

QUESTION 1

Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry which you recognized as one of success and fulfillment.

Our greatest sense of success and fulfillment is when we all get together to work or worship. Our annual summer sale is successful and fulfilling for all ages and interests. Many parishioners work together for weeks leading up to the sale and then turn out again on day of the event. It attracts people from Jamestown and beyond, is a tremendous fundraiser, but more importantly provides us with a sense of community and makes St. Matthew's very visible on and off the island. Another ongoing successful ministry at St. Matthew's is our popular thrift shop. Parishioners and other community members volunteer to sort, sell or repurpose the donated merchandise and we donate merchandise to local families in need. It attracts customers from neighboring communities as well as from Jamestown and is a major source of income. A recent one-time event which brought fulfillment was the successful fundraising for our new organ and dedication concert open to all in the community.

QUESTION 2

How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the Future?

Our former rector led the charge for us to embrace technology as a communication tool of the future with our website, e-communication and other technologies: online giving, "Sunday news and Notes", a parish calendar and servers' schedule, and videoed (and shared) events. We are aware of and accepting of the likelihood of declining membership in the church of the future. We have committed church school teachers who are re-imagining our church school to fit and draw in more children. We are also studying the possibility of adding a more modern service. We would like to continue to explore more ecumenical communication which our former rector had started in our small community. Our warm and well-attended fellowship hour after each service makes sure that every visitor and newcomer feels welcome. We have dedicated choir members, ushers, acolytes, lectors and Eucharistic ministers, an altar guild and a parish hospitality committee. Other talented parishioners are willing to help in other ways and are merely need guidance to do so. We are excited for what our future holds.

QUESTION 3

Please provide 4-6 words (separated by commas) describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.

Compassionate, Extroverted, Deep faith, Theological knowledge, Relatable real-life preaching, Inspiring leader

QUESTION 4

Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship provided by your community.

Our style is traditional (e.g. Eucharist at every service), although it is not “high church.” Music is an important part of the 10:00 service (8:00 has no music), of which the new digital organ, a skilled music director/organist and a full choir are important elements. Portions of the liturgy are sung by the priest. There is a strong spiritual sense to the services. The weekly liturgy does not vary much except in accordance with the seasons of the church calendar. Some would like to see more variation in the service offerings, including more variety in musical genres so as to attract younger adults (e.g. a monthly or occasional evening service with contemporary music). St. Matthew’s is seen as inclusive, embracing of the very youngest children, those in wheelchairs or with other visible or invisible disabilities, those briefly visiting, as well as our Newport Naval War College temporary resident families. The annual outdoor service under the beech tree, “Blessing of the Backpacks”, Blessing of Pets, unique Good Friday Service, and ecumenical services with the neighboring Catholic and Baptist churches are some of our favorite special services.

QUESTION 5

How do you incorporate others into ministry?

On a week-to-week basis members are able to contribute to worship as a lector, choir member, Eucharistic minister, acolyte, or usher, and through altar guild, as a church school teacher or coffee hour host. Other opportunities to be involved include serving at monthly meal site, volunteering in our thrift shop and being part of our annual Summer Sale. People who get involved in these various ways get fulfillment from their participation and contribution. Right now it feels like the same people do everything which actually could be intimidating to newcomers. On the whole we are very welcoming to getting people involved but it’s always harder than it looks. We hope to make better use of a shrinking volunteer pool through personal invitations and requests which align to individual talents and desires to serve vs. relying on sign-up sheets and requests for people to “raise their hand” to volunteer.

QUESTION 6

As a worshipping community how does St. Matthew’s care for the congregation’s spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

This is an area we have identified as needing improvement. In the past we have had Lenten study groups and prayer groups but recently there has been less. We have ecumenical services at Thanksgiving and Good Friday. We have two licensed lay Eucharistic Ministers who bring

communion to parish shut-ins, and sometimes church school members bring them food or the Altar Guild brings flowers. Members are supportive of one another during difficult times but there is very little intentional work going on in this area. Organized pastoral care by the rector or by any designated group has been largely absent and, quite frankly, missed by most all at St. Matthew's. We'd like to do more in this area and will look to our new rector for leadership.

QUESTION 7

How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

Our rector has not been involved on a regular basis with worship at nursing homes or other such places but we support people in recovery through AA meetings held daily in our building. We regularly collect food for local food pantries and are responsible for serving at a meal site in Providence monthly. Through our thrift shop we provide household goods and clothing in times of emergency as well as inexpensive goods and clothing to people on an ongoing basis. Our thrift shop also provides a place for much needed social engagement for members of the community at large who may not otherwise have much interaction. We also participate in a giving tree at Christmas for families in need. There is an opportunity here for more intentional and organized efforts for those beyond our worshipping community.

QUESTION 8

Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider church or geographical region?

St. Matthew's is deeply involved in the community, on its own premises as well in the surrounding community. Using the church property are numerous organizations/events, including 12-Step groups 7 days a week; the Community Band; Scout meetings/scout special events; "Looking Upwards Yoga" (developmentally disabled adults); Rotary Club, Newport Music Festival event site; Jamestown Piano Association concert site; the Christmas Fair and Angel Giving Tree; monthly Blood Drive; and the Summer Fair. Off-site are St. Stephen's meal site, the Food Bank; the Johnny Cake Center; marching in the Memorial Day Parade and the annual Blessing of the Fleet (with the other church clergy). With the other Jamestown churches we share management of the Kit Wright Fund to support community members in need and ecumenical services at Thanksgiving and Easter. Financially, St. Matthew's regularly meets its apportionment commitment to the Diocese as well as regularly contributes to Episcopal Charities. Finally, the our Thrift Shop has become known all over the state, both for its well-run and affordable shop, as well as for its charitable no-cost assistance to local families in need.

QUESTION 9

Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

Last year our music ministries were revitalized with a new organ and an increase in choir size. The new smaller digital organ opens up the beautiful Palladian window which was hidden by the old organ structure! We also began hosting some Newport Music Festival, Jamestown Piano Association and Community Band Concerts. For the children, the parish initiated the Blessing of the Backpacks at the beginning of the school year. We have opened the church to more community associations such as Training sessions and Yoga for developmentally disabled adults. "Ashes-to-go" and a "Three-church Covenant" were attempted but their futures are currently awaiting the change of clergy. St. Matthew's parishioners tend to be supportive and look forward to expanding our ministries with our new rector. The contact person for all of the above is Joan Breakell, the Senior Warden.

QUESTION 10

What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?

Requests for annual pledges is low key and generally there's not a lot of pressure for people to give more. Our rector wisely focused our most recent pledge drive on all that we do and have done for the community beyond our church doors which resonated with many. Online giving & auto deductions are options. We had a successful capital campaign a handful of years ago which enabled us to do needed major repairs and upgrades. Just a couple of years later we found ourselves in need of a new organ and thanks to the well-researched plan from our Rector, Organist, and others, parishioners quickly and generously stepped up to contribute to make that project a reality. We are currently seeking contributions to a 50th Anniversary fund to help with repairs to our steeple and to the large stained glass behind the altar, among other things; and again, folks have happily contributed to help. These efforts have served to bring people together in their awareness of the joint ownership of our physical plant. Of course, some folks are better positioned to offer stewardship in the form of time or talent like expertise in web-design, gardening etc and that too, is recognized and highly valued.

QUESTION 11

What experience of conflict have you had as a congregation and how did you address that?

Some conflict is to be expected within any community, particularly one as personal as a worshipping community. We've learned that conflict in a specific area of the church or among a handful of individuals, while troublesome, usually is resolved. A recent source of conflict was the absence of our rector for several months during a several months long leave. While some parishioners were very supportive of the rector and his family, other felt deep uncertainty and loss. Some simply stayed away. Being without a rector then, as well as without one now while we await our interim, has increased the feeling of uncertainty which often stirs up conflict. This time our strong vestry has been working hard to keep folks informed and engaged, and this process has given those who needed/wanted it, a way to feel heard.

QUESTION 12

What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? What did you learn?

The advent of a new rector presents a perfect opportunity for change at St. Matthew's. If changes transpire at a reasonable pace, and are inclusive with strong communications, the parish will respond positively. In the past couple of years, change in our parish has become rare; we need a priest who can bring new ideas. Change has not gone well in our church when conflict is involved and issues are not brought forth and openly discussed. In the past, leadership was not necessarily open to change yet the congregation's expectation is that we need new approaches, especially in the cultivation of younger families and care for the sick and homebound. Some in the parish would like to be relieved of their long-held responsibilities. Previously some suggestions for change have been rejected with little or no open discussion, resulting in much resentment behind the scenes and some people leaving the church. The current process addressing the search for a new rector has been helpful, informative and inclusive in preparing our parishioners for change, and in teaching us, as a parish family, the importance of soliciting feedback and communicating often and openly.