

**A Report to St. Mark's Anglican Church on meeting of November 19, and
December 8, 2013**
by Allen Box

The meeting of November 19 opened with time being given to a parishioner, who had asked to speak in advance of the meeting, to express her concern about the poor communications to parishioners who do not have access to email, with the poor communication of this particular meeting being an example. It was her understanding that there had been a commitment made several months ago to improve such communications. The meeting agreed that that had been the case, and the St Mark's MAP leadership team members said that they will be more proactive in communicating about MAP from now on. We agreed to keep communications in mind at various points throughout this night's meeting.

The meeting was marked by a number of different moods but the clearest and most strongly expressed was that of lack of trust. This was especially evident in the time given over to identification of our expectations and desired outcomes for the meeting.

The questions posed exhibited distrust, fear of manipulation, and a strong sense of being drawn in on a process in whose development many felt they had no part or influence. There were requests for information on process and content. There were assertions of mis-information and missing information. Betrayal was expressed in the perceived shift in conversation from sharing ministries to closing buildings.

Here is a sampling of statements from this part of the meeting:

- What control do we have?
- Can we get off?
- Who is making the decisions?
- Do some have hidden agendas?

The tone of the meeting was somewhat and briefly tempered by an expectation to work to find a common ground for considering the future and the challenges for our churches in these days.

There was a keen interest in proposing solutions, different paths, etc.

In the course of this discussion I declared my own intent to disclose fully any knowledge I have of the process, my assurance that my enquiries indicated no decisions already made, and that to my knowledge there was no parish slated for closing. I openly shared my own sense of confusion on the status of the documentation shared and the purpose of meetings held to date.

Following a conversation for clarification, we agreed the timeline set forward by the Planning Committee is as follows and that we would have time to discuss it later in the meeting:

1. December, 2013 - document being prepared by Discernment Team
2. January, 2014 - parishes to discuss and provide feedback to Discernment Team
3. Throughout January - document to be re-written by Team as feedback received.
4. end of January - final document to be ready
5. early February, 2014 - document circulated to parishes for consideration and action by Palm Sunday 2014

After about an hour of this conversation we took a break and came back together to consider the use of time left in our meeting.

On reconvening, the meeting agreed to:

- A. Identify some Basic Standards for further conversations within this congregation (to be shared with other parishes for consideration and additions)
- B. Develop messages we would like to send to St. Michael's and St. Richard's
- C. Consider the impact of the Proposed Timeline.

(A) People at this meeting affirmed their intent to live by the following standards and permit each other to be reminded of the standards in the course of future conversations:

- be kind
- be respectful
- be patient
- be open
- listen without my answer running
- engage in conversation, not presentation
- acknowledge and empathize with what another person is trying to convey
- accept difference
- feel free to ask
- work from strengths
- agree on the facts.

(B) In addition to our invitation to consider use of and addition to these Standards, we would like to send the following messages to the other parishes involved in this process.

- We want to share ministries - and wish to have a conversation with you about how we see that work
- St. Mark's does not want to close - we love your people, don't like your buildings
- We are three families - with shared parentage - that suggests living in different ways and in different places
- We are called to the world "Outside" - we would like to examine that challenge together with you

- Would you consider changes to timelines for decision-making based on the time we feel we need to proceed with the conversation? (see what follows)

(B2) Message to the Diocese

- If buildings close, what happens to any funds generated by sale and other assets held by the parish?

(C) The meeting then considered the Timeline as set out above and its implications

Note: A full discussion was held on the undeclared assumption that this basic timeline must be adhered to. Late in the meeting, in the context of discussing this assumption, many declared their preference for abandoning this timeline and developing a new one. However, all agreed, at this point in time, to take the proposed timeline and to make the following recommendations.

- on the period of preparation for the revised document - item 3 above - that the Discernment Team await the feedback from all the congregations before beginning any re-write
- that the Leadership Team develop a new timeline based on the preceding recommendation with the re-write beginning February 1 and allowing ample time for that re-write to be completed
- that parishes be free to develop their own process for consideration and action on the document with completion before Palm Sunday 2014.

Observations:

- I believe this meeting has established a shaky (but positive) foundation on which to proceed.
- I urge those responsible to put in place a process for better two-way communication in the wider parish during MAP until a parish decision is made. I also encourage St. Mark's to make a full review of communications in the parish following MAP.
- Issues of trust remain paramount in this parish. Use of the Standards for Conversations will help deal with that. Behaviour with each other will determine the degree to which trust deepens.
- That is the challenge for all in the parish.

I request permission of the St Mark's Leadership Team, who asked me to facilitate this meeting, to share the contents of this document with the people who attended the meeting, with the other parishes involved and with Diocesan Officials.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. Can T. Allen Box
November 20, 2013

A second meeting was held December 8th for those who were unable to attend the November meeting. Those in attendance included some from the meeting of November 19th and some for the first time.

Once again the meeting opened with strong expressions of lack of trust and sense of conspiracy with a very strong plea for hearing the "facts". Alongside this phenomenon was an equally strong plea, repeated more than once, for being open to the future and the possibility that this movement is one of the Holy Spirit, to be listened to and entered into.

As in the previous meeting, I assured the gathering that I was convinced there was no plan in place to close St. Mark's and that there was no final paper hidden away for later presentation. I asked those from whom I had received such assurances to declare themselves if this was untrue. Likewise, I asked any present who could present evidence of either to do so. None responded.

Judy Darling gave a brief report on the meeting on December 1 of the Leadership and Discernment Teams. This information, attached to this report, was well received and provided a sense of confidence that there was room for further discussion.

The assembled group quickly found common ground in the idea of discovering a vision for long term ministry. They committed energy to identifying steps that needed to be taken now and in the near future to arrive at such a vision.

All present worked to create a list of such steps:

1. circulate the report received from Judy Darling on the activity of the Discernment Team, particularly the conversation and direction of the meeting of December 1.
2. identify, evaluate and prioritize ministries of the parish(es) with a focus on their impact on the community, their relevance to community needs, and any gaps in ministry which emerge.
3. examine issues of sustainability for the programs and the congregations.
4. address fears (there is a need to squash rumours)
5. get to know each other in the parish.
6. survey those who have left each of the churches
7. work on membership recruitment and retention

The key messages this gathering wished to send to the other two parishes were:

We have mixed feelings about this. Do you?

and:

Romans 8:28 "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

Responses and recommendations:

The potential for a shift around the proposed timeline (in the Leadership Team Report attached) was very positively received and helped the meeting move into more creative activity than had been possible at the meeting of November 19th.

The shaky foundation to which I alluded in reporting on that meeting became stronger and more focussed.

The list of steps to be taken to arrive at a vision for the future is a very helpful one. I recommend it be shared with the other involved parishes to see if there are any common grounds on which to work. I think selection of the top 2 or 3 for immediate, intensive work should be done by whatever is the responsible body.

The meeting experienced something of what an enhanced commitment to communication could provide. This is very good news. However, it still needs to be carefully considered and monitored.

Trust in the parish is still a major issue. It is shaky. The implementation of steps 2,3, and 4 would profoundly influence the state of trust in the parish.

I believe sharing this report, as suggested earlier, would be helpful in naming the struggles of St. Mark's, in beginning a more open process of sharing between St. Mark's and the other parishes, and possibly in finding common ground for further fruitful conversation.

Allen Box
December 11, 2013

Summary of Discernment Meeting of Ottawa West Three, (St Mark's, St Michael's, St Richard's) December 1, 2013 as reported by Judy Darling to St Mark's MAP conversation December 8, 2013.

Participants from St Mark's in the Discernment team are: Georgia Roberts, Judy Darling and the Reverend Brian Kauk (who also serve on the Leadership Team) along with Keith Wilkins, Karen Roberts, Penny Miller and Audia Barnett. St Richard's and St Michaels also sent their Leadership Team members with four other members each. Facilitation is provided by the Reverend Ross Hammond from the Parish Growth and Renewal Consultants Advisory Panel, with support from Archdeacon Peter John Hobbs, Director of Mission for the diocese.

The first meeting was held on November 3rd. On the original timetable, the second meeting held on December 1st was to be the final meeting. As you will read below, the Discernment Team added a third meeting to the timetable. They were tasked with producing a report that proposes a direction for the three churches to pursue. That report will be presented to the vestries for consideration. It is the vestries of each church that determine whether their proposals will be implemented beyond the current MAP process.

The meeting on December 1st convened and the facilitator introduced the afternoon with the observation that it has been a month since the group last gathered. He asked 'having considered the last meeting where are you now?' Around the room several responses were offered:

- trying to separate the basic decision about the way ahead from the answer to how to get there. The two ideas must be separated.
- realization of the importance of communications
- all three congregations are on different stages of the continuum of the process
- the time frame should be more flexible
- request to reflect on what it would be like to have a common mission
- while some don't seem to be listening, we must remember not to leave anyone behind or disregarded

In response to a question about where St Mark's is, it was made known that St Mark's is having a difficult time; some of the issues raised at the November 19 parish town hall meeting at St Mark's were revealed, particularly the lack of trust of the process and inadequate communication. We were asked why we are unsure and what can St Mark's be offered. Continuing the conversation was offered as the most therapeutic approach. Another participant indicated that we are facing difficult truths and distrust cannot be part of the solution. Another observed that if St Mark's backs away now they will never be equal partners. Many expressions of support for St Mark's were spoken. One participant expressed a new understanding and sees the need to slow down.

The next steps seem to indicate that we don't know the outcome but we want to travel together moving forward. One participant observed that we must communicate that we are moving together to share ministries not just for the sake of change.

One member asked for clarification of the vision and the response was that while unwritten at the moment, the vision is and always has been shared and sustainable ministry. We noted that clear and concise communication is a good way to dispel any appearance of dishonesty.

The question was asked: what are the main ideas still on the table? The following answers were suggested:

- one congregation in one place
- shared ministries
- impact on the community
- continued discernment in regard to buildings
- mission first
- clear two-way communications

What next? Continuing conversation seemed to indicate the following direction:

- one body with a time line of from a few months to a year or more with many decisions tackled during the interim period
- shared ministry is best achieved by one congregation, with shared ministry needing a roof in some configuration (it is too soon to talk about where or what)
- the one roof should be rotational and temporary during the interim (the ways of this developing have not been explored)
- spend 2014 in experiential discernment
- working toward an implementation plan for presentation to vestry in February of 2015

It was noted that much work must be done on ministry evaluation, staffing, administration, resources, integration of finances, communication plans, formation of an implementation team, assessment of buildings (to be done by a third party), liaison with the diocese, strategies for forming the joint team and how to engage stakeholders.

It was agreed that the discernment group would meet again on January 5, 2014. Prior to that date, three small groups will meet to consider:

- next steps
- a proposed vestry motion (2014)
- implementation strategy

St Mark's participants were encouraged by the warm, open reception to the challenges we are experiencing and that the concerns and hesitations in our parish have been heard. The other churches were open and interested in working with St Mark's however they could. The willingness offered to us to slow down the process and decision making while continuing to talk together, experiencing worship together and sharing some ministry during 2014, shows good will and a desire to move forward.