

Appreciative Interview Summary

The Search Committee held two appreciative interview sessions on May 15 & 22. Approximately 25 people participated in the first session; 10 in the second. In addition, there was a Zoom session between the two in-person events; about 5 people participated in this session. In the first part of the session, congregation members worked in pairs to discuss the following questions about their experiences, hopes and wishes for St. Paul's. Individuals recorded their partner's responses to the questions. The second part of the event asked participants to identify characteristics they feel are important in our search for a new rector.

QUESTIONS:

1. **BEST EXPERIENCE.** Reflecting on your entire experience as a member of St. Paul's, tell me about a time when you felt most alive, most involved, spiritually touched, or most excited about your involvement.
2. **VALUES.** What are the things you value deeply: specifically about or for yourself (don't be too humble!) and about being a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.
3. **CORE VALUE.** What do you think is the core value of St. Paul's? What value gives life to our congregation?
4. **THREE WISHES.** If you had three wishes for St. Paul's, what would they be?

Interview Information

Responses to the interviews yielded five themes that were present throughout the questions (not in any particular order):

- 1) People
- 2) Tradition/History
- 3) Worship/spirituality
- 4) Community – Internal and Outside
- 5) Openness to Change

People

References to the people who make up St. Paul's congregation came up in several questions. One person shared that while the building was foreboding, they were welcomed once inside. Another described being welcomed with open arms when they returned to the church after a lengthy absence. In addition to positive references to St. Paul's people in general, several respondents spoke of favorite sermons by specific clergy. Several people specifically mentioned the desire to have more opportunities to socialize, and mentioned intergenerational events specifically. Others also noted the need to develop leadership opportunities for younger church members while continuing the stewardship of older generations.

Tradition/History

The traditions and history of St. Paul's were mentioned by multiple people as part of our values, most often accompanied with recognition of the need for openness to the new. Tradition was also mentioned specifically related to worship. Attentiveness to the Book of Common Prayer, carrying over traditions from "before", and maintaining our liturgical identity without becoming too formal were mentioned and things that are that are deeply valued by participants. St. Paul's building was mentioned as valued by some participants. Suggestions were made to make the building more open to the community – having more doors open and improving the lighting around the church were mentioned as ways to make the church more welcoming.

St. Paul's long standing music program was discussed by many of the participants. The music program was identified as a value by a number of them. Lessons and Carols was cited by several as one of their best experiences at St. Paul's. A wish for continuation and growth of the music program was identified by multiple participants across questions.

Worship/Spirituality

Reflection and comments about worship and spirituality were mentioned across the questions. Sometimes these comments were related to tradition and history as mentioned above, but also mentioned separately. Several people noted what they consider to be an introspective liturgy, "quiet and spiritual – not always loud and chaotic". Others wished for continued spiritual growth, ministry to those confined to home through small home worship opportunities and pastoral visits. Maintaining a solid liturgy was the terminology used by others. Several others noted their participation in EFM as one of their best experiences associated with St. Paul's. Several also noted that they find preparing the altar before church to be a reverential experience. The availability of recorded ministry/services during Covid was also noted and appreciated. Several people mentioned that St. Paul's has brought them the opportunity to explore their faith, another finds St. Paul's to be a place where they are part of a group attempting to live a Christian life – shaping their identity as a Christian. Another wants St. Paul's to be a place for continued spiritual deepening.

Community – Internal and Outside

A sense of community within the church flowed through the answers to the questions. Diversity Sunday- with a jazz band, the African American speaker sessions, Lessons and Carols, Bible study, and book discussions, were all mentioned as being important to people at St. Paul's. At least one person noted the inclusive nature of the Eucharist, with the welcome for anyone to come to the table as important.

Participating in community outside of the walls of the church permeated responses. There was a general reflection that we need to make a commitment to the city. Some responses were specific – develop a community project, identify our neighbors, continue and enhance our footprint in the community through organizations like Common Ground and the Gathering, working on issues that affect the city and general outreach were all offered as ways we can extend our internal community to the greater community. Maintaining a solid commitment to social issues was something that several participants identify as something we should look to do.

Openness to Change

While openness to change was identified as an area across the interview questions, the responses about it were sometimes couched in a desire to change, but not in every aspect of the parish. One person indicated they would like to see variety, but in items outside of the service. While some saw the move to one service – “unified as one body” - as a good thing that should be continued, others indicated that we should return to two services on Sunday. And at least one person suggested looking at a Saturday service. Multiple responders spoke to the need to make the changes we need to make to grow. One specifically stated that we need to address the elephant in the room – All Saints, while also putting aside our individual wants for the benefit of the congregation.

Characteristics of Our Ideal Rector

Participants were asked to identify as many critical attributes as possible that they think are required in the next rector to achieve our strategic goal. Four main areas/characteristics emerged as the top characteristics participants are looking for. They are:

Leadership – including empowerer, inspiring, confident, delegator, involved in community leadership, team player (collaborative), action oriented, not conflict or issue avoidant

Pastoral – Included characteristics such as shepherd & evolver of traditions, faith guide/leader, and nurturer. Most respondents used the term “pastoral” as a characteristic with no further explanation.

Spiritual – including theologically sound, server, sermon engagement, meaningful worship, effective preacher

Effective Communicator – including welcoming, good listener, approachable, available, engaging with the congregation

Other areas received notice from the participants, but not to the extent to be in the top four areas. These include effective administrator, outreach, open mindedness and comfort with diversity.

This summary is not intended to reflect all of the rich and thoughtful discussion that occurred at the three feedback sessions held. Rather it represents the majority of feedback we received.

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