



Highlands United Church Five-Year Ministry Plan 2019—2024

INTRODUCTION

Why do we have a Five-Year Ministry Plan?

We grow as we purposefully move forward.

From the beginning, faith communities have moved forward with purpose.

Our ancient Hebrew ancestors wrote: “What does the Lord require of you but to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.” Jesus started out his ministry with the words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives...”

God calls us to be attentive and responsive to the world around us, changing our plans as community, finances, and the needs of the world change. We are called to respond intentionally.





Past Five-Year Plans

Ministry planning is not new to Highlands United Church. Highlands drafted ministry plans in 2004, 2008 and 2013, to guide the vision and develop the ministry of the church community. In 2013, a five-year ministry plan was adopted and has guided the work of the leadership board, staff, and congregation over the last five years.

Highlands is also blessed with a vision statement that continues to resonate strongly with the congregation and its leadership.

The Team

In early 2018 the Leadership Board called together a small group from within the congregation to evaluate, research, and draft a new five-year ministry plan with clear goals to guide the leadership, staff, and ministry of Highlands from 2019 through 2024.

The Five-Year Ministry Planning Committee included Bill Dyer, Colin Madill, Jessica Keefe, Sheila Stanway, Margaret Currie, Ardis Nelson, and Will Sparks. This group designed a process for gathering relevant feedback on the demographics, needs, and longings of people on the North Shore, the role of Highlands in the community, the significance of our ministry, and future goals of our congregation.

Five-Year Ministry Plan Process

The group undertook a discernment study to better understand the process of discerning God's call before conducting a historical review of the previous five-year ministry plans and presenting our findings to the Leadership Board. We drew information and insights from demographic sources (Environics research from 2010 and 2016), significant non-Highlands community sources, and from the Highlands community through conversations and a survey. We heard both in surveys and in conversations, common threads, consistent messages, thoughtful insights, and a high degree of satisfaction with life at Highlands. The research was compiled and provided the source material for the proposed Five-Year Ministry Plan.

Paying attention to God's call

During this process we consulted Highlands' vision statement (2004) and the tag line (2017) LIVE GROW THRIVE as sign posts reminding us of our purpose and helping us to discern God's call for our church community.

Highlands United Church

Vision Statement

The vision statement is a lens through which we:

*As followers of Jesus,
we want to be a community
that gathers and takes risks:*

*To receive and engage
a diversity of people,*

To celebrate life-giving worship,

To love and be loved,

To know and be known,

To serve and be served.

To learn, pray and grow together.

*Trusting in God,
we want to be people who
scatter:*

To live out faith in action,

*To seek peace, justice and
healing,*

*To share time,
ministries and money.*

*Led by the Spirit,
we are continually transformed
on this journey.*

**LIVE. GROW.
THRIVE**

THE GOALS

The needs of our congregation, community, and world are great.

God calls us to respond.

There are many things we could be doing, but to respond most effectively with the time, talent, and treasure we have been given, we need to prioritize.

The four goals set out in these pages will form the lens for Highlands Leadership Board, Ministry Staff, and congregation to prioritize over the next five years to help us and our community, both local and broader, to

LIVE. GROW. THRIVE

■ BEYOND OURSELVES

Goal: Broaden and deepen our leadership and relationships with the wider community.

■ COMMUNICATION

Goal: Effectively communicate what we care about, what we do and who we are to ourselves and to the wider community.

■ CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Goal: Ensure that at every age and stage of life, people are invited into community and to deepen their relationships.

■ SUSTAINING COMMUNITY

Goal: Understand the ever changing ways people give their time and financial resources, and the variety of new models of funding and support for ministry in the church

BEYOND OURSELVES

Goal: Broaden and deepen our leadership and relationships with the wider community.

Desired Outcome

We will be a visibly welcoming, inclusive community building strong relationships and demonstrating leadership in Edgemont Village, on the North Shore, and in the wider community.

Potential Actions

- Provide opportunities for learning about, and connecting with, other faiths and Indigenous people.
- Explore how we can become a more inclusive and welcoming congregation to a more diverse population, including members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Strengthen our relationships within the local community, including the facilitation of more opportunities to partner on projects and initiatives
- Pay attention to, and act on, opportunities to provide leadership and support to the wider faith community.

What We Heard

- In the responses we received, diversity and inclusion are common themes. Many people spoke with passion about multicultural/interfaith relationships and exploration. Building strong relationships with Indigenous people is important for members of our congregation and responds to both the United Church's history with residential schools and the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action. LGBTQ+ inclusion is an important theme and developing greater inclusion in an overt way is supported.
- We also heard a desire by several people both within Highlands and in the local community that we should be more visible in what we do and what we value. In our immediate community of Edgemont Village, our presence is viewed as essential.
- We also heard, both from within our immediate congregation and in the wider church community, that as a relatively healthy faith community, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to offer leadership and support to the wider United Church.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Goal: Ensure that at every age and stage of life, people are invited into community and to deepen their relationships.

Desired Outcomes

- We will have engaged, contributing, connected young adults whose needs for community are met.
- We have an intentional process by which newcomers make Highlands their spiritual home and find friendship and community.
- We will understand the experience of “the missing middle” and develop faith-based program with which they engage.

Potential Actions

- Explore the needs of young adults, develop and implement ministry programs to meet those needs.
- Develop our approach to small groups, workshops and events that allow people to get to know each other more deeply, and that address the relevant life and faith issues of adults.
- Continue to generously support ministry with children youth and families
- Reach out to “the missing middle” (perhaps people who used to come to Highlands and have drifted away) to understand their experience and spiritual needs, and respond accordingly

What We Heard

- Highlands is blessed with a long-term commitment and capacity with Children, Youth and Families, a healthy engaged young adult population, and commitment and capacity to meet the needs of Seniors.
- Fine work is done welcoming people as they initially connect with Highlands on a Sunday morning, through our program life, or through the office.
- The North Shore demographics suggest an abundance of support and resources for United Church ministry in all age groups.
- Many people drift away in their 40s and 50s, often as their children become adults. We called this “the missing middle.” This is a time in life when people are often very busy in all aspects of life, can be caring for aging parents while supporting young adults, have growing gifts to offer community, and face significant life challenges.
- Moving from initial contact with Highlands and becoming more deeply engaged can be difficult
- Young adults engage in music ministry and leadership with children and youth but there is no ministry focussed on that age demographic (post High School to 30ish)

COMMUNICATION

Goal: Effectively communicate what we care about, what we do and who we are to ourselves and to the wider community.

Desired Outcomes

- Communicate effectively to all
- A comprehensive communication plan incorporating a variety of communication platforms so that we reach all we intend to reach
- Continued Livestream leadership

Potential Actions

- Undertake a comprehensive overview of our existing platforms of communication to understand their effectiveness, including understanding preferences of different demographic groups for accessing and receiving information
- Explore and understand different platforms of communications to understand which are most effective
- Development of a Social Media strategy
- Ensure our Vision statement and LIVE GROW THRIVE are understood as key guiding concepts in our planning and programming
- Continue to be a leader in the development of livestream programming
- Make what is going on inside the building visible to all (eg. an electronic signboard?)

What We Heard

- Responders who are not part of our congregation said their impressions of HUC are: *friendly, open minded, generous, involved in the community, many young people involved, good energy, progressive, inclusive, does good work with vulnerable groups.*
- This small sample of responders, included HUC ESL students, a local Mayor, a UC minister who has preached at HUC, and representatives from local agencies. Their impressions of HUC are based on contacts with HUC members, staff, and programs.
- For this group, it appears that our work done in the community and connections to their organizations communicates our values to the world outside our walls. None of the respondents mentioned looking at our website or social media.
- Responses from within our congregation do not address communication specifically but we believe communication plays an underlying part in many of the comments we heard.
- Responders commented on the abundant and sometimes overwhelming info available on the Action and sign up tables, the number of good events and programs we offer, although some seemed unaware about programs we offered the challenge for young adults to feel part of the life of HUC, the longing to find community within the congregation with those who share similar life experiences, challenges, interests.
- Responders did not reference our online presence, or the other ways we communicate.

SUSTAINING COMMUNITY

Goal: Understand the ever changing ways people give their time and financial resources, and the variety of new models of funding and support for ministry in the church

Desired Outcome

- We are ready and equipped to respond to God's call to this congregation in respect to volunteer and financial resources.

Potential Actions

- Research and recommend emerging models of sustainable funding that would give Highlands security of both human and financial resources into the future.
- Research and experiment with different ways of offering volunteer opportunities for ministry.

What we heard

- Relatively few responses commented on financial sustainability.
- The sustainability of volunteer time was mentioned more frequently in the light of changing demographics and an aging church membership.

What we also Know

- The funding model of the national church is changing.
- The age demographics of Highlands is changing and this has financial and human resource implications. For example, stewardship research suggests that it takes the offering of 5 newcomers to replace the offering of 1 long time member.



What we learned and heard along the way:

- Many churches do not create ministry plans. Life for them evolves organically. Other churches make ministry plans but leave them on a shelf. If a ministry plan is going to be effective, it needs to be a living document that guides the agendas of the leadership, priority setting, budgets and the work of the whole church.
- We are thoughtful about the relatively low response to aspects of this process, especially the congregational survey. We wondered whether there were flaws in our design, whether it would have been different if we had asked different questions or in a different format. We also wondered if there is a level of complacency, a comfortable pew phenomenon at work.
- There is a very high level of confidence in the paid and volunteer leadership at Highlands.
- Highlands is a strong congregation, and knows it. There are great things happening and that is mentioned frequently. We heard and also mused about overconfidence. It is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 8 when Moses cautions the people who have come into the promised land that they not forget that there is wilderness out there and that their life depends on God. Deuteronomy 8:7-18
- We heard of an amazing abundance of powerful acts of faithfulness, compassion and care that happen unheralded every day that will never appear in a report.

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THRIVE**

THE PROCESS FROM HERE

- February 2019: The Leadership Board receives the report of the Five-Year Ministry Plan Team and decides what to recommend to the Congregation.
- March 2019: The Congregation receives the report and recommended goals at the Annual Congregational meeting and officially sets the goals for the next five years.
- March 2019 forward: The goals approved by the congregation are now official and the Leadership Board is given the task of guiding their implementation.

Supporting Documents available in the Church Office:

- Five-Year Ministry Plan process
- Environics Reports from 2010 and 2016
- Extended Leadership Board First Glance Presentation November 2018
- 2013 Five-Year Ministry Plan
- Raw data gathered by surveys is available upon request



Highlands United Church
Live Grow Thrive