



Strategic Visioning Report

*St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Flint, MI*



AT THE INTERSECTION
OF HERITAGE, FAITH,
& COMMUNITY

Partners for Sacred Places

Table of Contents

Project Background	3
St. Paul's Vision	
<i>Vision Statement for the Property</i>	4
<i>A Confident and Ambitious Beginning</i>	4
<i>Key Learnings</i>	5
<i>Final Thoughts</i>	6

PROJECT BACKGROUND

St. Paul's Episcopal Church (St. Paul's) is an historic congregation and a longstanding institution in the community of Flint. As St. Paul's celebrates 150 years of ministry and service in Flint, the parish is looking to the future and how it can remain a vital presence in its neighborhood and city. In 2022, St. Paul's engaged national nonprofit Partners for Sacred Places to help the parish raise its profile in Flint and strengthen its impact in the community as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations. Specifically, St. Paul's hoped to create and strengthen relationships with community leaders, residents, and organizations to help build a collaborative vision for the use of the church's facilities. St. Paul's sees its building as a vehicle to further its mission of the parish in Flint, and as an asset for community partners to enhance their own impact and presence.

In June 2022, Partners staff helped facilitate an asset-mapping event, using methodology that developed out of the Asset Based Community Development model. The participants were identified and invited by a team of St. Paul's leaders and two community members, and represented a wide range of constituencies, professions, and perspectives in Flint. A tour of St. Paul's facilities and conversation about the church's mission framed the event. Partners staff led the participants in facilitated discussion and activity to identify and connect the assets of the parish and the community. Working in small groups, the participants came up with new ideas for expanding and enhancing St. Paul's impact by utilizing these assets in new and creative ways. The congregation took the findings and recommendations of the corresponding report to begin building and strengthening community partnerships in Flint, most notably with Genesee County Health Systems and the Flint Social Club.

In the fall of 2022, St. Paul's convened a team of church and community leaders to begin work on a Strategic Vision process, led by Partners for Sacred Places. This process would help the parish reflect on and evaluate its current opportunities, capacity, and legacy, to articulate a strategic vision that will guide the parish as it continues to faithfully steward its property as the congregation, and the wider community of Flint, continue to experience changes in membership, priorities, and needs. The team from St. Paul's consisted of Joel Arnold, Tim Grant, Barbara Mannor, Velecia Ford, Maggie Hart, and Dexter Clarke. The team explored St. Paul's mission and values, its legacy in Flint, and its experience with the community surrounding the church downtown. Throughout these conversations, the team identified key areas of St. Paul's mission that the facilities and property could continue to serve in new ways and drafted a Vision Statement that would guide stewardship decisions and initiatives for the parish. Utilizing the Vision Statement, the team then identified a "launching project" - an initial project that would move St. Paul's onto a trajectory towards realizing that vision. The Vestry formally approved the vision and the launching project on June 28, 2023. St. Paul's should feel proud of the work that the Strategic Visioning Team (and the entire parish) has done - their creativity, inspiration, wisdom, and dedication has set St. Paul's up for a bright future in downtown Flint!

ST. PAUL'S VISION

A VISION STATEMENT FOR THE PROPERTY

Members of St. Paul's Strategic Visioning team drafted the following vision statement, which is meant to be a guide for the parish to develop and implement a mission-driven, sustainable stewardship strategy that will help St. Paul's live out the congregation's mission now and into the future.

St. Paul's, a parish that has been part of this city for generations, seeks to serve the greater Flint community at the intersection of civic and spiritual life. Seeing our parish building as a community asset, we seek to serve as a welcoming and safe space, providing a center for community to gather to grow together, and partnering with those who serve the common good. Nourished by diversity, we work together with our community across Flint and the region to further a world filled with those virtues Christ has taught us - compassion, solidarity, and social justice.

This vision statement reflects key discussion topics throughout the strategic visioning sessions, which include the desire to look beyond downtown Flint for partners, the flexibility of St. Paul's space for a variety of activities and programs, the knowledge that St. Paul's will need to create mission-aligned space-sharing partnerships to provide services to the wider community, and an emphasis on diversity that breaks with the parish's legacy of being the "elite" congregation in town.

A CONFIDENT AND AMBITIOUS BEGINNING

As part of the Strategic Visioning process, St. Paul's discussed how the parish can start, and stay, on a successful trajectory towards realizing the vision. The team discussed how to identify indicators that would help St. Paul's evaluate its work, logic models that would help the parish navigate "stumbling blocks" to the vision, and how to articulate the "next step" in its journey. The first project that St. Paul's will undertake is a space-sharing relationship with Genesee County Health Systems, which was looking for a site to pilot a community-based mental health program in Flint. The church has also recently entered into an Agreement with Family Promise of Genesee County, who will lease the upstairs classrooms in the church building (dedicated use) as they move their offices and operations to the church.

This launching project will involve the negotiation of a space-use agreement with GCHS as well as the implementation of new policies at the parish that will strengthen its capacity to host external, secular organizations' events with minimal parish oversight. This will be an important test-case for St. Paul's as the parish has never had a secular space-use partner use the parish's building on a frequent and consistent basis. St. Paul's will be building skills and knowledge related to:

- Congregational communication about building use by community partners
- Security and safety measures
- Coordinating traffic flow in the building between St. Paul's events, the activities of Family Promise, and GCHS
- Negotiation of Memorandums of Understanding between the parish and external partners.

KEY LEARNINGS

The Legacy of being a Downtown Church

Some of the most exciting and engaging conversations during the Strategic Visioning sessions focused on the legacy of St. Paul's in the downtown Flint community. Specifically, what pieces of St. Paul's legacy the team wanted to make sure was carried forward and which they wanted to leave in the past. St. Paul's, especially in the last few decades, has advertised and promoted itself as a welcoming, progressive community of faith that cares deeply for its neighbors – “the church with a heart in the heart of the city.” This has been lived out through various outreach events, participating in downtown Flint art-walks, and the parish's well-connected members who are active in local development initiatives. St. Paul's current presence and reputation in downtown Flint was affirmed during the Asset-Mapping event in 2022, in which many community leaders and stakeholders were invited into the building to co-imagine opportunities that would benefit all of Flint, leveraging St. Paul's many assets. This is the legacy that the team desired to build on, and which is reflected in the Vision Statement.

The founding members of St. Paul's, and the membership for many decades, were the “social elite” of Flint. In a city that was characterized, even in its boom years, of having very clear distinctions between racial groups and socio-economic classes, St. Paul's was seen as the “elite” church. In its more recent history, St. Paul's has made diversity, inclusion, and community service clear priorities of the parish, which has worked to change the perception of the church in the downtown neighborhood. Strategic Visioning team members were very clear that they wanted to be intentional about the parish continuing to diverge from its past as an “elite” institution to be one that advocates for, and stands in solidarity with, more marginalized groups in Flint and Genesee County. The launching project will help move towards this goal in a few ways. First, it welcomes folks who are often on the margins of society into the church for programming and not for charity. Second, it necessitates that the church become more flexible in its building policies and move into a space of discomfort and growth in thinking about what a partnership can look like.

Navigating the Spiritual and the Secular

The members of St. Paul's, and the Strategic Visioning team, see all of the church's work as an extension of their faith. As the team discussed the “why” of St. Paul's mission, they often referred back to the core beliefs and values of their religion. While this gives St. Paul's confidence and valuable resources to discern and do the work of the church, it can also be limiting as St. Paul's seeks to build relationships with individuals and groups who may be of different faiths or of no faith. The team recognized during the process that they would have to interpret the Vision Statement, the launching project, and the overall work to invite more of the community into St. Paul's property through the lens and language of Christianity for the parishioners – this would help members better understand how and why the building should be offered as a community resource. The team also recognized that St. Paul's would need to develop confidence in describing its mission and vision to people who do not share, or who may have been harmed by, the Christian faith. This will help the parish develop more, and diverse, partnerships that will help the facilities live out the congregation's mission.

During the course of the Strategic Visioning sessions, St. Paul's entered into a significant space-sharing agreement with Family Promise of Genesee County – an organization that the parish had partnered with for years. Post-COVID, Family Promise's service model changed, and while they no longer needed to coordinate church buildings to provide temporary housing, they did need office space for more centralized services and operations. Following up on a conversation that started at the Asset-Mapping event, St. Paul's developed a relationship with Family Promise and was able to invite them to “move in” to several

under-utilized classroom spaces on the second floor of the church building. Family Promise is a Christian organization and works with networks of churches – the Strategic Visioning team discussed how that faith affiliation made the space-use agreement much easier for the congregation. The launching project will be the first significant space-use agreement with a totally secular entity, which will help the parish expand its understanding of who can use the space as an extension of the congregation's mission.

Who is St. Paul's Neighbor?

One of the key repeated topics of conversation throughout the Strategic Visioning process was the question of who St. Paul's was called to serve geographically. The parish has most recently seen itself as a church that serves the downtown community of Flint, though many of its members live outside of that area. The story of St. Paul's, however, is that of a mothering church – it helped to seed the other Episcopal parishes in Genesee County. St. Paul's is also a vibrant and vital congregation whose membership lives across the city of Flint, and so are geographically tied to many different neighborhoods and communities within that area. As the Strategic Visioning team discussed potential stakeholders and constituencies to serve, the question of geographic area continued to surface. Ultimately, the team discerned that the facilities and property should serve all of Genesee County. This expansion of St. Paul's "mission field" was an exciting conversation for the team, and might be for the parish as well. Partners recommends that clergy and lay leadership take opportunities to explore with the congregation what the boundaries of St. Paul's "parish" are and what that understanding might call the congregation to do.

FINAL THOUGHTS

St. Paul's Episcopal Church began a community engagement project with Partners for Sacred Places at a time that coincided with the parish's 150th anniversary; indeed, the project was seen as helping St. Paul's enter its next 150 years. The Asset-Mapping event and Strategic Visioning process have helped St. Paul's define a bright future for the parish and its facilities. One Strategic Visioning team member commented, after updating Partners on the Agreement with Family Promise, how surprised she was that the congregation had no hesitation and no reservations about entering such a partnership. This is a testament to the work that St. Paul's clergy and lay leadership have done over the past two years to re-orient the parish to its property; members are starting to understand the building as not "theirs," but a community asset that they are charged with stewarding. This internal shift will make possible many new opportunities for partnership and service so that St. Paul's remains a strong and vital presence in downtown Flint, and that the church will continue to be known as "the church with a heart in the heart of the city."

The vision statement that the Strategic Visioning team has articulated provides an inspiring guide-star for the church as it continues to re-evaluate and reform its own stewardship and mission strategies. Like all mission or vision statements, this will only be useful if it is intentionally integrated into the life and decision-making processes of the congregation. This statement will be valuable to evaluate possible partnerships, imagine new ways of managing the property, plan for financial sustainability, and ensure that the physical structure continues to support the work of hospitality, diversity, and liberation. To build familiarity with congregational Mission and Vision statements, churches often incorporate the statements into liturgy, educational programming, and governance meetings. This property Vision Statement should be incorporated into any meeting or activity that focuses on the maintenance and stewardship of the building (Vestry meetings, property committee meetings, annual meetings, etc.). St. Paul's might also host special activities that familiarize the congregation with

the Vision statement and invite them to participate in the imagining and planning process of how St. Paul's might stay on a trajectory towards that vision's realization.

The launching project with Genesee County Health Systems is an opportunity for St. Paul's to move along that trajectory towards success. It will be important for St. Paul's to revisit the arrangement with GCHS at least once during the initial arrangement timeline and at the end of the initial timeline. St. Paul's and GCHS should discuss what worked well in the arrangement, how they could improve the arrangement, and possibilities to expand the partnership if both parties felt it was a good "match." St. Paul's should also use this pilot partnership to identify indicators of a successful relationship, which can be used to assess and evaluate St. Paul's work towards its vision for the property. For instance, how many community members visited the building within a given timeframe, how many requests for space use the church received within a given timeframe, how different space-use partners would "rate" their experience of working with St. Paul's, and how frequently various spaces are used for congregational and/or community activities. After this initial partnership with GCHS has come to an end, St. Paul's should also convene a meeting of leaders who could reflect on the experience and learnings in light of the property Vision Statement and work to identify a next "project" that would help move St. Paul's towards realizing that vision.