

## Interviews with Community Leaders

Interviews with selected community leaders and business owners. Mainly concentrated in Newtown, but includes Southbury and Danbury. Includes First Selectman; business owners; High School Principle; Community Services Directors; active volunteer in local organization; economic development coordinators.

**1. Challenges:** Challenges noted are significant and continuing. It is observed that birth rate is decreasing, school age children is decreasing, there is a general graying of the population and increase in families without children. Generally it was felt that Newtown and the church community are not directly serving and helping these groups as we see these changes. Add that the financial burdens continue and you can see that we are not drawing younger families to Newtown and that the elder population continues to ask the question whether it is time to leave. We are seeing an increase in drug issues, growth in single parent families and an ageing infrastructure and we can see mounting issues. It was also mentioned that Newtown does not have an all encompassing mission or vision, so while there seems to be tremendous activity, it is not always linked and we are not unifying our community. Some specifics:

**Implications:** Trinity needs to find new/more ways to serve the aging population, and not relying on families with children to be our backbone. As well, it is clear that the issues of kids today (drugs, etc.) are increasing, and the challenges of single parents and younger parents continue and are increasing, so we must find ways to reach these groups and invite them into Trinity and find ways to serve their needs.

**2. Quality of Life:** The quality of life assessment I got from reading the interviews was certainly mixed. There were pockets of good (and generally these were greater) and pockets of not so good. It was commented, that when not so good – folks leave Newtown as we do not offer needed support. Families with school age children generally had higher quality of life than those without children. I observed that some feel we let local folks who need help drop through the cracks and that our formal and informal support services are not sufficient.

**Implications:** We need to find ways to reach those feeling like they are left without a safety net and/or support from the community. This seems to be a growing group (high school youth, young families, elder families, etc) and we need to find ways to reach them. As 'standard' Sunday services and the needs of a larger parish (substantial giving) may be driving them away, or not be inviting, we need to address how to bring these individuals to Trinity and better meet their needs.

**3. Trends:** The general trend was to the 'graying' of the population, and notably that the community is not doing enough to support this age group. If I look across all comments, it was also felt that the younger population does not feel invited. Financially, we live in a community with a very high cost of living and a town with very high tax rates, so folks are being driven away, and new ones not coming as fast as we want. Some comments suggest an emerging change to the economy and some positive news, but still not strong.

**Implications:** We need to find ways to reach the significant changing demographics. The graying of the population will leave us with a decreasing parish family, and insufficient resources to support our current programs, which may not be needed, or necessary to support the new demographic needs. It appears that Trinity is inviting to the gray population, as this is how many grew up, but not so to the younger population. We need to find ways to 'invite' the younger population, while supporting the needs of our graying population and still be financially viable as we move into this new focus. Our internal Trinity leadership may also be 'graying'. We need to bring more folks into leadership positions who better match the demographics of the future Newtown. This will mean we may need to give up some sacred cows, become inviting and valuing to significantly different ways of thinking, and importantly, need to offer leadership positions that are not so demanding as the ones we have now in terms of time commitment.

**4. Are Organizations and Churches helping?:** This was generally viewed as a positive. Churches are looking to help and offer themselves. There is this lack of a common vision/mission and not a unifying approach. Resources and programs split between Trinity and St. Johns may not be the most effective and may not be meeting the broader needs of community as fully as possible.

**Implications:** We need to find our way back into leadership in the community and working with other churches and the local governments, work to develop a common mission and vision for the community, and then have this drive the specific focus internal to Trinity. This will be very challenging, but will both support the local community and Trinity.

Trinity, St. John's and Diocese need to develop a plan for the respective parishes and if and how to incorporate St. John's and their ministries in the vision Trinity is developing.

**5. Trinity, and/or other churches:** Trinity and other churches in general need to continue what they are doing but increase focus on the local community. It was noted that this needs to be in concert and together, versus independent, to best tackle

challenges and to better unify the community. Get out there in local organization. Focus more on community and less on parish. More outreach in Newtown

**Implications:** Trinity may need to look to move outreach (ideally visible and inviting) local to our own community. We need to find ways to use our resources to better serve our community, and be visible in that work. As a simple example, maybe we create a tuition grant process for TDS, to both support TDS and actions and meet needs of young families.

**6. Ideas:** Many great ideas. Most typically focused on the local community, and seem to have a theme of unifying the community and helping locally. Some specific ideas:

- Food/Clothing Gathering and donation process
- Taize service noted – can we do more
- Annual town wide picnic – partner with new firehouse
- Clear vision and associated actions and link to Newtown
- Be involved in community, not just parish
- Local outreach
- Help establish a local community mission with Town and other churches
- Consider alternative options to move away from the already busy Sunday mornings
- Help with addressing drug and alcohol use, especially with youth
- Participation and development of secular events
- Continue, and increased, use of Trinity Day School

**Implications:** As per above, we need to be willing to take on, and lead/co-lead some of these programs that bring more folks into Trinity and critically make us more aware of the needs of the community around us. We may need to be more open to failure and learn, versus guaranteed for success. Some of these ideas may/may not work, but we can learn from them.