

Vestry Report out of Capital Campaign Discernment Phase

November 19, 2025

Discernment Steering Committee:

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1. Overview and Participation

The St. Clare's Discernment Steering Committee hosted 13 small group discussion meetings between September 25 and November 5, 2025. Meetings were held at church, in members' homes and on Zoom. Everyone in the congregation was invited to participate, and in all about 100 people joined such a meeting. The people who engaged with this process represent a diverse cross-section of the congregation: including long-standing members, newcomers, children and youth (7 and older), clergy, and staff.

The meetings were structured around four central questions:

- reasons for joining and staying at St Clare's
- how to building on parish vitality and growth
- reactions to four proposed capital campaign areas
- additional needs or projects

2. Recommendation for Vestry Consideration

Proceed to the 'Feasibility' phase: The small group discernment process revealed strong attachment to the church and broad support for a capital campaign. Members agree that funding near term and longer term repair and improvements to the buildings and grounds are a priority. There is a desire for clarity, inclusivity, and continued energy and engagement in the campaign's messaging and execution. In a feasibility phase, the steering committee should develop a case statement of areas needing funding that can be tested through interviews and a survey compiled by our consultant.

3. Key Themes and Findings

A. Reasons for Joining and Staying

- **Welcoming and Inclusive Community:** Mentioned in almost every group as the primary reason people visit and stay was the warm welcome, inclusive, and non-judgmental atmosphere. Many felt immediately welcomed, whether through personal invitation, family connections, or positive first impressions.
- **Children and Youth Programs:** Families are drawn by the quality of children's programming, youth group activities, and the church's openness to children's participation in worship.

- **Genesis Partnership:** The unique partnership with TBE is a foundational and deeply appreciated aspect of the community's identity, often cited as a reason for joining.
- **Music & Outreach:** The music program, outreach initiatives (e.g., food pantry), are significant draws.
- **Quality of Pastoral Care:** High quality of sermons and pastoral care were noted many times.
- **Sense of Belonging:** Members value the sense of community, opportunities for involvement, and the church's progressive stance on social issues.

B. Building on Growth and Vitality (these are roughly listed in order of frequency named):

- **Continuing to Grow Our Programs for Children and Youth:** All meetings included a discussion of the vital importance of programs for children and youth (and their caregivers), and named a desire for this area of our congregation to continue to grow.
- **Staffing and Leadership:** Maintaining at least our current level of staffing (whether that is continuing the model of two clergy alongside other key staff, or something else) is seen as vital. There is concern about funding for staff positions, especially as grant support for the curate ends.
- **Community Engagement and Marketing:** Staff hours to improve marketing and communications, and to offer more events appealing to the wider community are recommended to increase visibility and attract newcomers.
- **Social Justice and Inclusivity:** The church's commitment to social justice, environmental stewardship, and inclusivity is a source of pride and a potential growth area.
- **Focus on Inviting and Incorporating Younger People:** There is strong consensus that supporting programs for younger people is important, including community-building events like game nights and 20s & 30s bible study. Continuing to encourage leadership by younger and newer leaders was also named several times as an important value at St. Clare's.
- **Support for the Genesis partnership** and ensuring that we have the resources to maintain it effectively.

C. Reactions to Proposed Capital Campaign Areas

The four proposed areas received broad support, with some important differences in perspectives:

- **Building Repair and Maintenance:** Universally recognized as critical. Deferred maintenance, safety (elevator, fire suppression), and accessibility, are priorities. A well-maintained building is seen as foundational for all other activities and represents our face to visitors and new comers
- **Capital Reserve (Ark Fund):** There is support for establishing or growing a reserve or adding to the Ark Fund to avoid crisis-driven repairs and to relieve pressure on the operating budget.
- **Staffing:** Many voiced support raising money for staffing and/or including staffing in the campaign, especially for sustaining current staffing levels, preventing burnout, and

growing children's/youth ministry. However, a handful of people strongly voiced an opinion that staffing (and operating expenses) should be funded through annual pledges, not capital campaigns. Several discussions included the notion that funding the building maintenance through a capital campaign could free up operational money for staffing and programs.

- **Outreach:** Some suggest focusing campaign funds on building and capital needs, while others advocate for targeted (specifically named) outreach initiatives. Outreach spending has been traditionally met through fundraising events and special appeals. Some people expressed support for including specific outreach initiatives in a campaign; similar numbers thought that outreach should not be funded through a capital campaign.

D. Additional Needs Mentioned (each were voiced between 2 and 5 times)

- **Partnership with TBE:** Desire for clarity and transparency in joint projects and capital responsibilities with TBE.
- **Accessibility and Facilities:** Family bathrooms, improved play spaces for children, new carpeting in the Lower Level, and other upgrades to the downstairs area to better serve newcomers and families.
- **Decarbonization / Environmental Sustainability:** Continued investment in energy efficiency (solar, geothermal) and green improvements.
- **Technology Upgrades:** Improved audio/visual systems, better integration for online worshippers, and enhanced communication tools.
- **Security Enhancements:** Concerns about safety and welcoming entrances, especially in light of antisemitism and increased building security.
- **Grounds/Trees:** Improving our outside spaces and ability to care for the trees on our grounds.

4. Challenges and Considerations

- **Financial Sensitivity:** Members express concern about the ability to contribute, emphasizing the need for inclusive messaging and multiple giving options.
- **Clarity and Transparency:** Several voiced a concern for clear communication on specific use of funds raised in a capital campaign, especially for operating expenses versus capital expenses.
- **Campaign Excitement:** Some suggest including a “visible” or “exciting” project to energize the campaign, alongside necessary but less glamorous repairs.
- **The Genesis Partnership:** There is a need to clearly communicate why a capital campaign would happen without TBE, that TBE declined to join a capital campaign effort when St. Clare's began this process, and that Genesis will continue to function as the joint decision-making body for any capital spending on the shared facility.

[FAQs from the Discernment Small Group Conversations](#)

One young person from our congregation was listening in on a discernment session and took these excellent notes, which we share with permission!

