



# **STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

## **2024-2029**

**From Planning & Input Sessions on May 16, May 22, and May 26, 2024**

**Approved by St Thomas Vestry June 18, 2024**

Updated: June 12, 2024

*Terms in the Strategic Action Plan Packet*

**Part I: Completed in Focus Group Session.**

**Vision:** The overall vision for St. Thomas Parish in relationship to this Strategic Action Plan.

**Strategic Directions:** The overarching directions for the Strategic Plan are **Root Down, Be Nourished, and Branch Out** for Jesus.

**Strategic Focus Areas:** These are priorities that define the work within each Strategic Direction-- Root Down, Be Nourished, and Branch Out for Jesus.

**Goals:** These are the desired results within a Strategic Focus Area (Root Down, Be Nourished, and Branch Out for Jesus) that our parish commits to achieve.

**Part II: Created by subcommittee.**

**Strategy Implementation:** This roadmap includes actions, responsibility, timeline, and success indicators. For each goal, it delineates steps to be accomplished, by whom, by when, and measures of success leading to goal accomplishment.

**Strategic Plan Accountability:** To facilitate communication with the Vestry regarding progress made toward accomplishing strategic plan goals, committee chairs will provide quarterly reports to their individual vestry liaison. *Note, the plan identifies committee chairs and committees responsible for each action. Those committees will initiate and oversee that action.* Other committees, staff, parishioners may work with those committees as needed to accomplish the goal.

The timeline for each action is part of accountability. Committee chairs may report to the vestry any issues related to the timeline.

Focus Group Commentary: Includes notes from our focus groups from May 16, May 22, and May 26, 2024.

### ***Vision Statement***

The primary mission of St. Thomas Church for 2024 – 2026 is to build a vibrant, diverse, and loving Christian community within the Episcopal tradition that is recognized as the flagship Episcopal parish on Seattle’s Eastside.

People will know us as followers of Christ through our liturgically rich worship, faith formation for all ages, service to the community, and inclusive message where everyone belongs. This, alongside intentional marketing and evangelism efforts, will help increase membership and provide for long-term financial stability.

### ***Strategic Directions***

*Root Down, Be Nourished, and Branch Out*

We seek to be a Christian community where people can **Root Down** in their relationship with God and one another, **Be Nourished** through spiritual and social programs, and **Branch Out** to invite others to join us and to serve our community.

### ***Strategic Focus Areas***

*Root Down, Be Nourished, and Branch Out*

#### ***Root Down***

**Strategic Focus Area: Strengthen financial health of St. Thomas to ensure institutional flourishing today and in the future.**

1. Goal: Narrow \$350,000 budget gap over 2024-2025 so that operating expenses and revenue are balanced by 2026.
2. Goal: Grow annual Stewardship to sustain current complement of 3 clergy.
3. Goal: Raise \$2 million for Rector Housing Fund by 2025.
4. Goal: Increase Endowment to \$7.5 million by 2029 (75<sup>th</sup> anniversary).
5. Goal: Increase Legacy Society membership.

**Strategic Focus Area: Bolster Newcomer and New Member Ministry, creating a clear progression from newcomer to member.**

1. Goal: Revise Newcomer and New Member program to include a clear process that is shared by clergy, staff, and lay volunteers.

#### ***Be Nourished***

**Strategic Focus Area: Become essential church community for family ministry (children and youth) on the Eastside.**

1. Goal: Strengthen Godly Play and Sunday School for children by increasing offering to two classrooms and recruiting additional adult volunteers.

2. Goal: Strengthen Youth Program and increase size by attracting more local youth through confirmation class, service opportunities, mission trips.
3. Goal: Pilot Sunday service from 5-6:30 pm, that includes a 30-minute deconstructed liturgy with a potluck dinner.

**Strategic Focus Area: Become a Center for musical excellence on the Eastside that is inclusive of sacred music, concert series, choir and chorister programs, and community music offerings.**

1. Goal: Execute inspiring sacred music program through Sunday worship, Evensongs, Lessons and Carols, and other sacred music offerings.
2. Goal: Implement Royal School of Church Music training program for chorister program, begin charging \$350 per student this Fall 2024, and plan for a choristers' component to the England trip in August 2025.
3. Goal: Fundraise and plan 2024-2025 concert series.
4. Goal: Plan and execute Choir-in-Residence trip to St. Paul's Cathedral, London in August 2025.

**Strategic Focus Area: Offer inspiring worship and compelling formation, fellowship, and pastoral care for members.**

1. Goal: Launch Adult Formation Committee.
2. Goal: Increase inter-faith involvement and forge interfaith connections on the Eastside.
3. Goal: Add to Fellowship Committee to plan additional fellowship events throughout the year.

***Branch Out***

**Strategic Focus Area: Grow Church Membership by 15% by 2025 building a vibrant, more diverse, and inclusive community for seekers and newcomers.**

1. Goal: Perform demographic study with Unstuck Consultants to better understand populations that live on the Eastside.
2. Goal: Create Strategic Communications Plan with Unstuck Consultants that targets and markets to seekers, newcomers, and potential new members.
3. Goal: Increase marketing through social media, direct mail, email, street signs, banners, concerts, plays and promotions that target and are inclusive of Greater Bellevue demographics.
4. Goal: increase digital presence to provide a cohesive online offering for virtual members near and far and of different ages and stages of life.

**Strategic Focus Area: Increase Church's Presence in the Community by partnering with Bellevue and Medina to learn of opportunities for social and service engagement.**

1. Goal: Sign up for booth at Paws and Pride.
2. Goal: Host Medina Days Beer Garden.
3. Goal: Promote service days with St. Thomas Church.
4. Goal: Create committee to research additional opportunities.

***Background Information from Focus Group Sessions***

**Positive Characteristics of St. Thomas Church:**

- Talented, new and young clergy & excellent lay paid staff.
- High quality of preaching.
- We are fully staffed, no vacancies at present.
- Dedicated corps of lay volunteers w/ over 20 active committees
  
- Two beautiful, updated campus buildings that offer capacity to grow, and all construction is completed.
- No debt on buildings and no debt on line of credit.
- Increasing membership: 20 new members for 2023 and 49 newcomers.
- The Church is easily accessed from multiple cities, in an attractive, affluent neighborhood.
- Our parish is large, the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest in Olympia Diocese.
- Maintenance projects are getting done.
- Outreach programs are working well, including Porchlight, clothing drive, Hopelink food drive, etc.
- Pastoral care program has core of trained volunteers.
- High quality music program, with growing choir and support for community concerts.
- Growing number of families & children and youth.
- Godly Play attendance is increasing.
- Youth Group is rebuilding, post-pandemic.
- Reserves are over \$1,000,000 as of May 2024.
- Our diversity is intergenerational, economic, political, and geographic.
- Live streaming and recording of services is organizationally perfected and working well.

- Marketing programs are robust, including targeted campaigns for Christmas and Easter.
- We like to socialize!
- Coffee hour is busy and well attended.
- We are accepting of all – our theology is inclusive – and we welcome seekers of all backgrounds.
- St. Thomas people are hospitable and work at integrating newcomers.

**Despite substantial progress, the St. Thomas church faces several near term and long term challenges**

**Financial:**

- We need Rectory Housing now and in the future, and a capital campaign to raise at least \$2,000,000 for equity.
- Projected operating loss for 2024 is \$358,000 and will require a draw on the \$1,024,000 of reserves.
- The Vestry is willing to use up to \$500,000 of reserves, so 2025 operations need to improve to a loss of \$142,000 or less, and 2026 needs to be a break-even year.
- The Endowment is \$651,000 and provides only \$26,000 in interest income to help cover operating shortfalls.
- The church campus is beautiful, but it is expensive to maintain.
- How do we get more money from our facilities, events, rent, leases to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties?

**Attendance**

- Attendance has been declining over the past few years.
- The 8:00 AM service is barely surviving with about 22 average in attendance.
- The number of pledges has been declining over the last few years.
- St Thomas is not immune from national trends including fewer younger people attending religious services, with “nones” now the single largest cohort (28%) among American adults compared to evangelical Protestants (24%) or Catholics (23%).
- The live video stream of church services is viewed only by a few people, often less than 10.
- We have an aging church population.
- We need to increase attendance in our youth programs.

- We need to encourage and develop inter-generational family attendance. How do we get our adult children to attend St. Thomas?

### **Staff & volunteer burnout**

- We are fully staffed, but not completely staffed given our ambitions.
- We do not have enough staff and volunteers to maintain our current programs, much less add any new ones.
- Staff salaries need to be competitive and compensate for inflation or we will lose our good people.
- We have champagne taste on a beer budget.
- It's hard to get people to sign up to do volunteer shifts.
- We have multiple ministries: do we really need them all? Focus and prioritize.
- We have staff and volunteer burnout trying to support too many events and programs.

### **Attracting and retaining new members**

- We need to be welcoming of Greater Bellevue neighbors, understanding the gift of cultural diversity.
- We have a lack of diversity in our congregation.
- We need to understand our customer, the newcomer. Who comes here and why?
- We need to figure out what people want – who are our people? How do we reach them?
- We need to understand why our newcomers came, so we can target-market new people.
- We are perceived as a “wealthy church”, which may scare some people away before they get here or after they arrive.
- Medina location possibly a hurdle for those who see us as exclusive.

### **Weaker community ties**

- We need a better communication system among members. St. Thomas “Connect” does not work very well and should be replaced.
- We have an aging population, and difficulty communicating with each other – there is a feeling of disconnection.
- The relationship with St. Thomas School has drifted apart, and the lease is not favorable to the church.
- We need more community engagement.

- We need more outreach programs involving the neighborhood, like the “Thanksgiving Meal Delivery” program.
- We could improve our ties with City of Medina officials, i.e. Medina Days, etc.
- We need to better help people find out about service and social opportunities.

**Opportunities identified include:**

- Utilize Evangelism Grant from Eli Lilly to expand our online presence and find younger people where they are – here in West Bellevue but also beyond.
- We have the capacity to build our endowment to ensure we can maintain our campus into the future.
- We are a central gathering place, well placed for community service.
- Build stronger relations with city of Medina.
- Host community events like blood drives, speaker series to draw people from outside Medina/Bellevue area.
- Opportunity to increase 8:00 AM service to 50 plus attendees.
- Find ways to get people involved more than just giving their money.
- We have an opportunity to build relationships through small groups.
- Have side conversations through adult formation.
- We are in an unchurched part of the world – lots of people don’t go to church, but are seeking connection and a spiritual grounding, so it’s an opportunity for us to offer them a potential home.
- There are LGBTQ+ folks who have been told by their church communities they are not welcome. They are welcome here.
- We have an opportunity to welcome diverse communities, like LGBTQ, all represented on Eastside.
- We can run short, focused fundraising campaigns for visible, finite projects like improving the play area off of the childcare room (yes, we have one!)
- We could build our regional profile by promoting the excellent preaching from our clergy, and hosting headline speakers.
- More young people see Christianity as a toxic brand. We can fight against that.