

Research And Vision Drive Church Property Repurposing Plan

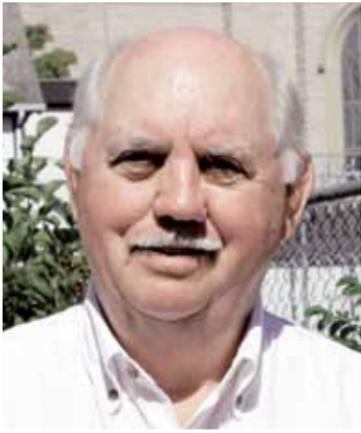


Photo: Diocesan Post

By Peter Daniel

As the diocesan asset manager, I am excited to be working with a skilled group on the Asset Management Advisory Team to develop a capital plan to support our diocesan vision. The plan includes socially innovative ideas to repurpose existing church properties to better serve the communities in which we find ourselves.

Through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit our diocese has been given a new vision which outlines new opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a hurting world. God is calling us to find new ways to go out in the world and partner with others to address the myriad social issues facing our communities such as refugee settlement, homelessness, reconciliation and the full inclusion of all peoples into the family of faith, family supports, and the restoration of the environment. Further, in his charge to Synod this spring, Bishop Logan specifically identified affordable housing as a imperative for our common mission.

We cannot wait at the door for people to come to us. Nor can we justify using our real estate assets just a few hours each week while the needs in our communities for safe, affordable places to live, learn and play are so great. The question is, what role will we play?

The Need For Community Spaces

Our diocese has some church

property that can accommodate new multi-use facilities that will bring together people of all ages into regular contact with one another and reduce social isolation, which is known to be a key health indicator, particularly for seniors. We also anecdotally know that when school age children are active in church, they are more likely to find strong communities of support, which can make all the difference in their growth and development. This is why bringing different population groups together with church communities is a model our diocesan leadership is enthusiastically embracing.

The Research

In 2015, the asset management advisory committee commissioned a research study which examined existing models where church, housing, education and activity centres with strong community interaction co-exist and thrive.

Through Royal Roads University School of Environment and Sustainability, Professor Dr. Ann Dale, former Canada Council Chair on Sustainability and Community, directed this research. The study was completed earlier this year.

Key Findings

- Declining church attendance is universal.
- There are few examples where church, activity centre, housing and education are all located on the same property.
- Development where this is occurring requires high financial commitments that have only been found when the private sector has become involved and provided professional management, direction and funding.
- Religiously-sponsored projects faced increased political challenges when seeking property approvals.

- Some of the land uses studied are complementary and there are excellent examples of successful models.
- There is no general approach that can be justified from the research findings.
- Child daycare is positive and may be financially beneficial.
- The assumption that the church will be viable over the long term by not relying on congregation generosity, and instead drawing on other revenue streams i.e. housing, education, daycares is not yet proven.

The research is dependable in outlining an overall approach. It is not definitive enough to assure church sustainability and does not support a generalized approach. However, if case by case success can be demonstrated in a rigorous and realistic business plan, sustainability can be proven through the execution of successful projects.

The Asset Management Team first presented the "Community Buildings" outline to Diocesan Council at its meeting in Campbell River in 2015. More recently, we presented a report to Diocesan Council in the spring of this year when it met in Comox. Now that the research is in hand, we have outlined these plans to some of the housing societies as key stakeholders and housing providers.

The Way Forward

Each of our church communities is different. Some churches are in bedroom communities, some are in urban locations, while still others are rural. In each case there is a different community focus with unique needs and challenges.

Further, because there is no generalized approach supported by the research, rigorous consultation and planning will be critical for a successful community buildings model to be developed.

Although most of our properties do not have the land necessary to accommodate new buildings, where there is sufficient land, there may be opportunities for some of these creative new uses that will help fulfill the vision God has given to us.

Use The Strength Of Our Societies

Throughout the diocese there are ten housing providers: two are life-lease housing communities, seven are societies and one is a wholly-owned housing corporation. Societies and the corporation own their own property and are governed by boards with members appointed by parish churches, and in some cases by the synod of the diocese.

The diocese has one very successful education society operating as Christ Church Cathedral School (K-8; 195 students on Christ Church Cathedral precinct; 43 pre-schoolers off site). The school recently opened its off-site preschool at St. Matthias parish in suburban Victoria. Students from both campuses attend services at Christ Church Cathedral (CCC) and the CCC parishioners have embraced the school as part of its mission. The school is a substantial revenue source for the Cathedral and St. Matthias. The current plan is to merge some housing providers in to a strong capital base for the redevelopment of existing affordable housing projects and potentially for investment in "Community Buildings."

Funding

Where does the money come from for all of this? It is apparent in the research that financing community buildings for education, housing and activity centres is a significant barrier. The diocese owns all parish property and has no debt. By subdividing and selling zoned parcels of selected diocesan land to a merged housing provider, mortgage financing would be available for housing and

potentially for education centres. Careful planning will anticipate financing models that support current church infrastructure through efficient management and long-term rental and property management contracts.

The asset management capital plan will identify property that is owned by the diocese as well as property to be considered for planting new churches. Funding for the purchase and development of land may come from the diocese, housing societies and the corporation. Where mortgage debt is required, security must be separate parcels of property that do not imperil church buildings. Provincial and federal grant funding is also available for affordable housing. These sources offer very low rate construction and long-term financing to spur construction in this much-needed housing sector.

Support For The Long-Term

This is not a short-term plan. The roll out of the capital plan is anticipated to extend for 25 to 40 years.

Several parishes are very interested in new affordable housing initiatives and together we are considering some exciting opportunities. The report provided to Synod by Waller and Associates earlier this spring touched on the potential for significant "internal funding" from the diocese. This funding may come from sale of subdivided zoned parcels of diocesan land to a merged housing provider to make way for new community buildings at various locations.

The Asset Management Advisory Team met recently and approved the direction proposed in the capital plan including new affordable housing projects. It has confirmed its support to the bishop in a written submission in June 2016 and is looking forward to helping to make our diocesan vision of *Renewed Hearts, Renewed Spirits and Renewed People* a reality.

COME AND JOIN US AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF:

ST. PAUL'S NANAIMO CENTRE FOR MINISTRY

Two years ago, St Paul's Anglican Church in Nanaimo decided that in order to continue in its current location in the heart of the city, it would be essential to refurbish or replace the building. Through a process of study, discernment, prayer and reflection the parish:

- Refurbished the roof, upgrading it for earthquake preparedness.
- Developed a "Vision for Ministry" to determine the long-term needs of the community.
- Raised \$2.3 million to support the development of a new ministry centre.

We are now completing construction and look forward to a cornerstone-laying ceremony and we want you to come and celebrate with us.

Sunday, September 18, 2016 and 2pm.

We hope to see you there!

For more information contact the parish at 250-753-2523.