

GENERATION TO GENERATION



Christ Church, Savannah
Strategic Planning Process for 2022 and Beyond

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21 and BCP Morning Prayer p. 59

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1733 as the first house of worship in the Georgia Colony, Christ Church has long been known as “The Mother Church of Georgia.” We celebrate this rich history, but we are even more excited about what God is doing in our midst today and will continue to do in the future.

This past February during the visitation of the Right Reverend Frank Logue, 11th Bishop of Georgia, we presented over 50 people for the rites of Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation of faith. Over thirty of these were middle and high school students. God is blessing us with a season of growth made up of people of all ages and from all stages of life. We believe that our current generation, rooted in the faithful work of those who have gone before us, is being called to sow the seeds for future generations.



BACKGROUND OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In 2015, Christ Church developed a strategic plan with the theme *The World is Our Parish*. The plan contained four sections. Each section outlined the church's history, where we stood in the present, and what we hoped to accomplish in the future. The plan received a positive response from the congregation, and together, we were able to implement most elements of that plan.

During the summer of 2021 our rector, the Rev. Michael White, took a six-week sabbatical with the aim of returning to Christ Church with the outline and theme of our next strategic planning process. The largest portion of this sabbatical was spent in prayer and study at Sewanee Seminary. While researching the history of Christ Church, he was drawn to the theme *Generation to Generation*.

Our congregation is blessed by the offerings of previous generations. Because of their commitment and work we can gather in our beautiful house of prayer for all people. Previous generations have also passed on a legacy of service; because of this legacy, we too have found a place serving our community and our world. The community of worship we experience today is the fruit of the love, labor, and wisdom of generations who have gone before us.

Now it is our turn. Remembering our past and living into our present, our task is to discern what we can do in our time to bless future generations. How can we be good stewards of our community and resources? What can we do to make it possible for future generations to experience the love, worship, and care for others that we enjoy today?

Following our rector's sabbatical, in the fall of 2021, Christ Church held a series of *Generation to Generation* retreat-like gatherings wherein Christ Church members could share hopes and dreams for our church in the days and years to come. We also provided an online opportunity for those who were unable to participate in person.

At the beginning of January 2022, the Christ Church vestry then appointed a *Generation to Generation* Long Range Planning Committee to partner with the vestry in examining the data gathered. This committee was tasked with presenting to the Vestry a draft of our next strategic plan. The committee is made up of Bill Wallace, Montie Acuff, Julia Mikell, Jerry Reeves V, Sarah Jones, Clayton Gagne-Thomas, the Rev. Samantha McKean, and the Rev. Michael White.

WHAT WE HEARD

As the committee began to sort through the ideas, hopes, and dreams of the people of Christ Church, common themes began to emerge. Each of these themes fit well within the framework of our stated core values, which had been outlined in the previous strategic plan: *Centered in Worship, All Are Welcome, Joyful Living, and Servant Leadership*.

The 2015 strategic plan highlighted the inspirational parts of our Christ Church history in which these values were embodied well. This time, we heard a desire from the congregation to explore the fuller story, including the painful parts. Many of the goals stated below are developed with this aim in mind.

We also heard a genuine joy and delight in the diversity that we experience in our congregation today. Alongside this appreciation was the desire to continue to grow in diversity, so that Christ Church can be a better representation of the whole city of Savannah.



There were many other insights gathered from the people of Christ Church, most of which cohered in an amazingly unified vision. Undergirding all of these reflections was a deep love for the spirit of openness, joy, and hospitality embodied by the people of Christ Church. This ethos was intentionally cultivated, and we heard an overwhelming desire to continue to nurture it for future generations.

In this report, we have collated and summarized the collective wisdom of the people of Christ Church.

We commit to focus on the goals below for the next five years.



Christ Church is blessed to be part of a tradition of worship and service that has been passed on through many generations. We are also uniquely blessed to be part of a current community of faith that is truly intergenerational. As a community of faith comprised of people of all ages and stages of life, we know that the work we do for future generations is for the youth, children, and young adults already living and serving among us and for generations yet to come.

With gratitude for the generosity, service, and leadership of past and current generations, we pray in the words of scripture: *Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.*

I. CENTERED IN WORSHIP

✝ Restore our Organ for Future Generations

Worship is the center of all we do as the people of God at Christ Church. Fifty years ago, Christ Church members purchased and oversaw the installation of our Harrison and Harrison Organ. From the prelude to the postlude and everything in between, this organ is a primary component of worship at Christ Church. After many years of accumulated temporary fixes, the time has come for a major restoration to ensure that our organ will be making beautiful music for the next 50 years. This project will require a capital campaign to cover the expense of a complete restoration. We will work with experts in approving and funding a plan for this generational project.

✝ Hire a New Director of Music

Music is an essential part of our experience of worship; our liturgy contains more moments of music than spoken words.

Timothy Hall, our much beloved Director of Music for 14 years, recently returned home to Virginia to be near his family. Following his departure, we conducted a national search for a candidate who would lead our music program forward, both musically and spiritually. We were pleased to find such a candidate. In the same week that the vestry approved the first draft of this strategic plan, they also agreed to the hiring of George Fergus as our next Director of Music.

We are now committed to fully supporting George, who will be involved in the Generation to Generation organ restoration project. Our Director of Music will also be committed to teaching singing and church music to adults and youth. With the financial support of the congregation, George will continue to develop and expand our Choral Scholars program, which provides music students of all ages tuition support for singing in our choir. This program allows students to be formed by our liturgy, take part in our choir community, and learn from our Director of Music. We commit to passing along the faith and the tradition of sacred music for generations to come.



✝ Provide Worship Ministries for All Ages

During our early days of gathering in person during the Covid-19 pandemic, we by necessity split into two smaller services in order to limit numbers in the church building. We offered a 10:00 a.m. service which, along with youth and children as acolytes, included youth and children as ushers, lectors, and volunteers leading the Prayers of the People. The 11:00 a.m. service, meanwhile, was aimed more toward an adult community.

In the fall of 2021, we were able to return to one 10:30 a.m. service. In the months since then, we have had both youth and adult members serve as ushers, lectors, and leaders of the prayers.

In years past we would offer a once-per-year program called “Lunch and Liturgy” wherein youth and children could learn about ministry groups such as the altar guild, flower guild, ushers, acolytes, lectors, and the choir. Younger members would then take part in these ministries on what was called “Youth Sunday.”

As part of our Generation to Generation thinking, we are committed to the continued support of our nursery, Children’s Chapel, and acolyte programs, but we also commit to including youth and children in all aspects of our worship ministries on each Sunday, not just Youth Sunday. It is our hope that as our young members grow up knowing that they are fully valued members involved in all aspects of worship, they will continue to be part of church life and faith in the years to come.

✝ Launch a Christ Church History Book Project

Since 1733, worship has been the constant thread throughout the story of Christ Church. The vestry has asked Barrie Bradley to research and write a comprehensive history of Christ Church with specific attention to the role of African Americans and women in the church; architecture of the three church buildings; leadership of both clergy and parishioners; and the role of Christ Church in the development of Savannah and the Diocese of Georgia, emphasizing community outreach programs. The book will be titled: *Christ Church Savannah: Mother Church of Georgia 1733-2023*.

Barrie grew up in Christ Church and moved back to Savannah and Christ Church last year. She is a professional historian and the author of nine substantial books published by university presses.

II. ALL ARE WELCOME

✝ Develop Hospitality Ministries



Hospitality to the stranger is a key biblical principle and is also essential to our continued growth as a church. Aware of this reality, Christ Church has cultivated an intentional value of welcome that permeates our congregation. This welcoming spirit is especially pronounced in the ministry of our committed lay leaders who serve as ushers and greeters each Sunday.

Our emphasis on welcome was challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic. We were at first unable to meet in person at all, and even after returning to in-person worship, it was inadvisable to overly engage in greeting one another. This strain on in-person hospitality was counterbalanced by new growth in the area of digital hospitality. Thanks to our new live-streaming capabilities, the experience of worship at Christ Church was made newly accessible to people who otherwise would not be able to join us. Sick, elderly, and geographically distant members and visitors were all able to join in worship online.

Looking toward the future, we are committed to developing and energizing our teams for hospitality ministry. Greeters and ushers will continue to express our core value of welcome for all. After-church receptions will provide weekly opportunities for connection for members, visitors, and guests. Volunteers will continue to run our

live-streaming equipment in order to connect those physically unable to attend worship services. In keeping with our Generation to Generation theme, these important hospitality ministries will be made up of people of all ages.

✝ Open Church During the Week with Docent Program

Another component of welcome and hospitality involves opening our church doors during the week for members, visitors, and guests. Christ Church aims to be a house of prayer for all people. At this time, however, the church building is locked up and unavailable during much of the week. We commit to developing a Docent Program that will allow the church to be open for at least a few hours each day of the week. This program will enable us to offer our building as a place for quiet prayer, and will also allow us to share our history and current stories of ministry with the many tourists and guests who travel through historic downtown Savannah.

✝ Mark Our History

Because they were the primarily recognized leaders of their time, most individuals named on markers at Christ Church are ordained white men. We are aware, however, that our history is rich with a much broader diversity of people who have shaped this community into what it is today. We will appoint a committee to develop a policy for future plaques and historical markers. A large component of this committee's work will be to find ways to honor lay people, women, and people of color as part of our Christ Church story.



III. JOYFUL LIVING

✝ Craft Ministries of Care and Connection



Our congregation, vestry, and lay leadership are made up of parishioners from Savannah and beyond. People drive to Christ Church from Hilton Head, Bluffton, Richmond Hill, Effingham County, and places all in between. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we developed an emergency plan to support one another using the various regions of greater Savannah. This structure of neighborhood Care Captains can be further developed as a long-term source of support for the members of our congregation.



We are also blessed with a multi-generational team of clergy (staff and retired) who can work within and supplement this system of support. Our parishioners are people of all ages who are also scattered throughout the region. Using our multi-generational clergy and neighborhood Care Captains, we can support one another in times of celebration and need even though we are geographically dispersed during the week.

✝ Develop Christ Church Curriculum and Rites

Christ Church's third rector, John Wesley, developed the concept of "Methodist Societies." These small groups shared a "method" of living out their faith, checking in with one another regularly to answer: "This week, have you studied the Bible, prayed, and served others?"

Using these areas of Bible, prayer, and service, clergy and lay leaders will develop an age-appropriate Christ Church core curriculum for children, youth, and adults. Along with regular Christian formation offerings in these areas, we will develop and supplement liturgical rites to highlight the curriculum. For example, following a program on the Bible, we might present Bibles to third graders during a Sunday church service. As part of Confirmation preparation, youth will learn about prayer and at their Confirmation service receive a Prayer Book. Older high school students can experience a service or mission project, and then during a Sunday liturgy, we can celebrate a rite with these students marking the importance of service as a core Christian calling.

✝ Collect Christ Church Stories

One of the gifts of being a multi-generational community is that we regularly celebrate births and baptisms. We also continually encounter the death and burial of members who are dear to us. Along with the Christ Church history project, we will launch a project to gather stories of members who can share with us various aspects of our Christ Church story. It is important that we record these memories while we can. Each year some of us move from this life to the next, and as time passes all of us begin to forget.

IV. SERVANT LEADERSHIP



✝ Deepen Connections with Outreach Ministries

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? Each time we celebrate a baptism, we renew our own Baptismal Covenant by answering these questions. Our response is: *I will, with God's help.* Each week many lives are influenced by the ministries operating out of the Christ Church Parish House. These outreach ministries each bring to life the vows of our Baptismal Covenant.

Emmaus House is celebrating 40 years of ministry this year. Over the course of a full generation, countless meals have been served to hungry people. The Emmaus House Clothing Closet also distributes clothing, tents, sleeping bags, and toiletry items each week to people in need.

Operation Paperback gathers, organizes and distributes books to members of the military who are stationed in faraway places without easy access to books and entertainment.

Over the Moon is a non-profit organization that gathers and distributes diapers and period supplies to people in need of these essential items.

Clemente is an adult learning program offering evening classes in reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. These courses count as a college credit and allow individuals seeking advancement an opportunity to take a step forward.

Because the Christ Church Parish House sits two blocks from our main church building, and because our members are scattered throughout the region, we can often feel disconnected from the daily outreach work that takes place in our buildings. These ministries, however, have been founded in the context of the community of Christ Church. They exist because of the financial support of Christ Church through both direct contributions and in-kind support (including rent-free space with no cost for utilities, etc.). These ministries are not separate from us; these ministries are us.*

We commit ourselves to deepening the connections between these ministries and our Sunday worshiping community and to creating volunteer opportunities for supporting these service programs that line up so well with our Baptismal Covenant.



**AA / Alcoholics Anonymous also meets daily in our Parish House, but because of the confidential nature of these meetings we are unable to interact with the people supported by this work.*

✠ Deepen Connections with the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia

Throughout the generations, Christ Church has played a leadership role in the life of the Episcopal Church in Georgia. Today, Christ Church clergy and lay leaders serve in support of various ministries of the Diocese: Diocesan Council, Commission on Ministry, Examining Chaplains, Deacon School Trainers, Committee on Constitution and Canons, Finance Committee, the Board of the Corporation, and Vice-Chancellor. The



Right Reverend Frank Logue, the 11th Bishop of Georgia, and most of the Bishops of Georgia were ordained bishop in a service at Christ Church. We also give significant financial support to the budget of the Diocese and to Honey Creek Episcopal Camp and Conference Center.

Reciprocally, the Diocese of Georgia has long been a vital support to Christ Church. When Christ Church went through a near-death experience, the Diocese of Georgia and all her people supported us in deep and meaningful ways, including financially. This important support has continued through our experience of rebirth and growth.

The Episcopal Diocese of Georgia is not separate from the ministry of Christ Church. We belong to a broader community of the Episcopal Church in south and east Georgia, and God has blessed us with financial and leadership resources to serve and support other congregations. As the “Mother Church of Georgia” we take seriously our calling to nurture the ministries and people of our diocese now and for generations to come.

✝ Appoint a Servant Leadership Institute Task Force

Christ Church is blessed with many talented leaders. We hope to develop a leadership training program through which we can share the experience and leadership resources of our congregation. People of all ages can be developed as servant leaders for school, work, civic organizations, outreach ministries, and church. A task force will be appointed to examine what sort of program Christ Church can develop and make available to members, non-members, clergy and lay leaders of other congregations.

✝ Establish a Creation Care Team

Part of generational thinking necessarily includes the call to preserve not only our faith but also the created world that we all share. We will gather a team of committed members to assist and coordinate our congregation in more sustainable ways to live as individuals and as a church. The mission of this team will be rooted in God's commission to humankind in Genesis 1: to love, protect, and serve creation as image-bearers of God.

FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORT

In order to pursue these priorities and to accomplish all that we believe God is calling us to do as a congregation, we will also need to work together with our clergy, staff, and vestry toward the following goals:

✝ Increase support staff and develop a new model of church office for the 21st century



Christ Church has three priests on staff, a full-time Director of Music, a deacon, multiple affiliated retired clergy, two city blocks of historic buildings, and ministries of worship, discipleship and service offered throughout the week. Even with the full breadth of our work, we currently have only one staff administrator: our Director of Administration. We are committed to adding an additional full-time administrative support staff position and incorporating current technology and forms of communication as part of our church staff now and in the generations to come.

✝ Create notebooks of guidance for staff and volunteer leadership roles to ensure sustainability in times of transition

Christ Church is blessed by the leadership of gifted lay volunteers and staff. As we have grown steadily over the last decade, much of the knowledge of how we operate has been carried in the institutional memory of these individuals. In order to continue to raise up future generations of leaders, it is essential that we create models of ministry that can be passed from leader to leader in the years ahead.

✝ Develop a Generation to Generation Endowment and Planned Giving Program to support all the ministry of Christ Church for future generations

Christ Church is blessed to have an endowment made up largely of funds given by previous generations. These funds have grown in the last ten years through sound management, conservative disbursements, and gifts from committed members. Through a program of planned giving, including a legacy society for those who include the Christ Church Endowment in their estate plan, and general gifts to the endowment, we are committed to raising awareness of the importance of the endowment for current ministry and for generations to come.

✝ Continue to maintain, preserve, and care for our historic house of worship on Johnson Square

We at Christ Church are fully aware that “the church” is the people and not the building where we meet. But we also know that our lovely historic house of worship is one of our greatest gifts for outreach to the larger community and to prospective members. Over time, the place in which we worship deeply shapes the spiritual lives of all who gather there. As part of our service to the larger community, our church building is used for concerts, historical lectures, and other public offerings.



Our current church building, the third on this spot, was completed in the 1830s. In the last ten years, we have undertaken a large-scale interior and exterior painting project, and we have fully restored the Ascension Window for the first time since its installation in the 1890s.

To ensure the continuation of this work, the vestry will appoint a Capital Improvements Committee to recommend and manage ongoing multi-year plans for needed restorations and improvements as well as the schedule and sequencing of these projects. It is our time to be good stewards of this gift passed on to us through previous generations. This will ensure meaningful experiences of worship and service for generations to come.

✝ Conduct a feasibility study for a new parish house adjacent to the church which would include ongoing support for all outreach ministries

Our parish house is two blocks away from the church building on Johnson Square. For many years Christ Church has dreamed of building a new parish house on the parking lot on Congress Street. Around 20 years ago, an architect was even engaged to draw preliminary sketches of a building that included parking, offices, a nursery, Christian formation rooms, youth rooms, a choir room, a gathering space for large receptions, and space for outreach ministries. If our facilities were adjacent and we could easily walk between buildings, future generations would be freed from some of the complications that we currently experience. It would be easier to have the church open, and parents taking children to the nursery would be only steps away. In our last strategic planning process, we stated that at the end of that five- to seven-year period, we would seriously engage with this long-term idea. Now that we are immersed in a new strategic plan, we commit to give a full exploration to the possibility of a new parish house.

✝ Grow our membership and pledging units by 5-10% per year

The word "Gospel" means "good news." The Gospel compels us to share with others the good news of the love of Christ, a love that we experience at Christ Church. In recent years, we have been blessed with steady yet manageable growth. We currently have approximately 600 members and 200 pledging units. By growing 5-10% per year, we can continue to incorporate new members and expand our congregation's opportunities for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and service.

We believe that all aspects of this strategic plan encourage each one of us to continue inviting friends and neighbors to “come and see” our worshiping community at Christ Church. Our commitment to growth will enable more of God’s children to share life and faith as current and future generations of Christ Church.

CONCLUSION

Strategic Planning is an ongoing process and not a one-time event. A church is a living and dynamic community, and we are always responding to current needs. We will continue to respond to the requirements of the moment as well as maintain a regular schedule of worship, study, and service. As we do so, our strategic plan will simultaneously point our gaze further into the future; in this plan, we commit to work on these stated priorities for the next five years.

Christ Church is truly blessed to be a community made up of people of all ages. We are committed to ensuring that the gift of church and faith that we experience now will be preserved and passed along for future generations.



Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

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