



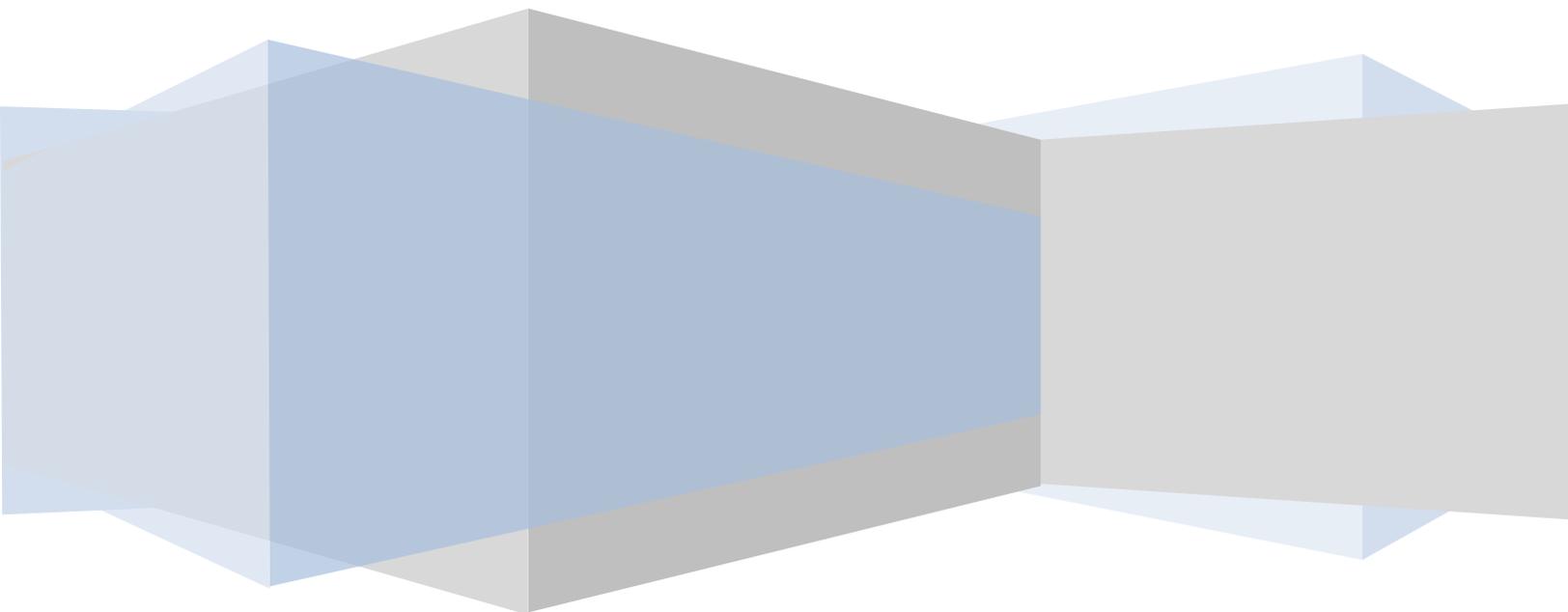
CHRIST CHURCH
CATHEDRAL
FREDERICTON NB

Cathedral Every Member Visitation Initiative

Summary Analysis with Recommendations

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June 29, 2016



Introduction and Background

It has been approximately 14 years since Christ Church Cathedral conducted an “all members” visitation initiative. Church development literature indicates that healthy churches are those that regularly conduct both “in-reach” and outreach; people need to feel a strong and sustained connection to their church community. Having a new Dean and a renewed Bishop and Chapter, it was felt there is tremendous opportunity for the church to reach out to one another in a visitation initiative.

In the fall of 2015 the lay chair of Bishop and Chapter approached me to see if I would be interested in leading an all member visitation program. I agreed to become the project lead and put together a project plan which was presented to Bishop and Chapter in February of 2016. The goals of the plan were as follows:

Purposes of the Visitation

- Sharing and promotion of the unique Cathedral ministries and services through focused discussions
- Gathering facts, opinions and suggestions from those visited
- Connecting with recent newcomers and non-regulars and
- Informing and encouraging increases in our offerings

After some discussion, the Dean suggested adding a fifth area of focus:

- Invite volunteer participation for future initiatives.

The project plan outlined a critical path:

- announce the initiative at the annual meeting, February 21
- evaluate level of congregational support for the project
- review of Parish List, March 31
- compilation of visitation materials, March 31
- half day training workshop, April 16 (Saturday)
- visits begin, April 23 (Saturday)
- visits end, May 7 (Saturday)
- debrief of visitors, May 29 (Sunday)
- final report to Bishop and Chapter, June 30

With some future modification (the visitation was extended to May 28 and the visitor debrief was moved to June 5); the plan was accepted by Bishop and Chapter at the February 15 meeting. The visitation was announced by the project lead at the annual congregational meeting on February 21.

Development of Questionnaire and Methodology

The visitation questionnaire was developed by the project lead in conjunction with the Lay Chair of Bishop and Chapter; the Dean; and the Communications Committee. The bulk of the questions were

derived from the work previously undertaken by the Diocesan Task Force on Rural and Struggling Parishes and is referred to as the *9 Marks of a Healthy Parish*. It was felt these questions would be most appropriate to serve as the “guide” for the visitations and the online questionnaire as they had been previously vetted by the Diocese, were tested and validated and used for a purpose similar to the Cathedral visitation.

The questionnaire is essentially a perception survey. The scale chosen was a Likert scale, rated from one to five, familiar to most people and easy to quantify. The survey instrument sought to measure level of agreement. Do you agree with the following statement; please rate you level of agreement from one to five; note: 1 indicates strong disagreement, 5 equals strong agreement. 3 is neutral. It is important to note the questionnaire sought to measure the relative health of the Cathedral Parish, not the individual parishioner itself.

Results of the questionnaire were calculated as arithmetic means (averages.) For the purposes of interpretation, results above 4.0 could be considered representative of “good” or “strong” levels of agreement.

The remaining questions were considered to be “ice breakers.” These were placed at the introduction of the questionnaire to serve as lower-stakes, transactional questions, to assist the visitor and the congregational member to develop a rapport. This would serve to guide the discussion through the question of worship routines: which service one attends; how is communication obtained? etc.

39 respondents used the online questionnaire. 93 respondents used a hardcopy form.

What data informed the visitation? The Cathedral Parish list, which was reviewed, updated and sorted by a sub-committee in March, 2016 formed the backbone data set for the project. This final list contained 423 “households” – many of them containing multiple worshippers. Other parish lists of individuals exist, but it was felt that the household list (which turned out to be surprising accurate) would be the most efficient and allow visitors to leverage their time via contact and visits most effectively.

Thirty-six visitors were recruited and were given a half day training session led by the project lead in April. The intent was to familiarize volunteers with the visitor information packages that were developed and assembled for this purpose; select the households to visit and answer any remaining questions.

Visitors were encouraged to select a minimum of five households to visit. They were instructed to telephone their households first to schedule a convenient time for the visit. If the parishioner did not wish to receive a visit from a volunteer, they would be invited to complete the questionnaire online or via hardcopy provided in the Cathedral nave.

Visits concluded on May 28. A de-brief for all volunteers was held June 6 and led by the project lead. The purpose of the focus group was to receive feedback from volunteers – what worked; what didn’t work? – the essence of which would help inform this final report.

Results

1. We Want to Grow Spiritually and Numerically

We are addressing our members' desire to know and love God more deeply through prayer, study and encouragement. We are also striving to add to our membership both for our benefit and the benefit of those who are not yet active members of the Body of Christ.

Mean Score: 3.63

Sample Comments:

"There is little evidence this is so"

"It seems efforts are being made to provide opportunities for spiritual growth, but few are taking advantage – why?"

"Limited opportunities to grow in the Christian faith"

2. We Communicate Positively & Live in Harmony with One Another

We accept the Apostle Paul's guidance that we "speak the truth in love." Presuming good will in others, we respect and see value in views that may differ from our own. We listen carefully and sympathetically to one another, and we regularly share information and ideas within our diocese, archdeaconries and deaneries as well as in our own parish/congregation.

Mean Score: 3.85

Sample Comments:

"Like most parishes, we are overly parochial"

"I think this is an ongoing challenge for faith communities of differing views and values"

"One of my favorite aspects of our church is when all of the congregation has an opportunity to socialize (Harvest Supper; Pancake Supper; Silent Auction)"

3. We Are Christ-Centered

We are Christ-centered in who we are and what we do as Anglicans. We know Jesus is always in our midst. We continually turn to Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life, and we work together as the Body of Christ.

Mean Score: 4.12

Sample comments:

“Our personal lifestyle (as worshippers) does not enable full participation”

“I think the Cathedral members who are active do this. I think those who are less active would not be able to agree”

“What about the role of the Trinity?”

4. We Make Disciples for Christ

As a church congregation and as individuals, we are deliberately active in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ through the witness of our words and our daily lives.

Mean Score: 3.71

Sample Comments:

“Personally, I am not good at this. I think there are a few people that do this, but not many”

“I feel uncomfortable with evangelism”

“The lack of a youth group is a sorry fact”

5. We Offer Our Best in Our Worship of God

Our worship services are to the glory of God and are the best that we can offer Him. Our worship touches our hearts and is personally meaningful. Respecting and building on our Anglican tradition of worshipping God “in the beauty of holiness” we seek not only to glorify God, but to encourage and edify those who worship with us.

Mean Score: 4.28

Sample Comments:

“We like the Anglican tradition and rituals”

“We very much appreciate the new approach to Baptism (sponsor training), First Communion and Confirmation. The approach feels more engaging, relevant and meaningful”

6. We Are Intergenerational and Multi-Cultural

We recognize that the future of our church depends on bringing new members into our congregation. In worship and in parish life we invite, welcome and engage people from all age

groups and cultural backgrounds. We are especially aware of the importance of attracting young families, children and youth.

Mean Score: 3.77

Sample Comments:

"We need more families with young children"

"But how are we attracting the younger crowd?"

"We feel the desire is there, but it is a work in progress"

7. We Share Leadership and Responsibility

We use all the gifts that God has given to us as we strive to build up the Body of Christ, which is the church. To that end our clergy and our lay members share leadership responsibilities, and work well together.

Mean Score: 4.07

Sample Comments:

"It seems a small number of lay members provide most of the lay leadership, with the risk that they will burn out"

"There are lots of 'silos'"

"Inadequate opportunities for youth to grow in the faith"

8. We Give Generously for the Work of the Church

We recognize the need to give of ourselves and our resources, each according to our means, so that our church may prosper and grow in the service of God. We accept and teach what the Bible tells us about faith, money, 'first fruits' giving and the generous offering to God of our time, talent and treasure.

Mean Score: 3.69

Sample Comments:

"We don't give enough"

"This is an area that needs continual nurture"

"I think there is plenty of room for growth"

9. We Share What God Has Given Us as We Reach Out to Others

God's love in Christ is shown in our compassion for those in need, spiritually and materially. As a parish we reach outside our local church(es) to help those around us and in our community(ies). Through our contributions to the diocese and the national church, as well as other missionary and aid organizations, we show that love to the world.

Mean Score: 4.22

Sample Comments:

"The Cathedral outreach program is commendable"

"I think the Cathedral makes a strong contribution at the local, provincial and national level"

"The needs we have far exceeds our ability to provide"

Analysis

As a general comment, it is safe to assert that congregants feel the Cathedral is functioning well and we are reasonably "healthy."

Did the Every Member Visitation program meet the established goals? A review of each goal is necessary to establish if the Every Member Visitation did indeed align with the goals of the original project plan and then meet them.

- GOAL: Sharing and promotion of the unique Cathedral ministries and services through focused discussions

This goal cannot be considered to have been met. Visitor volunteers lacked the essential information necessary to share and promote "unique Cathedral ministries and services." The project lead determined at a point too late in the process, that the Cathedral Office does not possess an up to date compilation list or handbook of all of the Cathedral ministries and services. The list that does exist was last updated in 2002 and the project did not possess sufficient time to update and create a new list of groups and committees. Visitor kits did contain a printed sheet based on information currently available on the Cathedral website. Unfortunately this list does not contain accurate contact information for each committee and no detail beyond the name of the committee/group. There is no background information or context.

- GOAL: Gathering facts, opinions and suggestions from those visited

This goal can be considered to have been met. Every member of the congregation was given the opportunity to participate in the visitation initiative through any channel they wished: online access; hard copy form; or in-person visitation. Those few who were not selected from the Parish list by a

visitor were invited to contact the Cathedral office or the project lead for a follow-up visit. Many visitors reported that they had robust discussions with members; the level of feedback was good and the engagement by those who chose to participate was strong. Many visitors and parishioners reported they appreciated being contacted and enjoyed the fellowship and information-sharing.

- GOAL: Connecting with recent newcomers and non-regulars

It is unclear whether this goal was met, as a significant number of non-regular members elected not to be visited. As well, the most-frequent gaps in our demographic information (incorrect or out of date telephone numbers, email and physical addresses) confounded the attempts of the visitor to connect with the parishioner. In addition, as reported by both members and volunteers, the survey instrument was geared more to regular, long-standing members and less-relevant to newcomers and non-regulars. A more targeted visitation effort would need to be made to ensure this goal is met.

- Informing and encouraging increases in our offerings

Many visitors and congregational members expressed discomfort with this topic, period. Matters of money are deeply personal for many and the Every Member Visitation Initiative was launched with the message that this “would not be about money.” The compromise solution was to focus discussion on E-offering as an option and visitor kits were equipped with this information. Time will tell if more parishioners elect to use this method for giving; many visitors report this information was shared with all households not currently on the E-offering program.

- Invite volunteer participation for future initiatives.

This goal is linked to the “Sharing and promotion of the unique Cathedral ministries and services” goal that suffered from lack of information. It is difficult to discern if this goal was met, as conversations in this domain would have been high level and superficial due to lack of specific, concrete information on groups/committees and their mandates.

Other Thoughts

Many households did not wish to be visited at all. This could be interpreted a variety of ways: chronic busyness; timing of visitation (winter/spring holidays); comfort level with the way things are (regular members are “OK”); little perceived value in a visitation; privacy concerns.

Areas of weakness are not surprising – youth programming; youth attendance; financial need and our approach to giving could be improved. These are not new challenges for the Cathedral and they will require a focused and concerted effort to address over the long term. A promising facet of the areas of weakness is that there appears to be a consensus amongst the Cathedral congregation as to what the problems are; improvement planning can be built upon this consensus.

The survey was difficult for both volunteers and parishioners to interpret. Many characterized it as “too philosophical.” Other visitor volunteers pointed out that the questionnaire was not really directed at

non-regular attenders, as they are not in an informed position to comment on Cathedral matters in this way.

There was a shortage of volunteer support. As with many other Cathedral initiatives, there was no outpouring of volunteer support to assist with this project. The project scope was adjusted due to the number of volunteers: the initiative had 38 volunteers who signed up, but could have easily used 50-80 volunteers to pair people up and ensure every household was visited. It is only through the concerted efforts of Bishop and Chapter; the Dean and a few other motivated individuals, that the project was successfully launched through an aggressive volunteer recruitment campaign.

The flipside of the lack of volunteer support is that there was a good response from members. The visits conducted were overwhelmingly positive.

Feedback from visitors

Some of the themes from the June 6 debrief with visitor volunteers were as follows:

- This Every Member Visitation should occur more often – let's not wait 14 more years
- A script for both telephone calls and meetings would have been helpful
- The questionnaire was too wordy and too long
- Many households did not wish to be visited and/or preferred the online option
- Future visits should require partner visitors and better compliance with Safe Church policies

Recommendations

- Conduct another visitation program in two years to determine how we are doing
 - One option is to use the same survey metric for “regular attenders” to measure improvement over time
 - Target non-regular attenders as a separate cohort with a different survey instrument
 - Recruit more volunteers and have all visitors paired up (no spousal pairing of visitors)
- Perform non-visitation type activities such as a telephone campaign/outreach to update Cathedral database and demographic information. There is an implicit value in simply “checking in” with folks to see how they are doing. This will serve the added purpose of repeating the message that visitation is not about fundraising.
- Continue to use the updated Cathedral website as the primary method for dissemination of information/communication/engagement. There was universal praise for the new website and many households use this as their primary method to obtain information about Cathedral matters.
- Create an updated list/booklet of Cathedral committees/activities for members and interested visitors. New Cathedral members; current members and prospective members all desire to have this information. Additionally, improved volunteer engagement can only happen if we share the wealth of opportunities that currently exist for members.
- Explore the option of hiring a new young families and youth coordinator to engage younger members of the congregation.

- That the next visitation program focusses on increasing participation of congregation members in the programs and activities of our church, and in offering their individual God-given gifts in service to the mission of the church.
- That the use of e-offerings (pre-authorized offerings) continue to be encouraged as part of on-going stewardship education.

Acknowledgements

It is only through the work of many that this project was successfully launched and executed. I would like to extend a special thanks to the Dean, Jim Morell, Bishop and Chapter, the Cathedral Communications Committee, Fran Miles and especially those 38 individuals (listed below) who served as volunteers in various capacities as visitors, supporters and recruiters. God bless.

Keith Radford	David Perritt	Sam Mayo
Diane Radford	Heather Perritt	Kaye Small
Michael Hines	Alan Hall	Catherine Schmidt
John Ball	Michele LeBlanc	Kurt Schmidt
Bonnie Greenwood	Connie Moore	Charles Ferris
Marilyn Lewell	David Crowe	Bob Garland
Gwen Davies	Joanne Barfitt	Paul MacDonald
Eric Hadley	Dalton London	Catherine MacDonald
Carol Hines	Sheila London	Kathy McBride
Wendy Brien	Ken Howlett	Gail McGillivray
Cheryl Jacobs	Carolyn Howlett	Jody Gorham
Peter Jacobs	Jane Smith	Dianne Wilkins
John Macaulay	Ava Christie	