

WEST END COLLEGIATE CHURCH
THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

2008-2011

We are “a neighborhood church for all people”... “a strongly relational culture”...
“a small town in a big city”...

Our Mission

West End Collegiate Church is a visible, welcoming congregation that helps people love and understand God. Through worship, service and education, we seek to apply the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible in today’s world.

Our Vision

In keeping with our mission, West End envisions an inviting church that supports people in their spiritual journey through worship, education and service.

Our vision is to communicate the love and grace of Jesus Christ. We are a family of faith who come together to provide spiritual growth opportunities in education, worship and personal ministry. By adopting this vision, we commit ourselves to increase awareness of activities within the church, to rehabilitate physically our worship and fellowship spaces and to visibly increase membership through new approaches to evangelism. We seek to manifest the promise of Christ, “that by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

Introduction

During the process of creating a strategic plan, significant events occurred independently of our plan and will have major implications for our vision and the future of West End Collegiate Church. We are presently in a place of creative energy with an exciting opportunity to purchase property to be used for a parsonage and/or additional meeting space for staff and congregation, the beginning of an architectural assessment of renovation and space enhancement for the West End Collegiate Church building, and the continued discussions with Collegiate School about navigating our shared needs for space. Among the staff changes are the recent departure of our Associate Pastor, the resignation of the Director of the Playschool for the 2008-2009 school year, the anticipated retirement of the Director of the Ministry of Music after over 50 years of service, and most significantly, the announcement that our Pastor will retire effective July 1, 2008 after 40 years devoted to West End Collegiate Church.

Although these staff changes are major losses for a congregation, our Minister remains a vital and active spiritual leader and is invested in our envisioning process. Our Director of Music has graciously agreed to remain for an extended period to assist us in the transition of our music program, an emblem of pride and priority for many in our congregation. Search committees are presently being organized for a new playschool director, a transition plan for the minister of music, an interim minister and, following a period of an interim ministry, an installed minister. With these considerations, we present our three-year strategic plan recommendations.

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

Based on the self-evaluation studies, research projects and insights from the congregation, the Envisioning Guiding Task Force has identified “key elements” of our ministry, which if successfully addressed, will ensure a vital, secure, and spiritual future for West End Collegiate Church.

COMMUNITY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

A Percept analysis of our demographic profile was prepared for West End Collegiate Church and indicated that 78% of the residents in our Upper West Side neighborhood are considered to be “affluent educated urbanites.” The ethnic population of the neighborhood has changed over the last decade becoming less diverse with 77% Caucasian, and the census continues to decrease for all ethnic groups except Asians, which is expected to increase by 12% between 2006-2011.

In our neighborhood, the largest representative age group is between 25 and 45 years and the family structure is predominantly “non-traditional” where married persons and two-parent households are below the national average. This population is generally “un-churched” with low religious affiliation. The overall education level is very high with 93% having graduated from High School and 73% graduating from college. The average income is \$137,000. Interestingly, according to a New York Times article (March 23, 2007), the number of children under the age of 5 living in Manhattan has mushroomed by more than 32% recently and these families tend to be wealthy and white. In fact, the median income was recently readjusted to \$187,000 from \$143,000 in 2005.

From the Percept findings, the major interests in this community are finding companionship, assuring social justice, seeking life direction, addressing racial/ethnic prejudice, a satisfying job and career, and time for recreation and leisure. In terms of church preferences, this population ranked the following items the highest: cultural programs, spiritual retreats, theological discussion groups, food resources, 12-Step Programs, global missions and intellectual worship.

Recommendations

- Within the coming year, we recommend that WECC develop and pilot a program for parents of toddlers. Such a program could be integrated into the Playschool and help attract more young families and service the needs of the neighborhood.
- Another step would be for West End to design programs and support groups for young parents and for single and same-sex parents, all of which would be open to neighborhood residents.

CULTURE, VALUES AND IDENTITY

The congregation of West End Collegiate Church prides itself on being a community which is friendly, welcoming and embracing to all people. This is a relational church where its members have strong and individual relationships with each other and our Minister. There has been a comfort in the size of the congregation, which maintains this close feeling of a “small town in a big city” but ironically, this comfort zone can also function as a barrier to growth and limit community outreach, causing us to miss out on new energy for our church.

Our congregation is educated, professionally diverse, and artistic. It is accepting of different viewpoints and styles; respects the intellectual and individual spiritual journeys of others; values intellectual stimulation and challenges surrounding issues of faith, the Bible and spiritual well being; is committed to children; and expresses interest in a more diverse membership in age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and social and economic backgrounds.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

During a time of change, communication is especially important in maintaining psychological stability and cohesion through disseminating accurate information on a regular basis. Since the majority of our members have varying degrees of computer literacy, it was our conclusion that an investment by the church in electronic communication, advertising and marketing would dramatically lift our goal of enhancing our visibility in the community. To achieve some of our goals, WECC will need to evaluate our outreach efforts to increase visits from and engagement with our neighbors.

Recommendations

- Implement email communication for dissemination of information to members and between members of WECC.
- Create a Communications Committee with a designated staff person having oversight.
- Create an advertising and marketing task force that will be our liaison with the Collegiate Church Communications Committee for purpose of developing a strategy for WECC, which would focus on publicizing service projects, activities, benevolences and events for the community.
- Contract a consultant or train a staff member with skills for website design and maintenance to enhance site and coordinate with CCC site.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Music and worship are of paramount importance to everyone at WECC. However, we are clear that one style does not fit all. There is general agreement that the congregation will embrace experimentation and support mixtures of styles including classical, jazz, ethnic, gospel, praise and worship styles in our services as long as we do not supplant the traditional music style.

Recommendations

A music transition committee has been created to plan for the retirement of our Minister of Music. In collaboration with him, the committee will assess the skills and talents required for his successor as well as create a plan for the change in music leadership. We also recommend that the committee explore varied use of sanctuary space and present a transition plan for the next Minister of Music.

The music program could also potentially include utilizing the musical and dramatic gifts of the church members during worship services, concerts and other events.

EDUCATION

The adult congregation is hungry to learn and values an intellectual, stimulating and challenging educational program. Most adults are very satisfied with the Wonder Hour curriculum; however they want more of it and a more varied program. Young adults identified several topics and issues that are of special interest to them in their stage of life. The children requested more music, drama and action in learning, while the teens expressed the need to do short-term focused service projects, artistic creations and a space “of their own” for recreation and projects, meetings and discussions.

Recommendations

Adult Education

- Further fuse the practical application with the theoretical and intellectual in the curriculum, addressing the different knowledge levels of Bible study and discussion.
- Continue to create a variety of education series that is accessible to all.
- Education Committee to explore ways to advertise our Wonder Hour to the broader neighborhood community.
- Consider advertising and reaching out to the community by coordinating events with guest speakers outside of Sunday’s Wonder Hour time.
- Create an Intersections liaison team to ensure representation and collaboration between West End and Intersections and our other churches; collaborate with Intersections on social witness activities and communicate regularly with the congregation on the progress of Intersections’ programs and potential opportunities for West End members.

Children's Education

- WECC to hire a part-time music and youth group director to assist Director of Youth and Education with the pre-teens to early teens
- Expand on the success of Kids' Night and experiment with programs for younger children.
- Develop the high school teen's program by creating a designated space to be used for classes and projects and is appropriate for homecoming college youths. It is recommended that the church invest in video/film and other electronic equipment that are age appropriate and conducive to creative and spiritual expression for this age group.
- Create a Youth for Action team to implement community service projects, charity and social justice programs appropriate for their age range.

WEST END COLLEGIATE PLAYSCHOOL

Historically, the Playschool has enjoyed an excellent reputation and maintained a stable enrollment of 60 children annually who generally live in the neighborhood. The school is strategically placed for the emerging young population in the community.

Over the years the Playschool, along with other church-affiliated nursery schools and ongoing schools, has moved toward more independence from the church. However, Consistory has affirmed the importance of the playschool as a core program of the church and wants it to remain as an important asset for the neighborhood and a possible conduit to meet neighborhood families. Consistent and strong leadership is important for the continued success of the school. A search committee for a new playschool director has been formed to replace the current director who will not be returning for the 2008-2009 school year. The timeline parallels other transitions for West End Collegiate Church and the committee will have an opportunity to enhance and further improve this important program during the search process.

Recommendations

The Playschool is considered a valuable church program for WECC and should be cultivated, enriched and assessed for expansion in the future. In the coming year, we anticipate the new director will help make the school a strong, viable program of the church.

The following should be re-examined, reassessed, revised and strengthened:

- Playschool mission
- Governance issues including administrative and board structure, board membership and by-laws, supervision and oversight.

Initiate a more visible WECC presence in the school by permanently incorporating a story-telling program for the children presently spearheaded by the Director of Youth Education.

Incorporate the Playschool into the church communications and advertising/marketing strategy.

The Playschool advisory committee, WECC staff and WECC Consistory should initiate a needs and feasibility study on the establishment of a toddler program and/or expansion of daytime school hours for the future.

SERVICE AND PROGRAMS

WECC has a genuine and deep commitment to stable and continuing education programs (Wonder Hour, book clubs, tutoring etc.), service (Stephen's Ministries, community service, Supper Center, Saturday Center, yoga, etc), peace and social justice, worship and prayer, benevolences, and music and performing arts. However, coordination and oversight of the committees that operate the programs has been casual and in some situations has challenged the success of the program. In 2007, WECC had 51 staff and/or volunteer run programs and committees.

In our view, spiritual growth is connected to service. In service, we are transformed through those whom we help and connect with our own feelings through the giving of ourselves. This is a congregation that values volunteerism and service but also wants a greater variety of opportunities in which to volunteer.

Recommendations

- Recruit and utilize volunteers in an effective way to provide meaningful service.
- Establish and support leadership development training for members who are interested and/or identified to have the interest and skills.
- Organize short-term community service projects that are diverse and available to various age groups.
- This spring, design and incorporate service projects into a special program that will be a gift and legacy for our Pastor upon his retirement.
- Expand the tutoring program by providing additional training and support.
- Create linkage agreements and collaborations with community-based organizations in the neighborhood for service projects, e.g. Hudson Guild.

WECC to hire two additional staff members within the next three years:

- Director of Membership and Small Group Ministries who will develop and expand membership recruitment, create engagement strategies for new members, supervise and oversee service and community programs, assume some volunteer support role, and develop leadership among the congregation. Recruitment and hire for this position should be completed by early winter 2008.

- Volunteer Coordinator who would: recruit and train volunteers, coordinate and facilitate leadership development, develop and consolidate programming, collaborate to formalize and clarify structure and mission of committees, cultivate linkages and service relationships within the community with other programs, e.g. Hudson Guild, West End Intergenerational Residence, and provide overall supervision of programs and nurture volunteerism at WECC. The need for this position will be determined by our development and growth. It is projected that WECC may require a volunteer coordinator toward the end of 2010.

FINANCE AND GIVING

Collegiate Church congregations are blessed with a unique financial footing and security. However, these assets support only a portion of the operating budget of our four congregations. Increasing the annual budget of WECC to meet our envisioning goals cannot be achieved without a major portion of this spending being funded by increased annual giving. Historically, it has been difficult to raise the giving levels of the membership. Annual giving has remained steady over the past 5 years (between \$200,000 and \$250,000). Based on the demographics of our community and congregation, giving levels appear low with 27 families making up 75% of the total annual giving.

We believe that one of the key factors in the low level of annual giving is a lack of clarity amongst our members about how funds are allocated from the corporation versus funds raised locally. There is evidence to suggest that when members give more, they are more likely to become more active in the church governance and its programs.

Recommendations

WECC should help the Stewardship Committee develop a short-term and long-term strategy of projected financial need for the next 3 to 5 years. More frequent financial meetings might help “demystify” and more accurately communicate financial information about WECC as well as the Collegiate Church Corporation. Assess the possibility of providing members with a user-friendly annual report on how and why monies were spent and have concrete fund-raising goals which are project oriented.

BUILDINGS/GROUNDS/SPACE/CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

There is strong support among members and staff that WECC needs more space for administration offices, meetings, events, storage, kitchen, and recreation. Some current spaces need renovation, more meeting space is needed, and handicap accessibility to church space other than the sanctuary have been identified as priorities by congregation members.

Recommendations

WECC Consistory should continue to support the Capital Improvement Advisory Committee to work with staff and the congregation in designing a plan for better use of

the church building in timeline phases with the current stated priorities. WECC should continue to work with the architectural consultant to help us plan for space in the future by assessing and redesigning existing space, planning future take-back space from the Collegiate School, and recommending and designing phases of renovation and improvement.

Space considerations and allocation must especially take into account the following:

- Expansion of Small Group Ministries and Service programs
- Teen and youth meeting and recreation space
- Parsonage
- An expanding tutoring program with any needed equipment

Within the next year, the CIAG, in conjunction with the church's administrative staff and Collegiate Church Corporation, will seek out and negotiate opportunities for purchasing real estate property to be used for off-site space and/or a parsonage.

COLLEGIATE SCHOOL

The Church founded the school in 1628, and the relationship between the Collegiate School for Boys and the Collegiate Church Corporation was officially altered in 1941. Since then the two organizations have been connected by small service programs and religious education and through school board representation by CCC and WECC members. Most importantly, the school and WECC have utilized and shared common building space over the years. Much of the space utilized by the high school that is contiguous to the WECC chapel, is due to be returned to WECC in a staged delivery over the next 21 years. This is a key part of the strategic planning for both our organizations in the future.

Recommendations

- WECC has appointed a WECC member to represent the interests of WECC in meetings with the Board of Trustees of Collegiate School in the negotiations around building space.
- The WECC Consistory will continue plans for the return and utilization of the school space for the church.
- In consideration of the long relationship and leadership forged by our Minister, the need to continue this tradition and strengthen the relationship with enhanced communication is especially needed. We recommend a continued open dialogue between the Consistory and Collegiate Board members to assess and evaluate the possibilities of sharing both space and program opportunities.

STAFFING AND ADMINSTRATIVE SUPPORT

Staffing should be evaluated in the context of the needs of the church. During a time of major multiple transitions, compounded by scheduled capital improvement projects and

the purchase of a new property, staff will carry a significant burden as they reallocate talent and resources to adapt to new needs and fill vacuums.

In order to accomplish the goals set forth in our plan, we will need to hire additional staff. However, we should be mindful that increasing staff and creating new positions will shake the status quo and may be counterproductive and contribute to more stress on staff. It will be important to evaluate, prioritize and sequence the hiring of new staff in the context of evidence of need and financial capacity to support.

Recommendations

We recommend a full-scale analysis of our staffing needs for the present and a projection and time-line for the next three years. In view of the expansion of participation in programs and services and the anticipated growth for WECC, it is recommended that WECC initiate a search and hiring of the following additional staff:

- Youth Music Director (PT) was hired in December 2007.
- Facilities Supervisor (FT) to oversee day-to-day construction on take-over space as well as manage and supervise church and new property. To be hired within six months.
- Director of Membership Development and Small Group Ministries (FT) to be hired within 6-8 months.
- Receptionist/Office Assistant (PT eve/weekend). Need for staff position to be evaluated within 3-6 months.
- Volunteer Coordinator (FT/see Programs and Service). Need for staff position to be evaluated within 18 months.
- Associate Minister. Need for position to be evaluated after hire of installed minister.

In Conclusion...

The members of the Envisioning Guiding Task Force hope you feel the enthusiasm we have felt as we look forward to planning for our future at West End Collegiate Church. This was a challenge and a privilege and we were honored to have the opportunity to experience the heart of our church and congregation in a very unique way. During each phase of our projects and processes, we were conscious to uphold the dreams and visions of our church through the congregations' eyes for our future. This has been a challenging journey as we prematurely felt the passion, fear, excitement and anxiety that accompany change. However, in the end, we are more resolved than when we began. West End Collegiate Church is a very gifted, loving and faithful community who care deeply about our congregational well being and living our lives close to the way Jesus would want.

The members of the EGTF want to thank the Collegiate Church Consistory for this exceptional opportunity. We also want to thank our consultant, Alice Mann of the Alban Institute, for her acute insight and foresight, her gentle challenges and very skillful

guidance through this journey. She helped us evaluate our course when needed and to always keep the needs of the whole of our congregation in mind.

We want to thank the members of our consistory and church staff for their consistent support and generosity. And finally, we want to thank the members of our congregation for sharing their histories, their courage to speak out, their skepticisms and enthusiasms, and their wisdom. All of these make West End Collegiate Church a special place to be. We thank you all.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth Gorsuch, Naomi Niles, Craig Russell, Anne Todd, Susan Xenarios