

ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
Episcopal

May 12, 2011

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This is a report on the results of the St Mark's Parish Member Questionnaire that was administered at the 7:30 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. services on Sunday, April 10, 2011. Most of the questionnaires that were received were completed that morning, and the remainder was received one to two weeks after that date. This report might be of use to the Offices of the Bishop and the Vestry as part of the Rector Search Process.

This report has three parts. Part One will report the demographic and statistical results. Part Two will have a summary of the narrative responses received to the questions that people answered. Part Three will offer my personal observations and conclusions.

### Part One: Statistical and Demographic Information

If one were to summarize the typical person who attends St. Mark's Episcopal Church, it would be a married, college-educated female who has lived in St. Louis Hills for at least ten to twenty years, grew up in the Episcopal Church, has no school-age children, is 55 years of age or over, is employed full time, has attended this church for at least twenty years, and attends church four times per month.

Fifty-eight questionnaires were received. Of the 48 respondents who listed their zip code, 14 live in the St. Louis Hills area, the same zip code as the church's mailing address. The next largest number of respondents (7) live in the Affton area. Most of the respondents live in a somewhat triangular area bordered by I-44, I-270 and I-55.

Sixty percent of the respondents have attended St. Mark's for 10 or more years, and 43% have attended for twenty ore more years. There is a high frequency of church attendance;

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ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
Episcopal



Parish Questionnaire Report  
Page 2

58% are in church at least four times per month, and one-half of the respondents say this frequency of attendance has remained the same. On the other hand, 20% of respondents stated that their involvement in the congregation has decreased, mostly because of health problems (five persons) or because of a more negative attitude toward the church (4 persons).

One-half of the respondents stated they grew up in the Episcopal Church, and one-quarter of the respondents grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, and the next largest group grew up in the Lutheran tradition. Clearly, most of those who attend St. Mark's come from a liturgical heritage.

Two-thirds of the respondents were female, and 57% of the respondents are 55 years of age or older. Of the 58 respondents, 18 are 55-64 years old, 8 are 65 to 74 years old, and 7 are 75 years of age or older. Twenty-six of the respondents are in the age range of 26 to 54, while two are under 20 years of age. While there are six to ten children in the Sunday Godly Play program, it is clear that one of the challenges facing St. Mark's is that of growth as the older generations pass from the scene.

One observation that could be made of the congregation is that it is not a very diverse group. For example, St. Mark's is an almost entirely mono-ethnic congregation. Of the 58 respondents, 56 indicated they are White, and one person is White and Hispanic. There also is little diversity when it comes to levels of education. Eighty-one percent of the respondents have at least a college degree (19 of 58 respondents), and a higher number (28 of 58 respondents) have done graduate work or have a graduate degree. However, at the same time, one could say that the congregation is well-educated and appreciates study and new learning experiences.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents are employed full-time, 19% work part-time, and 22% are retired.

Finally, those who attend St. Mark's represent a stable portion of the population; almost two-thirds have lived in this general area for twenty or more years, while only one person has lived here one year or less. Clearly, this is not a congregation with a high turnover of members.

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## Part Two: Summary of Narrative Responses

The Questionnaire had two sections of questions to which people could write narrative responses. The first section contained two questions:

What are three things that St. Mark's Church does very well that you think should continue in the future?

What are three things St. Mark's Church is not doing that you would like to see the church do in the future?

First, the question, **“What are three things that St. Mark's Church does very well that you think should continue in the future?”**

The respondents had numerous positive comments concerning life in the parish. There was widespread praise for the liturgy and the music in the worship life at St. Mark's. There is a deep appreciation for the architecture of the building, and at the same time there is recognition that maintenance of the buildings and grounds is an ongoing concern.

St. Mark's has a dedicated core that each month gathers after church on one Sunday per month to prepare and serve a hot lunch at Trinity Church, Central West End. In the past there has been an active shawl ministry, yet that has waned with the departure of the clergy who supported and encouraged that ministry.

Respondents noted that St. Mark's takes hospitality very seriously and does its best to welcome newcomers. Those who are newer to the parish commented on how warmly they were received. It also is an Oasis congregation, and many people commented on St. Mark's ministry to the GLBT community.

Frequent mention was made of the ready-made circle of friends members find in those who are part of the parish. Parishioners especially appreciate not only the social activities the parish provides; they also appreciate the many opportunities for socializing provided by the congregation. It should be noted, too, that many in the congregation appear to be related to each other so, in a sense, many are part of an extended family.



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314•832•3588

ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
Episcopal

Parish Questionnaire Report

Page 4

Secondly, the question, “What are three things St. Mark’s Church is not doing that you would like to see the church do in the future?”

A number of themes were expressed by all age groups and by both genders. Those themes are as follows.

Broader Participation

There is a concern that too few people are doing much of the work and providing most of the leadership in the parish. There is a sincere desire for more people to step forward and share in the circle of leadership and to help shoulder the burdens of ministry.

Activities

A number of respondents expressed a desire for more social activities both in the parish, and also events to which people in the neighborhood could be invited. Some expressed the hope that the latter also could be used as evangelism opportunities.

There also is a desire for social activities for teens, young adults and young married couples.

Worship

While there is an appreciation for the current style of worship, some respondents expressed a desire that more contemporary church music be incorporated into the life of the congregation. Some suggested that such music could help attract new members who appreciate that style of music. There was an expression of appreciation for Mr. Mullgardt's occasional use of African-American songs and their uplifting spirit, and hoped those would be used more frequently.

Christian Education

There was a frequent wish for more adult education of the type the Interim Rector provided during Lent (a study of *The Last Week* by Borg and Crossan). Respondents noted the lack of education for children and youth ages 11-17. There were suggestions that more adults be involved in the Sunday School program.

It should be noted that the present pattern of Christian Education for young children, using the Godly Play program, is unusual in that the children are in their class from the start of church, come up with their teacher (who is widely praised for her work) to receive communion, and then return to class with their teacher. The more common pattern in Episcopal churches is that children are in class until the time of the Peace when they join their parents for the remainder of the service and receive communion along with their families.



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ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
— Episcopal —

Parish Questionnaire Report  
Page 5

Growth of the Congregation

Respondents expressed a desire for the congregation to grow; one suggested “moderate” growth, while another hoped there would be 20 new members in order to add “variety and new-ness” to the congregation.

There was an expressed desire not only for evangelism, yet also for more intentional follow-up with those who visit St. Mark's. Not only should there be better ways of inviting people; there should be work on motivating visitors to return.

Finances

One part of parish life that needs more attention is stewardship. St. Mark's has relied on a Flea Market to raise additional funds for the church's budget. That effort has been discontinued, yet there is a wish to have another “less stressful and less disruptive” fundraising project.

One respondent noted that the parish spends money on things “that are too expensive for a congregation this size,” yet no explanation was offered.

Buildings and Grounds

Respondents expressed a wish that the better care be given to the buildings and grounds. Further, with an eye to better stewardship of the environment, there is a wish that St. Mark's be a “greener church.”

A Concern

One respondent expressed a wish that the “historical cliques be dissolved,” suggesting that the presence of these “cliques” is a “huge constant” in the life of the congregation.

Thirdly, we will consider the responses to the question, “**What do you think God is calling St. Mark's to BE in the future?**”

The most frequently-expressed goal is that St. Mark's continues to be a congregation that is accepting, inclusive, a place of worship where difference in individuals is accepted and valued, a place both for thoughtful believers and seekers, a place of growth where all people can be challenged, and make a better life for all concerned.

Parishioners also believe that St. Mark's should be involved in the life of the community. While the congregation might be small, they still hope the church can have a big impact on the larger community. Moreover, the people of St. Mark's should not be “stuck” in the



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314•832•3588

ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
Episcopal

Parish Questionnaire Report  
Page 6

mentality that says, "We always do it this way."

The final question was, "What do you think God is calling St. Mark's to DO in the future?"

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A number of the sentiments expressed in this final section of the questionnaire echo opinions and goals expressed above.

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Worship

A number of respondents favor providing different options in worship, particularly using more contemporary music that might attract younger generations. This, they said, could serve to open the doors to prospective members. Only one person hoped the church would continue to use "traditional" services.

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Hospitality and Inclusivity

As stated in earlier sections, respondents hope that St. Mark's will continue to be a community of faith that is open, diverse and tolerant, and that provides a place where seekers may find spiritual community. There was a suggestion that St. Mark's especially could be a church that appeals to those who are un-churched, and those who are "mad at organized churches they have belonged to, and help them discover and re-discover what it means to be a Christian."

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Community Involvement

A number of persons expressed the hope that St. Mark's will engage in more community work. The congregation could reach out to the surrounding neighborhood in more ways than is now the case. There was strong support for the Trinity Church lunch program, yet also a hope that more could be done.

There also was a hope that the church will strive for justice in the world, whatever shape that might take. St. Mark's could be a voice for peace by starting small in order to be a credible voice in the community.

The community garden received much praise, and there was a suggestion that the effort could lead to a healthy cooking class and perhaps a cookbook.

While some are satisfied with the level of care being given to members of the congregation, it was suggested by several that more can and should be done to assist people in the congregation. Efforts can be focused on the underprivileged and under-served.

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314•832•3588

ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
Episcopal

Parish Questionnaire Report  
Page 7

Christian Education

Much of the same sentiment was expressed in this portion of the questionnaire as was discussed above. There should be, some said, opportunities in Christian education that will encourage spiritual growth. Moreover, education programs should take into account "all ages, classes, and groups."

Church Growth

This recurring theme echoed goals expressed above, that, namely, growth is necessary, growth can take place through reaching out to the surrounding community, growth can take place with the aid of more contemporary worship, and that the right choice of a new Rector can provide the congregation with the right leadership to help growth take place. At the same time, there was one suggestion that perhaps St. Mark's cannot afford a full-time Pastor.

Worship and the Arts

There is a recognition that the facility lends itself to being a venue for musical performances, and this can help enhance the reputation of the church in the community.

**Part Three: Personal Observations and Conclusions**

I have been the Interim Pastor of St. Mark's Church since January 1 of this year. My service followed the departure of the previous Rector who served a long-term pastorate of eighteen years. I would characterize her tenure as successful and fruitful. Her final years were marked by the installation of a splendid new pipe organ, and the construction of a new addition to the church building with an elevator to make the building handicapped-accessible.

It is my sense that the period of grieving is finished and that the congregation is ready to start a search process. It should be noted that only one of the respondents mentioned how much the individual missed the previous Pastor and the Deacon at St. Mark's who recently retired from the active ministry.

Following are some observations concerning the results of the questionnaire.

First, there is a concern about church growth. This is an area the congregation will need to take seriously as the congregation ages over the next ten to twenty years. While St. Mark's does not have the heavy preponderance of senior citizens that many other parishes have, this aging factor should be a major concern in the future. They certainly will benefit from receiving training in the area of church growth and evangelism. This is a subject I have



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ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
— *E p i s c o p a l* —

Parish Questionnaire Report  
Page 8

raised in sermons. Furthermore, they will be helped further if the next rector has some experience and training in congregational development.

Secondly, while the questionnaire did not raise the issue, I have raised with them the possibility of future involvement with a cluster ministry or a regional parish if growth and finances become a serious issue.

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Thirdly, the question of finances should be of concern to the leadership of the parish. Some have questioned whether they can afford a full-time Rector, and that question certainly should be discussed at the outset of a Search Process.

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Along with the matter of finances is the level of stewardship. The annual financial commitment campaign has not been the most intentional, and I think this was due to an absence of clergy leadership because of the departure of the previous Rector. Accordingly, I have suggested to the Vestry, and they have agreed, that I will offer them a day of stewardship training of the sort that I did with parishes in the Diocese of Hawaii when I led diocesan stewardship conferences and also was part of team that provided training to leaders in a congregation. This, I hope, will give them the preparation they will need to lead a successful stewardship campaign this year, and provide a base for future stewardship efforts.

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Fourthly, there is a concern about outreach into the community. As I said above, the congregation recently completed two major capital efforts, namely the addition to the building and the purchase and installation of a new pipe organ. Since their competitions, the congregation has had a bit of a breather from those efforts, and I think the time is right for them to do some talking and planning about outreach into the community at-large.

Fifthly, attention needs to be paid to the parish education program. The parishioners are a well-educated group, and appreciate a focused, relevant adult learning experience. I have not had direct contact or involvement with the Godly Play program for young children, yet I refer the reader to the unusual Sunday schedule I described above. While there are a few young people in the 11-17 year-old age range, there probably are not enough for a program for them. It would be wise to link them with an active youth group in another congregation with such a program, such as Grace Church, Kirkwood.

Sixthly, the parish has a rich musical tradition with a talented and experienced Director of Music and Organist, and a volunteer choir that performs with great skill is valued by the congregation. Having said that, a recurring theme from the respondents was a desire for more variety in the hymns with an emphasis on more contemporary music that, in addition to providing variety, might also appeal to an under-represented younger generation.



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ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
Episcopal

Parish Questionnaire Report  
Page 9

4714 Finally, a congregation the size of St. Mark's should have one or two Deacons whose ministry of servanthood would go far in aiding the congregation in identifying and carrying out ministries beyond the parish. The ministry of the former Deacon is missed. If St. Mark's wishes to continue to have a diaconal ministry, and if this is supported and encouraged by the next Rector, they could work together in identifying one or more persons in the congregation who have the respect of the parish and who would be willing to enter into a discernment process and receive appropriate training.

CLIFTON I have enjoyed my time as the Interim Pastor of St. Mark's, and I especially appreciate the willingness of congregants to respond the questionnaire. I hope the above will be of help to the Vestry, the Search Committee, and the Offices of the Bishop as the Rector Search Process gets underway.

SAINT If there are any questions concerning this report, I will do my best to answer them.

Faithfully yours,

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