

St. Elisabeth's South Philadelphia 1975 – 1981

What follows are two reports on the parish. The first was done by Denise Shinn, a vestry member, in response to a request for information from the Bishop's Office. The second was part of a peer-parish-assessment process. A team from two South Philadelphia parishes, Crucifixion and St. Elisabeth's developed the report as part of a process required for all aided parishes in the diocese. For the purposes of the Shaping the Parish program we invite you give special attention to the parts on St. Elisabeth's.

ST. ELISABETH'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ACHIEVING OUR GOALS 1974 - 1978

In 1974, I became a member of St. Elisabeth's Church. At that time, Fr. Bridge was the Vicar. The first time I attended services at St. Elisabeth's I was touched by the warm and friendly reception I received. I was impressed as I became familiar with the people in the parish and became very involved through the infectious spirit of work and cooperation that existed. The parish itself presented a well-kept look in the interior of the Church and the people seemed cooperative and caring. I had never experienced such a warm spirit of brotherhood and unity in any Church I had attended.

Soon, however, I was to become acquainted with the problems of St. Elisabeth's. In 1974, the parish did not have a formal vestry, and did not have any organized method of handling workload. Parish meetings in which the business of the parish was handled were drawn out by bickering and disagreement. Although the parish was concerned with community outreach, those programs which did exist were incomplete and disorganized. It seemed that the parish was working hard and efforts were getting nowhere. All systems of parish oversight had completely collapsed. The parish had no by-laws from which it operated, no records and no means of handling the mounting property problems.

The congregation looked to Fr. Bridge as the only source of leadership. The burden of financial oversight, paperwork and all types of management fell upon his shoulders. An atmosphere of distrust developed between the Vicar and the congregation. I began to feel the frustration and helplessness all of the members of the congregation shared. We were too small, overworked, disorganized, and too poor to really change anything. Some members dropped off, either because they moved out of the area, or because the frustration just became too much. The morale of the parishoners was low, their determination undercut by an almost certain closing. Spiritual energy was drained and resentments, distrust and hurt feelings grew. Still, somewhere in all of the frustration the Spirit of God held us together. In spite of all of the parish's problems, worship on Sunday was touched with a real sense of Christian fellowship.

Although the future looked questionable, when Fr. Bridge announced he was leaving in early 1975, the parish, with the assistance of the Bishop, began to look for a new Vicar. Fr. Gallagher was hired on a part-time basis as a result of that search.

Beginning in 1975, under the guidance of our new Vicar, the parish began to look at its ministry in a new way. People in the parish began to have a new awareness of their strengths as opposed to being overwhelmed by their main weakness. The parish, as a whole, reclaimed the wealth of gifts God had given

to it so long ago and began to develop those gifts.

In that year, the parish, at a meeting on All Saints Day, stated three definite goals for the future:

I. TO GROW AS INDIVIDUALS, PERSONALLY & SPIRITUALLY

Over the last three years, particularly, the last 1 1/2 years, St. Elisabeth's has come a long way toward this goal.

First, the parish as a whole, in 1976, was still largely groping for sound control of its business affairs. Although the parish was moving toward the foundation of an organized system of stewardship, people in the parish were not fully responsible. People had gotten used to not being responsible over the past few years. We were still letting our Vicar run the show, and carry most of the workload. The parish morale was devastatingly impaired by the sense of frustration and helplessness that had become an excuse for not taking stewardship too seriously. I remember quite vividly a Sunday morning when Fr. Gallagher asked for a certain number of people in the parish to commit themselves to work toward growth for a period of three years. I knew what would happen to that group. They would volunteer, work hard for a few months, become discouraged, and disappear. This is just what is bound to happen when you've struggled for years with little or no success. I wondered how long it would take for our new Vicar to become discouraged with the situation. I know I was not alone in that thought. The people in the parish were pushed, led and even hounded about stewardship. Over time, it became apparent that some of it was beginning to have an effect.

The most important event in our parish's development happened late in 1976. The Bishop had decided to give the parish a grant to develop a viable parish in the South Philadelphia area. Finally, after years of struggle and neglect, we were being recognized. People changed their attitude. They began to see that someone really did care, besides themselves, whether or not St. Elisabeth's stayed open; that it was not our little congregation against the Episcopal Church (and the world in general) fighting for survival. The Bishop had seen and recognized that we were ready to grow, wanted to grow and would work hard to make that happen. The sense of hopelessness and defeat had been changed to new vitality and enthusiasm. Most important, however, is the fact that now people realized that our Church was blessed by God and in existence only by His mercy and goodness.

Growth in the parish stability came in leaps and bounds with this new attitude. Within the first 14 months, we had an elected vestry, who under the guidance of our Vicar (now full-time) and his staff, developed a set of by-laws and began to function in a way that would make any congregation proud. I recently joined the vestry to fill an empty seat. I had been on the vestry before in prior years and was amazed at the change in this group of people. They were organized, decisive and seemed to be of one mind in seeking the ultimate good of the parish as a whole.

It would be very difficult to decide whether our stewardship growth initiated our spiritual growth or the other way around. I won't try. It seems as though both occurred at the same time and so quickly it was almost unnoticed.

Somewhere along the line the vision of the parish was changed. When I first came to the parish, there were approximately 25 members, all committed to work hard to keep the congregation alive. Today, there are about the same number of people all working hard out of their commitment to serving Jesus Christ and making His Kingdom apparent in this world. They are all aware that He is Lord and Savior of all things and are doing their best to exercise responsible stewardship over His gifts. Every parishoner is more aware of the presence of God in everyday life; and how whatever one does, it can be turned into "ministry" if we seek Him out in our daily work and relaxation. To say we all have experienced spiritual growth is an understatement. I believe the word used in a report made in 1975 was "renasence", I would prefer the word "renewal".

Disagreements which before split the congregation and caused people to "dissappear" were now brought into the open and settled. The diversity of the parish is a source of strength and knowledge, bringing us a challenge to understanding the nature of Christian love. When the peace is passed at the Eucharist on Sunday morning, it is truly the peace of the Lord.

Our growth shows, spiritually and personally. When I was away from the parish for about six months, I was amazed at the change in different individuals. Our growth shows; it shows in our worship, our interest in retreats, quiet days, etc.; it shows in our interest in developing our awareness of God's presence in our lives. We have learned to respect each other, try to understand each other and love each other, regardless of the tensions and disagreements. Most of all, we have learned how to work with each other (and sometimes around each other) to overcome the difficulties of being such a small parish. We have learned how to be supportive of one another when it is necessary, and how and when to ask for support. There is no one at St. Elisabeth's who doesn't know that they belong first to Jesus Christ, then to the whole Episcopal Church, and then to the family of St. Elisabeth's. The beauty is that we can all express that belonging in our individual ways, within the same parish, and share that expression.

Several of our members have become or are in the process of becoming associates of a religious order. A Rule of Life is required for Sub-deacons, Lay-readers, Officers, Teachers and recommended to the vestry. Most of our members live under a Rule which includes the Daily Office on a regular basis.

The Christian Life Institute has been attended at least in part by almost half of our members. All of our members are pledging higher and digging deeper into their own pockets to help support the parish efforts. Most important, when the Eucharist

is distributed on Sunday morning, everyone in the Church goes to the rail, no one stays behind.

In general, the parish is taking its faith, and its responsibility, very seriously. This, I would say, is a substantial sign of the growth and maturity of our parish.

II. GROWTH IN MINISTRY TO OTHERS

St. Elisabeth's has now several community groups using its grounds as a meeting place, including the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, ACORN (a community-organized, City-funded program for youth), and others. This is only in addition to activities of our own. We have education programs (Christian Life Institute, S.E.E.K., and our Sunday School). In the Summer of 1978, S.E.E.K. organized and sponsored a Summer Day Camp which was filled to capacity with children from the neighborhood. This program was highly successful in bringing the children to realize their identity as Christians, as well as making their parents aware of St. Elisabeth's as a Christian fellowship interested in the community around it. A number of the children who attended the Day Camp are now attending our Sunday School.

ACORN used our facilities during the Summer months to show films to the young teens of the neighborhood. ACORN will be using the facilities again in the coming months.

S.E.E.X., in cooperation with M.A.T.C., offers several events a year such as Human Interaction Weekend, Life-Planning Weekend, Working Effectively in Small Groups, and others, showing the community that we are interested in the world they live in, as well as their spiritual lives.

There are many other activities going on in the parish that can be mentioned. It seems, whenever I am at the Church for any reason, it is always occupied by a meeting somewhere.

In that same report in 1975, the parish mentioned wanting to be a "visible sign of God's Kingdom in a community which is now experiencing a certain racial and generational tension." I believe we are that visible sign. Our congregation is diverse in age, race, educational background, and economic background. Our flag, an orange and yellow Jerusalem Cross, hangs above Mifflin Street setting the rectory door apart from the rest. That flag is passed under, at all times, by all manner of people; black, white, old and young. Our bells have been mentioned by several of the neighborhood people as being part of their lives. Our presence in the neighborhood is important to people. Our diversity stands as a testimony that Christian fellowship can overcome any difference.

III. TO GROW IN ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

The parish has grown in active membership over the last three years. This has taken place in two ways; first, there are some new and very active members; second, some of the old members have become more active. Our average attendance at a regular

Sunday Eucharist is noticeably higher, but we still have a long way to go. It is most difficult for me to understand why a parish like St. Elisabeth's isn't "standing room only" on a Sunday morning. This indicates our major problem. People don't know what they are missing. We need to learn how to tell them.

In October of 1978, a number of parishoners, including Fr. Gallagher, attended the National Episcopal Renewal Conference in Pittsburgh. Out of that Conference a method of evangelism, though it is now in its very earliest stages, was instituted. Parishoners will be visiting lapsed and infrequent members in the near future in an attempt to bring them back. The thrust of the visits will be to confront individuals with where their relationship to Jesus Christ is, and how that needs to be connected with the Church in order for it to survive. Two such visits have been made, one very successful. We are looking forward to developing this push into a larger area, getting other interested parishoners to visit people who have signed the guest book, who have shown some type of interest in worship at St. Elisabeth's.

The parish as a whole needs to be made aware of the urgent call to evangelism. I believe the whole Christian Church needs to be more aware that there are too many people in the world hungry and searching for God. People in our parish need to be encouraged and helped to share what they have found in their relationship to Christ and where they go to worship Him.

News is not news unless it is told; Good News isn't Good News unless it is shared with joy and enthusiasm. That means people in our parish need to get excited, need to get bold, need to get just a little bit aggressive. We need to go from personal owning of our faith to an enthusiastic living and sharing of it, silently and verbally.

In 1978, Fr. Gallagher mentioned, in his report to the parish, that we would work to become a "Spritiual Powerhouse". I believe we are now that "Powerhouse", generating love and understanding, peace, goodwill and fellowship, all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need to direct that power of the Spirit in our own lives to make us stronger and more powerful witnesses to Jesus Christ. We are presently studying the possibility of advertising in local newspapers, not the usual sort of ad, but one that will reach out and touch people; bring a response. We have a prayer group that meets weekly which has potential for bringing people into the parish; but more important, may help bring people to knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Our third goal is on the horizon, just ahead. I have every reason to believe that God will bless us in this area, too. With concentrated effort, prayer and work, we will achieve that goal. I am confident that God has not rescued us from our former situation without a plan for our future.

Fr. Gallagher has been, all along, a great source of direction and support. He has done a wondrous job, and the people

of the parish have done a wondrous job. With the Holy Spirit as a driving force and our love of the Lord at the center, we will not be defeated again.

I, personally, am proud and thankful to be a part of St. Elisabeth's. I look forward to many years of continued growth and service where I am needed. I believe the Lord led me to the Church because he knew it would be a place for me to find Him, worship Him and serve Him. Attending that first service at St. Elisabeth's was the beginning of something I could never have anticipated; a love affair with my Lord, with the Episcopal Church, and with this parish.

Denise L. Smith

12/78

June 13, 1981

JOINT REPORT ON COAC CONGREGATIONAL VISITS - SPTM MUTUAL EVALUATION:

CHURCH OF THE CRUCIFIXION

- ST. ELISABETH'S CHURCH

Eighteen people from the two parishes joined in a mutual sharing and evaluation process. We met twice, once on April 29th at Crucifixion and once on May 23rd at St. Elisabeth's. We discussed both parishes each time, using standards from the COAC guidelines to focus our discussion. (III B 7 "definition of a healthy congregation" and III B 8 "proper attention" to three areas) What follows are some of the understandings we arrived at in our visits together. For reporting purposes we will use the same frameworks for looking at a parish that we used for our discussions. As you can see, there is some overlap. Our general experience was that each way of looking at a parish brought out different concerns.

Definition of a Healthy Congregation

A. A Positive Membership Picture

Attendance is up at Crucifixion. The average Sunday attendance in 1979 was 49, in the first part of 1981 it is 75. A 53% increase in a couple of years. This is largely made up of people who had lapsed and have returned. There are also some new members from the immediate neighborhood. This seems to be partly due to the sense of stability gained from having a full-time Vicar, living in the neighborhood, who plans to stay with the parish for a significant number of years. It is also partly due specifically to Fr. Bell's leadership. The parish has a positive membership picture with the capacity for an increasingly strong ministry in the area.

St. Elisabeth's remains one of the smaller parishes in the Diocese. Average Sunday attendance is about 46 people. The parish has grown steadily since 1975. Attendance has increased an average of 10% a year, baptized members has gone from 58 to 105, and Communicants in Good Standing from 54 to 74. Almost all of the increase is in people new to the parish. Because the parish had maintained a strong ministry with Navy personnel, and had paid relatively little attention to the immediate neighborhood, by 1975 there were no lapsed members to come back. An interesting development has been the decision of one family to move from N.E. Philadelphia to South Philadelphia in part to be closer to the parish and of an individual to change her job and to move from the suburbs so she could live within the parish.

Both parishes have made efforts to be open to new people and to root their membership in the neighborhood. Crucifixion is largely black with some white members. Most members still live some distance from the parish. St. Elisabeth's is a mix of whites, blacks and Asians; most all living in South Philadelphia.

B. A Responsible Presence in the Neighborhood

Both parishes are committed to serve their neighborhoods.

St. Elisabeth's

- + Summer Day Camp (helped by V.I.M.)
- + Supplying emergency help - food, heat, etc.
- + Enabling three neighborhoods in the parish to become organized (currently aided by V.I.M./COAC City Action Fund)
- + Being a responsible institution in the neighborhood by keeping the property in decent shape.
- + Providing meeting space for a variety of community groups.
- + Has sponsored various educational programs
- + A number of members are actively in community concerns.

Crucifixion

- + An A.A. group meets at the church.
- + A summer program for children is planned (supported by V.I.M.)
- + Helping to form a basketball league.
- + Beginning to address the issue of the condition of its property.

Both parishes have too little available space for use in serving the community because of space tied up in rentals. This is an especially serious problem for Crucifixion.

C. Definition of Christian Mission in the region

Both parishes have a clear commitment to serve their communities in the name of Christ by responding to the various needs that present themselves. Crucifixion has a need to root its membership in the neighborhood so it might have a clear identification with the neighborhood. They are beginning to work on this. Fr. Bell living in the neighborhood has helped.

St. Elisabeth's has developed a relatively strong community relationship, has plans to expand its ability to serve and has a good base of members living in the community. The relatively small number of members is the main limitation. The parish continues to work at it.

Both parishes are active in the South Philadelphia Team Ministry. Both have been helped by the Convention's decision to stop closing parishes.

Each parish has a St.

Crucifixion

* Stewardship ... ing.

- + 60% have raised pledges in the last year.
- + Pledges have gone from \$10,900 to \$20,000.
- + Average pledge per unit per week is about \$8.00.
- + Expects an increase of another \$4 - \$5,000 this year.
- + Rental to Get Set for \$8,100.
- + Trying to de-emphasize fund raising events, to focus on pledging and other aspects of Christian life and mission.
- + Needs to develop budget formate that can be used in planning.

St. Elisabeth's

- + Average per unit per week is \$6.74.
- + Has developed an endowment fund.
- + Strong program of stewardship of property.
- + Energy saving effort has meant an increase of fuel costs of only 35% while cost of fuel in Philadelphia has gone up 234%.
- + Has effective budget formate for planning purposes.
- + Vestry did away with fund raising events as they were a distraction from Christian stewardship, pulled people away from worship and other ministries and never had a significant effect on the budget.
- + Rental of parish house to Ken Crest for \$12,000.

E. Self Renewal Process

St. Elisabeth's

- + Has a regular pattern of planning and evaluation.
- + Has done long range planning 3 times since 1975 using outside consultants and resources at various stages. Planning process has become deeper, more discerning, and increasingly involved more people. The first plan in 1975 was put together in three days. The plan now being developed has taken 1 1/2 years, involving in-depth evaluation, a process of communal discernment, and then detailed planning.
- + Parish uses a clear model of the Christian life for planning and evaluation.

Crucifixion

- + Renewal has centered around liturgy; providing power for general renewal.
- + Lots of new energy around renewal - seeking direction.
- + Beginning work of setting goals, revising by-laws, planning a budget, looking at time use.

Proper Attention to Three Areas

When we looked at where the energy of each parish was now, we came up with the following:

	<u>Crucifixion,</u>	<u>St. Elisabeth's</u>
Institutional Maintenance and Development	80%	20%
Internal Nurture and Equipping	10%	40%
Outreach	10%	40%

Given the stage of renewal and development for each parish, this seems appropriate. People from St. Elisabeth's said that four years ago they were in the same place as Crucifixion is now.

A. Institutional Maintenance and Development

Crucifixion

- + Property still a problem area. Members had taken care of many minor repairs and improvements. Major property problems were neglected. Now "it feels like everything coming at you at once". Lack of clear job description for sexton and amount of salary a problem. Sexton does good work in what he does but needs more order in the work.
- + Has auxiliary vestry; helps getting new ideas moving; most on the vestry have served a long time.
- + Parish is not "aware" that it does get aid from the Diocese in various ways.

St. Elisabeth's

- + Five years ago none of the elements of institutional life were in decent shape; most didn't exist - now all function well.

B. Internal Nurture and Equipping

St. Elisabeth's

- + "The Christian Life" a 20 - 24 hour course in Christian faith and life has had a significant impact on individuals and the parish as a whole. Offered every fall. Most active members have done some of it, many have completed it.
- + Use of lay catechists for teaching part of "the Christian life", new member classes, 1st Holy Communion instruction, baptismal instruction.
- + Lay readers assist at the Eucharist and officiate at most services of Daily Evening Prayer.

- + Library used by many. Now about 50 books out.
- + Spiritual guidance is strong. Many have ^{growth} of issues in spirituality. Many have own "rule of life". Several are associated with Order of the Holy Cross.

Crucifixion

- + Growth in Christian education for children from 3 teachers and 1 child to 20 children. Fr. Bell works to get children in worship, trains them.
- + Strong adult confirmation preparation - each gives "witness" to the congregation.
- + Want to combine social activities with spiritual life. Especially with children. Have bible study then go to ball game, etc.
- + Planning to develop strong adult education program. Is a weak area now.

Both parishes have a strong worship life with several celebrations of the Eucharist on Sunday, Daily Offices and Eucharist during the week. Both have had problems getting and holding a decent organist. Both affirm the importance of having a priest stay long enough to build on developments in the spiritual nurturing of the congregation.

C. Outreach

Crucifixion

- + Has a food cupboard (helped by Diocesan ECU)
- + Beginning to work on evangelism, putting out a flyer in the neighborhood.

St. Elisabeth's

- + Has clear evangelism approach focused on neighborhood presence and a long term view.
- + "Ministry in the City" is a summer program for college-age students. They live in the rectory and participate in the parish's worship and ministry. Includes study in the Christian life and urban ministry.
- + Would like to start a day care center

Summary

Crucifixion and St. Elisabeth's are in good shape, however, they are in very different places in their development.

STRENGTHS

NEEDS SPECIAL ATTENTION

Crucifixion

- + Liturgy
- + Strong loyalty to parish
- + Attendance
- + Stewardship

- + Adult education
- + Membership growth from the neighborhood

St. Elisabeth's

- + Education
- + Liturgy
- + Community Involvement
- + Stewardship
- + Lay ministries

- + Membership Growth
- + (important for ability to expand ministry and in taking on greater share of financial costs)

Church of the Crucifixion - St. Elisabeth's Church
COAC Congregational Visits - SPTM Mutual Evaluation

summary: We are working on establishing a more effective and efficient evaluation and sharing process that meets the needs of the participating parishes, COAC and the South Philadelphia Team Ministry. Our assumption is that this work will continue into the future, be revised based on our experience and that the results will be shared with the COAC Task Force.

The Situation

Both parishes are part of COAC and the SPTM. Each group expects parishes to be engaged in sharing and evaluation processes. The approaches of each group are compatible.

SPTM is the regional instrument of mission for the Diocese. As part of the Team the clergy meet monthly, clergy and laity meet as a Team Council four times a year, and both parishes work as part of a four parish cluster within the Team that gives special attention to evangelism.

There is a strong and growing awareness within SPTM of how the "health" of each parishes effects the other parishes. There is an explicit concern on the part of the Team to help each parish in its living of the Christian life in all its aspects.

Goals

To establish a process of mutual sharing and evaluation that:

1. Strengthens the life and ministry of each parish and SPTM.
2. Meets the needs of COAC and SPTM for adequate sharing and evaluation.
3. Allows for a continuity and a deepening to the sharing and evaluation.
4. That makes use of and strengthens the already existing network of relationship and shared ministry. That integrates sharing and evaluation systems and so reduces the amount of overlapping work.

5. That provides valid and useful information to:
 - a. Each participating parish, about itself and the other parish from which it might learn.
 - b. COAC
 - c. SPTM
 - d. The Bishops office and the larger Diocese through COAC, SPTM, and each parish.

Procedures

1. Each year the two parishes will visit one another. (in 1981 - April 29 and May 23). Teams of six or more people from each parish will join in the visiting.
2. Prior to the visits each parish will send to the other appropriate written materials, including:
 - a. Parish plan.
 - b. Most recent self evaluation
 - c. Parish brochures and/or recent newsletter
 - d. Current budget
 - e. Available information on membership, attendance, and pledging for recent years.
3. In general our desire is to assess how each parish is contributing to the SPTM purpose - "To work for the long term presence, stability and improvement of the ministry of the Episcopal parishes in South Philadelphia." We will do this by focusing our sharing around appropriate criteria. Both parishes will share during each visit.
4. At the first visit we will focus our sharing in terms of the "Definition of a healthy congregation" (see COAC guidelines III B7 and Bishop's plan for South Philadelphia).
 - a. A positive membership picture
 - b. A responsible presence in the various neighborhoods

- c. A clear definition of the Christian mission in the region.
 - d. A strong stewardship thrust
 - e. A self renewal process.
5. At the second visit we will focus on area III B8 of the COAC guidelines regarding "proper attention" to three areas:
 - a. Institutional maintenance and development.
 - b. Internal nurture and equipping
 - c. Outreach
 6. The Vicar and a lay person from each parish will form a committee to prepare and present a report to be made to COAC (in 1981 - June 13). The report should:
 - a. Summarize information gathered in each area
 - b. Identify areas of special strength
 - c. Identify areas that need special attention, along with a comment regarding the parishes current awareness of and action in regard to the needs identified.
 7. The report will be shared with SPTM and the vestry of each parish.

The Future

1. Revise this process based on our experience.
2. Consider involving other parishes of SPTM in this process, especially those that are part of COAC.