

# White Paper on Vision 2017

St. David's Episcopal Church, Austin, Texas  
March 26, 2017

*Reflections on where we are as a parish, what kind of Church we are called to be in the next three years, and how we can get there together*

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## INTRODUCTION

March 14, 2016 was a big day for St. David's Episcopal Church. It was Palm Sunday, but also the culmination of an enormous amount of prayer, discernment, and work in preparation for calling a new Rector. The people of St. David's spent months in prayer and discussion about who we are, what kind of people God is calling us to be, and what kind of Church we are called to be in the future.

March 14, 2016 was also the beginning of a relationship between a church and its new Rector. Getting to know one another was a high priority for everyone, and a series of 24 "Meet and Greets" took place in the first three months, as well as countless staff, committee, Vestry, and one-on-one meetings. At each of these meetings people got to know one another better and began talking excitedly about the future.

From those discussions and from the work that preceded my calling as St. David's Rector, we now have the outline of an inspired, exciting, and challenging plan of action for St. David's immediate future.

## YEAR ONE REVIEW

Even as the vision was starting to take shape in those early months at St. David's, work needed to begin immediately on two urgent issues facing the parish. First, it was vital to us all that we strengthen our ministry to youth and families. We began a search for a Youth Director and by the fall had hired one. Along with the Rector, the Youth Committee, and the youth community, Youth Director Jenny Campbell is making great strides to strengthen this ministry. Second, the deficit financial position of the parish had to be addressed. The Vestry, the Finance Committee, and the Stewardship Committee worked with the rector to find ways to reduce the deficit and increase giving. We made appeals for increased giving, and people responded generously. We have set concrete stewardship goals to increase the generosity of our parish over the next three years. Although more of this intensive work will be required in the years to come, we believe meaningful progress is underway.

As we worked on those two urgent priorities through the summer and fall of 2016, St. David's also considered bigger underlying questions:

- How do we articulate God's common vision for the future for St. David's?
- How do we move from vision to action?
- What are our first steps?

There was great enthusiasm in the meetings about these questions. They showed us clearly that we already have the key components we need to move forward on this inquiry and work:

### **RESOURCES FOR OUR INQUIRY AND WORK TOGETHER**

1. A strong, healthy, beginning relationship between the parish and the new rector.
2. A parish profile compiled during the search. This profile is a clear snapshot of the parish at a particular time and place, as well as a clear articulation of the core values, concrete objectives, and dreams for the future.
3. Vestry Goals for 2016 and beyond.
4. Feedback from the 24 Meet-and-Greets held from April-June 2016.
5. In-depth discussion among the Vestry and staff of a "Mission Continuum," a tool provided by the Diocese to help us define specific places of growth for 2017-2019.

Some of our objectives are high and lofty; others are very practical and concrete. However, with the wealth of resources on this list, all components are in place for St. David's to act on our vision for the future.

## **MISSION STATEMENT AND CORE VALUES**

A key question as a parish defines and commits to a vision is whether that vision aligns with what the parish has already stated about its mission and core values. In St. David's case, my sense is that the prayer and discernment over the past two years have resoundingly reaffirmed our existing Mission Statement and Core Values.

### ***St. David's Mission Statement***

"St. David's is a diverse worshipping community of believers, unified in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to receive and share God's love, hope, joy, vitality, and vision as we serve others."

### ***St. David's Core Values***

- *Faith*: Believing in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as articulated in Scripture and the Baptismal Covenant and lived out in prayer and worship.
- *Learning*: Deepening our relationship with God through education, reflection and application.
- *Diversity*: Welcoming in the spirit of the New Covenant all people who are seeking God.
- *Serving*: Doing God's work in the world by serving others.
- *Tradition*: Honoring the Anglican heritage as well as our history of civic engagement in Austin since 1848.
- *Participation*: Encouraging all parishioners to participate actively in our community of faith.
- *Authenticity*: Striving for truth and openness in our relationships with one another.

These Core Values show up in the common life of our church as we worship, as we care for each other, as we participate in education and service activities, and as we grow as a congregation, abiding in the community around us and in the world. They also echo throughout the priorities we expressed in our Parish Profile and in the small-group conversations that preceded it.

## PRIORITIES IN PARISH PROFILE AND VISION DISCUSSIONS

The community of St. David's articulated its highest ministry priorities this way in the Parish Profile:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
- Develop the spiritual generosity of the people to financially support the ministry of the church.
- Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people with special needs.
- Strengthen the process by which members are called and equipped for ministry and leadership.

In 2015, as part of its work in compiling the Parish Profile, St. David's held small-group discussions on ideas for St. David's future. These vision discussions affirm that St. David's will:

- Continue and expand our service to the homeless and poor of Austin. Partner with other downtown churches and groups and work to end homelessness.
  - A specific priority is to collaborate with other churches and nonprofits in our community to identify critical needs of Austin's poor and create solutions that will reduce the suffering and eventually end homelessness in Austin.
- Increase and better communicate cross-generational opportunities for service in Austin and abroad.
- Be creative in evangelism, as we are in our "Ashes to Go" program.
- Make it a priority to educate and nurture our young people. Offer the youth more opportunities to serve and expand their educational offerings.
- Strengthen the way we identify parishioners' needs and connect volunteers with those in need.
  - A specific priority is to be a connected community that lovingly ministers to the needs of members in crisis or transition as well as to members who are homebound or in assisted living communities.
- Maintain our traditional liturgy and music, and continue exploring new types of worship services.
- Mirror the diversity of our community, warmly welcoming members of all ages, races, classes, income, geographic areas, and sexual orientations.
- Actively evangelize to bring any and all to know Christ, particularly those who live and work downtown, both in high-rises and on the streets.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these priorities were reaffirmed and discussed in more detail in the Meet-and-Greets in 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> Only 10% of the worship congregation of St. David's lives within 2 miles of the Church. However, more than 25,000 people live within a one-mile radius of St. David's, and many more work there. The fast-growing downtown community includes residents of

## MEET-AND-GREET INSIGHTS

The Meet-and-Greet discussions identified strengths of St. David's, as well as continuing challenges of being an attractional,<sup>2</sup> downtown church, and opportunities for us to grow in our mission.

### *Strengths*

- *Balancing Tradition with Experiment:* Keeping familiar worship traditions is important to many at St. David's. On the other hand, Meet-and-Greet participants praised St. David's for not being afraid to try new things and take risks with new approaches to worship.
- *Balancing Reflection with Action:* The number of different activities going on in the church testifies to this strength; the building is always bustling with events, both for parishioners and for the larger community. At the same time, members value the church as a place of retreat, where one can escape the busyness of life, particularly in worship opportunities.
- *Community:* Unifying initiatives like One Church, One Book help create community, as do small groups where people really get to know each other. Participants praised St. David's for being good at "keeping the edges porous" – that is, offering a sense of intimacy along with openness to newcomers.
- *Diversity and Inclusivity:* People are drawn to St. David's because of the wide range of perspectives among its parishioners. It is also a place where wealthy parishioners sit beside homeless neighbors.
- *Service, Outreach, and Social Justice:* The number of ways to serve others is one of St. David's key attractions. These are plentiful and varied: Ministering at Trinity Center to those experiencing homelessness, the environmental guild, supporting worship through service on the Altar Guild, engaging in social justice advocacy through the Amos Guild, and working with Chef Ray in the kitchen are just a few examples. The church's commitment to outreach is one of its key strengths, as well as the fellowship these service opportunities provide.
- *Education:* St. David's offers a variety of chances for all ages to find fulfilling education. Adult Formation classes allow participants to wrestle deeply with questions by providing both longer-term programs like Education for Ministry and shorter courses like Journey Groups. For Children's Formation, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program is a great strength, and also the wonderful experiences children have in the St. David's Day School.
- *Music:* Many people – both participants in the choirs and members of the congregation – come to St. David's for the music. A wide variety of music programs is available, and people want to see that variety strengthened and promoted.

### *Opportunities For Growth*

- *Youth and Children's Formation:* There is an opportunity to build on the momentum currently present in the youth and children's ministry programs. St. David's can expand these ministries by continued discussion of what kinds of education youth could benefit from, including sex education and healthy relationships. St. David's can also be an important space for youth to explore moral issues. Building community among youth in a city as large and diverse as Austin is an ongoing challenge, but a very high priority. Christian formation for children of all ages is something that requires constant attention and support, both from the staff and from volunteers in the parish.

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<sup>2</sup> "Attractional Church" is a term used to describe older and well-established churches that offer varieties of worship and programs that attract people to the church's location.

- *Pastoral Care*: Like building community, providing pastoral care to a large, diverse parish is an ongoing challenge. We have made great strides recently with staff and lay volunteers, but strengthening these areas of ministry remains a high priority for the parish.
- *Diversity and Inclusivity*: Although diversity is also a strength of our parish, Meet-and-Greet participants cited several ways for St. David's to grow in this regard. We can become more racially diverse, and also better able to work through sensitive issues when they arise in the parish.
- *Expanding Worship and Formation beyond Our Walls*: People hope for more opportunities for spiritual formation outside of the church building itself.

## CONTINUUM FOR MISSION

Designed by the Episcopal Diocese of Texas specifically to help congregations reflect on their missional disposition, the *Continuum for Mission* allows churches to place themselves on a spectrum from a stagnating parish headed for decline to a vibrant entity that can multiply and transform the community around it. It is a useful tool to help large, attractional churches like St. David's identify things that require attention for them to grow in their service to God.

In-depth discussions have taken place around this tool with a large group of staff members and with the Vestry. We explored specific areas of emphasis, and these are some of the perceptions that emerged:

- ✓ *Spiritual Focus of the Parish*. The spiritual focus of St. David's is naturally concerned with the satisfaction of the current congregation. However, we also believe that we are being transformed through spiritual growth and service and have an increasing desire to turn our attention outward to mission in the world around us.
- ✓ *Anxiety, Hope, and Expectation*. There is some anxiety in our congregation as well. We are anxious about a slow, steady decline in Average Sunday Attendance (ASA), and in the percentage of the households in the parish that are giving to the church. However, there is also a great desire for shared spiritual growth as we continually add and expand opportunities for a variety of ages and interests. Even though we have some anxiety about the future, we are also filled with hope and expectation for the future.
- ✓ *Predictability/Adventure*. There is predictability in the everyday life of the parish, particularly around worship times and styles. At the same time, the church is also constantly bustling and busy, expanding ministries to those outside the church and to those who call St. David's home. We sense that we are called to be a church for downtown Austin, and a great sense of adventure permeates the congregation. Sometimes it is unclear to us exactly what it means to be a church for downtown Austin, and defining this is one of the highest priorities for the next three years.
- ✓ *Leadership*. Some of our behaviors around leadership may be keeping us from being the growing, attractional church we aspire to be. We continually ask a small group of people to fill more and more leadership roles in our constantly crowded ministry calendar. In recent years, we've grown more dependent on a large, competent staff for essential parts of our parish life. We also spend a lot of time thinking about the happiness of our current membership; it will be healthy to spend more time on goal-oriented leadership. It is essential to continue offering outstanding liturgy and programming; to attract, invite, and incorporate newcomers; and to develop leaders. This focus will allow us to widen the group of leaders in the congregation, and turn our attention to vitality and mission. By doing so we will build stronger relationships with the wider external community, and include new members in the work and ministry of the parish more quickly and naturally. To do this, we must be willing to try new things and take risks, expecting both failure and success.

## THE WAY FORWARD

By focusing more clearly on the core vision of the congregation, we believe we will experience the energy and creativity for ministry in the years to come. We will focus our attention on strengthening ministries that support our goals, while jettisoning other ministries that have either run their course or that do not enhance our common work. We acknowledge that there may be some anxiety and grief in this process, and that we need further conversation and maybe even coaching in this area. We also believe that we are called to turn much of our attention outward, into the world God loves and where God has placed us to be a “light on the hill,” sharing the light of Christ with Austin and the world.

# OBJECTIVES AND GOALS FOR 2017-2019

*Participating in God's transformation of the world, we are people being transformed by the love of Christ.*

There are clear objectives that St. David's can establish to accomplish our goals of being a healthy, growing, attractional church. These objectives are a reflection of our Core Values: Faith, Learning, Diversity, Serving, Tradition, Participation, and Authenticity.

## *Worship and Attendance*

### **Objectives:**

- 1 Articulate the purpose of the 11:15 a.m. Bethell service, and provide staff and resources to implement recommendations.

### **Goals:**

- 2017: Work with the existing clergy, music team, and participants to set a musical and liturgical agenda.
  - Expand musical team to accomplish set goals.
  - 2018: Rebuild the budget for this area to amplify the goals.
- 2 Develop initiatives across all worship opportunities to increase our Average Sunday Attendance (ASA).
  - 3 2018: Work with the clergy and music team to explore ways to offer worship opportunities outside the walls of St. David's.
  - 4 2019: Implement the plans for offering worship opportunities outside the walls of St. David's.
  - 5 Expand liturgical, outreach, and formation activities to the community around us.

## *Christian Formation*

### **Objective:**

- Expand opportunities for more parishioners to enter into meaningful relationships with God and other believers through educational opportunities.

### **Goals:**

- 2017: Develop 4 opportunities for dialogue with the downtown community around issues of interest, i.e. poverty, environment, community development.
- Strengthen and expand our ministry to children, youth and families.

**Action Item:** By Easter of 2017 gather all staff and interested volunteers to identify areas of overlap and assess our ministries to children, youth and families.

- 2018: Explore ways to expand our engagement of a holistic approach to ministry, including mind, body, spirit, and community.

## *The Parish Initiative*

### **Objective:**

- 2017: Design and implement *The Parish Initiative*, expanding the ways in which we engage those living in the downtown community. This will include expanding our ministry to the homeless as well as engage those who live in the high-rises near the church. We see this as one of our primary mission fields for the next 3 years.

### **Goals:**

- 2017: Design *The Parish Initiative*.
- 2017: Establish a deeper relationship with the Downtown Austin business and residential community. This will include providing opportunities in these areas off campus as well as finding ways to include non-parishioners who live and work downtown into our outreach and formation activities.

**Action Item:** Host a crawfish boil on the surface parking lot for the downtown community on April 7.

- 2017: Partner with the Parish Learning Leadership to develop four opportunities for dialog with the downtown community.
- 2018: Expand ways in which we include parishioners and non-parishioners in the work of The Parish Initiative.

## *Service and Outreach*

### **Objective:**

- Continue to strengthen and expand opportunities for service locally, nationally, and internationally.

### **Goals:**

- June 2017: **Action Item:** Add a Curate to the staff of St. David's whose ministry focus will be Outreach and Service.
- 2017: Identify ways to work more closely with Next-to-New and Trinity Center to do collaborative work.
- 2018: Lead a Pilgrimage to the Diocese of Southern Malawi.

## *Building Restoration*

### **Objective:**

- Complete and implement a long-term plan for necessary repairs of the Historic Church.

### **Goals:**

- 2017: Make urgently needed modifications to stabilize the West wall of the Historic Church.
- 2017: Identify the scope of work required to stabilize, restore, and renovate the Historic Church.
- 2017: Identify other necessary restorations and renovations throughout the facility.
- 2017-18: Embark on a Major Gifts Campaign and a Capital Campaign to do these needed repairs and restorations.
- 2018: In the fall, begin construction on the facility.

## *Leadership and Participation*

### **Objectives:**

- 1 Expand our work with incorporation of new members into the common life of St. David's.
- 2 Continue the work already started to develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances, those in transition, homebound, or in assisted living.
- 3 Develop clear invitation and training opportunities for volunteer and leadership development in the parish and in the Diocese of Texas.

### **Goals:**

- 2017: Create a "Volunteer and Leadership Academy" to equip people for service inside and outside the Church.
- 2017: Actively encourage parishioners to take on roles of leadership within the parish and the diocese.
- 2018: Graduate first class of the "Volunteer and Leadership Academy".

## *Financial Health*

### **Objectives:**

- 1 Balance the budget and build future budgets around income, vision, and objectives.

### **Goals:**

- 2017: Approve a budget with less than a \$100,000 deficit position.
- 2017: Move from a pledge based budgeting model to a giving based model.
- 2018: Approve a balanced budget.
- 2019: Approve a balanced, sustainable budget that is fully aligned with strategic priorities, reflecting a culture of generosity in the parish.

- 2 Strengthen stewardship initiatives.

**Goals:**

- Increase giving among those who pledge by 6% a year for three years.
- Increase the percentage of parishioners who give from 41% in 2016 to 60% by 2019.

## *Working Together*

**Objectives:**

- 1 Continue to strengthen the role of prayer in all of our decision-making processes.

**Goal:**

- 2017: Offer training or community prayer for ministry leaders throughout the parish.
- 2 Continue to improve communication among ministry areas and do more collaborative work.

**Goal:**

- 2017: Vestry and Staff will work together to come up with specific goals for the year.
- 3 Provide clear channels of communication within the parish.

**Goal:**

- 2017: Develop a communication assessment tool to measure our effectiveness.
- Develop a metric that will allow us to measure our effectiveness as a parish beyond the traditional tools of ASA, Baptisms, Confirmations, and Receptions.