

2007 Parish Survey Results

In February of 2007 a parish survey was distributed to adults of the parish¹. Church members were asked about their overall needs and wants for the church; about worship, parish life, outreach, Christian education, the Vestry and church communications; as well as why they worshipped at St. John's Episcopal Church. Parishioners were also asked to communicate the qualities and characteristics of the Rector they desired.

254 members responded, representing 26% of the adult members of the parish. The responses were slightly skewed toward the older members of the church (ages 51 and older), but for the most part corresponded with the overall parish make-up.

The initial questions the survey asked were "What first attracted you to St. John's?" and "Why do you continue to worship at St. John's?" The three most common reasons people first came to the church were the style of worship (58.7%), the music program (34.3%) and that it was their family church (31.5%). Members stayed to worship here because of the style of worship and the music program, but also because of the sense of community (40.6%) and the sense of the Holy Spirit (30.3%) they found.

The top six qualities desired in our new Rector were:

- To have strong preaching skills (65%)
- To be a spiritual guide; leading others in the formation and development of the spiritual life (62%)
- To create a sense of community within the congregation (62%)
- To welcome the diversity and inclusion of all people (47%)
- To be an effective administrator and manager for the parish (45%)
- To have a clear plan for St. John's growth and progress (44%)

Members were asked a number of open ended questions about what might be missing for them at St. John's, changes they would make, programs they would like to see strengthened and other programs they would like to see added. The responses were varied, but most fell into the following categories:

Improve the sense of community and fellowship at the church: This was particularly true with regard to welcoming newcomers and helping them find a church family at St. John's. Several

¹ A separate survey was also given to the youth of the parish.

members mentioned the lack of an organized newcomer ministry as a problem. There was a desire for an increased sense of belonging within the church and more opportunities for social interaction. There was a consensus that the church needed to continue to grow by welcoming and supporting young families and strengthening the children and youth programs. Many respondents mentioned foyers or other supper clubs as a way to get to know people throughout the church and increase fellowship. There was also a strong response for social activities geared toward smaller groups within the church, like singles, young married couples and young families, empty nesters, men's groups, etc. The Parish Retreat was mentioned as an important fellowship opportunity, but several respondents cited the cost of the retreat as a barrier to their participation.

Strengthen and Increase Outreach: This was an area about which many members felt a deep commitment. There were calls to increase the church's outreach to the disadvantaged in the community (through Grace Mission, ECHO, Habitat for Humanity, assistance to the homeless) and to increase our general outreach as well (through ecumenical projects with other area churches, sponsorship of groups like Scouting, membership in TEAM, etc.) There was also a desire for increased outreach at the national level (ERD, disaster relief, involvement with the Episcopal Church's MDG projects and the Episcopal Public Policy Network) and at the international level (foreign missions, the Heifer Project, alternative Christmas shopping and Bread for Life).

Support for Parish Members and Families (Inreach): There was a request for increased pastoral care visits, but most acknowledged that the current small number of clergy precluded this. Many respondents said that support for the elderly of the parish with transportation to church events and increased opportunities for worship at Westminster Oaks should be a priority. There were also a number of requests for support of families caring for elderly parents. Support for young families, including new mothers, was mentioned along with relationship and financial health workshops, health and nutrition classes, and divorce support groups. Stephen Ministry was cited several times as an important source of support at St. John's and there were a number of calls to strengthen that program.

Christian Education and Devotional Activities: Many respondents requested a wider variety of topics be offered as classes and bible studies, especially those that could be targeted to specific groups like women, men, couples, parents, etc. There were also a number of requests for education opportunities at times other than Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings so that more people could participate. There was also a desire for strengthening current devotional ministries (Centering Prayer, Daughters of the King and Cursillo) and adding other opportunities (Lenten prayer partners, Quiet Days/Silent Saturdays, Eucharistic Devotion, etc.). Wednesday night dinners and classes were cited as the program people considered most important and most wanted to see strengthened.

Worship and Music: 39% of respondents considered their preferred style of worship to be “high church or formal” and most respondents were happy with the current style of worship at St. John’s. There were some requests for other worship opportunities to be offered occasionally (Morning Prayer, Saturday Vigil, contemporary/youth service, and Taize or Celtic prayer). Several members requested that more periods of silence and quiet reflection be built into the service, especially during the prayers of the people. Most respondents reported that they were very pleased with the current music program and only wanted to see it strengthened. Advent Lessons and Carols and the Evensong Service were also very important to a number of respondents. When asked to name which ministry or activity was most important, the Choir was cited the most often by respondents. There was a call for occasional inclusion of more contemporary music where it might be appropriate, such as in youth oriented services.

Administration, Vestry and Communication: Better communication by the Vestry to church members was the most often cited need for improvement in this category. Many members did not feel that they had a good understanding of parish issues or the financial picture. A number of respondents felt that the church has too many “Roman” elements such as the Crucifix and the votive candles in Carter Chapel and requested their removal. There was also a strong call to change the signage and church materials to reflect the traditional Episcopal shield. There were a number of requests to improve the St. John’s website, to enhance both outreach and communication within the parish. Finally, there were recommendations for various staff to be added to enhance the church’s growth and operation. These were: additional clergy (to help expand pastoral care), a director of youth and/or children’s ministry, and a Parish Life director (to coordinate parish ministries and activities, strengthen the newcomers program and aid in the church’s growth).