

Vivid Vision for St. Margaret's Episcopal Church:

Imagining ourselves on Pentecost, 2024

What is a Vivid Vision? A vivid vision is just that: a clear, purposeful image of what our community will look like in the future. We've chosen a date around 3 years in the future from the writing of this vision, and we will return to and revisit this vision over and over as we move towards that date to guide us and remind us of where God is leading us.

So, imagine that you are coming to our church for the Feast of Pentecost, on May 19th, 2024. What do you see? What is our church doing? What impact is it having on our community, our members, our souls? This is what our Vivid Vision describes.

Our 2024 Vivid Vision...

You are driving down Stahl Road towards St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. As you approach you notice our bright and sleek-looking LED sign, lit up with interesting information about the church and school, along with cute pictures of kids from our school. Before you reach the parking lot, you see some slides appear on the sign indicating your parking options for Sunday, with special parking close to the church for visitors, folks with kids, or those with mobility issues. You also see that parking is available in the Stahl Elementary School parking lot, which is good because each of the smaller lots is looking full.



Since you are arriving almost in time for the 2nd service of the day, you see families and other parishioners greeting each other and walking towards the door with grins on their faces. You notice one or two volunteers in matching tee-shirts helping people find parking, carry baby seats, and generally assisting in giving directions to members and visitors.

As you walk from where you have parked your car towards the parish hall and church, you notice the freshly manicured grass and well-kept landscaping. As you pass the warm and inviting Parish Hall and see folks inside finishing up refreshments and fellowship

and notice the care which this church takes with its buildings and grounds. On the lawn, you spot the place where the ground will be broken to build a *new* Parish Hall sometime over the next few months. You see the appealing and peaceful prayer garden and make a note to come back to visit it sometime during the week. You know that when you do, you often find one or two other folks there to pray, walk, or eat their lunch outside. You also notice the field beyond is still set up with soccer nets and other equipment from last week's games.

You are guided towards the Church building by professional yard signs along the walkway. You see that some of them also have encouraging messages, or invitations to check out the day school or church, which are probably directed towards the dozens of Stahl Elementary parents who walk these grounds every weekday. As you get close to the door, you are warmly greeted by a friend and fellow member who hands you a bulletin for the service and asks you how your week went. This greeter along with the others knows to direct newcomers and visitors to fill out a newcomer card and help them with any

questions they might have. Though you are not new, you see another greeter introducing a newcomer to another member with a smile and helping them to their seats.

As you enter the church, you note a few members and new faces milling around outside the doors to the sanctuary. A man with a family who you do not recognize is looking at all the pictures around the room. Looking around yourself, you see that anyone who glanced at these displays would immediately get the sense of the warmth and friendliness of the church, and how great it would be to belong here. You smile, as you know this to be the truth, and feel comfortable introducing yourself to this man and showing him just how accurate that is, and he tells you what a great church you seem to have.

You say goodbye and begin to find a seat in the sanctuary. As usual for this service, the pews are full of mostly familiar faces: folks with kids laughing and wrangling their little ones, older members chatting, some youth sitting together and studying one of their phones intently, and a handful of new faces or folks that you have seen just a few times. You also notice a few of the several families who have started attending church after having enrolled their children in the church's School. You have come to enjoy the community at each different service on Sundays and how, even with over 100 people coming to the church on an average Sunday, people seem to know and like each other deeply. Looking across the pews, you make a note to say hi to a couple that has attended the last few weeks. You love extending a warm welcome to new people.

The band, led by a very talented musician, and several very talented volunteers, is warming up for their usual mix of upbeat praise and worship music and more familiar, though still catchy, settings of traditional hymns. They are dedicated to their ministry and play beautifully. The paid musician plays at all services and is accompanied at the 8 AM service by a small choir and chanters. You know that the music is a very important part of all the services and the culture here, usually matching the readings and sermon of the day, and you laugh as you think about how often the songs, with their deep and powerful meanings, get stuck in your head the rest of the week.



As the service begins on this festival day, you notice the full crew of ministers of worship has assembled at the back of the church for the procession. The Acolytes, Eucharistic Ministers, and the priest are all wearing their clean, well-fit vestments, and, as usual, everyone looks calm and confident, like they know exactly what they are doing. The smell of incense fills the air as it always does on high Holy Days. You think back fondly to the last big party on St. Margaret's Day filled with food, music, and worship, and are glad your church makes a special occasion (and a real feast) out of all the important feasts of the church year, even marking them on their Facebook and social media accounts with pictures and posts about each special day.

While the ministers are taking their places around the sanctuary to the tune of a joyful entrance hymn, you take time to admire the hangings and decorations of the church. The colors match, the flowers pop, and in your head, you thank the Altar Guild and flower team who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make sure the church is well stocked, equipped, and prepared for every service.

You also notice the service being filmed and broadcast live from the back of the church, something that

has continued since the virtual services from the COVID times. On days when you could not make it to church, you appreciated the ability to still tune in and worship from home, and you know even as it allows housebound members to still worship with the community, it is also often a gateway for newcomers to check out the church and that many have visited and become members after doing so.

As always, you are struck by the mix of upbeat, fun, and contemporary music with the more traditional language and prayerful vibe of both the priest and congregation. The prayers are truly prayed and not just said, psalms are sometimes sung and sometimes chanted, and you know that the combination of excitement, awe, and holiness of the Sunday Communion service is a fundamental part of the church's faith life and the discipleship of its members, including yourself. Many of the parts of the service on this festival day are chanted in simple but beautiful tones and, as always, the congregation confidently and powerfully chants and/or says the responses together.



The sermon is interesting, and Gospel-centered, as you have come to expect, and you always get something important out of the Sunday message. The sermons are mostly given by Fr. Eric, but there are occasional guests and visiting preachers who enrich the worship of the congregation with their excellent and faithful messages. Sometimes the youth or other ministers of the congregation preach as well, which is always a treat! And you happen to know that the sermon videos and audios are frequently viewed and downloaded by people from all over the internet.

The passing of the peace is lively as usual, and you make a point to offer peace to some of the new and visiting worshipers in the pews around you. Later, as you go up for Communion, you see that newcomers can confidently participate, sometimes guided by ushers and helpful members, and feel free to receive communion or a blessing as they prefer.

As the service wraps up, you listen to the short and relevant announcements, which let you know about what is going on in the church, and how you can get involved and you appreciate that there is no insider language or vague instructions like "talk to Ted after the service" that you would not know how to follow. As they are mentioned in the announcements, you see that in your pew and every pew around you there are blank and visible newcomer's cards, prayer request cards, and "I'd like to get involved with..." cards, making it easy for you to respond to an announcement about helping with the food after church next week.



After the service you shake hands with Fr. Eric who greets you warmly on your way out, and you smile as you see the visiting family you met on your way in waiting in line to say hi with a filled-out visitor card. You know that not only will they be getting a warm welcome from the priest, but they will also get a personal visit from him to their home later that afternoon, as Fr. Eric always personally visits each new family that fills out a card that same day, bringing them a St. Margaret's mug and some other church welcome information. You remember warmly your

first visit and mug, along with the welcome emails and texts from other members who helped you find

your way around and get involved at St. Margaret's.

You move out past the well-manicured garden with the other folks leaving the church. Several are headed to their cars, or to let their kids play around on the front lawn or playground, but you head into the Parish Hall. Other folks are also heading into the hall, some head immediately towards the kitchen for a little bit of food and fellowship, not to mention coffee, while others head towards the spacious, clean, and well-run nursery, where their young children have been lovingly watched over by trained and background checked nursery workers.

The inside of the Parish Hall looks as organized and cared for as the other buildings, and you are proud to know that it is utilized almost every day and night of the week both by the school during the day as well as by programs of the church and outside organizations that are very grateful to have access to the versatile space and kitchen.

After a few minutes of chatting, eating, and drinking coffee, adults and older youth begin sitting down at the table in the main space, while younger children find their way to the Sunday school class for their age group. This is the last class of a 7-week series on the historical resurrection. As always, there is an excellent presentation with professional materials and visual aids and engaging slides. You enjoy these Sunday series greatly, of which there are generally 4 per year, all led by talented and dynamic instructors including



Fr. Eric and several other members of the church, and occasionally led by invited speakers. The topics are always engaging and useful for discipleship, and people enjoy attending and even invite friends to join in. Other series and classes often go on during a weeknight at the church, often geared towards benefiting the community at large with topics such as parenting, financial planning and education, and even cooking classes. All community education offerings include a connection to evangelism and an invitation to explore the faith and church more deeply. In addition, small virtual and in-person groups meet throughout the week online and in people's homes.

In the discussion section of the class, your friend mentions that their spouse is in the hospital. They tell you that they contacted the pastoral care coordinator who made sure they were on the prayer list, arranged a visit from the priest, and were organizing some other ministries to provide meals here and there for the two of them for several weeks while they recover. You know that members of the church feel cared for by their community and that if you ever needed pastoral care or prayer, help would be just a phone call or email away.

As the class ends and you prepare to head out, you check the calendar for upcoming events on your phone. The website is crisp, professional-looking, and easy to use on your mobile device, and you easily find the weeknight event you are looking for. For a moment you get distracted by the fun and well-curated photos on the website. One, of the church buildings at night, particularly stands out, as the well-lit paths, parking lots, and buildings twinkle, giving passersby the sense that this is a warm, inviting, and active place, even at night.

You turn and head towards the door, pausing just to look at a display in the Parish Hall that you had also noticed near the entrance of the church. It is a bright and interesting visual display of the finances of the church, and how your giving is used to further the mission of the church. You notice with pride

that the resources devoted to worship, nurture, and outreach have steadily increased. On one side of the display, next to the model and plans of the new Parish Hall, you are excited to see that enough funds have now been raised to schedule the groundbreaking and begin building.

Another board shows the pictures and descriptions of the additional staff and volunteers, and the impact they make in the church and the community around you. When you have visited the office during the week, you find these staff members and ministers happily going about their work. Just like all the volunteers, they are well trained, and each knows their clear roles and responsibilities. They often express gratitude for the opportunity to perform meaningfully, Christ-centered work and for their fair and competitive compensation.

You are thankful for the way St. Margaret's communicates how it stewards its resources so clearly throughout the year and are proud as you read that St. Margaret's members have grown significantly in their church attendance, involvement, financial commitment, and personal spiritual growth over the past few years.

One more display catches your eye as you turn towards the door, one that outlines the effect St. Margaret's has been having on the whole neighborhood. You have been aware of this through the colorful and informative emails, Facebook, and other social media posts, of course. And you have seen articles and features from the Diocesan channels, and even in the local media. They all tell you what you and many other members have experienced for yourself through outreach events and efforts: that your church knows and is well known by families in the area. It has helped people out of poverty, to deal with addiction, helped people raise families, and to steward their resources wisely.



But most of all, and through all our efforts, we have given people an opportunity to encounter and respond to the love of God in Jesus Christ and offered them the Good News. Because of this, people in our neighborhood and local institutions look to us for spiritual guidance and support, and people say that the neighborhood is friendlier, safer, and just straightforwardly more Christian due to our work.

As you begin your pleasant walk back to your car to get on with your day you reflect on all the ways St. Margaret's has changed your life and helped you grow in your relationship with God. You are happy to see just how much you have been a part of the spiritual renewal going on at St. Margaret's, how you have grown in your spiritual practices, been prioritizing church on Sundays, taken up your study of the scriptures, learned the importance of evangelism and even reached out to others to ask them about their faith or lack thereof. You have moved from being a newcomer to being a sporadic attendee to a fully-committed member and leader. You now view all your time, treasure, and talent as a gift from God and have begun discerning what your particular gifts for ministry are.

As you get in your car and turn the key, you see just how much the fruits of the Holy Spirit have been developing in your own life, and in the church community as a whole and as you drive away you smile and thank God for the work He has done through His imperfect servants at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church.