



St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Weston, MA

Strategic Planning Process and Report

May 2021-October 2022

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- 7. Demographic Data for Weston, Wayland and surrounding community (available in electronic form only). Copy and paste links below into your browser and download the document to be able to see all of the demographic information and click on sections to expand the information.

Weston, MA:

file:///C:/Users/Elise%20Brown/Downloads/Weston%20zip%20code%20-%20Neighborhood%20Profile%20V1.4.html

Wayland, MA:

file:///C:/Users/Elise%20Brown/Downloads/Wayland%20zip%20code%20-%20Neighborhood%20Profile%20V1.4%20(1).html

10, 15 and 30 minutes driving distance in all directions from St. Peter's:

file:///C:/Users/Elise%20Brown/Downloads/Wayland%20zip%20code%20-%20Neighborhood%20Profile%20V1.4%20(1).html

- 8. Appendices (hyperlinks found in the electronic version and St. Peter's Website)
 - a. [Missional Assessment Profile Survey Results](#) (MAP Survey taken of entire congregation from June-July 2021)
 - b. [Leadership Systems Inventory](#) (LSI Survey taken from core staff and lay leaders from October, 2021)
 - c. [Listening Report](#) presented to congregation on November 20, 2021
 - d. [Generosity Index Results](#)
 - e. [Community Engagement Panel Report](#) (from November 11, 2021). Live Streams of both Panels can be found on the St. Peter's Facebook Page.

Executive Summary and Background

In May 2021, the Vestry of St. Peter's decided to engage external assistance in formulating a strategic plan for the congregation. Concerns about the direction of the congregation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic fueled this need. There was also the sense that St. Peter's numbers had dwindled over the past several years and serious discernment was needed to determine the best and most productive path forward for the congregation.

The Vestry reached out to Kairos and Associates and engaged the services of consultant, Rev. J. Elise Brown, Ph.D., to lead this effort. A Listening Team was put together to organize and help move forward with the initial Listening Phase of the process. The Listening Team included Debbie Boshart, Albert Hanser, Mike Iacono, Karen Montague, Ann O'Rourke, Steve Peacher, and Anne Ruggles. They did an excellent job launching the Missional Assessment Profile Survey (MAP) to gauge current congregational health as well as scheduling in-person and Zoom interviews with parishioners in August, 2021. The results of this work can be found in the Appendices documents.

In the midst of the process, a change in clergy leadership occurred and the process was put on hiatus for several months while an interim rector was identified. The process picked up in the Spring of 2022 and a new Strategic Planning Committee was identified including Ann O'Rourke as Chair, Wardens - Michael Iacono and John Jacobs, Lynn Maruskin, Karen Montague, Anne Ruggles and Scott Westvold. It has truly been an honor to work with such a dedicated and engaged group of lay leaders. Their love of St. Peter's and their heart for this process shone throughout our time together.

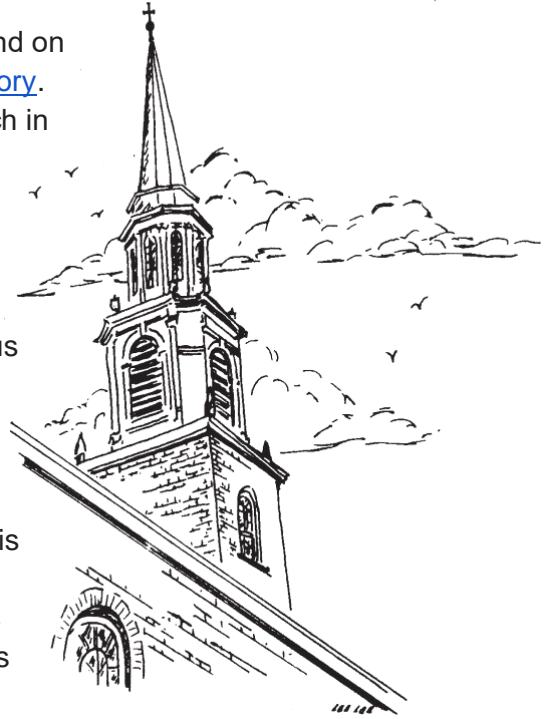
Drawing on all the work that had been done, including the extensive Listening Phase, the team created a new Mission Statement, Statement of Shared Values and Tagline for external communication purposes. The Strategic Planning Committee then moved on to identify the key strategic priorities that will form the backbone of the Strategic Plan. Our plan is centered around a key strategic priority – to transform St. Peter's and its identity, programs and activities from a Sunday-focused place of worship into a community "hub" of mission and service activity, while continuing to offer a wonderful Sunday worship experience. We will seek to measure every program and activity we undertake by its impact in our community, whether it is taking place inside or outside the walls of St. Peter's. Four additional strategic priorities have been identified that each intersect and support the first priority. The rationales for and the details of each of the priorities are described in this report. For each of the five strategic priorities, there is a team being led by members of the Strategic Planning Committee and they welcome the participation of others in the congregation. If you have a heart and passion for any of these areas, please reach out to the Chair or Co-Chair and find out how you can become involved in this important effort.

Central to the success of our Strategic Plan will be the implementation of various specific initiatives for each strategic priority. Work has already begun on many of the initiatives detailed below but other ideas are emerging as the various teams undertake their work. We need to think about church in new ways, with new, fresh ideas that consider the reality of the changed environment the church finds itself in in 2022.

St. Peter's History

A full and rich summation of St. Peter's history can be found on the newly designed website: <https://www.stpetersweston.org/history>. St. Peter's was founded in 1865 and was the first Episcopal church in Weston. In those days the area around the church was farmland but over time it became one of the many suburban communities surrounding the Boston metropolitan area.

St. Peter's history is tied to the development of Weston and for many years was an anchor congregation in this prosperous community. Known for its strong schools and excellent quality of life, Weston is an attractive place for families to raise children if they can afford to live in the community. Weston is a place of abundance and prosperity. The community has much to offer children and youth through a strong and active school system. This asset is also a challenge for St. Peter's because families are very busy and programmed in the Weston community. Yet, St. Peter's has been committed to strong children, youth and family ministries for decades and that commitment continues.



Like every urban and suburban community across the United States, Weston has undergone changes that have had an impact on church life and the role and place of the church in the local community. There are a few other strong congregations in Weston, including St. Julia's Roman Catholic Church and First Church Parish, Unitarian Universalist, both within walking distance of St. Peter's. But they, too, have experienced challenges and changes, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic.



There are several Episcopal churches in the wider community, some that are doing well and others that are struggling. Each Episcopal congregation has its own personality and identity and a particular relationship with the local community. An analysis of the surrounding Episcopal churches was conducted by Rev. George Stevens to see what could be instructive in St. Peter's efforts. This included examining their current membership numbers, annual budgets, staffing structures and programs.

There have been strong eras in the life of St. Peter's. People remember when the pews were fuller and a robust children's program was in place. There have been periods where engagement with youth and families was strong; lasting, meaningful relationships have been forged at

St. Peter's. The congregation has benefited from the presence of middle-aged and "young retirees" who have contributed mightily of their time, talents and financial support. St. Peter's is blessed to have an endowment which has enabled the congregation to remain a full-time ministry for the past decades. The leadership is aware that drawing from the endowment in

larger numbers will create an increasingly less viable financial future. Part of this process has included looking at various financial and staffing models, putting everything on the table and discerning God's guidance for what is the best, most faithful and responsible stewardship of these resources.



St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Mission Statement

*To build a welcoming, joyful community,
transforming lives by serving God in Christ,
one another, and those in need with love and
acceptance.*

Statement of Shared Values

As a Christ-centered community, St. Peter's Episcopal Church strives to live our faith through these shared values:

Love – *Loving God and practicing kindness toward our neighbors and ourselves.*

Inspiration – *Offering engaging, uplifting, and thought-provoking worship and music.*

Generosity – *Sharing our gifts through service and giving.*

Hospitality – *Welcoming all with genuine warmth and compassion.*

Community – *Forming a close-knit congregation where people of all ages and backgrounds connect and grow together in faith.*

Tag Line (for external communication)

Welcoming all. Transforming lives. Growing together.



Strategic Priorities:

Position St. Peter's as a Mission Center – An Outreach Station in Weston and the Surrounding Community

Rationale:

St. Peter's has a long tradition of outreach and service. But it is no longer evident that our surrounding communities recognize that this is a focus and passion for St. Peter's parishioners or that St. Peter's is a place where they can come to fulfill their desire to serve others. When people are asked what draws them to a faith community in today's ever-changing world, or what gets their attention, a desire to be part of places that are making a difference in the world and sincerely helping others are at the top of the list.



St. Peter's has a great opportunity to build on its longtime commitment to service to widen its reach to include more people from outside the existing St. Peter's congregation. A key element of this strategic priority will be to get outside the walls of the church and introduce St. Peter's more fully to the surrounding communities. Further, by providing both long-term and "bite-sized" opportunities for mission and outreach efforts that draw in single people, couples, families and other groups, we can offer unique intergenerational experiences that are hard to find in today's world.

Initiatives to accomplish this strategic priority:

1. Building on the Community Engagement Panels, partner with local organizations to work collaboratively in outreach efforts already happening in the community. Look at strengthening relationships with local Councils on Aging, considering intergenerational programs. Engage Rotary and other organizations doing positive work in the community.
2. Survey the congregation on what outreach efforts they believe are most important at this time and in what sort of efforts they would be willing to commit to being involved.
3. Create an outreach calendar that looks at the full program year and schedules outreach/mission activities and events far enough in advance that good marketing and publicity can be done to increase attendance. Because of the busy-ness of the people in Weston and surrounding communities, advance planning is paramount to the success of these efforts.
4. Plan for some efforts to be housed in the St. Peter's church facility, but offer a similar number of outreach opportunities out in the community so as to involve newcomers and those unfamiliar with St. Peter's and introduce them to the ministry of the church.
5. Review the relationship with WATCH and determine the best path forward for engagement with this organization. Examine the Afghan refugee outreach program and discern the longer-term plan for this engagement.

Co-Chairs: Karen Montague and Anne Ruggles

Increase St. Peter's Physical and Virtual Visibility in Weston and Surrounding Communities

Rationale:

One of St. Peter's many special assets is its beautiful building and prominent location. Over the years, however, St. Peter's presence in the community, and the communities' awareness of the offerings at St. Peter's have diminished. Although we have improved the main outdoor signs, more work needs to be done to convey to the community the many ways in which St.



Peter's may serve them. In addition, St. Peter's web presence is minimal. In today's world, churches must assume that any person who visits their church has gone on their website or mobile application before attending a service. If the website/mobile app does not communicate life, vibrancy, energy and spirit, a person seeking a new church community is unlikely to check out the church.

This strategic priority will examine St. Peter's visibility in the community, both physically and in the on-line space, to raise awareness and knowledge of its presence as a strong, active congregation that is making a difference in the world and individual people's lives.

Initiatives to accomplish this strategic priority:

1. Redesign the website, focusing on the newcomer and making it an active place that both members and newcomers go to regularly for information and connection.
2. Discover the key ways people in Weston and surrounding communities get information about what is going on in their community and events/opportunities to plug in to. Develop a strategy that actively utilizes these key community resources for marketing and outreach.
3. Focus efforts to enliven the physical property for those driving, cycling, running or walking by St. Peter's.
4. Publicize and "market" new efforts and programs that draw newcomers (and existing members) into participation in St. Peter's events and ministries. Track which marketing mechanisms garner the strongest response; build on those mechanisms.
5. Collaborate with local organizations that are mission-minded (Rotary, Council on Aging, WATCH) to host events at St. Peter's that draw traffic and attention to the work of the congregation.

Co-Chairs: Mike Iacono and John Jacobs

Grow and Strengthen the Congregation



Rationale:

St. Peter's is a unique congregation in the Weston community. With well-crafted and conducted liturgy, strong music and a commitment to inspiring and intellectually stimulating preaching, St. Peter's provides an oasis of spiritual care, hope and healing in challenging times. St. Peter's is a progressive church, authentically welcoming diverse people into its warm and vibrant community.

Over the last several years, the congregation at St. Peter's has dwindled in number. To be a strong, vital congregation in this community, St. Peter's must grow the congregation in membership and involvement, focusing on both those who are already part of the congregation, those who have drifted away, and those who are not here yet.

Initiatives to accomplish this strategic priority:

1. Review current membership and determine who has become inactive; create a one-on-one outreach strategy to connect with these inactive members to determine if/how they might become re-engaged and involved with St. Peter's.
2. Develop a clear plan to follow-up within 24-48 hours with any person who visits St. Peter's.
3. Develop a clear plan to follow up with people who attend a program at St. Peter's during the week as part of the outreach strategic priority. Create a new category of "friends of St. Peter's" comprised of non-members taking part in St. Peter's programs and activities. Communicate with this group regularly through thank you notes and information on future events and programs that may be of interest to them.
4. Create opportunities for newcomers to attend social or educational events that would introduce them to St. Peter's (including, but beyond, Sunday worship) and help them make new friends and meaningful connections with others.



Co-Chairs: Scott Westvold and Lynn Maruskin

Children, Youth and Family Ministries

Rationale:

As St. Peter's membership has declined, so has the number of children who might take part in youth formation programs. Furthermore, the lives of families have become so incredibly busy and overscheduled it is difficult for us to identify how to offer youth formation programs that families have the bandwidth in which to participate.

Nevertheless, St. Peter's believes that to be a healthy church in our community, we must find a way to offer programming that helps families raise young people in the faith and the Christian commitment to care for others.

This strategic priority will work to consider new models for children and youth ministry that are suited for 21st century families. It will consider possible collaborations or partnerships with other churches and faith-based organizations and will be as creative and innovative as possible, realizing that whatever programs are designed will not look like those from decades past or previous eras in the life of the church.

Initiatives to accomplish this strategic priority:

1. Contact neighboring churches, both Episcopal and other denominations, to learn about their youth formation offerings and determine whether St. Peter's can combine forces with one or more of these churches to offer programming to reach a "critical mass" of youth, making the experience of attending more attractive to the youth and families.
2. Work with the Outreach Team to offer mission and outreach programs that can involve children, youth and their families.
3. Create a youth leadership team that enables young people to imagine, create and lead programs of interest and concern to them and their friends.
4. Involve children and youth in leadership roles in worship and other church meetings and gatherings.



Chair: Ann O'Rourke

Develop a realistic financial plan to reach a sustainable balanced budget that supports these priorities and St. Peter's programs

Rationale:

The decline in St. Peter's membership over the past several years has led to a decline in pledge revenue that is forecasted to create a structural operating deficit in 2022 and to compound in coming years. This deficit would have occurred earlier were it not for several one-time sources of revenue and the growth of St. Peter's endowment during recent years of bull markets.



In order to return to a healthy “budget neutral” position, St. Peter's will need a realistic financial plan, including a staffing and financial model that ensures long-term sustainability. In addition, in order to ensure that we have sufficient resources to give the strategic priorities laid out above a reasonable likelihood of success, it is highly likely that funds from the endowment will be needed to support the operating budget, at least over the next few years. With a solid plan and

a commitment to responsible stewardship of the financial resources with which St. Peter's has been blessed, St. Peter's has a runway in which it can put its Strategic Plan into action with a goal of stabilizing its financial position so that it may carry out its Christian mission for years to come.

Initiatives to accomplish this strategic priority:

1. Work with the treasurer and financial team to discern which financial and staffing model is most responsible and reflective of where St. Peter's is today, and where it would like to be in 3-5 years.
2. Make a recommendation to the Vestry as to which financial model(s) it should consider.
3. Share the recommendation and rationale for the financial model with the congregation.
4. Share the recommendation and rationale with the Diocesan staff working with St. Peter's on future leadership.

Co-Chairs: Camille Batarekh and Rev. George Stevens

Strategic Planning Committee Members:

Rev. Elise Brown

Rev. George Stevens

Ann O'Rourke, Chair

Michael Iacono, Warden

John Jacobs, Warden

Lynn Maruskin

Karen Montague

Anne Ruggles

Scott Westvold

