

# Trinity Episcopal Church, 2022 Parishioner Survey and Forum:

## Process and Results

June 2022

### **I. Introduction**

As our time of COVID shifts from pandemic to endemic, the Trinity Initiatives Committee (Jim Sterne Michael Neal Arnold, Sarah Fenstermaker, Susan Kruttsch, Julia Laraway, Kate Wallace, Kristi Wallace) was charged by the Vestry to identify initiatives that would re-engage our Parish and enhance Trinity's role in the community. We have relied on our clergy and staff to pull us through and now it is up to all of us to rebuild our collaborative spirit. The Initiatives Committee's job is to encourage everyone to take the initiative to participate in things we are doing, restart things we used to do, and initiate things we have yet to do.

The Initiatives Committee developed an anonymous survey to discover what our congregation wants and what will make Trinity an even more vibrant community. We wanted to know what our congregants believe are the best next steps to reinvigorate Trinity and its shared ministries.

The results from 109 parishioners were delivered at a Trinity Parish Forums on May 22. The forums attracted about 100 people who heard a presentation of the Survey results and then discussed the entire effort in small groups. Several people at those forums raised their hands to volunteer to be the organizers for various initiatives.

The additional input from those forums have been combined with the survey results and are presented here.

## **II. Glossary** (Words that emerged as useful in discussion)

### **Initiative**

Any project, process, or activity that someone is keen to help make it happen. Initiatives shall be approved by the Vestry regardless of cost, scope, or impact. The Vestry is responsible for balancing all of Trinity's activities and while enthusiasm may be high for any given initiative, economics, staff availability, and overall coordination should be of critical consideration.

An Initiative might be short term (improve the curb-cut into the Trinity parking lot) to perpetual (reengineering our entire wedding practice from attracting new wedding couples to creating policies and workflow procedures).

### **Lightning Rod**

The individual who acts as the point of contact for a given initiative. For example, Jim Sterne has volunteered to be the Lightning Rod for both examples above. The Lightning Rod will be responsible for communicating with an assigned Vestry Liaison.

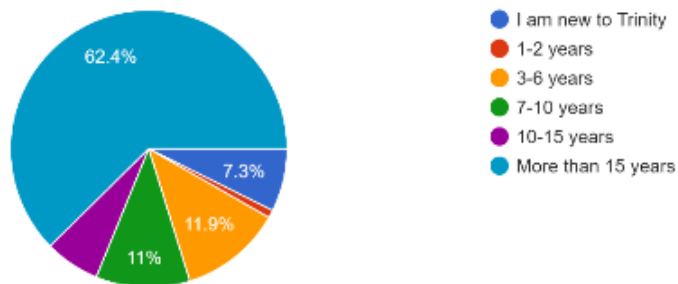
### **Vestry Liaison**

A Vestry member who is in touch with the Lightning Rod and through consultation with the Vestry, provides approvals for any given initiative. Working with the Lightning Rod, the Vestry Liaison ensures the lines of communication stay open to keep the Vestry apprised of intent and progress and to provide the initiative volunteers direction as to rules, regulations, economics, and activity coordination.

### III. Results of the Survey: Charts and Summary

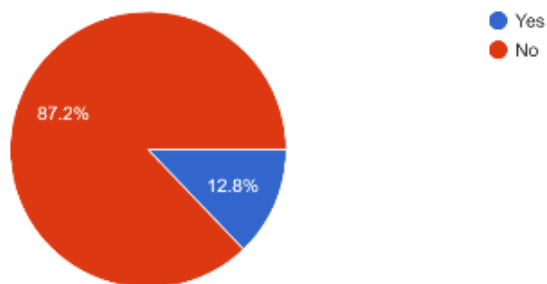
#### Chart 1: Years of Membership of those who responded to the Survey

First, some questions about your Trinity membership: How long have you been a member of Trinity Parish?  
109 responses



#### Chart 2: Survey Respondents with children in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

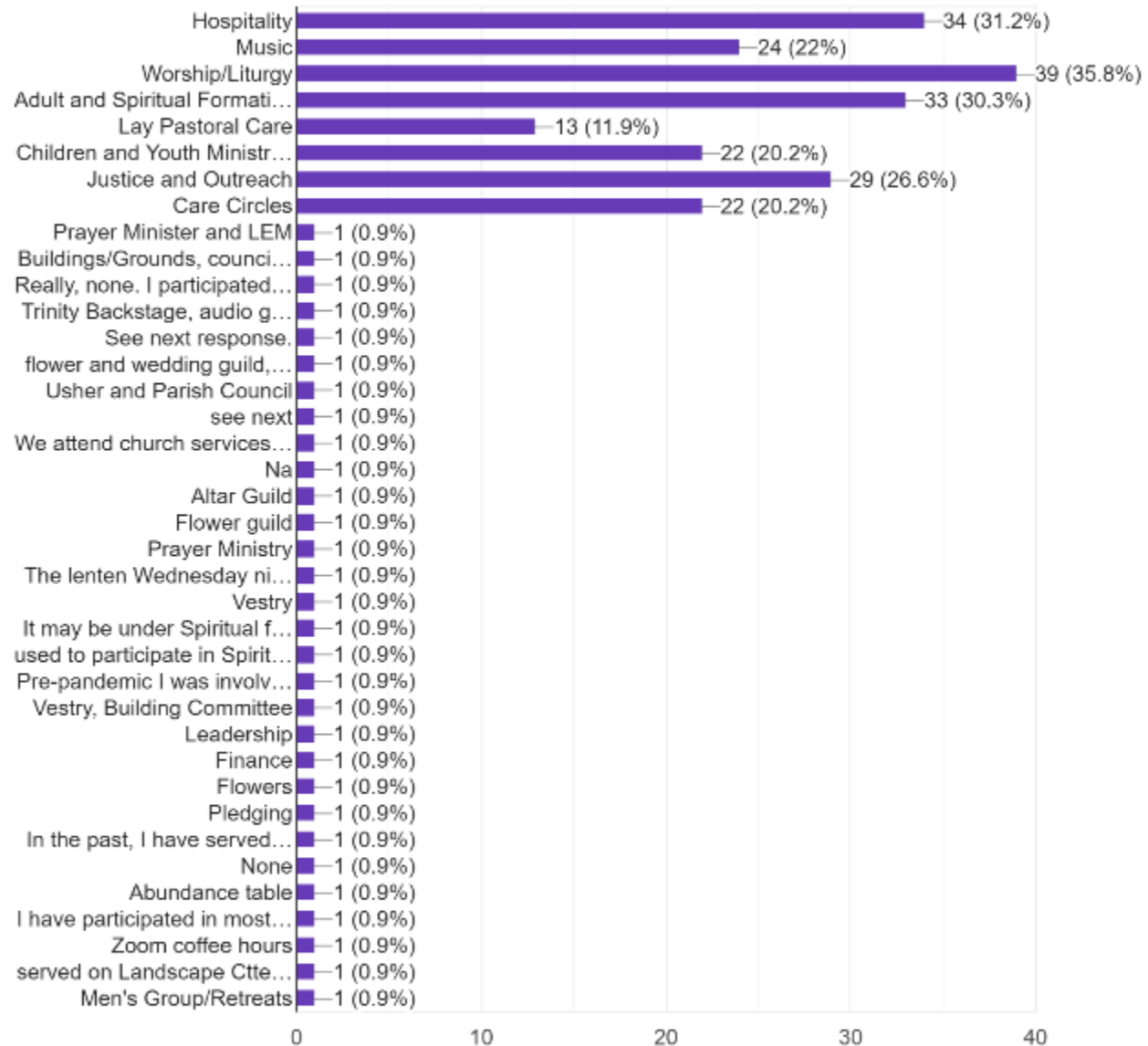
Do you have a child (or children) participating in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?  
109 responses



### Chart 3: Activities that respondents have actively participated in previously

Next, a few questions about your active participation in Trinity's existing shared ministries. Mark all that apply to you.

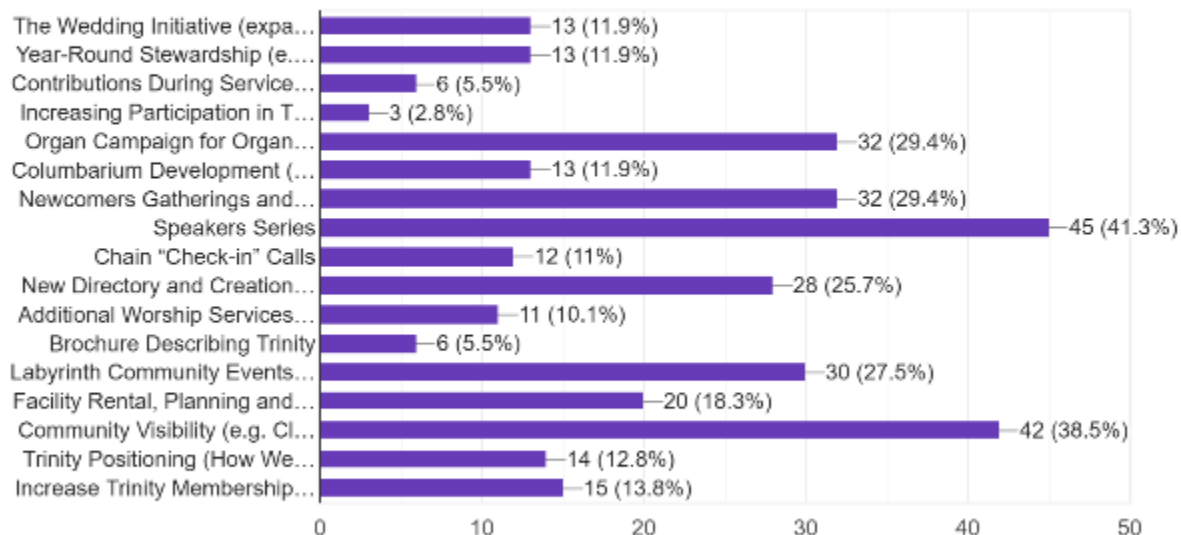
109 responses



## Chart 4: Respondents identified the top three Initiatives they would most like to see Trinity embrace

This section contains a list of possible new efforts the Parish might undertake. By way of clarification, for some initiatives the Committee ... are now welcoming volunteers; more on that soon!)

109 responses



## **Summary of Survey**

This part of the report presents a summary of the four questions posed in the survey.

The first question is, "what brought you to Trinity?" The second, "how would you say Trinity is rare or even unique?" And the third, "as a Trinity member, what are you most grateful for?" The fourth and final question is one that asks about any frustrations parishioners may experience.

The responses to each of the first three questions reflected a different aspect of parishioner experience: It is as if the first question is a kind of origin story for the parishioner – in capturing why they joined; the second, what they came to find and value over time and the third, what they are now most grateful for. And what I saw is that what parishioners end up

grateful for reflects both what they came to value, and what prompted them to join.

#### SUMMARY OF QUESTION 1 – What prompted you to join Trinity?

While responses mentioned the choir, and the architecture, there were four categories that overwhelmed the other aspects that prompted people to become members of Trinity. They are openness and friendliness, a commitment to progressiveness, community and justice, and the music.

Here are a few representative quotes that emerged from this question:

- *We walked into the church and were warmly greeted. The people in the pews were clearly present to one another and to the clergy. A lot of intangibles, to be sure, but it boils down to welcoming the stranger. We felt that we had come home.*
- *Beautiful and relevant liturgy and music, commitment to progressive theology and social justice. A community shaped and empowered by shared ministry.*
- *The emphasis on progressive theology and church experience, including the warmth, the authenticity and inclusivity of the parish, as well as the progressive people we met soon after arriving.*

#### SUMMARY OF QUESTION 2: What makes Trinity Rare or Even Unique?

The responses to this question were a reprise of the first question, but other responses stood out, and sharpened what priorities the parish has with greater experience in the community. Again, three responses stood out:

- Progressive politics/open-mindedness and welcoming practice
- Unique blend of liberal theology and traditional liturgy
- A commitment to direct service to community.

A few quotes are instructive:

- *Progressive theology and a way-cool facility*
- *The sense of openness to the world as it is, not as we might nostalgically want it to be. The engagement of the congregation in so*

*many dimensions of the work of the parish. Finally the sense of inclusion whatever your religious/spiritual orientation*

- *Trinity is a lay-active parish of thinking, feeling, faithful people who integrate their life of spirit with active engagement in the parish and their life in the greater community. Parish life blends the traditions of Episcopal worship with our support of progressive approaches to issues confronting all of us as Christian people living in a world of diverse opinions and beliefs.*
- *A welcoming community where you need leave no part of yourself outside the door. An idealistic community that is not rigid and appreciates a questioning mind. A wonderful worship experience that includes everyone. Friendly fellowship and opportunities for learning and participation in ministry serving others.*
- *The Cathedral experience without the travel.*

SUMMARY OF QUESTION 3: What are you most grateful for about Trinity?

In many ways, this question can be summarized by simply saying, Trinity community! Community! Community! Many listed some version of parish community as the thing they are most grateful for. Again, one can see reflections of the very aspects of Trinity that prompted people to join in the first place, and what they think makes Trinity unique. It should be pointed out, though, that there are many things that make for, and sustain, a sense of community, and these were mentioned too: the liturgy, the clergy, the music, and the Catechesis of the Good Shepard. Here are a couple of illustrations:

*The Trinity community has helped me in a way I did not think was possible in Christianity anymore. It has revived my hope in God and the Church. Thank you!*

*I'm grateful for Diana, the CGS teachers, and others who help create a space for children for religious exploration and discovery.*

Finally we turn to the question about what parishioners might have found frustrating in their time at Trinity.

SUMMARY OF QUESTION 4: What have you found frustrating?

This frustration question is fascinating, since unlike the other responses there can be important single observations worth attending to. In this case, there were a variety of complaints that garnered 1 or 2 mentions. By far, though, there were either no frustrations noted or a much smaller number (but larger than the others) centered on two complaints: the frustration of difficulties 'breaking in' to the existing congregation and making friends, and the problem of those who cannot attend or attend regularly feeling left out. One person said:

*Sometimes it's hard to get to know people and get plugged into ministries. We're not set up for welcoming new people, building relationships and getting plugged in. I wish we had more adult learning opportunities and ways to connect in small group settings.*

Importantly, a number of frustrations implied an idea for an initiative or action of some sort. Here are several examples:

- Bible study, not necessarily clergy-led
- Lack of enough disabled parking
- Modify our Catechesis program to allow those with lesser time and training to take part
- Once a year training for new Altar Guild, Ushers, and Readers to encourage new participants
- Greater community visibility, e.g. the "collar in the room" at public events
- Expansion of congregational care by fellow-parishioners
- Spanish-language activities and expanded Latino community outreach
- Greater responsiveness by all the clergy to parishioners in some sort of trouble.
- More mindful consideration of the environment in Trinity's practices, banking, investments, etc.
- Greater responsiveness and clearer process for pastoral care

#### **IV. Parish Discussion**

The Trinity Parish Forum held on May 22 after each morning service included roundtable discussions after the presentation of the above Survey



results. Discussions were lively and participants discussed what could be improved, what things were running well and could use some additional volunteers, and things yet to be.

After the discussion concluded some raised their hands to be Lightning Rods for various Initiatives. Many felt they wanted to wait for consideration during the Summer of Discernment. The volunteers and their initiatives:

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| • Art Fisher                     | Solar panels  |
| • Susan & Paul Zink              | Non-perishable lunches for the homeless                   |
| • Ashley Miller<br>& Anna DeVore | Group Discussions   |
| • Susie Bartz                    | Grief processing  |
| • Jerry Bartz                    | Building things - assist with shop                        |
| • Elizabeth Patterson            | Welcome Committee   |
| • Susan Kruttsch<br>& Doug Clegg | Year-round Stewardship                                    |
| • Doug Clegg                     | Outreach to Latino Community                              |
| • Anita Ferguson                 | Raise amount of budget for Justice and<br>Outreach to 10% |
| • Jim Sterne                     | Weddings  |
| • Jim Sterne                     | Organ Refurbishment                                       |
| • Jim Sterne                     | Widen curb cut in parking lot                             |
| • Kate Wallace                   | Labyrinth Events  |
| • Al Christ                      | Community Hot Rod Project                                 |
| • Bob Burtness                   | Nature Hikes  |
| • Michael Arnold                 | Teas at Trinity for Seniors                               |

## V. Conclusion: Next Steps

As a parish, we are proud of what we do for each other and for those beyond our borders. As a community, we value tolerance and embracing different views and perspectives. At the same time, we do not wish to become complacent or inward-looking. There are a variety of initiatives that can address those concerns as well as play to our strengths. This is only the beginning.

Over the next few months, we will enter a "Summer of Discernment." During the next few months, parishioners will receive information to discern the best decision for themselves about participation in one or more initiatives. There will be descriptions of initiatives offered via the Trinity newsletter and from the pulpit.

The first chance to learn about such opportunities is the "Justice and Engagement" summer series, sponsored by the Justice and Outreach Council and beginning June 19<sup>th</sup>.

The annual Trinity Ministries Fair will be the culmination of the Summer of Discernment where the Trinity community is welcome to volunteer for a variety of initiatives, old and new.

We welcome your thoughts, comments, discernment, and participation in a re-engaged Trinity!

Thank you,

The Trinity Initiatives Committee