

Holy Conversations

Report to the Vestry and Congregation

October 2011

The Mission of St. Andrew's is to know Christ and to make Christ known.

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, in Tacoma, Washington, is a healthy and stable Episcopal parish in the Diocese of Olympia (Western Washington). In January 2011 at the Annual Meeting, the congregation was called by the rector, the Rev. Martin Yabroff, to a season of discernment of who we are, where we are, and what God is calling us to be and do. In March 2011, the Vestry appointed a Holy Conversations team of seven persons to engage the parish in this inquiry, guided by the book Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations, by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann (Alban Institute, 2003). The team has conducted three "Holy Conversation" exercises with the congregation, engaged the Vestry's retreat work on our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, studied the history and current demographics of the congregation, discussed the parish's activities and organizational character, and prayed for God's guidance and direction. We present this report to the Vestry and congregation with the hope that God will continue to guide us through continuing holy conversations about this work and God's mission for St. Andrew's.

Yours in Christ,

Linda Brice (current chair)

Kristen Mellis

Marian Warren

(Patty Mannie withdrew in the Summer)

Skip Broadhead (initial chair)

Pam Rhodes

Martin Yabroff

Sections of this report:

- + Strategic Planning and Spiritual Discernment
- + History and Demographics
- + Three Holy Conversations
- + SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
- + Organizational Character
- + Findings
- + Appendices, including some personal reflections



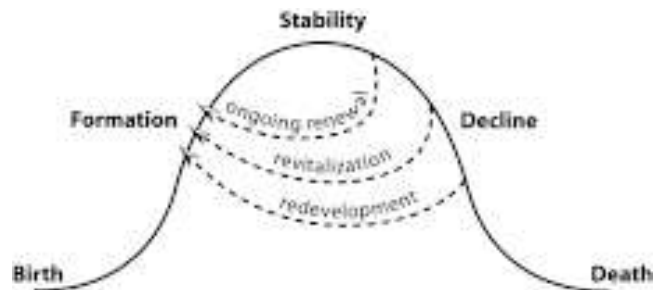
Strategic Planning and Spiritual Discernment

The kind of planning and self-study we are presenting is usually associated with congregational crises or the search for a new pastor. In contrast, St. Andrew's is in neither situation, and our work these past months confirms our sense that St. Andrew's is indeed a healthy and stable congregation.

Broadly speaking, there are three types of strategic planning.

1. Problem planning is a short-term methodology designed to fix things that are broken. Its goal is to return things to the way they were, and its timetable is immediate and limited.
2. Frame-bending planning begins with the recognition that what we had been doing in ministry is no longer faithful and effective. It seeks to radically re-vision ministry, beginning with foundations and initial needs, and takes 12 to 18 months to complete.
3. Developmental planning, of which this project is an example, recognizes that things are good. What we are currently doing in ministry is faithful and appropriate. It asks the questions: Who are we?, where are we?, what is next?, and where are we called to go? Its goal is to determine next steps, building on what is presently being done. Its timetable is 3 to 6 months, and is commonly revisited every few years.

All congregations (indeed, all organizations and organisms) have a life cycle of birth, formation, stability, decline and death. St. Andrew's is a stable congregation, but without renewal or revitalization, will naturally decline and die. The following diagram describes our situation:



In addition, our world, our society and culture, and our local community, are all changing (as described in the SWOT analysis). This is a further reason why stability cannot be a final state but both invites and requires us to seek renewal and re-‘formation’.

Spiritually, we know that God's people are not called simply to be stable and settled. Jesus called Andrew, and calls us, to follow him where he would lead. At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus sent his disciples onward in mission (Matthew 28:16-20). The Israelites followed God's leading through the wilderness and were formed in faith as a new people for a new land and time. The Word of the Lord comes to us through the prophets: "Behold, I am doing a new thing, do you not perceive it?" Our lives and families and community are all changing – by faith we seek to follow God as a parish. This is necessary and exciting planning and discernment.

We see this spiritual discernment as a shared experience: *Strategic planning is a structured conversation about what a group of people believe God calls them to be or to do.* (Mann and Rendle) Through conversations, we seek to understand who we are as God’s people and how God is calling us to live and serve.

While with this report the Holy Conversation team finishes its work, we look forward to the continuing conversations and faithful initiatives of the Vestry and congregation as we seek God’s renewal and re-vitalization.



History and Demographics

St. Andrew’s began as a worshipping congregation in 1890, and began services on this current site in 1953. The first hundred years of St. Andrew’s ministries are wonderfully described in a centennial booklet available in the Church Office.

Reviewing the Parish Profiles prepared for rector search processes in 1995, 2002 and 2006 showed that St. Andrew’s has not changed greatly in its ministries over the recent past. Regarding the 2002 profile, Skip Broadhead wrote: “Some ministries seem to have gone away and membership may be smaller (today), but the characterization of who we are at St. Andrew’s and what we want to accomplish seems remarkably similar to what I have experienced as a member and heard in the Holy Conversation process. There hasn’t been a change of direction. In some areas there may be more energy today, but in some others there seems to be less. No surprises or disconnects here.”

Parochial Report data on St. Andrew’s membership, attendance and pledge/plate income from 1999 to 2009 are presented in the chart of Participation and Giving Trends (Appendix 1).

Here at St. Andrew’s:

We have 119 active households, more or less, as of August 2011

- 49 single person in household (41%)
- 10 single person active within larger household (i.e. spouse not active) (12%)
- 31 couples (no children at home) (26%)
- 29 families (at least one adult, one child) (24%)

Of these 119, 104 attend somewhat regularly. (15 attend infrequently if ever but consider themselves members)

These 119 households comprise 218 persons. Of these 218, 39 are children or youth.

Of 122 households on our mailing list as active members:

- 55 live in Tacoma
- 39 live in University Place or Fircrest
- 14 live in Gig Harbor
- 9 live in Lakewood
- 3 live in Puyallup

Half of our active households do not live in Tacoma.

We currently have 78 pledging units for 2011

St. Andrew’s Average Sunday Attendance in 2010 was 106/Sunday

- By comparison, the median Average Sunday Attendance for all Episcopal churches in the country is 66. (Half of all congregations are larger, half are smaller. We are in the larger half!)
- 67% of Episcopal congregations have an ASA of 100 or less.



Three Holy Conversations

The team hosted three events to facilitate conversations among the members of St. Andrew’s and to encourage discernment regarding God’s purpose for us as a parish. This section provides a description of these events and a very brief summary of the conversations we shared.

First Conversation: Sunday, April 3, 4:30 pm – **Bread, Soup and Bible**

Some 30 parish members, mainly from the 10 am service, gathered in small groups to consider what Bible stories or hymns reflected where we are as a parish.

- a. We know our Bible stories – a wide and rich gathering of stories
- b. Conversation and fellowship are eagerly enjoyed and yearned for
- c. The Parable of the Prodigal Son as a paradigm for remembering who we are and welcoming those with different experiences, humbly and honestly

Second Conversation: Sunday, June 26, after each service – **What is important to me?**

(4 questions) *Participants: 25 after 8 am, 28 after 10 am*

1. **What is the most important to me about St. Andrew’s?** Being an accepting and welcoming community, its outreach, and its youth ministry.
2. **Reflect on your entire experience with St. Andrew’s. Recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, spiritually touched or most excited about your involvement.** Through personal encouragement, serving in outreach and in worship, working and playing together, and in celebrating holy times.

3. **What do I worry most about when I think of St. Andrew's?** Some worries about our future growth, carrying-on ministries, and developing our facility and ministries.
4. **If I could change one thing about St. Andrew's at the drop of a hat, what would it be?** We see tasks to do physically and a healthy through sometimes conflicting variety of ideas for worship and ministry

Third Conversation: Sunday, August 7, during sermon time at 8 am and 10 am. Two questions were presented and written responses invited concerning St. Andrew's mission statement. Responses were also invited by e-mail to all members. 43 responses received (14 from 8 am, 29 from 10 am folks)

First question: How has St. Andrew's helped you to know Christ and to make Christ known?

Responses:

- + **Through worship services.** The sermons connect me to daily life, help me to make decisions in life. The mystery of the Sacrament, the liturgy and the music are also helpful. St. Andrew's is a place where I can rest, concentrate on Christ and be comforted. Services provide a time and place to think on Spiritual matters, to confess, be forgiven and to feel renewed. An important issue revealed to me is that I need God in my life and I need to tell others about God.
- + **Through Outreach.** The Outreach Committee, the Food Bank (working with people) Kairos Ministry. Service, in the form of outreach helps to remind me why I was put on this earth.
- + **Through our parish staff.** The clergy's influence in my life through Adult Education, Bible Study, through lessons and by being encouraged to grow and study. The clergy have been helpful in illness and death of loved ones. The music at St. Andrew's has helped me to know Christ.
- + **Through the people of St. Andrew's.** St. Andrew's is a welcoming church where there is a spirit of friendship, warmth and generosity. Fellowship, participation in various events, the women's groups, working together, acceptance of the disabled, Cursillo ministry and listening to others' experiences as we travel on our journey helps me to know Christ. Through its people and resources, St. Andrew's provides a foundation for helping me to know Christ and to make Christ known.

Second question: How could St. Andrew's help you to do this better?

The responses to this question tended to focus on being connected with other people at St. Andrew's. A number of people indicated that they needed to take the responsibility to be involved. The way St. Andrew's could help would be to continue to expand classes and offer friendship to the community. We need to continue to model Christ, to examine the needs of the community, to host volunteer activities, to join services with other denominations and to spend more time in small groups with others in the parish. Comments indicated that "we like being together" and appreciate the chance to interact with others at dinners and other functions at

church. It was suggested that we find some way to discover the talents of members and to use those talents.

Our church needs to continue to be a strong, visible center in the community, utilizing the energy of the members of the congregation. Empowering people to share their faith and teach members how to talk to others about God would help us to reach out to others in offering friendship to those outside our walls.

Continue to be involved....there is something for everyone was a strong message in the suggestions given.

Over-all, we also found that these three conversations were eagerly received and enjoyed. More should be offered.



SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

The Holy Conversations team received the SWOT discussion from this year’s Vestry Planning Retreat and further refined and developed these areas as follows:

SWOT analysis as begun by Vestry and refined by HC Team

1. St. Andrew’s current strengths:
 - a. Episcopal / Anglican liturgy and theology
 - b. Our continuing outreach to the local community through the Food bank, tithing of contributions, and community support through building and members

2. Weaknesses:
 - a. Concerns about growth and about sustaining leadership
 - b. Continuing need to nurture community and fellowship
 - c. Building accessibility

3. Opportunities before us:
 - a. Responding to spiritual hunger with the ‘bread’ we are finding and celebrate
 - b. Creatively engaging the gifts and talents among and around us

4. Threat or challenge: The Pacific Northwest in the 21st c. is a particularly challenging “mission field” – fewer church-goers than the rest of the nation. We also recognize that attitudes towards religion and spirituality are changing; some would call this a ‘Post-Christian’ age. How shall we make Christ known in such a context? .



Organizational Character

Members of our team plus some other lay leaders considered our experience of St. Andrew's in terms of the organizational character analysis developed by William Bridges. He writes:

“Organizational character varies greatly and subtly. In one sense, there are as many characters as there are organizations. But those infinitely varied differences can be profitably grouped into sixteen basic categories. This system parallels the sixteen basic personality types developed from the work of the great Swiss psychologist Carl Jung by Americans Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. This mother-daughter team created the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* instrument to identify an individual's personality type.

“As with personality type, organizational character can be established with a fair degree of objectivity.” The Character of Organizations: Using Personality Type in Organization Development (Davies-Black, 2000), p.2.

Our inventories and discussion describe St. Andrew's as an **ISFP** Organization. (See the longer excerpt on this type in Appendix 2)

Inverted – takes cues and draws power from within the community

Sensing – concerns itself with actualities, attends to details

Feeling – reaches conclusions on the basis of values and beliefs, and with regard to persons.

Perceiving – likes to keep options open, distrusts too much definition.

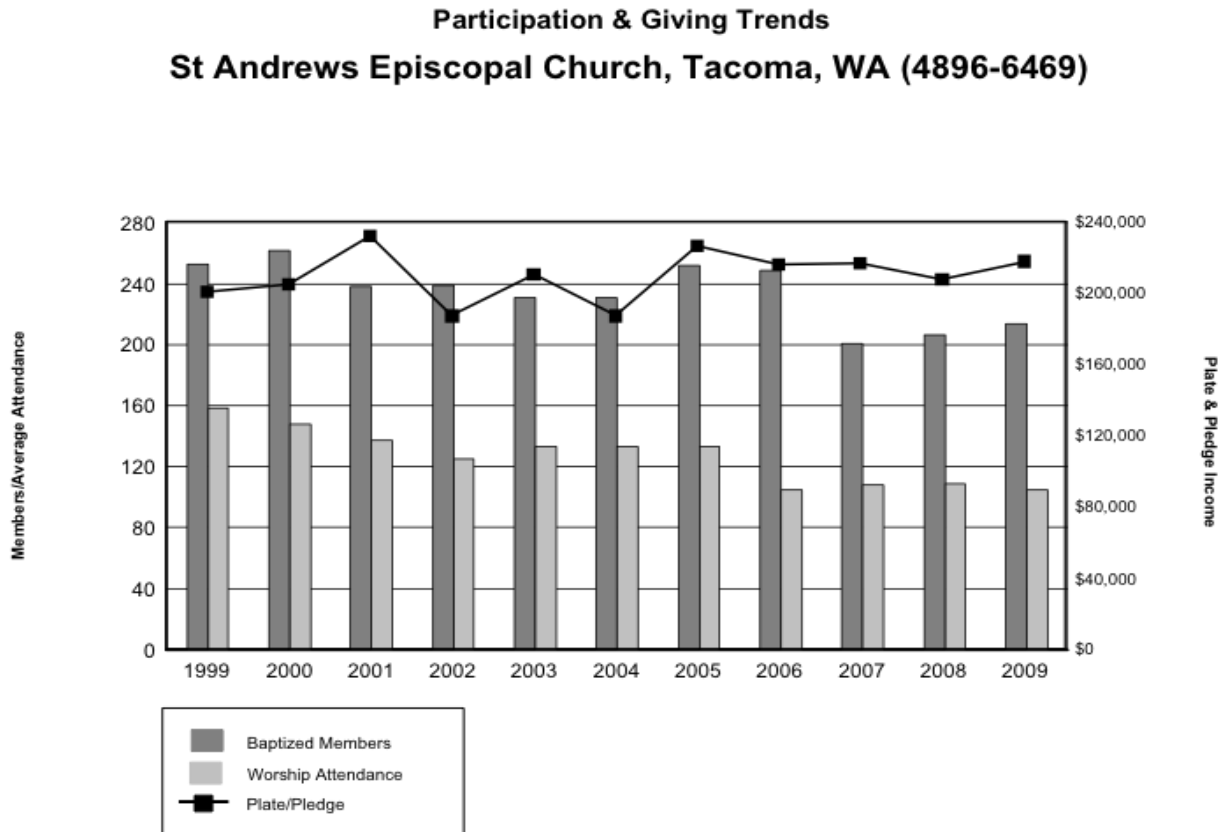


Findings from the Holy Conversations Process in 2011

1. We observe that St. Andrew's is not a large congregation but is a very active congregation. On September 18, 2011, the Vestry hosted an Activity Faire, with a “Connecting the Dots” guide prepared by our team for the College of Congregational Development. Over 30 active ministries were presented at tables around the Parish Hall – an amazing sight. We do a lot with a limited number of persons. We need to pace ourselves regarding what we can do, and consider when a ministry or activity is ready for celebratory retirement so that other work may be done.
2. The mission statement of St. Andrew's, at least since 1973, is “To know Christ and to make Christ known.” We found through our third conversation and generally that our congregation identifies with this statement as our mission. We also discern that we do not talk very much about making Christ known. We believe that this mission statement is a gift from God to guide us ahead in mission. The questions and challenges we sense from the Lord and commend to the Vestry and congregation are:
 - + How shall we grow spiritually as persons, households and as a parish, to know Christ better?

- + How shall we reach out to the community around us and to the larger world specifically and intentionally to "make Christ known", to share the strengths of the Episcopal Church and of our welcoming and friendly congregation?
- + How shall we intentionally minister to the spiritual needs and interests of our larger community, that they also may "come and see" Jesus?
- + What specific and intentional ways can we reach out to the larger community and invite them to visit St. Andrew's, beyond what we already do?

Appendix 1: Parochial Report data



Appendix 2: An excerpt from The Character of Organizations: Using Personality Type in Organization Development (Davies-Black, 2000), p. 66f, describing the ISFP type organization

The ISFP organization is designed to make it possible for individual performers in some craft or art or profession to do what they do well. Hierarchy and authority in general are at best tolerated for the conditions of freedom that they create, and the result is often little islands of activity surrounded by a very loose network of support services.

The culture of the ISFP organization is individualistic and emphasizes expertise and grace. The organization's management structure hardly deserves its title, for it is little more than an umbrella under which the key individuals operate. Leadership similarly is minimal, unless it is embodied in a master performer or artisan, whom all the others admire.

This kind of organization depends for its continuity on countless little satisfactory encounters between the practitioners and their publics. If these practitioners are skillful and sensitive, they will stay in touch with those publics. But their own values may preclude changing what they do – which they would see as prostituting themselves – and so they may go out of favor. There is little long-range planning or formal marketing effort to keep that from happening.

Within the organization, there is little concern for formal communication. People may express themselves vocally, but there are seldom the concerted efforts that demand clear communication of intent and response to intent. The organization's records, training, and management structure are also informal. Formal systems are poorly developed and generally viewed as unnecessary.

The ways in which people interact within the ISFP organization have a pragmatic quality: "What are we doing this for? What do you want out of it? What do I want?" Individuals end up exerting more or less power depending on the particular situation and their own desires, so the pragmatism is efficient in only relatively uncomplicated situations.

The work itself has a peculiar quality to it: It is more a form of play or a game or a context than it is work in the conventional sense. Skill, whatever its content, is esteemed, and competition is expected. The results of the competition may be a kind of ranking in excellence, but that does not translate into an organizational hierarchy any more than the seeding in a tennis tournament does. And as with such seedings, there is a collegueship that cuts across the rankings.

The ways in which ISFP organizations handle change depend on how the performers themselves handle it. They tend to like excitement and to not be afraid of risk, so there is nothing about change per se that frightens them. If they can continue to respond to a changing audience, the organization will probably back them up. But the organization itself will not take the lead, plan, develop new resources, or test market. Yet it will not resist change, either, for its positions do not constitute real power bases or turfs from which to view change as destructive.

All in all, the ISFP organization is a kind of anti-organization. It works best when it is part of some larger organization that can do for it what it cannot do for itself. If it is self-contained, one would not expect it to last very long. Rather, it would be more likely to die and be reborn as some similar organization – probably another ISFP. Some people spend their working lives going through this death and rebirth cycle with a sequence of ISFP organizations.

Appendix 3: Personal observations from some Holy Conversations team members

Linda Brice

Being on the Holy Conversations team has been a new and interesting experience for me. At times I have been impatient at the process, but I have also had “aha” moments during the last six months. Being a person who likes to know where we are going, what the end result of what the task looks like, the process of Holy Conversations was frustrating at first—I kept asking myself “Where are we going?” and “How will I know when we accomplish our task?” Then a light bulb went off for me—this is what discernment is—letting go and letting God take the lead. And in letting go I began to see more clearly who we are as St. Andrew’s, and what is God calling us to do.

I see St. Andrew’s as a friendly, supportive church. We enjoy fellowshiping with each other, and we enjoy worshipping together. We are a flexible church—if a crisis arises, we deal with it; if we have a great success in some area, we celebrate it. That is who we are for me in a nutshell. But what is God calling us to do?

The biggest aha moment for me in the process of Holy Conversations came when, as a committee, we took a long, hard look at the mission statement of St. Andrew’s. The first part of our mission is “To know Christ”. For me that is a daily journey, keeping my eyes focused on my Lord and working each day to have a better relationship with Christ. To get to know Christ better.

But “to make Christ known”—that is where I seem to falter, but that is what God is calling us to do. I may “make Christ known” in subtle ways—inviting people to events at St. Andrew’s, talking about the various activities at our church. But I don’t think God wants me to be subtle. I think he wants me to be outspoken. He wants me to share in clear and uncertain terms what God means to me and he wants me to share His love with others. And as a church, I think he wants us to act boldly to make Him known to our neighbors and friends.

What “acting boldly” as a church looks like, I don’t know. But I think we need to listen, pray and be ready in whatever task or challenge God has for us.

Skip Broadhead

Where and who is St. Andrew’s now?

St. Andrew’s is a small parish whose members are happy with the welcoming, family feel of the congregation. Parishioners are drawn to the Episcopal liturgy and its Anglican roots and traditions and welcome the opportunity to share them with anyone who comes to visit or become a member. Outreach is particularly important at St. Andrew’s, and its people are pleased with the commitment the parish has made to donate 10% of its receipts to outreach in the community and abroad.

St. Andrew’s is a stable church – spiritually, financially and institutionally – but with some concerns about aging of the congregation and declining energy to support all of its ministries. Members seem aware that there is a risk that the parish may shift from stability to decline but there is no strong impetus for change, except perhaps to upgrade some physical features of the church to improve accessibility, utility and appearance. The parish’s cultural style

is relational, consistent with its size, but it may face the challenge to become programmatic if numbers increase.

Where do I see St. Andrew's being called?

Members seem committed to the mission to know Christ and to make Christ known, but rather than a single vision of how best to proceed, there are many options the church could pursue in furtherance of its mission. Outreach, youth, music, worship, adult education, family programs and social opportunities are all activities with the potential to engage and expand the congregation in pursuit of its mission. There is an interest in Celtic spirituality that may present an opportunity as well.

Do St. Andrew's members want the parish to grow from Pastoral to Program size? Would they support the addition of a curate to add more leadership bandwidth to parish ministries? What about a capital campaign to finance desired improvements and position the parish to sustain a larger paid staff? What else can we do to appeal to younger adults, families, and our neighbors who don't belong to any church today?

Pam Rhodes

It's been a soul-searching few months with the Holy Conversations team. I have learned a few things about our parish and about myself in relationship to the parish.

I feel we are a church that always wants to improve itself, if we can. We are willing to try things that only big churches are willing to take-on; we are like the little dog that thinks they are a big dog. We like to think of ourselves as capable of just about anything.

The truth is, we are pretty small in comparison to some of the other churches in this area, and in the county. We care about each other deeply, and we care about the community at large. If something terrible were to happen (and right now I can't even think of what that would be) there isn't one person who would hesitate to do what it takes to bring about a solution. We have assumed Food Bank, Phoenix Housing, Diocesan ventures, Cursillos, Kairos, Music concerts, Celtic Faire, while weekly serving each other with coffee hour, flowers, music, and lay people serving with clergy. We are good stewards of the building, the income and one another. I can't think of a better place to bring children, seniors and everyone in between. Our numbers show that on any given Sunday, our attendance is above average—we actually 'come' to church.

Do I think there is room for improvement? ALWAYS!! The basics of church-going people are that we constantly strive to improve the Sunday School programs, music programs and our outreach. Do I think we are stodgy old folks who are going to dig in our heels and keep things "going the way they've always gone?" That would be a "h--- no!" That is not who we are. But I do think we will always continue to try to improve, to be more inclusive, to display radical hospitality at every opportunity, and share the love of Christ in every way we can.

We are friends, we are co-parishioners, but mostly, we at St. Andrew's are FAMILY.