

FORWARD

St. James' Visioning Initiative

2026 Visioning Day Summary

Discerning Our Future Together

St. James' Episcopal Church

Overview

More than two dozen parishioners met for a 3.5 hour process on June 20 facilitated by Rev. Jason Lewis, Canon for Congregational Vitality for the Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky. The group heard a presentation of preliminary survey results and then took part in small group discussions. Topics included: What People Love About St. James', Core Values, and Vision for the Future. Notes are on display on flip chart paper in Gleason Hall. Also in Gleason Hall are boards with post-it note responses to a series of questions. This report includes summaries of both the Visioning Day process and comments provided on the boards throughout the month of June.

The Visioning Day process revealed a congregation with a strong foundation of community, belonging, authenticity, and resilience — coupled with a clear desire to grow through deeper formation, broader community engagement, stronger visibility, and increased participation from families and younger generations.

Survey results and group discussions consistently pointed to a church that members deeply love — not primarily because of programs or facilities, but because of the people, relationships, and culture of acceptance that define St. James. Participants expressed a desire to preserve these strengths while expanding the church's reach and impact in the community.

The Visioning Process

The visioning effort follows five phases, moving the congregation from initial discovery through to delivery of a shared plan for the future:

Discovery	Assessment	Areas of Focus	Prioritization	Delivery
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The congregation is currently in the Discovery and Assessment stages, gathering insights about St. James' current strengths, culture, opportunities, and aspirations before moving into goal setting and implementation.

Survey Highlights

Participation

53 survey responses were received, reflecting strong engagement from the congregation.

Length of Membership

- **Most respondents** have attended St. James for more than 20 years.
- **A significant secondary group** have been attending for four years or less — a meaningful number of newer members.

This suggests a congregation that combines deep institutional memory with a meaningful number of newer members.

Congregational Culture

Respondents reported very high levels of satisfaction across several areas:

96% Believe faith is fundamental to the church	92% Describe the atmosphere as friendly
86% Report genuine care and concern among members	85% View the congregation as warm, supportive, and welcoming
86% Value the church's tolerance of differing beliefs	76% Feel spiritually nourished
72% Say participation has given new meaning to their lives	~90% Would recommend St. James to others

Future Priorities from the Survey

The top areas respondents identified for future focus:

Better use of property & facilities — 91%	Spiritual health & formation — 78%	Attracting families, children & youth — 66%
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What People Love About St. James

Across surveys, sticky notes, testimonials, and small-group discussions, several themes emerged repeatedly.

1. The People

The most frequently mentioned strength was simply “the people.” Members consistently described St. James as welcoming, accepting, supportive, caring, authentic, and family-like. Participants repeatedly used

words such as family, belonging, community, home, acceptance, and support — and many shared stories of receiving care during grief, illness, and life challenges.

“People come because of the church and grounds, but they stay because of the people.”

2. Freedom and Authenticity

Members highly value the freedom to be themselves, ask questions, speak openly, and participate without judgment. Participants repeatedly referenced no shame, no judgment, respect for differing viewpoints, open discussion, and genuine acceptance — many connecting these values to the Episcopal tradition’s emphasis on Scripture, Tradition, and Reason (“the three-legged stool”).

3. Worship, Music, and Tradition

Members expressed deep appreciation for Episcopal liturgy, the sacraments, traditional worship, music ministry, choir participation, and the church’s historic identity. The beauty and history of the church building were frequently cited as important spiritual assets — including the prayer garden, the sense of sacred space, and the connection to generations who worshiped before them.

4. Meaningful Relationships

Members highlighted coffee hour, Dining Outs, St. James Day, Trivia Night, small group participation, and EFM (Education for Ministry) as activities that build relationships extending well beyond Sunday worship.

“A second family.”

5. Service and Outreach

Members take pride in St. James’ outreach ministries, including Healing Blankets, Laundry Love, the Animal Care Ministry, food assistance, book ministries, pet food distribution, and other community support efforts. Participants consistently emphasized that St. James seeks to serve beyond its walls.

Core Values Identified

When Rev. Canon Jason Lewis asked participants to identify St. James’ core values, the following themes emerged:

Community	Strong relationships and shared life together.
Service	Commitment to helping others and serving the broader community.
Freedom & Respect	An environment where people can be themselves.
Non-Judgment	A culture free of shame and exclusion.
Authenticity	Being genuine and transparent.
Love	A consistent theme throughout every discussion.
Integrity	Living faith through actions.

Family	Supporting one another through all stages of life.
Inclusion	Everyone is welcome.
Growth	Especially spiritual and emotional growth.
Resilience	Successfully navigating clergy transitions, societal changes, and the pandemic.

Vision for the Future

Greater Participation and Engagement

A recurring vision was moving from 10% of people doing 90% of the work to 25–40% of members actively engaged in ministry and leadership — seen as a major sign of congregational vitality.

Stronger Christian Formation

Participants expressed a desire for more faith formation opportunities: education for all ages, parent-focused learning, youth formation, Sunday formation opportunities, and Christian formation beyond traditional Bible studies. Formation emerged as one of the strongest priorities across all groups.

Families, Children, and Youth

Many participants envisioned more young families, more children in worship, a youth group, a youth choir, a Children's Chapel, and parent support and education opportunities.

"A source of hope for the future."

Increased Community Visibility

Participants expressed a desire for St. James to become more visible in the broader community — through a stronger social media presence, better communication about ministries, inviting friends and neighbors, and greater public awareness of church activities.

"People should know St. James as more than 'the church with the red doors.'"

Expanded Community Partnerships

Participants envisioned more partnerships with local churches, collaboration with community organizations, expanded outreach ministries, and shared events and service opportunities.

Greater Use of Facilities

Ideas included a concert series, student recitals, community events, educational programs, and additional outreach activities — using church facilities as a resource for the broader community.

Additional Worship Opportunities

Many participants expressed interest in exploring a second worship service, considering alternative service times, and increasing opportunities for worship participation.

Financial Stability

Participants consistently identified financial security as a prerequisite for future ministry growth — not merely survival, but freedom from budget anxiety, capacity for ministry innovation, and sustainable support for outreach and formation.

Priorities Emerging from the Day

Combining survey data, sticky-note exercises, and group discussions, the following priorities emerged most consistently:

- 1. Christian Formation and Lifelong Learning** — High-quality education and spiritual growth opportunities for every age and stage of life.
- 2. Reaching New People** — Developing intentional strategies for outreach, hospitality, and welcoming newcomers.
- 3. Families, Children, and Youth** — Creating ministries and worship experiences that attract and support younger generations.
- 4. Community Engagement** — Expanding St. James' role as a visible and valued community partner.
- 5. Meaningful Relationships** — Creating additional opportunities for connection, belonging, and fellowship.
- 6. Leadership Development** — Equipping members for ministry, leadership, and active participation.
- 7. Financial Sustainability** — Building long-term stability to support mission and ministry.
- 8. Communication and Visibility** — Improving communication internally and externally, particularly through community outreach and social media.

Signs of God's Hand Already at Work

Participants identified several indicators of hope and renewal already visible at St. James:

- Recovery and resilience following COVID
- New visitors attending worship
- Multi-generational participation
- Growth in ministries
- Strong volunteer commitment
- Active outreach efforts
- Increasing community engagement
- Ongoing visioning and discernment work
- A congregation eager to imagine and build a faithful future together

Conclusion

The Visioning Day revealed a congregation with a strong sense of identity rooted in faith, community, inclusion, authenticity, and service. Members deeply value the welcoming culture of St. James and want to build upon these strengths rather than replace them.

The clearest vision for the future is not simply larger attendance, but a church that is spiritually vibrant, more visible in the community, engaging more members in ministry, supporting families and youth, expanding Christian formation, and financially sustainable — continuing to be a place where people experience belonging, acceptance, and God's presence.