



Mission Action Plan
for the Church of St John the Evangelist, Elora

A Paper to Prepare for Vestry

Pentecost 2021

Foreword by the Rector

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

- Psalm 122:1

Out of love for one another and the members of our community, while we are presently prevented from physically gathering together in the house of the Lord to worship, I am learning that the Body of Christ, because it is a living body, continues to live, function, and fulfill its role of service in the world. I hear how you faithfully continue to offer your sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, to make intercessions, to read God’s holy Word, and thereby present yourselves as a living sacrifice to bring glory to God. It is a remarkable gift to intentionally participate in these actions and thereby be reminded that we are always connected to the communion of saints, and we are called by God to be the church visible and invisible, the Body of Christ which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Of course while we still long for and look towards a day when we can safely gather in the house of the Lord, to fully partake of Word and Sacrament together, we recognize that the “house” is more flexible than we ever knew. It has a height, and breadth, and depth that certainly I was unaware of. While the physical building still has a very important role, the ministry of the church is not confined to or limited by a physical structure.

In 2018 the Parish Council identified five areas of ministry as priorities for the next three years: Welcoming Newcomers; Accessibility; Children and Youth; Social Justice and Outreach; and Information Technology. Working Groups were established to address these five areas, and much was accomplished. The pandemic has provided the opportunity to redefine and review these priorities.

Recognizing that we were at the end of a three year cycle, in January of 2021 I invited five people to help me think through what we are learning about ministry in the pandemic, and begin to imagine where God is calling us to in our future ministry at St. John’s. Peter Barr, Colleen Murray, Mark Haslett, Pam Gradwell, and Thomas Littlewood met with me every Friday afternoon to reflect, to pray, to listen, and to develop a process for the parish to engage in conversation about these questions. It has been a wonderful experience.

This paper provides you with an overview of the process and a summary of what we have heard from you. The process was introduced in the Easter edition of “Common Supplications.” Some people have participated in online workshops and others in telephone conversations. The appendices provide some further context to this work. If this paper intrigues you to have some further input, please let us know. I encourage you to attend a special Vestry on **Tuesday June 15th at 7:00pm** on Zoom to uphold the findings of this work as a vision for future Vestries, Corporations, and Parish Councils that it might inform, shape, and guide our budgets and decisions as we move into the 2030s.

Thank you for your participation, for your willingness to prayerfully engage in holy listening, and your commitment to God as expressed through your dedication to the ministry of St. John’s Elora. Clearly your role helps St. John’s to be uniquely situated in a healthy space so that we can imagine, by God’s grace, a ministry that continues to grow on the strengths of our past, and creates a space for fostering faith and human flourishing in our community in the future “until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13).
Glory to God!

Canon Paul J. Walker,
Rector

Preface

The Rector's invitation to the Visioning Team provided an opportunity for a small group of parishioners to join together in thinking about where God is calling the Parish of St. John's Elora into the 2030s. It was a dynamic and prayerful process which engaged a great number of individuals and groups to discern many different ideas of what our future together might look like. What is presented in this document is the distillation of those conversations. The Visioning Team was honoured and privileged to engage with so many thoughtful, giving, and collaborative individuals. Thank you.

*This paper was prepared by the Vision Team:
Canon Paul Walker, Peter Barr, Colleen Murray,
Pam Gradwell, Thomas Littlewood, and Mark
Haslett.*

Some Background

What is a visioning and strategic planning process?

As a visioning team, our goal was to facilitate a process in which parishioners could explore, imagine, and discern where God is calling St. John's into the 2030s and then to draft a "strategic framework" for how to get there. This was done with the understanding that we can't be everything to everyone. We need to discern what God is calling St John's to be and how our distinct ministry responds to the needs of our community.

Strategy is not simply adopting the status quo, nor is it copying the church next door. St. John's is a unique community that we take pride in. As we move forward as a community of God, we need to make decisions and to prioritize the gifts God has given us while innovating for the future.

Vision Team Terms of Reference

- To consider how best to create and execute a vision for our parish to thrive in a post COVID world.
- To embrace what we have learned from the last twelve months (COVID).
- To hold fast to the best elements of our past.
- To create a draft vision and strategy to workshop with the parish to achieve consensus for a flourishing parish ministry into the 2030s.

As part of this process, the Visioning Team intentionally decided to take an ‘age agnostic’ approach, rather than, for instance, focusing specifically on attracting young families. Instead of focusing on demographics, the focus is on St. John’s common values and God-given strengths and ministering to people who share them.

A visioning and strategic planning process also requires identifying boundaries and articulating our community identity. At our core, we are a Christian community in the Anglican tradition within the Diocese of Niagara seeking to proclaim and to pattern our lives around the event of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. This is not meant to be exclusionary, and we certainly welcome those who do not necessarily identify with those words, but it is who we are and who we want to be in the future. As such, our worship, mission, and activities are offered to the glory of God, and in thanksgiving for all of God’s gifts, but particularly in response to that unique event in the world expressed through the incarnation.

Strategy moving forward

The 2020/21 pandemic has shaken us all. It has also shown us that St. John’s Elora is a giving, collaborative, and welcoming community which has, with agility and imagination, embraced worship in an online environment, notably joined by many “non-Parish” visitors. The thirst for places, both on-line and in-person, that provide spiritual nourishment is evident. The community, liturgy, and choral music at St. John’s provide such an environment. Online and in-person ministry will be part of our path forward together.

It is not yet clear what 2021 or even 2022 will present us with in terms of pandemic restrictions, but we do know that we live in rapidly growing communities and in a world challenged by climate, environmental, and other justice issues. Collaboration, partnerships, and thinking imaginatively are all critical as we move together towards the 2030s. St. John’s is well placed to be a community partner and to provide leadership in such partnerships. By building on our Anglican tradition of liturgy and choral worship, and by thinking expansively and imaginatively, we can work together to address some of our challenges such as facility issues and to foster new possibilities such as being a regional hub for choral music.

Group consultation Sessions

- 1. Technology Committee**
- 2. Knitters and Quilters**
- 3. Book Club**
- 4. Parish Choir**
- 5. Coffee Hour**
- 6. Parish Council**
- 7. Two Open Sessions**



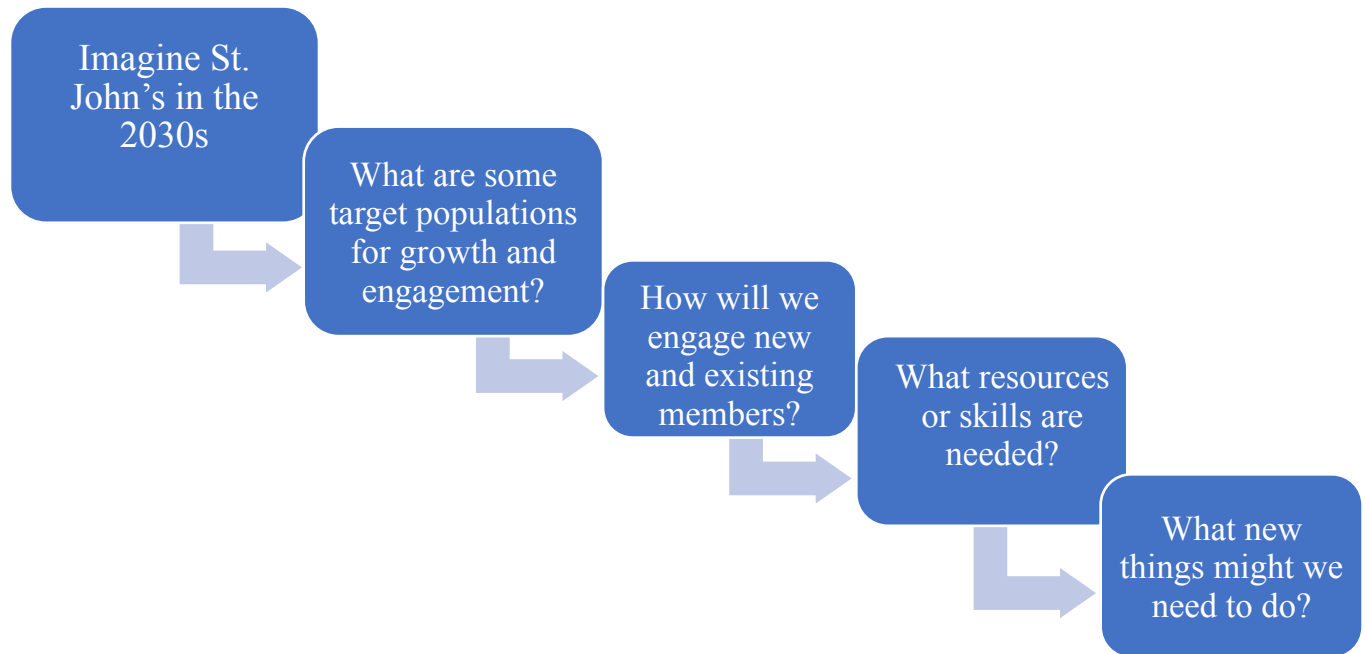
The Visioning Process and Parish Engagement

The Visioning Team met nine times to develop its preliminary thoughts on where God is calling St. John's into the 2030s and a possible "strategic framework" for how to get there. We debated many elements of the "vision" and revisited it many times throughout the meetings as we tested our thinking. The team consulted with members of corporation in the early days to get their take on our approach and work to date.

The team met with approximately eighty members of the parish in nine different Soundings Sessions to discern together our path forward. We also consulted with the diocese to ensure that we were in alignment with diocesan priorities and initiatives. In each session we reviewed the role of the team and then outlined what a visioning and strategic planning process is in the St. John's context. We then shared our working tool, called the "choice cascade," which is a common tool used to assist in the development of a view of the future of an organization and possible subsequent strategy to get there. The image below illustrates the tool. A similar image was also shared in the Easter parish newsletter.

The conversations in all the Soundings Sessions were robust. Once the groups understood the opportunity to think freely about the future without the encumbrances of current constraints, ideas began to flow. Enthusiasm invariably built as the conversations proceeded. Many participants expressed excitement about the process and the possibilities for our future life together as people of God.

Where is God calling us? The Choice Cascade Process/Tool



Findings from the Soundings Sessions – Four Areas of Ministry

Through the Soundings Sessions, it became clear that God was calling us to four distinct areas of ministry. While there are many things yet to be explored, they provide an overarching strategic framework for moving forward.

- 1. Proclaim the love of Christ:*** We are being called to foster faith and human flourishing in others by authentically celebrating who we are and what we have done through God's grace and not to imitate others programming.
- 2. Engage and Involve:*** We are being called to partner with the community and engage broadly through a hybrid of in-person and expanded online programming.
- 3. Musical Outreach:*** We are being called to invest in our music programming to foster faith for people from all geographies, age groups, and those thirsty for spiritual engagement and fulfillment.
- 4. Open Doors:*** We are being called to create a new accessible and welcoming space for all.

Proclaim the Love of Christ

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” - 1 John 3:11

As a community, we value spiritual nourishment and intellectual integrity. This is evident at St John’s in engaging sermons, thought-provoking speaker events, and our regular book clubs, fellowship groups, and parish retreats.

Our approach to liturgy, music, and education has been fundamental to our success as a parish, and God calls us to expand our program of worship, special services and concerts to proclaim the love of Christ and further deepen our faith. This will be offered in person and online via livestream or recorded content. Music, both liturgically and in concerts, is a gift that we offer to our community as a way to proclaim the love of Christ.

Elora is a growing tourism location and includes many local festivals and arts organizations that participate and even drive some of that activity. We are being called to find new ways to work with those organizations and leverage our gifts to the greater good of the community. That said, we are being called to do this authentically and not clamour for the attention of those who might take a more commercial approach.

Engage and Involve

“Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” - Ephesians 4:7

Our worship together is the centre of our activity. We are committed to traditional liturgy, biblical and relevant preaching, and the highest standards in choral music. These are gifts which we need to protect and build upon.

We are being called to create a hybrid of in-person and online ministry. One of the most common refrains in the Sounding Sessions has been amazement at the reach we have in our online ministry. St. John’s has long been a “regional parish” in that many of our members live outside the Centre Wellington Municipality. We have also benefited from adherents and supporters from even further away but who visit when able and frequent our larger “festival” services such as Christmas and Easter. Our online presence offers us a chance to build that community even further. It also allows our own members who may not be able to attend services and other events to do so in the comfort and safety of their homes. As we return to in-person activity, we need to integrate online participation into everything we do. This is a significant new way for St. John’s to reach out to a larger and wider community.

The members of our parish have many gifts and God calls us to encourage and foster those gifts so that everyone can use their talents to glorify him and in service of our collective mission and strategy. We call this reaching in. Reaching in is a way of identifying the gifts that God has given each one of us and using them for a collective purpose.

Finally, we are being called to engage more fully with our community partners including the Diocese of Niagara, Portage, and area churches. We believe that we have a leadership role to play through these partnerships on issues such as climate change and social justice.

Musical Outreach

“Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!” - Psalm 105:2

We know that our music program has been the envy of some, and that it has drawn many of our members to the parish. Our Parish Choir remains an essential part of St John’s in the future. We also know that our musicians want to do more. We understand music as a fundamental outreach for our parish. We are being called to consider community outreach such as a children’s music camp and different summer programming during the high tourist season. This outreach should also include strengthening partnership with our summer festivals and key players in the summer season in the business community.

Bringing our musical gifts out into the community will not only foster relationships with community partners, but it also is a way to bring people to know Christ in our community. As a missional church, part of our calling is to share the Good News with those around us and to help people develop a relationship with Jesus. Just as the music program has nourished so many of us in our faith, we are called to turn it outward and nourish the community around us.

Open Doors

“You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” - Ephesians 2:19, 20

We are being called to ensure that our facilities are welcoming to those who are not currently able to access many parts of our building. Hospitality is part of Jesus’ call to mission, and for us to fulfill that mission we need welcoming and accessible spaces. The pandemic has also taught us that safety is more important than ever, and our bathroom and kitchen facilities need to meet what will surely be more stringent safety standards.

We are being called to create a new space to be hospitable to the broader community. To host more community functions and have more social elements in our parish life, we need an accessible space, both physically and in a way that facilitates our online community. During our community soundings, we heard a great deal of support to explore a multi-functional facility between the Parish Centre and the church that includes accessible washrooms, a commercially-safe kitchen and a large reception hall that would also allow live-stream participation. Such an environment would be less formal than our sanctuary and therefore less intimidating to some and more accessible to all.

Next Steps - A Framework for Moving Forward

“To equip the saints for the work of ministry.” - Ephesians 4:12

In addition to the four areas of ministry outlined above, the other major outcome of the active parish-wide engagement in the visioning process, has been the development of the “St. John’s Statement of Intent and Purpose” below. The four areas of ministry together with this statement provide an overall “vision” of where God is calling St. John’s into the 2030s, as well as a “strategic framework” for how to get there.

St. John’s Statement of Intent and Purpose

St. John’s Elora is a Christian community within the Anglican tradition with a strong history of liturgical worship and choral music. In a spirit of service, self-giving, and thanksgiving, we offer to the glory of God, ourselves, our souls and bodies, endeavouring to foster a faith in Jesus Christ and facilitate human flourishing. We strive to be a thriving, spiritually nourishing, healthy, welcoming and missional community. Reaching out and reaching in, community engagement, and partnerships are all critical as we build on our past and present strengths. Our ministry together depends on factors such as spiritual authenticity, intellectual integrity, respectful behaviour, the ability to listen attentively, and community hospitality. We move towards the 2030s in a spirit of love with thanksgiving for what we have been given.

- 1. Proclaim the love of Christ:*** *We are being called to foster faith and human flourishing in others by authentically celebrating who we are and what we have done and not to imitate others programming.*
- 2. Engage and Involve:*** *We are being called to partner with the community and engage broadly through a hybrid of in-person and expanded online programming.*
- 3. Musical Outreach:*** *We are being called to invest in our music programming to foster faith for people from all geographies, age groups, and those thirsty for spiritual engagement and fulfillment.*
- 4. Open Doors:*** *We are being called to create a new accessible and welcoming space for all.*

Come to a Special Vestry on
Tuesday June 15 at 7:00pm on Zoom
to uphold and agree to this Vision for St. John’s.

Appendix 1

Online and Social Media

There is nothing like an emergency to demonstrate one's ability to respond with agility, imagination, grace and caring. Over the past year St. John's clergy, staff and volunteers have done just that as they implemented creative ways to maintain communications with parishioners. A few examples include:

- Live-streaming Sunday morning church services using **Switcher**
- Hosting Vestry, parish meetings, guest speakers & book club on **Zoom**
- Sharing Morning & Evening Prayer on **YouTube** and **Facebook**
- Announcing on-line special events & resources through **Instagram**
- Posting Orders of Service and sermons on the church **website**
- Collaborating with musicians to create joyful song **virtually**
- Distributing Pastoral Letters weekly by **e-mail**

The past year has taught us many lessons about the appropriate use of technology in Ministry. Here are some observations relating specifically to **Facebook, Instagram** and **YouTube**:

Why Online and Social Media?

- St. John's ministry extends beyond the walls of our church building and geography
- There is a demand for online ministry
- Technology will not replace "in-person" but can fill a need for shut-ins, busy parents and persons living outside the community
- An opportunity exists to support and minister "seekers" who may not feel comfortable in a traditional church setting
- People's love of music is boundless
- Ministry can happen 24/7

Someone Is Watching!

- 826 St. John's social media account holders and YouTube subscribers
- 200+ liturgical services, choral concerts etc. recorded
- 32,000 St. John's videos have been viewed
- 3,211 hours "watch time"
- 45% of viewers are not account holders or subscribers

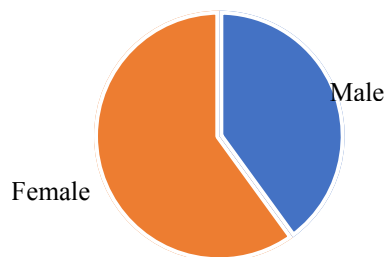
What Are they Watching?

The top 10 videos viewed by number of viewers

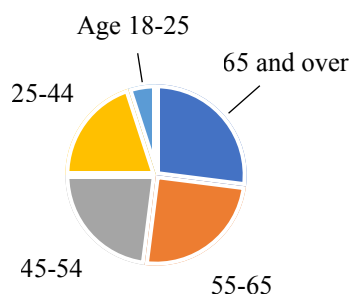
Viewers	Video
851	Advent Lessons and Carols, November 2020
728	Choral Thursday, October 2020
633	Ringin in the New Year, January 2021
449	Hallelujah Chorus, Easter, April 2021
380	Christmas Eve Liturgy, December 2020
364	2020 A Year in Review Vestry February 2021
356	Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols with Bishop Susan Bell, December 2020
353	Ash Wednesday Liturgy in Drayton, February 2021
334	Introit: Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies, Easter, April 2021
334	Choral Thursday, November 2020

Who are they?

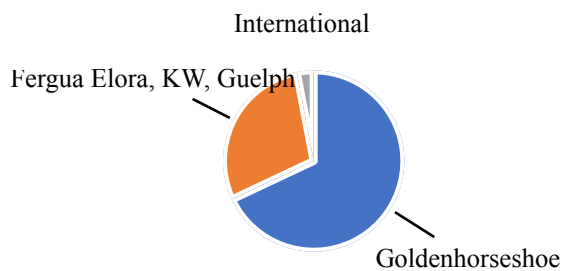
Gender



Age



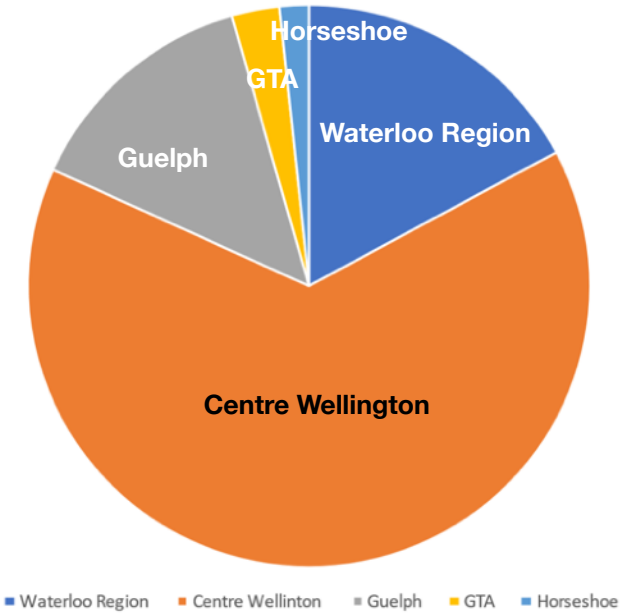
Location



Appendix 2

Donations by Region

Donations by Region - 2019



Donations by Region - 2020

