

# Embracing the Spirit



The United Church of Canada is encouraging churches who wish to stay open and thrive to enter the age of the spirit and reinvent themselves, reflecting on how, why, and where they serve their community with compassion, grace, and imagination. The UCC, and others, are willing and able to help churches who offer them proposals that reflect their understanding of church in the 21st century.



Embracing the Spirit is an initiative within the United Church of Canada, supported by Mission and Service.

It was created to help people in faith communities with their innovative ideas about how to be church in today's society. It supports: "positive spiritual, social, and ecological impacts and potential for financial sustainability."

Both Primrose and Trinity have strong visioning groups, formed by people who desire a viable future for their home church and have exciting ideas of what that might look like. They have been meeting for over three years. They have: attended numerous workshops and webinars, done a massive amount of reading on new church imagining, reviewed a wide variety of grant applications, studied what other churches are doing and taken day trips to other churches/art centres/restaurants to visualize how a church might reinvent itself physically, and been 'experimenting around the edges' by testing out various partnerships. They have also overseen a the renovation of a particular space to create a 'church within a church.'



During this time the pastoral charge has formed an 'umbrella' of ministries and initiatives and partnerships of various kinds, working organically as people and organizations present themselves in conversation.



What follows is a presentation that combines the work of the visioning groups with the intentions behind the initiatives and ministries under the umbrella of our pastoral charge.

This vision emerges from many conversations and the hope filled anticipation of those who love God, love the church, love their community, and want to see us all working together in harmony for the greater good.

The visioning groups begin by noting a few important points to hold in mind.

1. Western society has moved from an obligation and duty-based worldview to a choice and preference-based worldview.

This shift has happened over the last hundred years in Western culture.

2. In the midst of that move, there has been a crisis of legitimacy, a loss of trust in the Christian church. Our faith tradition no longer holds 'pride of place' in the world.

It has failed to meet the needs of people in a very real way and made large missteps in common culture, particularly in the last century.

The result is that people no longer feel that the church cares about the important challenges of our time - economic disparities, environmental uncertainty, increasing violence, both domestic and societal, and near pandemic mental illness.



3. In the midst of this public humbling, perhaps out of fear for its future, the church has forgotten that it does not serve itself but the vulnerable, the maligned, and those pushed to the margins of society - aka Jesus' friends and family.

Our failure to recognize this, in combination with the increasingly overwhelming needs before us, has resulted in the abdication of our calling, which has now been taken up by the various levels of government and the numerous NGO's (non government organizations) who do charitable work.

(It should be noted, however, that though there are many who are doing what was at one time the sole responsibility of the church, they do not necessarily do it with the same spiritual undergirding that might yet be offered.)

4. The result of the above three points is that the church is no longer the sole place where people can go to give their time, money, skills, talents and enthusiasm in order to go good in the world and help change lives for the better.

In financial charitable giving, churches have gone from attracting 70% of the donations to 30% of the giving's and it is dropping.

(And note that it follows that where people give their money, they give their attention.)

And here is something else we must consider.

The UCC, working with Clif Christopher, author of 'Not Your Parents Offering Plate', studied how charitable groups outside the church are successful in attracting people's support, while the church falters in this area.

After much investigation Clif concluded that "People don't give to the church because we don't offer them a compelling vision of the good their giving will achieve."

He further articulated that there are three reasons why people give to a charitable organization.

## People support something because:

1. There is a vision for changing people's lives for the better that they think is a wonderful idea.
2. They believe the leadership in place can realize that vision.
3. The finances of this group/institution are stable.  
(no one wants to give to a boat that is sinking.)

Our financials are stable for the time being.  
Our lead minister at the moment is extremely capable, though we are in the process of looking for a full time leader for the year 2021.

Our concern of the moment is to articulate our vision.

What is our plan for changing people's lives for the better?

We begin, as we always must, with the way of Jesus.

And what Jesus offered people was sanctuary  
- spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual sanctuary.

The early Christians were 'People of The Way'. And that way, was the way of love, the way of sanctuary and grace offered to all people, in all situations, at all times.

The United Church of Canada takes up the call to be 'People of the Way' in the 21st century.

**And in the Shelburne/Primrose Pastoral Charge  
Would like to take it up with them.**

People of the Way offer:

Sanctuary for Everyone

Radical Hospitality

Endless Grace

Active Compassion

Enlightened Education

Spiritual Wellness

Contemplative Practices

Creative Possibilities

This church would have to reorient its focus.

Traditionally, we have seen the church focused on what happens during the Sunday morning service in the sanctuary.

But the church of Jesus the Christ is so much more than that because Jesus was so much more than just the time he spent in the synagogue.



Let us imagine a church that is not  
focused solely on Sunday  
morning worship,  
but sees our sabbath morning worship  
as informing and nourishing the spiritual  
and compassionate work  
that takes place  
the rest of the week.

The church would then become a centre  
for spiritual nourishment and  
compassionate care for all people,  
of all ages,  
working within these four areas.

**Engaging the Spirit**

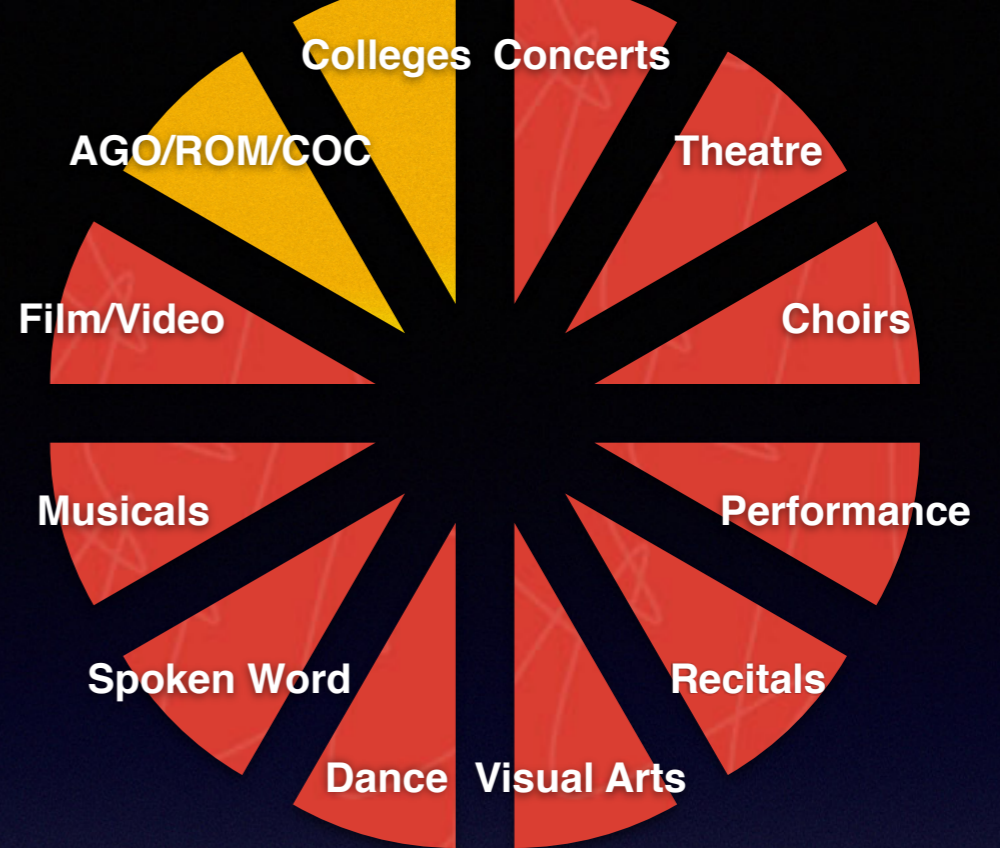
**Nourishing the Spirit**

**Compassionate Care Within**

**Compassionate Care Extended**



## Engaging the Spirit



## Nourishing the Spirit



## Compassionate Care Within



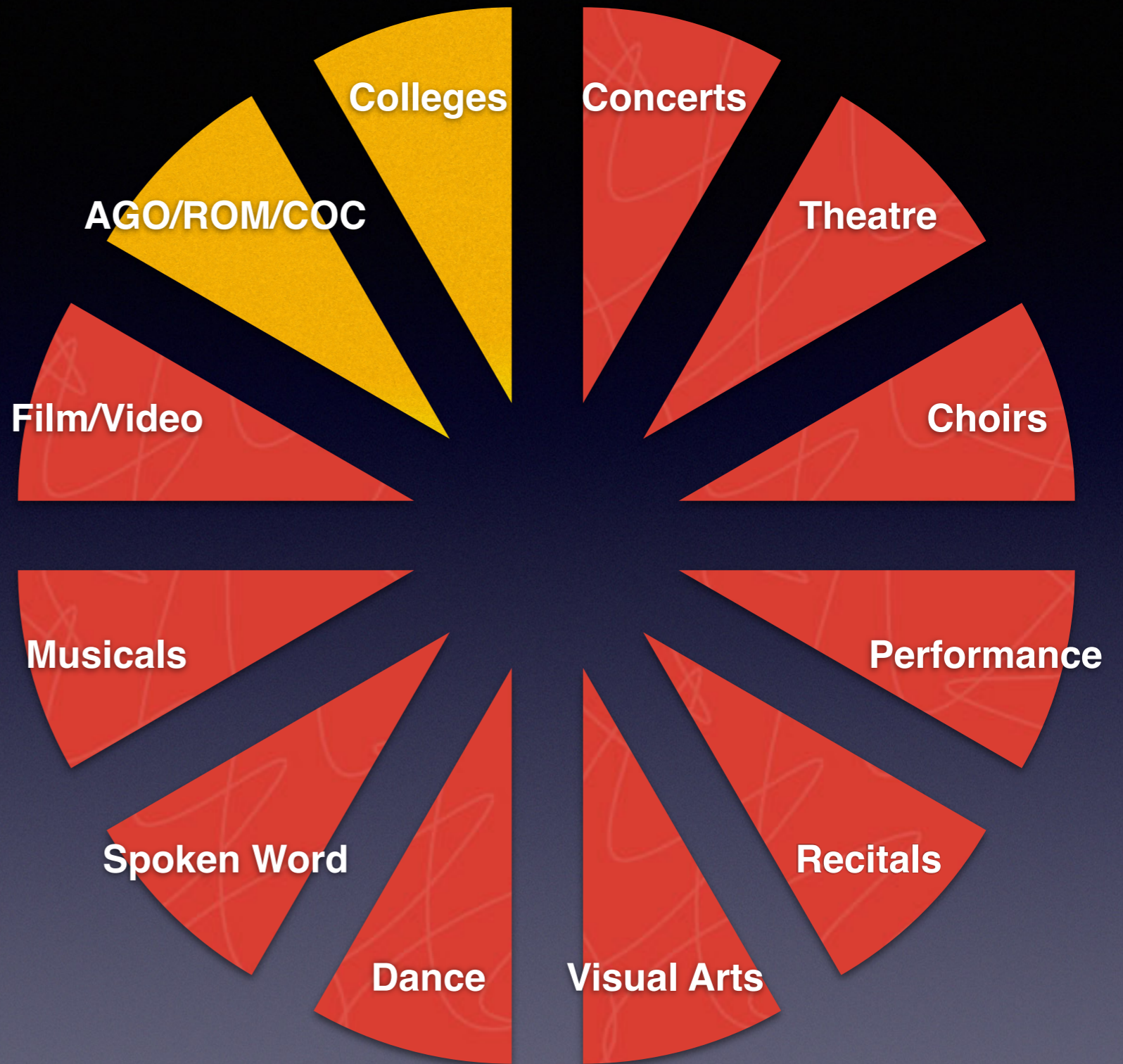
## Compassionate Care Extended

There is a myriad of ways to worship, praise, and engage with the Great UnNamed Mystery we have named 'God'. In our pastoral charge, the Sunday morning services at both locations offer a time of contemplation, study and exploration of the Christian faith as seen through the eyes of the United Church of Canada. Our traditional UCC Sunday gatherings are foundational to our church community. But we also welcome our Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist friends into our sanctuary and they too worship here in a different way, but searching as we do to experience that which is beyond our understanding. Yoga as spiritual practice, our interfaith dialogues and our contemplative days in the Primrose Meditation Garden also engage the spirit in divine wonder. Others may wish to express their worship through their devotion to deep ecology, social justice concerns, 12 step spirituality, various sacred texts, and warm conversations desirous of further understanding the divinity within ourselves, others, and the cosmos. All forms of worship that honour and expand the United Church's understanding of Christianity should be welcomed and encouraged.



## Engaging the Spirit

The arts nourish the spirit, enliven the mind, and offer consolation to our weariness. They may emerge from artists in our community, or be brought to us from partners within the extended community of our province as we search for those offering existing programs in the field of art, history and music. The full landscape of the arts, however, is not confined to the professionals, but also to the collective artistry within us all as we participate in play readings, sing in community choirs, discover pottery, dance while everyone is watching, and peer through the eyes of the artists as we come to see our planet as the astonishingly sacred beauty that she is, and ourselves as creators living within her exuberant poetry. In the endless possibilities that the arts offer, our souls are nourished, and the world enriched. Here, worship reaches out past its traditional form, and finds new expression and ways of communicating our longing for connection with one another and the divine, in all its inherent complexity.



## Nurturing the Spirit

Compassionate care begins at home. Within our two congregations we offer palliative care as needed, home visits to those desirous of them, hospital visits as required, and on going crisis and emergency relief. We also offer to our home community, as well as the wider community, a variety of ritual celebrations - weddings, baptisms, baby naming services, funerals and celebrations of life. Our minister, Rev. Bist, is a trained spiritual director and offers this spiritual practice to individuals who wish to meet with her once a month. We provide transportation for various concerts, services, and church suppers, as well as food bank deliveries, participation in the community Meals on Wheels program, and emergencies when needed. The on going care of those who gather under our spiritual umbrella is the compassionate ground from which all other adventures emerge. Going forward, it is hoped we will be able to offer assistance to our young families and their children in after school and special programs.



## Compassionate Care Within

Extending our embrace to the wider community, we have partnered with the International Quiet Garden Movement, providing a meditation garden welcoming all people for rest and restoration at our Primrose location. We are partnered with KAIROS and their wonderful social justice work, particularly with Native Canadians. We support the peace-building work of Partera International and the on going care of our local refugee families through First Line for Syria. Soup Haus provides beautiful weekly complimentary dinners at our Trinity location. We have volunteer groups with the local food bank and Meals on Wheels. We are partnering with Rural Response, an extension of Family Transition Place that offers services to women living in the country. We are exploring workshops with Hospice Dufferin, Homewood Health Centre in Guelph and the Centre for Mental Health and Addiction in Toronto. We are investigating the possibilities that parish nursing may offer and in dialogue with the local municipalities concerning the state of homelessness and affordable housing in Dufferin County.



## Compassionate Care Extended

# HOW?

The question is: HOW?

How does a church focused on Sunday morning service, with dwindling resources and a failing financial model, morph into a place that can create, sustain and communicate an emerging vision?



It works to reflect a vision of a  
centre of spiritual and  
compassionate care in these four  
supporting and interwoven sectors.

**Space and Spirit**

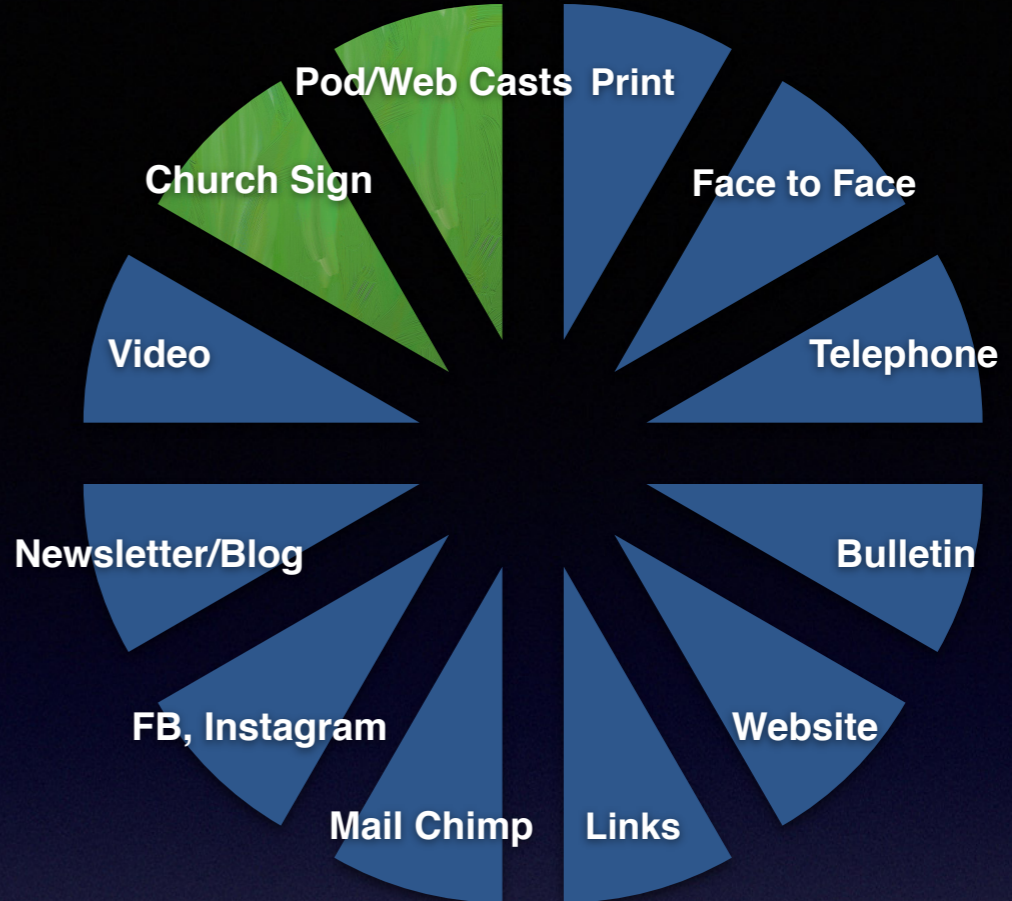
**Communications**

**Partnerships**

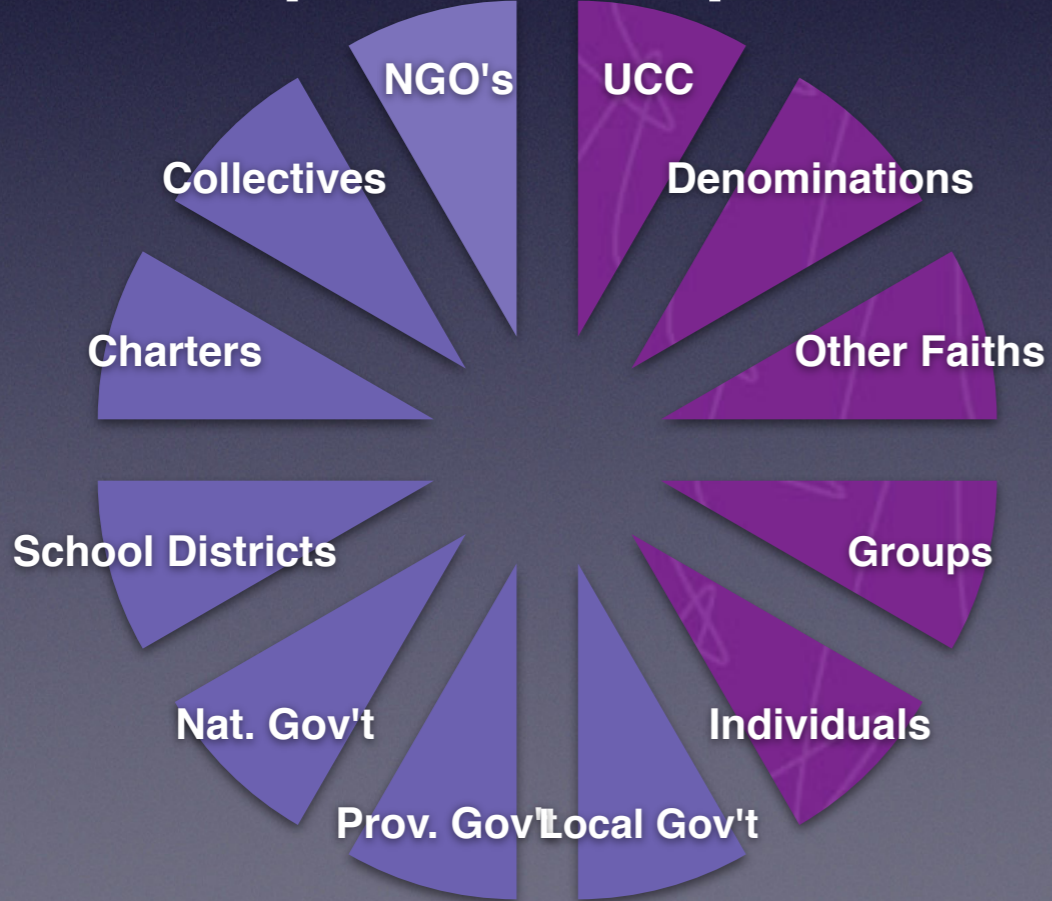
**Financials**



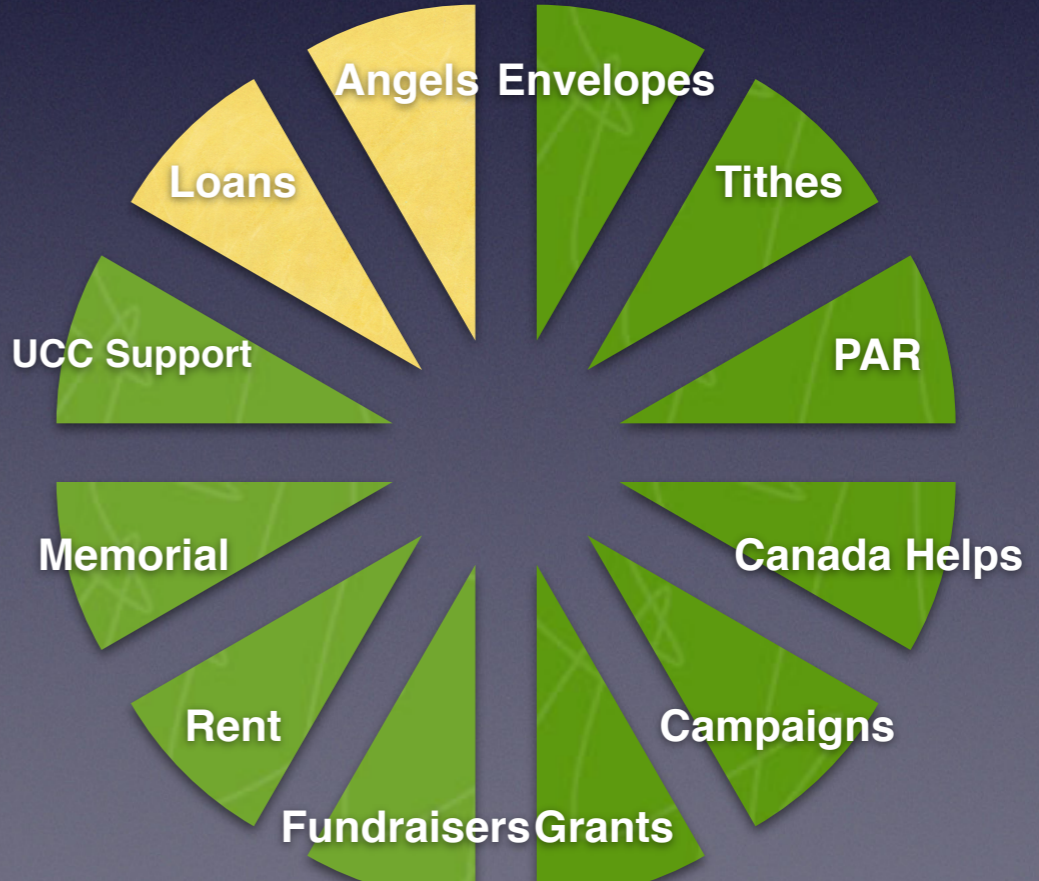
**Space and Spirit**



**Communication**



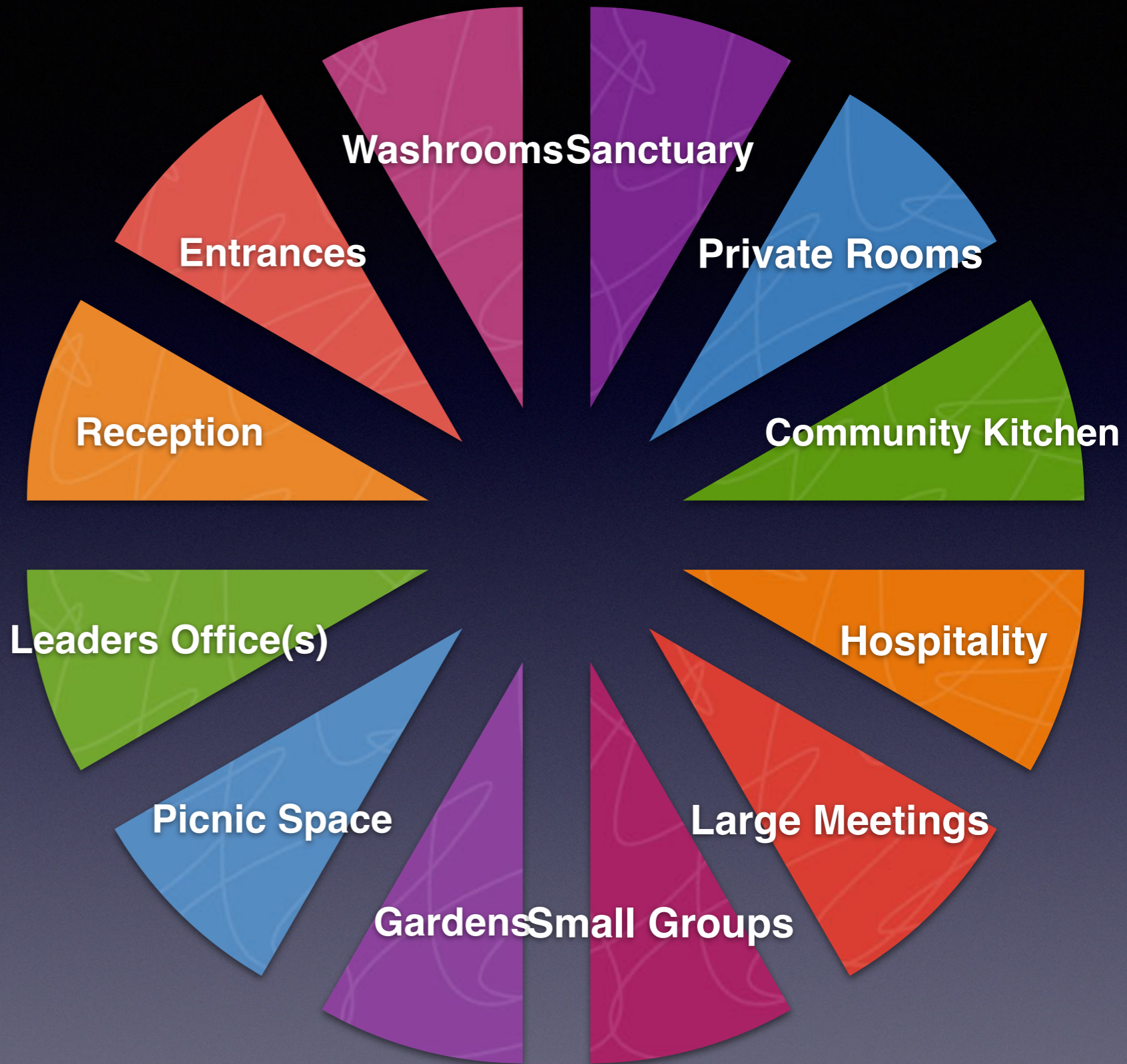
**Partnership**



**Financials**

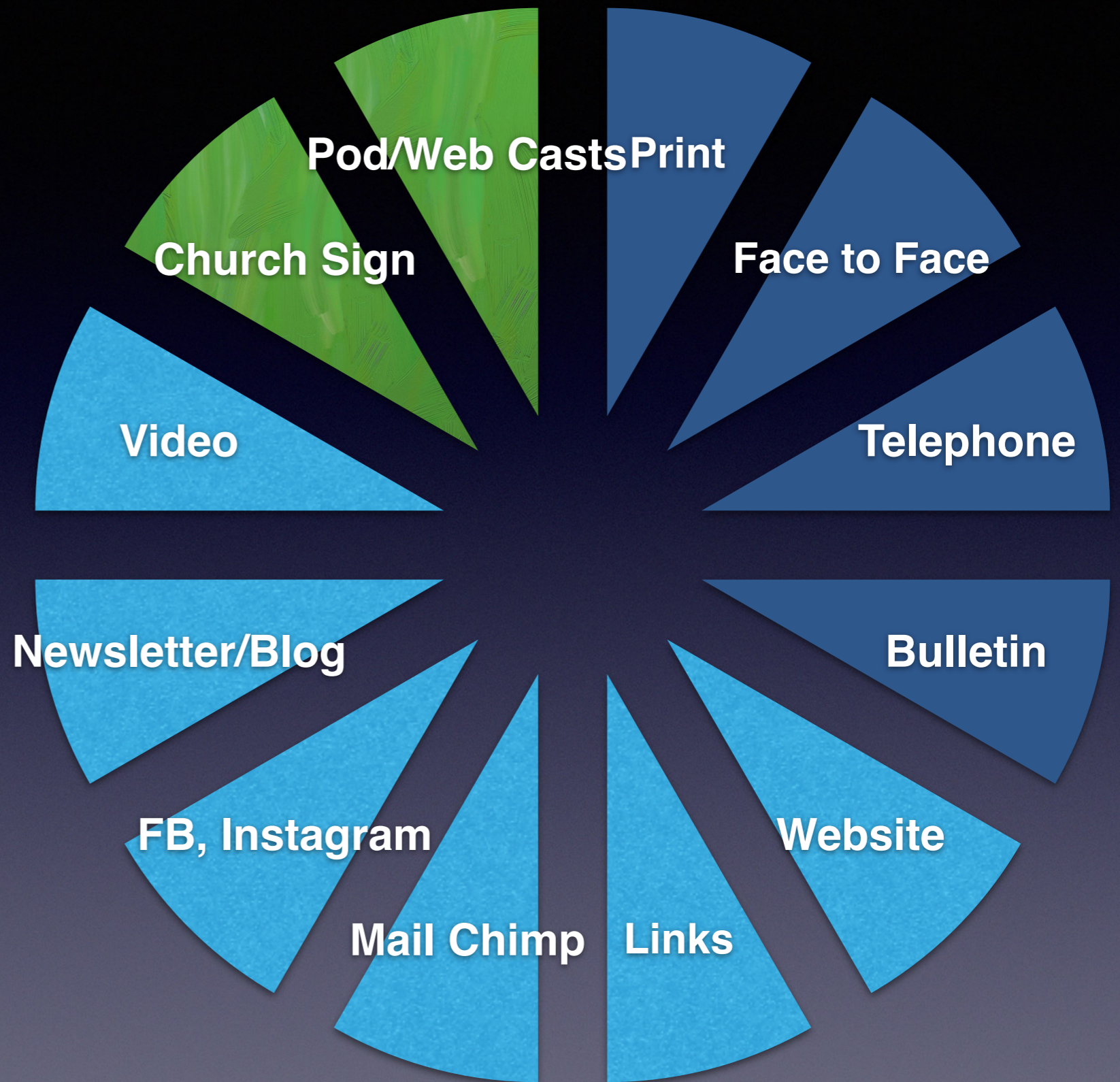
The interior and exterior of the church buildings should, in every way, reflect the ethos and ethics of that which it is trying to teach and embody. Hospitality, in its purest sense, should be seen in every detail. The buildings should be beautiful in appearance and constructed or refurbished on the latest environmental principles.

They should, as much as is possible, use local materials and tradesmen in their construction. Wherever possible, gardens and quiet spaces should be offered. Internally, the buildings would be organized to reflect the multiple possibilities for use. In making decisions the principles of welcome, kindness, compassion and beauty would inform the design. The specific needs of various groups would be of consideration, but always, under the banner of providing sanctuary for everyone. Following the UCC initiative, the buildings need to be *Open and Affirming Places*. \*\* We are currently testing this out in our *You Belong Here* Room at Trinity, which we think of as a little church start up inside the bigger building.



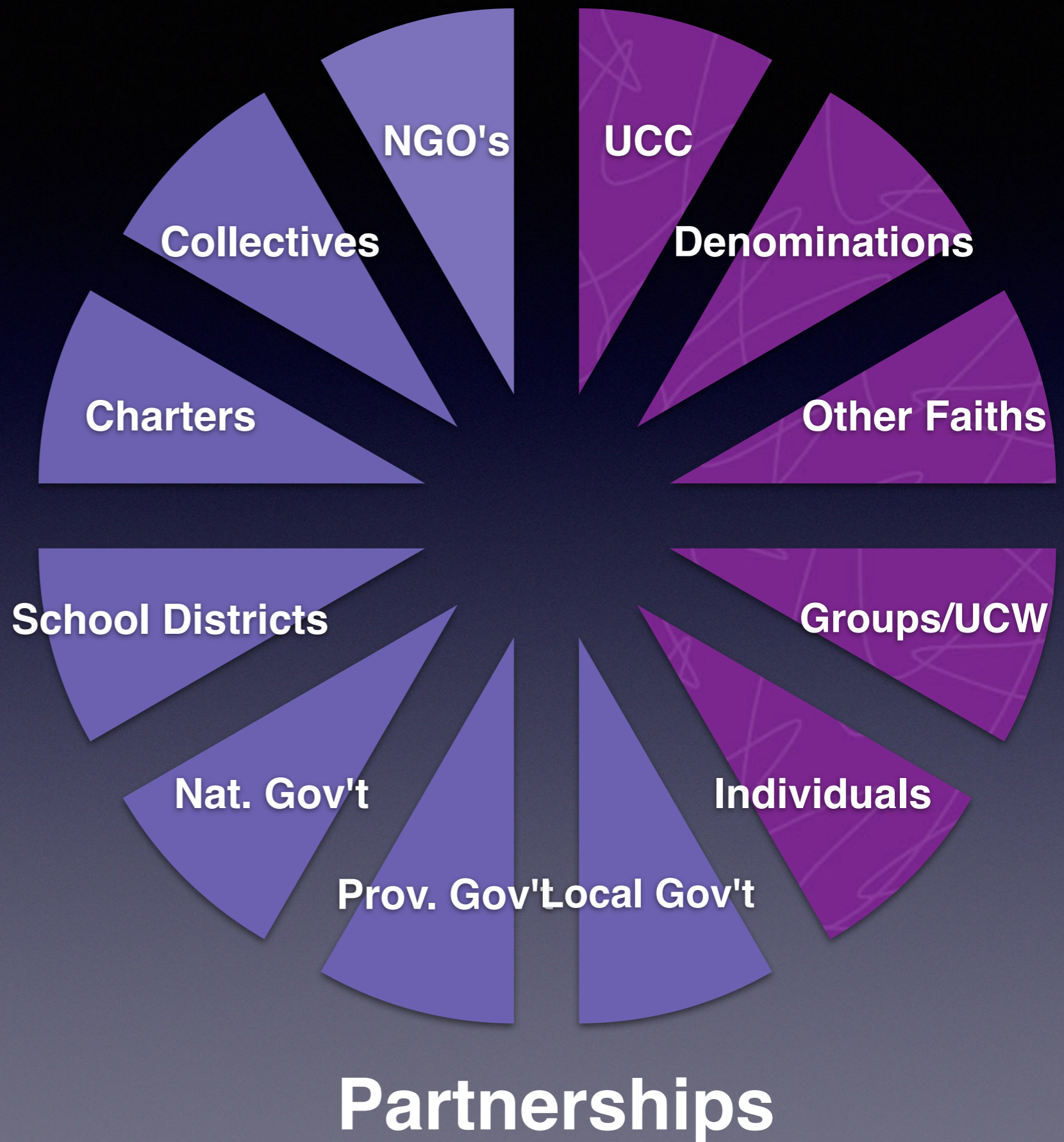
## Space and Spirit

How the church communicates its vision as a centre for spiritual and compassionate care is key. Every time a poster is created, a weekly congregational update is sent out, or a narrative annual report is imagined, the principles behind the communication should reflect the underlying principles of hospitality and sanctuary. All communication should be beautiful, clear, accessible, and appropriate for its receiver. Hand written notes are for some. Personal visits are for others. Facebook and Instagram for others still. The website - the social media hub - would offer more than just what is going on, though up to date calendars and events would be standard. It would offer spiritual support, articles of interest, a current ministerial blog, and additional materials to enrich Sunday worship. The collection of recordings and photographs would be on going, with the congregation's permission. And as person to person interaction reflects so much, all those hired to represent the church, as well as all companies doing work for and with the church, would reflect the ethics of the vision the church is attempting to create.

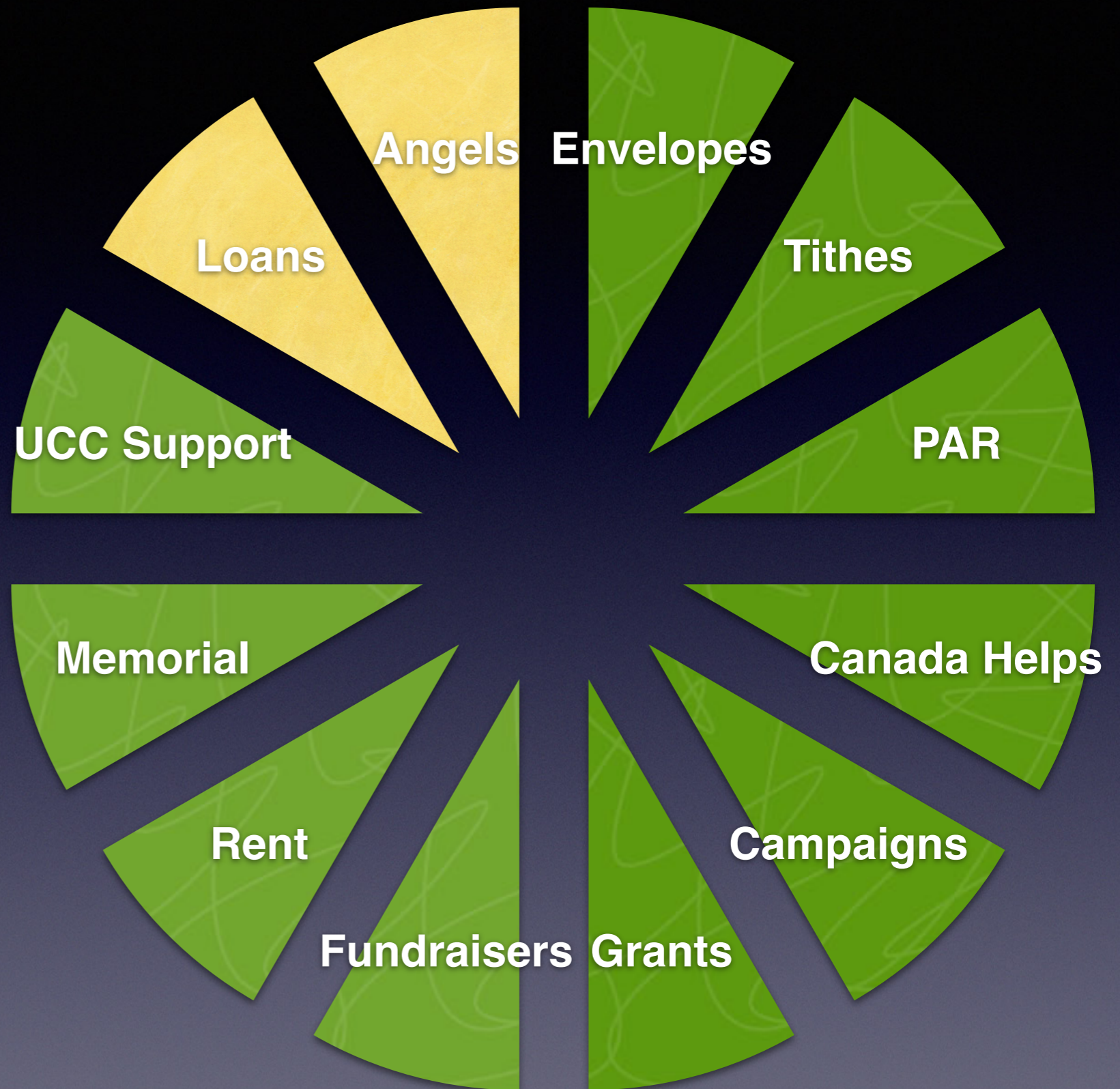


# Communications

Partnering is a key part of developing a vision. There are many people, initiatives and adventures who have similar goals - the desiring of serving the larger good. In municipalities, school boards, agricultural initiatives, environmental groups there are those who also reflect a desire to provide a place of sanctuary for others. These various groups also have staff, financial backing, infrastructure and visions of their own. By partnering with others we are able to do more than we can do on our own. What do we have to offer? What do they have to offer? How can we work together to uplift one another and provide more for the community and beyond? Selecting good partners and then working hard so everything is running smoothly is an essential part of the vision of a spiritual and compassionate centre. We have already formed some good partnerships and we can continue to experiment with this model as we imaginatively seek out new conversations in our community.



The church needs to construct a new financial model going forward. The old vision of a church being supported solely on the principle of tithing will not hold into the next generation. It is a sound way of going, but it is no longer a viable one, though as the church makes its way forward, the current tithes are essential to support matters as new pathways and partnerships are created. It needs also to be acknowledged and reflected, that people currently give in many different ways - credit cards, pay pal, email transfer, automatic debit - as opposed to cash and cheque, which are being used less and less. The website and church administration needs to reflect the many options available, making it easy for everyone to give in a manner that is comfortable. The financial mechanisms supporting the church should be like a good framework, clearly in place and supporting the structure, not running it. And with full welcome in mind, we may consider how to engage people without them feeling they must have money on hand to participate.



# Financial Model

It would follow then, that the leadership required for this new model would be oriented to a wider circle, including the importance of Sunday worship, and firmly based in Christian spirituality, but offering other skills, perhaps shared with more than one person.

Depending on where the churches decide to put their emphasis, here are suggested leadership skills in the vectors preciously mentioned. These places of leadership could be a combination of paid positions and volunteer positions, full or part time configurations, possible clusters with other churches or entities, in as varied an array of possibilities as could be imagined.

**Engaging the Spirit** - UCC Ordained leadership with skills in interfaith dialogue and communication/partnerships keeps the connection with UCC and their support

**Nourishing the Spirit** - a person of creative, organizational, production value abilities with experience working in the arts/communication

**Compassionate Care Within** - a parish nurse would be ideal, as they combine UCC spiritual ordination with practical nursing skills. But it could be a person known for their compassionate nature who desires to serve in this way who is gifted in the ways of the spirit and called to this position.

**Compassionate Care Extended** - a person with social justice and NGO experience, grant writing knowledge, with skills working in the charitable sector and a nature inclination to work well with others.



**Space and Spirit** - a person with property management knowledge who can also work with designers/builders and has a sense of beauty, architecture and imagination

**Communications** - a creative, gifted communicator who can reflect the spiritual vision in all vectors, from print through the full social media range, as well as photography and video

**Partnerships** - a person gifted with people skills to forge strong alliances with municipal/existing/developing initiatives

**Finance** - astute financial manager/company/council who can set up an overview of all financial possibilities, someone with business experience, charitable status understanding

This is a new way to imagine serving the community.

It is already happening in many other sectors all around us, in various non profits, NGO's, government agencies and programs, and local initiatives. This vision, which is already established in many ways, collects them under one umbrella with a particular lens - the lens of Christian ethics and the spirituality that is reflected in the compassion and grace which defines it.

Reimagining the church's future is of paramount importance because without it decisions on future leadership, the state of our two buildings, our financial situation, and where to put our energy and resources are uncertain.

There is a reason that the United Church of Canada has named their initiative 'Embracing the Spirit.' It is because many hope that as Christianity has passed through the age of faith and the age of belief, it will now enter the age of the spirit.

The emerging Christian churches that attempt to embrace the spirit will be in for quite an adventure.

Let's be part of that adventure.

# Embracing the Spirit

