



HOLY COW
CONGREGATIONAL
SURVEY

JANUARY 2022

*Christ Episcopal Church
Of
Springfield, Ohio*

HOLY COW!

Consulting of Westerville, Ohio, was engaged to administer and interpret an online survey. It was based largely on an instrument the company has used with more than 2,400 churches (mostly mainline Protestant), including more than 200 during the COVID pandemic.

Christ Church's responses were compared to (benchmarked against) responses from several hundred congregations that have taken the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) from across the country over the past 18-22 months. This gives us an actual apples-to-apples comparison and perspective on how we are doing compared with other churches at this moment in history.

**Thank you for your participation in this activity of discovery and learning.
We had excellent response!**

WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY

SENT TO INDIVIDUALS = 177

NUMBER COMPLETED & RETURNED = 77

Age of Respondents:

9% under the age of 35

28% between 35 and 64

65% aged 65 or older

Where We Live:

69% reside in Springfield

31 % live elsewhere, of these

28% travel four to nine miles

33% travel more than 10 miles

Years as a Member of Christ Church

18% -- attended 10 years of less

25% -- 11 to 20 years

55% -- over 20

How Often Services are Attended

30% -- less than five times a year

68% -- one & three times per month

27% -- four times per month

ANALYSIS

Christ Church's responses were compared to (benchmarked against) responses from several hundred congregations that have taken the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) from across the country over the past 18-22 months.

This gives us an actual apples-to-apples comparison and perspective on how we are doing compared with other churches at this moment in history.

- **Overall, approximately 21% of our members are clearly satisfied with things in the church. This, along with other information, indicates that members can imagine a church with a higher level of vitality than they are currently experiencing and are searching for a pathway that will lead them to a stronger church.**
- **Not every question is of equal importance to members.**
- This response rate enabled us to hear from a broad, representative sample of our congregation.
- Our responses were compared to responses from several hundred congregations that are similar to Christ Church and that have taken this survey of the past 18-22 months.

Please remember – these data should not be viewed as a negative but rather as areas we can improve upon as we growth our congregation and serve those in need.

Every church exhibits patterns in its life that contain strengths and potential weaknesses.

Christ Church has strengths related to openness and structure of religious practice. As members look to the future, our top four goals are:

- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc.).
- Develop and Implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and Incorporate them Into the life of the church.
- Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
- Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth to our church

Potential weaknesses include a tendency to become tradition-bound and overwhelmed with needs.

In comparison to other churches, three goals that are unusually strong for Christ Church are:

- Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people in times of need (emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, etc.).
- Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society. (i.e., homeless, immigrant, transient persons)
- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc.).

These identified goals can serve as the foundational and directional work of the current Vestry.

The Overall Congregation's Top Priorities

- 1. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.**
- 2. Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth.**
- 3. Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.**
4. Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.
5. Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.
6. Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people with special needs.

In a comparative view of top priorities among congregational age groups, three of the six top priorities (1, 2, and 3) are shared across all age groups. So, there is some unanimity around what we need to focus.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We assessed our congregation in eight areas:

- ❖ Hospitality
- ❖ Morale
- ❖ Conflict Management
- ❖ Governance
- ❖ Spiritual Vitality
- ❖ Readiness for Ministry
- ❖ Engagement in Education
- ❖ Worship and Music

When compared to other congregations, the following areas should be the focus of our attention:

- ❖ Hospitality
- ❖ Morale
- ❖ Spiritual Vitality
- ❖ Readiness for Ministry
- ❖ Engagement in Education/Formation
- ❖ Worship

Important to Keep In Mind

While the satisfaction scores in these six areas (hospitality, morale, conflict management, spiritual vitality, readiness for ministry, engagement in education/formation, and worship) were lower than other congregations, our scores were NOT inherently negative.

Hospitality

- Members do perceive that our congregation is engaged in warm hospitality. In fact, it is a strong attribute of ours.
- We reported that we are a welcoming community and enriched by those from many different walks of life.
- We feel that our congregation has brought meaning to our lives, that a friendly atmosphere prevails, and that we show genuine concern and care for others in times of need.

How can we best understand and serve the surrounding community?

In comparison to other congregations, we are more laid back about how we deliver our hospitality.

Morale

Morale (the persuasive engagement of members in the mission of the church) scores demonstrate that a majority of our members are “on the fence” or hold a “wait and see” attitude.

In part, this can be attributed to our transition time, the pandemic and the conflict represented in our questionnaire results.

Spiritual Vitality

Spiritual Vitality measures the degree to which members believe their faith is central to their lives.

This index reveals strength in our congregation. We strongly affirm our connections with God in our lives. Yet, we are experiencing what can be called *spiritual dissonance* (a state in which a congregation desires two different things that are mutually exclusive and that are sustained by a disconnect between faith and action).

This manifests in a number of different ways, according to the Holy Cow survey.

- ❖ One type of spiritual dissonance reflected in our data is **strategic-tactical**.
We want to get to a destination without having to take the required journey. Concretely, this means that members may want their church to grow without making the required changes in what they do or how they do it.
- ❖ Another type of spiritual dissonance recognized in our data is **interpersonal-corporate dissonance**.
(wanting a vital congregation while engaging in interpersonal behaviors that are unhealthy, resulting in conflicts).

When members of a congregation cannot seek and receive forgiveness from one another, we are robbed of a potent resource. While being able to ask forgiveness certainly doesn't guarantee success in times of conflict, the inability to do so almost certainly, guarantees its failure.

Readiness for Ministry

This is also true of Readiness for Ministry (how we engage and support our members in the ministry of this congregation).

We recognize that ministry to those in our congregation and to those in the world are very important to our identity as a community of faith.

Our results demonstrate that members feel 'on the fence' about all aspects of ministry:

- identifying their call to ministry;
- preparing to engage in active ministry and;
- Supporting efforts and the number of opportunities to serve.

There is room for improvement here if we are living out the message of Matthew 28: 16-20 (go out and bring members to the church) to go out and serve those in need.

Engagement in Education/Formation

Engagement in Education measures the degree to which our congregation understands that Christian formation is a life-long process that prepares us for ministry in the world.

Our results demonstrate that members are motivated to learn, and that education and formation are drivers of member satisfaction.

Our program quality and flexibility are areas that require continued attention.

Worship and Music

- Worship/Music are the primary indicators of congregation vitality.
- While the majority of the congregation experiences our music as outstanding in quality and appropriate in style, the remainder of the worship experience received more mixed reviews.
- These aspects include the presiding, preaching, pace of the liturgy, ease of participation, and delivery aesthetics. These results offer us an opportunity to talk about our worship experiences and where we might focus energy to improve the experience.
- This is important to us because we want to grow. If we experience poor worship, then visitors and newcomers will also.

Worship and Music is our number one driver of satisfaction, meaning that it is an important aspect of our communal well-being requiring creative attention.

Conflict Management

- Conflict management measures the degree to which members believe that conflict is appropriately managed and, where possible, resolved.
- Thirty-five percent (35%) of our congregation agree that there is a disturbing amount of conflict. However, 81% believe that conflict is resolved.
- The Search Committee is not aware of any prominently visible rift within the congregation. We speculate that the comparably high conflict score (we are in the 60th percentile) may indicate differing stories circulating about the reasons for the departure of previous rectors or the personality clashes that typically occur in parish ministries such as vestry, altar guild, choir, outreach, pantry, etc.
- Conflict is an aspect of every relationship including relationships within the church. The constructive use of conflict often leads to better decisions. The level of conflict in a congregation is a reliable predictor of whether a congregation exhibits vitality or the energy-sapping climate of a recovery/reinvention church (such as ours).

Conflict can have a devastating effect on a church's sense of mission. And one of the realities of conflict is that a portion of a congregation is unaware of it.

- Promising pathways include equipping members/staff with skills in conflict mediation. It is especially important that [Christ Church] become a self-regulating system that is able to lovingly but firmly deal with problematic behavior.
- Increasing missional flexibility (the ability to make necessary changes to achieve the church's mission without having to invest a significant amount of energy in managing internal conflict) can be done through incremental steps.
- Unresolved conflict is not only a failure to keep the promise of well-being; it erodes most aspects of vitality in the life of the congregation.
- And, finally, hoping that conflict levels will simply fade over time is a "dead end." Eruptions of conflict that are an aspect of a church's culture and that continue unabated become regular cycles over decades if not addressed." among ourselves.

- It is good news that 81% of the respondents (below the 40th percentile of comparable churches) agree that “problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort”.
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) disagree that “there is frequently a small group of members that oppose what the majority want to do.”

During this transition time, it is important that we seek to understand perceived conflicts and do whatever work of healing and reconciliation is possible to become a healthier congregation.

Governance

- **Governance measures the degree to which members believe that the decision-making and processes of the church are open to their concerns.**
- **Overall, our scores indicate that the congregation positively perceives leadership.**

The perception of leadership is positive, allowing us to use our strong leadership in ways that move the congregation forward in healing, reconciliation, and some re-thinking about how we engage the needs of members as well as the needs of those we are trying to reach in our community.

Financial Support

- Respondents reported giving an average of 1.61% of their income, placing Christ Church in the 22nd percentile of comparable churches.
- The national Episcopal average is 2.4-2.5%. There is untapped potential. If the congregation “dared to be average,” financial contributions from the congregation to the church would double.

Education Levels of Congregation

51% of the respondents have graduate degrees.

Characteristics in a Rector We May Wish to Seek

Someone who can:

- Be excited about working with a recovery/reinvention church.
- Be entrepreneurial and visionary.
- Expose us to new ways of thinking and rethinking who and what Christ Church means and does.
- Embrace the role of scientist, experimenting with ways to equip new leaders, reconcile with the past, clarify mission and purpose, and reenergize both worship and spiritual formation.

Characteristics in a Rector We May Wish to Seek cont.

Someone who can:

- Facilitate healing within the congregation of past hurts and the COVID experience.
- Have an open style of communication.
- Help us discern and focus upon no more than two priorities in the short run, moving on with new energy as we experience success.
- Balance the naturally varying interests of different age cohorts (e.g., social justice among under 35s, community coalition building among those 35-64, and strengthening pastoral response among those 65 or older).
- Help us reach out to the “dones”—those people 45 or older who are tired of infighting and judgmentalism within their churches and the larger society.

What else did we learn?

Our congregation's culture:

- We are theologically diverse. While theologically progressive, about one-quarter of our congregation is theologically conservative. Our ability to hold and learn from these different perspectives could be an important strength in attracting new members.
- Our flexibility style registers the degree to which, as a congregation, we are willing to make adjustments or experiment with the ways we go about our ministry in order to connect with our local context.
In this area, we demonstrate that we are quite settled.
 - ❖ It is interesting that the majority of our indicators suggest that we seek renewal, change and growth, and yet are not willing to make changes to achieve our goals. This is an area that invites thorough conversation.
 - How might we go about renewal as a settled congregation? In incremental ways?
 - How might we experiment with new ways in aspects of our congregational life and learn from those experiments?

Research indicates that being adaptable to our context, like any organization, is essential to our ability to grow and thrive as a congregation.

We also learned about our congregation's climate.

Church climate is measured by two questions:

1. Member Satisfaction (sense of well-being, peace, lack of discord); and the other is
2. Energy (force of engagement in mission).

- We learned that compared to other congregations like ourselves, currently satisfaction and energy are low. In both cases, the majority of our members are “on the fence” meaning that we are satisfied by some things and dissatisfied by others; we are energized by some things and not by others.
- Some of this is related to our history. It will be important to discuss these matters as a congregation so that we can learn ways to improve both measures over time. These scores indicate that we are a “recovery/reinvention” church. Our work is to communally discern our identity and common mission/vision and to clarify the promises we make to our members and to those we seek to serve in our community.

What will we “deliver” in the name of God and Jesus and “why”?

We Learned About Aspects of Our Communal Life That “Drives” Our Satisfaction

We are most satisfied when:

- Worship services are exceptional in quality and spiritual content.
- Problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort.
- Our church provides high-quality education.
- We are willing to adapt our worship to the needs and circumstances of the people we want to reach in our local community.
- Our clergy ensures the development of a plan to care for members in times of need.

Our Drivers of Energy

We are most engaged in the life of the church when:

- ❖ Problems between groups are resolved through mutual effort.
- ❖ The whole spirit of the congregation makes people want to get involved.
- ❖ We are willing to adapt our worship to the needs and circumstances of the people we want to reach in our neighborhood, local, and regional communities.
- ❖ There is a healthy tolerance for differing opinions and beliefs.

The characteristics about the congregation that confirm the importance of these drivers in relation to growing a healthier and more vital congregation are:

- ❖ Our ability to mutually resolve problems.
- ❖ Our ability not to allow problems to “color” a friendly atmosphere.
- ❖ Our ability to adapt worship to the needs of others.
- ❖ Our willingness to become more engaged in the missional life of our congregation.

Our Congregation's Overall Top Priorities

- ❖ Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.*
- ❖ Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth.*
- ❖ Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.*
- ❖ Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.
- ❖ Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.
- ❖ Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people with special needs.

Of particular interest is the comparative view of top priorities between congregational age groups. Three of the six top priorities are shared across all age groups. So, there is some distinct unanimity around what we need to focus on.

* Items 1-3 are shared by all age groups

In Conclusion:

- How we think and act about change will determine our future.
- We are invited to discern what is needed to create communal connection and engagement in our mission/ministries. In undertaking this important work together, we will do what is necessary to become a healthier and more vibrant congregation for the future.
- These data clearly helps us identify the characteristics and skills we need in our next Rector.

Thank you for your participation in this important exercise of self-study and planning for our future!

We do look forward to the ongoing conversations and work that these results are calling us to do.

Blessings to All,

The Search Committee
Fred Bartenstein
Bonnie Bingman
Keith Doubt
Kay Koeninger
Dan McGregor
Denise Sharp