

PARISH VITALITY ASSESSMENT

Christ Church, Chaptico, Maryland
September, 2021

This document was written by the Search Committee of Christ Church

1. Compelling Mission and Vision. Rating: 5

A healthy parish has a clear understanding of its mission, states the mission clearly, and creates ministries which align to that mission. The mission is shared and supported by all levels of ministry leadership, lay and ordained.

It can be fairly said that Christ Church does not clearly “state the mission,” Most parishioners are not aware that we have a mission statement, and certainly, one has not been articulated recently. Yet, there is no doubt we are a thriving congregation. We believe the people of Christ Church are the mission and vision, inspired and motivated by our faith in God, our church and the community of fellowship that we have created through our gathering and outreach, compassion and friendship.

Our recent Parish Survey revealed parishioner’s responses were fundamentally similar to our mission statement. “We are called to be people of prayer, dedicated to proclaiming a lively faith in God, and service to others in the name of Christ.” We are fulfilling this mission, not because of any ‘official’ mission or vision statement; but rather it is the authentic expression of who we are, the people of Christ Church.

We are an affable and gregarious congregation, very much a family parish where all are welcomed. At Christ Church, the unnoticed visitor does not exist. Both the ‘breakfast club’ after the 8 a.m. service and the ‘coffee hour’ following the 10 a.m. service bear witness to this sense of church family where all our lives are intertwined and, although we each walk our own path to Christ, we are better doing so traveling together. We are not just friendly; we are friends. We baptize and bury, cry and mourn, love and laugh together. And, you? You are joyously welcomed to celebrate with us!

2. Clear Path of Discipleship. Rating: 5

A healthy parish has a path of discipleship for members of all ages and stages of life. This discipleship path is clearly articulated, has multiple on-ramps, and provides growth opportunities for all to engage in formation and ministries.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Christ Church was vibrant and alive. We supplemented our Rite I and Rite II Sunday services with Thursday evening Eucharist, weekday Bible or book studies, and an all-ages Friday Night Sunday School that became a model for the diocese. The opportunity to serve as a Lay Eucharistic Minister, Lector or Acolyte was expanded. The Altar Guild grew and the Choir flourished. There were Youth Group fundraisers, parish workdays and yard sales, and many festivals, all of which proclaimed the image of Christ Church in the community.

During the lockdown, we were fortunate that our 10 a.m. service had already been streaming online and attracted an audience well beyond our parish walls. Following the online service, via Zoom, parishioners gathered for our popular after-church ‘coffee hour,’ glad to see one another, if only through a video screen. Similarly, through Zoom, Bible and book studies seamlessly continued, and additionally, noon-time morning prayer instituted.

While we do have many paths of discipleship to pursue, there is no guidance to point people in a particular direction. This will be addressed. Nevertheless, there are many opportunities for anyone to participate in the life and ministry of Christ Church as they feel called. And, as earnestly strive to emerge from the pandemic, we also find our parishioners eager to resume their participation in our many church activities.

3. Faithful Financial Practices: Rating: 8

A healthy parish utilizes financial best practices such as transparency, on-time reporting to the diocese, and forecasting sustainable budgeting. Finances are a faithful conversation, understood as Christian stewardship and formation.

Christ Church has been an active parish for more than 375 years and financially successful during that period. We've been blessed with talented financial leaders and advisors who have been skilled stewards of the parish finances and endowment. They have been adept at budgeting so that the Church has been able to allocate its funds on a realistic basis.

While we experienced some financial strain during the Covid period, the Church stayed committed to maintaining its solid financial footing. Covid eliminated in person services for over a year with a consequent decline in revenues and in the number of members making a pledge. Responding to that pressure, the core of the membership has stepped forward with increased commitment so that income is currently running ahead of budget. Further, we have not had to use the endowment funds to support general operations. Because of the efforts of the financial advisor, the Endowment Trustees and the Finance Committee, the endowment funds have shown good growth so that they total approximately \$920,000 as of July 31, 2021. That total is approximately double the amount seen in 2010, even after some withdrawals in the period.

The membership stays well informed of the Church's financial state through a full report at the annual meeting. The Vestry receives updates at each of their monthly meetings. When administration is restored to post-Covid, the Church will resume a regular newsletter and probably include summary financial information on a quarterly basis.

4. Inspiring & Capable Leadership. Rating: 8

A healthy parish invests in continuing education, training, and rest for its lay and ordained leaders, who are nurtured, valued and appreciated.

Christ Church has historically supported and invested in continuing education and training opportunities as those opportunities presented themselves and/or were requested by laity and ordained alike.

Despite the challenging transition out of the pandemic coupled with the recent departure of our rector, Christ Church has discovered a new depth of lay leadership through previously unknown skills and talents of parishioners who have stepped forward to assist at all levels of Christ Church administration and management.

In lieu of an interim priest, lay people are regularly and capably handling service and administration related tasks, providing an easy adaptation for visiting supply priests and our church family. We are blessed that our Vestry and Lay leaders have been able to establish a sense of continuity and comfort in our parish life. Nevertheless, without a priest, there remains a sense that the parish is not quite balanced, not quite whole.

5. Welcoming & Connecting Ministries. Rating: 6

A healthy parish is intentional and strategic about welcoming guests; it is prepared to invite and provide next step connections. Our church family is a place to belong. Welcoming ministries are dependent on the leadership of active lay members.

Christ Church is a family warmly welcoming all who come, newcomers and longtime parishioners alike. No guest goes unnoticed at Christ Church; we warmly welcome everyone.

The welcome begins with greeters at the door and continues after each service, especially at the 8 o'clock Breakfast Club and the post 10 o'clock service Social Hour. We offer a genuine welcome without any expectations or strategic goals beyond simply making everyone feel included and welcome. If guests return that's a bonus.

In the past, we have had priests who organized and participated in gatherings specifically designed to give formal recognition to those who are new to the church and invite their participation in our parish life. We hope to be able to resume this practice and intentionally engage membership in this vital outreach.

6. Uplifting & Inviting Worship. Rating: 5

A healthy parish gathers for worship that engages people with inspirational experiences and relevant teaching; it engages and offers full participation to all. While shaped by our Episcopal ethos, worship expresses the cultural and ethnic heritage of members and the surrounding community.

It is true that "providing [an] uplifting and inviting worship experience" is important. It is also true that the liturgy of the service resides primarily in the domain of the ordained clergy. The priest decides the form of service and sacramental rites for the various church seasons, on Sundays and Holy days.

In almost all ways, it is the priest that sets the tone for our services and who helps guide our congregation through teaching and instructional sessions. The few exceptions to this include Morning and Evening Prayer and particularly in Christ Church's very recent calendar, Sunday Morning Prayer when a supply priest is not available. On these Sundays the lay leadership of Christ Church has proven more than able and competent to provide a meaningful and joyful service.

Christ Church is very much focused on the Eucharist. Our previous Rector did a wonderful job providing rich and varied liturgies, often taking inspiration from other Anglican communities. Our services beckon all members of the community and provide opportunities for all ages and members to participate as Lay Eucharistic Ministers, acolytes, lectors, and greeters. The music at Christ Church is expansive, including gospel and jazz, and the contemplative meditation of quiet piano. The Altar Guild always 'sets the table' with floral elegance. And, when the prayers and singing conclude, the congregation gathers to bond together as families and friends in Christ.

We are searching for a priest with a similar liturgical and musical outlook, who will encourage and instruct us, and who embraces the eager, participatory nature of our congregation.

7. Blessing Our Community. Rating: 8

A healthy parish advocates for and partners with the local community and other organizations. This engagement focuses on the welfare of our neighbors and justice initiatives such as food scarcity, racial inequities, and immigration concerns. The parish is invested in the health and well-being of its local community.

Christ Church has a long history of outreach to our community, as well as the occasional foray into international aid. Parish members regularly contribute to local foodbanks, and revenues from Parish events often benefit local non-profits. Throughout each church year, we also provide contributions and aid to individuals, families, and groups when misfortune suddenly strikes. Our congregation is active and generous with their time, talent and treasure.

In an area bereft of meeting places, our Parish Hall provides an affordable, safe, local venue for community events, civic functions, funerals and family gatherings. The demand for hall use is such that Christ Church must schedule in-parish events well in advance or lose the date.

Predictably, the use of the Parish Hall has been curtailed by Covid-19 and the preference of many people to not be in a public, indoor setting. However, our outreach missions continue.