

Good Futures Accelerator

Team Report, January 2025

What is the Good Futures Accelerator?

The Good Futures Accelerator is a self-paced course designed to help a team within a church learn to think in fresh ways about how church buildings and property can be used to both meet community needs and generate income. It's created by Rooted Good, an organization that works to help faith-based organizations "align money and mission, reclaim their relevance in a changing world and be the Church the world needs today."



From the introduction to the workbook:

"We are in the midst of a season of significant change. Across the nation, congregations of all kinds are experiencing changing patterns of attendance, membership, and giving, all while many of their local communities and neighborhoods are also undergoing significant change. This context leads to significant theological questions and economic challenges. How do we best serve our wider community, when our wider community has changed so much? How do we stay rooted in our tradition but also adapt to be able to respond to a changing context? In this post-pandemic world, how do we rediscover our identity and purpose? These are all questions we have heard time and time again, and have also asked ourselves.

At the same time, another set of questions and challenges is becoming ever more urgent. How can we generate enough income to survive the next five years? How can we best use our buildings and land, now that we aren't using them as much as we once were? Our space was designed for the congregation we used to be; what does it mean to re-design it for who we will be tomorrow?

We believe that these two sets of questions are profoundly related. Both sets of questions need to be asked together, not separately. This moment offers an opportunity to explore new, creative ways of fulfilling your congregation's mission and purpose that also generate new forms of income and find new, sustainable ways to use your land and buildings. We don't think social enterprise is the 'silver bullet' that will solve all the problems that the church faces. However, it is an important and needed tool in the toolkit that can help your congregation become both resilient and impactful, becoming more and more the church that the world needs."

Why this, now? ...

Over the past few years, despite being careful and strategic with our parish budget, it's been difficult to match our income and expenses. Churches like St. Dunstan's have long been sustained financially by members in middle age and above. But today's younger generations will not be able to give at levels comparable to their elders as they move into middle age. People who are 40 today own just half the wealth that older generations did at the same age. Meanwhile, basic expenses like health care, housing, and education cost many times more than in past decades. Our annual church budgets are already feeling the pinch of these large-scale economic and demographic forces. Many long-time, generous givers have gone ahead into God's presence. Current and new members have been exceedingly generous, increasing their total giving year over year to bridge the gap. Yet we have repeatedly had to adopt deficit budgets in recent years. Special gifts have allowed us to avoid cutting back on staff or programs, but deficit budgets are not sustainable. To continue to grow and expand our mission and ministries, rather than shrinking them, we must take steps to protect our financial future. The Good Futures Accelerator is one step in this direction.

A Key Concept: What is a “Social Enterprise”?

A *social enterprise*, in the context of this work, is, basically, a project or initiative that checks all three boxes: it uses church assets to meet community needs and generate income to support ministry.

From the RootedGood website: “A Social Enterprise is an organization that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in financial, social, and environmental well-being. This is sometimes noted as a ‘triple bottom line’ enterprise: making a qualitatively positive impact on people/community, the planet/ecology, and profits/economy. Some will add a fourth bottom line of personal and social transformation/spirituality.”

Read more here: <https://www.rootedgood.org/post/social-enterprise-a-gift-or-a-risk-to-the-church>

Although our team has spent many months with this concept, we are still getting used to it! People in churches are much more used to the idea of making our resources available for free or a nominal price, to support good work in the wider community. But that mindset doesn’t serve churches well when they are also financially stretched - and it limits possibilities, too. For example: You’re not going to invest in renovating a space for a group that can only make a modest monthly donation - but that renovation may make a lot of sense to accommodate a tenant that CAN pay fair rent, and is also doing good work for our neighbors.



The Team and the Trajectory of the Course

Our team included Marian Barnes, Miranda Hassett, John Laedlein, Helyn Luisi-Mills, Debra Martinez, Valerie McAuliffe, Todd Smet, and Michelle Waldron. We began our work at the end of April, 2024, and concluded it in mid-November. Over those eight months, we worked through the seven sessions of the Good Futures Accelerator curriculum. The Good Futures Accelerator course led us through a process of wondering, exploring, developing and testing ideas for potential church-based social enterprises. We got to know each other, identified core values and strengths of our parish, explored our neighborhood and wider context, re-familiarized ourselves with our buildings and grounds, brainstormed and evaluated ideas, and reflected on next steps for carrying what we learned and the results of our shared work out to the congregation.

Some Caveats...

One thing we noticed along the way is that the Good Futures Accelerator materials assume that the team working through the curriculum will identify and **begin a new social enterprise** at the end of the process. We did not understand our work in that way. We saw ourselves as a group learning some new ways of thinking, to help kick off some shared wondering and exploration in the congregation as a whole. While some possible social enterprise directions are an obvious next step from where we are now, other possibilities would need time, conversation, learning and discernment for the people of St. Dunstan's to be ready to move forward together.

Another thing we noticed is that many case studies in the Good Futures Accelerator materials start with a faith community that had dwindled to a few determined members, or closed entirely. These are “**death and resurrection**” stories of churches that found new life in community service, perhaps surviving as a small congregation with a new core mission, perhaps ceasing to exist as a congregation but giving their life force to something new for the greater good.

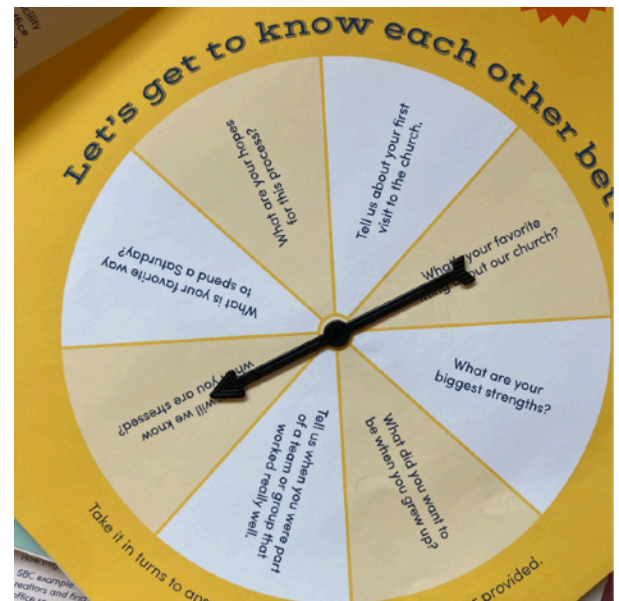
St. Dunstan's has work to do on our financial sustainability, but by many other metrics we are thriving. We're not at death's door, as a congregation, and we have a fairly strong sense of shared purpose. As we continue learning and exploring together, it will be interesting to look for case studies of social enterprises from churches that have some vitality and direction.

Session 1: Introducing the Process

Our Good Futures Accelerator team met for the first time on Tuesday evening, April 30. Over a light meal, we watched the first video of the curriculum, and discussed some “get to know you” questions. We shared stories of times when St. Dunstan's has done something new, from our own experience and that of folks we interviewed. We discussed ten different case studies of churches or faith organizations that have developed social enterprises - projects that use under-utilized church assets to generate income for the church and meet a community need. Finally, we discussed the core animating ideas of the Good Futures program - a theological perspective on the economy; death and resurrection; and recognizing abundance instead of scarcity - and discussed what core values and priorities would shape our work.

Here are some of the themes that emerged in our conversation:

- Lean into a vision of human dignity and worth as inherent, not dependent on people's ability to work or earn. Look for “rising tide” solutions that lift all boats.
- Keep the SOCIAL bigger than the enterprise, in Social Enterprise. But it's also OK to think about money. Jesus wasn't mad because there was money in the Temple; he was mad because people were being taken advantage of, instead of helped.
- Some core priorities: kids as the face of the future; creation care and social justice; inclusivity - prioritizing the dignity of every human being; small group connections, friendship, and mutual support, as a counter to loneliness and disconnection; building a sense of belonging - for folks who step into the church, or anybody who needs it.



As preparation for this session, we were asked to ask members of the congregation about stories of change and innovation from our congregation's past, and times when they'd seen our congregation at its best. Some times that came to mind, for members of this team and those we interviewed:

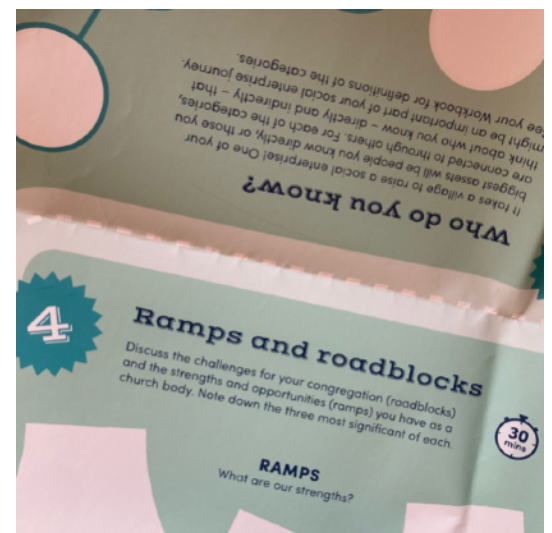
- Times of clergy transition - showing capacity to weather change and rebound after difficult seasons
- Our adaptation to Covid lockdown, learning to use technology to sustain community
- Growing in our active support for the LGBTQ+ community
- Growth in our sense of ourselves as a multigenerational congregation, our welcome of kids in worship and our congregational support for kids and youth
- Quick responses to community needs/new outreach projects

An overview of responses can be read in **Appendix 1**.

Session 2: People and Passions

An effective social enterprise emerges out of a church's particular identity, commitments and gifts. That's why the Good Futures Accelerator program starts with some focus on who we are and what we are about, at St. Dunstan's.

This session built on the work of Session One as we explored our identity as a congregation, identifying what we care most about, and our "ramps and roadblocks" - things that could help us move towards a new project, or get in our way; what comes easily to us as a congregation, and where we sometimes struggle or get stuck.



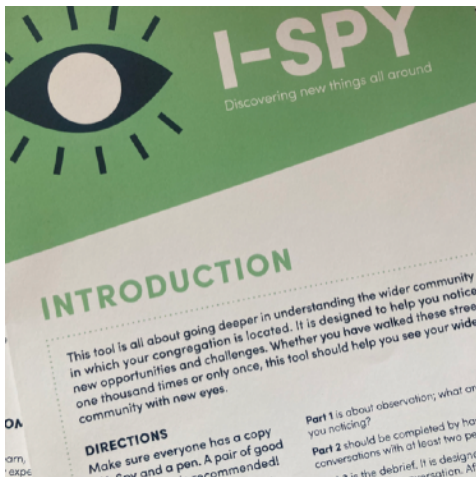
In conversation about what's special or distinctive about St. Dunstan's, some strong themes were: Our commitment to including and supporting kids and youth; our commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion, and a more general sense of striving for inclusive welcome; our outreach work; our liturgical life, which includes creativity and opportunities for participation for all ages; our creation care commitments; and the breadth of opportunities to participate and share one's gifts and skills.

The **"ramps"** - opportunities and positive aspects of our parish life - that we named included involvement and investment of both new and long-term members; a sense of being a community where people are able and willing to share many gifts and skills; relatively stable finances and a generous community; a sense of warmth and trust; flexibility and the capacity to experiment; a good location, appealing buildings and beautiful grounds; and goodwill in the larger community.

The **"roadblocks"** - potential challenges - that we identified included lack of a large endowment to support ongoing expenses or cover property needs; gradual loss of our older generation of generous givers; need to focus, prioritize, and recruit leadership strategically, in a small-to-medium organization in which people have many ideas and passions; not much history of whole-parish projects; many people who'd rather show up and do the thing than serve as committee members who help plan stuff; we sometimes have more creativity than follow-through; the need to be careful about "future-proofing" and not having a significant project be too dependent on just a few people; and some unknowns associated with becoming part of a new diocese.

We also spent time **brainstorming our connections**: people and organizations who might help us identify or access resources and make connections, or share learnings and expertise, such as fellow churches that have undertaken social enterprise projects, and local nonprofits that we've worked with for many years. We also identified some potential collaborators and partners - people and organizations who might have some role or voice in our potential social enterprise - as well as potential gate-keepers whose buy-in we might need to secure.

Read **Appendix 2** for a more detailed overview of our conversation.



Session 3: Community and Context

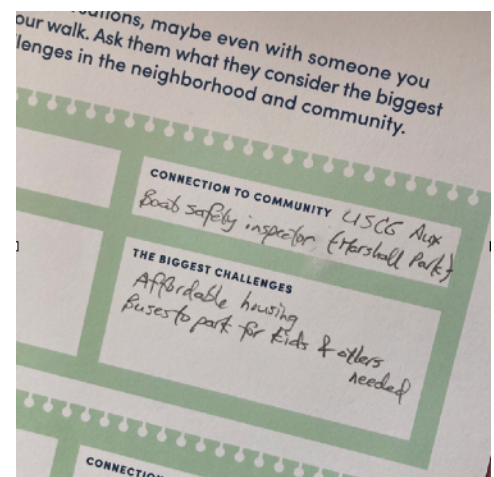
This session focused on the necessity of understanding our community and context, in order to build a social enterprise that actually serves our neighbors. Session materials explain, “This session will... help you think about what it means to participate in long-lasting change in your local community. Good intentions, while important, are insufficient. Creating an effective social enterprise means learning quickly about the difference you are making - we can’t just assume that things will work out as we hope.... If we don’t clearly articulate and increasingly understand the challenge we are trying to solve, we tend to only focus on the efforts of our activity as an indication of success. If we do this, what looks like success to us (such as more food donated) might

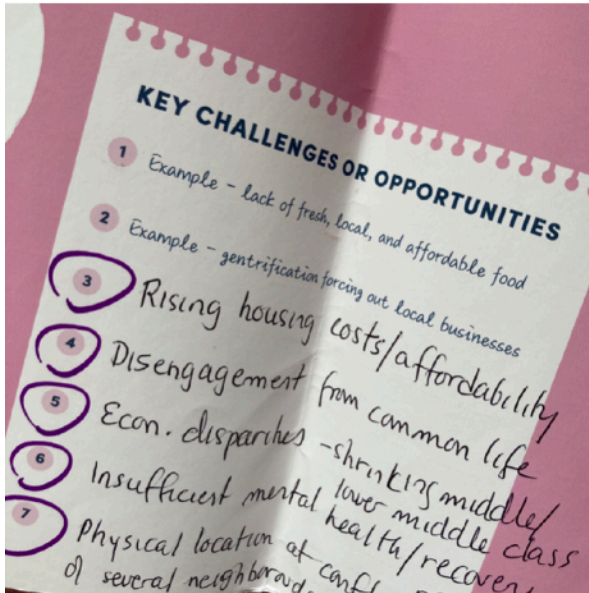
actually be an indicator of the challenge only increasing (more food poverty).” We discussed two case studies presented in the materials, and how and why they failed to make meaningful change.

As a step towards better understanding OUR community and context, we prepared for this session with some community exploration - taking walks around the church’s neighborhood (or in some cases, our own neighborhoods) and, where possible, chatting with people we encountered, asking them about the strengths and challenges of the neighborhood. We also sought out and interviewed people who live and work in the area near the church. Turn to **Appendix 3** for an overview of what we heard and learned from those exercises!

Based on that work, we identified a list of challenges faced by the communities surrounding the church: Housing affordability; insufficient mental health, recovery, and wellness resources; growing economic disparities; disengagement/disinvestment from community; and lack of affordable, quality child care.

This session moved us towards beginning to identify some possible directions for a social enterprise project. As the materials say: “Choosing what challenges in your local community you want to respond to involves considering two different aspects: Firstly, how significant a challenge or opportunity is this? Secondly, how much empathy do we have for this challenge?”





Using those criteria, we identified two of the challenges on the list as standing out to our group the most:

- **Housing affordability.** The church (especially, but not only, folks involved with the Outreach committee) have a strong awareness that housing is a big need locally, and that rising rents and housing costs are a huge burden on many households, reducing funds available for other needs like food, health care, education, and so on.

- **Mental health, recovery, and wellness resources.** We have a number of core members who care deeply about the ways addiction affects people, families, and communities, and the need for strong recovery resources of all kinds; and likewise, a number of members who care deeply about the need for stronger mental health support.

Session 4: Mapping Space

In session 4, we gathered to explore our church's buildings and property. We walked around, visiting different locations; in each place we shared memories about the space (events held there, ways it's been used in the past) and acknowledged things we might miss from those previous chapters. We also challenged ourselves to imagine how the space might be used in the future, generating "what if" questions.

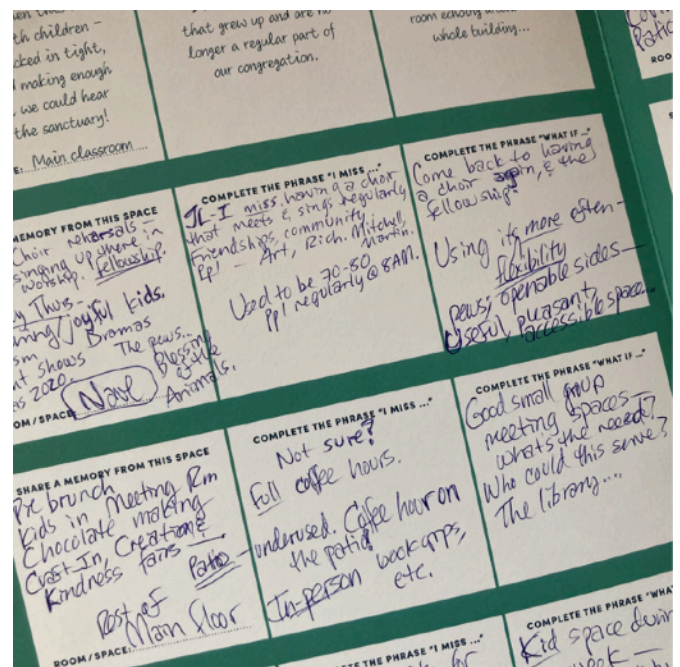
This session was simple but eye-opening - for those who knew our buildings well, as well as those who hadn't been on a full tour before. It helped us notice and acknowledge changes that have already taken place, and begin to open our minds to new possibilities.

Please read **Appendix 3** for an overview of what we talked about, as we moved around our property. We could have spent much longer, walking, talking, remembering, noticing and reflecting!

At the end of our "tour," we gathered our thoughts in response to some prompts in the materials:

What were you most grateful for as you walked around the building? We have so much space. There are lots of under-utilized rooms, buildings, spaces. We are grateful for the 2018-19 renovation and what we improved.

What are the best things about your current space? A small but nice kitchen in the main building. Spaces that are usable, pleasant, accessible. We have parking! Most spaces are ADA-flexible spaces that can be used in different ways. Our outdoor spaces are an asset too.



What part of your space holds the most promise?

1. The Parish Center

- **Thoughts from the “What if?” Exercise:** What would it cost to add air conditioning, and update the heat? Could we create an office area? ADA issue with access to the upstairs; we could improve on this somewhat. Members of our team feel some excitement about the Parish Center and see a lot of potential for this space: it’s private, but accessible. There may be organizations looking for clean, safe meeting spaces. It could also serve as a space for parties and events. Definitely space with revenue potential, with some investment. Good space for support groups, client meetings.
- **Thoughts from our closing reflection time:** This could be useful space for non-for-profits, community service providers, etc. We could roll the Parish Center into a strategic plan, including maintenance too. That could be an “on ramp” to deepen engagement with the wider community, and help close budget gaps. Working with that could develop our capacity to manage and maintain spaces we use and share actively, too.

2. The “Back 40” (*the small woods between the Parish Center and Old Middleton Road*)

- **Thoughts from the “What if?” Exercise:** What if we used some of this land for affordable housing in some way? What about developing part of it, but keeping green space too, which we value for its ecological and neighborhood-enhancing qualities? Could there be a possibility of re-using existing building footprints (like the Rectory or Parish Center), and keeping the woods as part of a redevelopment project? **This “what if” stirs up many possibilities but also some anxiety!** People care about the woods, and have seen lots of examples of development that seem ugly, disruptive, or like they don’t truly meet the community’s need for more affordable rental and housing stock.
- **Thoughts from our closing reflection time:** We see lots of potential here, but those would be big changes and we’d need to have a lot of conversation, first within the church and then beyond it, to even begin to move in this direction. (*More on this below, in the “Conclusions and Next Steps” section!*)

3. Other notable possibilities: The Rectory. We’ve been renting it out as a rental home for several years, but we could change that at any time and do something different with that building or site. It is an appealing historic building, but is not registered in any way. We also wondered about hosting more meetings and events in our **main church building**.

Between Sessions 4 and 5: Playing the “Mission Possible” Game

The Good Futures Accelerator curriculum instructed us to play the game “Mission Possible,” which came with the rest of the Good Futures Accelerator materials. The game helps teach the process of design thinking, and helps explore how to address big challenges with unlikely resources. We held two sessions and really enjoyed playing the game! Only a few non-GFA team members participated, but we think this game is an important tool. One of our next steps will be to take the game around the congregation, to give more of us some practice in thinking creatively about how to use particular resources and assets (like a specific building, volunteer base, equipment or expertise, etc.) to address big, complex challenges.



Session 5: Gathering Ideas

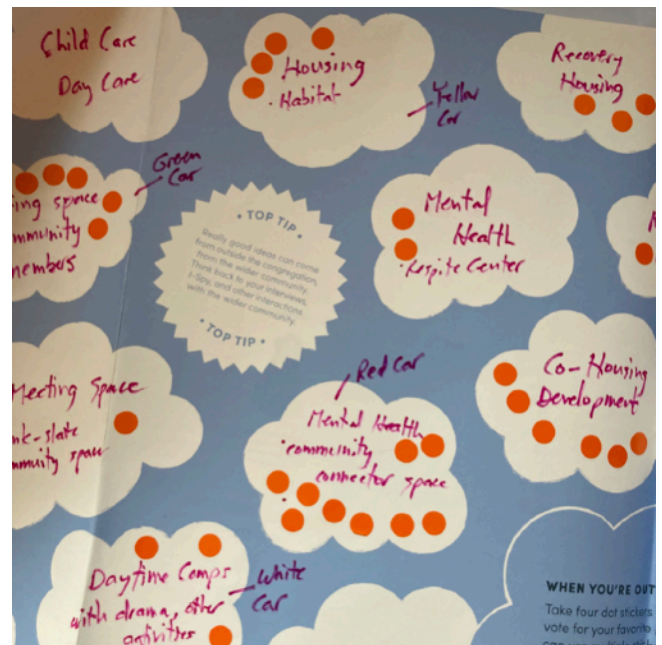
Session 5 began the process of helping us hone in on a specific idea (or two), to continue to explore and develop, based on all the work already done in sessions 1 through 4. The Mission Possible game primed the pump for us to think about how the places and spaces we visited in session 4 might be useful in addressing community needs. Session materials stressed that we should expect that the process of developing a social enterprise is likely to involve **pivots** - moments when the plan or direction have to change, in response to feedback or learning through the development process, external or internal roadblocks, learning more about context, need, and demand, or other factors.

We also learned that the process of developing a social enterprise is likely to involve **partnerships**.

Social enterprises are often a collaboration between several organizations and groups, and we shouldn't assume we have to have all the skills and resources needed to pursue our idea. Rather, early on, we should expect to reach out to partners we can learn from, and perhaps work with.

During the session, we revisited the work of the previous four sessions. Based on all that, we brainstormed some ideas for potential social enterprises that might use St. Dunstan's resources to address the community needs we named in session 3. You can read our full brainstorming list in Appendix 5. After we'd generated some ideas, each member of the team got five stickers to use to vote for their favorite ideas. Here are the ideas that got at least four votes:

- 9 votes – Mental health/community connector space in the Parish Center
- 7 votes – Renting Parish Center space to community members for classes, events, etc.
- 6 votes – Co-housing development on the property
- 4 votes – Daytime summer camp with drama, other activities
- 4 votes – Housing development with Habitat for Humanity



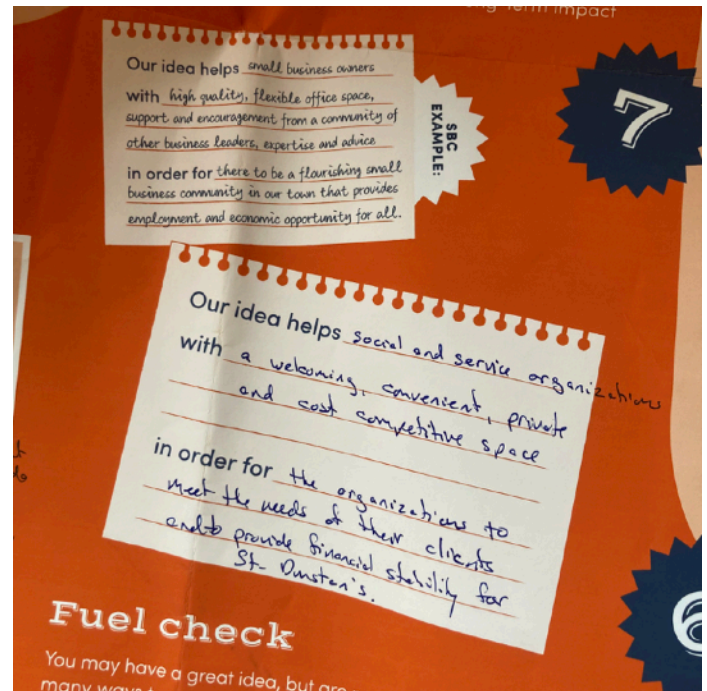
We then used a playful process (involving tiny paper cars!) to work through questions that helped us evaluate these ideas, like: Which idea most connects with your identity and gifts as a congregation?, "Which idea shows promise in generating new forms of income?", and "Which idea is something that you as a team really want to see happen?" With each question, we discussed it as a team and then moved tiny cars along a track on our session sheet for the corresponding idea.

Out of that process, we once again found ourselves focusing in on two ideas, one more short-to-medium term - exploring making the Parish Center available and attractive as a space for local organizations to work with clients seeking support with mental health, recovery, and wellness - and one more medium-to-long term, with much more to room to wonder and explore: potential affordable housing development on the church's property.

Session 6: Road Testing Your Idea

In session 6, we were invited to further “road test” and develop one of our favorite ideas. The session materials introduced some important concepts, including:

- **Beneficiary:** the person who benefits from having their needs met by a service or product.
- **Customer:** the person who pays for a service or product. *Not necessarily the beneficiary - consider a service provider renting space from us: they would be the customer, but their clients would be the beneficiaries.*
- **Demand:** How much people want a product or service, and how much they are willing to pay.
- **Value Proposition:** How a business describes its value and what it does or offers.



During the session we decided which of our ideas to work with. This was a bit of a challenge because we had several ideas that are very different in terms of scope, and also some of our ideas could potentially overlap - or even conflict. After some discussion, we decided to focus for this session on the idea of potentially collaborating with community partners to use the Parish Center as a hub for mental health, recovery, and wellness services.

We brainstormed and listed potential customers and beneficiaries, including imagining specific meetings, events, and “personas” - community members - who might use the service/space we’d like to provide. We considered how to explore and evaluate demand for our idea. We reflected on a series of questions designed to help us assess our own level of support and readiness, as a team, to continue exploring and developing this idea - and felt that we were interested and motivated. We thought about funding sources, partners, and collaborators.

Finally, the materials had us write up our value proposition: “Our idea helps social and service organizations with a welcoming, convenient, private and cost-competitive space, in order for the organizations to meet the needs of their clients and promote financial stability for St. Dunstan’s.”

Session 7: Next Steps

This session invited us to think more about what makes a good **partnership** relationship in a social enterprise, including looking for partner agencies that are clear in their mission, good at what they do, and aligned with our values. Some potential partners we named included: WayForward Resources; MAICO (Madison Area Intergroup Central Office) for AA; the Middleton Chamber of Commerce; Joining for Families; our Diocese; local schools/school districts; and other organizations that our Outreach Committee might suggest.

The session also encouraged us not to be deterred by capital and startup costs that might be involved, for example, in preparing a space for new uses, but to think ahead to the longer-term **operating model**, anticipating longer-term income and expenses, when evaluating whether a social enterprise will be sustainable and meet our needs. We considered some of the potential costs of using the Parish Center regularly as a meeting and service provision space, including capital upgrades, staffing, cleaning, scheduling, advertising, accounting, and supplies.

The session also encouraged us to think about **roles and responsibilities**: “The more developed your social enterprise idea becomes, the more you have already started to think about roles and responsibilities. This might already be causing some concern - how much time can I, as a team member, give to this? Do we have the capacity to pull this off as a church? What role can the pastor or other staff members play? Do we need to hire someone now, even at this stage?” The materials stressed that successful social enterprises usually rely on a mix of employees and volunteers, and urged us to take skills, capacity, and passion all into account when recruiting. We thought about the need for staffing to handle scheduling, cleaning, and preparing the space for use, as well as some additional bookkeeping.

This session invited us to start listing other organizations that have relevant expertise or have undertaken similar projects that we could **learn from**. We listed our denomination and sister denomination and churches; Mark Elsdon himself, who is based locally; housing co-ops and other local housing-focused organizations; and potential users of the Parish Center space. Finally, this session reminded us to expect **multiple income streams**, including grants, gifts, sponsorships, and so on, and had us start brainstorming some possibilities in that direction, such as hosting retreats and performances and seeking out grant opportunities in a variety of directions.

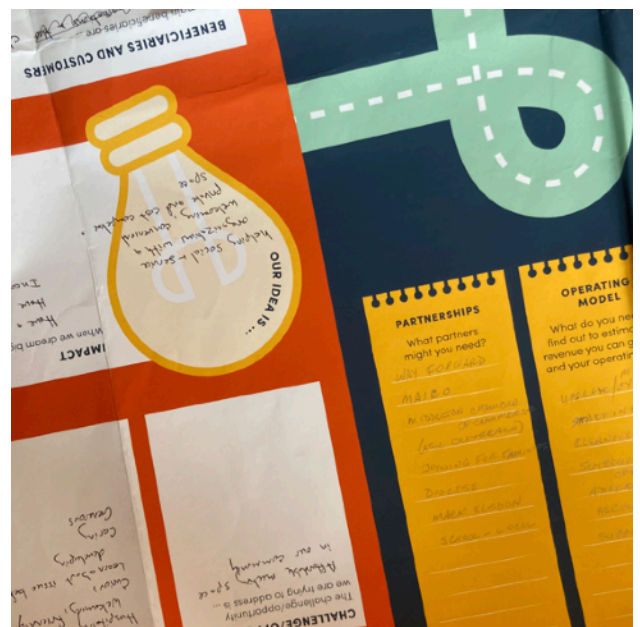
To wrap up the work, we filled out a “**Social Enterprise Model Canvas**,” pulling all these ideas together in one place (see **Appendix 7**).

OUR Next Steps - and yours?...

As we moved through this session, we felt a need to diverge somewhat from the materials. The GFA curriculum anticipates that the team doing the course will then move on to begin actually developing the social enterprise they have chosen. That was not our understanding, for a couple of important reasons:

- This team was recruited to learn and wonder together, not to start a project.
- This parish likes to be involved in decision-making. It’s not in our culture here for one small group to make a big decision on their own, without wider conversation and input.

On the one hand, it’s been the intention to **seek out more organizations and groups to use the Parish Center** since the 2019 renovation of that building. So the idea we’ve been fleshing out makes a lot of sense. Members of this team (and the Vestry, who have been kept up to date on the Good Futures process) have some energy for exploring the need and demand for our Parish Center as a meeting and service provision space for mental health, recovery and wellness work.



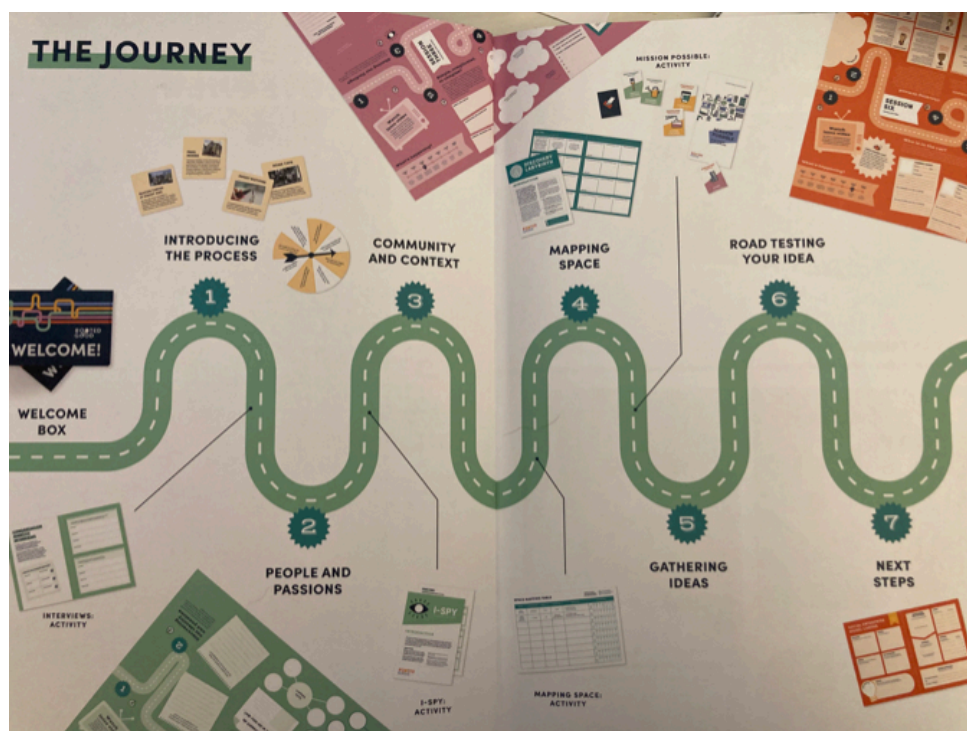
On the other hand, our team felt strongly that **our next step is to engage the wider parish in the same kinds of learning, wondering, and brainstorming we've been doing** through the Good Futures Accelerator process. We very much want to broaden the conversation about how our church's property assets might be able to generate income while meeting community needs.

We're particularly mindful that our second, bigger and more nebulous idea - doing something to address the housing affordability crisis - will feel like a really big step for many folks. We understand! Even though the idea arose through our shared work, many members of our team also had strong reactions to it early on. But it stood the test of several GFA sessions that encouraged us to evaluate our ideas in various ways and choose the ones that would have the greatest impact, make the best use of our resources, and be most aligned with our parish's values.

The idea of some kind of housing development on the church's property will take a lot more exploration, conversation, and discernment! We know that there is a big need for affordable housing in Dane County. We have learned that in other cities, churches are finding different ways to use their property to respond to the need for housing. Churches can be good partners in affordable housing development because while they need some income, they don't need to maximize profit or make their investment back as soon as possible, as in commercial housing development. If you'd like to read more about this, we've collected a few articles.

St. Dunstan's treasures our green space, and we would carry that core value into any exploration what it could look like to develop housing on some part of the church grounds. Likewise, our team is very clear that any housing development here would have to have a substantial element of making housing accessible to people and households who can't otherwise easily afford to own homes.

We understand that anything like this would be a really big step, and would need plenty of time for congregational discernment, as well as lots of exploration of what would even be possible. The Good Futures Accelerator team simply wants to report out that our work together identified housing as an important need - and got us wondering, together, what it could look like for St. Dunstan's to respond to that need.



So what happens now? ...

Thanks for reading this report! It was important to us to walk you through the process with us, not just share outcomes. We hope to take some time for questions and discussion about all this at the parish Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 26th.

Our Good Futures Accelerator team has completed its work - but we anticipate, and hope for, follow through on three different fronts.

1. **Bringing you along** by sharing this report and inviting others to gather and play the **Mission Possible game!** In the coming weeks, we will start reaching out to groups in the parish that meet regularly to ask if we can bring this game to a meeting. It takes about an hour to play. We will also plan some additional times for interested folks to gather and play the game. **Watch for opportunities!**
2. Continued exploration of **ways the Parish Center could serve our community.** We'd like to make some connections and find out if that space could be useful to local organizations for groups and client meetings, and if so, what modifications or improvements would make it useful and attractive. We will also, of course, be in conversation with the youth group about how the space works for them and what it could look like to share it. **If anyone has ideas or connections, or wants to get involved with this project, let us know!**
3. Gathering a group to continue the conversation about whether and **how we might use our property to respond to the housing crisis.** To begin with, this would involve learning more about the need(s) and how other organizations are responding - and also continuing to offer space for congregational learning, conversation, and discernment. **If anyone wants to get involved with this piece of the project, let us know!**



To share your interest in being part of any of these next steps, contact the Rev. Miranda Hassett at revmiranda@stdunstans.com or 608-469-7085, and you'll be looped in as teams gather and work continues.