

**DISCUSSION DRAFT**

June 17, 2008

**VISION TASK FORCE REPORT**

**APPENDIX**

**A PICTURE OF**

**WHO WE ARE AS A CONGREGATION**

**DISCUSSION DRAFT**

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# CHRIST

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### **CHRIST**

We begin with Christ because, as our mission statement says, we are “called together in Christ,” and as a congregation of Christians, we are individually and collectively following Christ. As the Vision Task Force conducted our work, we were struck by the extent to which St. Peter’s strives to keep Christ at the center of everything we do as a congregation. For example, through our Sunday School, Godly Play, and youth programs the congregation seeks not only to keep our youth entertained and involved, but also to teach them about the Bible and how to live the Christian life. Similarly, St. Peter’s mission and fellowship programs, such as the recent Saint Peter’s Fiesta and Yard Sale were designed not only to bring the members of St. Peter’s closer together, but also to reach out to those around us and to help those in need. We believe that our focus on Christ and on bringing Christ into all aspects of our community is what keeps our congregation strong and vibrant.

The Vision Task Force also heard repeatedly a desire within the congregation to take time out of our busy lives to focus on spiritual growth. In particular, a number of parishioners sought a quiet space and more opportunities for quiet reflection and a deeper connection with Christ, both intellectually and spiritually. As the task force was preparing its vision statement, spiritual growth emerged as a critical element of God’s call to the members of St. Peter’s.

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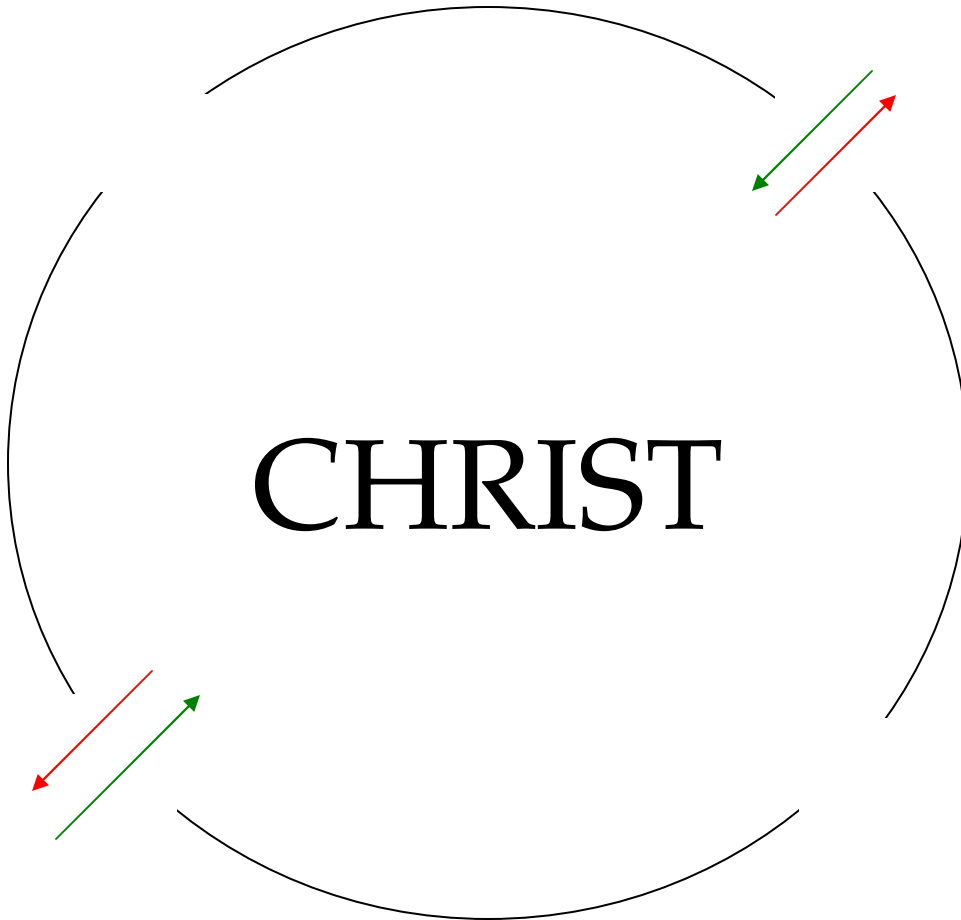
### COMMUNITY

Next we add a circle, with Christ at the center, to represent the St. Peter's community: a community of faith. Nearly everyone with whom we spoke identified the sense of community at St. Peter's as something that made our congregation special. Whether it was the key factor in a family deciding to come to St. Peter's on a regular basis, a sense of joy at being part of a church family, or an appreciation of the history of St. Peter's congregation and the role it played in the lives of those in and around it, all agreed that as the church grows, it is critical to maintain our sense of community and our identity as a congregation.

The gaps in the circle reflect, in part, our diversity as a congregation: as one member put it "St. Peter's is like a university, with many different communities bound together by a common purpose." In addition to our "cradle" Episcopalians, many of the members of our congregation come from other denominations, and this diversity of backgrounds enriches our theological discussions and encourages greater tolerance for differences of views within the church. Similarly, as a parish located in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, our members come from many parts of the country and the world, as well as a wide variety of professions and life experiences. Finally, our clergy come to us with a variety of experiences and together offer our congregation a broad spectrum of talents, passions, knowledge, and ministries. St. Peter's is full of talented, motivated, devoted, and energetic people who are eager to use their gifts to serve God and the church.

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### **COMMUNITY: Welcoming In and Reaching Out**

The gaps in the circle also reflect the many doors into our community. St. Peter's uses these doors regularly to welcome those who find their way to us (green arrow), and to reach out to those around us (red arrow).

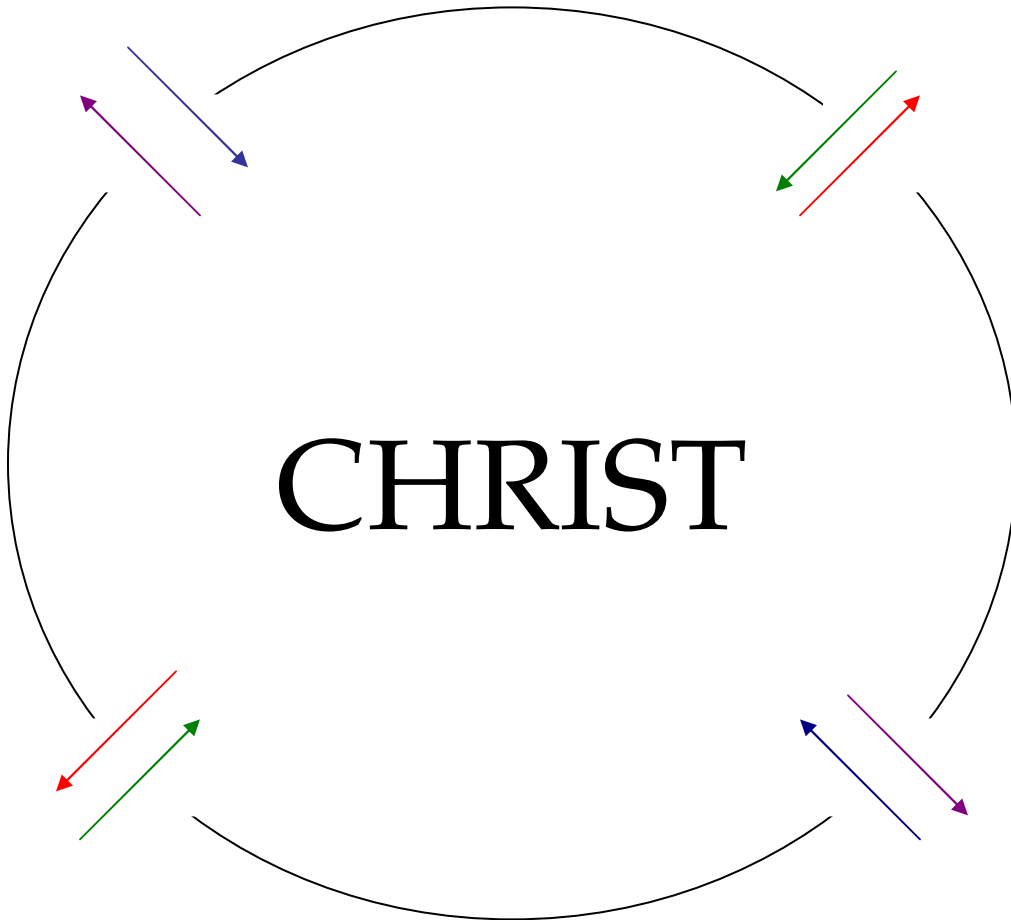
St. Peter's strives to make all who enter our doors feel welcome without feeling pressured to come back. From a greeter giving "high-fives" to kids as they enter the narthex, to ushers directing traffic during communion, to Sunday School teachers welcoming a new child into the classroom, to parishioners making a point to introduce themselves to a newcomer, we try to show Christ's love to all who enter and let God bring them back. For those who decide to return, our community accepts them as they are, and where they are in their spiritual journey. While we endeavor to give our newcomers whatever time and space they need to decide when and how to get involved, we also provide special programs for newcomers to make them feel welcome and to help them to get to know us better.

As we listened to the congregation, it became clear that this is one area where the growth of the church has created some challenges. Many people expressed concern about how the narthex and Sunday School spaces are so crowded and busy on Sundays that newcomers, particularly children and seniors, may feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable. In addition, with a steady stream of newcomers to the church, we are already seeking ways to keep better track of them and to make information available to them to encourage them to get involved.

St. Peter's is also strongly committed to reaching out to the community around us. We do this in two ways. First, our congregation regularly reaches out to invite people into our church. Our music ministry plays a central role here, with the musicals, Messiah sing-along, recitals, and special concerts designed not only to minister to the congregation, but also to invite our neighbors to get to know our church and our community. The Bazaar, Yard Sale, youth groups (Godzilla and The Ten Spot), and new signs on Glebe Road, are other examples of how St. Peter's seeks opportunities to introduce ourselves to those around us. Second, we are increasingly inviting people along as we get together outside church. Members have historically invited friends to join us at the parish weekend at Shrine Mont in April, and this year's attendance was the largest yet for St. Peter's. More recently, our young adults have begun meeting after work for fellowship and Bible study. These events enable friends and neighbors to meet us in informal settings where they have the time to learn about our congregation and what our church has to offer them.

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### **COMMUNITY: Stewardship and Ministry**

Through its doors, St. Peter's also receives a portion of the bounty that God has showered upon our members (blue arrow) and uses it to minister to those in need within our church community, our neighborhood, our country, and our world (purple arrow).

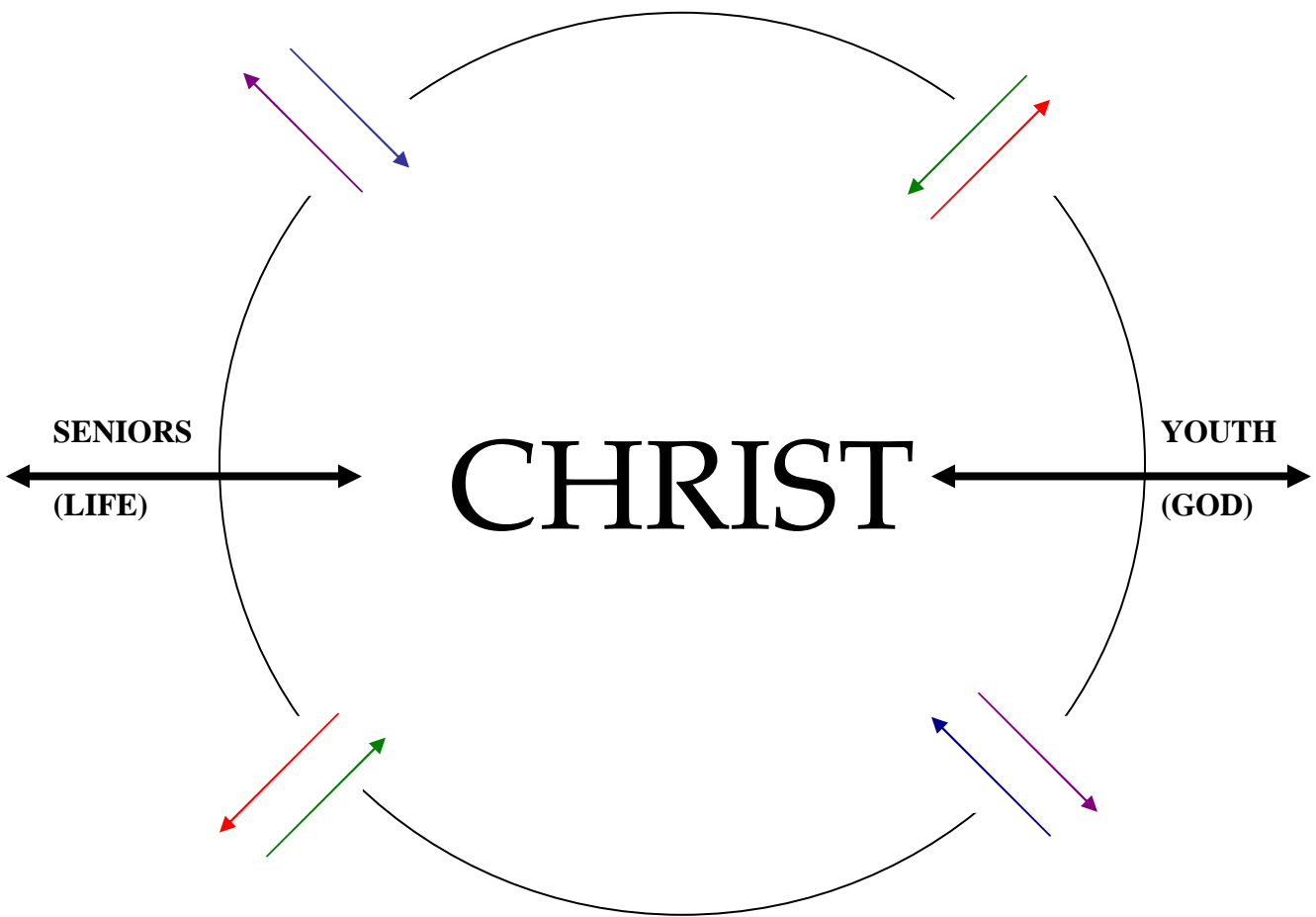
Much of what we heard over the past two months ultimately involved stewardship. Specific suggestions we heard, such as adding a Sunday afternoon service, expanding our mission trips, and lengthening the adult forums, would all require inflows of time/talent/treasure from our congregation. Many of our members expressed a desire to address space concerns in the narthex, Sunday School rooms, choir robing room, and elsewhere through a variety of possible building projects; any of which would require a significant commitment of funds by our church. At a recent adult forum on the budget, we heard that, as the church expands in both size and programs, stewardship must keep up.

Many with whom we spoke were acutely aware of the need for stewardship within the congregation. As we discussed these matters with the members of the congregation, three themes seemed to emerge. First, there was a strong desire to use what God has provided wisely. We received several requests to "see the numbers" showing how St. Peter's was growing (which we relayed to the Vestry), and a number of members expressed the hope that St. Peter's would consider a variety of alternatives if and when we decide to address any space issues. Second, members urged us "not to be afraid" when looking out into the future, and to trust that God will provide. Third, members recognized the need to reach out to newer members of the church to invite them not only to pledge to the church, but also to share their time and talents so that members would not get "burned out" and the many programs at St. Peter's could continue.

St. Peter's chooses to spend much of its time/talent/treasure on ministry, and values it so highly that "sent out to serve," is the final piece of our mission statement. Space and time do not permit a full description of St. Peter's many ministries; suffice it to say that through St. Peter's ministries, Christ touches the lives of those within our church family, our neighbors around us, and our brothers and sisters around the nation and around the world.

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### **REACHING OUT TO AND ACROSS GENERATIONS**

Next we add two arrows, extending East and West to represent the different generations within our congregation and how we walk together, and work together, to follow Christ. We specifically reference our adult seniors and our youth, because the members with whom we spoke consistently stressed the importance of ensuring that both generations were cared for and included in our community. In addition, we note the particular contribution that each generation offers the church, in addition to the gifts and talents they bring as individuals.

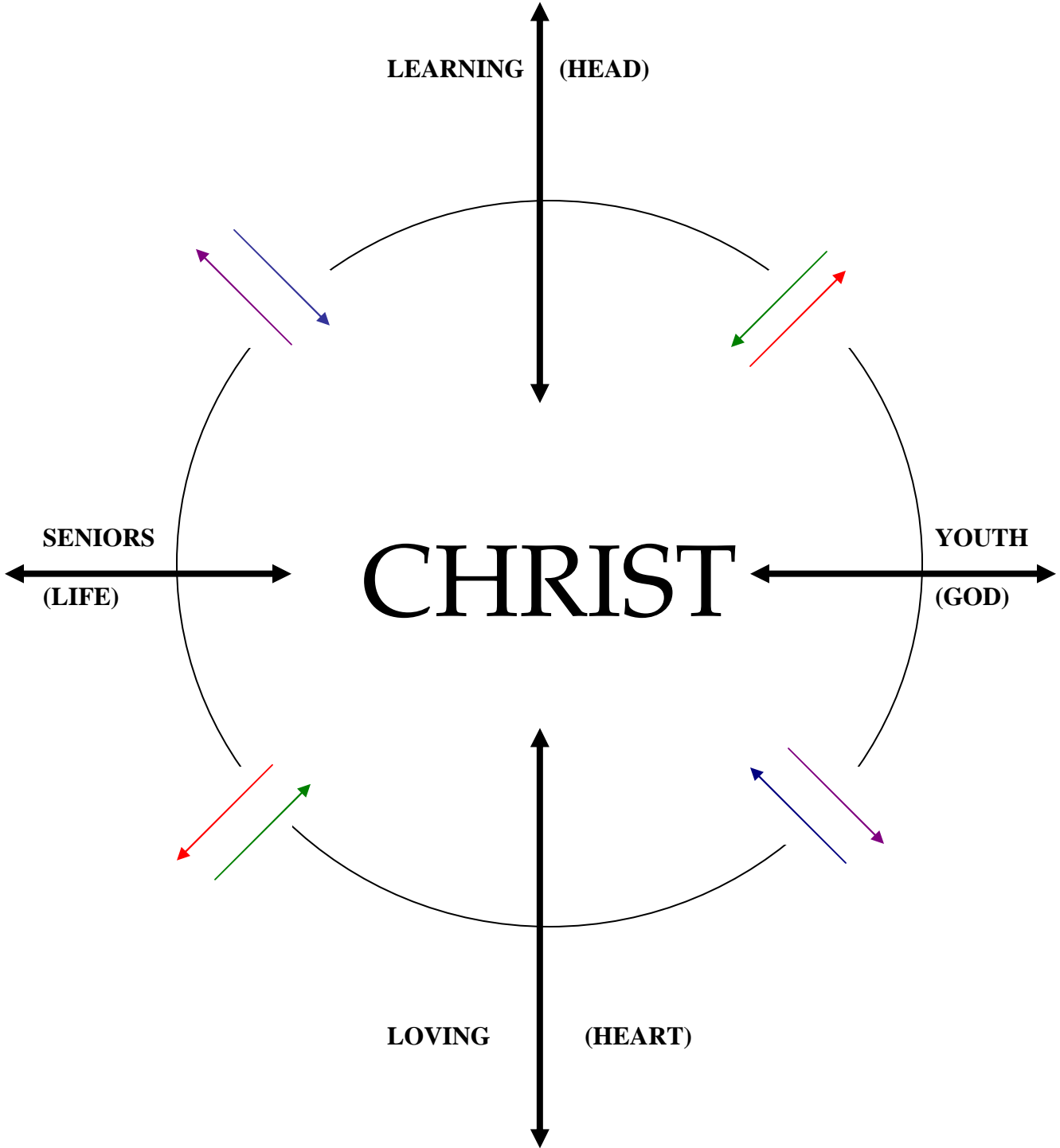
As our Vision Statement indicates, St. Peter's views its children as the future of the church. We also appreciate how our children's innocence, joy, love, wonder, and creativity reflect Christ's character, and remind us of the need to make time and space for these things in our own lives. St. Peter's has worked hard to create a safe haven for our children where they can learn about the Bible and our church, and feel that they are a part of a loving, supportive community. For example, St. Peter's has added a 9:00 a.m. "family" service and then supplemented it with a new Godly Play program where our younger children explore Bible stories by seeing them told and acted out by an adult and then wondering about what they mean. St. Peter's also seeks to include its youth in the worship services as acolytes and readers and in many of the activities and programs at our church. A constant theme from those with whom we spoke was a desire to continue to support and strengthen the youth programs we have, as well as provide additional opportunities for our youth to be involved at St. Peter's. With regard to our teenagers, it seems this feeling is mutual. When asked to identify any particular needs or interests, they wanted: 1) to use their time together not only for fellowship, but also to serve others; 2) to take on leadership roles in the church and to have opportunities to be more involved in worship services; and 3) to have a space to call their own.

Many with whom we spoke also expressed concern that we not lose track of our seniors or otherwise fail to provide for their needs. Members recognized not only our seniors' faithful service to the church and our community over the years, but also their ability to share their wisdom and experience with us, and to help us live as Christians.

Finally, St. Peter's is increasingly becoming an inter-generational church. In addition to having parish families who have three generations involved in our church, there is a growing desire to reach across generations to involve members from several generations in our activities and programs. The recent Wizards and Wonders program is an excellent example of this trend, and we heard members welcoming similar developments in Altar Guild, Sunday School, mission programs and trips, and our music programs. And, of course, there is widespread appreciation and anticipation of the bi-annual musicals that bring together the talents of children, youth, young adults, and adults to form a production that brings a spiritual message to our own congregation and also reaches a broader community.

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### **PROGRAMS: FOLLOWING CHRIST**

Finally, we add two arrows, extending North and South to reflect the many programs at St. Peter's that provide our members opportunities to learn, grow, serve, receive, and love. While some of us tend to rely primarily on our intellect (head), and others' strengths lie in matters of the heart, together we make up the body of Christ that is our congregation.

The second piece of our mission statement is "transformed by God's grace," and this is where much of that transformation is effected. By getting involved at St. Peter's many of us have come to feel that we are part of a Christian family where we can provide for each other as well as receive love and support when we face the inevitable challenges that arise in our lives. Through our involvement, we are also challenged to grow as Christians and seek greater balance in our lives, and are called into a closer relationship with Christ.

This is another area where our church faces some challenges, as our growth has made it increasingly difficult for members to keep track of all that is happening in the church and for our Clergy, staff, and Vestry to communicate information to our members about opportunities to get involved. This can also be a busy, intimidating place, particularly for members who are more comfortable in one-on-one and small group settings. Our Vestry is already working to address these concerns, for example by updating the church web-site. We believe God is calling us to improve our internal communications, in order to support the congregation's awareness of, and participation in, the wide range of programs and ministries here at St. Peter's.