



PATHWAYS

EXPLORING PARISH MODELS

Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

(God said), “I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” - Joshua 1:9

Introduction – God’s Path to Life

This is a guide for congregational leaders as they explore a new pathway to revitalizing ministry in their particular context. It assists congregations to consider fresh arrangements to re-energizing ministry. Parish identity related to values, mission and vision for ministry, serve as the foundation for setting priorities during this process. Prayer throughout is also key.

What Options Are Available?

Sometimes congregations need to consider their current ministry arrangement. It’s **IMPORTANT** to Look at ALL the options - no matter how far-fetched or unpalatable some of them may seem. By doing this you will gain clarity and confidence about the decision, as well as the **WHY** and the **HOW** it can be done.

This is a basic list of ideas for repositioning with existing clergy and lay leaders. It mainly involves general parish governance and buildings. There may be other options that are not explored here.

(A) A parish (or church) may **merge** with another congregation. They adapt the name of the other congregation and fold into them.

(B) A number of churches or parishes may **amalgamate** to create a multi-congregation parish, complete with a new corporate name and identity. They may gather in an existing church or churches or establish a new shared location (build/buy/lease).

(C) A number of churches or parishes may keep their separate corporate parish identities and buildings and form a **collaborative ministry arrangement** or confederation. They share a team of clergy, Licensed Lay Ministers and others, using a salary pool.

(D) A number of churches (or parishes) choose to **consolidate** their buildings and move to one central facility. This may be an existing church, a purchase property, a new build or a rental space.

(E) **Ecumenical Shared Ministry arrangement.** A parish, church or number of churches may choose to partner with another denomination, to share a paid minister and/or a facility.

(F) A parish, church or number of churches may choose to **partner** with a community organization or business to share a facility. This could be an adaptation to an existing building or the sale and purchase of an entirely new property.

(G) A parish or church may choose to **reform**, and thus sell their property and continue to meet in another space – a private home, public community room, Lion’s Club, etc. An Anglican presence remains in the community and continues to worship and offer ministry.

(H) A parish/congregation may choose to be **bi-vocational**. This is where a church decides to open a business or social enterprise to help fund ministries. Ex., restaurant, construction company, etc.

(I) A parish may opt to **end their ministry well** and close their buildings, giving the remaining assets to another Anglican church or the diocese for future ministry.

What About Options Regarding Clergy and Leadership?

A variety of models for spiritual, pastoral, administrative and governance may be considered. These would depend on the availability of ministers, their particular gifting and the financial means of the parish. Lay leaders and clergy may be un-paid or paid. Truly vital congregations always have strong lay leadership as well as clergy. Some examples are:

- A full-time rector (priest), plus lay leaders.
- Part-time priest (rector or priest-in-charge), plus lay leaders.
- A team of clergy, which may be made up of priests and deacons (full-time or part-time), plus lay leaders. They would share the ministry work together.
- A team of clergy in a region or large church, may be made up of priests and deacons (full-time or part-time), plus lay leaders. Each member applies their specific expertise to their ministry.
- The Bishop appoints an official Parish Administrator to oversee key parish operations, while a team of lay and clergy serve in particular aspects.

Some Things to Note:

- Parishioners will need to monitor appropriate expectations of clergy roles and responsibilities, especially with part-time and non-paid priests and deacons.
- A good question to ask: What are the particular tasks for ministry in our parish that require a priest or deacon? What are the responsibilities that lay leaders may be trained and released to do? Would the role of a Parish Missioner catalyze ministry in the community?
- It may be difficult to obtain part-time clergy, especially the kind who would have energy and the specific skills to lead the parish into a revitalized future for ministry.
- It is financially challenging for a parish to return to full-time rector ministry after having been accustomed to paying for part-time ministry.
- Housing supply and prices may be a challenge in some communities, especially for part-time paid clergy.
- Parishes who truly have a heart for well-defined mission in their community, need to strike a balance between 'just enough' building and 'just enough' paid clergy to support the members in their outward-oriented ministry. Question to ask: How much are we investing in ministry and people as compared to maintenance and buildings?

POSSIBLE AVENUES TO EXPLORE RELATED TO PARTNERING:

- Check with the **local business association** (Chamber of Commerce/Board of Trade) to see if there is a business or organization that may be looking for a location.
- Talk with leaders at **other local churches**, especially those who are renting space in places like schools, movie theatres, etc., or may be struggling to maintain a building too. (Perhaps more than 2 faith communities could share a building.)
- Contact the **local Health Authority/Hospital** to see if there is a need for a satellite medical care office (clinics, mental health supports, etc.).
- Get in touch with some **professional organizations** (doctors, dentists, etc.) to see if there is a demand for a collaborative care medical health office. Your church could complete the picture of “holistic health” with spiritual care.
- Consider the idea of hosting a **business, arts or cottage industry retail centre** whereby several companies lease space from the parish. It can serve as a community hub.
- Talk with **other non-profits** in the area – Lion’s Club, Unions, Legion, etc., who may be looking to share space.
- Check into the possibility of hosting your facility for **hospice care** (or day programs/care for Alzheimer’s patients, etc.), a **nursing home site** or **funeral home satellite location**.
- Contact **local realtors** to see if there are any businesses or organizations who are seeking property/locations.
- Are there **housing demands** in your community? Consider redeveloping your existing facility or building new structures on your property to offer safe, clean, low-income and/or senior residences. Possibilities could be apartments or tiny homes.
- Meet with officials at the local community college and/or the municipality, etc., to offer space for **education/training** or the establishment of a **business co-operative** (small manufacturing, artisans, restaurateurs, etc.).
- Utilizing the skills and gifts of your parishioners, consider **starting your own business** or **social enterprise** - coffee shop, hair salon, yoga studio, market, recording studio, etc.

A CRITICALLY IMPORTANT NOTE:

If a church or parish’s intention is for the revitalization of their faith community, the FOCUS and GOAL for conversations should be about answering the question, “**How can we *better position ourselves* to be able to do more ministry and mission?**”

- ✓ Honestly ask, “Is this just about our church's survival?” (Or saving the building?)
- ✓ Is this about being able to have MORE time and energy and lay leadership ability to offer more ministry, both outside and inside your church?
- ✓ Is this is about INCREASING CAPACITY TO DO MINISTRY and to MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY, IN PEOPLE'S LIVES (through Christ)?

STEPS FOR EXPLORATION AND DISCERNMENT

This map assists leaders in navigating a path to greater parish vitality and mission-oriented ministry. The guideline needs to be adapted to each particular parish setting. Some actions may be omitted or modified to fit the context. Step #1 is absolutely essential!

- 1. PRAYER:** A fresh emphasis on corporate and private prayer is to be encouraged and practiced, particularly during worship and meetings. Scripture, devotional and prayer resources are published and circulated to parishioners. Special prayer gatherings may also be held. Focus on seeking the guidance of the Spirit to serve the missional needs of the neighbourhood.
- 2. PARISH COUNCIL** affirms and commences the revitalization initiative by officially commissioning a task group to lead the parish through this discovery process.
- 3. WHY?:** The task group gathers information and presents a clear-cut case for why the status quo is no longer an option. For example, the increased focus and investment on maintenance (buildings, administration, etc.) over ministry (mission, spiritual development, evangelism, etc.), repair costs, energy inefficiency, leadership team spread too thin, financial sustainability, accessibility issues, etc. Ask these questions: What will the future look like if we do nothing? Where is the mission focus?
- 4. WORKSHOP:** Host a gathering for the entire parish to name and explore all the possible options. (See the list above and add other ideas if you have them.) There is no need to have all the details worked out for each option. Keep them general. Begin with the widest list of ideas, and explore each one carefully. List the advantages and disadvantages for each option. Gradually work to narrow down the list to two to three options. Encourage lots of conversation and input from a variety of viewpoints. This step serves to clarify motivations, realistic expectations and prepares the soil for significant change.
- 5. INVENTORY:** Create a list of parish assets and strengths, as well as liabilities. This exercise helps parishioners see the abundance of gifts God has given them and also a realistic understanding of their weaknesses. This inventory includes not only hard assets (like funds, buildings, material goods), but also “soft” assets like a core team of organizers, people with carpentry skills, a culture of handling tension well, congregational unity, etc. The liabilities list is simply to help gauge the gaps in your community, as you consider a future option and proceed into a period of transition. This activity may be done in a large church gathering or by the task group. Parish Council (or the Executive Committee) should endorse this completed inventory as an accurate picture of the parish.
- 6. RECOMENDATION:** The task group, using the workshop feedback information and the inventory data, undertakes a detailed study of the two to three options. They investigate in greater detail what would be required to move forward with each one. This may include having conversations with potential partners, seeking advice from a realtor, checking on municipal zoning, understanding Diocesan legal procedures, etc. They make a recommendation to Parish Council as to which option should be selected for future redevelopment.
- 7. APPROVAL:** A Parish meeting is held at which the favoured option is presented and explained thoroughly. Printed materials should also be circulated. A period of time should be permitted as parishioners review and pray about the proposal. Another Parish meeting is held to answer questions, clarify concerns and a consensus is taken. All this information, comments, etc., is shared with Parish Council, and they make the final legal/canonical decision. After that, the affected parties are notified in an appropriate manner.
- 8. MOVING FORWARD:** Depending on the particular option chosen, concrete actions begin towards making the recommendation a reality. The task group may continue to do this work or others may share or take over this next phase. A project plan, complete with steps and estimated timeline, is prepared. If there are sensitive negotiations that are required, the team members will need to

possess a high capacity for discretion, gifts in wisdom and wholesome integrity. Clear guidelines for confidential communication are to be established. Appropriate information updates are shared regularly with parishioners.

9. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS: If the preferred option includes the introduction or closer ties with another parish or congregation (or organization, etc.), intentional community gatherings are held to help nurture deeper relationships and trust. Events and activities that foster mutual cooperation and focused mission-oriented ministry further create a sense of cooperation.

10. PARTY & CARRY ON! Once the redevelopment plan is complete be sure to celebrate the victory and give thanks to God in worship. Take time to name all the blessings of the process as well as the new reality. Remind parishioners that the work is not finished. It is beginning again as mission and ministry focus is reinstated to a primary emphasis of the Parish's identity and active call to serve in mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Cast a clear vision and repeat it often during the redevelopment process. This is the "why" of this decision and plan, and it needs to be about transforming people's lives (not about buildings, money, etc.). Money and enthusiastic commitment follow sound vision.
- As the parish embarks upon a major redevelopment plan, a definite focus on mission, ministry and ongoing Christian formation needs to continue in tandem. The old saying, "If we build it, they will come" is a fallacy.
- Ensure there is a clear understanding for the norms of discussion and debate. Promote an environment where all voices, regardless of age or amount of time within the church, are heard and respected. Cultivating a high level of open and honest dialogue based on principles, facts and ideas is of great benefit throughout the redevelopment process. In some cases, these norms will need to be named and affirmed repeatedly, depending on the level of healthy relationships and parish culture.
- Clear and constant communication is absolutely essential! This is verbal and written sharing of the planning progress to the leadership and the general congregation. Transparency and regular updates build trust and buy-in by parishioners. Basic steps in the process need to be communicated all along the way. Clarity and openness help reduce anxieties, gossip and suspicion.
- Talk about the spiritual fruit that is being grown and is expected to be harvested in mission-oriented work. This is especially important for the outcomes of this major redevelopment process. Tell the good news stories, even the small 'wins'.
- Prepare the leadership and congregation members for those who will be against any or some particular change. It is normal to 'lose' people during major transitions in parishes (some research shows as much as 20%). Ask the question: How many are being 'lost' because of inaction or the status quo? Not everyone will be on board. That is to be expected.
- Attempt to anticipate the fears and anxieties from those who are resisting change, especially around the loss of identity of 'their home church.' Ask the question: How can the memory and legacy of these churches be honoured and remembered without jeopardizing the vision and focus for the future identity of the parish as a whole?