



# Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014

Prepared for the Christian Education & Formation  
Committee of St. James' Parish

St. James' Parish  
5757 Solomons Island Road  
Lothian, MD 20711

©. *St. James' Parish, 2009*

**Almighty God,**

We pray you to look favorably upon the efforts of our congregation to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We commit our Sunday School, its teachers and pupils to your divine care and guidance. Be with us also as we develop programs that will nurture our adults so that they may increase their knowledge of you, and to explore the many questions that face us as we walk through this earthly life. Make us ever mindful of our baptismal covenant in which we promise to seek and serve you by serving one another. Help us to use the inward and spiritual grace that we received in our baptism to stay in union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Make us faithful members of God's family the church, forgive us our sins, and grant us new life in the Holy Spirit.

***Amen.***

# Table of Contents

Christian Education at St. James (Historic)	4
Strategic Planning Team Members & Dedication	5
Background & Introduction	6
Christian Ed at St. James 2008- 2009	8
I. Roles and Responsibilities	
The Christian Formation & Education Committee (CE)	10
The Assistant Rector	16
Parents & the Congregation	17
II. Christian Formation Programs	
Elementary Program	21
Middle & High School Programs	24
III. Adult Christian Formation	29
Summary	32
List of Recommendations	35

*Where did we start?*

Christian education, as a distinct activity, has been part of the mission of St. James' Parish for a long time. Although it certainly existed in some form prior, in 1863, the Reverend James D. McCabe (1861-1867) went forward with plans for establishing a "parochial school," and by January 1864, he had raised a "Subscription of Six Hundred Dollars" and was hopeful he could raise that amount to an impressive "Eight Hundred Dollars."<sup>1</sup> In Vestry minutes from 1890, it is noted that under the care of the Right Reverend William Paret (1885-1911), there was a "Parochial School and Chapel on the Glebe for Colored people, a few hundred yards from the Parish Church, lately erected...and...that there is now employed a coloured man as Teacher."<sup>2</sup> By 1894, the Reverend Alexander Galt (1891-1900) noted in a letter "...I held Service there [in nearby Bristol] twice a month in the Public Schoolhouse, but had no Sunday School. We have lately begun Cottage Services...Mr. Wilson's daughter has been teaching a Sunday school for the children of that neighborhood for several months and Mrs. R. Estep ... has had a class for colored children."<sup>3</sup> By 1899, Mr. Galt's annual report to the Vestry showed the Parish had "Four Sunday School Officers and Teachers."

By the turn of the twentieth century, Christian Education was well established at St. James'. Although Vestry records for this period have not been published, we can assume that this effort continued through the world wars. After World War II, there was a vibrant program described by one parishioner as "the center of our social lives." Throughout the post-War period, education was conducted in the hour prior to church, at 10 am every Sunday. Since there was only one building on the campus, excluding the rectory, the children of this generation held their classes in the church, augmented with a small Sunday School Library. In 1960, with the construction of the current Parish Hall, classroom space was set aside for Sunday School. In 1991, an Education Building was erected for the sole purpose of Christian Formation and Education.

*How will we be remembered?*

---

<sup>1</sup> St. James' Parish, *Old Herring Creeke Parish: A History*, vol 2, 1997, page 37.

<sup>2</sup> *History*, vol 2, page 45.

## **The Christian Education Strategic Planning Team**

Douglas Ellmore, Sr., Chair  
Tricia Sanborn Hurlbutt, Representing the Parish  
JoEllen Kelly, Ph.D, Vestry Liaison to Christian Education  
The Rev. Amanda Knouse, M Div., Assistant Rector, St. James' Parish  
Claire Ford Pickart, Representing the Parish  
George A. Pickart, Representing the Parish  
The Rev. Carl Rehling, Deacon, St. James' Parish

*With great humility, we dedicate the work that has gone into  
this Strategic Plan to the wonderful leaders, teachers and  
support staff of the St. James' Parish Sunday School—  
past, present & future.*

# St. James' Parish Sunday School Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014

## BACKGROUND

At its Planning Retreat on February 16, 2008, the Vestry and leadership of St. James' Parish unanimously endorsed a thorough review of its Christian Formation and Education programs. The purpose of this review was to accurately depict the current state of Christian Education at St. James' Parish, and to suggest improvements through the development of a strategic plan. The Vestry committed to supporting recommendations through funding enhancements where necessary and if possible.

Shortly after the retreat, the Vestry liaison to the Christian Education and Formation Committee (CE) presented the Vestry initiative to the Christian Education Committee at its March meeting. The CE Committee performed some preliminary research that included a visit to St. John's Episcopal Church (Norwood Parish) in Chevy Chase, Maryland. St. John's had recently finished a 2-year process of strategic planning within its Parish. After the visit, and subsequent discussion among the CE Committee, it was decided that a separate planning group would be established to conduct the review and the development of a strategic plan. As the process unfolded, the chairs, teachers and all other stakeholders would be brought in as needed for information and, eventually, review. The Christian Education Strategic Planning Team (SP) mission was established to review both the youth and adult programs.

The first order of business for the SP Team was to ask the Vestry to declare 2008-2009 *A Year of Christian Education at St. James'*. The SP Team felt very strongly that the Strategic Plan should be embedded in a wider effort to raise and celebrate education as a year-long focus for the Parish.

From start to finish, it has taken a little over one year to complete the review and to write, disseminate and promulgate the plan. During this time the SP Team met regularly to discuss progress. Stakeholder meetings were conducted where the SP Team interviewed students, parents and teachers. Two written surveys--one for parents and one for teachers--were completed. The SP Team also invited the Reverend Amy E. Richter, Missioner for Lifelong Christian Formation, Diocese of Maryland, to come meet with the SP Team, the CE Committee, teachers, and parents to help discuss various programs and options.

The SP Team suggests that the recommendations identified in this document be studied and implemented by the CE Committee over a one- to five-year period. The CE Committee should know best how to organize its time and establish milestones based on current and future events and resources. Many of the recommendations made in this plan may be accomplished in a much shorter timeframe; in fact, several issues identified during the planning phase resulted in action items that were immediately implemented. Many of the remaining recommendations, however, should rightly be regarded as more complex—requiring longer horizons to adopt and resource.

It is the hope of the SP Team that the CE Committee will endeavor to accept and implement as many of the recommendations contained in this report

as possible. This will require the CE Committee to work differently than it has in the past, to set aside planning time, and to establish critical milestones for each recommendation. The SP Team recommends that the CE Committee conduct a stand-alone retreat that includes involvement from teachers and other lay leaders in the Parish to plan how and when to tackle each of these recommendations. It is recommended that the CE Committee consider an outside facilitator to plan, organize and lead the retreat. If needed, the facilitator can assist in the development of an implementation strategy. As an ongoing process, it is suggested that planning work not be part of monthly meetings, but should be approached independently--perhaps quarterly and certainly at an annual review. Successes and problems should certainly be discussed as they arise during the monthly Christian Education Committee meetings.

This Strategic Plan offers a series of recommendations that allow for both small and dramatic improvements, and defines roles and functions of the CE Committee, as well as that of key individuals relevant to its success. It is our hope that the CE Committee will utilize these recommendations as stepping stones, and expand on the strategies suggested in this plan.

#### **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT St. JAMES' PARISH 2008-2009**

The current state of Christian Education and Formation at St. James' is one that should evoke pride in our members. Each and every Sunday of the school year, dozens of children leave church and happily go to their classes where enthusiastic teachers greet them. Currently, approximately 60 students in

grades pre-Kindergarten through high school attend Sunday School. In addition, over 75 adult learners take classes on Sunday and throughout the week.

The elementary program offered in the grades pre-K through sixth grade uses a curriculum called the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd which is based on a Montessori learning model pioneered in the Roman Catholic Church.

The middle- and high-school students are all part of the curriculum called The Journey to Adulthood (J2A) although they are taught within three modules— Rite-13 (grades 7 and 8), Journey to Adulthood (Grades 9 and 10) and Young Adults in the Church (YAC—grades 11 and 12).

There are within each grade group fellowship opportunities with attendant “youth groups.” Although the youth groups are under the purview of the Assistant Rector and the jurisdiction of the Christian Education Committee, these groups have not been reviewed directly by the SP Team. A few recommendations about youth groups are contained within this plan, but the youth fellowship groups should probably be studied more carefully by the CE committee during the implementation phase.

Adults in the Parish are offered a number of good opportunities to further their lifelong learning. There are Sunday classes offered between the services and a number of classes occur during the week. Education for Ministry (EFM) and Goodness Gracious (lay-lead) are two such examples. Adult learner programs were not rigorously examined in this review. For the first time, the Christian Education Committee and SP team published a guide to all our courses for adult learners that seemed to reinvigorate these adult-oriented programs.

The SP Team hopes the CE Committee publishes a course catalog on a yearly basis with an update published each January in *The Shell*.

## **I. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **The Christian Formation & Education Committee (CE)**

The CE Committee is lead by co-chairs, both of whom are teachers of long-standing. The CE Committee is composed of the chairs and teachers, but not all teachers attend meetings on a regular basis. As a core responsibility, the Reverend Amanda Knouse serves as the clergy liaison with Christian Formation and Youth Fellowship. Presently, Christian Education represents less than 2% of the budget.

CE meetings are held on the second Monday of each month. The focus of the meetings is divided roughly 2/3 to Christian Education and 1/3 to youth fellowship. Each month, the co-chairs begin the meeting with announcements and then a teacher representing a teaching level gives a report. Finally, new business is discussed. This usually includes how events such as the Christmas Pageant or the High School Ski Trip will be organized. There are dozens of such events throughout the year that need resources and leadership. The CE Committee should be commended for the number of programs and special events it organizes each school year and the many members of the Parish who step forward to participate and lead activities and programs.

The first set of recommendations focuses on empowering the CE Committee to take on expanded roles and programmatic goals.

**Recommendation# 1: Establish a policy to encourage attendance by teachers at all grade levels, including those teaching adult classes, to the monthly meetings.<sup>4</sup>**

**Objective:** To broaden teaching staff awareness of programs, and to encourage interpersonal growth between the teaching staff.

Strategies:

- Encourage the submission of written program and classroom reports prior to the meeting via email and or at a website specifically for use by the Christian Education Committee. These can be included in the minutes instead of taking up valuable meeting time.
- On a regular basis, assign teachers responsibilities for brief (5 –10 minute) topical reports—*for example*: attendance, discipline, students with special needs, etc. End each topical report with five minutes allotted to brainstorming ideas and solutions.
- Endeavor to circulate minutes to all attendees and all members in a timely manner—no more than one week after each meeting.
- The SP Team also suggest that monthly meetings continue to be open to teachers and all members of the Parish, so all feel invested in the process and have the opportunity to participate.
- Finally, with status reports more organized, use the time available on the agenda to allow for “theme” meetings to address intra-program issues, information guest speakers, and time for “quick” training, etc.

---

<sup>4</sup> As policies are developed, they should be promulgated regularly among the teachers and copies of CE policies and procedures should be available for any parent, teacher or parishioner within a short period of time.

During the Fall of 2008, one of the co-chairs, Steve Dorsey, submitted his resignation, pending finding a replacement. He has served in this position for more than three years and deserves the gratitude of the Parish and teachers for his leadership. As of this date, nobody has volunteered to replace him.

**Recommendation# 2: The CE Committee should establish a team to discern and redefine the leadership roles within the CE Committee.**

**Objective:** Working with the current CE Committee co-chairs, collaborate in the identification of leadership to steer the committee during implementation of the strategic plan.

Strategies:

- Develop a position description in consultation with the present co-chairs that accurately reflects their duties as co-chairs. Consider defining the role of chair as a singular purpose, one that is not held by a teacher but that of someone who will be focused on leading the committee—especially as they pertain to oversight of the implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- Advertise and interview this position to reflect its stature and importance.
- Select leadership that possesses the vision, organizational and administrative leadership skills necessary to steer the committee through this Strategic Plan period.

**Recommendation #3: Within the Committee itself, define additional roles and responsibilities to address curriculum, training, and financial oversight.**

**Objective:** Distribute and strengthen the administrative activities of the committee, while allowing teachers and formation leaders to focus on Christian Formation teaching.

Strategies:

- Define and recruit a curriculum coordinator to focus on development and management of curriculum resources for Christian Formation programs of all ages.
- Define and recruit a training coordinator responsible for the management of training and professional development of the Christian lay leadership, aligned to various curriculum and program requirements.
- Define and recruit a financial coordinator responsible for budget development, fund raising organization and management, and budget management.

**Recommendation # 4: The CE Committee needs to practice more evangelism within the Parish and with the other committees. The Christian Education Committee should be interested in how the church grows, especially where there is contact with potential new members.**

**Objective:** To encourage a belief within the Parish that Christian Education is everyone's concern if we are to attract families with children, and if we are to continue a commitment to lifelong Christian learning.

Strategies:

- Work with the Clergy regarding visiting and meeting new and current members to understand their Christian Education needs.
- Have teachers contact members about the programs and getting feedback on a regular basis.
- Continue to encourage members to invite friends and families who are not members of this Parish to attend Christian Formation activities at St. James' Parish.

Likewise, as the Christian Formation programs grow, there is increasing need placed on the buildings and grounds to support fellowship inside and outside the classroom. These needs must be communicated to the Buildings and Grounds committee whenever discussions are held regarding future plans. As it stands presently, there is very little space in the Christian Education building for additional classroom capacity.

**Recommendation # 5: As more families with young children join the church, we will need to accommodate their educational needs. The CE Committee should conduct a space allocation survey to understand present and future impact of programs on building and grounds.**

**Objective:** Optimize current facilities in terms of giving each class their own classroom<sup>5</sup> and plan for additional needs with the Building and Ground committee.

Strategies:

---

<sup>5</sup> YAC Students currently meet in the Assistant Rector's home.

- As soon as possible, regular meeting space should be identified for the YAC program.<sup>6</sup>
- Classroom and meeting space should be reviewed regularly based on attendance and use.
- Parish policies regarding the use of classroom space by outside organizations should be reviewed by the CE Committee and a suggestion made to the Vestry regarding such policies.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that classroom space integrity is maintained. Overflow from SCAN (an important Parish ministry) and any other outreach should not impede on precious classroom space.
- The CE Committee, in its space allocation study, should identify outdoor space requirements to serve the needs of programs requiring outdoor facilities.
- The CE Committee, in its space allocation study, should consider a Phase II expansion of the Christian Education Building to include more classrooms, meeting space, modest kitchen facilities and a small auditorium.

A vision for this plan is for the CE Committee to take on board many changes and to virtually reinvent itself in a short period of time. It is only due to the confidence we have in the current team that such far-reaching goals have been established. We are steadfast in our belief that the Christian Formation & Education Committee is ready to move forward and is more than able to implement the recommendations and strategies presented.

---

<sup>6</sup> All three Atrium classes can be partitioned to create two rooms each (6 in all).

## **The Assistant Rector**

The Rector, supported by the Vestry, identified the Assistant Rector as having both spiritual and organization oversight of all youth-related activities. For some seventeen years, the Reverend Eileen C. House assumed this role. With her untimely and sad death in October 2007, a new Assistant Rector was sought who specifically had the skills to manage the youth programs. The Reverend Amanda Knouse was identified and hired in June of 2008 to assume the role of Assistant Rector of St. James' Parish. A principal focus of her position is directed toward Christian Formation activities.

At this critical juncture, it is important that the Assistant Rector spend as much time as possible helping the CE Committee reorganize to implement the recommendations laid out in the Strategic Plan, keeping in mind that as planning progresses and situations and circumstances change, accommodations will need to be made accordingly.<sup>7</sup> On the Parish level, we would encourage the Assistant Rector to continue to view her role as one of making alliances between CE and other church entities<sup>8</sup>.

**Recommendation# 6: The Assistant Rector should be seen as the Principal Spiritual Leader and Teacher leading Christian Formation activities at St. James' Parish.**

---

<sup>7</sup> We have in mind here, for instance, budget decisions made by the Vestry that would mandate a complete restructuring of the CE budget for one to two years or more.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, the Music Director could be asked to review and make suggestions regarding the music components for each level in the Sunday School.

**Objective: To provide our Parish with a central clergy leader who will become the keystone for the development and advancement of Christian Formation activities of all ages.**

Strategies:

- The Assistant Rector must be viewed as the “go-to” person for all questions, concerns, and problems associated with Christian Formation programs, providing management assistance and spiritual oversight to the CE Committee and its chairpersons.
- The Assistant Rector will be responsible for mentoring and developing lay Christian Formation Leaders.
- As the principal education leader, the Assistant Rector will share in leading lessons and coordinating with other clergy inside and outside the parish to bring spiritual leaders closer to participants.
- Be a spiritual resource for teachers and parents in their daily lives, inside and outside the classroom.
- Maintain and continue development of relationships with Christian Formation activities, inside and outside the Diocese.

**The Role of the Parents and Congregation**

A successful Christian Education program requires not only effective teachers and a well-chosen curriculum, but also a strong base of support among parents and the entire parish. A parish involved in the Christian Education

process serves as a living example of Christian community, teaching children to be others-focused instead of self-centered. It models servanthood and provides children with opportunities for growth in their faith through the ideals of Christian service and Community service.

It is the goal of the CE committee that every family at St. James' will:

- Regularly attend worship services with their child(ren).
- Make Christian Education attendance a family priority.
- Provide time, talent, and treasure in support of the Christian Education program.

For a church to survive, it must attract families with young children. St. James' has historically proven itself to be a welcoming and loving institution by encouraging the presence of children at worship services. However, the lack of a staffed nursery for the last four years has made it difficult to attract and retain families with very young children. This can be a make-or-break issue; some parents may not attend worship services without alternative arrangements for their infants. We may be losing these potential Christian Education students before they are old enough to enter a classroom.

Teachers identified poor and sporadic attendance by students as a key problem during the Committee's early discovery meetings. While this can be attributed in part to sports and other family commitments on Sunday mornings,

there seemed to be a strong feeling among teachers that many families made Sunday School attendance a low priority.

How do we change this attitude? An involved parent is an engaged parent; one who will make Sunday School attendance a priority for their family. It is imperative that clergy, teachers, and committee members strive to make parents feel that they are an important part of the program from the very beginning. Regular communication regarding curriculum, behavior, volunteer opportunities, and resource needs is an important step. Secondly, we must welcome and encourage volunteers within the program. General requests for volunteers have never been effective in the past, so a more organized effort by the CE committee is suggested. In the fall, create a Talent Inventory to be filled out as part of the registration process, compile a database of volunteers by skill, and tap the talents of these individuals. Targeting volunteers by interests and abilities, preferably by personal contact, is the most effective way to encourage people to donate their time and talent to the program.

Furthermore, we must look to the entire parish for involvement in the programs. Efforts to do so in the past have been uneven: liturgies that form the core of the Journey to Adulthood program and provide a 'connection' between the youth and older parish members have been skipped over; volunteer opportunities have been unavailable or poorly communicated; and teaching positions have required extensive training and long-term time commitments. The older adults and senior citizens at St. James' are a valuable resource of talent

and knowledge, and should be encouraged to take an active role in the faith education of our youth.

**Recommendation # 7: The teaching staff and CE Committee should identify and implement ways to encourage both parental and parish involvement in Christian Education programs for youth.**

**Objective:** To create greater parental and parish support of the Christian Education programs for our youth.

Strategies:

- Analyze if the Nursery is indeed a CE Committee priority, or whether this vital function would be better managed by another Committee or at the parish administration level.
- Plan and implement regular parent-teacher contact via *The Shell*, email, or other method.
- Hold parent-teacher conferences and an annual Open House for parents and the community.
- Prepare a talent inventory as part of the registration process in the fall. Compile the list, and distribute to teachers, clergy and committee members.
- Identify, encourage and develop the talents of volunteers within the classroom.
- Provide a training session for teachers regarding volunteers

- Utilize a rotational teaching model when faced with teacher vacancies, to involve as many adults as possible in the program.

Finally, it is recommended that the CE committee carry out the liturgies written into all three levels of the Journey to Adulthood program as an important visible sign to the Parish. These liturgies are important rites-of-passage for our young people, and charge the entire parish with responsibility for guiding them into adulthood.

## **II. CHRISTIAN FORMATION PROGRAMS**

### **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAM**

Ideally, an elementary school curriculum provides a solid Christian foundation to a church's youngest members, is appealing to a wide array of current and potential teachers and volunteers in the congregation, and sustains the interest and involvement of students and parents alike. Our current curriculum, The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is designed to achieve the above and enjoys the support of dedicated teachers and volunteers.

However, after seven years of use, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has struggled to be fully implemented at St. James' in terms of resource allocation and staffing. Staffing and resource gaps need to be identified and coordinated with the CE Committee.

Likewise, training requirements have at times proven to be an issue in the recruitment of teachers.<sup>9</sup> This is not a unique issue with any volunteer program that requires training, but one that it is hoped can be overcome with the additional assistance from training and curriculum coordinators on the CE Committee. While current staffing seems strong, there may be need for back-up teachers and assistant teachers to help with children with special needs.

Interestingly, during the review with students themselves, the students noted a particular improvement following some staffing additions in the past year. Leadership at this level is to be admired for trying to pull all aspects of the Catechesis into a cohesive teaching model.

**Recommendation #8: Ensure the elementary school curriculum meets the needs of the Parish.**

**Objective:** Establish a structured process to guide the current leadership toward a more robust utilization of the current curriculum, while leaving open the possibility of evaluating and integrating new curriculum.

Strategies:

- In coordination with the Christian Education Committee, the Atrium teachers will submit a resource plan, including action items and a timeline to maintain full staffing, strong parental involvement, and a complete set of resources for the three Atria, covering the period from Winter 2009 until Fall 2011.

---

<sup>9</sup> There are other well-respected elementary programs that do not demand the same level of training as the Catechesis which requires approximately 60 hours of formal training per teacher per grade level or several years on-the-job training as a classroom aid.

- The Assistant Rector will work with the CE Committee, curriculum coordinator, training coordinator, financial coordinator, and the Atrium-level teachers to address all areas in need.

From a program perspective, students indicated a desire for more “hands-on” and participatory activities such as crafts, field trips, singing, and greater involvement from parents, clergy and outside speakers.

While the curriculum focus of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is primarily on the New Testament, parents stressed that the curriculum should do more to provide our children with an introduction to major stories and lessons throughout the Bible. They also wanted to see continued use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Church calendar, and a strong emphasis on the essentials of what it means to be a Christian and an Episcopalian.

The SP Team, through its interviews with the children and understanding of the youth fellowship activities, came to see that there is a recreational aspect of CE that is very important. In fact, *play* is an integral part of binding groups together and learning; all learners, young and old, learn better in a mode that stresses physical interaction. Providing outside and inside recreational-based learning environments for each level of the elementary and Journey to Adulthood programs may improve learning outcomes for some students—and certainly more fun for the rest.

**Recommendation # 9: CE teachers should look for opportunities to integrate physical play with learning whenever possible and practical.**

**Objective:** Increase long-term understanding and learning of the Christian faith with physical play.

Strategies:

- Physical play should continued to be stressed whenever possible, especially at the elementary and middle-school levels where the youth were highly vocal about crafts, role playing, and singing as learning activities.
- Form a working group of the Building and Grounds Committee and the CE Committee, teachers, and youth to identify K-12 recreational space use and needs within and outside the Parish, including the development of an open multipurpose field for games and picnic recreation. Work with teachers to identify outdoor activities for spiritual learning.

**MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

The Journey to Adulthood (J2A) program for secondary school students is guided by the principle that “Manhood and Womanhood are free gifts from God, but Adulthood must be earned.” Each of the three components of J2A uses Bible studies, prayer, rites-of-passage, outreach ministries and youth group activities to underscore this theme. One of the unique aspects of this program is that two grade levels of students remain together through each of the three two-year courses, creating a cohesive unit of peers traveling the often rocky road to adulthood together. The curriculum is designed to be team-taught by two leaders, one male and one female, to model platonic relationships between adults of the

opposite genders. Journey to Adulthood was specifically created for use within the Episcopal Church, and has been proven highly effective in the Diocese of Maryland and beyond.

**Rite-13**, (6th & 7th or 7th & 8th graders), focuses on celebrating the individuality of each young person and their creative potential. It also provides the foundation for all stages of the J2A program, because it is the time when students get to know each other and bond as a group by learning to pray together, serve together, and very importantly, socialize together. This is particularly important to the youth of St. James', because our students represent a wide variety of geographical areas, and often do not attend school together. The behavioral norms and standards for the ensuing years are also established at this point, and the rites of passage within the curriculum give younger students a milestone to look forward to. The highlight of this stage is the Rite-13 celebration, marking each student's thirteenth birthday and acknowledging their receipt of God's gift of manhood or womanhood.

**Journey to Adulthood**, the middle portion of the program (8<sup>th</sup> and 9th or 9th and 10th graders), engages youth with the skills and critical thinking involved in adulthood. J2A is highly experiential and culminates with a pilgrimage that the students plan and execute. This pilgrimage is often the spiritual highlight of their youth. Confirmation preparation is intended to be incorporated into the curricula for this age group.

**YAC—Young Adults in the Church** (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students) is a mentor-based program that helps older teens discern and take action to carry out a ministry within their church or in the larger community. Vocation and development of a personal credo are also emphasized. A final rite of passage liturgy sends them out into the world as respected adult ambassadors of Christ, and they are recognized by their more mature adult peers as fellow adults.

One of the strengths and challenges of this program is the requirement that two grade levels be kept together as a unit throughout all six years of the program. Because of this, it is necessary to make alternate arrangements for Christian Education for sixth grade students every other year. However, when St. James' began using the J2A curricula a decade ago, no effort was made to follow this guideline and class structure was divided into Rite-13 (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) and J2A(9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades). Starting in 2003-2004, 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were no longer included in Rite-13, but remained in Atrium 3 for an additional year.

Until this year, all four years of high school were included in the J2A class. The CE Committee found the age span too great, and there was attrition of older students due to the repetitive curriculum. In 2008-2009, for the first time, the CE Committee began implementing the YAC component for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The reorganization of the high school class has, thus far, been well received.

**Recommendation #10: Fully implement the Journey to Adulthood program for Grades 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>.**

**Objective:** Provide grades 6-12 with a path to developing knowledge, skills and abilities to provide Christian service.

**Strategies:**

- Implement the 2-year rotational schedule for the J2A Program that keeps children together as a cohort.
- Create a long-range rotation plan (10 years) for classroom organization by grades of all levels in order to deal with years when there will only be one grade in pre-Rite-13 or post YAC.
- Plan a two-year curriculum schedule that identifies topics, events, activities for each level, and the one year there is a single year pre-Rite-13 or post-YAC class.
- Plan supporting curricular and staffing needs, including staffing with a male-female teaching team per the guidelines.
- Ensure staff are trained or retrained prior to leading sections of the two-year curriculum. Training should be provided by a member of the Leader Resources staff within the curriculum. Training should provide a general overview of J2A, but focus on the specific level and two year section in which the leaders will be involved.
- Plan and execute an information session and prepare accompanying written materials for parents to educate them about the upcoming changes in class structure. Make curriculum plans available to parents so they can help and provide home support.
- Identify roles for parents and have them commit to supporting the program with classroom or activity support as defined by the curriculum.

- Ensure all related training costs are presented the annual budget.

**Recommendation #11: Connect classroom activities with youth fellowship, thereby creating a community within the youth and a Christian learning focus outside the traditional classroom meeting environment.**

**Objective:** Increase and promote bonding within the groups. Recognize the curricular mandate within all stages of the program that Youth Group activities be utilized to reinforce classroom lessons.

**Strategies:**

- Assistant Rector to work directly with classroom teachers to develop priorities for Rite-13 and J2A youth group activities.
- Recognize need for each level to have exclusive fellowship time and activities, as well as time spent in fellowship with the youth at large.
- Establish bonding activities for this group early in the year, including a retreat that will support the groups individually and collectively.
- Recruit parents and other members of the Parish to be involved in leading and conducting group activities. Require all involved to have the proper training to lead programs.
- Develop and publish a calendar of events that is easy for the students to access—most probably on-line. Send e-mails bursts when events are nearing. Try to avoid canceling events as youth in this age range are not reliable in terms of signaling when they will participate.

- Continue to encourage “regular” events such as lock-ins, coffee houses, mini-trips, etc. to build trust within the high school groups—both in Sunday School and Youth Group. Use small group techniques to build bonds between youth who are not “naturally” bonded through school, sports, etc.

### **III. ADULT CHRISTIAN FORMATION**

At this time, strong ties do not exist between adult Christian Education and the Sunday School programs, or any educational endeavors aimed at post-high school young adults or adults in general. In the past, a representative from the adult programs has not attended the monthly Christian Education meetings, although almost all the adult staff did attend a kick-off for *A Year of Christian Education* in September 2008. Also, within the past year there has been a representative of the adult programs engaged in the monthly Christian Education meetings. We can only surmise that more adult educators do not attend monthly meetings because there does not appear to be any function for them at the Committee level. In return, when they are not “at the table,” they are not considered in terms of budget priorities, etc. In the end, the SP Team was never entirely cognizant of how the adult classes get organized, staffed, advertised, etc.

**Recommendation # 12: Encourage teachers of the adult programs to participate at the Committee level by creating space for them to come and discuss ideas for future courses and to seek input regarding growing the participation of adult learns in the Parish.**

**Objective:** Help grow the adult learning programs.

Strategies:

- Establish specific expectations for these instructors at the monthly CE meetings.
- Establish specific objectives for the adult learning environments and support these objectives through marketing of classes and financial support where necessary.

Throughout the review, the SP Team was reminded that there exists at St. James' an intermediary age cohort (post-high school through early family years) that is not being supported in terms of Christian Education. Outreach to the college-level parishioner would benefit from this small but important group.

**Recommendation #13: Support Young Adults in the Parish**

**Objective:** To provide the young adults out of high school, attending college, or working with regular and formal Christian Formation opportunities. To provide the young adults with an experience that engages their unique interests, supports the challenges they are facing at this time of their life, and moves them to a service to others.

**Strategies:**

- Identify one or more individuals to serve as peer group leader(s).
- Have member of clergy work with peer group leader(s) to:
  - Identify specific interests of St. James' members in this peer group.
  - Connect with an Episcopal Young Adults Ministry Network (YAMN)

- Develop formal plan and identify budget needs to implement any programs to CE Committee.

#### **Recommendation #14: Support Adults with Young Families**

**Objective:** Meet Christian Formation interests and schedule needs of adults with young children. Allow them to take part in a supporting and learning environment that supports their adult interests and interest in being nurturing Christian parents. In addition, help them find ways to practice faith in their homes, and support one another as parents.

**Strategies:**

- Identify one or more individuals to serve as peer group leader(s).
- Have member of clergy work with peer group leader(s) to:
  - Have peer group leader(s) identify specific interests of St. James members in this peer group.
  - Connect the peer group leader(s) with resources for busy families with young children in the Episcopal Church
  - Develop formal plan and identify budget needs to implement any programs to CE Committee.

Finally, we should not forget that our clergy are also adult learners. The Parish is contractually and morally obligated to give these men and women time to study and learn.

**Recommendation #15: Provide clergy the necessary resources, funding, and time to further their theological education and to keep current on ecclesiastical and liturgical knowledge.**

**Objective:** To keep current on required educational trainings, e.g. Prevention of Adult Sexual Misconduct, Anti-Racism Training and to broaden their own education concerning God, the church, and their relationship with both.

**Strategies:**

- Develop and maintain communication with the Diocesan Center concerning clergy education and trainings.
- Provide contacts with seminaries, retreat centers, and universities in relation to courses offered.
- Identify continuation needs of clergy and cost for program participation.
- Allow adequate funding for continuing education for clergy.
- Provide ample time for clergy to participate in continuing education classes.

**SUMMARY**

Like all strategic plans this one exists presently only as words on paper. Many times, that is what they remain. Planners have no control over how their ideas are implemented. Plans are a lot like children—you give the best advice possible and cross your fingers.

It is the hope of the Strategic Planning team that the carefully thought-out recommendations presented in this plan will be given equally careful and

prayerful consideration by the Christian Formation & Education Committee. From dozens of recommendations that flowed to the SP team via teacher, parent and parishioner surveys, only fifteen have made it to the final report. We feel these are broad enough to be interpreted and implemented by the CE Committee in ways that are advantageous to its particular circumstances.

For instance, Recommendation #7 (The teaching staff and Christian Education Committee should identify and implement ways to encourage both parental and parish involvement in Christian Education programs for youth) can be accomplished in many different manners. We have offered some strategies that we think will assist accomplish this goal, but by no means should these strategies be considered the total implementation package. At all times, however, the objective of each recommendation should be adhered to as the *spirit of the recommendation*. In other words, we ask that the objective of the recommendation be foremost in mind—how the objectives are achieved can be negotiated at the committee level.

The Christian Education Committee needs strong multi-layered leadership to carry out this plan. The chair or chairs must ultimately take responsibility, but they need strong teacher, parent and parish-wide involvement. Clergy must stay on top of implementation and become part of problem-solving at the institutional as well as the Committee level. The Vestry, for its part as the body that commissioned this study, must stay motivated to improve all aspects of Christian Education. In the most positive way possible, it must hold the Christian Education

Committee responsible to carry out its duties regarding improvements. An annual update to the Vestry through 2014 would be appropriate.

Finally, to answer a question posed earlier—*How will we be remembered?* Of course, we cannot answer that question today, but we can certainly think about the legacy of Christian Education in these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and ask some critical questions. Are we doing the best we can by the children? Are we creating programs which make all learners feel welcome and, when they leave, satisfied that their time was well-spent? Are we making a difference in the life of our Parish by drawing in new members because the quality of our education programs is unparalleled in the region? Are we making a difference in your life? If we can answer these questions positively, in 2009 and in the near future, then indeed we will have done the best we can.

## List of Recommendations

**Recommendation# 1** (page X): Establish a policy to encourage attendance by teachers at all grade levels, including those teaching adult classes, to the monthly meetings.

**Recommendation # 2** (page X): The CE Committee should establish a team to discern and redefine the leadership roles within the CE Committee.

**Recommendation #3** (page X): Within the CE Committee, define additional roles and responsibilities to address curriculum, training, and financial oversight.

**Recommendation # 4** (page X): The CE Committee needs to practice more evangelism within the Parish and with the other committees. The Christian Education Committee should be interested in how the church grows, especially where there is contact with potential new members.

**Recommendation # 5** (page X): As more families with young children join the church, we will need to accommodate their educational needs. The CE Committee should conduct a space allocation survey to understand present and future impact of programs on building and grounds, in its space allocation study, should consider a Phase II expansion of the Christian Education Building to include more classrooms, meeting space, modest kitchen facilities and a small auditorium.

**Recommendation# 6** (page X): The Assistant Rector should be seen as the Principal Spiritual Leader and Teacher leading Christian Formation activities at St. James' Parish.

**Recommendation # 7** (page X): The teaching staff and CE Committee should identify and implement ways to encourage both parental and parish involvement in Christian Education programs for youth.

**Recommendation #8** (page X): Ensure the elementary school curriculum meets the needs of the Parish.

**Recommendation # 9** (page X): CE teachers should look for opportunities to integrate physical play with learning whenever possible and practical.

**Recommendation #10** (page X): Fully implement the Journey to Adulthood program for Grades 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>.

**Recommendation #11** (page X): Connect classroom activities with youth fellowship, thereby creating a community within the youth and a Christian learning focus outside the traditional classroom meeting environment.

**Recommendation # 12** (page X): Encourage teachers of the adult programs to participate at the Committee level by creating space for them to come and discuss ideas for future courses and to seek input regarding growing the participation of adult learners in the Parish.

**Recommendation #13** (page X): Support Young Adults in the Parish

**Recommendation #14** (page X): Support Adults with Young Families.

**Recommendation #15** (page X): Provide clergy the necessary resources, funding, and time to further their theological education and to keep current on ecclesiastical and liturgical knowledge.