

St. Martha's Episcopal Church, Bethany Beach, DE
Executive Summary of the Congregation Assessment Tool and Commentary
July 2020

The Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) was recently administered in your church. Responses to the CAT totaled 145 representing 145% of average worship attendance. This level of participation has given you a highly reliable result. A response from every person is not required to provide valid results. For the complete results, please review the Vital Signs© report. A summary of that report is provided below:

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I. Overview

Culture is a critical element in the church. It can predict how members respond to leadership decisions, relate to one another in conflict, describe what folks might be most passionate about, and what they are likely to struggle with.

Members at St. Martha's are likely to focus on balancing an intellectually open and reflective faith community with structure and practices that provide external stability necessary for those seeking to develop and grow. These members are often comfortable with the path that each individual must follow with attention paid to important patterns of spiritual practice. For many, the Gospel is understood as an instrument with the power to transform, not simply comfort.

When the community is warm and hospitable, it has the potential to be a haven for those in need of healing or recovery. In a compassionate response to suffering, members may develop counseling centers, food pantries, homeless shelters, spiritual direction, support groups, and recovery services-often engaged in the front-line work of these ministries. They may struggle to balance the admirable tendency to accept people where they are with an adequate level of accountability that is also essential to wholeness. They might tend toward overcommitment to meeting the needs of others which could result in burnout for some. Missional focus, intentionality, and deep meaning prevent work from devolving into just going through the motions of set activities and a loss of a sense of deeper meaning.

II. Satisfaction and Energy

Overall, approximately 37% of members are clearly satisfied with their overall experience in the church and 43% feel energized by the work and ministry of the church. Satisfaction indicators are low relative to other churches in the country over the past 5 years. However, energy is relatively high. This may give many a sense of confusion. In churches like St. Martha's, often there has been a loss of missional focus. Highly capable, motivated and well-intentioned efforts have gone into preventing a sense of malaise. However, without a clear sense of core values, unique identity, and a clear intention for the future, that effort may have resulted in many ministries being developed that function outside a sense of overall connection to a central purpose for the church.

When asked how satisfied and energized they are, members of St. Martha's tend to focus on the issues addressed in the statements below. When they feel more positive in these areas, they are more likely to feel more positive overall. Conversely, when members feel less positive about any of the areas below, they tend to feel less satisfied with or energized by their experiences in the church overall.

A note about those respondents who answered "Tend to disagree" or "Tend to agree": Called "fence-sitters" these folks are generally understood to be waiting to see what happens next. It is understandably tempting to want to combine "Tend to agree" responses with "Agree" and "Strongly agree", but this is a mistake. Churches must strive for excellence in the things that are most important to its ministry. An evaluation of "Tend to agree" is a statement of ambivalence-not specifically critical but neither is it a vote of confidence. It frequently reflects the absence of enthusiasm.

However, there is significant opportunity with fence-sitters. Unlike specifically negative evaluations, an on-the-fence person is very likely to be responsive to positive changes in the most important areas. These areas are known as drivers.

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Satisfaction Drivers
Whether or not persons who serve as leaders in our church are representative of the membership.
Whether or not the laity in the congregation work with the Rector leading and planning worship services.
Whether or not the church prepares members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts.
Whether or not the church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world.

Energy Drivers
Whether or not the whole spirit in the congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible.

III. Goals

The table above shows the top seven priorities from a possible 17. Each of the 17 was presented independently in the CAT and then ranked based on responses to the question, "Where should the church put additional energy and how much?"

Rank	Question #	Priority
First <i>Average</i>	Question #57	Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth to our church.
Second <i>Average</i>	Question #59	Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
Third <i>Average</i>	Question #58	Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.
Fourth <i>Very high</i>	Question #55	Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people with special needs.
Fifth <i>Average</i>	Question #64	Work to renew and revitalize the community around the church by building coalitions with partners.
Sixth <i>Low</i>	Question #65	Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
Seventh <i>High</i>	Question #50	Deepen our sense of connection to God and one another through stronger worship services.

If the church is serious about family ministry, leaders and members will want to become avid learners of the dynamics of families and what they deal with in our time. There will also be issues of building technological infrastructure and know-how to reach folks under 40.

IV. Vital Signs

The *Vital Signs* report contains 10 indices, or thematic areas. The first two are *descriptive* in nature: Theological Perspective and Flexible Style.

Theological Perspective: On the whole, St. Martha's is theologically progressive, but maintains a higher degree of theological diversity than many churches. This presents both challenges and opportunities. Can there be a more powerful Christian witness in

All the information in this report should be explored and validated in further conversation. Survey data is not the end of a conversation but the beginning.

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our time than people who have different understandings on significant issues, yet have learned to worship, learn, love, and grow together harmoniously? Any breadth of viewpoint is an area to consider as an asset to be leveraged in terms of identity and development of tolerance for differing viewpoints. This can build the church's capacity to sharpen focus and give more meaning and purpose to ministry.

Flexible Style: Developing the capacity to accept the need for change and strategically implement meaningful changes is necessary to engage the community. Members appear to struggle to adapt, even in the context of reaching others in the community. This may serve as a limiting factor for growth. In general, it is those churches who have developed a "let's try it" posture and have normalized failure as a part of learning that are experiencing numeric growth, financial stability, and increased ministry effectiveness.

The next eight indices are *evaluative* in nature and are thus termed Performance Indices: Hospitality, Morale, Conflict Management, Governance, Individual Spiritual Vitality, Readiness for Ministry, Engagement in Education, and Worship and Music. Each of these indices is compared to over 2000 other main-line denominational churches in the US with whom we have worked in the past 5 years. In other words, what do people experience in these areas at St. Martha's compared with what they might experience at another church?

Index	What it measures	Score relative to other churches in the US
Hospitality	The degree to which members perceive that the congregation is engaged in offering themselves and their resources to folks who are new, different or in need.	Average (43 rd percentile)
Morale	The positive, passionate, and persuasive engagement of members in the mission of the church.	Average (49 th percentile)
Conflict Management	The degree to which members believe that conflict is appropriately managed, and where possible, resolved.	Low (22 nd percentile)
Governance	The degree to which members believe the decision-making processes of the church are open to their concerns and input.	Low average (35 th percentile)
Spiritual Vitality	The degree to which members believe that their faith is central to their lives rather than peripheral or episodic	Low (11 th percentile)
Readiness for Ministry	The degree to which the church has helped members identify their gifts and connect them to ministries that fit those gifts.	Low (16 th percentile)
Engagement in Education	The degree to which members understand that Christian education is a life-long process and believe the church provides developmentally appropriate opportunities and makes them accessible given the pace and schedule of members' lives.	Very low (9 th percentile)
Worship and Music	The degree to which members have a vibrant worship experience.	Music-High (77 th percentile) Worship-Very low (4 th percentile)

Hospitality Commentary: People generally expect that churches will be inviting and supportive communities. However, church communities have decidedly different "temperatures." Some feel cold, others warm and still others-on fire! It can be difficult for members to gauge this accurately since some may have a network of relationships that others do not. While few would describe St. Martha's as unfriendly, 1 in 5 are not having the experience of a prevailing friendly atmosphere. A significant struggle for the congregation regarding Hospitality is about welcoming folks from different walks of life, and many are not finding the deeper

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meaning they are seeking as a result of their involvement with the church. This is of particular concern given the culture of the church based on theological perspective and degree of adaptability. In order for St. Martha's to live into the best version of itself, Hospitality must be given developmental priority.

Morale Commentary: Members must find energy from their experiences with the church, be engaged emotionally, not simply conceptually or in dutiful behavior, and sense the need to bring others into the experience. Few experience the church as lacking energy, but many respondents exhibit lower satisfaction with the church overall. Again, this is particularly difficult given the culture which requires a clear sense of connection to the broader work of the church in order to avoid drops in energy. Yet, the majority are still connected to the spirit of involvement in the church. This is an asset from which to reclaim meaning, explore core values, and develop a clearer sense of purpose behind the activities of the church.

Conflict Management Commentary: It is critical to understand that the tools required to deal with conflict go beyond good intentions and involve specific training that nearly anyone can learn-if they choose to do so. Conflict is inevitable in any organization, including churches. However, how it is managed makes the difference between it becoming a risk factor for divisiveness or an opportunity for increased depth of understanding, respect, and fellowship.

It is clear from responses that folks are uncertain about the direction at St. Martha's which often serves to increase conflict. This is likely due a loss of focus which is critical for this church. To avoid competition for the resources within the church for ministry, alignment of activity to a core identity and intention is essential. Without focus, the "confused" feel in the church could become more chaotic and reduce the energy that still exists.

Governance Commentary: In cases of strong church governances, leadership has developed the skill and trust capital to manage inevitable conflicts productively, creating opportunities for increased relational authenticity. Committees, commissions, task forces, leadership assemblies, and joint meetings expand the decision-making circle. Regular opportunities for input can give people a sense of involvement in the way decisions are made.

Members at St. Martha's are struggling with the decision-making process. This suggests one or more of the following in the church's not too distant past: 1) There have been staff decisions made around which leadership was unable to be completely transparent, 2) There is difficulty with larger decisions facing the National church and impacting local congregations, 3) There was or is a very strong leader (in competence and/or over-functioning) resulting in disempowered lay-leaders.

Given the recent history of conflict in the congregation, the church is likely to benefit from external resources for conflict mediation and skills training.

Spiritual Vitality: Daily spiritual discipline is closely correlated with high Spiritual Vitality. In general, it is important to note, that although it is certainly crucial work for the church to help members connect to God in meaningful ways, individual piety alone has little or no impact on the overall health of the church or on interpersonal relationships.

Readiness for Ministry Commentary: In the last thirty years, a shift has taken place in our understanding of ministry. Some churches call it lay ministry, some lay leadership, others, the ministry of the baptized. In each case, the concept is that all members of a church are called to ministry, and it is the responsibility of the church to help members identify their gifts and connect them to ministries that best fit those gifts.

Currently, the members of St. Martha's are experiencing a low level of Readiness for Ministry overall. It is essential that each person discern the purpose for which they were born and are developed in those gifts and directed to ministries where those gifts can be utilized. Clarity of intention is important, and it could be that some feel they are going through the motions without a sense of mission, or there may be opportunities not yet considered that would be a better fit for the breadth of gifts in the church.

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Engagement in Education: Christian education is a life-long process that enriches a person's spiritual life and better prepares him or her for service in the world. This ministry is essential because it can be the pathway to the development of lay leaders and equipping folks for ministry that is meaningful and revitalizing. Members bear witness to average levels of motivation to engage in education and formation. This is an area to nurture; life-long learning is a key capacity in healthy churches. However, members do not find programming accessible and of sufficiently high quality. There are likely venues and opportunities not yet considered that are more appropriate. Consider offerings that would build tolerance, discern gifts, provide support for conversations about different theological viewpoints, and invest in leadership skills.

Worship and Music: The worship experience is central to the vitality and growth of a congregation. While members are often engaged in a wide variety of activities, worship is the one experience that every member shares. Research suggests that worship is a primary factor in the morale of a congregation and that when the worship experience of a congregation is vibrant, members also tend to feel energized about the work of the church. Music in the parish is important since music taps into the emotional centers of the brain and can lead to deeper worship experiences. Currently, roughly 1 in 3 persons find the worship experience to be that which they are seeking, but they are connecting meaningfully to the music. Attention should be given to worship as an area requiring frequent and consistent evaluation for quality and effectiveness.

Final Comments: HCIC research identifies five promises that folks want their churches to make and keep.

Promise #1:

We will create a church where worship experiences are exceptional in their ability to inspire, engage and enrich our spiritual lives.

Promise #2:

We will create a church experience where involvement is good for the soul instead of leading to disillusionment or disappointment.

Promise #3:

We will create a church experience where every person understands the significance of his or her life in the universe and is supported in fulfilling the purpose for which they were born.

Promise #4:

We will create a church experience where people live in peace with one another by resolving conflict in ways that are respectful and restorative.

Promise #5:

We will create a church where persons experience leaders who listen deeply with open hearts and make courageous decisions with good intentions.