

FORWARD

St. James' Visioning Initiative

2026 Congregational Opinion Survey

Narrative Summary of Findings

St. James' Episcopal Church

Introduction and Survey Process

In 2026, St. James' Episcopal Church conducted a Congregational Opinion Survey to better understand the experiences, priorities, and hopes of its members as the parish considers its path forward. The content of the survey was shaped by a similar parish survey conducted in 2015, the FORWARD Visioning Team, St. James' vestry and rector, and Rev. Canon Dr. Jason Lewis. The survey was publicized to the congregation through email, direct mail, and Facebook, and ultimately drew 53 responses.

The goal of the survey was to define the spiritual purpose and priorities for St. James'; to discern where God is calling us as a parish now and in the future.

Who We Are

The survey respondents skew notably older and more highly educated than the surrounding Oldham County population. While the county's median resident age is 40, 82% of St. James' survey respondents are 55 or older. In the 2015 survey, 63% of respondents were age 55 and older.

Educational attainment is also high: 77% (75% in 2015) of respondents hold a college degree or above, compared with 46% of Oldham County residents. Respondents are 90% white, somewhat higher than the county's 84%, and tend to live in smaller households — 67% report two-person households, versus a county average of 2.9 people per household.

This demographic snapshot is an important lens for interpreting the rest of the survey: the voices represented here are disproportionately older, longer-tenured, and more highly educated than the broader community St. James' sits within, which has implications for how the parish thinks about outreach to younger families and a more diverse population.

Tenure at the church also stands out. Of the 47 members who answered the question, 36% (27% in 2015) have attended St. James' for more than 20 years. However, it is notable that 21% have attended for 3-4 years and 6% of respondents are in their first year.

Church Culture and Community

Respondents consistently describe St. James' as a warm and welcoming community. Eighty-six percent strongly or very strongly believe there is a healthy tolerance of differing opinions and beliefs at St. James', and the same percentage describe members as warm, supportive, and welcoming, with 57% holding that view very strongly. Ninety-two percent agree or strongly agree that a friendly atmosphere prevails among members, and 86% agree there is genuine care and concern for one another in times of personal need.

92%	agree or strongly agree that a friendly atmosphere prevails among the members of St. James'
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Taken together, these figures point to a strong relational foundation at St. James' — members feel genuinely cared for and welcomed, which is a meaningful asset the parish can build on as it considers growth and outreach.

The Role of Faith and Church in Members' Lives

Faith plays a central role in how respondents understand their lives: 96% believe faith is fundamental to how they live day to day. A somewhat smaller but still substantial majority — 72% — agree or strongly agree that being part of the St. James' community specifically has given new meaning to their life. This gap between the near-universal importance of faith broadly and the slightly lower figure for meaning derived from church community may be worth exploring further, as it suggests some room to deepen members' sense of connection to the parish itself.

Worship

Worship attendance remains strong and steady. Seventy-four percent of respondents attend services weekly or two to four times per month, and 69% report attending about as often as they did three years ago, with 12% saying they attend more often now. In 2015, 62% of respondents reported attending between twice a month and weekly. Most members find worship spiritually nourishing: 76% agree or strongly agree that they are spiritually fed by services.

Ministries, Activities, and Events

Nearly half of respondents (48%) attend ministries most of the time — a category that spans groups such as Animal Care, Daughters of the King, Altar Guild, Choir, Eucharistic Visits, Healing Blankets, and Laundry Love. Engagement is somewhat lower for activities and events, 20% attend activities and 30% attend events most of the time. Still, fewer than 20% of members report never attending ministries, activities, or events at all, indicating that involvement beyond Sunday worship is broadly distributed across the congregation.

What's Going Well

St. James' strongest results center on satisfaction and word-of-mouth advocacy. About 90% of respondents would recommend St. James' to family, friends, or others in their social network, and a similarly high share,

92%, feel a friendly atmosphere prevails among members. Eighty-six percent sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern in times of personal need.

90%

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These figures reflect a congregation that is proud of its community and, by and large, eager to share that experience with others — a strong foundation for any future outreach or membership growth efforts.

Areas of Opportunity

Low intensity in church satisfaction and formation opportunities

Alongside these strengths, the survey surfaces two areas where enthusiasm is more measured. Only 2% of respondents are very strongly satisfied with how things are in the church currently, although a further 49% are strongly satisfied — suggesting general contentment but limited passionate enthusiasm. In the 2015 survey, 38% of respondents clearly agreed with the statement, “on the whole, I am satisfied with how things are in our church,” while 60% of respondents were, “on the fence.”

Also of concern, just 4% strongly agree that St. James' offers educational and formation opportunities varied enough to fit their complex lifestyles, though a larger group (61%) agree with the statement — the response did not carry the same intensity as responses to other questions.

These findings point less to dissatisfaction than to an opportunity: members are generally content, but there is room to move more of the congregation from being "satisfied" to being genuinely enthusiastic, particularly around the breadth and flexibility of educational and formation programming.

Some other areas of concern:

A gap between wanting change and trusting the church will change

Only 60% agree the church is open and willing to make the changes necessary to fulfill its mission (with 23% actively disagreeing and 15% unsure) — yet a majority of respondents say moderate-to-substantial change is needed to realize their personal vision for the church (56% say moderate or substantial change is required). People want movement, but a meaningful share aren't convinced the church will follow through.

Ministry and gifts discernment is the weakest culture item

Only 46% agree the church helps them discern their gifts and understand their call to ministry, and 34% are unsure — the highest “unsure” rate of any culture statement in the survey. Many members are already active, but the on-ramp into intentional ministry involvement appears unclear.

Education and formation offerings feel one-size-fits-all

65% agree St. James' offers education and formation opportunities that fit their complex lifestyle, but only 4% strongly agree, and 22% disagree or are unsure — the lowest-conviction item among the belief statements measured. If the church wants to grow participation, current programming does not appear to be meeting flexibility needs.

A core tension: outreach by older congregations to younger families

There is a real disconnect between stated priorities and the congregation doing the answering. The group most enthusiastic about attracting young families and increasing outreach is itself older, longer-tenured, and demographically narrow. This is not necessarily a contradiction — congregations often want to grow beyond their current makeup — but it does mean any strategy built on this data should account for the fact that the younger families the church hopes to attract were not well represented in shaping it.

Where We're Headed

Respondents rated a set of future-focused statements. Ranked by strength of agreement:

#	Priority	Agreement
1	Better utilize church property and facilities	91% agree/strongly agree (only 6% unsure)
2	Increase focus on spiritual health via education, Bible study, pastoral care	78% agree/strongly agree
3	Attract families with children and youth to the church	Rated most important overall — 65% high/very high priority
4	Increase local outreach and community service	64% agree/strongly agree
5	Renew and revitalize the surrounding community via local partnerships	Weighted average 4.45 of 6
6	Expand small groups, mentoring, and fellowship	53% agree — highest “unsure” rate (30%) of any priority item
7	Expand international mission (financial and personal involvement)	Lowest priority — 50% rate it low/very low importance

The strongest, most unified signal in the entire survey is property and facility utilization — both the highest agreement and the lowest uncertainty of any future-focus item. By contrast, small-group expansion shows genuine ambivalence rather than clear demand, and international mission is clearly not a current priority; the congregation's appetite skews local rather than global.

What Actually Moves Participation

Personal, relational asks outperform institutional messaging by a wide margin:

- Personal request from another member — 64%
- General announcement at a worship service — 51%
- Personal request from the priest — 44%
- Email request — 33%

If the church wants to grow ministry involvement, peer-to-peer recruiting will outperform broadcast messaging. Among non-participants, time is the dominant barrier (24%) — almost no one cited feeling unwelcome or having nothing to offer.

Conclusion

The 2026 Congregational Opinion Survey paints a picture of a parish with a strong relational core: members feel welcomed, cared for, and proud enough of their community to recommend it to others.

Survey respondents clearly envision a future where the church property and facilities are better utilized and spiritual formation for its members are prioritized. Growth in families and local community outreach are the next highest priorities.

These findings offer a foundation for the vestry, visioning team, and clergy to prioritize next steps — discerning and implementing a plan with specific action items that lead toward this vision. St. James' Episcopal Church can lean into the results of this survey and the results of the entire FORWARD Visioning Initiative by further evaluating the scope of our ministries in order to develop a more purposeful and intentional path for how we serve God's people in our community.