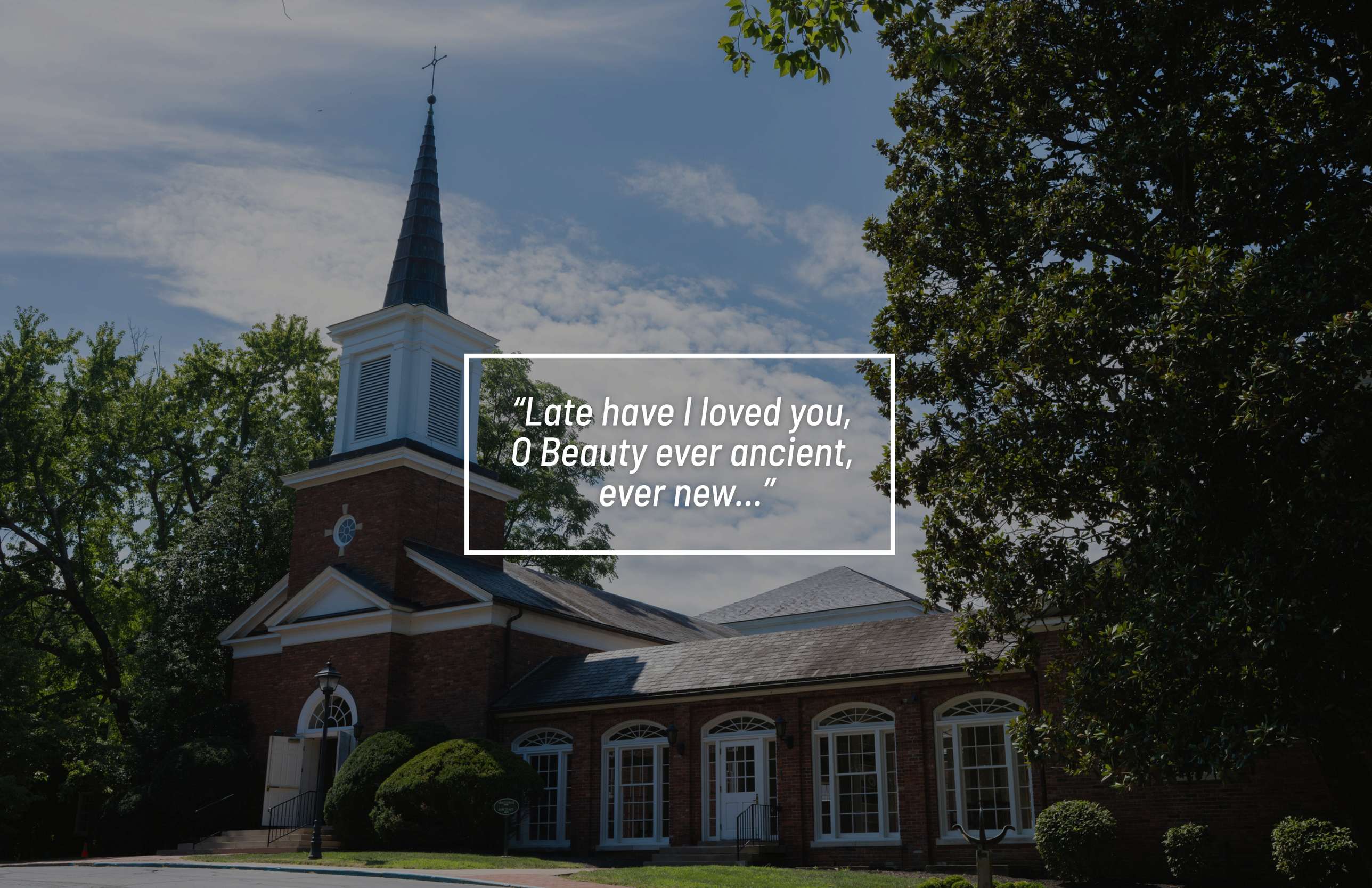
Ever Ancient, EVER NEW

The St. Francis Strategic Plan

ST. FRANCIS IN THE FIELDS
EPISCOPAL CHURCH


"Late have I loved you,
O Beauty ever ancient,
ever new..."

Introduction

Since our founding in 1945, St. Francis in the Fields has continually responded to the changing needs of our people, the greater Louisville community, and the world. From tuberculosis clinics and a day school to Alpha programs and catechesis, the face of our ministries has changed over the years. Our campus and people have changed too: from a little neighborhood church in rural Harrods Creek to a spacious facility with members from all corners of Louisville. But no matter what has changed in the world around us, we have been guided by the things that never change: the love of God, the truth of the Gospel, the witness of those who have gone before us, and the riches of the living tradition that has been entrusted to us.

And Jesus said to them,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Our mission is to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ, drawing all generations into worship, formation, and witness. We are committed to this, and we seek to live it out in all that we do. This mission isn't unique to us: It was given to the disciples by Christ himself (Matthew 28:16-20)—a commission that echoes through the centuries.

As we enter the next 80 years of ministry in Louisville, we have a question before us: How are we to be faithful to Christ, here and now? We know that the needs of the Church, of Louisville, and of the world are different today than they were 80, 50, 10, or even five years ago. What do we need to do to make and grow disciples in Louisville, in 2030 and beyond? How do we keep the ancient faith, while being a witness not to the glories of the past, but to the hope of the future? How do we respond to change, without becoming slaves to the winds of cultural anxiety and the spirit of this age?

We believe the answer to this question is simple: We respond to the changes and concerns of the day by holding fast to the things that don't change: scripture, sacraments, liturgy, the teachings of the apostles, and the witness of Christians around the world and spread throughout time.

The riches of the Great Tradition of Christianity are a gift that has been entrusted to us for this time, for this moment. We live out our mission by working every day to become a church where God's people, worn and anxious from the changing and transient aspects of human life and contemporary culture, can find peace and rest amid the things that endure.

In these pages, you will find a strategic plan to guide St. Francis in the Fields in the coming years. This overview represents more than two years of discernment by many members of the parish, including the St. Francis strategy working team, the Vestry, parish staff, and the many parishioners who have shared their hopes and vision for the future of St. Francis in the Fields. These faithful and considered efforts have culminated in a collection of ways to both enhance our current programs and ministries and innovate in new directions, while continuing to steward the gifts that we already have and the things we already do well.

We call this plan **Ever Ancient, Ever New: The St. Francis Strategy**. The title is drawn from the work of St. Augustine of Hippo, who prayed to the God who is: "Beauty ever ancient, ever new." An emphasis on beauty is one of the gifts of our inheritance. We see beauty in the design of our sanctuary, through our legacy of sacred music, in the tranquility of our campus, and in the countless ways our people reach out and serve in our church and community. As we contemplate how to maintain and extend this vision to even more people, we can be guided by the wisdom of St. Augustine:

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty *ever ancient, ever new*, late have I loved you! ... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. "
— St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

American Church in Crisis

Since the 1970s, religious service attendance has declined by 20%, despite efforts by mainline churches to grow by appealing to the non-religious. You may have witnessed the trends that have swept through American Christianity over the past 50 years: strong emotion and cultural relevance elevated over teaching and formation, softening or skipping hard truths, and structuring church around consumer-friendly models.

Unfortunately, these theological compromises have not only watered down the faith, but also failed to achieve growth. Average Sunday attendance in the Episcopal Church declined by 28% in just 10 years (2011–2020).

These major themes and trends in mainline churches over the past few decades reflect a church in crisis. Throughout the 1990s and into the 2010s, many churches emphasized cultural relevance as central to their witness. In addition to ignoring, amending, or evading questions of theological rigor, they simplified the liturgy to make it "seeker friendly," which led to congregants going through the motions without reverence or serious formation. Finally, the church fragmented internally, representing a lack of a clearly defined worldview and values. This resulted in theological ambiguity and institutional disintegration, and strife, anxiety, and broken relationships in its wake.

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Churches outside the mainline tradition also sought to appeal more to seekers, adopting a casual atmosphere, emotionally compelling music, and technological accessibility, including online worship and sermoncasts. The "Mega Church" movement offered seekers an experience, but left many longing for deep relationships, an embodied presence, and a sacramental richness that could not be communicated through a screen. Many of these churches were firm on what they believed, but compromised instead on richness, ritual, and rootedness.

But what if it doesn't have to be this way? What if there were a church that offered the best of the Episcopal tradition: ancient ritual, robust teaching and preaching, and warm community fellowship?

And what if God is calling us to be that church?

The Turn to Deep Beauty

In the past few years, the West has seen renewed energy around traditional forms of Christianity, especially among young adults. After years of steep decline, the number of Americans identifying as Christian is beginning to rise. Most people—92% in a 2025 Pew study—believe in God or a form of spiritual reality. A 2024 survey of Eastern Orthodox clergy indicated the majority of recent converts are under age 40. Ministers across the country, in varying denominations, are reporting that new attendees are seeking a traditional, embodied, community-focused church home, in contrast to the shiny packaging and anemic theology they may have encountered previously.

Increasingly, people—especially young people and families—are craving a sense of rootedness, connection, and deep formation. They don't want something that is "easy" or "approachable"; they want something rich, challenging, and life-changing. They don't need their faith to be "relevant" to modern issues; they want something that transcends modern issues. Moreover, they have a strong intuition that sacred spaces should not look or feel like a concert venue or trendy coffee shop. They want beauty, holiness, and awe. They don't want a stage, a rally, or a convention; they want an altar, a temple, and a home.

There is a name for this focus on an ancient faith that speaks to modern problems: It is called **Great Tradition Christianity**. Americans' hunger for a feeling of connection with the practices of early Christianity is palpable. St. Francis is here to welcome and embrace them. Our decades of commitment to foundational truths and spiritual practices are a testament to the enduring power of the faith we have inherited, and now we're ready to offer those gifts to even more people.

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That's the Great Tradition

Great Tradition Christianity endures not by reinventing itself, but by remaining rooted in what was handed down. Today's problems don't require modern solutions, because the problems themselves are not modern. Studying the Church Fathers and Mothers reveals that they wrestled with the same questions about life, faith, and human nature that we have, and that they often discerned perspectives and approaches that can nourish and guide us in our day. We receive this wisdom with thankfulness and reverence, gratefully picking up the mantle of tradition worn by the saints who have preceded us in the faith.

So, what is Great Tradition Christianity? While all churches, regardless of denomination, emphasis, or style, seek to bring people to Christ, Great Tradition Churches do it in a way that is scriptural, apostolic, catholic, sacramental, and liturgical.

Scriptural

Scripture interpreted through the Church's historical wisdom—councils, creeds, the Church Fathers, and centuries of community reflection.

Apostolic

Continuity of authority and teaching preserved through bishops connected directly to the apostles, for the faithful transmission of doctrine and practice.

Catholic

Affirming unity and fellowship that transcends cultural, geographic, historical, and denominational boundaries, recognizing a shared, ancient Christian heritage.

Sacramental

Sacraments—particularly baptism and the Eucharist—as genuine encounters with transcendent reality that form and nourish the Christian life.

Liturgical

Structured, historically rooted worship enhanced by sacred music, art, architecture, and rituals that engage the senses and draw believers deeper into divine mysteries.

These values have always been part of who we are at St. Francis in the Fields. They are the reason we returned to in-person worship as quickly as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are the reason we prioritize Bible study and joyfully orthodox preaching and teaching. They are the reason we are passionate about our children and youth being formed in the "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). And as we've committed to living out these values, we've continued to grow—with a 36% increase in average Sunday attendance from 2020 to 2024.

We don't do this just to grow or because there is a market demand for this type of church. This is the way that we believe God has called us to be disciples and to make new disciples. We are called to be part of a story that is bigger than ourselves, our cultural moment, or our modern anxieties.

Over and over again, we have seen ancient wisdom meet people in the present day. We see it when our Lay Eucharistic Ministers share Holy Communion with shut-ins. We see it when we remember the Faithful Departed on All Souls' Day. We see it when we gather for Morning and Evening Prayer. We see it when we praise God in song. We see it when our young people have a life-changing encounter through service. We see it when we remember the Paschal Mystery each Holy Week, and the Mystery of the Incarnation each Christmastide. Day by day, week by week, we walk a path that is ever ancient, and ever new.

The St. Francis Strategy

We know that there is a hunger in America for ancient ritual practices. We also know that there is a need in the Louisville area for a Great Tradition church that offers accessible but deep formation, beautiful worship, and warm and intentional community. There are people in our city and in the surrounding communities who want a church like St. Francis in the Fields.

At the same time, we aren't interested in growth just for growth's sake. This isn't about maximizing pledging or recording impressive numbers in our annual report. Our mission isn't to increase membership; it is to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ.

Make disciples
measured by average Sunday attendance

Grow disciples
measured by engagement in deep formation

Over the past two years, we have surveyed new and longtime members, conducted interviews of parishioners, and held workshops to get the perspective necessary to build a profile of St. Francis's core identity and guiding values. From that work, our strategy working team began discerning the shape of a strategic plan consistent with those values. This team asked questions and prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit to discern:

- What are we already doing well, and where do we need to grow and change?
- What ministries and programs will we put in place now, to help us move with confidence into the future?
- Where do we need to invest in our campus, culture, and capabilities?

Out of this work, the team was able to align on a distinct vision for St. Francis, providing the clarity required to guide us as we face the next 80 years. Our mission remains to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ by drawing all generations into worship, formation, and witness. Our strategy is how we are going to do it.

We believe there is a need in Louisville for a church that offers a rich expression of Great Tradition Christianity. We believe that God is calling us to be that church.

Our Vision: To be the best place to engage deeply with the richness of Great Tradition Christianity.

Focusing the Vision: Who and Where

People and their spiritual challenges are diverse. No church can meet the spiritual needs of every person or the practical needs of every community. Different churches have different strengths and gifts, just as the individual members of churches have different strengths and gifts. Strategic decision-making asks, who are we called to serve in a way that only we can?

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

1 Corinthians 12:4–6

Before we decide what programing or ministries we offer, we must discern whom we are seeking. We do this by looking at who is seeking us. Through the strategy working group's careful research, analysis, conversation, and prayer, a clear ministry landscape has emerged.

Truly Multigenerational

Great Tradition Christianity holds multigenerational appeal and is currently experiencing a resurgence among young people and young families. Rather than attracting only those who feel they "should" go to church or who are coming to St. Francis because that is where their friends are, we will be a church for people at any age who are taking an active posture toward their faith; those who find our approach appealing will tend to be intellectually curious with a respect for history and tradition.

All of Louisville

People are seeking a church that meets their spiritual needs, and they are willing to drive to get there. We will increasingly draw parishioners from across Louisville and not just our immediate neighborhood, as people seek out a Great Tradition church with accessible community. This will also be reflected in our outreach: We are called to local witness where we can build deep relationships, and global witness that is rooted in our Anglican identity.

Embodied Presence

Sacraments and liturgy are not optional, and we believe that deep formation and deep belonging can only happen in community. The people who seek us will be seeking real relationship—with Christ and with one another. We will emphasize an in-person encounter with Jesus Christ, with technology serving as an enhancement to embodied worship and never a replacement for it.

Living the Vision: What and How

We build on whom we serve by determining how we can serve in the way that only we can. We know that we have limited time and resources; having a clear vision and strategy allows us to make real decisions about what we will emphasize, invest in, and steward. As we implement the strategic plan, every program and ministry will drive toward fulfilling our mission and vision by focusing on:

Accessible Depth

We know that people are longing for a rich, robust, and challenging faith that provides real answers, not platitudes. But at the same time, we know that Great Tradition Christianity's depth has a learning curve. We will draw people into deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through intentional, thoughtful, and well-designed formation initiatives that make this depth accessible to anyone willing to learn and grow.

Structured Community

People are craving deep connection, not just deep formation. We want to be a place where people can form real relationships with others who differ in age, political affiliation, and socioeconomic status. We see Jesus in everyone, and we will be intentional about developing structured ways of building community among newcomers and longtime members.

Global Connection

The Church extends beyond the four walls of St. Francis in the Fields. We will be intentional about our global relationships to help form our people, and we will actively engage in the wider Christian conversation, always seeking common ground and shared mission with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Kingdom Focus

We will be unapologetically orthodox, growing through Gospel faithfulness—not political ideology. We will be faithful to the politics of the Kingdom of God, not any temporal human institution, and we will strive for communion and conversation among people who disagree.

Building the Vision: Strategic Initiatives

Many of our established programs and ministries already align with our vision and are well implemented. Our care for those who are sick, hospitalized, or in crisis; our robust Bible studies; our local outreach partnerships; and our beautiful and reverent worship are foundational not only to who we have been, but who we will continue to be. The strategic plan is not a new direction or a restart. This plan will allow us to go deeper in the places where we are already thriving, and to grow where we need to fill in the gaps as we seek to become the best place to engage deeply with the richness of the Great Tradition.

The proposed initiatives are closely aligned with our vision and our strategic choices. While our mission and vision will remain firm, the details of these initiatives may change, evolve, and shift as we begin implementing them, and as conditions on the ground change.

Worship

Liturgical Design Enhancements

Discern improvements to our worship spaces, as part of our comprehensive campus plan, by contracting with a liturgical design consultant. In addition to potentially refurbishing sound systems and seating, we will look at ways to deepen the piety and beauty of our worship spaces, while still being true to our architectural inheritance as a classic, Georgian-style building.

Early Church Ritual Evangelism

Develop a liturgy based on ancient, early church practices of worship, followed by a fellowship meal, to create an on-ramp to church for those young adults who are attracted to ritual, but who are unlikely to visit a regular Sunday service.

Preaching Excellence Program

If we are going to make the deepness and richness of Scripture available to people, regardless of their background or previous study, then high-quality preaching is non-negotiable at St. Francis in the Fields. The Preaching Excellence Program will help our clergy learn from one another through structured feedback, review, and continued education. More importantly, it will deepen our relationships with other parishes who share our commitment to preaching the gospel, through peer coaching.

Building the Vision: Strategic Initiatives

Formation

Great Tradition Children's and Youth Ministry

A reimagined approach to the formation of young people that focuses on giving them a strong foundation in Scripture, liturgy, sacraments, and sacred music. These ministries will offer robust teaching, deep relationships, and life-changing service opportunities and will prepare children and youth for a lifetime of deep faith. We will focus on teaching that is rigorous, but not onerous or boring—the best way for children and youth to learn is for them to encounter the joy and beauty at the heart of the Christian faith.

Universal Childcare

A commitment to offering childcare at every parishioner event, so that more young families can participate in our offerings.

Anglican Youth Pilgrimage/Mission

Empowering our youth for ministry through international pilgrimage and mission trips to deepen relationships with one another and the global church.

Ancient Paths Youth Confirmation

A three-year curriculum for middle school students, emphasizing sacraments, Scripture, and service, to prepare them to make an adult commitment to Christ.

Sound and Spirit Lecture Series

A recurring sacred music lecture series that explores the richness and depth of our musical traditions to enhance congregational singing.

Great Tradition Conference

Gathering Anglican scholars, ecumenical theologians, and practitioners to speak and present on significant topics related to Great Tradition Christianity.

The Assisi Retreat

Inviting theologians, clergy, and church thinkers to integrate into our common life, bringing notable figures from the Christian world to St. Francis and giving our community an opportunity to serve the broader Church.

Great Tradition Lay Institute

All Christians are called to ministry by virtue of their baptism. The Great Tradition Lay Institute will be a multi-year adult formation program to equip those who are interested in going deeper in their vocations as lay people. The program will focus on developing theological depth and scriptural literacy in order to equip them for deeper service and ministry in the Church.

Building the Vision: Strategic Initiatives

Witness

Military and Veterans Ministry

Support active duty and retired military with hope and encouragement, especially at the new Brownsboro Road Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital.

St. Joseph of Arimathea Burial Guild

Provide free burials to children who die in childbirth or utero, indigent bodies that are unclaimed, or those whose family cannot afford a proper burial.

Alpha

An 11-week series exploring the basis of Christian faith, targeted at those who are not deeply formed in Christianity.

Anglican Communion Partners

Support the work of ecumenical missionaries in the Anglican Communion Office.

Clergy Residency Program

Part of our apostolic witness is raising up new leaders to serve not ourselves, but the broader Church. We have long been a place where people hear and respond to God's call. The Clergy Residency Program will allow us to do this in a more formal way, with additional resources and support. This multi-year residency will train new clergy in the context of a thriving parish. They will serve us and learn from us, and then be sent out to share the hope of the Gospel with the wider church, and the world.

St. Francis Preschool

A full-day onsite preschool that is unapologetically Christian and integrated into the life of the parish, the St. Francis Preschool will have a strong emphasis on catechesis and Christian formation. In addition to enriching the faith of children at a very early age, a preschool will be another way for us to witness to the power of the Resurrection, and the richness of Great Tradition Christianity.

Annual Family Conference

A multigenerational event that will help our families develop stronger bonds, establish traditions, and share meaningful spiritual experiences with other families.

Love Thy Neighbor Refugee Ministry

A partnership with Kentucky Refugee Ministry's (KRM) Skilled Neighboring initiative to support refugee families in Louisville.

Narthex Art Gallery

A gallery of local artists that enhances theological formation through beauty, facilitating contemplation that engages the Christian imagination and celebrates the fullness of God's kingdom through beauty, goodness, and truth.

Building the Vision: Strategic Initiatives

Belonging

Path to Belonging

An integrated guest engagement team that helps move people from first-time visitors to engaged members through a new worship class, lunches, formation materials, and invigorated hospitality methods and training.

Young Adults Ministry

Help adults aged 18–35 find belonging through structured opportunities for fellowship, formation, and service.

Young(ish) Men and Women's Group

Fellowship, formation, and service events that create strong and meaningful faith connections for men and women ages 18–50.

Franciscan Pilgrimages

Pilgrimage to holy sites, to places of historical and theological significance, or for retreat, reflection, and devotion is an ancient Christian practice. Many international pilgrimages, however, are accessible only to those who have the time and financial means to travel overseas. Franciscan Pilgrimages will make the practice of pilgrimage accessible to more parishioners by focusing on affordable trips to sites both within the United States and abroad.

The Cloisters Intentional Communities

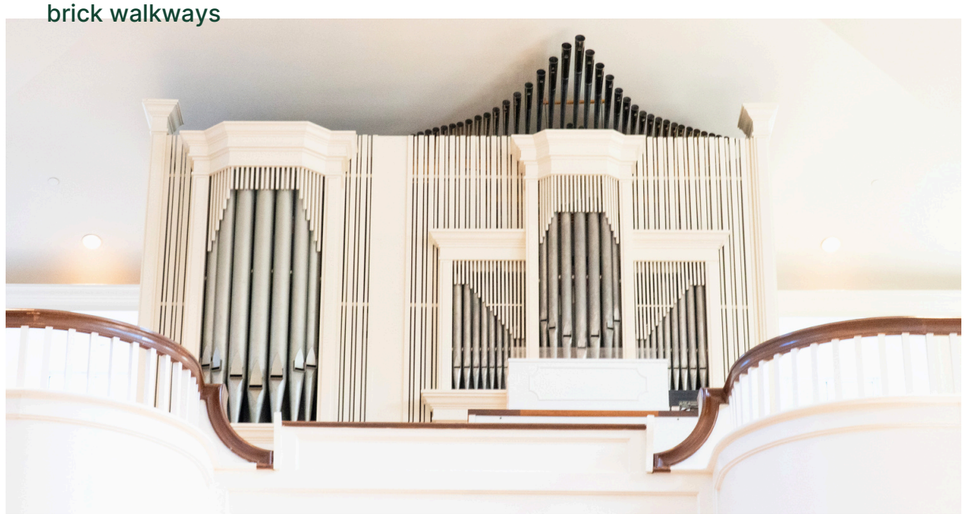
In the early days of the church, Christians became famous around the world for the love they showed one another. Cloisters Intentional Communities will be more than small groups, Bible studies, or supper clubs. Drawing inspiration from the Anglican monastic tradition, these community groups will be guided by a rule of life and rooted in Benedictine spirituality, allowing participants to have deep relationships and to be formed by a shared vision and values, while still pursuing secular work and individual interests. This ministry will offer deeper relationships for longtime members and will offer newcomers a point of rich connection and belonging.

Equipping the Vision: Capabilities

Facilities for Growth

We are going to need spaces that are capable of making these programs possible. A core part of the St. Francis Strategy will be discerning what changes, additions, and improvements we need to make to our campus. We will be developing a comprehensive campus plan, which will look at everything from parking to sewers. The key focus of the plan, however, will be designing the facilities we need to enable the ministries and programs outlined in this plan. These will likely include:

- A multiuse space for fellowship and community building, to support small groups, Bible studies, young adult gatherings, newcomers' lunches, and a Great Tradition lending library
- A new youth center, built as a flexible facility that could include a chapel, a kitchen, and spaces for arts, sports, and fellowship, to support the next generation of Christians
- Renovations to our existing Williamson Room for brides, families gathered for funerals, small groups, and more
- Liturgical design enhancements and refurbished seating and sound
- A renovated narthex featuring sacred art by local and national artists
- Aesthetic and functional improvements to the front brickwork to facilitate accessibility and ease of movement for all parishioners, including on our historic brick walkways



Digital Communications

The way humans communicate is undergoing the biggest transformation since the invention of the printing press. If we want to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ in 2030 and beyond, we will need a cutting-edge web presence. This is not a replacement for an in-person encounter but is the new front door to a lasting relationship. Building out a digital marketing and strategic communications capability will include:

- A new website that prioritizes ease of use on mobile phones, is intuitive to use, and keeps next steps for guests and newcomers front and center
- Increased search-engine optimization across all of our digital platforms
- A digital ad campaign targeted toward those who are likely to be looking for a church like St. Francis in the Fields, but who are unlikely to be driving past the campus

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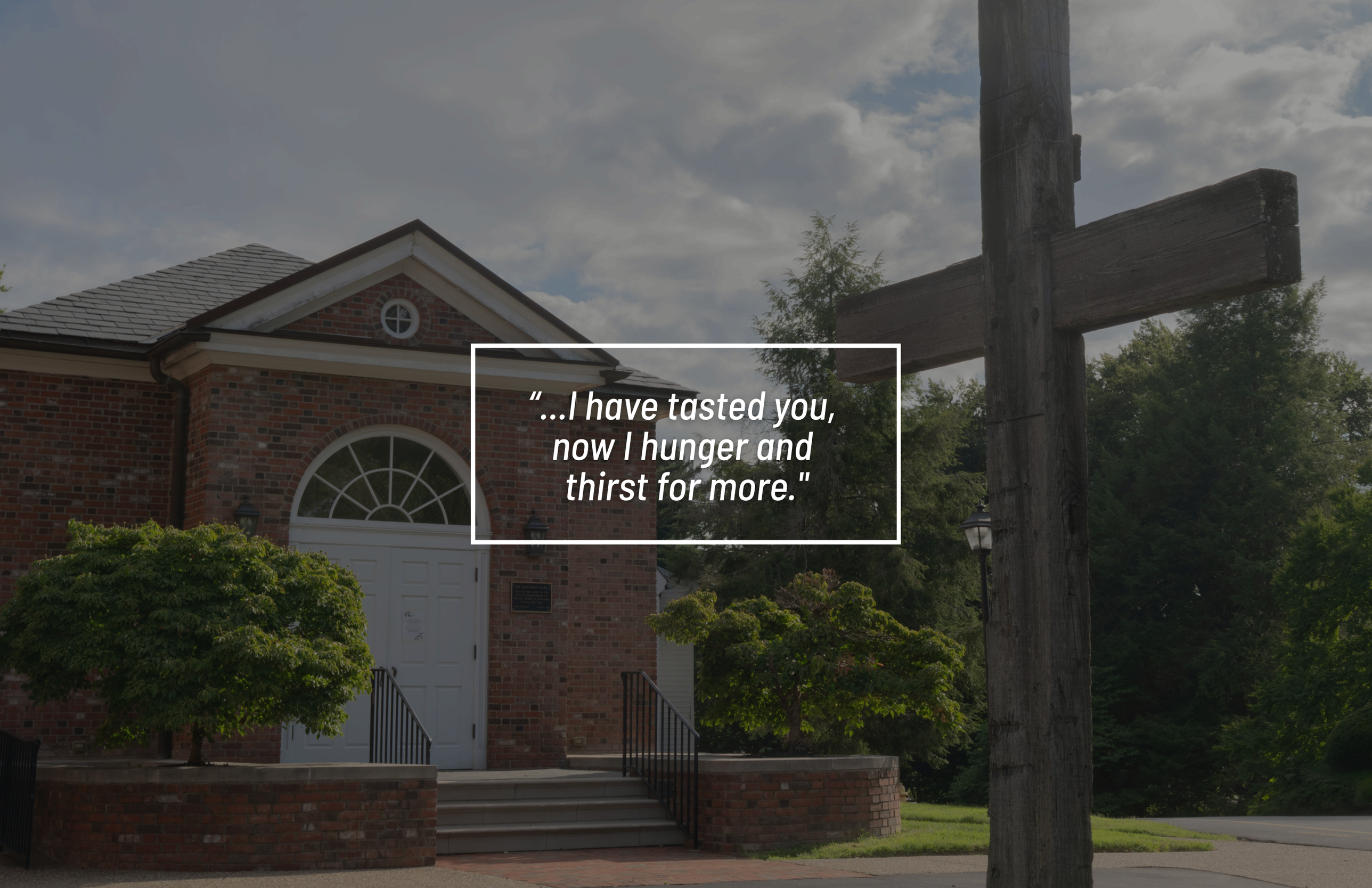

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