

# Strategic Plan for Episcopal Church of The Advent

June 16, 2021

## Executive Summary

The Episcopal Church of the Advent (Advent) located in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, had experienced a reduction in the congregation back in 2014. Over the ensuing years the congregation has begun to grow under the leadership of Rector Nancy Hauser.

Advent, like many church bodies, has an aging congregation and has experienced limited growth over the last few years. The COVID pandemic has added further strain on church life as we know it. While the pandemic forced Advent to leap into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by embracing technology to broadcast services and leverage ZOOM to maintain fellowship opportunities, it is too soon to know the true impact the pandemic will have on church attendance once we are able to resume in-person gatherings. Advent remains concerned about prospects for growth.

At this time, it is prudent for Advent to formalize where it wants to go in the post-pandemic environment and the steps needed to get there. In view of this, the Vestry appointed a committee to develop a Strategic Growth Plan (SGP), and the following outlines the potential areas Advent may look to in order to grow its congregation in 2022. Plans for congregational growth will be captured within a formal Business Development Plan (BDP) that will lay out how the Strategic Growth Plan will be implemented. This will ensure Advent's focus on congregational growth to strengthen and sustain our church in 2022 forward.

The Strategic Planning Committee has developed a SGP, outlining target populations for growth defining core activities that will outline who Advent is and how it will support the community. It is realized that the execution of the SGP will be a multi-phased project spread over several years. Therefore, the SGP has only identified a broad outline for

congregational growth and will leave decisions on the implementation of said plan to be captured within the Business Development Plan to be executed by a Business Development Planning Committee. This committee will be composed of current congregational members who can bring the strategic growth plan to life, drawing from their time and talents.

## **I. Vision Statement**

The strategic plan for Advent aims to create a comfortable, visionary worship plan to entice people to join our church. The plan will be based on six major tenets as follows:

1. Worship plan with modern input aimed at young and old congregants, open to all individuals seeking a committed church home no matter their race, creed, or lifestyle.
2. Worship supported by music leveraging multiple genres, to include a bell choir, adult, and youth choirs.
3. Educational/fellowship activities to entice younger membership, as well as programs aimed at the adult congregation to enable growth in faith.
4. Strong outreach programming to benefit the community both financially and with direct “sweat equity” support.
5. Continuing to grow the streamed and recorded services developed during the pandemic and seek opportunities to further expand and leverage this platform to provide online education and informational programming.
6. Seek to enhance Advent’s Fellowship options to ensure current congregants and newcomers, alike, have fun as well as enjoying top class worship.

## **II. Advent Business Summary**

The primary business of Advent consists of the following missions:

- Making Christ Visible
- Changing Lives

- Making a Difference in the community to bring peace, fellowship, understanding and access to all colors and creeds enabling worship together at our church.

### **III. Strategic Planning Committee**

The core team members of the Advent Strategic Planning Committee are as follows:

1. Rev. Dr. Nancy Hauser, Rector
2. Dave Scott, Senior Warden
3. Bill Garrett, Junior Warden
4. Cindy Rebind, Vestry Member
5. Hannah Ridic, Vestry Member

### **IV. Strategic Planning Analysis**

*Where are we as a Church?*

Advent has been in existence for over 135 years providing the greater Kennett Square, PA community with Episcopal church services. We currently have a congregation of 180 and offer an array of services to the congregation encompassing Worship, Education and Christian Fellowship.

In 2014, we suffered a significant loss in congregational numbers as Advent experienced a change in Rectors. Since then, we have had limited growth and as noted previously Advent's congregation is aging as evidenced by an average congregant age of sixty-five.

Our youth membership has declined, which will require a targeted focus in growing the number of younger families, as well as those young adults on the verge of starting families. Advent is lucky to have a very generous endowment specifically established to support youth programming, but we need to grow this demographic segment if we are to put these funds to beneficial use.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Advent is to be a congregation that makes Christ's presence visible in the world as the symbol of God's redemptive love for all humanity.

The following words represent a living statement of the values that direct our lives as a parish community, shape our relationships with one another, and inspire our efforts to fulfill our mission in the community as The Episcopal Church of the Advent.

*We value spiritual growth and maturing in our faith in an atmosphere of openness and acceptance.*

*We value a church family that is welcoming and provides a sense of community.*

*We value a spirit of generosity that enables us to reflect Christ's love to others.*

*We value spiritual guidance and leadership provided by both clergy and lay people.*

*We value our interpersonal relationships with our clergy and each other and our personal relationship with Christ.*

*We value active ministries in the church, in the community, and in the world around us.*

*We value the tradition and histories of our faith, our church, and our people.*

## **Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

The committee did an analysis of the **SWOT** position of Advent trying to determine the **Strengths**, which will allow Advent to achieve its Strategic Goals, the **Weaknesses** of Advent that may impede growth, the **Opportunities** that may exist to enable our growth at Advent, and the **Threats** that need to be contemplated in the development of a growth plan.

### **Strengths**

Financial stability, strong clergy leadership, strong music culture, progressing outward giving program, location and access, attractive and

functional campus, COVID defensive moves, large car park, commercial grade kitchen, digital resources.

### **Weaknesses**

Cultural resistance to organized religion, aging congregation, inability to attract younger families, political differences, limited congregational demographic – largely white, college educated professionals, congregational cliques, and congregant “burn-out” (20% of the people do 80% of the work).

### **Opportunities**

Catholic worshipers who have become disillusioned by Catholic leadership, other churches experiencing disillusionment by parishioners – first to react may get early growth. Target members who left Advent in the past ten years, increased outreach in retirement communities, increased outreach to area schools. Leverage the recent investment in streaming and recording technology to take Advent beyond the immediate community. Seek ways to encourage that population to donate in support of Advent programming online.

### **Threats**

Adverse demographics – core congregation growing older and youth congregation growing leaner, impact of COVID pandemic – will congregation rebound? As a midsized church can we compete against mega churches in the region? The next generation is growing weary and wary of organized religion.

## **V. Regional Demographics for the immediate area surrounding Kennett Square.**

Advent draws congregants from the townships surrounding Kennett Square located in Southern Chester County and just over the state border in Delaware. Within the area bounded by Birmingham Township to the north, West Marlborough Township to the West, New London Township

to the South, and Hockessin, DE to the east there is a population of about 45,000 to draw congregation from, all within a 30-minute drive.

Chester County is rated as the wealthiest county in Pennsylvania and the area surrounding Kennett Square encompasses many of the wealthiest townships in Chester County. Unemployment has been historically low in the state with a median percentage of 2.4%, and with a median population below the poverty level of just under 3% in the Townships deemed to feed Advents congregation.

Median household incomes range from \$65,000 to \$115,000 per township, and median individual wages range from \$25,000 to \$60,000 per township. The median incomes are impacted by the large Hispanic population which is resident in this area of Chester County due to mushroom farming, raising of thoroughbred horses, and agricultural businesses prevalent in the area. This is also a driver for the poverty level data.

The racial breakdown in the region around Kennett Square is 71% white population, 19.2 % Hispanic population and 5.5% black population.

## **VI. Advent – Suggested Strategy for Growing the Congregation**

The following are areas that the Strategic Growth Committee sees as potential opportunities for growth of our congregation. As noted earlier, some growth may result quickly, but much will develop over time and should be given the opportunity to mature. It will be up to the Business Development Planning Committee to prioritize the areas chosen from which to develop growth and to determine the composition of the committee to maximize effectiveness and achieve its goals.

A. It is clear we need to grow numbers and this needs to come from younger segments of the community, as the current congregation is heavily weighted to older members.

1. Grow families with children aged 1 through 12. We will need to determine what activities and religious offerings will appeal to this segment.
2. Grow families with youth aged 13 to 21. We will need to determine what activities and religious offerings will appeal to this segment.
3. Seek traction with young adults on the verge of starting families( mid-twenties – early thirties). We will need to determine what activities and religious offerings will appeal to this segment.
4. Grow early retirees aged 60 to 70 moving into over fifty-five communities located in Southern Chester County.
5. Target lost congregational members from 2014 loss and from loss due to impact of COVID pandemic.
6. Diversify our congregation by growing Black membership.
7. Diversify our congregation by growing Hispanic membership.
8. Diversify our congregation by growing Asian membership.

In the case of the latter three, these racial groups represent about 12% of the Chester County population and 26% in Southern Chester County in the area surrounding Kennett Square. It would seem the greater priority is with white families, but we should not ignore the black and Hispanic population.

B. Music has been a big draw in the past for growing the Advent congregation and we should explore how this can be used going forward.

1. Expand music beyond the Classic Christian and Jazz that we have done in the past.
2. Consider expansion into Pop Christian.
3. Rearrange current hymns using more modern tempo.
4. Incorporate youth bands into musical offerings.
5. Resurrect/expand youth choir.
6. Roll out the Bell Choir further and include a youth bell choir element.
7. Host more concerts in the car park/lawns to entice new attendees.
8. Stream more musical offerings and recorded offerings on website.

C. Over the years we have dropped off in the number of fellowship and fun events we have offered congregants and newcomers. We should look to expand these offerings to highlight the offerings Advent can make.

1. Utilize the Kitchen and Fellowship Hall more to host community get-togethers .
2. During pleasant weather hold community barbecues together with musical offerings from B above.
3. Currently we host the following and should be able to expand them with more communication:
  - a. Welcome back picnic
  - b. Lenten Potluck Dinners
  - c. Saltshaker Dinners
  - d. Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper
  - e. Spaghetti and Chili dinners
  - f. Chefs of the Advent
4. New events could include:
  - a. Singles nights
  - b. Movie nights
  - c. Wine tastings
  - d. Pig Roast
  - e. Sporting and seasonal groups
5. Memorial Day Food Truck venue during parade
6. Parking for events being held in Kennett Square.
7. Joint events with other Church Groups such as Home and Away services with AME, Lutheran, United Methodist etc.

D. Streaming services and expansion of our communication capability are well underway, but further enhancements can be added to help grow the congregation.

1. In addition to services, we should promote the screening of weddings, baptisms, confirmations, and funerals to allow family and

friends located too far away to attend to be able to celebrate and join in.

2. Expand the music offered by Wilson on a recorded basis for people to listen to online. Invite outside groups to share in this outreach with Wilson.
3. Discussion Groups – Have round table discussions on pertinent topics with a moderator allowing people to download from online libraries or live stream.
4. Hold speaker series both in person at church and streamed/recorded with topics including non-religious issues of interest to the community.

E. The current education program is quite expansive but unfortunately, we have too few younger congregation members to utilize it fully. We can expand the education program to include the following:

1. Summer school classes or fun events for kids to provide breaks for parents during summer and give kids a structured program.
2. Invite ethnic and socioeconomic groups to share services with Advent on a home and away basis.
3. Family fun nights with quizzes aimed at all ages tied in with a simple supper. Promote family unity.
4. Expand the Adult education offerings like Bible Study but also topical discussion groups on issues in the community not necessarily religious based.
5. Re-promote the Men's and women's breakfast groups.
6. Leverage the diocese programming, host events at Advent.

F. The PIM Outward Giving has grown well in the last few months, but the focus is on giving money or goods to needy groups. More "Sweat Equity" projects should be included such as the Good Neighbors summer project to promote Advents caring for the community and our own congregation's needs given their aging.

- G. Increase Advent's presence at local events such as the Memorial Day and Christmas Parades, Mushroom Festival Anson B Nixon concerts and other local events.
  
- H. Pastoral Care is an extension of the "Sweat Equity" concept as it requires visitations together with giving. We seem to have slowed down in this area and should look at how we can expand this ministry.
  
- I. Review all procedures for greeting newcomers such as the Usher and Greeter protocols to ensure we are being as welcome as possible and utilizing ways to allow existing members to identify newcomers. We need to do a better job recognizing when parishioners are absent and reach out to ensure they know we notice and care.
  
- J. Advent is in a particularly good financial position and once we finalize the Capital Drive will be in an even better position. We should find a way to discreetly publicize this to promote growth through migration to a Church that will continue to survive and flourish.