

Trinity Identity

1. Historical Continuity: Trinity has been in existence for over 280 years serving Newtown and the surrounding area. It is a well-established institution in the community and appears to have a good reputation among longer-term residents. Over this time, Trinity has been successful adapting its life and ministry to serve within its ever-changing context. Although it has “village church” roots, it has increasingly developed a more regional ministry.

Implications: Trinity has demonstrated capacity to change with the times in terms of serving its community without compromising its core identity as an Episcopal church with a more traditional/liturgical style of ministry. It would appear that Trinity may be at another key turning point in needing to re-contextualize in translating its ministry to a new generation of residents, many of whom are not as familiar with the Christian faith, in general, and the Episcopal faith tradition, in particular.

2. Suffering and Healing: Trinity has a ministry with a demonstrated track record of helping people heal and connect with God. Being a place of refuge is potentially a profound way of walking with the larger community. In its history, Trinity has suffered as a whole in a variety of ways during extreme losses over the past several decades; organist (inappropriate behavior), long time Pastor—Frank Dunn—leaving (turnover), Greg Carlson Bancroft (inappropriate behavior), the passing of several of our young persons, the 9/11 tragedy, and the Sandy Hook tragedy.

Implications: Trinity’s ability to “walk with people through suffering” as a critical part of its core identity and is a great strength. It would be helpful to explore how this strength might be utilized to develop further ministry in the community to those who are outside of any church who are hurting or who are marginalized.

3. Youth: Trinity puts a strong emphasis on youth, nurturing their faith as well as including youth in parish leadership, programs and worship. The youth are missed when not present. In its recent history, Trinity’s Youth Program experienced a successful growth pattern when it had a paid staff along with a large number of committed parents on the Youth Commission and Newtown was in a growth mode. However, history shows that a paid staff, dedicated to youth, does not ensure a successful program, since other components are needed for success. In general, it is perceived that Trinity has always had a strong youth program, however, that perception is starting to erode in the face of a declining youth program.

Implications: With the number of youth now being lower within the current membership, Trinity needs to explore whether it can use this historical ministry strength to reach out into the larger community to connect with youth who do not have a church home or a faith experience.

4. Property: Per Vestry's mandate to the Visioning Team, Trinity's sanctuary is a non-negotiable, meaning that it must remain after the work of Visioning in 2015 as the key location of Trinity as a Church. Since the mid-1960s, Trinity has built a "Curate House," bought a house and property adjacent to the parking lot on Church Hill, (provide low income rent), demolished that house, formed a committee to evaluate Rector's house, and rebuilt the barn after a fire. Most recently the Church Hill property was sold to Newtown Hook & Ladder Fire Co.

Implications: It appears that all of Trinity's properties are negotiable except for the Church building. The Visioning Team needs to explore what additional changes to the current property and buildings might be advantageous for enhancing ministry going forward.

5. Financial: Trinity has a financial history of struggling from time-to-time and the financial pressures that we feel in 2015 would not be unfamiliar to any era in Trinity's history, recorded as far back as 1882. It is important to note that the Capital Campaign for the Restoration of the Church in 2000, was a financial success. However, financial concerns arose following the plan to invest in growth and additional funds were taken from the endowments starting in 2005 to cover costs during the anticipated growth period, with the intent for these funds to be paid back. But this has not yet occurred.

Implications: It is critical for Trinity to "live within its means" in terms of developing a realistic budget based on current giving, though promoting financial stewardship might be an additional component to implementing this approach.

6. Ministry Approach that is Open and Respectful of Diversity: Trinity is a faith community that provides many opportunities to look outward to the larger community. This is expressed in a strong desire among many of Trinity's members to serve and to give, who have a track record of doing so. This is rooted in Trinity being a prayerful community. It is expressed in Trinity being open to and respectful of diversity.

Implications: This is a great strength that the Visioning Team needs to carefully consider how to leverage for further engagement with the larger community in connecting with people, especially with those outside of the church.

7. Casting Vision and Engaging in Long Range Planning: Trinity has a history in recent years of casting vision and engaging in long range planning. However, it has tended to develop somewhat of a reactive posture since 2008 with declining revenue that also led to staff reductions.

Implications: Trinity is well beyond the last long range plan and in need of once more investing in vision and planning that is based on an honest assessment of our current realities, both within the church and within the regional area we seek to serve.

8. Developing Ministries and Programs: Developing and adding programs has been one of Trinity's strengths over the past several decades. However, it has now become one of our biggest challenges and somewhat of a weakness due to insufficient funds, reduced staff, and fewer lay leaders to support our ever expanding ministries and programs.

Implications: The Visioning Team needs to develop clarity regarding the following: (a) the type of ministry approach required for moving into the future, and (b) the size and scale of this ministry approach in terms of what can be supported by volunteers, staff, and available funds.