

# Vision for Ministry

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St. Laurence Anglican Parish, Calgary

June 2005

## SUMMARY OF VISIONING PROCESS

Members of St. Laurence were invited to a parish weekend in November 2004 to begin a facilitated process to “clarify the vision” for our mission and ministry. Before the weekend event two educational sessions had been held to explore and reflect on contemporary ministry research. This “Clarifying the Vision” process built on our previous 2002 planning process and sought to bring greater clarity to our present situation (both what is happening within St. Laurence and what is happening across our Diocese). A follow-up event was held in January to hear reports from each of the information gathering groups for future scenarios for St. Laurence that had been developed in November.

After the January event, three parish sessions were held to further discuss and assess the scenarios. The first session, held on March 6<sup>th</sup>, reviewed the spiritual process of organizational renewal and sought to clarify the criteria that would be used to assess each of the scenarios. The second session, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, reviewed three scenarios that focused on remaining in Lakeview. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> a third session was held to review two scenarios that focused on co-operating or merging with other Anglican parishes in southwest Calgary. After each scenario was presented, participants worked through a review process, which consisted of discussing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks associated with each scenario.

These reflections formed part of the input that the Congregational Development Team used to assess possibilities and to create this vision for ministry. A final assessment opportunity was created for all members of the St. Laurence parish when a survey was distributed in late April. The planning committee was pleased to receive 113 returned surveys, which represents a significant majority of the active adult members of the parish.

It is important to note that the decision about a vision for ministry at St. Laurence was not simply a matter of selecting one of the scenarios that were presented in the survey. Instead, the Congregational Development Team extracted elements from many of the scenarios in the survey (some more than others) and used the assessment criteria to attempt to discern what the future ministry and mission of St. Laurence parish should include.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The Congregational Development Team believes the parish has learned many things during the Clarifying the Vision process. Some of these things affirmed what was heard in the 2002 process, such as the significant desire to remain in the Lakeview community and recommit to creating a relevant ministry for the community. However, there is also an increased awareness in the parish of the challenges of doing ministry in an established and enclosed neighbourhood. These challenges extend to ministering as a mainline congregation in a “post-Christian” culture (i.e. in a culture that is no longer predominantly Christian and could even be considered as antagonistic towards the Christian faith). Paralleling these challenges are changes being talked about and implemented within the Diocese that call for more strategic planning and better stewardship of resources in order to renew the Anglican presence within Calgary and across Southern Alberta.

All these challenges pushed St. Laurence to reflect on whether a “stand alone” Anglican parish in Lakeview was serving the greater Anglican ministry within Calgary. In response, two scenarios

were presented that sought to create future ministry in partnership with other Anglican parishes by promoting a move from the Lakeview neighbourhood into some kind of co-operative or merged ministry with others in a new location. All scenarios recognized that we are living in a different time and that St. Laurence needs to clarify its vision for ministry in order to focus on renewing its unique call to be a Gospel community for a new day.

While the Congregational Development Team recommends that St. Laurence seek to renew its ministry from its Lakeview location, the team also suggests that the parish be mindful of the present challenges in maintaining a traditional mainline parish in this kind of neighbourhood. We want to highlight what first came as a suggestion from another scenario, the "Growth" scenario, that we should set a reasonable five-year action plan for ministry, with clear benchmarks for success. If, after a five year period, St. Laurence is not realizing the growth and development of ministry as proposed then an alternative plan for moving out of Lakeview and into ministry partnership with other Anglican parishes will be developed. This strategy is intended to keep us focused on our goals while at the same time being intentional about planning a transition for ministry while we are still vital and able to make a significant contribution to the wider Anglican ministry in southwest Calgary.

Given this input, and the feedback that has been received throughout this process, the Congregational Development Team proposed the following *Vision for Ministry*:

## **VISION FOR MINISTRY**

We affirm as our "universal vision" the foundational scripture that was identified in the 2002 planning process:

We will proceed under the guidance of Jesus' Great Commandments:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength", and "Love your neighbour as yourself".*

As the Anglican parish of St. Laurence we feel called to create:

*... an intentional community seeking to practice a renewed Christian spirituality in order to deepen our experience of God and share this path with others as a response to the growing hunger for meaning and hope in our community and our society.*

We imagine this vision being fulfilled through an intentional community life shaped by the practices of:

*... **thanksgiving** (vital worship centered in the Eucharist)*

*... **contemplation** (deepening faith through the disciplines of silence, meditation, and prayer)*

*... **compassion** (works of mercy and justice)*

*... **healing** (personal and corporate wholeness and pastoral care)*

We believe this vision to create an intentional community of renewed Christian spirituality will lead us to directly live out our foundational scripture. Our vision invites us into loving God through a deeper experience of wholeness in heart, mind, body and spirit and seeing our neighbour as our self. This focus is, in itself, a renewed understanding of Christian practice that speaks to the spiritual hunger of contemporary culture.

This vision for ministry includes staying in Lakeview, but intentionally examining every aspect of our life together to become what recent research describes as a "Practicing Congregation". Practicing Congregations are mainstream parishes that are revitalized by focusing on worship,

spirituality, and the intentional formation of a way of life. Conventional theories of church growth over the past twenty or thirty years have highlighted growth in fundamentalist or evangelical traditions with conservative theological content and consumer-focused, entertainment-based “packaging”. However, research has begun to show that mainstream congregations (such as Anglicans) that have moderate to liberal theological messages and that embrace traditional Christian practices in worship, prayer, moral formation and life together have experienced new vibrancy as they rework denominational tradition in light of local experience.

Thus, in our vision, St. Laurence will be a parish devoted to innovation in worship and to re-discovering Christian practices (including both spiritual practices such as centering prayer and moral practices such as doing justice) that can be adapted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our energies will be directed to thinking together about what would enrich our spiritual lives and the spiritual lives of other intelligent, seeking individuals in the Calgary community.

We believe that through this “*Vision for Ministry*” the Parish will be unique in Calgary in being large enough to be financially self-sufficient but small enough to encourage leading-edge innovation in worship and practice. This vision sees St. Laurence as a congregation in Marcus Borg’s “emerging paradigm” and as a congregation that is “intelligent” in its approach to leading people to a deeper relationship with God in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE VISION**

The following strategies will support this Vision for Ministry at St. Laurence:

- **3 TO 5 YEAR GROWTH STRATEGY**

The “Growth scenario” provided some helpful direction in the area of developing a communication plan for telling our story in the Lakeview community and beyond. This is an instrumental part of our action plan for ministry. Developing this vision has helped us to “reframe” our story as a parish. The growth strategy will help us think about how we intentionally tell that story.

- **SOUTHWEST CALGARY ANGLICAN CO-OPERATION**

Although we are proposing that we remain in Lakeview in order to develop a unique ministry, we believe there is merit in continuing the conversation with other Anglican parishes in southwest Calgary. Our focus will mean that some things will not be able to be done the way we have done them in the past. However, partnering with other parishes on specific ministry opportunities may allow us to strengthen ministry while being better stewards of our resources (e.g. by creating the possibility for shared confirmation, youth ministry, or other specialized ministries)

- **RECRUITING UNIQUE LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT VISION**

Leadership (both clergy and lay) will be a critical factor in our success. Clarifying our vision for ministry has identified specific characteristics and ministry gifts that will be invaluable as we seek to enter into the canonical process to find a new rector. It is our recommendation that this process begin as soon as possible.

- **INTENTIONAL PASTORAL CARE PLAN FOR MEMBERS DURING TRANSITION**

The Congregational Development Team identified two areas of pastoral care that should receive special attention during the transition process. One is to continue to ensure support and care for our seniors and others in need. The second is to offer support and guidance for those that may be confused or feel the need to look for another faith community, given the direction for ministry chosen by the parish.

- **EDUCATION PROCESS TO HELP MEMBERS UNDERSTAND AND EMBODY OUR *VISION FOR MINISTRY***

We will need to plan right away (during the fall) for an education process to help people come to a deeper understanding of the vision and what it means to be an *"intentional community practicing a renewed Christian spirituality"*. This process will include exploring what other parishes are beginning to create across North America in order to determine what will work within St. Laurence.

## **CREATING AN ACTION PLAN**

If this proposal is accepted by the parish, Vestry plans to establish a new Team to begin work this summer or early fall on developing an action plan that will become Vestry's plan for implementing this vision for ministry at St. Laurence. This plan will need to include the following:

- Transition plan for ministry until a new Rector is established (including a pastoral care plan and an education plan to support the development of the vision)
- First steps in establishing the vision for ministry (including identifying the benchmarks to be used in assessing the success of the *Vision for Ministry*)
- Goals for St. Laurence representatives to take to a joint meeting of the south-west Anglican parishes to begin the planning for possible co-operative ministry programs

## **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

At the November 2004 weekend and the follow up event in January the parish developed criteria for evaluating future scenarios. Several scenarios for the future of St. Laurence were created and presented to the group. A risk assessment model, SWOR (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks) was used by the group to evaluate the scenarios against the criteria developed. Finally the Congregational Development Team prepared a survey to assess the general sentiment of the parish in regards to each of the scenarios.

The Congregational Development Team developed this *Vision for Ministry* based on the results of the survey, the criteria and the SWOR analysis. The Team also considered the identity and purpose themes articulated throughout the process and the recommendations from the 2002 planning process.

The visioning sessions were well attended and the survey response was significant and therefore the Congregational Development Team believes that the feedback is representative of the parish.

The responses to the survey favored scenarios that resulted in staying in Lakeview by a significant margin (see table below). The Practicing Congregation scenario had the most support of the group. Fifty-six of the 113 survey respondents listed it either first or second in their ranking of the five scenarios. The Family Ministry scenario placed very close to that with 48 first or second place rankings. However, more respondents indicated they would decrease their time and financial commitment to the Parish under the Family Ministry scenario as compared to the Practicing Congregation scenario. Also, more respondents indicated they would increase their time and financial commitment if the Practicing Congregation scenario were chosen as compared to each of the other scenarios.

The Focus on Growth scenario received a moderate level of support. Based on that and some of the comments, the Congregational Development Team concluded that the Focus on Growth concept was viewed as a strategy and not a vision on its own. It was felt that it should be implemented together with one of the other scenarios.

As noted, the Practicing Congregation scenario had the highest level of support and the least level of resistance. In addition this scenario generated the most positive and least negative comments from survey respondents.

The Practicing Congregation scenario directly meets the majority of criteria that were established for evaluating the ministry scenarios. The criteria that were judged to have been met were:

- An increased emphasis on spirituality and faith development (become a “thinking” Christian community for seeking individuals)
- Relevant, hopeful, uplifting worship
- Increased relevance to our neighbours and neighbourhood
- Continued service and support for seniors and elders
- Continuing the tradition of offering leadership within our Diocese
- Increased services and programs to reach out to young families
- Evangelism: our future ministry needs to proclaim the Gospel and be faithful to the Scriptures

The strengths of the Practicing Congregation scenario include its attention to faith and spirituality. The potential weaknesses are connected to leadership and implementation. The Congregational Development Team has not underestimated how important leadership will be to the success of implementing this vision.

The Practicing Congregation scenario also provides a sound outline as to the qualities and gifts for ministry that our next spiritual leader will require.

As noted at the beginning, this Vision for Ministry draws on elements of many of the scenarios that were presented in the recent parish survey. However, many parishioners might be interested in knowing what the survey indicated. The following table shows the overall results for the 113 survey forms that were returned. Further detailed results of the survey are available for those who are interested.

Number of survey respondents:	Focus on Growth	Family Ministry	Practicing Congregation	Southwest Collaboration	St. Martin
Ranked first or second	40	48	56	32	36
Ranked fourth or fifth	46	28	25	46	51
Leave Congregation	12	13	11	34	52
Decrease Financial	30	31	21	45	57
Increase Financial	10	12	16	5	6
Decrease Time	36	37	29	51	65
Increase Time	10	11	19	8	5