

St. Paul's Community Engagement Discernment Process

Report Back from Spark Mill

October 2020

Introduction

In 2020, The Outreach and Community Engagement Ministry hired The Spark Mill to help the ministry discern its strategic direction and develop a strategic plan. We began the project with a kick-off meeting in April 2020 with the Strategic Planning Team. At this meeting, we discussed an overview of the process and began establishing key project dates.

Strategic planning team members included:

- Susan Brooks
- Matthew Cole
- Barbara Holly
- Michelle Walker
- Chris West
- Lynn Williams
- Matt Stehle

During our April strategic planning team meeting, we determined which key stakeholder voices we needed to engage and how best to talk with them. Once the team created the stakeholder list, The Spark Mill began engaging stakeholders and gathering data.

The Spark Mill then gathered input and feedback from persons and groups inside and outside the congregation to hear their ideas and perspectives about the current and future emphasis of the Outreach and Community Engagement Ministry.

The Spark Mill gathered data from approximately 250 people using one-on-one interviews, a congregational survey, and four focus groups with congregation members. They also reviewed internal documents, including previous strategic and financial documents, annual reports, and other important organizational data.

Below, you will find a synthesis of all the data collected during the Gather phase. The Spark Mill met with the Strategic Planning Team and the Vestry to share the results, and is now

working with the Strategic Planning team to begin drafting goals and strategies to guide the ministry for the next three years.

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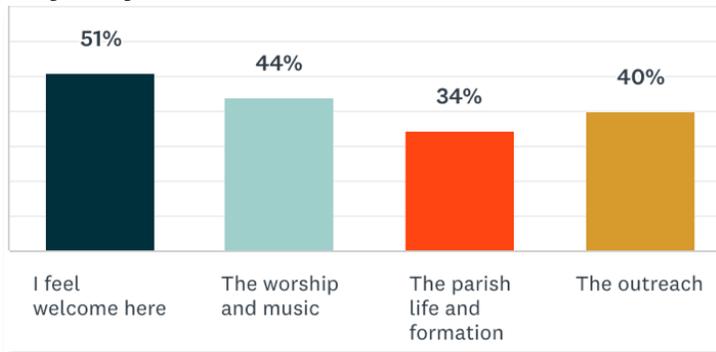
Survey Data

About the Respondents

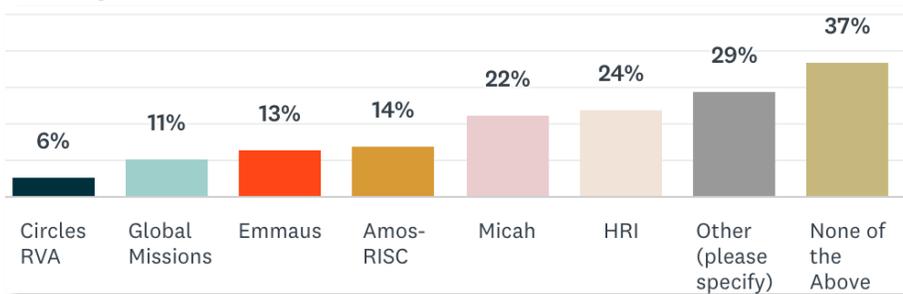
178 responses for a 45% response rate (based on initial email list provided)

- 88% - White
- 62% - Female
- 62% - 65 years or older; 13% - 44 or younger
- 66% - attending 10+ years; 23% - attending < 5 years
- 67% attend Sunday worship 3+ times/month
- 21% attend other SP programs 3+ times/month
- 92% financially contribute to St. Paul's
- 93% financially contribute to other organizations

Why do you attend St. Paul's?



Participation in outreach ministries



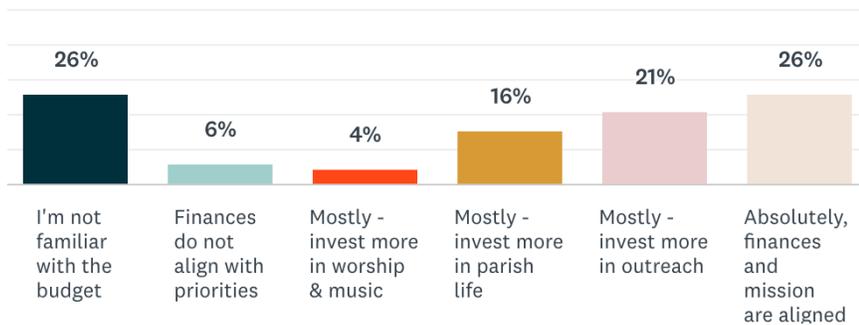
49% of respondents report their favorite thing about St. Paul's is the welcoming community

About St. Paul's

Effectiveness of outreach ministries

	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Mostly Effective	Very Effective	Not sure
Amos-RISC	2%	13%	12%	17%	56%
Circles RVA	3%	10%	4%	9%	75%
Emmaus	0%	4%	18%	48%	29%
Global Missions	1%	8%	17%	36%	37%
HRI	1%	10%	17%	42%	31%
Micah	3%	13%	22%	28%	34%

Does St. Paul's budget give an accurate picture of what is important?



Reasons respondents support other organizations instead/in addition to St. Paul's include: mission alignment, impact, convenience, St. Paul's doesn't need the money

I believe St. Paul's is known for...	
Outreach & Engagement	45%
History & Building	37%
Diverse & Inclusive	21%
Progressive & Social Justice	18%
Lenten Lunches	8%
Affluence	6%

I wish St. Paul's was known for...	
Social & Racial Justice	24%
Outreach & Service	23%
Welcoming & Inclusive	21%
Loving & Caring	12%
Worship & Programs	9%
Modest Partner	6%

How is God calling St. Paul's to be in ministry with the community?

- 22% - Racial Reconciliation
- 21% - Outreach/Service
- 12% - Listen and Partner
- 10% - Lead
- 9% - Welcoming to all

THEMES

A theme is a topic or idea that we heard in multiple stakeholder conversations. For each theme, you will find a brief narrative that describes the theme. The Spark Mill identified the following eight themes:

A REQUEST TO DOUBLE DOWN ON RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Your stakeholders want you to continue to move away from “ministry that does “for” to a model of “ministry that does with” others. They emphasized the importance and power of relationships with the community.

YOUR LOCATION IS AN ASSET

For some, your location is an asset because of its physical location in the center of the city. For others, your location’s significance is due to your proximity to the state capitol. Stakeholders want to see you leverage your location as part of your ministry. Surprisingly, very few people mentioned the actual buildings in these conversations. The focus was on the location.

ANTI-RACISM WORK – YOU’VE ACKNOWLEDGED IT, NOW WHAT?

St. Paul’s has a history of creating teams, commissions, coalitions, and committees to talk about race and racism. This dialog is important and necessary to keep the issue of race and racism from getting lost. However, there is a desire for St. Paul's to engage in active anti-racism work. There is a desire to see the History and Reconciliation Initiative’s work become implemented in the life of the church.

MISSIONAL APPROACH

Stakeholders wanted four things from the outreach ministry:

Clear Focus. While there may be many issues you could address, stakeholders desire you to narrow your focus to make a greater impact.

Desired Impact Should Drive Programs. Stakeholders urge you to create, invest in, and support ministries/ programs that drive tangible impact. This doesn't mean starting something new. It might look like leveraging Non-Profit Organizations already in place to affect lasting change in the city.

The Congregation Wants To Be Involved. The congregation wants to be engaged. They want to participate in helping shape the mission/outreach direction and participate in the work.

Outreach As A Response To, And Embodiment Of, God’s Goodness And Love. The comments that connected mission to faith emphasized that the work you are doing is an extension of God's grace, love, and mercy. It's is not about proselytizing but an embodiment of, and a pointing to, God's goodness and love.

YOUR SUPERPOWERS: A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT AND PROGRESSIVE APPROACH

Over and over again, stakeholders named welcome/inclusion and your progressive approach as what they valued or what made them feel a part of St. Paul's. These are your "superpowers." Every focus group, and 75% of survey responses named inclusion, welcome, and/or progressive theology as a strength or value of the congregation.

AFFLUENCE AND ENDOWMENT ARE AN ASSET AND A BARRIER

St. Paul's endowment and affluence came up consistently across all the ways we gathered input. For some, the endowment is a gift to be stewarded wisely. For others, it is wealth that was accumulated from privilege at the expense of others. Affluence and influence (real or not) are part of how you are seen and shape your identity with the community.

UNMANAGED CONGREGATIONAL POLARITIES

Several "polarities" emerged in our conversations. A polarity is an interdependent pair of opposites that each have a positive. However, if one of the pair is overemphasized at the other's expense, it leads to negative impacts. For example, breathing is a polarity, inhaling versus exhaling. Both are necessary to live. If you only do one, then the negative impact of passing out (or worse!) occurs. Polarities are not problems to solve, but tensions to manage. They require a "both/and" approach instead of an "either/or" approach. Two polarities came up consistently in our conversations:

- In-reach & Outreach
- Clergy Leadership & Lay Leadership

These are common polarities that all congregations deal with. However, to move the ministry forward and gain consensus on a missional direction it is important to acknowledge these tensions to shift to a "both/and" approach. Note these are also natural tensions that come as the church and its structures grow. Future healthy growth is shaped by how these tensions are "managed."

YOUR STORY SHAPES YOUR IDENTITY AND THE WAY PEOPLE THINK OF YOUR FUTURE

Racial History: The history of your connection to confederate leaders of the civil war and the evolution of your emerging resistance to and ultimate repudiation of the "lost cause" narrative. Over the decades, St. Paul's and its members have engaged in several initiatives to address race and racism issues. The current movement and awakening to systemic racism issues make your story and history even more pertinent as you consider how to live out your identity as the people of God in this place and this time.

Advocacy/Political History: Still related to race, members of St. Paul's since the 1920s have engaged in local and state political advocacy. This thread is two-stranded: first that St. Paul's members have a history of being engaged in local politics. Second, much of that civic engagement has been in advancing racial reconciliation and change.

Funder History: In the 20th century, St. Paul's allocated significant portions of its budget to Outreach. In the 1970s, there seems to have been a shift from merely funding outreach programs to looking beyond St. Paul's and funding community initiatives. This legacy continues to this day through the COVID Relief Fund grants.

Leadership History: St. Paul's has a history of strong clergy and lay leadership that has helped shape who you are today. Another part of that leadership history is the tension between clergy and lay leadership. This is not (necessarily) a conflict, but more like the tension of a rope spanning a gulf. There needs to be appropriate tension, or one can't bridge the gulf. If there is too much pull, the rope snaps; if there is not enough, the rope sags. The goal is to achieve maximum tension for the gulf to be bridged.

Social Innovation History: St. Paul's has been a large part of social innovation in Richmond, whether directly from initiatives started within St. Paul's such as Micah to others that have been started by St. Paul's members like HOME and Better Housing Coalition.

TRANSFORMATIONS:

Likewise, The Spark Mill identified potential opportunities for the Outreach and Community Engagement to consider as they work towards crafting a strategic direction for the ministry.

Pick a focus, and get clear on what it means to "proclaim Christ in the heart of the city"

Your stakeholders are asking you to choose depth of impact over width of reach. *Choose two to three areas on which to focus your mission and outreach efforts for the greatest impact.* And then, let the focus and desired impact drive how you leverage your assets and direct your energy. Remember that just because you choose two or three areas to focus, doesn't mean you stop caring about other needs and justice issues in the city. What it means is that in humility, you are choosing how best to apply your money, time, and energy for the greatest impact as a way of "proclaiming Christ in the heart of the city."

Create a two-tiered model of ministry

In whatever areas you discern to focus, create a two-tiered approach. One tier is aimed at meeting immediate needs, and the other tier is focused on creating change so that the immediate need no longer exists. A two-tiered approach also allows you to engage your congregation in participating in the work at a "hands-on level" or at a "systemic level." Too often, congregations choose an either/or approach to issues. Your unique story, your

congregational desire, and your assets, you are in a unique position to implement both tiers and drive impact in your community.

Racial Equity and Justice MUST Be Embedded Throughout Your Work

Given your unique story, racial equity and justice must be a part of how you engage (all of) your work. However you choose to engage this work, two key points bear repeating and need to stay top of mind: engage the work with humility and beware of paternalism. These have been tensions that St. Paul's has grappled with throughout its story and will be important for you to continue to manage as you lead into the future.

Deepen Congregational Engagement

This is more than creating more opportunities to volunteer. It means developing ways to involve as many of the congregation as possible in all Outreach and Community Engagement levels. This will require setting up flexible systems that give guardrails and allow for lots of free movement, paired with clear goals.