



THE WATCH REPORT

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, TORONTO

JUNE 2023

SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a year-long process to develop a strategic plan for the future direction of St. Andrew's Church. The Strategic Planning Committee conducted a comprehensive examination of our history and past successes; consulted inside and outside the congregation; and developed a vision and direction for our future as we move forward to celebrate our 200th anniversary in 2030.

The report sets out findings and recommendations under five important subject areas which form the acronym WATCH:

Worship Accessibility Technology Connections Hope

The report presents a clear goal for each of these five areas. The report then presents strategic priorities that our congregation needs to support for us to achieve these goals. There are 19 recommended strategic initiatives.

The Committee presented its report to Session in May 2023 at which time Session reviewed the findings and recommendations. This resulted in Session agreeing to and approving a prioritization of the Strategic Priorities recommended by the Committee. After careful review and discussion Session has selected eight of these strategic initiatives with implementation to begin over the next eighteen months. The remaining 11 strategic initiatives will be implemented at a later date. The eight are:

- 1. *Radical hospitality*: deepen our greeting process with committed and organized follow-up and fellowship opportunities for new attendees.**
- 2. Form an “Advisory Council on Technology” to monitor advances in social media, technology, artificial intelligence, make recommendations to Session, and offer guidance on the appropriate use of social media and the positions required to successfully run a high-quality media program.**
- 3. Provide the ways to receive digital offerings during worship and church events.**
- 4. Implement additional forms of worship that appeal to members and newcomers to our community of faith.**
- 5. Implement a program that attracts, engages, and retains young adults and families.**
- 6. Make the chancel accessible to all people.**
- 7. Invest in better equipment for the production of on-line options, while being mindful of potential consequences such as creating separate on-line and in-person communities.**
- 8. Promote social activities to encourage, strengthen and deepen relationships within the congregation.**

Please review this report, which provides the background and the rationale to support the recommended 19 initiatives. In the early Fall of 2023, the report highlights will be reviewed and discussed at a congregational meeting, as will the action steps we as a congregation must take to implement these eight initiatives.

BACKGROUND

In spring 2022, St. Andrew's Church formed a Strategic Planning Committee to reflect and discern challenges and prepare for our 200th anniversary in 2030 and beyond.

The Strategic Planning Committee, consisting of Will Ingram, Candy Grant, Sandy Aird, Judy Neal, and Stephen Jackson, collaborated with the Rev. Canon Dr. Tim Elliott, a ministry development consultant, to create a report outlining their work, reflections, recommendations, and priorities for St. Andrew's Session and congregation.

In carrying out its research the Committee focused on four specific themes:

Looking Back - to draw from the congregation's history and legacy

Looking In - to engage with current St. Andrew's community members

Looking Out - to learn from similar congregations

Looking Forward - to identify strategic priorities for the future based on their findings.

Looking Back

The Committee reflected on past strategic plans and recent focused studies such as “The Rotman Nexus Report” (September 2013) and “The Callosum Report: Understanding the Spiritual Needs of Millennials” (June 2018), both of which centred on understanding and responding to the spiritual needs of our dramatically growing young adult downtown community. The Committee also examined the transitional moments in St. Andrew's history, from 1830 on, focusing on factors contributing to its long-standing strength and challenges faced by the congregation and Christianity in modern culture. These reflections were shared during a congregational retreat in November 2022.

St. Andrew's Church has had long and proud history of successfully and faithfully serving the downtown community of Toronto for nearly two hundred years. We have continued to build this history in our time: our important *Out of The Cold* programme serving hundreds of meals weekly to those in need; our *Better English Café* providing scores of newcomers to Canada a chance to practice English; our *Heart of the City Speakers Series* bringing important voices and topics to the community; and the wonderful music program of noon-time recitals, special concerts and the new *SingTO* community choir.

In the past few years, the congregation has regularly participated in the *Doors Open Toronto*; in the Charity Challenge of the *Scotiabank (TCS) Waterfront Marathon*, in the work of the *STARS* Refugee Support Committee, and in the ongoing presence and fellowship offered by *SAGA*. Beyond the congregation, the people of St. Andrew's have continued to provide leadership, financial support and hours of volunteer services to important ministry partners such as *Evangel Hall Mission*; the *Portland Place* Community Housing Corporation; the *ARISE Ministry, Boarding Homes Ministry; Presbyterian World Service and Development*; the *Knox College* Board of Directors, the *Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto (ECUT)*; and *Presbyterians Sharing*; as well as service in the Presbytery of East Toronto, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Canadian Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and other denominational, ecumenical and interfaith organizations.

In summary, our strength in outreach is a foundation for future growth. Over the decades a number of important factors have consistently contributed to this strength.

Key factors include:

Strong Ministry	True Fellowship
Meaningful worship	Financial stability
Committed Leadership	Active volunteering
A beautiful worship space	Community engagement
Intentional community building	A growing congregation

Looking In

The Committee sought to discover the thoughts of the congregation. Reflections were guided by conversations at a congregational luncheon in September 2022; and a full-day retreat in November 2022, both facilitated by Tim Elliott. Important themes emerged from these discussions.

Strengthening personal connections	Accessibility
High-quality worship experiences	Compassionate service
Inclusion	Pastoral care

Looking Out

The committee interviewed leaders from urban congregations in Canada and the US, discussing lessons from COVID-19 closures and emerging challenges. Interviewees included representatives from churches in Toronto, Ottawa, Chicago, and Vancouver. Insights from these interviews helped shape the priorities listed below. Every one of these churches is coping with similar challenges and opportunities: the impact of COVID, new demographics, congregational growth and community needs. Many are testing new forms of worship, small group studies, investment in new technology, and considering new opportunities for community outreach.

We interviewed the following people:

The Rev. Dr. Jason Byassee – Timothy Eaton Memorial United Church, Toronto
The Rev. Dr. Karen Dimock – St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Ottawa
Bishop Jenny Andison – St. Paul’s Anglican Church (Bloor Street), Toronto
The Rev. Shannon Johnson Kershner – Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago
The Rev. Dr. Peter Elliott – (Retired Dean) Christ Church Anglican Cathedral, Vancouver
The Rev. Alisdair Smith – Deacon/Business Chaplain, Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver
Ms. Lois Kebler – Elder, St. Andrew’s Wesley United Church, Vancouver
The Rev. Rhian Walker – Co-lead Minister, St. Andrew’s Wesley United Church, Vancouver

Looking Forward

The committee worked through a series of discussions to map out the way forward and develop this strategic plan. There are four key components to the plan. They are:

Our **Mission**: Our reason for existing, our purpose.
Our **Vision**: An aspirational statement of what we want to achieve.
Our **Goals**: The important targets we need to achieve to reach our Vision.
Our **Strategic Priorities**: The actions needed to achieve each goal.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Our Mission

The people of St. Andrew's are called by God to serve in faith, hope and love in the heart of Toronto.

Our Vision

On our WATCH we will be a dynamic and growing presence for the ministry of Christ in our community.

Our Goals

Worship	Dynamic worship that glorifies God and builds faith in community
Accessibility	Open and adequate space for all people and programs
Technology	Technology that facilitates our purpose and presence
Connections	Strong connections that bring us together in faith
Hope	Hope in the future driven by honouring our history

Strategic Priorities

WORSHIP

Dynamic worship that glorifies God and builds faith in community

As we embark on the journey of developing a strategic plan for St. Andrew's, it is essential to recognize the core elements that shape our faith and guide our actions.

At the heart of our Christian experience lies the act of worship, which brings us together as a community to give thanks, praise, and honour to the Triune God, revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; and present with us through the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Worship plays a pivotal role in strengthening our relationship with God, allowing God's grace to work within us and transform our lives.

We are blessed to have a large and spiritually uplifting sacred space in a vibrant location in the heart of downtown Toronto, and people who live their faith with hope and love. Our sanctuary can welcome over 1,000 people for a variety of worship experiences.

We lack a chapel that could provide a more intimate and welcoming space for small weddings and funerals, services for healing and well-being, and other small gatherings. Chancel renovations that respect and honour the beauty and sanctity of our space could address this need and enable greater versatility.

Faith

In tandem with the importance of worship, our strategic plan must emphasize the significance of Christian education and life-long discipleship in setting a firm foundation for a strong faith that transcends generations.

St. Andrew's strives to provide Christian education opportunities for children, youth, and adults. It is heartwarming to see the increasing number of children participating in our Church School program.

We could expand our current Faith Formation program by focusing on ways to attract, engage, and retain young adults, especially those who are unchurched. Examples could include:

- Offering thought-provoking podcasts covering topics of interest to young people with related blogs to encourage engagement.
- Activities that combine socialization and the exploration of religious questions.
- Expanding our educational offerings to include small group studies or discussions that delve into how Christ informs us to live and work in the world, drawing on biblical and non-biblical sources.

Online Worship

The COVID-19 pandemic that began early in 2020 presented us with the opportunity to find a way to continue to worship together even though we could not gather in person. We adopted a pre-recorded video format, which offered a more intimate experience than livestreaming from an empty sanctuary. This format has been very well received, with more than 200 views per week on average. Our worshipping audience includes people from around the world.

A considerable number of people have expressed the hope that we would continue to offer worship services in this format. It offers those who are unable to travel to the church on Sunday morning an opportunity to stay connected with the congregation. On the other hand, the convenience of watching a worship service video at home could contribute to continued lower in-person attendance on Sundays. We must give thoughtful consideration to this issue.

Alternative Worship Services

Now that we can gather in person again, it is important to explore the possibility of offering alternative forms of worship, such as jazz vespers and a contemporary service that may be more appealing to young adults.

Strategic Priorities – Worship

- 1. Renovate the chancel to enable its use as a chapel.**
- 2. Implement additional forms of worship service that appeal to members and newcomers to our community of faith.**
- 3. Implement a program that attracts, engages, and retains young adults and families.**
- 4. Expand opportunities for adults of all ages to explore their faith (such as study groups).**

ACCESSIBILITY

Open and adequate space for all people and programs

Accessibility focuses on making information, resources, and services usable and understandable by a diverse range of people. The related concept of availability focuses on ensuring that these resources or services are present, distributed, and reliable.

Both accessibility and availability are crucial to ensure that everyone can benefit from information, resources, and services, and both emerged as priorities during the "Looking In" and "Looking Out" phases of our study.

Physical Accessibility

The chancel area is largely inaccessible for people with mobility issues, as are some other parts of the church such as meeting rooms in the east and west towers. It is important for us to explore chancel renovations to ensure that everyone can participate in activities such as Lay Reading and small, intimate worship services.

Linguistic Accessibility

We are experiencing an increased ethnic and linguistic diversity among worship service participants. We must find ways to be more sensitive and adaptable for those facing barriers due to language, or to hearing or vision limitations or other Special Needs. For example, we could provide printed copies of sermons and prayers to read during worship services or study at home. We believe that one of the marks of a healthy community of faith in the heart of downtown Toronto will be its intercultural and multi-ethnic nature.

Availability of Facilities

Like many churches, St. Andrew's has come to rely on income generated by renting office space, meeting rooms, and the sanctuary. We rent the entirety of the third floor in the Church Centre to commercial tenants, and a large portion of the second floor to a daycare centre. Additionally, we rent individual areas at hourly or daily rates for a large variety of activities such as film shoots, election polls, outside meetings, and musical events.

Various church groups and committees compete with rentals for space. We have a shortage of office space for church staff and a severe shortage of storage space. The Coordinator of Faith Formation for Children and Youth and the Director of Music both work in rooms little bigger than closets.

If we are successful at growing our community of faith, demands for appropriate space for meetings, fellowship activities and additional staff will only increase. It is imperative that we explore ways to meet these needs.

Strategic Priorities – Accessibility

1. **Make the chancel accessible to all people.**
2. **Explore ways to increase linguistic accessibility.**
3. **Contract outside expertise to identify ways to maximize use of all space and make our facilities, programs and services accessible to all and available for church use.**

TECHNOLOGY

Technology that facilitates our purpose and our presence

Audio-Visual

During the COVID-19 pandemic, technology transformed various aspects of the church's ministries, such as worship services, study groups, meetings, and pastoral visits. Hybrid options were introduced to maximize participation, and events like the *Heart of the City Speaker Series* and *Friday Noon-time Recital Series* were recorded for online distribution.

Technological adaptations allowed geographically distant or mobility-restricted individuals to participate in significant events. Both "Looking In" conversations and "Looking Out" interviews identified technology as a crucial learning and permanent change.

At St. Andrew's, our current audio-visual technology is temporary and limited, with challenges for hybrid meetings. Many congregations have implemented technological renovations for livestreamed services, hybrid meetings, and digital donations. We need to conduct a thorough study of the advantages and disadvantages of various options, the hardware and equipment needed, and the cost implications.

Social Media

Today, young people primarily engage with social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, while other demographics tend to use Facebook, email, and various websites. Although we use Facebook, we do not take advantage of the social media platforms favoured by younger generations. To address this, our website requires some refreshing in terms of aesthetics, user-friendliness, and attractiveness to young people. We should also investigate using the social media platforms mentioned above, with the support of a Social Media Committee.

In the search for a new Associate Minister, we should seek someone who is adept in the use of social media.

Digital Offerings

One of the lasting effects of the pandemic is the widespread tendency to use debit and credit cards for all or most purchases. As a result, fewer people carry cash, which may mean they don't have money to put on the offering plates. Some churches now routinely offer a way to pay using credit card terminals.

It would be beneficial for us to explore the possibility of making offerings using a 'tap' technology.

Strategic Priorities – Technology

1. **Invest in better equipment for online options, while being mindful of potential unintended consequences such as creating separate online and in-person communities.**
2. **Form an Advisory Council on Technology (ACT) to monitor advances in social media, technology, and artificial intelligence, make recommendations to Session, and offer guidance on the appropriate use of social media and the positions required to successfully run a high-quality social media program.**
3. **Require further social media and technological training for members of the church Ministry Team.**
4. **Provide ways to receive digital offerings during worship and church events.**

CONNECTION

Strong connections that bring us together

Fostering connection within a church community is essential for creating an environment where members feel a sense of belonging, unity, and mutual support. To cultivate a thriving congregation, it is important to focus on welcoming newcomers and integrating them into church activities. It is equally important to invite and encourage long-time members to participate in a variety of worship, study, fellowship, and social activities as well as volunteer service ministries. God's love includes everyone—without exception.

Radical Hospitality

At the November 2022 retreat, participants highlighted the significance of a welcoming atmosphere when sharing their involvement in the congregation. Additionally, many consulted congregations from the "Looking Out" interviews stressed the importance of fostering an authentic and robust welcoming process for newcomers. We characterize this as 'Radical Hospitality'.

The Committee acknowledges the significant increase in young adults and families attending worship services and participating in programs like *The Better English Café*, *Out of the Cold*, and *SingTO*. This group is crucial for the church's growth, vibrancy, and future leadership. The new Associate Minister needs to focus on this community.

We can help newcomers to form strong connections to our congregation by inviting and encouraging them to participate in small groups and ministries that engage in meaningful service, such as the *Out of the Cold*, the *Better English Café* and *SingTO* programs.

Members of the St. Andrew's community expressed a desire to deepen their relationships, particularly after the isolation experienced during the pandemic. While the "Fellowship and Pastoral Care" committee made efforts to maintain connections, the SPC believes strengthening the sense of connection should be a priority.

"Looking Out" interviews highlighted the importance of small group ministries and activities centered around common interests. Opportunities for shared service, such as volunteering, helped cultivate connections, but intentional fellowship opportunities could be strengthened by supporting small discussion groups and Bible studies, organizing events and activities that cater to various interests and demographics within the church to encourage interaction, and by encouraging a culture of care, where congregants feel comfortable sharing their needs and offering assistance to others.

Reception and Signage

Currently, the lack of a regular presence in the reception area and unclear signage hinders our welcoming efforts for visitors and newcomers. It's often unclear where to find offices, the sanctuary, meeting spaces, or ministers.

Strategic Priorities – Connection

1. ***Radical Hospitality:*** deepen our greeting process with committed and organized follow-up and fellowship opportunities for new attendees.
2. **Promote social activities** to encourage, strengthen and deepen relationships within the congregation.
3. **Reconsider using designated pastoral districts** to maintain intentional connections.
4. **Prioritize the demonstration of "Welcome"** at both virtual and physical entry points, not only during worship services but also throughout all weekly activities.
5. **Create a program that fosters community and relationship-building** for young adults and families who worship with us and participate in our Outreach programs such as *Out of the Cold*, *Better English Café* and *SingTO*.

HOPE

Hope for the future inspired by honouring our past

Hope, based on honouring our history of faith in action, resilience, innovation, and courageous choices made in challenging times, and driven by the Holy Spirit, can guide us confidently toward remaining a dynamic and growing presence for God in our community.

St. Andrew's was founded in 1830 by a hardy band of Scots from the Church of Scotland. Eventually the Scots connection faded, and today we have a highly diverse, intercultural and inclusive congregation that reflects the people who live in the heart of the city of Toronto.

From the very beginning we mixed serious religious contemplation with earnest social work. During almost two centuries of vast social, philosophical and theological turmoil, St. Andrew's has been in the forefront of progressive theology and social reform. We continue that tradition today and strive to be strong leaders in the future.

In the words of one of our previous ministers, the Rev. Cameron Brett:

“If you want the real pulse of the community of faith and a true sign of the life and vitality of St. Andrew's you must look beyond the printed reports. Men and women gathering for worship, praying with and for one another...caring for one another, serving one another and the wider community...that's the flesh and blood of this congregation. Statistics are important but it's the story that counts, God's story, this Church's story... a story that is full of hope...love...renewal. Daily it touches more people than we can know.”

The Strategic Planning Committee believes that increased awareness of our history can instill hope and guide the congregation through present circumstances and upcoming opportunities, particularly as we approach our 200th Anniversary. With *Hope* inspired by our history, we can devise implementation plans that embed the essence of Welcome, Accessibility, Technology and Connection in all aspects of our movement toward being a dynamic and growing presence for God in our community.

Strategic Priorities – Hope

1. Conduct another *Oral History* interview project before our 200th Anniversary celebrations.
2. Consider a second volume of *The Book of St. Andrew's*.
3. Complete a welcoming and accessible space dedicated to the congregation's history and archives.

NEXT STEPS

Strategic planning is not a one-time event. Strong, successful organizations have ongoing processes for reviewing progress, assessing changes to their communities, and updating their priorities. This report sets out what the Strategic Planning Committee considers are the most important strategies to act on today. Therefore, we recommend the following next steps:

- 1. Present this report to Session for its review and approval and for Session to determine the prioritization of the 19 Strategic Priorities.**
- 2. Distribute this report to the Associate Minister Search Committee to incorporate key findings and recommendations in the St. Andrew's Profile that committee is preparing.**
- 3. Have the Strategic Planning Committee work with Ministry Convenors and Committee Chairs to determine action steps to be taken to implement the selected strategies.**
- 4. Hold a meeting of the congregation in the Fall to discuss and welcome feedback on the Plan and the proposed action steps.**

CONCLUSION

The members of the Strategic Planning Committee are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the discussion, discernment, and consultation process, and for Tim Elliott's assistance. We hope this report sparks deliberate, serious consideration of its recommendations which, by focusing on Worship, Accessibility, Technology, Connection, and Hope will have us be **a dynamic and growing presence for God in our community.**

Appendix: GOALS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Worship: *Dynamic worship that glorifies God and builds faith in community.*

1. Renovate the chancel to enable its use as a chapel.
2. Implement additional forms of worship services that appeal to members and newcomers to our community of faith.
3. Implement a program that attracts, engages, and retains young adults and families.
4. Expand opportunities for adults of all ages to explore their faith (such as study groups).

Accessibility: *Open and adequate space for all people and programs.*

1. Make the chancel accessible to all people.
2. Explore ways to increase linguistic accessibility.
3. Contract outside expertise to identify ways to maximize the use of all space and make our facilities, programs and services accessible to all and available for church use.

Technology: *Technology that facilitates our purpose and presence*

1. Invest in better equipment for online options, while being mindful of potential unintended consequences such as creating separate online and in-person communities.
2. Form an Advisory Council on Technology (ACT) to monitor advances in social media, technology, and artificial intelligence, make recommendations to Session, and offer guidance on the appropriate use of social media and the positions required to successfully run a high-quality social media program.
3. Require further social media and technological training for members of our Ministry Team.
4. Provide ways to receive digital offerings during worship and church events.

Connection: *Dynamic connections that bring us together*

1. *Radical Hospitality*: deepen our greeting process with committed and organized follow-up and fellowship opportunities for new attendees.
2. Promote social activities to encourage, strengthen and deepen relationships within the congregation.
3. Reconsider using designated pastoral districts to maintain intentional connections.
4. Prioritize the demonstration of “Welcome” at both virtual and physical entry points, not only during worship services but also throughout all weekly activities.
5. Create a program that fosters community and relationship-building for young adults and families who worship with us and participate in our Outreach programs such as *Out of the Cold*, *The Better English Café*, and *SingTO*.

Hope: *Hope in the future inspired by honouring our past*

1. Conduct another Oral History interview project before our 200th Anniversary celebrations.
2. Consider a second volume of *The Book of St. Andrew's*.
3. Complete a welcoming and accessible space dedicated to the congregation's history and archives.



ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

KING & SIMCOE | TORONTO