St. John's Episcopal Church

Parish Survey and Listening Sessions Summary

Autumn 2025

Dear St. John's Family,

Thank you to everyone who participated in our recent Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) survey! With 162 survey responses, and 84 attending the in-person Listening Sessions, we've gathered a clear picture of where we stand as a church and where we hope to go next. This summary is meant to share the highlights with you, spark conversation, and guide us as we move forward together. Printed copies of this summary will be available in the narthex and in the church office.

Survey Summary

Where We Are Now

We're in a time of transition, and that's reflected in our survey results. About half of us feel satisfied with church life, and a third feel a strong sense of energy and purpose. Many are "on the fence," waiting to see what comes next. This is normal for churches going through leadership changes, and it means we have a real opportunity to shape our future.

Compared to other churches nationwide, our satisfaction and energy levels are typical. We're neither struggling nor thriving—we're in a "reinvention" phase. This will take intentional effort, patience, and care.

What Matters Most to Us-Satisfaction and Energy Drivers:

We're most satisfied and energized when:

- We have opportunities to serve both inside and outside the church.
- Our worship services are meaningful and high-quality.
- There are flexible options for Christian education.
- Church decisions are made openly with input from members.
- The spirit of our congregation makes people want to get involved.

To boost satisfaction, we need to:

- Offer more ministry and service opportunities.
- Adapt programs to fit busy lifestyles.

- Enhance worship experiences.
- Improve how decisions are made and communicated.

Our Priorities for the Future

Nine big priorities emerged from the survey, but we'll need to focus on just a few to make real progress. According to the survey these are the main themes in order of importance:

- Attract families and young people.
- Reach out to new people in the community.
- Expand Christian education and spiritual formation.
- Strengthen pastoral care for those in need.
- Create more opportunities for meaningful relationships.
- Develop ministries for healing and support.
- Equip members for leadership and ministry.
- Encourage generosity to support our mission.
- Deepen our worship and connection to God.

Interestingly, our congregation feels we need to do some internal work—strengthening relationships, education, and worship—before focusing outward on growth. Research shows that churches grow when they look outward, so balancing both will be key.

Our Strengths and Challenges

Strengths:

- **Hospitality:** We're welcoming and caring, especially to newcomers. There's room to grow, but we're above average nationally.
- **Conflict Management:** We handle disagreements well, which helps us stay healthy.
- **Spiritual Vitality:** Faith is central to our lives, and this is a strong foundation.

Challenges:

- **Governance:** While we trust our leaders, we can improve communication and transparency on how and why decisions are made.
- **Readiness for Ministry:** We value service but need more opportunities and support.

- **Education:** We're motivated to learn, but our Christian Education programs need strengthening.

Our Culture

We lean theologically conservative but are diverse and respectful of different spiritual paths. This diversity is a strength, especially as we seek growth.

However, there's a gap between our desire for renewal and our willingness to change. We value tradition and stability, but to thrive, we'll need to experiment and adapt—while honoring what makes us "St. John's."

Critical Abilities for our next Rector

Our parish survey ranks these top four priorities in order of importance:

1. **Preaching**- Capacity to inspire and connect people to God's word and how it connects to our daily lives. We want sermons that appeal to a broad cross-section that feed us spiritually and gives us something to think about in our daily lives from week to week.
2. **Pastoral Care**- Capacity to engage people empathically and care for parishioners in times of need.
3. **Strategic Leadership**- Capacity to cast a vision and lead the congregation toward the realization of the vision.
4. **Teaching/Training**- Capacity to deepen understanding, form character, equip parishioners with new skills.

Summary of Listening Sessions

Thank you to everyone who participated in our recent listening sessions and completed response cards. Your input is invaluable as we discern our path forward together. Below is a summary of the key themes and insights gathered from your responses.

What We Value Most

From the response cards, several core values emerged as most important to our community:

- Engagement, Commitment, and Community: Strong sense of dedication and support through attendance, sharing time, talent, and treasure, and fostering fellowship and belonging (48 mentions).

- Friendliness and Welcoming Spirit: Emphasis on being a friendly and welcoming congregation (32 mentions).

- Caring and Inclusivity: Importance of pastoral care, inclusivity, and a caring environment (28 mentions).

Other notable values include meaningful worship, energetic sermons and music, diversity, trust, openness to change, spirituality, ministry involvement, and support for youth.

High Points

Moments when the church was felt to be fulfilling its mission:

- Youth Programs and Ministry: EYC, J2A, Trinity Center, Christmas Pageant, mission trips, Sunday school, youth choir, Vacation Bible School, Guardian Angel program (22 responses).

- Outreach Ministry: Family Promises, Newton Grove, La Sagrada Familia, hurricane relief, Connections of Cumberland County, homeless ministry, rummage sales, mission trips.

- Inreach Ministry: Blessing of the Pets, Cursillo, pastoral care, senior groups, Bishop Currie visit, beach weekend, needlepoint prayer shawls, casserole committee.

Desired Qualities for Our Next Priest

From the Listening Session responses, these main categories emerged:

- A priest who supports a strong music ministry, including some contemporary music
- Engaged and caring pastor
- Dynamic preacher
- Neutral on political topics
- Sermons focused on understanding Jesus' teachings.

What's Next?

From both the survey and the Listening Sessions your voices have painted a clear picture of a congregation that values engagement, warmth, inclusivity, and meaningful ministry—especially for youth and outreach. As we search for our next Rector, we'll look for someone who can guide

us with care, strategic thinking, and a deep understanding of our church's unique culture. Any change will need to be thoughtful, gradual and transparent.

One thing we heard in both the in-person sessions and from the survey comments is that while we are excited to embark on this next chapter in our parish leadership, there is no sense of haste coming from the congregation. Parishioners shared that they believe it is more important that we take our time to make sure we find the right candidate who best suits our needs. They also shared that they are enjoying the variety of services being offered on Sundays, both from our visiting priests and lay leadership.

Thank you for your honesty, your faith, and your commitment to our shared mission. Together, we can build a healthier, more vibrant St. John's for the future.

Thank you for being part of this journey!

The Search Committee

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Grant Steffan	**Mary Flagg Haugh**
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