

St. Edward's Questionnaire
Report on Survey Results

April 2019

Introduction:

Over the course of three weeks, ending April 18, parishioners were asked to fill out a survey for the search committee. The participation was impressive: 140 responses out of an estimated population of 160 or so. We could not be more pleased.

This summary captures the major results that will inform the series of parish meetings to be held in May and June. Complete, "unredacted" results will be available online, enabling you to see the responses question-by-question and draw your own conclusions. Throughout this report, items presented in *italics* are likely topics for group meetings, although anything presented here is open to discussion.

The high response rate strongly suggests that parishioners care very much about their parish, are engaged in the effort and are eager to participate. The next step is the parish meetings, which will lead to drafting a Parish Profile, the document used to describe our parish to potential applicants. The more thought we put into describing our community and goals, the better a prospective rector will understand what we need.

For ease of reading, all statistics are rounded to the nearest whole percentage, with .5 being rounded up.

Demographics:

If wisdom comes with age, St. Edward's is a parish of sages. More than seven out of ten respondents (76%) are 60 years of age or over;

- 54% are aged 70 or over
- 22% are aged 60-69
- 13% are aged 50-59
- Every group younger than that is in the single digits.

By gender we are 60% female, 40% male and 73% married. Widowed parishioners account for 14%, singles are 9%, divorced 4% and partnered 2%. Almost half of us live within 10 minutes of the church.

We're a well-educated lot. Three quarters of us attended college. About 58% of us are retired from a wide range of fields. Of those still working, more than 40% are in the professions (doctors, attorneys, teachers, CPA, etc.), followed by managers and support staff. The range of past careers of our retirees is varied and accomplished.

Just over 43% of us grew up as Episcopalians, and another 30% in other Protestant churches. A full 26% of us have been at St. Edward's for more than 20 years. That number is juxtaposed by:

- 22% who have been here 2 to 5 years
- 13% here for 6 to 9 years
- 34% for 10 to 19 years.

The top factors that attracted us here were the clergy, the style of worship and the convenient location, followed closely by fellowship. Those are the same factors parishioners list as their top reasons for staying at St. Edwards. A notable twist is that 37% list fellowship as a reason they came, yet 64% list it as a reason they stay. Clearly, the friendly, supportive nature of St. Edward's makes itself known.

East is east and west is west... 41% of the parish attends the Rite I service at 8:00 a.m., while 49% attend the 10:15 Rite II. A mere 4% migrate between the two services. The monthly contemporary service attracts 20% on the second Sunday of each month, and the 5:30 p.m. Saturday service draws 8%, when it is held. A recent area of growth has been a noon service on Wednesdays. About 16% of parishioners attend; for many of them it is their only service of the week. *This might suggest we should work on activities that can draw us all together, to enhance our sense of community for all.*

We're a church-going bunch: 71% attend weekly, while those showing up a couple of times a month to less than once a month range from 7% to 9%. Less than 4% of us only come to church major holidays.

Half of the survey respondents have a spouse who is also active at St. Edward's. For another 10% their spouse is not active in any church. Most people who are part of a couple come as a couple.

Concerning stewardship, 67% report that they pledge, while another 23% give regularly without pledging. Only 9% of us have made provisions for St. Edward's in our will. At the same time, significant numbers support special projects (49%). This reflects a generous nature, yet it is unclear how many people may be counting their contributions to special projects as part of their pledge for general operations, thus diverting funds from the operating budget. *It is telling that 14% of us don't know how the church deals with financial stewardship.*

Worship and parish Life:

Correlating somewhat with choice of which service to attend, 54% say it is important or somewhat important to have a quiet service each week. On the other hand, 80% think it important or somewhat important to have music. Clearly, if you add up the totals, there are many who believe both are important. *Strategies for building on this interest is a good topic for conversation with the parish family and musicians.*

Our parishioners like to be involved in parish life and social outreach. Over a quarter of respondents (26%) don't know if lay ministries are available to them, thought. This suggests we need to do a better job of making that invitation more obvious. Encouraging new participants can

serve to relieve a core group of volunteers while also welcoming new folks and getting them engaged early in their membership. However, the stage is set for inviting folks to get involved in parish life activities, as 86% feel very welcomed. *This is an interesting dichotomy, worth pursuing in our parish meetings.*

The congregation recognizes the importance of building membership but reflects a somewhat unfocused initiative to accomplish it. A full 48% believe we warmly welcome new members as they come on their own, while only 7% feel we have any program to attract them and 26% don't know what we do in that regard. *Most of us feel we warmly welcome those who come to us but have not made an effective effort to reach out to attract new members. It suggests a need to work on this as we go forward.*

Fellowship and mutual support happen organically more than programmatically. Fifty one percent feel we primarily reach out to those we know; 21% reach out by calling, praying and offering help to others (as opposed to only their closest circle); 8% feel we leave the task to the clergy and 20% don't know what we do. *A discussion of this might be useful if combined with membership development.*

Most respondents had some sense of what Christian Education is available but nearly 25% indicated they did not know. *This also suggests that there is work to be done in thinking about how to communicate to all what is offered and perhaps offer more.*

When it comes to parish communications, we're a very modern, digital bunch. The weekly email was the top channel, at 72%. However, traditional means are still important: 71% follow the Scepter and 71% the weekly announcement bulletin. And, of course, 42% count on word of mouth. (We are a church, after all!) *The website lags at 21%, indicating an important area for growth, since the internet is one of the main channels "seekers" use to explore churches.*

Social Outreach:

More than 85% of respondents feel it is important to participate in outreach. The parish overwhelmingly views outreach as an "all-hands-on-deck", intergenerational effort, with 97% indicating that sentiment.

A series of questions in the survey probed parishioners' preferences for targeting social outreach efforts. For starters, as stated above, 85% feel that social outreach is either very important (41%) or somewhat important (44%). The clear preference is to start close to home, focusing on the local community in partnership with the Lancaster Convocation and other area nonprofits. As we spread out from there to Diocesan programs, national programs and, finally, to international programs, reaction swings from "very important" to "somewhat important" to, as you get farther afield, "not so important."

Our apparent preference for local projects could be interpreted as a wish to be involved close to home, to feel that connectedness, and to know the impact of our efforts more clearly – again, all as part of a sense of community worth celebrating as we figure out how to do it better.

Attributes of a New Rector:

Concerning desired attributes for a new rector, there are some clear preferences. Respondents were asked to select their top six attributes from a list of 30. The top scorers, all being picked by more than 50% of respondents include, in order, “good spiritual guide,” “keeps confidences; discreet about other’s problems, situations,” “friendly, with a warm personality,” and “communicative with the congregation.” That seems to cover the basics.

The next level gets more focused. Scoring between 30% and 49% are “relates to parishioners of all ages,” “good sense of humor,” “skilled at building parish membership,” and “skilled at pastoral care.” The item dead last on the list, at 1%, is “preaches about political topics.” This suggests we want, a) a friendly spiritual leader we can relate to and work with, and b) someone who understands the problems we face in growing the parish and can help us tackle them. Other attributes attracted meaningful numbers of responses – it was a long list and respondents chose six – and should be carefully considered. While 61 % are looking for a spiritual guide (the top selection) many items on the list drew responses from 15% to 25% and are thus clearly important to a full picture of the parish.

Interestingly, “has a successful record of parish fundraising” only drew 7%, while building membership was one of the top selections at 45%. This may indicate a disconnect in people’s awareness between membership and stewardship, or the question may have been interpreted as fundraising other than stewardship. This should be discussed in the group meetings, as it is vitally important to understand the desired balance between efforts to grow membership and emphasis on stewardship.

The relative low preference (38%) for a priest good at pastoral care suggests either that many of us haven’t had the experience of needing that from a priest, or perhaps we really don’t understand what that is. This possibility is reinforced by the question showing the top three parish visitation concerns (i.e. pastoral care) were visiting shut-ins (60%), hospital visits (80%) and attending parish functions at the church (76%). (Respondents were asked to pick their top three from a list of six attributes.) Either way, (51%) want him/her to be discreet. *Understanding what pastoral care means to us collectively is important before we call a new priest.*

The subject of responding to public policy suggests a key element in the make-up of the parish. Asked about the importance of our priest pursuing public policy agendas such as Social Justice, 15% thought it was extremely important and 51% thought it was somewhat important. At the same time, 16% thought it extremely important that the rector avoid policy agendas, while 34% thought avoiding them was somewhat important. This indicates that about 15% of parishioners want to pursue public policy agendas and 17% want us to avoid them. Everyone else is grouped in the middle. That may indicate that a third of the parish hasn’t thought about the issue enough to have an opinion. At the same time, 78% of respondents think the priest should maintain a non-partisan atmosphere in sermons and parish life. This suggests most are not looking to the church for political action.

This issue should be explored in the group meetings. There are probably strong feelings on both sides and a lot of confusion about just what is meant by “public policy agenda” or “Social

Justice.” Coming to an understanding of this is very important, as this is the sort of issue that can divide a parish if not pursued in a balanced manner. St. Edward’s seems to have found that balance.

Most parishioners feel we have a general idea of what the church should do in the next ten years, or need some help clarifying those goals. Less than 10% feel our future course is clear, and 30% want a priest who will lead us in establishing goals.

Regarding the congregation’s goals and objectives, there is clearly much work to be done. Only 11% think we are deeply committed to a course; the largest group (38%) feels we have some general ideas of what to do in the next ten years and just need some help getting there; 25% say we need help identifying those goals, and a full 25% feel we’re at the very beginning of the process and want our new priest to help us define goals. That said, what are our goals and how do we expect a new leader to clarify and develop them?

In terms of leadership style, respondents consistently (88%) favor a priest who will be a leader but encourage others to take initiative along the way. Just 9% want the priest to give strong directions, while 3% want one who defers entirely to lay leaders and staff.

We want our priest to take some involvement in community affairs but focus primarily on the parish. While we don’t want isolationism, we do need a strong emphasis on building our own future and making sure it is secure. The low preference (8%) for a new priest working at the Diocesan level might suggest either we are ready to have a priest more available to us and/or that we lack an understanding of the work done at the Diocesan level and how it related to St. Edward’s..

Almost 75% of us prefer a blend of conversational and formal styles in the preaching. Nothing too “loosey-goosey” but nothing too rigid. We want our sermons to be pastoral (75%), reflective on scripture (80%) and short (56%). (Those were by far the top three attributes out of nine listed.)

And finally, 87% of us are in favor of a candidate who will lead with a blend of new and adapted ideas. That should be encouraging to the candidates. It suggests we are not stuck in our ways! We seem to prefer a priest who encourages and guides, and delegates and nurtures rather than dictating and insisting on his/her own way. These responses suggest a reasonable expectation of a new priest for St. Edward’s. We are not looking for one who has all the answers and can do it all, but a shepherd that will guide us into a future that together we have shaped with hard work, conversations, hope and prayers.