

In 2018 Woody Nook Christian Reformed Church went through a visioning process and discerned the following vision statement.

“We are a multi-generational community, desiring to continually draw closer to our Triune God, walking together through life’s journey, and blessing our neighbours in tangible ways.”

In short, we are *“Rooted in Christ and Growing in Grace.”* This vision shaped our ministry plans for programming and staffing at that time, and has also helped us improvise as we responded to unforeseen events since then.

Growth in any community involves pursuing the vision God has called us to, placing our energy in the direction of producing fruit, and doing the pruning necessary to make good changes in our programs and facilities.

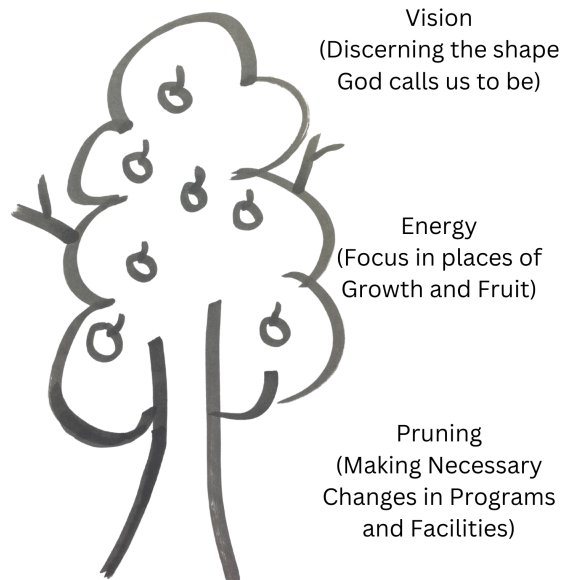
There have been numerous changes since 2018, and Council thought it appropriate to reconnect as a community, to recommit ourselves to following God’s call in this particular part of the world, and to reevaluate some of our ministry plans in response to the changes over the past five years.

So we began a “Vision Refresh” process that will help us determine together how our methods may need to expand or change in order to continue to follow the mission God has called us to.

The Vision Refresh process has a number of parts:

- 1) We started with a sermon series September 2022, examining the three distinct, but intertwined, rhythms of discipleship (Up, In, and Out) and how Woody Nook church is here to help equip the congregation in each of these rhythms. (completed)
- 2) A council retreat in November. (completed)
- 3) A Congregational Retreat February 4, 2023.
- 4) A series of small gatherings in congregant’s homes called “kitchen table” discussions across Lacombe County. (during March and April)
- 5) A report is provided to Council who then works out a plan for implementation.

The Growth Process



All of this is guided by the following purpose driven question:

Given that the church is called to equip the people of God to do what God is calling them to do, and we are all called to grow as disciples in the three rhythms of discipleship; deepening our relationships with God, with each other, and with the surrounding community, how should we structure our staffing and ministry?

This report is designed to help you understand where we are in the process, see some of the things we will be continuing to explore over the course of this process, and encourage you to get involved as we move forward.

Report of the Council Retreat

At the Council retreat, it was good to simply be together and we also did quite a bit of work as we went through three main exercises. All of these exercises were shaped by the three rhythms of discipleship so that we would explore all those aspects and not simply focus on one “problem” or one “solution”.

The **first** was a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) assessment of Woody Nook CRC, our ministries, and the surrounding community. Here is a list of some of the things we found.

Strengths

- Pre-Covid Attendance and relatively large membership.
- Strong Sunday leadership and participation (pastors and teams)
- We are multigenerational, Biblical, relevant, and have good volunteer engagement
- Willingness to push boundaries/push out of our comfort zone
- We are caring, passionate, and inclusive (most of the time)
- Strong programs aimed at discipleship which are well attended.
- Engagement in service programs or ministries
- Extremely generous with time and money
- Space for more people to get involved.
- multiple pastors

Weaknesses

- Focus on knowledge OF God not our personal relationship WITH God
- Want routine/We like to be comfortable and are worried about “proper” behaviour
- Limited time together
- Busy and tired
- Size, can get lost in the crowd
- Closed mentality in our community - stick to our groups, cliques

- Unsure how to leverage our Rural Location
- lack of passion for evangelism and mentoring
- tendency to avoid Accountability
- Not enough youth involvement
- Slow to change

Opportunities

- More testimonies - Seeing God's story in other's lives
- More people involved in other aspects of service; Prayer, liturgies, ...
- Leading young people into worship
- Increasing small groups involvement
- Opportunities for evangelism right around us
- Member involvement in the church AND the community
- Intergenerational Mentoring
- More advanced education/Adult education
- Use building more (prayer groups, food and potlucks, more community events)
- Online / Social media
- Lots of kids and youth
- See ourselves as sent into sports as missionaries, not just participants

Threats

- "gods" of the age; prosperity, individualism, busyness, being self-sufficient
- Lack of commitment or unwillingness to sacrifice
- Judgmentalism
- Being too comfortable
- Feeling inadequate and fearful
- Increasingly secular society
- Less felt "need" for corporate worship
- Focus on social part of church rather than the God pieces
- A perceived need to "keep face" - it is hard to share the heartache

Second, we moved into a time of brainstorming. In response to the SWOT analysis we used the statement, "How might we...", in order to brainstorm a lot of ideas. Most of these focused on the opportunities presented. The goal of this time was simply to create a lot of ideas without thinking about whether they would be good to pursue or not. Here is a list of some of the ideas presented:

- restart small groups
- Build chapel - 100 seats
- 3rd pastor
- Congregation retreats
- Church wide devotion plan

- Teaching/training nights - Woodynook 201, 301, 401...
- Start a new church
- Review connecting procedures for visitors
- Paid staff to help volunteers
- Youth mentors - every youth has a mentor
- Invite people to share testimonies
- Praise Evenings
- Evening "Service"/ Sunday event - Creative time to try new things
- Become church of Gull Lake
- Invite people to share poems/writings/reflections
- Encourage interactive worship - actions
- Different easy to engage in prayer and communion
- Leadership training preparation for new council
- Diverse spaces for worship - Art Display, Chalkboard
- Prayer partners
- Accountability partners
- Welcome Center
- Intergenerational activities
- Space for community groups within the church
- Invite uninvolved persons toward service and encourage them
- Intentionally spend time with different people
- Young people to have space of their own
- More diversity in music
- Inviting unchurched in our community to follow Jesus with us
- Addressing people who have left our community
- Go to sporting events and serve food/drink
- Build a gym
- Online community - build a good online presence
- Offer courses on how to share our faith and being welcoming
- Build a culture of prayer for our non-christian community
- A bus to pick people up
- A support network for community members (eg. Community kitchen, financial planner, mechanic, tutoring)
- Supported housing
- Daycare/preschool
- Deepen our relationship with the people on Maskwacis
- Serve trips
- Support Seniors
- Youth group - Bring GEMS and Cadets together
- VBS in the community
- Young adult camp

Third we followed an exercise which helped us build out some of these ideas. Some of these plan sketches are presented below.

- 1) Knowledge Workshops - Teaching/Training Nights (Mini courses)
 - Poll the congregation for suggestions
 - Find “an expert” on the topic
 - Host an evening/day presenting the topic
 - Discussion to follow
 - Ask congregants to share their prophetic insights
 - Can be practical or theological (Eg. Woodwork, how to change a tire, evangelism)
- 2) Testimonies
 - Signups based on upcoming sermons
 - Regular time in service for little moments of God-sightings - “Open mic”
 - Ask each other “what has God been teaching you?”
 - Sheets with suggestions/guiding questions
 - Encouraged in small group settings
 - Start evening service where this is more of a primary focus
 - Videos or “Cardboard” Testimonies written in advance and displayed
 - We could collect into book
- 3) Increased focus on prayer
 - Prayer Partners
 - Have people sign up - in the fall
 - Decide on a place to meet - 3rd place, prayer room
 - Online prayer group or by text message
 - Semi-annual gathering with picture together
 - Prayer request sheet with guiding questions
 - Prayer for surrounding community
 - Have a prayer bucket for requests
 - Have a text or online platform for requests
 - Have people to pray for the requests
 - Have people pray for non-christian people or groups
 - Let people know we are praying for them (encouragement cards)
 - Prayer walks and drives in the neighbourhood
 - Pray for community events
 - Send out daily prayer reminders with peoples names to pray for
 - Other prayer gatherings - eg. Gems/Cadet drop of time
 - Bring prayer groups to front of church
 - Keep Sanctuary as a worship/quiet space after the service
 - Increase use of the Bridge Prayer space
 - Gather to write prayer together

- Congregants/Elders praying congregational prayer
 - Have a formalised way for congregational prayer requests to be given before service.
 - Follow up with those who have asked for prayer
 - Have people share testimonies about prayer
 - Find people gifted in prayer/intercession
 - Prayer “Chaplains” for every service
 - Silent/Prayer retreats
- 4) Become the “Church of Gull Lake”
- Canvas the neighbourhood
 - Invite for a meal
 - Community Garden with people to teach
 - Cook meals with garden produce
 - Community Classes
 - Sailing Club
 - Offer to help around community - Snow removal, Lake Clean up, Community potluck, VBS in community
 - Worship events in Gull Lake - Recognizing worship happens everywhere
 - family dances, camp nights
- 5) 3rd Pastor
- Taskforce to figure out what to look for in a pastor
 - Target age group, Gender, Strengths
 - Collaborate with other churches in the area?
 - Explore congregations thoughts
 - Develop time frame and budget
 - Come up with goals - Full time/part time etc.
- 6) Use the Building More
- Build chapel (100 seat space)
 - Overflow for full services
 - More intimate space for smaller services/events
 - Offer space for community courses in the church
 - Daycare or preschool
 - Youth unlimited groups
 - Meals for community
 - Cook together and provide cooking classes
 - Frisbee golf course
 - First aid/trauma training
 - Music classes
 - Building Managers - Need 1-2 people to be the point people for events happening in church (Not pastors or secretaries) - Paid position
 - Have a business that allows the church to be open - Coffee shop?

- Easy way for people to request use of the space
- 7) An area in the church for youth to hang out
- Ask the youth what they want
 - Find people to run it - responsibility tasks
 - Ask for material to supply it
 - Have youth pick a day to lead group
 - Allow space for everyone
 - Develop youth leadership team
 - Determine size of space
 - Advertise events
 - Arrange transportation
- 8) Go to sporting events and serve food
- Identify sporting event(s)
 - Signage of our cause
 - Support a charity
 - Find and schedule volunteers
 - Encourage people to come to the church
 - Contact cards
 - Members available to talk with
 - Build relationship
 - Viewing parties for big games
- 9) Creative Play Area
- Gazebo Outdoor space close to church building for coffee and events
 - Build a play place for kids
 - Used for special occasions
 - People can stop and sit if church is closed
 - A space to get out of the weather
 - Firepit
- 10) Church plant
- Church plants provide the greatest opportunity for new converts
 - Vision to plant a church where there is no CRC church
 - Pray and discern God's leading
 - Set apart families and leaders God is calling to start a new congregation
 - Decide where to plant it, look for a facility
 - Find capable people to start a church
 - Find people with an evangelism heart
 - Find and purchase a building

Following this process, we determined a few ideas we definitely wanted congregational input on as we explored them further. Council wanted us as a church to pursue one major

goal in each one of the rhythms of discipleship over the next five to ten years, and so some of the options are presented that way below.

The three main areas of **further exploration** are:

- 1) 3rd pastor
 - We committed to a Pastor of Preaching and Worship, is that still a direction we feel called to go?
- 2) Building Expansion
 - Our current facility lacks a mid-sized gathering space that could be useful for our current programs (GEMS, Cadets, CATCH, other youth events) and future exploration (training events, community nights, community dinners, etc.)
- 3) Church planting
 - There are still a lot of people who do not attend church regularly, and a church plant is often the best way to reach and enfold new believers into a community that is following Jesus. Our Classis has set a goal of planting a new church every five years (and that may be too small to maintain the current size of members in our Classis), is that something we feel called to help with?

The next steps in the process need your participation.

- 1) We will be holding a congregational retreat Feb 4, 2023, to explore some similar exercises and begin discernment around where we hear God calling us.
- 2) A series of smaller gatherings (kitchen table discussions) all around Lacombe County to further this process of discernment and provide a more intimate space to express our concerns and excitement.

This is an exciting time, and we pray for God's leading and the Spirit's energy as we consider and pursue these possibilities. Please get involved in as many of these discussions as you can.

May God help us determine the shape of things to come, the places where our energy needs to be focussed, and the pruning that needs to be done.