

7 QUESTIONS FOR A 21ST CENTURY CHURCH

During his annual report to the 2012 Annual General Meeting, the Rector asked that all members of St. Andrew's engage in a time of reflection, prayer and discussion around seven questions, aimed at addressing the challenges facing us as we seek to become a faithful 21st century Church. The Vestry will be wrestling with these same questions over the next few months, but they will depend on the feedback they get from each member of the congregation. This is a "bottom up" rather than a "top down" process; it needs to be discerned at the pew level rather than imposed by any hierarchy—to hear God's voice, we need to hear your voice.

Each question below includes the brief commentary that Fr. Winston gave at the AGM. Our hope is that as we grapple with these questions we will develop our own unique style of ministry, faithful to God, but tailored to our surroundings. By taking the risk of rethinking our assumptions of ministry, reformulating our mission strategy, and re-examining our way of being the Church, we seek to move into our future confident and resilient, open and affirming, life-giving and liberating, with a compelling Gospel message that centers on Christ, combined with flexible, evolving methods of ministry.

1: What would be lost and how would Lakeside be worse off, if St. Andrew's Church ceased to exist?

A lot of the services the Church used to offer are today provided by secular organizations. From social service agencies to seniors' gatherings to self-help groups to yoga classes, many of our physical, emotional and relational needs are provided by a range of organizations, none of which are religious. So what unique purpose does St. Andrew's offer that no other organization can provide? Why do we exist? What would be lost if we ceased to exist?

2: How does St. Andrew's add value to people's lives that they can't live without—whether they know it or not?

Any successful secular business understands that if its products don't add value to people's lives, they won't sell. People stand in line for an iPad because of its perceived value. At a Cheesecake Factory in Pennsylvania my family has waited an hour for a table. I ask myself, "Would these people wait this long to attend Church?" What value is iPad offering, what value is Cheesecake Factory offering, what value is any successful business offering that we are not? And just as important, what can we do about it?

3: What challenges does St. Andrew's face in order to fulfill our mission, and what can we do to bring about that new thing God wants our Church to be?

This question's a little subversive, because it asks us to consider what rules and regulations presently set the boundaries around how we function as a Church. Do these rules and regulations make sense in light of today's challenges? If not, why do we continue to have them? What if we had the freedom and flexibility to move beyond these rules and regulations and reshape the way we do Church? How would that enhance our ability to fulfill our mission? To put it another way, is our present way of doing things generating the results we want? If not, why not—and how can we turn that around?

4: What are the barriers that keep us from seeing reality, and how can we overcome them?

Sometimes what gets in the way of effective ministry is our own restrictive thinking. The barriers are more imagined than actual, more inward than outward, and based on outdated assumptions rather than present reality. Every time a new way of doing Church arises, someone inevitably insists, "We can't!" But why? What if we said, "We can!" What if we gave ourselves permission to imagine, innovate and create something different that has the potential to connect St. Andrew's more effectively with our surrounding community? Maybe we should ask ourselves what St. Andrew's would look like if we were brand new at Lakeside. How would we design ourselves for mission and ministry? What would we look like to most effectively reach people in our community?

5: What issues does St. Andrew's need to face in 2012 so that five years from now we won't have to say, "We wish we had..."

There's a sense of urgency to this question, because lots of churches are living on borrowed time. But we believe in a God of resurrection. So what would happen if we began to act as a community of resurrection—faithful, fearless, willing to risk and try new things, putting our emphasis on ministry more than maintenance, and making a serious effort to engage people who may not sing the Lord's song in exactly the same way we do?

6: If money were not an issue, where would you like St. Andrew's to be five years from now?

This invites us to envision a new kind of Church. As we develop a shared picture of the future, we're energized and drawn into that future. A true vision deals honestly with reality, no matter how unpleasant, but also gives hope that tomorrow can be better than today. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is a

great example of vision. A true vision for St. Andrew's will inspire and motivate us to sacrifice, serve and give generously, and the end result will be worth the effort it takes to develop the vision. Above all, we need to sense the purpose and will of God for the future of St. Andrew's.

7: In what ways can we affirm the basic beliefs of our faith without appearing to be bigots?

This is the evangelistic question for St. Andrew's as we minister in a secular, multicultural, multi-religious environment, where our neighbors are more likely to be of a different denomination—or Jewish, or Buddhist, or agnostics or atheists—than they are to be Anglicans. In such a highly pluralistic world, how do we communicate the truth claims of our faith without appearing narrow-minded, intolerant, or exclusive? A lot of us here in Mexico try to be bilingual, but the people of St. Andrew's need to be bilingual in a different way: speaking the language of culture while maintaining the language of faith. How do we do that?