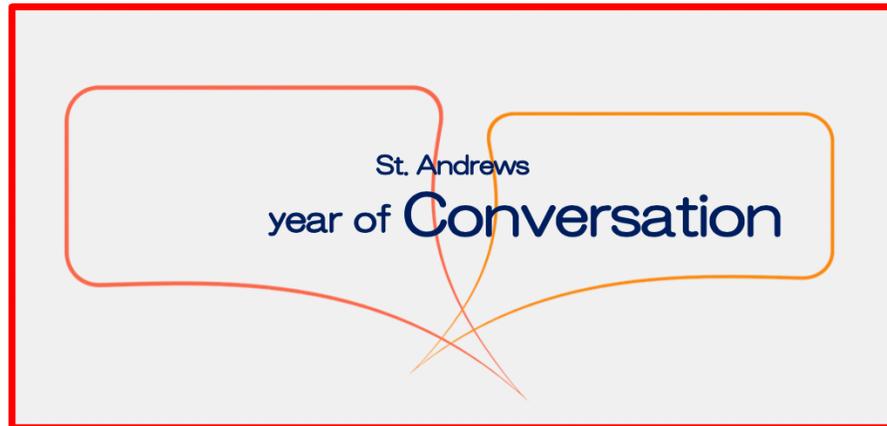


Saint Andrew's Year of Conversation

Discussion Groups Report

Round 3: January/February 2020



Process

Round 1: The 2018 Annual General Meeting included a presentation on the financial situation and development options for breakout discussion. Follow up discussion groups were held, with low turn-out.

Round 2: A large portion of the congregation participated in home-based or drop-in discussion groups in October/November 2019. Prior to the group sessions, participants were given a background summary document and option to access various supporting documents. Discussion groups ended with each participant responding to this question: **Do you direct St. Andrew's Council to issue an RFP for development options 1 and 3, as proposed by the Site Development Task Group?** There was near consensus in this directive, and Council received a full report on the findings on November 21, 2019. The report is available upon request.

Round 3: A replication of the Round 2 discussion groups was held January/February 2020 to explore meantime measures, with particular focus on addressing the deficit. Prior to the group sessions, participants were given a background summary document outlining financial

considerations. Discussion groups ended with each participant responding to this question: **Which of the following options should St. Andrew’s Council pursue in addressing the deficit?**

- Seek to reduce expenditure in all areas.
- Hold the quality of programming and services in balance and seek some reduction in expenditure.
- Maintain programming and services with little or no reduction in expenditure and seek increased efficiency and income.

15 small group discussions were held, facilitated by Susan and Russ, and attended by executive members of Council. Sessions typically opened with a short presentation by the facilitator, followed by open questions, discussions, and opinion sharing.

The groups will continue to meet throughout the development process for information sharing, discussion, and decision-making. The home-based approach allows flexible scheduling, shared responsibilities, and relationship building.

Overall Finding

A definitive majority of group participants direct the St. Andrew’s Council to hire an Executive Director, to replace the volunteer position currently occupied by Robbie Shaw. Participants are divided on the harvesting of funds from Minister salaries.

Of 88 participants

- 87 agree to hiring an Executive Director (ED)
- 1 disagrees to hiring an ED, preferring volunteer efforts in committee
- 1/3 of the total participants prefer the minister positions to remain at 100%
- 2/3 of the total participants are open to the minister positions being reduced to 90%, although opinions are more nuanced than simply yes or no.

Key Findings

Executive Director

There was resounding appreciation for the progress made under the leadership of Robbie Shaw, the work of Marilla MacLean, and the efforts of the Site Development Task Group, the Stewardship Committee, and the Building Committee. To ensure continued success, all but one agreed to replacing Robbie's volunteer role with a salaried Executive Director. A formal vote was not held on whether it should be a half-time or full-time position, however discussions generally turned to the assumption of half-time. There is an expectation that the Executive Director be involved in operational leadership, including visioning, strategizing, and problem-solving. For most, this includes engagement in the Site Development Process.

Minister's Positions

The question of reduced time for ministers generated substantive discussion. Many expressed concerns for the impact on the who and why and how of St. Andrew's, including worship, pastoral care, programming and outreach. Reduction to 80% is widely rejected. Reduction to 90% is acceptable to 2/3 of participants. Specific concerns fall into three categories:

- minister availability: how to meet the full spectrum of congregational needs.
- minister strengths, skill sets and call: currently balanced as a team, potentially unbalanced in the weeks of single ministry .
- minister retention or succession: implications are unknown.

For detailed comments, please see the final section of this report *Pulled from the Notes*.

Other Cost Cutting

The question of cost saving should extend beyond minister salaries. Questions were raised about all other staffing positions, with a common call to consider spending for contract musicians and part-time sextons. Linda's retirement in 2021 is seen as an opportunity to streamline administrative positions and costs. Meantime, there is satisfaction with the Office Administrator and Rental Manager work and expense.

An austerity budget is not of interest, but efficiency should be not be limited to staffing. Many see the merit of minor cost savings at every level, including administration, committee work, and property maintenance.

Timeline

In conversations most comments and decisions were framed in terms of one year. 2020 is seen by many to be a year to test staffing configurations and projected income. The need for a Needs Assessment was raised in several groups, but not all. Some propose an immediate start to the Needs Assessment, while others propose waiting for learnings from 2020 staffing and income. A few expressed fatigue or irritation at the prospect of ‘another’ Needs Assessment.

Ongoing Updates on Site Development

All groups spent time in Q and A about progress since the Round 2 conversations. Topics included the RFP process, maintenance/needs of the building, communications with the wider community and with other churches, rental experiences and prospects. Questions answered fully and honestly seemed to satisfy and instill trust. For this reason, transparency and communication should continue.

Process Learnings

A few things learned from Round 3.

- Fewer participants this round may be due to the topic (finance) and congregational availability (mid-winter travel, weather, full schedules for work/activities).
- Logistics of this approach are time consuming *and* worthwhile. Scheduling and communicating require significant administrative time. Attending Groups requires significant flexibility and time.
- A volunteer can manage the scheduling and communicating. Thanks to Andrea Harrison for her many hours of preparing, emailing, scheduling, and attention to detail.
- Home hosting distributes responsibilities, encourages ownership, and builds relationships. When asked, all hosts from Round 2 agreed to host Round 3.
- A member of St. Andrew’s Council should be in attendance (participant or observer) to answer questions and confirm findings.

Pulled from the Notes

The following are selected from every group that met. Simply representative, not comprehensive and in no particular order.

About the Deficit ...

“We’ve got to keep our mission in front of us always. There’s something here that is speaking to people.”

“Austerity budgets never work. In my years of government experience, we always found that across the board cutting creeps back and costs more in the long run.”

“Deficit reduction should be a 3- or 4-year plan.”

“I would like us to buy a year – carry the deficit – so we can do what’s right in terms of staffing. We don’t know what that is yet.”

“I am vehemently opposed to a cheese-cutting approach to the budget. I’ve seen it done and it always costs in the end. It also damages creativity and morale. Intentional and targeted changes are the only way to go. It may take time to do that right.”

“I don’t want to lose the focus on the spiritual / justice / Christian work. We are uniquely poised to sit at the intersection of being completely Christian and completely open. I don’t want that to get lost in the money talk.”

“Yes, we might need to eat another high deficit, but if you have a vision you need to invest in your vision. So, say to the congregation: we’ve heard you loud and clear; we’re not willing to get rid of Russ and Susan; this is the plan. Then give them 2- or 3-year plan.”

“Tell the congregation to trust you – you won’t move to serious cutting until we’re sure it’s the right thing. But also tell them: you want results? You have to step up!”

“You want us to cut costs? Volunteer! Time is money. If everyone volunteered two hours, we would save x amount of dollars.”

“I need a better cost – benefit analysis before I can agree to budget cuts. To me, that’s a year away, after we have an ED in place making changes and refinements.”

“Donating on-line is huge. It shows that you get how people live now. Great that the Stewardship Committee is making it happen.”

“Show the congregation where we’re reducing the cost. Give deliverables, and an action plan regarding all staff, and give concurrent findings on income. Like tonight, but more often.”

“The biggest asset you have is the people you have. The biggest asset is not the building or performance space. Continue to invest in the people.”

“I believe the rental incomes are going to get us where we need to be.”

“Do some theme fundraising: Appreciation Day for the Organ, Memorial Flowers in the Sanctuary, Support the ED for a Year. Be creative!”

“To do this right, the process of debt reduction could – should – take years.”

“We need to balance the risk of running out of money before we complete our transition versus the risk of not spending enough and losing our relevance and our people.”

“Operations expenditure should not be more than ministry/programmatic expenditure.”

“We should spend time figuring out what we need before we decide what to cut. I don’t think we’ve done nearly enough to know that yet.”

“People don’t have a reasonable understanding of what it takes / costs to run the church.”

“Small things add up. Please don’t just look at minister salaries. Bulletins for instance – stop printing. Heat and lights – get serious about turning them off. Office costs and committee costs – it’s just good practice and attitude. And even \$1000 matters.”

“First see if the projected increase in rentals and givings happens, then decide if ministers should be reduced.”

*“There needs to be a fundamental change in the culture of the church, where people give their time – volunteer time. We’re willing to do **this**, but you all need to do **this**”*

“I was surprised by the decision to increase sextons to \$15 per hour. It seemed to appear out of nowhere. This kind of decision making has probably contributed to the rising deficit.”

“I don’t agree with across the board cutting. Intentional cutting? Yes. If it takes more time – like a number of years? Okay.”

“I struggle with a deficit. It’s an albatross. It’s critical to get to a sustainable position. But that tells me we need an ED, because an ED is going to help us be sustainable.”

“Solving the deficit in one year is cutting your nose off to spite your face. We won’t have enough consistency to bring people through the door.”

*“One of the things about St. Andrew’s is that we don’t educate people about giving. We need to say, ‘We’re delighted that you’re coming, **and** this is one of the expectations we have of our people’.”*

“Everything should be up for grabs, not just the ministers’ salaries. Not like a total budget cut of 20%, but where else can we save?”

“A balanced budget doesn’t have to happen in a year. A plan is what I want to see.”

“This is the best meeting I’ve attended in all my years at St. Andrew’s.”

About an Executive Director ...

“We need to find an ED now, so that there isn’t a gap between Robbie’s departure and the new hire. We hate to see Robbie’s good work slip away in the transition.”

*“You staff **toward** what you need. We need money. Therefore, we need to staff for that need.”*

“It’s one thing to get rental contracts – it’s another thing to keep them. Marilla and an ED are very, very valuable. If renters have a good experience, they will stay, and they will spread the word. Reputation matters so much, and someone replacing Robbie is essential to that reputation.”

“Having a plan to get to sustainability in a few years is a must. The ED seems pretty important here.”

“The ED should watch the bottom line and revenue.”

“We should have a leadership committee – volunteer – to replace Robbie. We have a talented congregation.”

“The role Robbie has played has been so monumental and impactful.”

“Sometimes we come up with a job description, and there’s nobody who can actually do it. Be reasonable in the expectations of the ED.”

“We need an ED who is a strategic thinker, who can see the bigger picture and who has business experience.”

“We need a half-time ED for the kind of church we are now, and the kind of church we are becoming.”

Note: There were many more comments that said, in some form or another, *Yes, hire an ED.*

About Reductions in Staffing ...

“If you need it, a 90% reduction in salaries is a quick hit to show the congregation that you’re listening. I would say you also need to look at the music expenditure.”

“If you reduce the ministers and bring in a new ED, that is too many changes. It will reduce effectiveness and make the changes harder.”

“I really like that idea of morphing the two administrator positions into one, after Linda retires.”

“Council should focus on getting the right person in the ED position, and then look next year at refining staff. Ministers at 90% would be okay for this year – but let’s have a clearer understanding before we decide long-term.”

“Word in the community is that Marilla is fantastic to deal with.”

“I really like the idea of ministers at 90% who are focused on their skills and gifts.”

“Reducing the ministers may well help build the community. We default, and it’s to our detriment. I love when people get up and tell their stories in worship. I like it when other people lead the prayers. So interesting – and also moving. I wish more people offered small group things too.”

“Yes to 90%, but not a permanent change. Let’s reevaluate in a year.”

“Why a percentage of both ministers? Why not 80% for one and 100% for the other? Who decided that?”

“If there are cuts to ministry time, let the outside work be more impacted than the congregation and mission. I mean the work with other congregations or at other locations.”

“Let’s do 90% ministers and see how the congregation adjusts.”

“The strength of this church is Susan, Russ and Kevin. I’m really struggling with the need to reduce their time.”

“My concern is that if you cut ministers, and finances don’t turn around, then you will end up losing the ministers. Also, is one of them leaves, then who will you attract?”

“The ministers are offering to pay half the salary of another staff person. Shouldn’t that be more evenly shared by all staff?”

“Linda’s retirement is an opportunity. That, along with a drop in the ministers salaries and an ED will get us there – I mean will get us to where we need to be. Not necessarily a balanced budget, but a sustainable deficit.”

“It is probably a luxury to have two ministers. I don’t know any other church that has two full time ministers. Let’s pilot and see how we do with less for a year.”

“80% would be okay for a year. But only a year.”

“This church is generous to its musicians. If we weren’t dealing with a deficit, that would be okay. But we are, and so it’s not. Kevin is definitely needed. The others on contract should be carefully considered.”

“Council must hold staff accountable. Efficiency, yes. Also, ministers attending to the congregation as much as – actually more than – outside interests.”

“I feel so blessed that we have Russ and Susan. Maybe if we reduce their hours, we can at least keep both of them.”

“We should be clear: 1.6 ministers rather than a percentage reduction. A percentage hides the impact.”

“The development is going to take time from everybody. Three years from now we better have our staffing in good order. What are the core activities we will be providing and dealing with then?”

“Let the ED find efficiencies and help manage the budget. Let the ministers minister.”

“There’s no way Russ can be 80% and away from the congregation so much. Even 90%, he’ll have to compromise his external work.”

“The offer of 90% is a signal to the congregation that the ministers are willing to work with us on this financial need.”

“If the ministers are 90% the congregation should give another 10% to ministry type work. Maybe help with worship or visiting or coffee and hospitality?”

“I hate to cut the ministers.”

“I’m on the fence. 90% is preferable, but it doesn’t get us there in terms of deficit reduction.”

“We should rethink the \$10,000 to musicians.”

“If ministers reduce their time, then SASI should be a lower priority than the congregation.”

“Does the compensation fit the hours being given? Russ? Susan? Kevin? I guess I’d like a Needs Assessment.”

“If the quality and the care go down, and nobody comes in, then we’re not okay.”

“I adore the music we have here, but maybe we can’t afford it. At least not the extent of it.”

“Moving toward a model that has staff other than the ministers is a huge step in the right direction.”