

A COMMUNITY HUB MODEL CREATES NEW VIBRANCY

St. James Centennial United invited its community into partnerships to share space and mission

St. James Centennial United Church
Mary Street
Parry Sound, ON



Opening up the St. James Centennial United church to new uses has created a welcoming new space for non-members and congregants.

The Spark

St. James United undertook a process of discernment over five years in response to changes in ministry and an expanding approach to living its mission, as well as to address financial concerns. Based on the strength of long standing relationships with other churches and other not for profits, the idea took hold to expand their place into a true community hub where they could share their vision of community.

Their Journey

In 2015/2016, St. James United took a more intentional approach to these established relationships, declaring themselves a Center for Community, Promoting Creativity, Culture, Spirituality & Healthy Relationships with Each Other, Ourselves and the Land. The new vision is intended to extend their church mission while also providing greater community connections and revenues to sustain the building. Groups who join them are chosen for their alignment with the church's mission, and are charged based on a sliding scale from a full donation of space to a portion of the group's proceeds to a regular rent relationship.

The church building and manse are currently actively and continuously shared with:

- Mary Street Boutique: a well-established collaborative social enterprise of five local churches that provides second hand clothing to the community.
- Harvest Share Foodbank: who uses space in both the church and the manse to store and distribute food to those in need.
- A private accountant: who rents office space in a portion of the old manse.

The congregation itself has a number of missions that extend into the community including:

- Hospitality Lunch: group offering lunch on a donation basis to anyone who wishes to attend once a week.
- The Seniors Community Kitchen: a group for single seniors to cook and eat together weekly.
- A newly formed performing arts ministry which staged a production of Joseph and the Amazing Technical Dreamcoat in which 41 of the 45 cast members came from outside the congregation. The congregation provided technical, musical, building and monetary support to the project which drew a very large audience.

The Take-Away

Engaging more with the broader community through programming has opened up their building as a welcoming space for non-members and congregants alike. While the initiative is still recent, it is providing new life to the building and new revenues to sustain it.

Links:

- <http://www.stjamesps.com>