

Greater St. Catharines Anglican Church
Discernment Conversation

Final Report & Recommendations

November 2016

Prepared For: Bishop Michael Bird &
the Anglican Churches of Greater St. Catharines

Prepared By: Greater St. Catharines Discernment Group

Report Summary

Following several years of intermittent conversations, at the invitation of the Bishop, representatives from all eleven Anglican congregations across the Greater St. Catharines area came together for a facilitated conversation to discern God's call to the Anglican Church in the area. Three representatives from each congregation gathered regularly over twenty-two months to learn about each other, to deepen our relationships, assess our relative strengths and to understand how God is calling us to grow in faith together.

The mandate of the participants was to develop a set of recommendations to strengthen and support the Anglican Church in the St. Catharines area, and to deliver those recommendations to the Bishop and Synod Council for consideration. On our journey towards those recommendations, the participants discussed the health of their congregations, shared their programs and missional elements, learned about other forms of ministry and worship, and discussed underlying issues impacting each congregation's ability to be thriving, relevant and impactful.

As the conversation moved from engagement and relationship building to issue identification, several themes emerged consistently. Small groups were formed with a mandate to explore each issue more deeply and to develop specific draft recommendations to bring back to the larger group.

The recommendations that came out of the discussions focused on these themes; **Staffing, Faith Formation and Worship, Social Justice and Outreach, Children, Youth and Family, and Properties.** In short, the recommendations are to build ministry teams at congregations to diversify the gifts available at each church; to build area-wide specialized resources; to reduce the number of individual congregations by bringing different congregations together making them stronger; and finally to ask Synod Council to suspend the usual practice around funds from the sale of property to allow the use of the income from the invested proceeds from the sale of church buildings in the Greater St. Catharines area for the implementation of these ministry proposals.

The next step in the process is to share the recommendations with the members of St. Catharines area congregations through a city-wide town hall meeting for discussion and feedback. From there, the recommendations and the report will be finalized and delivered to the Bishop, and a motion around the use of income from the proceeds from the sale of buildings in St. Catharines will go before Synod Council. We are already seeing some fruits flowing from our group discernment and we hope some of the specific recommendations will begin a roll out in 2017.

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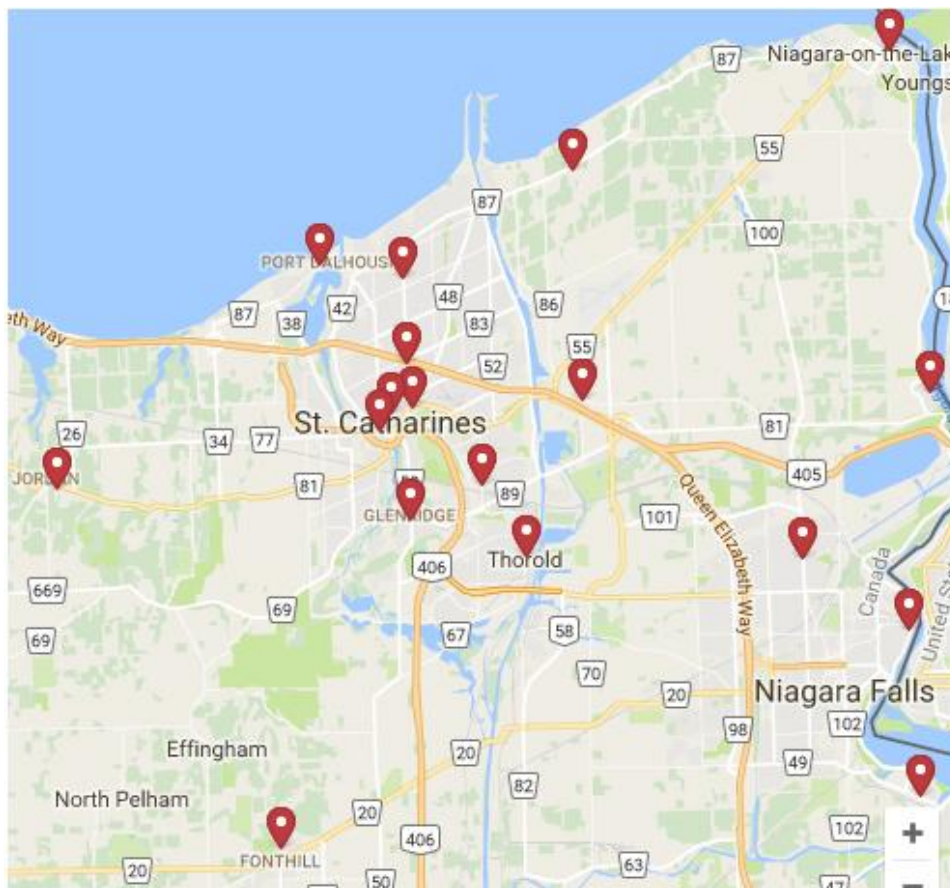
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1. Context & Situation

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided?

1 Corinthians 1:10-13a

A postal code search within "Find a Church" on the Diocese of Niagara website produces a map like the one below.



As you can see, within the City of St. Catharines, the adjacent community of Thorold and the western edge of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake there are 11 active Anglican Churches. The 2011 Canadian census reports approximately 152,000 people live in this area, a number that has not grown appreciably for decades. StatsCan's Household Survey from 2011 indicates that about 15,000 of these residents identify as Anglicans. However church experts suggest that typically fewer than 10% of self-identified Anglicans regularly attend worship, a percentage that is in decline. The sheer number of Anglican churches in the greater St. Catharines area has been a topic of discussion for many years, especially as churches struggle with declining attendance and oversized buildings. In a 2001 report commissioned by the diocese entitled "The St. Catharines, Thorold Cluster of Churches: Analysis of Performance and Opportunities" demographer Myrlene Boken concluded:

All the St. Catharines churches are working hard to keep going. Not all of these churches, however, will be able to survive into the longer term. Our long-term goal is to ensure that we have complete coverage of the mission field. This can best be provided by St. John's in Port Dalhousie, St. Columba and Good Shepherd in the north, St. Thomas or St. George in the central area, Transfiguration in the south and St. John's in Thorold.

Fifteen years on from Boken's report, Resurrection in South Thorold and Christ Church in St. Catharines have closed and the congregation formerly known as the Church of the Good Shepherd left the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Venerable Bruce McPetrie, the former Archdeacon of Lincoln and Rector of St. Columba, called a meeting of the remaining 11 parishes of the greater St. Catharines area in early 2014 at the former Good Shepherd site. An encouraging number of people attended that meeting, clergy and laity from each of the parishes numbered in excess of 115. After the meeting the Archdeacon wrote, "We all have concerns with declining attendance and financial income as our overhead costs continue to rise. We are no longer able to maintain so many large physical plants which need costly attention. Therefore, we need to be engaged in discussions ...". He recommended that the way forward was through some form of shared ministry and laid forth a 9-month time-line at which time a new form of joint ministry would commence. That ambitious plan did not gain the necessary support but it made an important statement – the way forward would necessarily involve working collaboratively.

In October of 2014 Bishop Michael called another meeting of clergy and laity. After expressing appreciation for their involvement in the earlier conversation and thanking Archdeacon Bruce McPetrie for his leadership in that effort, the Bishop highlighted a shift in direction for a rebooted conversation away from immediate action towards a slower discernment process and assured participants of his and the Diocese's support of them as they engage in this discernment process.

2. Conversation Goals & Focus

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9- 1:11

The mandate of the Greater St. Catharines (GSC) Conversation is to engage in a long-term mission-oriented dialogue with thoughtful and creative discernment and discussion about possibilities for the Anglican Church in the St. Catharines area. The goals as set by the Bishop at the October 2014 gathering are:

- A facilitated dialogue amongst the eleven GSC parishes to reimagine what the Anglican presence will be like in the immediate future and over the next five years
- An exploration of God's call to the GSC parishes through shared, mutual discernment in which participants are committed to the process of listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit
- A participation group consisting of the rector or interim and two parishioners from each of the eleven parishes
- The inclusion of worship or a scriptural encounter within each meeting
- The setting of a direction for ministry and recommendations for implementation of a GSC missional ministry plan

Further, the Bishop acknowledged;

- the value of working together and encouraged parishes to develop shared activities over the course of the dialogue recognizing that joint activities would only enhance and enrich the discernment process
- the importance of everyone feeling secure in their participation in the dialogue and that parishes in financial arrears would not be closed during the process (although debt and interest would continue to accumulate)

3. Representatives & Roles

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1 Corinthians 12: 7-11

While the group is atypically large for this kind of discernment process, the goal was to have a broad representation from all of the parishes and to balance the implicit power and influence of the ordained leadership by inviting two lay leaders from each congregation. Congregations were asked to choose representatives who were open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, knew their community well, could articulate the parish story and hopes, and open to new ideas. Parishes selected their representatives in a variety of ways and some of the participants changed over the time we met.

The role of participants was multifaceted to say the least. They were to represent their parish on the one hand but, on the other, to explore ministry options that benefitted GSC rather than just focusing on the needs of their own parish. In addition to praying, listening, pondering, reflecting, sharing, and brainstorming as a group, they were also tasked with generating missional ministry proposals and crafting a final report with recommendations for the Bishop. The participants were also to keep their congregation current on the conversation so that once a final report was generated each of the congregations would have travelled the journey with the group with no surprises at the end. To aid participants in their communication role, Martha Tatarnic and Bobbie Corcoran crafted a report following each meeting that was sent to the participants for distribution and discussion in the parishes.

A prayer group was recruited from across GSC and under the leadership of Dorothy Hewlett, that group prayed for the GSC conversation each time we met.

As the brainstorming was refined to a few areas, additional people joined the small groups that met intensively to shape proposals that would go to a citywide consultation. These people have not been named but we thank them for their participation.

Dialogue Participants

St. John's, Port Dalhousie

Jim Powell (interim until Feb 2015)
Laura Marie Piotrowicz (rector March 2015)
Valerie Acott
Sue Thibodeau
Alternate: Roger Daniels

St George's, Homer

Dorothy Hewlett (rector)
Bobbie Corcoran
Sue Keller

Grace

Michael Mondloch (rector)
Tom Lewis
Chuck Burke
Alternate: Dianne Williams

St. Barnabas

Dan Tatarnic (rector – sick leave March 2015)
Ronald Eckstein (resigned March 2015)
Marion Tulk

Church of the Transfiguration

Patricia Stansfield (rector)
Beth Kerley
Kelly Twerdy
Alternate: Rebecca Sinan

St. John the Evangelist, Thorold

Cathie Crawford Browning (rector until Sept 2015)
Jim Powell (interim from Oct 2015)
Lisa Bowman
Al Sherwin

St. Columba

Wayne Fraser (interim until July 2016)
Will Alakas (rector August 2016)
Nancy Henry

Christ Church, McNab

Dorothy Hewlett (rector)
Colleen St. Amand
Diana Graham

St. George's

Martha Tatarnic (rector)
Pauline Smith
Neil Culp
Alternate: Paul Chapman

St. Thomas

Kevin Bothwell (rector)
Maureen Bennett
Jan Kaye

St. James, Merriton

Pam Guyatt (rector)
Sandra Thomson
Nancy Scott

Facilitator: Canon Christyn Perkons, Director of Congregational Support & Development

4. Conversations, Discussions & Process

As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12.20-27

In late 2014, the Bishop mandated a local Anglican dialogue to ask the question “How is God calling us to be the church in greater St. Catharines?” Aiming to submit a report with recommendations within 18-24 months, the conversation began with an overnight residential session and 9 2-hour meetings at various churches. Facilitated by Canon Christyn Perkons, Director of Congregational Support and Development, each of the eleven constituent parishes has been represented by their rector/interim and 2 lay delegates. Meetings had approximately 70% attendance (22 per meeting), typically with at least one representative from each congregation. Reports from each meeting were distributed to all members of the group, and members were encouraged to provide the reports, and communicate the substance of the meetings, to their congregations.

This process has acknowledged the challenges of scheduling and bringing together 30+ people from 11 parishes in multiple short meetings, possibly an unprecedented scale for this nature of discussion. However, the commitment to the conversation has been firm, and a genuine desire existed to discern new ways of being God's church in this place. Meetings included prayer and scriptural reflection, and parishes were asked to support the conversation in prayer.

Initial meetings focused on learning about one another and our respective ministries. As parishes shared their unique situations, common themes emerged as well as a renewed commitment to be a viable and collaborative Anglican expression of God's church in this place and time. Within this community, it was clear that we have shared vulnerabilities, that we are dedicated to engaging the broader issues facing our community as a whole, and that we could do a better job of communicating and sharing our Anglican identity in the greater St. Catharines area.

Some of the creative visioning discussions addressed more general topics such as identifying parish cultures, learning alternate models of ministry in addition to 'traditional' church, and encouraging our congregations to engage with 'outside the box' thinking. More concrete, localized discussions took place around demographics, the change to understanding 'parish' boundaries, financials, and what our neighbouring communities know about us.

During the larger conversations, a variety of key themes emerged: buildings, faith formation/worship/ministry, justice and outreach, children/youth/seniors, staffing, and communications. Small groups were formed to focus on each of these issues. As part of this process, additional members of the participant congregations were invited to participate. The small groups met 17 times during the spring of 2016 to develop draft recommendations which were brought to the larger group. A summary of these reports, incorporating feedback from the larger group discussion, follows.

5. Recommendations

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise master builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one must be careful how he [sic] builds. For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:10–11

The various conversations undertaken by the group led to many areas of consensus, and resulted in a set of recommendations designed to support the present and future mission and ministry of the Anglican Church in the greater St. Catharines area. At a high level, the recommendations look to lay a foundation by developing stronger relationships across the Anglican community in the greater St. Catharines area, build in community-wide resources which will provide specialized supports for the parish clergy and leadership, and enhance our shared mission with partners in the broader community. Included is a recommendation to reduce the number of church buildings (thus shrinking the property burden) and use the funds from the sale of those properties to fund new initiatives for growth in mission and ministry. The income earned from these invested funds will support the development of new and specialized resources, enhance the connections between parishes, and ensure that there are viable congregations doing the work of God. In short, the following recommendations look to build a firm foundation for current and future generations of Anglicans in our community, making the above vision a reality.

The recommendations from the committee are split into a number of key areas which became recurring themes within the conversation. These themes seemed to link to the root causes leading to the reduction in parish viability across the greater St. Catharines area, and so the recommendations are meant to impact on those issues.

Staffing

This group put forth a number of recommendations, which they felt would utilize clergy to their best abilities and further the mission of the Anglican Church.

- Wherever possible, to build a best practice of staff teams at parishes, ensuring more than one clergy per church
- In the case of the disestablishment of a parish, that pastoral and strategic consideration be given to deploying those staff to another position within the St Catharines area
- To engage in a process to determine what kind of strengths and gifts would best suit the parish, reflecting both the individual parish and the larger context of the Anglican Church in the greater St Catharines area

Faith Formation and Worship

The faith formation and worship committee focused their discussions on how to ensure that the Anglican Church in the greater St Catharines area has a firm grounding in the gospel and the teachings of Jesus. As well, there was a strong sense of ensuring a focus on growing congregations and actively engaging with those who do not have a faith community. This committee's recommendations are:

- To hire an area-wide Director of Faith Formation to resource clergy and laity in meeting our mutual needs for a collaborative focus on discipleship and shared worship; strengthen and deepen faith and engagement; develop faith formation skill sets as well as connect us more profoundly with our collective and individual God stories

- To develop a coordinated, area-wide catechesis or seeker program for those looking to join or return to a faith community
- To implement a robust area-wide training program for the training and support of laypeople who are active in supporting the ministry in the churches
- To build different ways to communicate and share the stories that make up our communities

Social Justice and Outreach

Social justice and outreach were seen as a core component at the heart of God's mission. Connecting vulnerable people with Christian community, and strengthening our engagement in justice and outreach is considered essential to building a vibrant Anglican presence as part of the community. This group's recommendations are as follows:

- To create a half-time position to coordinate justice, outreach, and community engagement initiatives for the GSC area
- To establish a Social Justice and Outreach Committee for GSC in order to support social justice and outreach activities.
- To identify and respond to gaps in service in conjunction with the local parishes, existing social service providers, and other non-religious groups

Children, Youth, and Family Ministry

This group focused on how to better engage specific demographics, encouraging them to find meaning and value in being connected with the local Anglican community. Their conversations led to the following recommendations:

- To create a full-time area-wide staff position that will help parishes to reimagine ways to invite and accompany young people and their families* in spiritual journeys; support the development and implementation of ministries, programs, and events to support those journeys; assist parishes in engaging with children, youth, and families in their neighbourhoods; network with, support, and train parish children, youth, and family ministry leaders; encouraging intergenerational relationships and activities; and work with the Social Justice and Outreach Coordinator to facilitate the engagement of young people and their families in meaningful justice work in GSC.

** Children, youth & young families have been identified as a critical mission area; this initiative is not intended to exclude or minimize the importance of other demographics*

Church Properties

This group was tasked with asking how the church properties of the greater St. Catharines Anglican churches can be best used to further God's mission for the church. It was determined that the buildings could be used, as they become available, as a mechanism to finance the recommendations from the other groups, and provide a firm base to launch the suggested new initiatives.

We have already seen much in the way of fruits of the Spirit emerging from this long-term discernment process. The group would like to acknowledge that St. George's Homer is preparing to close when the Seaway ends the property lease in March 2018. Other fruitful developments are noted at the end of the recommendations segment of this report.

To support continuing in that direction, the following recommendations are made:

- To adopt an assessment tool to understand which churches are viable, vulnerable, or at risk, based on the following criteria:
 - **Mission** – the degree to which a parish engages in incarnational ministry; going out into the neighbourhood carrying and meeting the mission of God in every sphere of life
 - **Parish/Congregation Engagement** – The extent to which the congregation are engaged and invested in the life of the parish
 - **Financial Viability** – The parish’s financial state and ability to be financially sustainable into the foreseeable future
 - **Building Condition** – The building’s current state of repair and usefulness
- That three clusters of churches, specifically **North** (St. John, Port Dalhousie, St. Columba, Christ Church, and St. George’s Homer), **Central** (St. George’s, Grace, St. Thomas and St. Barnabas) and **South** (St. James, Transfiguration and St. John the Evangelist, Thorold) continue the process of relationship building and partnering to right-size our property footprint
- That a motion go to Synod Council asking that the SALE OF PROPERTIES OF DISESTABLISHED PARISHES policy be set aside for the greater St. Catharines area for the next 10 years and that proceeds from all building sales as well as funds held by the disestablished parishes be invested with the income made available to support ministry proposals including those contained in this report and others supported by the proposed governance body

Implementation

The final recommendations were not generated by any of the small group discussions but rather came from the assessment of the recommendations above in addition to a conversation within the Social Justice and Outreach group. In order for the recommendations above to be successful, and assure a growing level of parish cooperation and integration, it is important to put in place a body who will take responsibility for animating the recommendations and holding the vision on behalf of all the parishes. The following recommendations address this issue directly:

- That a council be created which will work to further the cooperation of the area churches ensuring partnerships in programs, worship and outreach. The recommendation is that the council be comprised of an odd number of representatives from the participating churches drawn from the clergy and lay leadership
 - That for a period of time (approximately 1-2 years) a representative from the Diocese appointed by the Bishop would sit on the council to provide guidance and support during the formative period
 - That the new shared resources (e.g. area-wide personnel) would report and be accountable to this council and the Bishop in order to ensure that efforts are focused on identified initiatives and goals
 - That this council could oversee area communications which a small group suggested be addressed by a GSC website and a Face Book page both of which would enhance the Anglican presence in GSC, allow for coordination of events and services, and further cement the bonds between the parishes

6. Next Steps & Future Considerations

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7:7-8

Proposed Timeline:

September 22	GSC Conversation Group receives and offers feedback on draft report
September 27	Final Report sent to GSC Futures Conversation Group
October 5	Final Report to All Parishes with an invitation to a Community-wide Discussion & Feedback Meeting
October 21	Questions/concerns to Christyn from those who cannot attend Oct 27
October 27	Community-wide conversation – St. George’s, 83 Church St., 7-9pm
November 1	Feedback deadline
November 8	Edits
November 11	Final Report to corporations with a request to endorse by signing a covenanting statement accompanying report – return by Nov 22
November 24	Report to Bishop Bird
December 6	Presentation to Synod Council with specific motion to address funds process
January 2017	Implementation process for proposals set in place

Disposition of Grantham St Property:

The Diocese expects to receive a report on the feasibility of a seniors' residence that would provide an ongoing revenue stream shortly. The hope is that the income from this would support some of the greater St. Catharines' ministry initiatives. Alternatively, the property would be sold and the hope is that Synod Council would permit the proceeds to be invested with the income used to support those ministry initiatives.

Other Ministry Initiatives Arising from the GSC Conversation:

Grace Church and St. George's, St. Catharines have entered into a mutual discernment process to explore doing ministry together from the St. George's building. They have assembled a "dream team" who will meet monthly to explore this missional opportunity under the facilitation of the Rev. Kevin Block. If the group concludes that this is a viable way forward, it is thought that in the spring the two congregations would vote on a motion to move forward with this innovative partnership. The initiative of these two congregations is seen to be an early fruit of the Greater St. Catharines conversation and in alignment with the recommendations set forth in this document.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Pam Guyatt, the parish of St. James has explored their capacity to continue in their current space, and is planning a special vestry on October 2 at which they will consider a motion to recommend that the parish be closed in January 2017. The group lauds their courage and their commitment to join, as a group, a neighbouring parish to share their gifts and strengths. In addition, the Church of the Transfiguration and St. John the Evangelist, Thorold are intentionally developing stronger ties including shared summer worship. Lastly, St. George's and St. Thomas have joined together to offer a joint youth group to our young people in our downtown congregations.

The two-year discernment process has created space in which the participants have deepened their bonds of affection and developed a strong and resilient sense of community. Through their relationships, parishes have begun functioning more collaboratively and now are well positioned for future shared mission and ministry to further the unfolding of God's mission of love.