

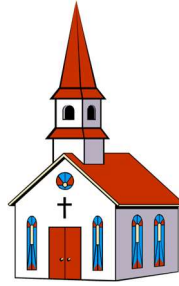
Standing on the Promises: Now What?

Here's the church,

Here's the steeple,

Open the doors,

Where are the people?



Times have certainly changed and many of us long for the days of yesteryears gone by when our churches were bustling with activity all throughout the week. Remember the days when there were two worship services on Sundays, a full slate of Sunday School classes, choir practice and prayer service during the week, plenty of potlucks, church picnics, baptisms, and so much more. Now, the reality is that many of us are struggling to keep just one worship service alive with only a handful of people. It's the last piece of familiarity that we cling to in hopes that something miraculous might happen. Meanwhile, for many congregations, offerings and other income are not near enough to carry the expenses of our empty aging facilities.

In reality, we are in new territory and have been for some time. The hard truth is that no rearranging of our schedule, repackaging our worship or switching the furniture will likely attract enough new people to help keep us moving forward. The fact is that churches everywhere are dealing with the same issues—aging membership, declining numbers, empty buildings, and challenges from the pandemic. According to a study done by Barna in 2014, the top two reasons people do not attend church is that they find God elsewhere and they do not find church relevant.

The \$5,000,000 question is how do we now reach people to share this incredibly remarkable community that we cherish? Truthfully, we don't know any other way than what we have lived and breathed for all of our life. And we simply continued the form from the foundation that we inherited—gathering in our buildings for study, worship, meetings, potlucks, etc. So now what? It may feel like a huge void as we try to discern what the next part of our journey will look like without a map or some concrete plan before us.



It's a well-known fact that people fear change, right? The fashion and electronic industries seem to believe otherwise. So do the weight loss and travel sectors. All of them are doing very well thanks to our desire for something different. Actually, we don't know how to live without change. Change brings new possibilities even if they are unknown, uncertain, unstructured, unproven, or freaky. We are now in a place where we can keep everything the same or we can make a difference, but we cannot do both.

Many years ago, I was inspired by the saying, "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space" (Morgan Freeman). It made me think about all the comfortable spaces that I was hanging out in. Yes, I may have known what to expect and could avoid surprises. But I wasn't going to

ever experience new opportunities and I wondered what I was missing by being overly cautious. Was there something more that I might be able to do?

Stress is compounded for congregations with very few members and a building that is crushing the budget. Do we continue to love it or should we list it weighs heavily on the hearts of all stakeholders? Although ownership of all facilities in our Mission are held in trust by World Church and managed by the Bishop of Canada, Canada East Mission is NOT the body who will decide for congregations. You are the author of your congregation’s future. Perhaps it may be necessary to crunch some numbers in order to determine the financial health of the congregation and to note any trends.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Attendance					
New members/friends					
Deaths/losses					
Contributions					
Other income					
Total facility expenses					
All other expenses					

Important questions to consider:

- What do the numbers tell us?
- If we keep doing what we’ve always done, where can we expect to be in 5 years?
- What do we want to dedicate our time and energy to?
- What is your congregation here for?
- What is God doing in our midst and in our neighbourhood?
- How could we contribute to our community to make a difference?
- If we sold our facility and were gifted with a portion of the funds for mission, what would that make possible?

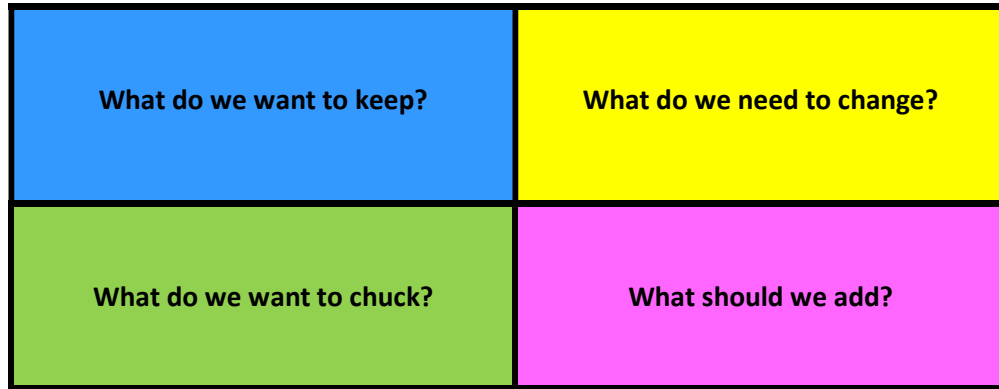


Certainly, sale of a facility will cause grief. The walls are filled with voices and memories from the past. Undoubtedly, many of our ancestors sacrificed blood, sweat, tears and finances for our spiritual homes. We can be grateful for all that they provided. For without their gifts, we would not likely be reaping the benefits today. Are we letting them down by choosing to let go of the bricks and mortar? Or are we letting them down by using up all of our resources until we are forced to turn the lights off and walk out the door empty handed?

We need to take an honest look at whether the building’s purpose has passed and ask if it truly is supporting mission and ministry or if we are serving the building with our limited energy and resources. The transition may feel scary, and we may be full of emotion and fear. But no matter where we land, we take the most important things with us for the ride—the people, our faith, values, passions.

Whether we continue with or without our building, positioning ourselves to meet the challenges of a new age is vital. There are things that we used to be able to do and we still can do. There are things that we could not do, and we still can't do. There are also things that we could do before but can't do now. And there are things that we could not do before that we can do now.

It may be helpful when thinking about the future to fill in each of the quadrants.



Remember, "The early church leaders didn't have the things we now consider essential for our faith. They didn't have official church buildings, vision statements or core values. They had no social media, radio broadcasts or celebrity pastors. They didn't even have the completed New Testament. Christ-followers were often deeply misunderstood, persecuted and some gave their lives for their faith. Yet they loved, and they served, and they prayed, and they blessed—and slowly, over hundreds of years, they brought the empire to its knees. They did it through love." (Read more in *Sacred Roots: Why the Church Still Matters*)

"Lift up your eyes and fix them on the place beyond the horizon to which you are sent. Journey in trust, assured that the great and marvelous work is for this time and for all time." "D&C 16:1a

We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ and to share generously our faith, to create communities of joy, hope, love and peace. We can close our mind and lose the opportunity to make change. Or we can open our mind and risk disappointment for a chance to make a difference. If we take a deep breath, can we see opportunities? What's in it for us? What's in it for the people in our communities? We get to write this new part of our story. The road may be bumpy, and it may feel weird, but the promises are sure. Fasten your seatbelts!

"The Spirit of the One you follow is the spirit of love and peace. That Spirit seeks to abide in the hearts of those who would embrace its call and live its message. The path will not always be easy, the choices will not always be clear, but the cause is sure and the Spirit will bear witness to the truth, and those who live the truth will know the hope and the joy of discipleship in the community of Christ. Amen." (D&C 161:7)