and check-ins are important, but do we have a vision other than adding members?
- ④ The tactical activities (VBS, parade float, county fair, etc.) need to be reasonable, affordable, and assigned to a lead/small group to take for action and report back to the Vitality Team. Issues such as where to procure lumber for a float or the money for a banner are matters for sub-groups and take our focus away from steering the ship in the direction that it should go.
- ④ Meetings regularly lasting over two hours will burnout the members of the team.
- ④ We have shortcomings so lets air them out, be clear on our strategy, and then invite, pick up, bring if that makes sense.
- ④ Each of the three services located at different worship sites have different congregations and needs.
- ④ Not sure we have a handle on who, exactly, we are supposed to be encouraging to come to church with us.
- ④ Is the church aiming to appeal to the whole community, young families, adults with grown children?
- ④ All of these groups require very different things from a church home. What is the target demographic? What changes should we be making to best appeal to potential new members.

- ☪ It seems as though we are putting the cart before the horse.
- ☪ Before bringing people through our doors without understanding what they need and what will keep them coming back, we need clarity.
- ☪ If we do not assess and meet their needs, bringing them through the door will be counter-productive, as they will be more resistant to return later, should we ultimately put systems in place to meet their needs.
- ☪ We understand it is necessary to actively plan and engage in community outreach taking ourselves out of the castle (parish hall and offices).
- ☪ The binder system at the Great Hall, for example, while fine for those of us who are used to it, it is incredibly off-putting and confusing for people who have never attended an episcopal service before.
- ☪ We need some kind of coffee hour so that people can socialize and actually become part of the church community (making them more likely to come back).
- ☪ We need to have designated people available to guide newcomers to both the coffee hour and Sunday school, for children and adults.
- ☪ If we are planning on trying to attract young families then we need to provide childcare.
- ☪ We need childcare at a minimum during joint services.
- ☪ The majority of our church understands that children will be present occasionally, but some members are less than accepting and it makes for a very unpleasant experience for parents of young children.
- ☪ We want to see the church succeed and grow, but worried that this whole process seems to be stalling around small-picture specifics when we should be delegating that work and focusing on big-picture issues.
- ☪ Concern about the unbalanced number of parishioners over 60.
- ☪ There seems to be a lack of attention given by the parish to welcome and nurture the younger parishioner and families in activities, programs, worship, and education.
- ☪ We could attract people in the age group of 30 - 50.
- ☪ Recommended to the team the book, Reaching People Under 40 while Keeping People over 60: Being Church for all Generations by Edward H. Hammett with James R. Pierce.
- ☪ We must first change (where needed) our church culture and image to attract the 40 and younger and secondly devise and implement a strategic plan to welcome, connect and strengthen the 40 and younger as they enter our church culture.
- ☪ We need to focus on one group 40's and under, or our efforts will be splintered at best.
- ☪ A quote from the above recommended book, "if the congregation decides to keep the over sixty crowd satisfied, the church will not grow numerically, and, in time, the congregation will die..."
- ☪ Most people under 40 are from a different world with different values, traditions, rituals and personal preferences – a different culture.
- ☪ The challenge is to get those who claim Christianity involved in a church they find relevant and meaningful and, through them to reach other young adults."
- ☪ The rest of us must listen to and be guided by them and be willing to work with them.
- ☪ Our consultants told us that we needed focus our work on the Middle Service in the Great Hall.
- ☪ It is nearly three months since they presented their findings. With a real intention to make it happen NOW.
- ☪ In the past we have held several focus groups regarding the "Middle Service".
- ☪ People have, in good faith, voiced their desires and concerns, but little ever comes to fruition.

- ⊕ This should be a cooperative plan and action involving both the parishioners and the clergy with action plans and time tables with drop dead deadlines.
- ⊕ Give the 9:30 service a new name instead of the stepchild connotation it now has as “Middle Service”. Let us call it what we envision it will become.
- ⊕ It was mentioned that after the rector returns from his sabbatical, the rectors will begin to address the “Middle Service”.
- ⊕ Rectors take vacation time during the summer months, how can we make changes and have them ready for September? Where is the continuity?
- ⊕ To succeed within a timely framework this endeavor cannot rest only with the clergy.
- ⊕ Furthermore, the service is just one aspect of what needs to be addressed for us to appeal to the under 40’s.
- ⊕ How and when we educate our children, adult education, social activities, as part of Christian Formation
- ⊕ What support groups do we offer and when and pastoral care for 40’s and under?
- ⊕ Continuity with whatever we decide to do is vital to our success.
- ⊕ As the Vitality Team we must understand and agree on what it is we vision, who we are and want, and how we express this visually, in our actions, and in our communications – printed, media and verbal, this should be part of our ongoing focus at each meeting.
- ⊕ If as a team, we are going to create energy and maintain it for the long term, we should use our committee meetings to look at the big picture and vision and leave the planning of events to committees and sub groups.
- ⊕ Financial support is one way the vestry demonstrates its support for a parish endeavor.
- ⊕ This project should have whole parish and vestry support, it is part of the cultural change, this allows the vestry to allocate funds which says to the parish- “THIS IS IMPORTANT.”
- ⊕ Our consultants are good and useful, but that they have preempted our committee work.
- ⊕ Paul has a ton of good ideas, but we need to identify and take care of our basics, while at time same time plan activities that will help us interact, connect and strengthen the group we are focusing on.
- ⊕ Paul took up too much of our committee time and most of what he shared was in the document that had been sent to us before the meeting. It felt canned.
- ⊕ We also need to take control of our committee and ask Paul for the direction and guidance we are seeking. Perhaps it would be best if Paul were part of the second half of our meeting instead of the beginning.
- ⊕ We do need to bring new people in, but we do not want to put ourselves in a position where we are guessing at the needs and/or wants of the people and families.
- ⊕ We should not be in a pattern of changing things every few months, and not only confusing newcomers but current parishioners.
- ⊕ Throughout the years we have made (and unmade) copious amounts of changes to the Middle Service.
- ⊕ It was to a point for a while where even regular attendees could not keep up on a month to month basis, and that doesn't include the times where everyone was second guessing whether it was the 9:15, 9:30 or 9:45 service.
- ⊕ Projecting service content on a screen would be a great option, and helpful to any and all generations alike.

- ⊕ Establish a childcare opportunity. If it is going to run during a service, it needs to be an, "if you or your child needs a break", giving parents the choice of allowing their children to attend the service.
- ⊕ On another Sunday School note, the adult education is great for adults, especially those with a working knowledge of the scriptures and religion in general.
- ⊕ Possibly consider offering another class for the adults who would like to learn at a beginning level.
- ⊕ There's an area where focus is needed in the parish hall to support changes, improvements, etc. to make worship, formation, and fellowship a positive and life-giving experience for all...members and guests alike.
- ⊕ We need to reflect on looking outwards too much, at the expense of addressing the needs, frustrations, and honoring the joys of those already gathering for worship would be neglectful.
- ⊕ We don't want it to be an either/or approach, but rather a both/and approach...tending to internal issues around hospitality and looking outwards.
- ⊕ This means a two-pronged approach, and if some members of the Team want to focus on one area more than the other, that would be helpful to know.
- ⊕ Our balancing of this so far has been lopsided (looking outside the castle). This will be corrected to tend to internal hospitality and Sunday-morning logistics as well.

Initiating new ways to welcome people.

Father David and Reverend Sarah held "listening sessions" for each of the worship spaces to generate ways that we can be more welcoming, in the summer of 2017. These were well attended with excellent participation. Some new initiatives were developed based on the sessions – all intending to make us more welcoming.

They setup Flip Charts to record responses, and first established "Group Norms".

Parish Hall (Middle Service Designed Also For Children) Listening Session Notes

Wednesday June 28th, 2017

Group Norms

- ⊕ Start and end on time
- ⊕ Listen respectfully
- ⊕ Use "I" Statements
- ⊕ Silence your cell phone
- ⊕ Make sure everyone has space to contribute
- ⊕ No parking lot conversations (keep it in the room)

What do you appreciate most about Sunday mornings? What's your wow moment?

- ⊕ I can let my young child move around during the service
- ⊕ Friendly, relaxed atmosphere

- † Children in the service and “on the rug” learning
- † Simple—welcoming
- † Music—appreciate it’s simplicity and starkness
- † Real community—all ages—tolerant and open—support one another
- † The music and the words to the songs we sing
- † Watching children grow up over the years I’ve been attending and serving with them
- † That the service takes place in a room with many functions—various groups and activities use it
- † The room is light, bright, and we can see the weather changes outside—doesn’t feel closed off or like “an old church building”
- † Soft chairs
- † The space is not shut off from life, life seems to flow from it
- † That my wife feels like home here, reminder of the Anglican church
- † Use of different prayers, more expansive language
- † That unexpected moments arise
- † Like that there’s often a dog present in worship, and that there’s an openness to having service dogs

- † **Where are our growing edges? Concerns? Hopes?**
- † Desire more from a sermon as an adult
- † Not feeling spiritually fed (expressed by 5 people)
 - distraction of my own children and having to care/worry about them
 - “feel torn”—want one thing for my children, but also recognize I’m missing something
 - desire/hope for childcare option—for juggling kids—would like the option of an exit strategy (ex. Nursery or have kids spend time somewhere else for a while during the service, perhaps after the children’s homily)
- † Want some people by age in the service (expressed by someone in their 40s)
- † Need nourishment for adults—non-traditional ways
- † Reminder to see that there’s a continuum on Sunday mornings from worship to Christian education...sometimes that gets lost
- † Where does fellowship fit on Sunday? It seems to often be missing (expressed by 3 people)
- † Feel like we’re missing an opportunity without Christian Education in the summer
- † Frustration as a teacher with having a small Sunday school class, sometimes only 1 child
- † Seeing the children keeps me coming—concern over them not being present throughout worship
- † Organ music is a turnoff
- † Teens are not listening—not connecting with children’s sermon
- † Wish those who worship in the chapels were present for fellowship and Christian formation on Sundays—find ways to draw them into Christian education
- † Support younger families
- † Sometimes the liturgy, flow, and music doesn’t seem to fit during the service
- † Introducing liturgy and music is a plus and could be done more, especially for those not familiar with liturgical tradition
- † The binder is confusing—consider projection
- † Better organize readers for the service—“I don’t know who to even ask about that.” “I miss reading in the service.”

- † Coffee hour before or after (two people mentioned this)
- † Not hearing people sing
- † Consider having Christian education on Sundays with a Joint Service
- † “I’m looking for help to get me through the week.”
- † Need a consistent system on how to welcome guests
- † (added after the session: LGBT community—advertise who we are)
- † Via email after the session:
- † Need an option for childcare during at least a portion of the service—open to what this looks like, but at least have it as an option
- † At a minimum, option of childcare during Joint Services is a must
- † Practicing new hymns before the service is confusing
- † Coffee hour time is important to make connections—maybe have Coffee and Conversation meet in the Great Hall or organize in a way similar to how St. Peter’s does it with one point person to either do it or organize others

Sunday July 2nd, 2017

Group Norms

Same as the ones from 6/28/17

What do you appreciate most about Sunday mornings? What’s your wow moment?

- † Relaxed atmosphere
- † It’s a contemporary service, and I’m not on autopilot during worship
- † Music
- † Interactive service—can’t just be on autopilot
- † It’s a service that’s comfortable for people who are younger and newer to the Episcopal Church
- † Having the children’s homily paired with a short adult homily—I get more out of having both
- † Deep comfort level/ relaxed
- † It’s like family
- † Open, bright space—feels less bounded

Where are our growing edges? Concerns? Hopes?

- † Inconsistent fellowship
- † No coffee hour
- † Would like more time for social gathering
- † More involvement of people in the service
- † Audio Visual improvements (sound improvement, binder improvement, possibility of projection)
- † Having a mini-tutorial to the binder is helpful, because without it, it’s confusing

- † Concern about access to Middleham Chapel from the Parish Hall (no sidewalk or easy walkway when you have to direct new people over there or when people with mobility issues need to get from one to the other)
- † Need to focus on younger families
- † Need to bring the Bible and have what we talk about in church relate to what people are dealing with in their lives—need this especially for teens
- † My fondest memory of my family and church is the time we spent at Camp Letts—wish we had more family trips and opportunities to bring friends
- † Christian formation—often gatherings are too small
- † Lack of consistent offerings for family activities
- † Rev. Sarah asked if adults present felt as if they were being fed on Sunday mornings: responses varied...“everybody is in a different place,” two parents shared that their main concern is making sure their kids are being fed (less self-focus or awareness on their own spiritual needs)
- † There aren’t ushers...at first offered as an appreciation, “people know what to do” and can go with the flow; on the other hand, might be confusing if a new person is sitting up front and isn’t sure on what’s going on
- † Audio experience in the space—hard to hear readers, especially when they are children; can’t always hear the children’s homily and the discussion unless it’s repeated for the whole room; adult readers and worship leaders trailing off at the end of sentences
- † LGBT community—advertise who we are
- † Concern about access to Middleham Chapel from the Parish Hall (no sidewalk or easy walkway when you have to direct new people over there or when people with mobility issues need to get from one to the other)
- † Audio Visual improvements (sound improvement, binder improvement, possibility of projection)
- † Audio experience in the space—hard to hear readers, especially when they are children; can’t always hear the children’s homily and the discussion unless it’s repeated for the whole room; adult readers and worship leaders trailing off at the end of sentences
- † Not hearing people sing
- † Organ music is a turnoff
- † Sometimes the liturgy, flow, and music doesn’t seem to fit during the service
- † LGBT community—advertise who we are
- † Concern about access to Middleham Chapel from the Parish Hall (no sidewalk or easy walkway when you have to direct new people over there or when people with mobility issues need to get from one to the other)

St. Peter’s Chapel Listening Session Notes

Sunday August 13th, 2017

Group Norms

- † Start and end on time
- † Listen respectfully
- † Use “I” Statements
- † Silence your cell phone
- † Make sure everyone has space to contribute

- † No parking lot conversations (keep it in the room)

What keeps you coming back?

- † Parish as a whole—always something for me to do and ways to serve
- † Love of this building and Middleham—space and it's history—part of a long line of people worshipping here
- † Organ is wonderful
- † I felt welcomed and needed
- † Intimacy
- † The acolyte program, and their presence in the service—watching kids grow up
- † Social and theological stances of the Episcopal Church
- † Appreciate how the ECUSA tries to build consensus on issues
- † For the clergy: “you make the words in the very familiar liturgy real”
- † Watching people leave and seeing how cheery they were made me want to come it—have felt welcome since
- † At first it was the children's programs for our family—now, I really appreciate the early service time
- † This is a community where we can laugh and cry together
- † Feels like home
- † coffee hour and that fellowship time—feels like a hole when we don't have it
- † need for God in our lives
- † Camaraderie
- † The people who lead us—appreciate the sermons
- † Friendliness of St. Peter's—feels like family, there's a spirit here
- † Resonate with the liturgy with earlier Catholic background
- † Welcoming—loving
- † Hope to grow here
- † People and the presence of the Holy Spirit
- † Help to meet challenges
- † This is my family
- † Time of the service
- † Proximity to where I live
- † Sacredness—spirit of those who came before
- † Singing—no fear around it—you can be yourself
- † The opportunity to help people in a variety of ways
- † Healing service on Wednesday—it's spiritual and fulfilling
- † My wife and her love of this place and community
- † Friendliness of community
- † Free to express myself in worship in the ways I desire (ex. I can kneel if I want or stand...accepting of “high” and “low” practices)

Where are challenges and growing edges?

- † I cannot manage coffee hour on my own anymore (grass is challenging, no arms on chairs) and so I leave because it's hard to ask for help. I really miss coffee hour though.

- † Coffee hour is hard to hold in bad weather, and it's missed when we don't have it
- † Get tired of hearing the same Eucharistic Prayer and Prayers of the People for extended periods of time
- † Can be hard for me to pray after Communion when we have hymn singing—can be distracting
- † I miss the choir
- † Concern about members who cannot attend in person—some people feel forgotten
- † How are they staying connected to the parish?
- † How can we welcome people into the space outside of worship times?
- † I first thought this was a museum, and know others do too
- † It can be hard to hear in this space—are mics a possibility?

Ideas

- † Be more conscious of the people around us (ex. Changes in mobility)
- † Think about how we set up coffee hour and be intentional
- † Name tags
- † Classes to help familiarize people with the Episcopal Church and MSP's history in particular
- † Diversify the Prayers of the People and Eucharistic Prayer
- † Consider playing instrumental music during Communion—more quiet time to pray
- † Encourage and develop lay pastoral care so it's not all on the clergy (ex. Buddies at Asbury to check in on and share updates)
- † Offer events and other programs here to have the space open for the community to join
- † Consider having St. Peter's open for meditation other than Sunday and Wednesday mornings
- † Improving signage out front—clarity, visibility, include a container/space for brochures, let some aspects of the sign be changeable when info. needs to change
- † Open the doors up during the week
- † Play to our strength of being a historic building and use that history angle as we invite people in to see and experience the space

Middleham Chapel Listening Session Notes

Sunday August 13th, 2017

Group Norms

- † Start and end on time
- † Listen respectfully
- † Use "I" Statements
- † Silence your cell phone
- † Make sure everyone has space to contribute
- † No parking lot conversations (keep it in the room)

What keeps you coming back?

- † I'm always welcome here even when I often go to St. Peter's
- † Close to my home
- † The building—historic, solid, acoustics

- † The people—appreciate that it's smaller and the warmth here
- † Liturgy is an important part of my formation—I seek out a strengthening of my faith and guidance—place of praise and faith—sermons help me put my faith in action
- † The people—they are invested, friendly, and joyful
- † Service time (four people mentioned this)
- † The people—"I feel enveloped"
- † I often go where I have a ride—I feel comfortable and happy here. I've missed coming here. It's where I was married.
- † I feel loved and cared for here (ex. Being helped up the stairs is a little thing that really means a lot)
- † Warmth and greeting I feel here—Dr. Bennett's welcome my first time here was so wonderful
- † Comfortable here—history of my family and kids here—feels like the right size
- † Spiritual comfort of being in this space even when I'm alone
- † I feel welcome
- † It feels like home—tradition, liturgy, and the priests say the words like it's the first time, the words feel fresh to me
- † Those who came before us are right here—on the walls and around us in the cemetery
- † It feels like coming home—so many memories here

Where are challenges and growing edges?

- † I wish there was more silence during the service, especially during the Prayers of the People
- † Sometimes people knock on the doors when we're here for altar guild and they see a car outside—would be good to have more info to direct them too—this was also brought up to show that people are curious about the chapel and grounds, want to see inside and learn more
- † Need to continue putting ourselves in the shoes of guests—finding the balance between welcoming and accosting them when they visit, important to remember how awkward and intimidating it can be to come to a new church
- † Intentionally greeting people (ex. staying at the door through the first hymn)
- † Access to this building can be challenging when coming from the Parish Hall—making it easier and safer
- † Concerns about sound in the Parish Hall were brought up during this listening session—sound system improvements

Ideas

- † Nametags
- † Revisit usher and greeter training
- † Have an "orientation" sheet or card in the pews that's laminated and can help guests new to the BCP and Hymnal juggling act
- † Have some information or something in the pew people can quietly read to learn more about the service and the church when they come as guests that doesn't call too much attention to the fact that they are new
- † Make sure bulletins are on the seats for the acolytes

- † Announcing where we are in the BCP is helpful especially for acolytes and guests
- † What if we had a St. Peter's Day and a Middleham Day (offer tours, open house, information, food) Invite the community and maybe coordinate it with a local house and garden tour.
- † Better signage, especially showing when the space is open
- † Could we have more historical information outside about the church and cemetery?
- † We have a large transient community on the base—how can we better connect with the military community both active and retired? Many of these people are literally in our back yard at St. Peter's at the Yacht Club
- † Have the chapel open events held on our campus like the Health Fair
- † Altar flowers—encourage people to pay for them in honor of a birthday or anniversary
- † Offer blessings during the service for birthdays and anniversaries
- † Healing prayer during Communion led by lay prayer partners—in Middleham have the space to do it in the little side area—would involve training, would be confidential, and would strengthen pastoral support of the community

Middleham and St. Peter's Annual Crab Feast and Calvert County Fair

Participation Encouraging Invite & Bring & Community Connection Example

“Let's continue to remember to invite and bring friends, family, and neighbors to our ministries and our worship services. We are seeing some good progress in that regard.

The Crab feast was a good start for parishioners to invite friends and family. Reverend Sarah randomly met someone at an offsite location and invited them to the crab feast, and they came. Others did the same, and we had many more folks (70 or more) attend than in recent years.

For the first time, our parish was represented with a booth at the fair. While this was a Welcome * Connect * Strengthen project, we had many more volunteers to help (19) than just the Vitality Team. Over the five days and 48 hours of the fair, our volunteers greeted over 300 attendees, providing them with information about upcoming events, and our ministries. We distributed hundreds of water bottles to fair attendees and had in-depth discussions with dozens of people.

We have seen the results of our effort, with people attending the Big Conversation discussions on Sunday afternoon who were invited at the Calvert County Fair.

Other events provide opportunities for inviting – The food drop is a good example. We always need help, and bringing a friend provides an opportunity to show how we are reaching out to the

community. The Big Conversation also provides a good way to show our ministries to the community. “Fellowship 15” has started at the 9:30 service. Coffee, juice, and munchies are available 15 minutes before the service, with parishioners having an opportunity to greet newcomers and generally provide a more welcoming atmosphere.

More events mean more opportunities for invitation. Many people are simply curious about the chapels. Invite them when our doors are now open on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays Noon – 1:00 PM 2nd and 4th Tuesdays 4:00 – 5:00 PM For Personal Prayer, Reflection or Meditation.”

In the Fall of 2017, a sub group of the Vitality Team met with the steering committee to do their own assessment of the Middleham and St. Peter’s Website, Facebook and Instagram accounts. Some changes had been made since the Social Media and Website audit by Ryan Carrell in November 2016, addition of the Instagram account in January 2017 an overhaul on the website throughout the summer of 2017.



SOCIAL MEDIA IN HOUSE ANALYSIS VITALITY TEAM SUBGROUP REPORT

Social Media - September 21, 2017

- ☉ Everything needs to be shared information – wise for all events in a timely manner across the board to make sure information gets out there.
- ☉ Facebook, Website, Instagram, Church Bulletin, Connector (Monthly Newsletter), Weekly Email- Constant Contact - hashtag everything!
 - What are the tentacles for promoting our events?
 - Who is responsible for what?

- What works for website, Facebook, Instagram?
- Who currently does everything for: Website, Facebook, Connector, Weekly, bulletin
- Feedback was given to the group about free marketing online
 - Community Calendars:
 - ✓ Southern MD News
 - ✓ The Bay Net
 - ✓ Southern MD Online
 - ✓ The Tester Military News/Calendars – read by those connected to Patuxent Naval Air Station – *this account was setup after the meeting from a suggestion of a Vitality Team member*
- Suggestions and Feedback –
 - Get feedback on website from outside
 - Review site
 - Did you find what you were looking for?
 - What did you think?
 - What would you change?
 - Less content, weed out the less important stuff
 - Pictures, pictures, pictures (want to see people who look like us, meaning the young group so others like them will want to come here)
 - We should have pictures of everyone, including the 55+ and older group who will want to come here and are willing to contribute socially and financially...
 - Big bullets smack in face – PICTURES
 - Mobile device friendly - everyone uses their phone for everything
 - Interested in doing blog posts on website
 - Archives for website re: Big Conversation
 - Attract LGBTQ, PFLAG meetings, (groups interested in discussing controversial stuff)
 - ✓ Show that we are welcoming to these groups and they have a place here - need to let them know
 - Graphic designer - Member of the sub group offered to have a go at designing some generic design for liturgical holidays and annual parish events - graphics need to be professional looking with banners and easy to read captions.
 - Leader of the sub group did say he does websites - but no specific details or website

***1st Year End of Year Grant Report to MD Diocese Summary for Case Study
Purpose November 30, 2017***

As we proceeded with project planning, we focused on the March comprehensive planning session that would have the coaches come on site for three days. That included a full day

Saturday for 60 parish members, and then a hospitality audit for all three of our worship spaces on Sunday. Coming out of those intensive three days were the following:

- ☦ All of those attending clearly understood the need for a new approach to reaching new people
- ☦ A general redirection of the parish was set to look outward – and to be in the community.
- ☦ A vitality team was formed to give direction to the project. The team met every other week initially – and then monthly.
- ☦ The parish is kept informed about the project through weekly parish emails and monthly newsletter

An action plan was set for six months initially including:

- ☦ Getting the clergy and the parish out into community
- ☦ Getting the church to be at community events – with the first major effort was having a booth at the county fair. This was over five days and provided an excellent opportunity to meet new people and share what was happening at the church.
- ☦ Improving welcoming at Sunday services – the clergy held listening sessions – and follow up action is being taken to address the ideas and recommendations.
- ☦ Parishioners were encouraged to “invite and bring” friends and neighbors to major events – the crab feast was the first focus.
- ☦ Shirts were made available for all parishioners to give us an identity – courtesy of the stewardship committee.
- ☦ Sermons have reflected the message of looking outward and inviting.
- ☦ The vitality team focuses on “progressive” 30-50-year-olds – and events and activities to draw them in – Doing this is turning out to be more of a challenge than we thought.
- ☦ Several new events to attract people have been set – like opening Middleham chapel at regular times, the Harvest Tea, the book club, a walking group, and evening meditation practice
- ☦ Plus regular events – like the Big Conversation – have been more heavily promoted to the community.

So, what did we discover? The biggest discovery is that changing the culture of the parish is way harder than we imagined. It will take a longer sustained effort. It has to start with getting new people to come to our activities – not necessarily church on Sunday. That hopefully will come later. So, the scope of our project has lengthened.

Give us one example or story of how this project brought God’s love to someone. The simple step of opening Middleham Chapel during the day has made it comfortable for neighbors to come to a sacred place, meditate, and feel God’s love. We are also seeing God’s love in a new way through our monthly food distributions to over 150 families.

2nd Year Mid-Year Grant Report to MD Diocese January 30, 2018

1. Give a brief assessment of how the project is going.

We are in the second year of our grant, but the project to reach into the community and grow our parish will extend well beyond the period of the grant. We have a two-tiered structure to manage the project – a five-member steering committee (rector, assistant rector, senior warden, project leader, and communications assistant) for overall guidance, and a 15 member “vitality team” to generate ideas and give direction to projects, with a particular focus on the middle service. Here is what we are doing about the seven tasks in the grant:

Task 1: Informing the parish about the project and having them reach out individually to their neighbors, engage them in church activities, invite them to worship.

We have continuously encouraged all parishioners, through our monthly and weekly communications, and from the pulpit, to reach out to friends and neighbors, get them engaged in church activities, and invite them to worship. This is a true “change in culture” for the majority of parishioners, and we will need to continue doing so indefinitely. In certain respects, this is the hardest part of the whole project.

Task 2: Getting our clergy and ministries out into the community.

Clergy has been working at partnering with other local clergy and faith leaders through the Calvert Interfaith Council. This has helped spawn two additional subgroups that meet on a regular basis to discuss issues ranging from peer support to deepening community connections to sharing ideas for collaboration.

Our rector is on the hospital board, providing good opportunity for the parish to be represented around health issues in the county.

Clergy has been attending and networking at events held by the Southern Maryland PFLAG, PRISM (Pride in Southern Maryland), and Our Common Calvert is another priority as these groups support building relationships with the LGBTQIA community and youth leadership in Calvert and St. Mary's counties.

New partnerships have been formed through the Big Conversation on Racism project – with seven community organizations joining.

Task 3: Structuring member – guest activities that will promote inviting the community.

We have structured several new and potentially ongoing activities that offer opportunities to welcome and bring new people:

- ✠ Middleham Chapel open at selected times during the week
- ✠ Evening Meditation Practice and two retreat days
- ✠ Soleful Strutters - New walking group
- ✠ Books, Banter & Brunch - New book club
- ✠ Harvest Tea
- ✠ Episcopal Fellowship at Asbury

And refocused regular events to be opportunities to invite friends and neighbors, including blessing of the pets, Trunk or Treat, the Christmas walk in Solomons, chili bowl, and the pancake supper.

Our September crab feast had a specific focus in this regard, with good results.

Our once a month food distribution is a great opportunity to engage the community – both for recipients and as volunteers in the distribution.

Two new major activities are being planned for the spring and summer – very specifically designed to invite the community, particularly 30-50-year old, including families in that cohort.

- ✝ Supporting the Parish Garden (our garden is a major source of produce for the community – we give several thousand pounds)
- ✝ A parish kayak/boating event and picnic at Drum Point

Task 4: Involve the church in community events which will enhance the visibility of the church in the community

Involving the church in community events was best accomplished through the parish having a booth at the county fair. We had a booth at the fair from September 27 to October 1 to reach out to the community, share our ministries, and invite people to our church. 19 volunteers staffed the booth for 48 hours over the five days of the fair. During that time, we:

- ✝ Engaged with over 300 people, sharing information on everything from opioid sessions to trunk or treat to who we are as a church community.
- ✝ Obtained follow up information on nearly 100 contacts through raffle tickets and requests for more information about us.
- ✝ Shared waters with hundreds of thirsty people.
- ✝ Held in depth discussions with dozens of people.

We have seen good results, with people engaged at the fair coming to parish events.

Two other church sponsored activities are specifically focused on welcoming people to our church community.

Our annual health fair and the series of health care events held at the parish hall and Middleham campus, including the monthly health van.

Our “Big Conversation” events, which this year focused on racism. We held three parts and eight events, which drew over 300 people, of which over 200 were not parishioners and from the community, with good representation both Black and White. We also partnered with seven community organizations, which helped immensely with reaching out to the community.

Task 5: Improve how we welcome guests on Sunday morning at all worship sites.

We held “listening sessions” at our three worship locations to generate ideas. Following listening sessions, major steps are being taken with the middle service:

- † Fellowship 15 providing fifteen minutes of a welcoming atmosphere at the back of the hall, including coffee, juice, and munchies
- † Plans for improving AV
- † Better signs
- † Making following the service easier for newcomers
- † Exploring best approach for child care / nursery
- † We are planning to do the same to follow up on listening sessions in the chapels.

Task 6: Improve the reach and relevance of our social media

A subgroup of the Vitality Team, along with the Communications Assistant reviewed and evaluated Middleham and St. Peter’s Website, in addition to social media channels, FaceBook and Instagram. A decision was made to launch Google Analytics to analyze traffic on the website. In progress, based on input from this meeting, it was decided that changes needed to be made to the website for relevance and ease of use. The understanding that the targeted demographics of 30 – 50 year olds view most social media on their phones.

Task 7: Share our findings through the case study and various other means with other Southern Maryland and Diocese of Maryland churches.

This will be a focus during the second half of the grant.

2. What barriers or problems have you encountered and how have you met them?

First, getting the majority of parishioners to truly buy into the culture change noted in task #1. For this, we need to continue to push the message and create opportunities and events to invite people, especially younger adults and families.

Second, we are evolving a better common understanding of our church community, with a balance between getting new people to be a part of our ministries and adding people to our Sunday worship – and the relationship between the two in this changing world. The initial work by our coach and his colleague at the opening session worked well to get us started. However,

now we are much more focused on developing our own strategies and are less dependent on the advice of the coach. Our plan is for the coach to provide assistance to the steering committee and the clergy, who will then share the coach's advice to the vitality team and the parish. We will give ourselves time to work on this at an upcoming retreat.

3. What are your next steps?




We will hold a strategic planning retreat on March 3 for the Vitality Team in order to give fresh direction to the project and solidify plans for the two major new activities.

We will complete plans for sharing our experience with other parishes – likely with a focus on parishes in the region. We will prepare a case study to help us with that.

4. Is there anything you need help with?

We are submitting budget revisions in order to better accomplish the seven tasks in the project. The major revision is to eliminate the cost for travel and per diem for coaches and increasing the funds for accomplishing the seven tasks.

Vitality Team Retreat Summary March 3, 2018

-  Elevator message (A concise "catchy" definition) - A good discussion of the WCS goals, without a final message set. Commitment to finish by email exchange. The quality of the discussion has us go well beyond schedule. The "Invite" – Assistant rector guided the session. The opportunity to practice and focus on inviting had us appreciate the value of engagement, try not to be about a particular result, the importance of sharing stories, need to be persistent, and seek out what gifts they can bring.
-  Vitality Team member and leader of the fall social media and website audit presented his PowerPoint on the need to focus our marketing efforts. He presented a model that the group agreed to accept and apply for future events. The concept is to; Target Audience, Market Research, Event Design and Event Promotion.
-  We discussed how to apply this marketing model to the upcoming garden event in May. The conclusion of the discussion was to be much more focused – planting sweet potatoes.

Other things that were discussed at the last meeting could be rolled into separate events, like the labyrinth maintenance and meditation group.

- ⦿ The morning concluded with our not having time to get to the last two major items on the agenda.
- ⦿ The rector and senior warden suggested that these be taken up at future VT meetings.
- ⦿ Commitment to follow up:
 - Complete the elevator message by email
 - Rector will follow up with community garden representative to form a sub-group to complete planning for the garden event.

Steering Committee Follow up of Vitality Team Retreat

Our meeting focused on what was needed as an immediate follow-up to the Vitality Retreat:

- ⦿ Completing the elevator speech. Follow up to complete the work on the “elevator speech” on task, also added a set of goals. Additionally, an added section on what WCS support should include. The next step would be to share this with the whole Vitality Team for their feedback.
- ⦿ Follow through on planning the garden event. At the retreat, the Vitality Team decided to make the garden event much simpler, with a focus on sweet potato planting. The other activities would be separated out into their own events, like preparing the labyrinth, which The Southern Maryland Meditation Community had selected as an activity to which they were committing. Rector would work with community garden leaders to get others to work with them, and to plan out both the event and how to recruit people to be a part of it. Rector would also respond to Paul Nickerson’s offer to help guide the event on March 20 or 21 by zoom.
- ⦿ Begin to scope out Drum Point Event. Hugh Davies indicated that he would provide greater detail on the site and the general schedule of worship, fun, and food. He would scope out logistics and other aspects of the event.

- ⊗ Following on the “Invite”. Rev. Sarah provided a well-received presentation on building relationships. The SC asked if she would convert her presentation into a document that could be shared with the VT and the parish.
- ⊗ Any research on activities? Ask Paul Nickerson about whether he has research or experience with suggestions for activities appealing to particular groups. Hugh will do this.

The above would be shared with the Vitality Team, so that they were aware and if possible involved coming into our next meeting.

We would also plan to follow through on the parts of the retreat that we didn't cover – namely:

- ⊗ Marketing and communication - How can we specifically include the LGBTQ community?
- ⊗ Coffee and conversation off site and open to the community - How do we do this?
- ⊗ Thirsty Theology - (Thirsty Theology is a safe and fun after-work space to talk about God, faith and life. All are welcome to be together in conversation and fellowship held monthly at restaurants in the community.) – reborn?
- ⊗ Leveraging other groups that use the parish hall
- ⊗ Doing Calvert County Fair and Patuxent River Appreciation Days (PRAD)?
- ⊗ -Other ideas
- ⊗ Where do we see WCS and VT in six months? A year?

Example of one of many articles used in either Weekly emails or Monthly Newsletter “The Connector” to keep the parish informed of the project.

The Vitality Team met on March 3, 2018 for a retreat to spend some quality time reflecting on what has been accomplished in the year since the initial workshop in March of 2017 and propose how to move forward with the original idea of growing our church.

Welcome Connect Strengthen (WCS) is MSP's intentional focus on growing diverse community participation with our church. This concept has been put into effect through the efforts of many people

in many ways over the course of a year, such as a booth at the Calvert County Fair, inviting friends to the Crab Feast, the Harvest Tea and the Chili Bowl, opening the chapel on Tuesdays, Father David holding office hours at Roy Rogers on Wednesday afternoons, Book Club meeting at Salsa's once a month, Episcopal Fellowship at Asbury once a month, and community groups holding their meetings at the Parish Hall.

Our ultimate goal is to connect with the larger community in as many ways as we can. Doing so will help sustain our faith, values and ministries ensuring our relevancy and viability now and in the future.

Our current plan is to hold a joint Vestry - Vitality Team meeting on April 3rd to evaluate this Evangelism effort and determine how to move forward in the best interest of Middleham and St. Peter's Parish.

Joint Vitality Team and Vestry Meeting April 3, 2018 - Letter From Member

Good meeting Tuesday evening with the Vestry and Vitality groups. It really demonstrated that there is a bit of a gap that we need to work to bridge as far as keeping up communications between the two groups.

As a member of both committees, I think the discussion was very worthwhile.

I think it appropriate that the Vestry provide oversight for where the Vitality Committee is taking the parish. The work Vitality is doing is the future direction of our church. We have struggled a bit to find direction and Hugh Davies, Project Leader, has been tremendous in helping us move forward together. There was good dialogue on the use of the marketing strategy that was presented, and the Vestry generally supported it's use.

The Vitality Committee will continue to define the strategy going forward, such as target audiences to draw into the church. During the meeting some Vitality members talked about targeting 30+, families, 60+, LGBTQ and so forth. But the Vitality Committee has not actually made those decisions yet.

Our focus should be on shaping the future of the church and growing our congregation. But in order to attract members in the community and let them know about our church, ministries, events and activities we need to formulate relationships however we can.

While we are not focusing on building a Community Center per say, our initial contact may be through ministries rather than getting people to come to worship on Sundays.

Whatever direction the Vitality Team and the WCS project chooses to move forward with to promote growth, the Vestry should be in a position to review those goals and targets when Vitality actually makes the recommendations.

June 2018 – Movement Forward with three designated Vitality Team Sub-Groups

Our purpose: "Welcome Connect Strengthen (WCS) is MSP's intentional focus on growing diverse community participation with our church."

WCS Goals:

Building/fostering a sense of community and fellowship utilizing a structured market analysis to:

- Attract the 18-30 year old group (no sub-group set up for this age bracket)
 - Attract the 30-50 year old group
 - Attract the 50-65 year old group
 - Attract the 65 + year old group
 - Attract families with young children
-
- ⊗ Provide/market activities desirable to target group(s)
 - ⊗ Promote "invite, pick-up, bring"
 - ⊗ Train MSP members to incubate and lead their own initiatives and activities with support of WCS

WCS Support:

- ⊗ Market analysis facilitated by WCS members teamed with age appropriate parishioners
- ⊗ Plan and facilitate prototype events in 2018/2019 with parish support
- ⊗ Document lessons learned from events
- ⊗ Provide Examples of the “Invite” and post event “Thank You” follow up
- ⊗ Provide Points of Contact in and out of the church - think community database
- ⊗ Provide Inputs on Event Planning
- ⊗ Assistance with Marketing an Event
- ⊗ Financial support for events/marketing (if need and funds are available)
- ⊗ Education of the parish in how to invite and welcome

Friends and Family Day at Drum Point – Invite & Bring Event July 15, 2018

Feedback on the Drum Point event - Hugh reported that 61 people attended, and 21 people assisted – much appreciated. But relatively few new people – six by my count. The conditions for the day were excellent – cooler than the previous week and no nettles in the water. Fifteen attendees responded to the survey.

- ⊗ Like outside worship
- ⊗ Lunch was fine – and liked cookie contest
- ⊗ Excellent event to invite friends and neighbors
- ⊗ All respondents understand the importance of growing the church through inviting and bringing friends and neighbors

What we learned from Drum Point -

- ☦ The design worked well, with shorter outdoor church service and a range of activities in a finite time period. Good access and mobility. Need to have a pet policy, as that was an issue during the church service. Real issue of concern, especially with small children.
- ☦ We need to continue to push moving parishioners from just understanding WCS to action. Still lots of work to change the culture.

Vitality Team Meeting - Out of the Castle in Community Center August 14, 2018

Updates on the age group sub-groups

- ☦ 30 - 50 – Sub-Group 1 - Early analysis had been done for this group. Over the summer there were a series of activities geared to this age group – VBS, the Bible Museum trip, a nature hike, Blue Crabs baseball, Drum Point Day and parents morning out. Specific planning going forward need to be developed with focus on inviting.
- ☦ 50 - 65 – Sub-Group 2 convened several couples in this age group at his house for dinner, with conversation focused on what their needs are. There needs to be an

“energy center” with this group. They are planning to have a next event be an overnight / bonfire event where they can continue the conversation.

- 65 + - Sub-Group 3 They interviewed as many as 30 parishioners in this age group. A power point on the presentation was presented and the content from their interviews follows. They have specific recommendations, which they plan to focus on and implement.

OVERVIEW - ELDER GROUP 65-90 year olds

- What Do Elders Care About
- What Do They Like To Do
- What Holds Them Back
- What Event Would They Invite Someone To
- What Event Will We Focus On and Implement Based On Research

What Do Elders Care About

- Family
- Friends
- Health
- Relationship with Community
- Enhance mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being
- Environment
- State of the Nation and the World

What Event Would They Invite Someone To

- Day time event
- Asbury Fellowship
- Show / Movie / Meal with transportation provided
- Concerts
- Big Conversation
- Events not labeled "Church"
- Events with small groups and stimulating conversation
- Card / Game Event (indoor or outdoor)
- Tea
- Bingo / Mexican Train
- Anne Marie Garden event
- Annapolis First Sunday
- Nature Walk / Walk the Labyrinth

What Do Elders Like To Do

- Visit with family and friends
- Address health needs – gym, doctors, walking, Tai Chi, some type of exercise
- Read – individual and book clubs
- Garden – individual and community
- Volunteer – Church, SMILE,
- Music / Art / Needlepoint – Concerts
- Travel
- Lunches with friends
- St. Mary's College Events

What Holds Them Back

- Time
- Health issues
- Age related difficulties
- Nothing
- Transportation – do not drive or limited driving
- Does not drive at night
- Limited energy to participate in night activities

What Event Will We Focus On and Implement

- Expand the Asbury Fellowship to include those not living at Asbury.
- Offer communion after the Asbury Fellowship for those who cannot make Sunday service or who are infirmed.
- Plan an outing to a play or cultural event in DC or St. Mary's County that includes transportation and is during the day.

Summary of MSP Clergy Coaching Calls With Coach Paul Nickerson 2016- 2018

The Rector and Assistant Rector have monthly coaching calls with Paul Nickerson as part of our contract with Griffith Coaching. Most months this consists of a video conference call using Zoom that lasts 30-45 minutes. Occasionally these calls are voice only due to traveling schedules, but a benefit of Zoom is being able to call in from multiple locations. Generally, each call begins with a devotion that Paul leads followed by a check-in and time for questions. These calls seek to foster accountability to keep the clergy on track with community networking, encourage clergy in their individual efforts, brainstorm ways to effectively reach out to the community, and hear updates on the larger Vitality Team process. Paul generally sends a worksheet ahead of time as well that we talk through or at least touch on as a resource.

While the norm for Paul and Griffith Coaching is to also have regular video sessions with the whole Vitality Team, we have struggled to make this happen. Paul continues to offer his services and coaching to the larger team, but there is a resistance or hesitancy from members of the Vitality Team bring him into the larger group conversation. This has been a continued barrier to his interactions with the larger team. Had his relationship with the larger Vitality Team been formed earlier and more consistently, it might have strengthened and energized the Team. It would also more fully take advantage of the coaching services for which the parish is paying.

During coaching calls, clergy have opportunities to share joys and successes of spending more time in the community and the Team's efforts to do so as well. One of Paul's strengths is to celebrate successes and then offer insights on ways to deepen or grow what we're already doing. For example, in a recent call we talked about a new senior housing development in our area that a parishioner has just moved into being a place to introduce ourselves to the community. Paul was ready with multiple ideas of how to begin forming relationships with new residents such as bringing breakfast from the parish over to the common room one day as a housewarming gift. His ability to encourage and then brainstorm so we can expand our impact is consistent strength of our calls. Naming that culture change is long and often hard work comes up in each call. Having a coach who shares stories from other parishes, supports our continued efforts as church leaders, and provides practical ways to continue and deepen the work is helpful each month.

*Phase 1 Steering Committee and Vitality Team meeting on October 30, 2018.
Brainstorming List of Accomplishments and Challenges from Vitality Team
April 2017-October 2018*

Accomplishments and events influenced by participation in the WCS:

- ☪ We didn't kill each other
- ☪ Raised awareness of parish to reach out into the community
- ☪ Drum Point Family & Friends Day
- ☪ County Fair
- ☪ Participated in Southern Maryland PRIDE
- ☪ Created good ideas – did not do all of them; some may still be initiated
- ☪ Focus Groups
- ☪ Community Day at Jefferson Patterson Park – NAACP
- ☪ New Activities / Events – Prompted by Karen: Soleful Strutters, Open Chapels, Meditation Group involvement, Book Club, Teas
- ☪ Rector at Roy Rogers Wednesday afternoons 2-4 pm
- ☪ Fellowship 15
- ☪ Rectors go outside of box
- ☪ See MSP active and in Community
- ☪ T- Shirts in conjunction with Stewardship 2017
- ☪ Children's Activities at Solomons' Christmas Walk
- ☪ Listening Sessions
- ☪ Child Care at Joint Services
- ☪ Expand Asbury Fellowship
- ☪ Posters on "Community" in worship spaces
- ☪ Big Conversation influenced by WCS – Collaboration with Community Groups

Some Challenges that are still out there that we shouldn't forget:

- ☪ "The Invite" - difficulty utilizing this concept across the congregation
- ☪ Takes multiple steps - need a connection that doesn't have anything to do with church - build relationships first

- ⦿ Are we trying to build a community center or trying to build a church?
- ⦿ Disconnect between us and the general congregation
- ⦿ Wasn't clear who was in charge
- ⦿ Addressing congregation on growing the church
- ⦿ Listening sessions - no follow up except: Fellowship 15, Child Care at Joint Services, Special Activities on holiday weekends, Readers at the Middle Service
- ⦿ Communication - Lacking, Not talking consistently about it at worship services, Saying what has changed due to listening sessions
- ⦿ Consistent about putting updates in Connector, but not enough
- ⦿ Never celebrated successes - Didn't take Paul's advice
- ⦿ Still don't know people across worship spaces - difficulty of 3 spaces, plus different group at joint services
- ⦿ Never got through to most of the 60's + why WCS was important, some 60's plus were our best inviters.
- ⦿ Connecting Dots to Attendance to Finances
- ⦿ How to Measure Success - Mixed ideas - People in Seats on Sundays who might give money vs Outreach / Presence in Community
- ⦿ Middle Service Attendance Issues - (Hardest nut to crack)
- ⦿ Changing patterns of how people attend church i.e.: maybe once a month, or less, still consider themselves actively engaged
- ⦿ Characteristics of Middle Service keep changing: Not only Families, Older folks who need easier access, a later service than St. Peter's, bathrooms
- ⦿ Committee was too big
- ⦿ Defining our role - Not sure we ever really did
- ⦿ Resistance to Jim and Paul's Thesis - Discomfort
- ⦿ Rejection of Consultants on part of this group
- ⦿ Unaware of the three different branches of this initiative: 1) Steering Committee, 2) Vitality Team, 3) Rectors conferencing with Paul and no feedback from conferences - Role and Structure not defined

What we learned in this process will be invaluable during the upcoming transition. We need to capture, retain, and apply what we've learned during the critical days ahead.

2nd Year End of Year Grant Report to MD Diocese November 30, 2018

1. Describe how your vision and goal was accomplished.

This grant was for the second year of a two-year project. The overall objective from the start was to improve the growth and vitality of the parish, and to document our experience through the development of a case study. That case study will be provided by December 31.

During the first year of Welcome*Connect*Strengthen (WCS) we set the overall approach for the project. This included securing the funds for it, obtaining the support of a coaching firm to guide us, informing the parish and securing their support, convening nearly 60 parishioners in a weekend long training and planning session, setting the plan and organizing a “vitality team” to guide the process. In the second year of the project, our work focused on implementing the plan. The following describes the vision and goals for the second year, and how they were accomplished:

- ☉ Having as many parishioners understand and undertake the process of a) looking outward to their community and neighbors, b) involving them in activities that include church members, c) inviting them to participate in church activities or ministries, and d) eventually and at the right time bring them to church for worship.

During the course of the two years of the project, we consistently sought to have parishioners understand and embrace all four parts of the Welcome*Connect*Strengthen approach. Our vitality team sought to systematically implement a model according to the needs and wants of three separate age groups, 30-50, 50-65 and 65+ after our demographic research, and designing activities that would attract them. This was only partially successful and is still in the process of implementation. An example of how that would work is 1) discerning the needs and wants of 65+ through interviews, 2) identifying specific activities – in this case “Coffee & Conversation” bible study at Asbury Retirement Community and 3) working to arrange for this, with parishioners inviting friends and neighbors.

The reality that we encountered was that it took much longer to get people to fully understand and embrace what we were seeking to do and to implement the model above. At the same time, regular church activities were continuing and growing, with some new activities included as well. We have experienced significant growth in the number of people involved in our activities as we reached out into the community. We believe that this will over time translate into growth in Sunday worship and pledges. All of this involves a sustained long-term effort to change the culture of the parish from an inward to an outward focus. It is truly a journey, not just a two-year project.

- ☉ **Getting clergy out into the community, so that they better understand the community, and the community knows them.**

We have been quite successful in having clergy out in the community. As we have undertaken multiple projects, clergy have been there. A special arrangement has been to

have the rector set up office on Wednesday afternoons in the local Roy Rogers. Clergy have also reached out and welcomed the LGBTQ community at local PFLAG events.

 **Have meetings and ministries take place in the community, rather than always within the church building.**


We were modestly successful with this. The vitality team did convene at the local community center. The major effort to have a continuing presence in the community was the rector having his “office” at the local Roy Rogers on Wednesday afternoons.

 **Create activities that provide good opportunities for welcoming new people.**

We have been successful at creating new opportunities for involving the community. We developed a major summer activity – a parish worship and picnic at Drum Point. We have structured several new and potentially ongoing activities that offer opportunities to welcome and bring new people: Middleham Chapel is open during the week, Evening Meditation, Soleful Strutters - a new walking group, Books & Banter - a new book club, and an Annual Harvest Tea. We have also refocused regular events to be opportunities to invite friends and neighbors: Blessing of the Animals, Trunk or Treat, for example. The Annual Crab Feast was a specific focus in this regard, with good results.

 **Include church in community events and activities. Reintroduce the church to the community.**

The first year we had a booth for all five days of the county fair, but not for the second year. Each year there is a Christmas Walk in Solomons. We set up a children’s activity tent in the front of the church and right along the walk. This drew many parents and children. We did have a presence at the NAACP community day. We met many people who were quite interested in our work on the “Trail of Souls” and dismantling racism. We had an informal presence at other events. We have a major presence in the community through our health, food, and dismantling racism activities.

 **Transform our church buildings and Sunday worship to make it much more welcoming.**

Through holding listening sessions at each worship space, we identified ways to do this. New signs were placed at the parish hall for the middle service. At the middle service, a “Fellowship 15” was set to have coffee, juice, and munchies and greeters at the back of the hall 15 minutes before the service in order to make it much more welcoming. This has been a successful and popular feature, making welcoming newcomers easier and more natural. AV is a major issue in Smith Hall, with specific plans for improved audio and video in place.

 **Substantially improve our social media to bring to the attention of the community the work of our church in bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to them through word and example.**

As part of our interaction with Griffith Coaching, we were given an option to have a Media Audit. As a result of this we revised our website, enhanced our Facebook page and added Instagram to our social media portfolio. We also expanded our reach into the community by

having all our events posted on the online resources such as Southern Maryland Online, Southern Maryland News, The Tester, and The Baynet. In addition to these community calendars our connection and hosting of the Southern MD Meditation Community events, they include MSP events through their email contacts and on their website, giving us additional community connection. The exposure of Middleham and St. Peter's and our activities has greatly increased during this period.

What new discoveries came from this project?

An important discovery has really been how we define ourselves as a church. How do we define growth? We are a church that has a growing focus on reaching out to the community through health programs, food distribution, our Big Conversation programs, meditation programs and others. Over the past two years our reach has expanded considerably through partnerships and networking. This is where our growth is happening. Each of the areas cited above has engaged in multiple new partnerships. Here are examples:

Health Van – Our work to provide health care has us partnering with the County Health Department in multiple ways. Through our partnership efforts, the mobile health van brings health care to dozens of people every month. The Annual Health Fair includes over 20 partners and vendors and well over 200 visitors.

Food Drop – We work with Farming 4 Hunger the MD Food Bank, and our own garden, to provide up to 8,000 lbs. of food each month for 150 families at the once a month food drop.

Dismantling Racism – Through MSP's Big Conversation, the current Dismantling Racism in Southern Maryland project has sponsored a dozen events over the past two years, involving nearly 500 people. The project has 13 partner organizations, including NAACP's, Mediation groups, other churches, and the Calvert County Public Schools.

Meditation – We are partnering with the Southern Maryland Meditation Community in a mutual beneficial relationship. It involves gathering for Evening Meditation, with monthly themes, meditative movements such as Tai Chi and Spring Forest Qigong. Annual Community Day of Mindfulness is also hosted at Middleham and St. Peter's Parish in Smith Hall. Drop-Ins are welcome and these offerings are open to all in the community. There is also an ongoing collaboration to restore our labyrinth.

Did the scope of the original project change?

The most significant change in the scope of the project was in the use of an outside coach / consultant who had a particular approach that he would have us adopt. Our vitality team resisted his guidance. The scope also changed in terms of how long the project would take.

In what ways?

The coach promoted the need to directly invite people into our worshipping community, and to bring them to church. Our team saw the wisdom of initially attracting people to our community through the range of outreach and other activities that we offered, and to promote those activities through social media and other communication means. We bought into the coach's advice around the changing culture and the need to adapt. In certain respects, the best approach to addressing this change has to be locally developed and embraced. It is an ongoing process.

2. **Give us one example or story of how this project brought God's love to someone -**
We offer three:

Dismantling Racism – Living into our Baptismal Covenant. The people and program sought to follow the commandment to “love your neighbor”. Black attendees expressed that finding authentic deep engagement around race in a white church was remarkable. The sustaining of the process during the project – from an initial 30 in a book study to over 500 people who have participated in 12 events, and now 15 organizations as partners.

The children's art project at the Solomon's Christmas Walk. It was a tangible way to bring the meaning of Christmas as a celebration of the birth of Jesus to kids who made something, they could take with them and put on their Christmas tree.

The rector's time at Roy Rogers. Fr. David Showers reported as follows: This week I had a high school student come by who talked about her parents both leaving Roman Catholic Church and no idea what that meant for her and church and faith in God. "What happens to God when you quit the church?" and "What is a Baptist?" I have had all ages and walks of life sit at the table.

How are you sharing this project with other parishes?

Sharing will come through the case study, which will be made available in written form and available to parishes in Southern Maryland including the Diocese of Maryland and Washington.

In closing, is our personal summation closing out 2018. This is a living document and a tool to guide us forward. Just like a sea that can be calm at times, mother nature can also change the wind direction and bring in rough seas and storms. We have learned to adjust throughout this project endeavor and will continue to learn in order to move forward.



While we did get some new people attending our church it did not appear to be as a result of anything specific, we did during the WCS period.

We do have some new families, but they are not giving or pledging to the church.

We did make extraordinary connections to people in the community and even the tri-county area, but they are engaging with our parish because of the Big Conversation programs that we initiated 7 years ago, and which expand our community base each year.

We also noticed that our stewardship campaign did result in a 5% increase in pledges from people already pledging. The demographic that is not giving or pledging is the 30-50 group with young families.

We have significantly improved our social media presence including a redesigned website with streamlined information and current events/activities highlighted on the front page, up to date Facebook postings and an Instagram account.

We realize that our “non-church” activities draw the community to our church more than our Sunday worship offerings.

We need to intentional in making sure we target our events to specific audiences / age groups: 20-30, 30-50, 50-65, 65 -90 and 90+.

Clergy and entire Congregation need to be fully engaged in the process of promoting growth, however that is designed.

If a Consultant is hired, they need to be flexible and accommodating to the specific needs of the parish and not just provide a “canned” / generic approach. Some of the suggestions to encourage people to come to church that were offered are useful, the “invite” (part of the invite, pick-up and bring) but the congregation needs to be educated and develop a comfort level with this that takes repetition and a lot of time.

Our listening sessions generated many thoughts from the congregation regarding what they like about what we are doing and where we need to make improvements. We did follow through on implementing some of their suggestions but still need to do much more. It is important to listen to the needs and wants of the congregation and discern what is needed to draw people to the church and ultimately keep them there.

 **Conduct Listening Sessions / Focus Groups to include:**

- ✓ What people need
- ✓ What people want
- ✓ What they like about the church
- ✓ What needs to be changed / updated
- ✓ What is important to them about church
- ✓ What do we need to have / do to attract people
- ✓ What will keep them here once they find us

Whatever methods are used to promote growth require long term implementation. It requires a cultural change. It is a journey.

The way we do church is changing. The focus is no longer on getting people to attend Sunday Services, but rather developing relationships with the community by engaging people in activities that may or may not be church related. Any change in culture, which is what seems to be required to address how churches look at getting people to come to church takes time. The older generations who come to church regularly have a different motivation for doing so than the younger generations.

We are going to assume that everyone has a spiritual need, (whatever form it takes), and a need for their spirituality to be nurtured, but identifying that faith base / spirituality is drastically different these days from when church was the social event of the week, hence the culture change.

- ✓ Define / Determine reason for coming to church. Older people have one, younger people do not.
- ✓ Update and communicate with the congregation regularly through a variety of ways.
- ✓ Celebrate successes.
- ✓ Keep track of what works and what doesn't and why.

End of Phase 1 2018

When we reached then end of our Grant funding and filed a final report to the Diocese in November 2018, it was determined that the current Vitality Team should disband with the intention of regrouping in a modified form in Phase 2. The timeline for this is currently undetermined as we move into a transition period and begin a search for a new rector, as ours is retiring in mid-2019.

The Steering Committee was also dissolved, but the sub-groups that were focusing on age specific targets and events could continue to move forward with their goals.

The coach would still be available for consultation through March 2019. There is still a lot of useful information that the coach has already and can still share with us that we can apply to our future needs as we continue our journey to grow our church.

