

Acton Congregational Church Strategic Planning Task Force Report

Presentation to the Congregation: June 2, 2024



ALL ARE WELCOME
SEEKING TO LIVE GOD'S LOVE



Final Report

- ▶ Full 30-page report available on the ACC website, links in E-news
 - ▶ Executive Summary
 - ▶ Approach: Scope, context, methodology
 - ▶ Findings and Recommendations
 - ▶ Next Steps and Priorities
- ▶ Presented to Church Council May 21

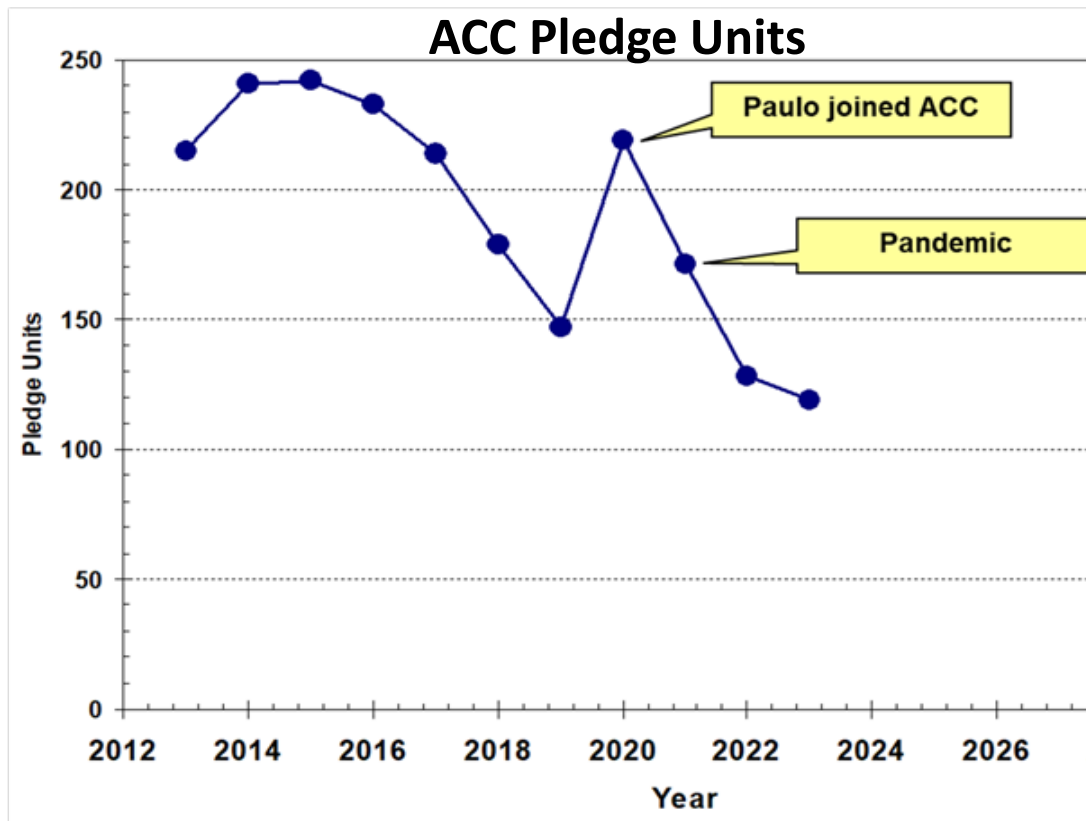
The Charge

“Our Church, like our world, is in a different place than it was ten, or even five years ago. With change, we have both a tremendous opportunity and a responsibility to take a thorough look at what we value most and where we want our focus to be in 2024 and beyond as we continue to fulfill our covenant with God and each other.”

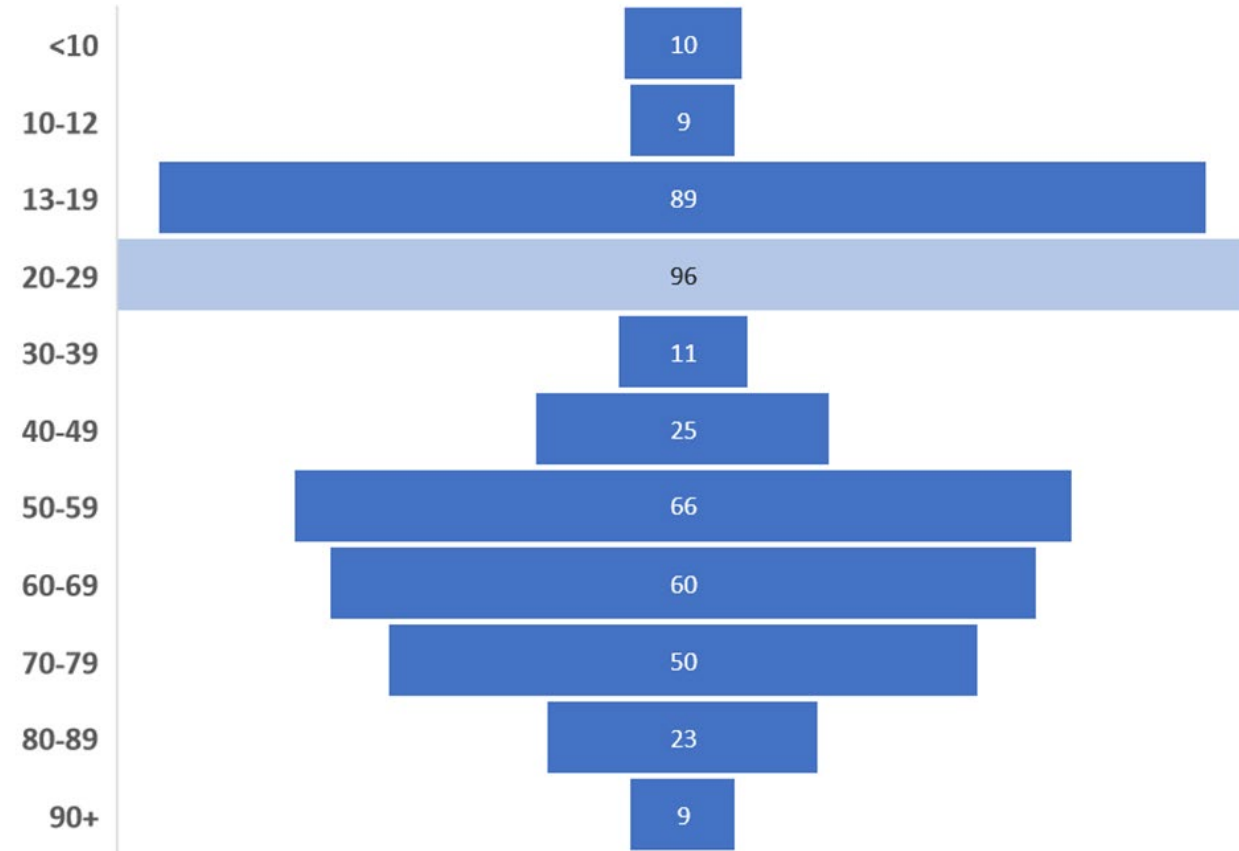
- ▶ Collect information needed to set the future course of ACC
- ▶ Identify core areas of focus for our church
- ▶ Use these areas of focus to set directions for programs and for staff and volunteer priorities in line with membership and giving scenarios
- ▶ Fuel our work with intensive listening to the priorities of our congregation

ACC Changes

- ▶ Fewer attending, fewer giving, older congregation



Age Distribution of ACC's 448 "Active" Members



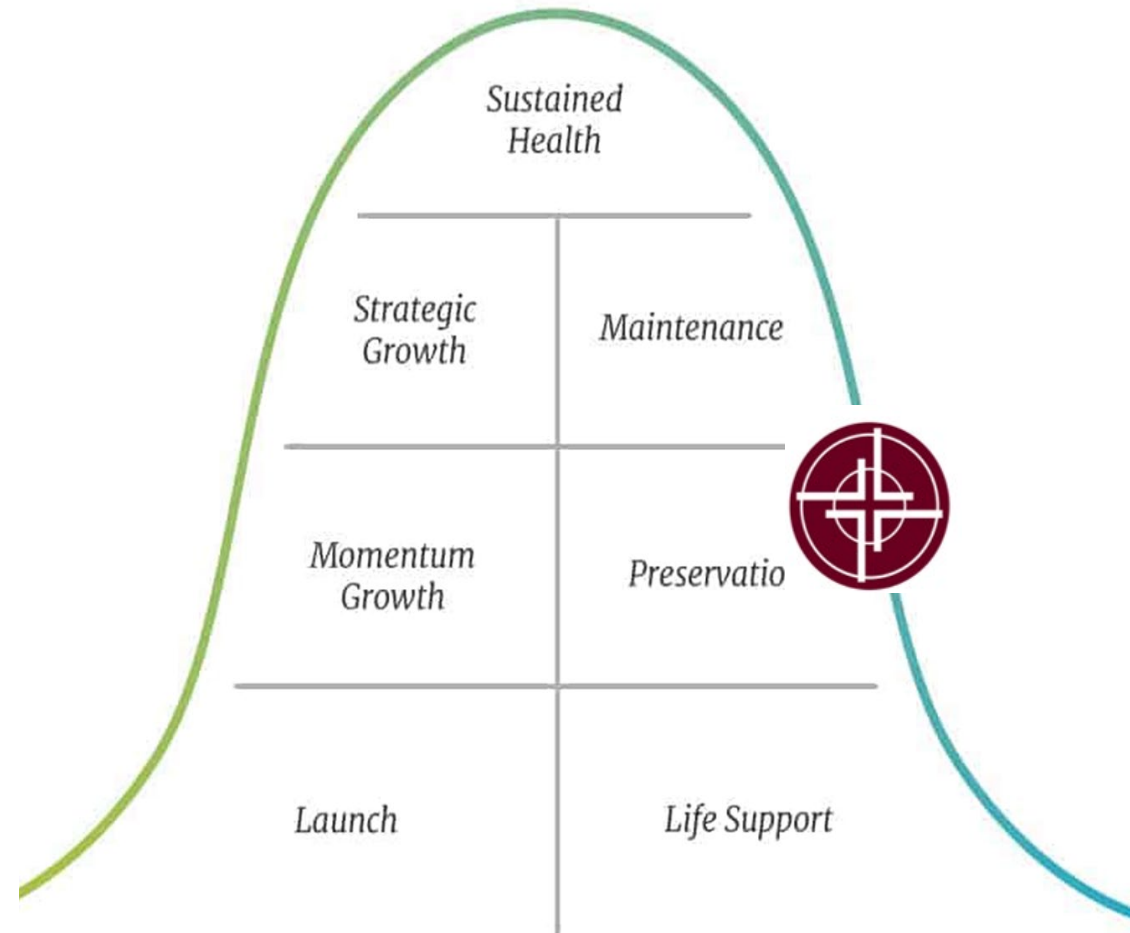
Acton Changes

- ▶ Non-Hispanic White: 88% in 2000, 63% in 2020 (51% in schools)
- ▶ Language other than English spoken at home: 33% (28% ESL or ELL in schools)
- ▶ Population 65+ 16% (8% in 2010)



Church Changes

- ▶ 99% drop in children and youth from 1970s
 - ▶ ACC confirmation 2008 ~25; 2024 8; 2025 4?
 - ▶ ACC Sunday School during the building project (2000) >100; today 7
- ▶ 25% of churches closed between 2000 and 2014
- ▶ Mistrust of institutional church/religion



“No Pressure!”



Intensive Listening

- ▶ Engaged 66 members through
 - ▶ Nine group discussions (including with SHYF)
 - ▶ One-on-one and Zoom meetings; Emails
 - ▶ Participation skewed older
- ▶ Discussed
 - ▶ Current involvement with ACC
 - ▶ Why should ACC exist in 10 years?
 - ▶ What exciting things are happening 20 years out?
- ▶ **We are reflecting back what we heard from you**

The Themes

- ▶ Community/Welcoming
 - ▶ Belonging, sharing, support, caring, mental health, friendships, third space
 - ▶ Dominant topic of conversations/primary focus of members
- ▶ Faith/Worship
- ▶ Mission
- ▶ Children and Youth
- ▶ The Building

Recommendations - Priorities

- ▶ Do better at welcoming: encountering, engaging, maintaining (Community/Welcoming)
- ▶ Encourage strategic decisions and investments to enhance the value of the building to the broader community (Building)
- ▶ Promote intergenerational opportunities through programs (Youth/Children)
- ▶ Focus on “soft entry” events to draw the community in, to become familiar with and comfortable with the church (Building)
- ▶ De-emphasize “check writing” and promote volunteer-focused activities to raise awareness and increase engagement (Mission)

Additional Recommendations

- Deliberately focus staff and volunteer resources on community formation and maintenance, engaging members and newcomers in community(ies) within the church
- Inventory what we're doing today; identify needs and gaps
- Foster special interest small group formation and participation to expand opportunities for belonging
- Create marketing opportunities for outreach to expand community/welcoming
- Maintain our focus that, before all else, we are a Christ-centered community of faith - beware of "religion lite"
- Expand music and arts ministries to enrich worship and communities while attracting participants and listeners through creative programming and collaboration

Additional Recommendations

- Revisit our vision statement (serving, welcoming, engaging, deepening); do they reflect who we are as a community of faith today?
- Participate/have a presence in community activities - farmers markets, activists walks (Social Justice), PRIDE
- Focus more M&O resources locally including immigrants and non-English speakers, LGBTQ+ community, the 3% of Acton residents living below the poverty level, our “shadow congregation” such as Thrift Shop customers
- Look for opportunities to provide third spaces for youth in a low pressure environment – study space, gaming, discussion groups
- Be mindful of shifting demographics and needs in staff and program priorities, recognizing that the parents of our children and youth also need our support

Next Steps

- ▶ Give everyone time to read/absorb the full report
- ▶ Through Church Council, develop an implementation strategy
 - ▶ Priorities
 - ▶ Who executes
 - ▶ Resources needed
- ▶ Grateful for the commitment of the Task Force members, Janette, Paulo, and those that participated