
Christ Episcopal Church

Vision & Strategies Report

Report to the Congregation

Annual Meeting · October 18

Toward our 300th Anniversary in 2027

Executive Summary

This report was created by the Vision & Strategies Committee members shown below from late July through October 2026. The purpose was to capture a **Vision** for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church (CEC) and to propose **Strategies** to achieve that Vision, as we celebrate our 300th Anniversary in the autumn of 2027.

Our Vision is simple but profound:

“A vibrant community of faith, welcoming all, growing together in Christ through worship and prayer, and sharing God’s love through compassionate service.”

The Strategies are proposed as the work undertaken by the congregation. Today’s churches, CEC included, have limited administrative and fiscal resources. CEC, however, is blessed with highly motivated, educated, and diverse worshipers and seekers. We enjoy working together, serving each other, and reaching out to our community.

The **Strategies**, and recommended steps to achieve them, are presented under the following CEC Ministry categories:

- **Parish Life & Membership** – Internal services and spiritual growth
- **Mission & Outreach** – External evangelism and understanding today’s world
- **Communications** – Connect and coordinate our congregation and community
- **Stewardship** – Managing and expanding our fiscal and physical resources

The **steps** to develop and achieve these Strategies must be **the work of the whole congregation**. Some steps are presented in this report as developed by the Vision & Strategies committee, but they are just concepts unless undertaken by members of the congregation.

In addition to the Vestry, the implementation of these strategies become the work of CEC’s existing or newly formed committees, teams, or groups.

Vision & Strategies Committee

Rev. Mercer, CEC Rector

Jay Abbott, V&S Chair

Greg Schuckman, CEC Jr. Warden, V&S Vice Chair

Yvonne Bronner, V&S Facilitator

Natalie Bedard, V&S Administrator

Erin Cassidy-Whong, V&S Communications

Denisa Hunter-Abdallah, CEC Sr. Warden

Andrew Eaton, CEC Treasurer

Toni Summerill, 300th Anniversary Chair

Sonni Aribiah

Greta Barnes

Nathaniel Knox

Ray Lyon

Doris Titus-Glover

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1. Introduction

1.1 Origin and purpose of this report

In 2027, Christ Episcopal Church celebrates its 300th Anniversary — a milestone that calls us to look honestly at where we stand, give thanks for how far we've come, and commit together to what comes next:

"Behold, I am making all things new."

Revelation 21:5

The 4800 Partners Study was clear: Christ Church needs a defined Vision and Strategy to meet the challenges ahead. Reverend Mercer and the Vestry acted immediately, forming a Vision & Strategies committee to bring concrete actions and programs to the congregation for approval at the October 2026 annual meeting.

1.2 Why we must achieve the Vision together

Christ Church's future depends on its people. With a congregation of approximately 300-400 members and attendees, this Vision & Strategies report is built on one central truth: our leaders, members, and supporters must work together, as volunteers, if this Vision is to succeed. The church needs us — all of us — to grow and thrive.

The era of large, well-funded, professionally managed churches has largely passed. The few that remain tend to be in urban or major metro areas, non-denominational, or less diverse than Christ Church. By comparison, the Diocese of Maryland considers Christ Church a healthy congregation — one that has retained both its members and its ministries.

Our paid staff is minimal, consisting of:

- Three clergy; 2 full time, 1 part time
- Parish Administrator; full time
- Communications Manager; part-time
- Property Manager (sexton); part-time
- Music Director; part-time
- Nursery staff; 2 part-time
- Youth Coordinator; part-time

This staff cannot meet the needs of our active congregation on its own, and hiring additional staff in the near future is unlikely. That means the work — and the future of this church — falls to us.

The people of our Church are responsible for its health — and we have stepped up before. We are being asked to do it again.

Our challenges include:

- Like most congregations, we have an aging congregation with only moderate youth participation.
- Like many congregations, our income has not kept pace with the cost of maintaining our historic campus, leaving deferred maintenance and a financial future that, without action, looks bleak.

Our assets include:

- A campus with history and charm unmatched by any church in our area

- A diverse, dedicated, and highly educated congregation
- Existing and potential church property that is currently underutilized

These challenges and assets are well understood by the Vestry, confirmed by the consultant's report, and echoed in the approximately 150 comments our congregation submitted in response to it. The path forward is clear: a realistic, short-term plan that steadies our finances now and builds toward a solid, sustainable future.

"Every sacrament, every Bible story, every church service, every sermon, every hymn, every bit of priesthood, ministry, or liturgy is for one purpose: to allow us to experience ... who we are in God and who God is in us—and to live a generous life from that Infinite Source."

Richard Rohr

1.3 Our Guiding Principles

Inspired by James Rouse's guiding principles for the town of Columbia, our Vision & Strategies committee adopted the following Guiding Principles to test every proposed Strategy and Step in this report. Any future strategies and steps should be tested against these same principles:

- **Christian Faith and Evangelism**
- **Retain Members and Grow the Congregation**
- **Retain Campus Charm and History**
- **Celebrate Racial and Personal Diversity**
- **Avoid Long Term Debt**

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common."

Acts 4:32

2. Our Vision

2.1 Vision statement

“A vibrant community of faith, welcoming all, growing together in Christ through worship and prayer, and sharing God’s love through compassionate service.”

2.2 What our Vision requires

Our Vision & Strategies committee worked from late July through early October to shape the strategies and steps that follow. But describing a vision is easy — achieving it is not. That work belongs to all of us.

Every member and visitor who benefits from these ministries is needed to help carry them out. This Vision cannot rest on the same few people doing most of the work — it depends on many hands.

Equally important is that:

- The steps in this report are only a **starting point**; your insight and involvement will shape what comes next.
- Coordinating these strategies and steps matters — and as noted above, our small church office cannot do it alone.
- We carry out these ministries for ourselves and for each other, embracing the changes that are needed to move forward.

2.3 What reaching our Vision will look like

In this current time of social distrust and doubt, we will **outwardly** share the message of Christ to:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

Our congregation will **inwardly** feel connected, organized, and involved in the many ministries underway at Christ Church.

3. Invitation to the CEC Congregation

3.1 How every member can participate

Every member and visitor is a participant through worship and prayer. Now we are asking you to step up further: join a fellowship or small group, join a ministry, take part in a service project or outreach effort, help with property improvements, or help administer these efforts. The church needs you.

The more of us who volunteer, the lighter the load for those who already carry so much.

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11:30)

3.2 Prayer and spiritual discernment

Every strategy in this report begins in prayer. As the Vestry, the committees, and the workshops take up this work, we ask the whole congregation to pray for discernment: for clarity about where God is calling Christ Church, and for the willingness to answer. Before any step is taken, we invite each ministry group to begin its meetings with prayer and to listen for who is being called to serve.

Discernment also means listening to what members tell us. Members and visitors will be intrigued and drawn to our varied ministries. However, after partial engagement with Christ Church some have said, "I didn't know we were doing this" or "I couldn't easily find who to talk with about it."

Our proposed Strategies for the ministry areas below (Membership, Outreach, Communications and Stewardship) are designed to answer exactly that: what is happening, and how you can be part of it.

3.3 Next Steps

The Vision & Strategies committee will complete its planning work with the delivery of this report at the Annual Meeting on October 18. The implementation of the Strategies becomes the work of Christ Church's existing or newly formed committees, teams, or groups.

To assist in that transition, Vision & Strategies committee members will hold workshops beginning October 25 on the four presented ministry areas so that existing groups can together plan and start the work needed.

- Sunday, October 25 at 9:30am - Membership
- Sunday, November 1 at 9:30am - Outreach
- Sunday, November 8 at 9:30am - Communications
- Sunday, November 15 at 9:30am - Stewardship

4. CEC Ministries, Proposed Strategies, and Steps

4.1 CEC Ministries and Strategies

In this report, the Strategies are grouped by the four existing CEC Ministries. This grouping does not imply a new organization or paid staff oversight of the Strategies; it is simply an ad hoc grouping for this report.

- **Parish Life & Membership**
 - Create a culture of welcome and belonging
 - Build community and spiritual growth
 - Develop a sustainable culture of volunteer leadership
 - Use the 300th Year Anniversary as a launchpad for another 300 years
- **Mission & Outreach**
 - Take stock of our outreach
 - Tell the parish about it
 - Celebrate 300 Years of our service
 - Plan the next chapter
- **Communications**
 - Audit and optimize our communication infrastructure
 - Empower ministries to communicate effectively
 - Strengthen congregation connection and engagement
- **Stewardship**
 - **Annual Giving & Fundraising**
 - Strengthen the Annual Stewardship Campaign
 - Move from plate to pledge
 - Broaden the base of givers across generations
 - Practice stewardship year-round
 - Pursue grants for projects that reduce operating costs
 - Plan for and grow our endowments
 - Coordinate fundraising efforts
 - Make giving easy with Realm
 - **Property & Facilities**
 - Explore undeveloped real property opportunities
 - Support buildings and grounds
 - Leverage energy production and efficiency opportunities to free up funds currently spent on utilities

What is a Strategy; what is a “Step”?

The **Steps** listed below are what the Vision & Strategies committee believe will improve and connect ongoing ministry areas. The Steps are open to debate and improvement by individuals who join in. Clearly, leadership, participation, and inspiration are needed from the congregation.

4.2 Parish Life and Membership

The Parish Life and Membership Ministry serves our vision by offering a pathway to build a welcoming, connected, and sustainable parish where people are known, valued and called; where newcomers become members, members become ministry leaders, and generations grow together in Christ.

Create a Culture of Welcome and Belonging – Developing a path for newcomers to move from welcome to connection to participation to belonging.

- Revive the Welcome Committee and invite parishioners to be greeters and hosts on a rotating basis.
- Establish a process for following up with visitors and newcomers periodically over the first two to three months.
- Offer opportunities for newcomers to meet clergy, ministry leaders, and other parishioners.
- Create clear, inviting ways for newcomers to become involved without feeling pressured.
- Learn why former members and visitors stepped away.

Build Community and Spiritual Growth – Creating the space for parishioners to grow together in Christ

- Strengthen connections between the Youth and Family Ministry and the broader parish by being intentional in providing opportunities to bring them together.
- Develop neighborhood small groups/circles that allow for both social and spiritual events and gatherings like bible study, guest speakers, dinners. Meet in homes, coffee shops, restaurants, etc.
- Increase the visibility of the Men of Christ Church and Women of Christ Church by planning group events such as sports watch parties, museum visits, dinners, teas, etc. Have each group sponsor a church service.
- Provide opportunities for youth to gather with friends such as museum visits, amusement parks, Christmas lunch/dinner. Celebrate youth by having the Men of Christ Church and the Women of Christ Church attend their school events such as sports or academic awards.

Develop a sustainable culture of volunteer leadership – Moving away from relying on a group of longtime volunteers to creating a broader and deeper pipeline of parish leadership

- Develop a simple, regularly updated list of volunteer opportunities across the various ministries. Include information on what volunteers would do, the time commitment, and contact person. Give volunteers the tools needed to succeed.
- Include small, short-term opportunities to volunteer, for example, helping with Sunday School for one Sunday or helping at one event for two hours.
- Enlist clergy, vestry, and other leaders to extend personal invitations to volunteer and serve.
- For new members, invite them to make the first step into volunteering in a low-pressure opportunity, for example, helping at coffee hour or assisting with a seasonal activity.

Use the 300th Year Anniversary as a Launchpad for another 300 years – *Learning from our history, living into our future*

- Use the anniversary to reconnect inactive members and welcome new people into the story of Christ Episcopal Church.
- Strive to engage the congregation as a community in envisioning the next 300 years.

4.3 Mission and Outreach

The Mission and Outreach Ministry serves our vision of sharing God's love through compassionate service. Through the outreach ministry, Christ Church supports more than a dozen ministries and partners, here at home and around the world, with an emphasis on sustainable, enduring projects that enable long-term goals. Mission is our core purpose to share Christ's love and message in the world.

Outreach is the practical way that purpose is put into action, locally and globally.

Take stock of our outreach – A complete, current picture of what Christ Church does and needs

- The Outreach Ministry confirms every partner and ministry, its contact person, what we give (funds, volunteers, or both), and current volunteer needs, including relationships not yet on our website.
- Sort volunteer needs into **short-term** (serve one dinner, work one garden shift, donate a bike) and **ongoing** (tutoring, driving a refugee family, a mission trip)
- Update the list each year and keep it on the website and in Realm.

Tell the parish about it – Working with Communications (4.4) and Parish Life (4.2)

- Feature one Outreach Ministry activity each month in the newsletter and, when possible, in a brief word from a volunteer during worship.
- Add Outreach opportunities, with time commitment and contact person, to the parish-wide volunteer list described in Section 4.2.
- Report once a year to the Vestry and the parish on what our outreach accomplished and what it needs.

Celebrate 300 years of our service – Using the anniversary to show our outreach

- Tell the story of Christ Church's service, past and present, as part of anniversary events and communications.
- Showcase our Outreach Ministries at major anniversary gatherings
- Highlight short-term volunteer opportunities at these events so visitors and members can connect on the spot.

Plan the next chapter – Building on the relationships we already have

- The Outreach Ministry and the Vestry set outreach priorities, testing new ideas against our Guiding Principles and our volunteer capacity.
- Deepen our school partnerships (e.g. Oakland Mills High School and Lake Elkhorn Middle School), drawing on the many educators in our congregation; consider parent round tables and use of our campus
- Provide a channel for identifying new ideas and shepherding into fruition for:
 - a community speaker series on timely topics such as artificial intelligence, climate change, and global migration.
 - community events on our campus such as a farmers' market or gardening education

4.4 Communications

The Communications Ministry serves our vision by connecting people to the story of what God is doing through our ministries and equipping our church to share that story with the community.

Audit and optimize our communication infrastructure - Review existing tools, identify gaps, and maximize what we already have

- Redesign the weekly email newsletter to improve clarity and engagement
- Formalize a Communications Committee to coordinate tools, share best practices, and onboard new volunteers
- Confirm and document who has admin access to our website, email, social media, and other communication tools, so access can be maintained and expanded as new volunteers join

Empower ministries to communicate effectively - Provide training, toolkits and support so ministry leaders can amplify their own work

- Create clear communication guidelines and toolkits for ministry leaders on how to use internal and outreach communication tools
- Provide training and ongoing support for those using church communications tools

Strengthen congregation connection and engagement - Use communications to help people feel connected, informed, and inspired to participate

- Ensure consistent, accessible, and inspiring messaging across all communication platforms
- Coordinate communications strategy with 300th Anniversary initiatives and other major church efforts

Workshop November 8

4.5 Stewardship

The Stewardship Ministry serves our vision by caring for the gifts entrusted to us, our giving and our historic campus, so that Christ Church can keep sharing God's love for the next 300 years. It has two parts: Annual Giving & Fundraising (4.5.1) and Property & Facilities (4.5.2).

4.5.1 Annual Giving & Fundraising

The Annual Giving and Fundraising element of the Stewardship Ministry seeks to grow a culture of generosity in which support for our ministries is shared across generations.

Strengthen the Annual Stewardship Campaign – Framing the pledge as an investment in the community we want to see

- Build the campaign around stories of the ministry that pledges make possible, and use the 300th anniversary as a theme for investing in the next chapter of Christ Church.
- Share the budget plainly: what it funds, what has changed, and where the gap is.
- Invite every household to take a specific step: a first pledge for new givers and a percentage increase for current pledgers.
- Thank every pledger personally and promptly, and follow up with households that have not yet responded.

Move from Plate to Pledge – Converting plate giving, about 17% of our revenue, into recurring pledges to stabilize our budget and cash flow

- Keep pledge cards and a QR code easily accessible year-round, not only during the fall campaign.
- Encourage those who give cash in the plate to use a named envelope or give online, so every gift can be acknowledged.
- Expand giving technology we already have, including text-to-give, and explore giving through our livestream

Broaden the Base of Givers Across Generations – Engaging every generation to join the faithful givers who carry most of our support today

- Root stewardship in belonging. The 4800 Partners study found that the gap is not willingness but clear ways to get involved; members who feel connected give more freely
- Meet donors where they are. For example, for younger adults, lead with online giving, clear impact, and ways to serve; invite a first pledge at newcomer and confirmation milestones.
- Teach giving as a spiritual practice to children and youth through formation.
- Work with Parish Life and Membership so that giving is part of the newcomer path from welcome to belonging.

Practice Stewardship Year-Round – Keeping generosity visible beyond the fall campaign

- Send quarterly giving statements with a short note on what gifts accomplished that quarter.
- Offer a brief stewardship moment in worship or the newsletter each month.
- Host community fundraising events such as markets, concerts, and festivals, using the 300th Anniversary as a natural anchor.
- Plan seasonal appeals (Christmas and Easter flowers, the auction) on a shared calendar so they support the pledge campaign rather than compete with it.

Pursue Grants for Projects That Reduce Operating Costs – Using outside funds for capital and energy projects that ease pressure on the operating budget

- Focus grant seeking on projects that lower our ongoing costs, such as the energy projects in section 4.5.2 and deferred maintenance, rather than on funding operations directly.
- Form a small grants team, led by members with grant-writing experience, working with the Property & Facilities working groups.
- Potential funders and next steps are listed in Appendix A.

Plan for and Grow Our Endowments – Building long-term support alongside annual giving

- Put endowment governance in place before asking for gifts and educate members why endowment giving is a long-term investment which does not support immediate needs.
- Launch the campaign during the 300th Anniversary.
- Develop materials for parishioners describing the ways to give, including bequests, IRA charitable rollovers, charitable gift annuities, and life-income gifts, and offer an estate planning workshop either in-person or via Zoom
- Pursue current major gifts alongside planned gifts, so the endowment grows now and not only through future estates.

Coordinate Fundraising Efforts – The Vestry will support a robust Stewardship Committee to ensure our appeals, grants, and leadership work together.

- Align annual giving goals with the parish strategic plan and develop a five-year financial model.
- Create working groups and task forces to work with the existing Stewardship Committee now so the transition is seamless when this work passes to them.
- Draw on The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) for campaign materials and training.

Make Giving Easy with Realm – Helping members use the giving tool we already have

Christ Church has had Realm for many years, yet few members know they can use it to pledge, give, and see their giving history. Checks and cash in the plate will always be welcome. Realm simply offers an easier path for members who manage the rest of their lives online.

- Host a Realm help table after services during the fall campaign, where members can bring a phone or laptop and get set up on the spot.
- Recruit tech-comfortable members, as “Realm Rangers,” a natural way for generations to serve one another.
- Encourage recurring online gifts, which steady our cash flow across the year.

4.5.2 Property & Facilities

Property and Facilities of the Stewardship Ministry seeks to identify opportunities to leverage the buildings and land left by our forebears to grow the ministries of Christ Church.

Explore Undeveloped Real Property Opportunities - The Vestry will create a working group of 5-7 professionals to work with the Rector to evaluate existing and potential CEC land for its best use for CEC's mission and revenue potential. The team will:

- Be representative of the congregation
- Seek and manage funds for this purpose (grants and donations)
- Some of this exploratory work will be confidential

Support Buildings and Grounds - The Vestry will support a robust Buildings and Grounds committee to improve the appearance and visibility of the campus.

- Create a task force to address deferred maintenance, to include identifying costs, prioritizing issues, and seeking funds.
- Create a task force to address landscape improvements
 - Improve campus signage and church sign visibility from our traffic intersection; a potential youth project with appropriate oversight
 - Review current landscape design and develop forward looking landscape plan

Leverage energy production and efficiency opportunities to free up funds currently spent on utilities.

- Seek opportunities to produce our own electricity through solar
- Seek opportunities to reduce our use of electricity while significantly reducing our use of natural gas and oil.
- Identify potential efficiencies, such as consolidating our internet access to a single plan while improving internet reliability

Workshop November 15

Appendix

Appendix A – Grant and Capital Funding Opportunities

The following opportunities were identified by the 4800 Partners Feasibility & Visibility Study (2026). They are intended as a working list for the grants team, and each requires confirmation of eligibility and timing.

National Fund for Sacred Places – Grants of up to \$500,000 for preservation campaigns, including structural preservation, solar energy, and anniversary or historical projects. The 2027 cycle coincides with our 300th Anniversary.

- Assess our historic significance and capital-project requirements.
- Evaluate the scope of the targeted project.
- Determine the appropriate application deadline for the 2027 cycle.

Delaplaine Foundation – A strong fit for historic preservation, spiritual enrichment, and community anniversary events, with a record of funding African American heritage preservation. Most of its giving supports arts and culture in Frederick County.

- Determine a current anniversary or preservation project.
- Assess the fit of a community or youth project aimed at improving youth engagement.
- Review previously funded projects that match Christ Church’s goals.
- Contact program staff for the current grant cycle timeline.

Maryland Historical Trust Capital Grant – Grants of up to \$100,000 for structural and exterior work on short turnaround projects, subject to current limits on state historic preservation funds.

- Monitor for funding announcements and provide updates through December 2026.
- Confirm eligibility and easement implications and begin pre-application planning.
- Track submission deadlines, with the next opening expected in February 2027.

Maryland Heritage Fund (Preservation Maryland) – Supports building and site preservation, community projects, education, research, and historic projects; \$153,000 was awarded across multiple projects in FY26. It can fund cultural resources not covered by other state programs.

- Track the opening of the once-a-year FY27 grant cycle in early January.
- Identify projects that match Christ Church and the fund’s focus.
- Confirm eligibility and begin pre-application planning.

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland – Diocesan grants and assistance vary by program and may support anniversary-connected ministry, outreach, formation, legacy initiatives, and archival work. Specific opportunities have not yet been identified.

- Review current diocesan grant programs.
- Identify programs that match our anniversary and ministry goals.
- Confirm application timelines.

Trinity Church Wall Street – Offers grants and real-estate support to Episcopal congregations.

- Review current grant priorities and eligibility for parishes outside New York.

Episcopal Church Building Fund – Offers loans and guidance to Episcopal congregations for building projects.

- Explore as a financing option for larger repairs once the building condition assessment is refreshed.

Federal Historic Tax Credit – May help fund preservation of the Old Brick chapel, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

- Confirm with qualified counsel how the credit could apply to a tax-exempt parish, for example through a partner.

Federal elective-pay clean energy credit (Section 6417) – Allows tax-exempt organizations to receive a direct payment for qualifying clean energy projects such as solar.

- Coordinate with the energy working group in section 4.5.2 and confirm eligibility with qualified counsel.

PARISH LIFE & MEMBERSHIP

(Internal Services & Spiritual Growth)



FORMATION

- Adult Formation (Sunday Circle)
- Inquirer's Class
- Youth Group
- Sunday School
- Parents Group
- EfM – Education for Ministry
- CSN – Center for Spiritual Nourishment
- Confirmation
- VBS & CC – Vacation Bible School & Choir Camp
- ToT – Theology on Tap
- Baptism
- Bible Study
- Nursery
- Book Club



LITURGY & WORSHIP

- Lay Preachers
- Lectors, Chalcists
- Acolytes
- Altar Guild
- Ushers
- Spiritual Life Commission
 - Advent & Lenten Retreats
 - Wed Evenings in Lent
 - Prayers of the People
- Lumen Christi
- Choir
- Handbell Choir
- Morning & Evening Prayers



PARISH LIFE & MEMBERSHIP

- Repasts
- Newcomers & Visitors
- FWF – First Wednesday Fellowship
- Auction
- Exercise Group
- Flea Market
- History
- 300th Yr Anniversary
- MOCC – Men of Christ Church
- WOCC – Women of Christ Church
- Young Adults
- Solos in Flight
- Family Ministry



MISSION & OUTREACH

(Understanding a Changing World)

- LEMS – Lake Elkhorn Middle School
- Outreach
- Refugee Ministry
- Grassroots
- Fish
- Dorsey Ctr
- Somos Amigos
- Food Drive
- Friends of Sabina
- DreamBuilders
- Paumier Scholars
- CCD – Christian Care Foundation for Children in Thailand
- Mission to Seafarers
- SLYC – St. Luke's Youth Center
- CCC – Columbia Community Cares
- Bridges to Housing



PASTORAL CARE

- InReach
- Lay Eucharistic Visitors
- Cards
- Prayer List
- Lay Eucharistic Ministers



STEWARDSHIP

(Managing & Expanding Fiscal & Physical Resources)

- Buildings & Grounds
- Finance
- Property Development
- Tellers
- Stewardship Committee
- Investment Committee
- Compensation Review
- Long-term Deferred Maintenance



COMMUNICATIONS

(Connect & Coordinate Congregation & Community)

- Website
- Newsletters
 - This week @ Christ Church
 - Gatherings Newsletter
 - Youth & Family Ministry Newsletter
- Social Media
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Substack
 - YouTube
- Livestream
 - Services
 - Morning & evening prayers
- Podcasts & Fr. Manny's Blog



Growing in Faith • Serving Christ in Our Community

