

## **ST. COLUMBA'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

*Committee on Mission, Vision, and Strategic Planning*

Report to the Vestry, with Statements approved by the Vestry

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## **Introduction**

In the fall of 2018, St. Columba’s convened our Committee to evaluate the Church’s programs, ministries and parish life, formulate a statement of Mission and Core Values, and develop a Vision for St. Columba’s that would facilitate strategic planning. As we announced to the congregation at the annual meeting in December 2018, our goal was to engage parishioners, congregational leaders, clergy, and staff in an honest appraisal of St. Columba’s current strengths and weaknesses, and inspire all stakeholders at the Church to reflect upon how God is calling us to grow. The work of the Committee arises from a sense that our Parish, our neighborhood and City, and the Episcopal Church as a whole face changes that present opportunities and challenges that require us to move forward with intention.

By most metrics, the District of Columbia and neighboring counties in Maryland and Virginia are thriving. With the population growing, especially among young professionals, there is an influx of wealth, new businesses and homes. With the Tenleytown neighborhood now home to three of D.C.’s top-rated public schools — Janney, Deal, and Wilson — many who previously saw this as a transitional “starter home” neighborhood are staying put. DCPS’s commitment to provide public Pre-K is a boon to residents, and prompts some adjustment in the mission of the Nursery School. This growth and gentrification pushes poverty further away, and prompts choices about how we address insularity, privilege, diversity, inclusion, and equity.

The partisan divide in the current political landscape infuses all aspects of life, requiring that we strike a balance between engaging the pressing issues of the day as “repairers of the breach,” while not alienating those who are more conservative or more progressive. With other “mainline” Protestant denominations and institutional Christianity, the Episcopal Church is experiencing what demographers term “systemic decline.” For a host of reasons beyond our

immediate influence, a growing number of people are not interested in attending or joining a church. Smart and thoughtful people within the church disagree about the best course of action — some calling for radical new ideas, others calling us to stick to our knitting and keep doing those things the church has always done best. At the very least, we are called to be attentive, creative, responsive, and entrepreneurial — mindful that younger generations call for integrity and institutional accountability.

Saint Columba's is thriving. We are a congregation of 2500 souls of all ages. Some have been members for decades, others are passing through. Some of us are Episcopalian; many are not. Many of us have advanced degrees. After several decades of dynamic growth and exuberant creativity, the parish experienced a challenging chapter of decline. While attendance at Sunday worship has been in modest but steady decline, there is a renewed spirit of adventure, hopefulness, and momentum as we pivot and re-launch. Our pledge income of nearly \$2,500,000 is the highest level in over ten years. With parishioners coming in equal number from the District of Columbia and from Maryland or Virginia, St. Columba's sits on a threshold, with opportunity to engage issues of the City, the Nation, and our local neighborhoods. We continue to be the largest church in the Diocese, able to generate a wide variety of ministries and programs; we thrive on the lively bustle of activity. While consistently stretched in finding needed resources there is a well-deserved sense that it is incumbent upon us to be an engine of innovation and creativity.

Everyone at St. Columba's is here with a high degree of intention and integrity. Many of us understand ourselves to be on a journey of faith, responding to Christ's call and seeking to live in the Way of Christ. We are eager to integrate our faith with our daily lives. As a congregation, we welcome and honor each person and the gifts each of us have to offer. This is a safe place — spiritually, emotionally, physically — in which we are encouraged to explore,

engage questions and doubts, and grow in faith. Each Sunday we affirm, “Whoever you are, wherever you find yourself on the journey of faith, you are welcome at Christ’s table.”

Our approaching 150th Anniversary in 2024 prompts a fresh look at the arc of our ministries and longstanding commitments. Responsive through the years to a shifting population we have consistently been at the heart of the neighborhood. The time is ripe to anticipate how we best position ourselves to be a source of Christ’s light for generations to come.

## **Process**

To guide the Committee’s work, we followed planning processes recommended by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, including guidance published by Tony Morgan’s Unstuck Church Group, and by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann in their Holy Conversations text. We also sought and received guidance from Sandra Kolb, a Washington, D.C.-based Episcopal Church planning consultant hired to facilitate the 2019 vestry retreat and support our Committee in its work. Our Committee met weekly from October 2018 through April 2019, collected existing data, and organized several events designed to gather meaningful input from vestry, staff, lay leadership and the congregational as a whole. Among other sources of information, our Committee considered:

- Data collected from vestry during the 2019 retreat, and written analysis of that event produced by Sandra Kolb.
- Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (“SWOT”) analyses completed by staff and program leaders.
- Input from the Outreach Task Force regarding its work and findings as of March 2019.
- Data regarding attendance and pledging trends compiled by Bronwyn Roy.
- A report regarding the current status and outlook for the Nursery School provided by Julia Berry.
- Existing written histories of St. Columba’s.
- Information gathered during “Inspiration Sunday.”

The Inspiration Sunday event held on February 10, served as a centerpiece of our information gathering process, and produced reports from fifty-three small group discussions held that day, seventy-two individual questionnaires completed at Church or online, and two-hundred and twenty-nine leaves (statements of value) and two hundred and twenty doves (statements of aspiration) submitted by adult members of the congregation. We also sought the input of children and youth, and reviewed summaries of the small group discussions held among youth aged 12-18, along with dozens of leaves and doves submitted by children and youth of all ages. In all, through the Inspiration Sunday event, we estimate that we received input from over three hundred adult parishioners at St. Columba's and over one hundred children and youth.

Our Committee worked iteratively, devoting most of December and January to designing the Inspiration Sunday event, orienting the vestry to our work, and developing the key questions we believed the congregation and its leadership needed to answer to discover St. Columba's mission, and core values, and to discern our community's aspirations. We devoted the months of February and March to analyzing our collected data, discerning themes and priorities, and articulating draft statements of mission and vision. In March and April we shared our work and tested our draft statements with vestry and congregational leadership, and used feedback from those meetings to further develop and refine our approach, and to draft fuller statements of core values that may be used as guideposts in the strategic planning process.

In the course of our efforts this spring, the Committee determined that a full planning process, including the articulation of strategies to realize the vision statements we have developed, would require further and different work, including a further collection of data. Ledlie has proposed the formation of a successor committee to carry out this work. In this report, therefore, we summarize our Committee's proposed statements of mission, core values, and vision, but offer only more general suggestions regarding strategies.

## **Findings**

Consistent with our prior briefings to vestry and our presentation to the congregational leadership group on April 2, we discerned a number of themes and **words** that reflect values and concerns of St. Columba's today, and influenced the development of our proposed statements of mission and core values:

1. Hospitality and welcome are extended to all who come through our doors (**inclusive**).
2. A **joyful community** that invites everyone to come as you are and provides resources to deepen our faith and take our light and love into the world through service and social justice.
3. **Love and light here fuel us to turn outward.** We engage in programs and initiatives that give hope and **justice** to a broken world (homelessness, refugees, environment, poverty).
4. We are seen and **loved**. We care for and support each other in celebration and need (physical, mental, emotional).
5. **Child centric** — celebration, spiritual care and development of children and youth.
6. We have the capacity to be **leaders**, courageous, faithful and outspoken.
7. We are spiritual seekers here to deepen our faith and learn to be Christ's disciples in the world.
8. A spiritual center from which all things radiate that transform our lives (welcome, music, worship, healing and service, etc.).
9. Duality and tension as we strive to learn and grow:
  - Dualities: Who we are inside and outside the church; service and community; passion and appetite for being radical in our way of being and actions
  - Tensions: Progressive versus traditional doctrine, worship and music; whether to stay with what has worked versus change; and many interests versus fewer focused ones

We also discerned themes and **words** that reflect aspirations for St. Columba's, and influenced the development of our proposed statements of vision:

1. Export our faith and through our acts, attract others to church.
2. Create a sense of hospitality that is extended initially and continues into all facets of church life. Create a **pathway** for this.
3. Be a **beacon** of community service and social justice by building **partnerships** and becoming allies with individuals, groups and communities in need.
4. Prepare ourselves to become disciples and **give witness** to our faith in the world as well as to engage in service there. Loving, living out our beliefs and values.
5. We can bear witness to how our lives are being changed. Openly address **what being Episcopal means** in a modern changing world and who we are as Christians. We are a beacon for seekers of faith to experience and explore Christianity.
6. **Cross boundaries** (religious, racial, ethnic, generational, and economic) to build relationships (internally and externally) that will allow us to be seen and to connect with others.
7. Engage, capture and sustain **youth participation** past J2A by inviting their voice and leadership and supporting causes of interest to them.
8. Become good financial **stewards** to our facilities, staff, mission and programs for current and future generations. Re-imagine our physical plant to reflect changing priorities and needs.
9. Expand our canvas for **deepening our spiritual foundations (pathway)** beyond worship in the sanctuary.
10. Invite and create more space for expressions of vulnerability and connect the **lonely** within our church.
11. Be a safe space to discuss complex issues and translate God's messaging of caring through understanding into action.
12. Incorporate more **community-building** in the life of our parish through fun, play and fellowship.

Reflecting on these themes, and incorporating the feedback we have received from vestry and congregational leaders regarding our earlier draft statements, we have further developed a statement of mission for St. Columba's and an accompanying "tag line," a statement of St. Columba's core values, and three proposed statements of vision that the vestry and our successor committee may use to carry out strategic planning.

The mission statement conveys who we are and why we are here; our core reason for being. Following the practice of other churches in the diocese, including the National Cathedral, we have also proposed the adoption of a "tag line" that accompanies our mission statement and serves as a short, easily remembered phrase that presents St. Columba's ethos. This form of tag line resembles the form of "mission statement" recommended by the Unstuck Church Group. We determined that it may be helpful and important to adopt a fuller statement of mission and a tag line that reduces mission to its essence.

We also developed fully articulated statements of core values, rooted in scripture, which reflect the commitments and character of St. Columba's and may serve as guideposts for the evaluation of our ministries and programs, and for developing strategies to realize our vision for the future.

Based upon our work, we also propose three statements of vision that we believe best reflect the aspirations of our Parish, and emphasize three areas of development that we understand as priorities.

***St. Columba's Mission and Vision Task Force***

**Proposed Final Statements of Mission, Values, and Vision**

**MISSION**

**Tagline:** *Live God's Love.*

**Statement:** St. Columba's Episcopal Church is a welcoming Christian community of all ages that encourages spiritual curiosity, celebrates children and youth, and embraces the world in the spirit of God's justice and love.

**VALUES**

Our values inform our parish life, guide us in our mission, and lead us to realize our vision for the future.

We are:

**1. Open-hearted**

Whoever you are, wherever you are in your journey of faith, you are welcome at St. Columba's.

*Jesus said, "Come, follow me." ~ Matthew 4:19*

**2. Growing In Faith**

We are growing in Christ's love through worship, song, study, prayer and celebration.

*For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." ~ Matthew 17:20*

**3. Grateful Stewards**

We approach our relationships and ministries with integrity and humility, and preserve, protect, and restore God's creation and all resources entrusted to our care.

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ~ Philippians 4:8*

#### **4. Innovative**

We are forward-looking and creative, as we seek to embody and share God's love in a changing world.

*Jesus said, You are the salt of the earth [and] the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God. ~ Matthew 5:13-15*

#### **5. Called to Bold Action**

We practice Christianity to create a just society; seeking allies and nurturing partnerships to serve our neighborhood, our City, and the world.

*Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. ~ St. Teresa of Avila*

### **VISION**

As a beloved community and disciples of Christ, our vision is to:

1. Practice faith in daily life, equipping parishioners to embrace discipleship and personal growth in relationship with God.
  
2. Strengthen the bonds of our intergenerational community by emphasizing fellowship in our ministries, programs, and parish life.
  
3. Embrace our City and our world, leading through acts of service as a beacon of God's justice and love.

## **Potential Strategies for Consideration**

We concluded that the development of specific strategies to realize our aspirations for St. Columba's future will require further information, discernment and time. But our Committee discussed several potential strategies and areas of emphasis with regard to each vision statement and offer these below. We present these suggestions as a launching point for the work of our successor committee.

### **Vision #1: Practice faith in daily life, equipping parishioners to embrace discipleship and personal growth in relationship with God**

#### Education and Spiritual Growth

- Create pathways for “A Life of Faith with Christ” starting from childhood through aging adult.
  - 5 Practices
  - Emphasize and teach discipleship in children and youth programs
- Translate our worship practices so the “unchurched” can participate.

#### Alternative Worship

- Expand our canvas for worship, opening new paths to faith for ourselves and others

#### Children and Youth

- Engage and inspire youth; seek further youth participation in the life of the parish giving them more opportunities to lead and share their voice.
- Seek opportunities for service and outreach locally, focused on issues that youth choose and perceive as compelling expressions of their faith.

#### Stewardship (Resources, Facilities)

- Launch a capital campaign in anticipation of our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration
- Prioritize development and use of our physical plant to reflect our priorities (including 21st century A/V technology); align our resources and activities with our mission and vision
- Attract new members by creating an inviting presence outside our building, using messaging to draw people in by showing them who we are.

**Vision #2: Strengthen the bonds of our intergenerational community by prioritizing fellowship in all our ministries, programs and parish life.**

Care and Support of Each Other

- Invite and create new space for expressions of vulnerability; proactively reach out to and connect the lonely in our midst
- Ensure that we are seen and loved; care for and support each other (physically, mentally, emotionally) in celebration and in need.

Fellowship and Fun

- Create new and regular opportunities for fellowship that welcome newer members and build more intergenerational relationships.
- Provide community building rituals (like Wednesday night dinners) that offer regular opportunities to share and celebrate.
- Extend St. Columba's welcome further — encourage a sense of hospitality that is extended initially and continues into all facets of church life.
- Incorporate more community building, fellowship and fun in our outreach programs.

**Vision #3: Embrace our City and our world, leading through acts of service as a beacon of God's justice and love.**

Service, Outreach, Engagement

- Implement recommendations of the Outreach Vision Task Force
- Create allies and build partnerships for outreach and civic engagement that provide different ways to participate.

Visibility

- Be a visible Christian presence in our community — a visible, audible contrast to surrounding culture.
- Leverage use of technology to improve communications.
- Convey to the world who we as Episcopalians really are, building on our denomination's inherent appeal (e.g., Bishop Curry blew people away at the royal wedding, and his message and view of Christianity is an attractive brand).