

## **Learnings from a New ACNA Church**

*by the Rt Rev Ron Ferris, rector, Church of the Ascension (Langley, BC, Canada)*

The Church of the Ascension, Langley, British Columbia is one of the first Anglican 1000 parishes. Regular services began in the fall of 2009. We began as a "cold start" brand new initiative. Leading up to the start of services was a Bible Study group, four summer services, and a few public meetings. One year later we average about 40 people per Sunday and offer a rich program of discipleship and outreach. Our learnings from the first year are as follows:

God always goes before us! After permission was received from the bishop to start a new church, we learned that a bible study group had been meeting for a year and praying for just such a development.

1. All that you really need for a church you can carry in two filing boxes; a bible, altarware, candles, cross, linens, service sheets, children's bible, offering envelopes, and register.
2. About 25% of new parishioners came from invitations to friends and family, about 25% from newspaper ads, about 24% from postcard household mail, 13% by referral from friends, agencies and churches beyond our parish, and about 13% just showed up on their own.
3. A relatively few personal invitations are most effective when compared to the thousands of ads and household mailers. That said, tasteful ads are extremely important!
4. Now that our website is active we are gaining increasing contacts from our site and that of our Diocese.
5. The major challenge of our first year was finding public meeting space that was affordable, attractive, accessible and permanent. After studying 40 sites we finally found just two that were suitable. Space was found in a recreation centre with a patio, air conditioning, caretaking on site, and unlimited parking!
6. Rental space liberates a parish from the worries of maintaining a property 24/7. The energy normally devoted to property committees and fundraising can be turned toward discipleship and community building.
7. Program needs to be carefully blended and spaced so as not to exhaust the energies of a relatively small congregation. Outreach receives high priority and many of our members support Christian projects and efforts in Africa, China, India, Haiti and locally. Another parish priority is to help to train the next generation of church leaders.

The first year has been a time of building friendships, building trust and putting the key structures in place that will help us grow in the future. Our congregation has been reliable, loyal and unflappable. There is a gracious and determined calm over the whole enterprise. Part of the excitement has been to place mission over maintenance, people over property, and discipleship over governance. Starting afresh can be a wonderful and God given opportunity to strike new priorities.