

IMMANUEL HIGHLANDS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

STRATEGIC PLAN

REVISED BY THE VESTRY JUNE, 2023

INTRODUCTION

This document was originally written in 2019. It has been updated to reflect the progress we have made and establish new goals. At its heart, Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church in Wilmington, Delaware, is a community of faithful Episcopalians who intentionally worship God and share God's love with each other and the greater Kingdom in prayer and service. We are blessed with generous bequests that help us maintain our beautiful property and serve our outreach partners. Our challenge is increasing our members. We are a work in progress.

Our core values:

- Centricity of the Eucharist
- Open and welcoming to all persons
- Commitment to Christian formation for children and adults
- Commitment to fiscal responsibility and good stewardship of our property
- Commitment to service in the community

In faith we are committed not just to survive, but to thrive—as a vital witness to the powerful love of God, and an agent of comfort and light to the world. This Strategic Plan serves as our guide to realizing that commitment.

There are six important areas for focus in this plan.

1. Worship
2. Stewardship of Our Resources
3. Church Growth
4. Christian Formation
5. Fiscal Responsibility
6. Service to the Community
7. Church Safety

Many of the areas are interrelated. Within each section (and subsection, where needed) there is a brief statement of current state, including historical context where relevant. Those statements are followed, in boldface, by our intention to develop that area of focus. Where a goal has been accomplished, it is noted. Finally, each section gives a target timing for achieving measurable change.

The Strategic Plan is a work-in-progress. Vestry will modify and update it as needed and present a status report to the parish. The plan is ambitious, and we are challenging ourselves to launch or support many initiatives between now and the end of 2023.

AREAS FOR STRATEGIC FOCUS

1. WORSHIP – Growing in Faith

a. Alternative style and schedule of services

The Holy Eucharist is the center of our corporate worship. We find comfort and deep meaning in the traditional forms of Episcopal liturgy. We are open to exploring ways to broaden our practices (worship structures, music, prayers) to make them meaningful and accessible to the broader age demographic of our congregation.

Our goal is to include everyone who wishes to participate in our worship. Our challenge is how to make that realistically possible. **In collaboration with our new rector, the Liturgy Committee and Vestry, we will continue to explore ways to broaden our practices and consider alternative scheduling of some worship events.**

TARGET TIMING: Immediate and ongoing, with the participation and guidance of our new rector

a. Liturgy education and instructed eucharist

All the elements of worship that we have inherited from the Anglican Tradition are the product of generations of thought and prayer. “Why we do what we do” is often not well understood, and as a consequence less valuable and more vulnerable to careless change. **We will provide education about the liturgy and prayers in the Episcopal Church in the form of instructed Eucharists and classes, so we can grow in their appreciation, understanding and connection with our worship.**

TARGET TIMING: In consultation with our new Rector, we will begin this program in the in 2024.

2. STEWARDSHIP OF OUR RESOURCES

a. Education for giving

God entrusts us with money, time, and talent during our life on earth. Being a good and faithful steward defines who we are as Christians. It is important we understand that giving freely and cheerfully sustains our mission to do God's work and for us as a parish to grow and thrive. **We will continue to undertake an engaging educational program, both written and oral, to help us better understand the importance of this spiritual act.**

TARGET TIMING: We will begin targeted messages to the congregation in early October, 2023.

b. Pledge Growth

We have enabled online pledging and giving. We reinstated the practice of passing the offering plate during the service, which brought additional revenue to the operating budget. By continuing educational programs on the importance of stewardship spiritually and practically, as well as the many options for giving, we aim to inspire members to

make regular contributions to the life, work and worship of the community they have chosen to join. **We will continue to communicate and ensure that all contributions are confidential. We will continue to monitor the number of pledges received after the campaign and track our progress yearly.**

TARGET TIMING: Ongoing, in conjunction with the stewardship program

c. Stewardship of our physical facility

Immanuel Highlands has a long history in the Highlands neighborhood, which is increasingly young, professional, and very active. **Connection to that community will require us to be in step—environmentally conscious, using sustainable energy, native & community-friendly landscaping, and being visibly activist.** Sustainable energy includes the conservation of heat, power, and water. After a 2019 energy assessment, we replaced bulbs with LED's, bought a dishwasher to reduce disposables, and analyzed heat and AC use. Community-friendly landscaping includes more public benches, edible landscaping, native plants and clear signage. Sustainability and community use will be publicized in the Highland Community Assoc. newsletter, social media, and on our website.

TARGET TIMING: Install energy savers such as locked thermostats, re-sized fans, re-ducted sanctuary air flow, and motion-detector lights in 2023-2025. Add more public benches, edible landscaping, native plants and clear signage in 2023-2025.

We must continue to maintain, restore, and make full use of the historically important, beautiful sanctuary and supporting buildings. The exterior restoration of the sanctuary—Cornerstone II/Phase 1—was completed in 2020 as a major fund-raising and construction achievement. Cornerstone II/Phase 2 will restore the sanctuary interior and awaits funding.

An active committee is organizing repairs and cleanup in the parish house and the Education wing; some plastering and roof repairs were done in 2019-2020 and the kitchenette was remodeled in 2023. Interior sanctuary repairs are being studied in 2023, by a team of architects, historic restoration & masonry specialists coordinating with church leadership.

TARGET TIMING: Complete cleanup and improve use of all floors of the Education wing in 2023; complete study of interior sanctuary repairs by year-end 2023

3. CHURCH GROWTH – PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS

We understand we must grow in order to thrive and to share the wonderful gifts God has given us with others.

a. Invite – Welcome – Connect

Immanuel fully embraces the national church's program and has adopted many of the ideas proposed by task groups focusing on each of the topics in the past four years.

However, we recognize the need to revitalize our efforts in addressing and prioritizing ways be more welcoming to newcomers, our neighborhood residents and those groups who share our building. **We will review and increase opportunities for them to share social as well as Christian education and worship activities with us.**

TARGET TIMING: Develop a Newcomer Program by the beginning of the 3Q 2023.

b. Communication

An important component to inviting, welcoming, and connecting with newcomers as well as current and past parishioners is a strong and consistent communication program. While many of the communication weaknesses noted from a previous survey have been addressed (telephone, IT and website upgrade; streamlined weekly newsletter and Sunday bulletin; and a new corner sign), there are other communication means to be developed and implemented. These include use of digital media messaging, increased photography, and outside advertising of church activities. **We will actively recruit people to participate in this effort.**

TARGET TIMING: Current and ongoing with emphasis on establishing an Invite-Welcome-Connect/Communications Committee, 3Q 2023

4. CHRISTIAN FORMATION

a. Christian Formation for Children and Youth

The children's Christian education program has grown nicely in the last two years and currently serves approximately 14 children ranging in ages from 3 to 11. In 2023 we were pleased to need to split into two classes, one for our youngest children, and one for first through fourth grades. Our teachers used a mixed curriculum of Godly Play and Bible-based story telling. **We are in the process of resuming a nursery for the youngest children and look forward to increasing programs for our older youth, who are a smaller but important part of our Immanuel family.**

TARGET TIMING:

b. Christian Adult Education

Prior to the construction of the Chapel and Sanctuary in 1918, Immanuel Highlands was a "cottage church" of small groups of people meeting in their neighbors' homes. Adult education remains as foundational today in our personal and collective growth as the children's and youths' Christian formation classes. Our adult forums are both clergy and lay led. Even through the pandemic, we held adult education classes via technology. We continue to hold a hybrid Adult Education class on Sunday mornings. The online platform has allowed us to reach members who are unable to attend in-person worship and education, and has attracted attendees from beyond our parish. **Our goal, in collaboration with our new rector, is to broaden our vision of the Kingdom and our work in it through a variety of forums, books (including our BCP), and Bible studies.**

TARGET TIMING: Immediate and ongoing

5. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The goal of fiscal responsibility is to achieve a good and sustainable balance between receipts and expenditures. That can happen through an increase in the one, a decrease in the other, or a combination. Good stewardship supports this work; but so does careful spending and budgeting, and ensuring that the programs we fund clearly support the Church's mission.

Offerings and gifts have declined the last several years, though pledges have stabilized somewhat and we now have additional plate income from passing the plate at services. According to the 2022 Parochial Report, pledge, plate, and regular support covered about 31% of our total expenses. Operating expenses have been steady or increasing. The shortfall is covered by invested resources, and the amount of money used from investment to support operating expenses has exceeded the earnings from investment. We *will* run out of money.

- a. Face the reality of the situation—communicate to parish

We will produce an updated summary of our financial condition, including the ongoing shortfall of receipts to expenses, and share this summary with the congregation through a public meeting and a printed and on-line presentation document.

TARGET TIMING: Hold a churchwide meeting during the 3rd quarter 2023.

- b. Reduce our expenditures

We have made progress in reducing expenses in the last 4 years. We have evaluated all our programs to ensure that we are funding those that are critical to our mission at an appropriate level. However, we must continue to look for new ways to reduce our expenditures.

The Finance Ministry recommends addressing this issue by decreasing expenses by \$75,000 and attempting to increase income by \$75,000 adjustment for the 2024 budget. This is an ambitious goal; however, these actions are a painful, but necessary step to a path of financial stability for the church. **Finance will work with Property during the remainder of 2023 and into 2024 as needed to explore additional revenue streams via building use. The Personnel Committee will review staff positions and identify opportunities and actions to reduce expenses.**

TARGET TIMING: Recommendations for the first phase of increased revenue and reductions in staff expenses will be presented to Vestry during the 3rd quarter of 2023, as part of the 2024 budget process.

6. SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Outreach is serving, giving and showing mercy. (Romans 12:8) It is equally important and an essential part of our Christian development, vitality and growth. Outreach brings us closer to those outside our church walls and improves our awareness of issues concerning our community. Participating in community activities to help those in need also provides us the opportunity to encourage those who do not attend services to get to know God better through our church.

Immanuel partners with local organizations that minister to a whole range of human needs.

We have a 2023 schedule of giving activities. **We will continue to reinforce and re-energize our commitment to Friendship House Ministries, Ministry of Caring, Seaman's Center, Emmanuel Dining Room and other local groups we are currently helping. We will support them financially, (including in-kind donations), and encourage broader parish participation in the work, including our children and youth.**

TARGET TIMING: On-going throughout 2023 and the years to come.

7. Church Safety

Everyone who attends, serves, or works at Immanuel must feel safe. We must renew our commitment to the Episcopal Church's Safe Church Program, and address other areas of safety such as emergency response. **We will appoint a committee of church leaders and parishioners to examine, develop, and implement a comprehensive program of church safety.**

TARGET TIMING: Committee formation – June 2023; plan creation and implementation – December 2023, with implementation ongoing as components are identified and created.