



**A REPORT TO TRINITY EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL, SAN JOSE,
ABOUT ITS INTERVIEWS ON
CONGREGATIONAL MISSION AND MINISTRY
from
The Congregational Discovery Reading Team
Center for Church Innovation**

How to Use this Report

This report gives the major findings of a self-study by members of the congregation about the character of worship, education, and general involvement of members, as well as the congregation's responses to community and congregational changes. It is based on 24 interviews, gathered in spring 2023, by several members of the congregation.

We believe these findings should be taken seriously even though they are based on information from a moderate number of interviews. Leaders should consider their own reflections and use common sense about the issues raised in this report, building on the strengths of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, San Jose, while addressing problem areas as opportunities for further growth as a congregation.

We believe that both the interviewers and those with whom they talked have the best interests of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, San Jose, at heart and gave information they hope will help the congregation.

Our recommendations are meant as questions, not to tell the congregation what to do. We believe that the insights discovered in these interviews can benefit your future. We also believe the congregation's leadership has the wisdom and ability to best address its own situation.

All of the people who took time to answer these interview questions, and most certainly the Listening Leaders who did so many splendid interviews, should be commended for their willingness to think seriously about your congregation's members' past and present experiences of worship, learning, change, and mission. Such careful and helpful work will be of dramatic value as we all consider what God is up to in the community and what God is calling Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, San Jose, to do here. As we seek to build on strengths, we remember that God equips us for every good work and that we lead by the grace of God's gifts to us.

Questions asked in all interviews:

1. Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in this congregation.
2. Describe an experience of profound worship you have had.
3. Who are we as a church? What is our identity? How would you describe the core, or essence, of Trinity Cathedral?
4. How would you describe our congregation to someone new? How would you tell them how they would be welcomed and nurtured here?
5. Tell us about how people participate in the life of our church. What might we do to get more people to participate more fully in the life of our church?
6. Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and other people were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled.
7. Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.
8. Tell us about your religious upbringing. What are two or three things you have liked about church in the past that we don't do now (Trinity, or other); how might we begin doing these things ourselves?

Question 1: Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in this congregation.

24 interviews, 34 remarks

(the number after a response indicates how many people mentioned it)

in worship/liturgy/sermons - 8

(one mentioned resemblance to Catholic mass, but without other Catholic restrictions)

in the tranquil atmosphere of our space/altar/sanctuary - 5

in the acknowledgement of Latino culture/Latino inclusion/Our Lady of Guadalupe - 4

in a diverse community sharing love and kindness/how we treat each other - 4

in our music, choir, bells - 3 (one mentioned especially the Sanctus before communion)

in social events - 3 (potlucks, parties, winery, celebrations)

mentioned once each (7): the Dean's welcome, prayers for missing people, faith stories, in feeling supported through personal difficulty, moving experiences of caring for others, feeding the homeless, [one person mentioned tension between the Anglo and Latino community]

recommended questions to consider:

1. People who attend Trinity come from different cultures and backgrounds. Their cultures influence how they think about God. How can we better understand and be sensitive to those differences? What does sensitivity to those assumptions imply for Trinity's future?
2. Will Trinity's future ideal be to blend musical styles within each service, to offer distinct styles and flavors at different service times, or some other ideal regarding multicultural music expressions?
3. Responses allude to the beauty and tranquility of the space (in response to this and other questions). How is Trinity's sense of this space evolving? What is implied for the future as you consider how to best appreciate and use this worship space?
4. Responses include a sense of sacredness in both encounters with other people and divine encounters. Worship changes have been implied by COVID, a changing context, and in Trinity's changing makeup. Who is responsible to plan worship that maximizes both - a sense of the sacred in encounters with others and in divine encounters?

Question 2: Describe an experience of profound worship you have had.

24 interviews, 29 remarks

when sensing profound community with others/oneness/loss of self - 4

special seasonal worship (like Holy Week) - 4

sensing deep peace/sometimes alone in the sanctuary - 3

feeling strength through prayer or Scripture at times of tragedy - 3

communion/being welcomed to open communion - 3

receiving special blessings with water or oil - 2

special rituals - baptism, procession - 2

mentioned once each (8): visiting the bishop's ranch, in personal encounter with the Dean, in music, special prayer meetings around tragic events like 9/11, when the celebrant bows during Sanctus (deeply reverential), past Guadalupean festivities, blessing others (Ashes to Go), feeling called by God to this church

recommended questions to consider:

1. Responses to this question are very diverse and based on individual experience. Is there any key event that you consider the most likely future highlight of the church year for the diverse people of Trinity?
2. If experiences become profound when individual narrative intersects with congregational narrative, then how are both going to be nurtured within the emerging liturgical forms? In what ways might the laity be directly involved in planning and choreographing worship so as to assure the right blend?
3. Something about the role of rituals and symbols is changing quickly at Trinity at the same time that there is a familiar permanence to aspects of the worship service. Who is attending to that evolution, and how do they bring an intentionality to that evolution?

Question 3: Who are we as a church? What is our identity? How would you describe the core, or essence, of Trinity Cathedral?

24 interviews, 43 remarks

committed to acceptance/inclusion/multiculturalism - 8

traditional, upper middle class, older, life-long Episcopalians - 6

notable shift in identity/very different from past/new identity still emerging - 5

beacon/lighthouse for downtown from civic leaders to unhoused - 5

experiencing people-hood, unity, trust, respect - 5

diverse but disjointed/only connecting superficially - 3

becoming a flagship church for how to bridge between secularism and Christian religious nationalism that divides our society - 2

external public identity in our tower and bells - 2

mentioned once each (2): adult-focused/less child-focused, identity shifted positively in past merger with St. Marks

mentioned once each with sense of negative identity (5): the older Episcopalians (bulk of Trinity) are not friendly, people choose suburban churches over Trinity, children should learn to sit in worship instead of going to Sunday School, Trinity has forgotten its older people, wish Spanish mass got out earlier

recommended questions to consider:

1. The common theme of responses is a significant change of identity/emergence/a future quite different from the past (and the mixed feelings that accompany it). How do the emerging strands intertwine - is there a common thread between the stalwarts and the typical newcomers to Trinity?
2. As some people exit Trinity, is the sense that this clears the way for change to continue? (Are those leaving the ones who resist change?) How does Trinity deal with the tension around losing the resources of those who may be exiting?
3. What shapes a shared understanding of the emerging identity? How do you engage a large cross-segment of Trinity in dialog processes steeped in positive relationships that deepen trust and lay a foundation for future collaboration?

Question 4: How would you describe our congregation to someone new? How would you tell them how they would be welcomed and nurtured here?

24 interviews, 43 remarks

universal welcome/place at God's table for all/warm open embrace - 13

engage them in tasks/ministries/action groups - 4

speak to them - 3

meet with the Dean/meet staff - 3

share my own experiences - 2

coffee hour - 2

sermons - 2

worship - 2

choir - 2

mentioned once each (8): beautiful facility welcomes people, passing the peace, assisting with prayer book, blessings, prayers of the people, action group, we nurture by getting to know, by our three pillars - welcome, open-minded, honoring Scripture

mentioned once each comments (2): the new people need to take initiative, I've heard that the Spanish service is more welcoming than English

recommended questions to consider:

1. Readers observe a strong verbalized commitment to radical inclusion juxtaposed with criticisms about failure to behave in inclusive ways. How can you best explore this dissonance and anticipate forging consistently inclusive behavior in the future?
2. Individuals may experience inclusion without being challenged or stimulated toward personal growth and faith development. In what ways are interactive/interpersonal processes becoming essential to faith formation in Trinity's emerging culture? How will staff and lay leaders intentionally capitalize on the human side/touch/interaction so as to foster a sense of inclusion, nurture faith, and stimulate personal growth of all future participants? Are there program-based nurture efforts that should be abandoned?
3. How does Trinity's location enhance/detract from the relational aspect of congregational nurture?

Question 5: Tell us about how people participate in the life of our church. What might we do to get more people to participate more fully in the life of our church?

24 interviews, 48 remarks

How people participate (21):

volunteer roles - 10 (readers, ushers, crucifer, teams, V & T, vestry, acolytes, finance)

outreaches - 5

choir - 3

mentioned once each (3): family feeling, social events, following traditions

Suggestions to get more people to participate more fully (23):

resume in-person Bible study class - 2 (Zoom inhibits interpersonal relationships)

questionnaire about interests/personal gifts survey - 2

mentioned once each (19): workshops about being Episcopalian, tell personal stories about what volunteering in the church has meant to me, remove barriers for Spanish speakers, need more signs/visibility, need more visible and inviting kids programming, need more Eucharistic Visitors so simplify the screening and training requirements, need to prearrange Seder clean-up volunteers as a new way to engage people, decentralize and more fully empower volunteers, directly ask people for specific roles, publicize our welcome more, do more creative promotion, assure more visibility for Guadalupe, be transparent about needs, build connections with SJSU students and outreaches, locate and contact past attenders, reinstate meal after Spanish service, make Spanish service earlier, give Spanish participants a full voice in decisions, and utilize retirees more fully

Grief points mentioned (4): sad about loss of things like choir dinners, feel limited due to family obligations (2), need to welcome more in actions instead of just words

recommended questions to consider:

1. Readers note lack of consensus about where to go from here. Strong individual opinions emerged with few of them widely shared. The strongest way of being included is doing things that help keep Trinity Cathedral afloat leaving little energy for doing things that announce how Trinity is a bearer of Good News. At this very moment in Trinity's life (not thinking of the past or imagining the future), where are the most notable indicators of Good News?
2. How does participation in volunteer roles help to deepen inclusion and stimulate personal growth?
3. Things that connected people to Trinity in the past have been lost. Leaders are struggling with how to fabricate connecting points for the future. To what extent, and in what ways, should or shouldn't that be primarily staff driven?

Question 6: Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and other people were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled.

24 interviews, 49 remarks

not applicable/not observed/no conflicts (7)

What about (26):

cultural differences and insensitivity - 9

(Anglo-Latino split, issues around Guadalupe, imbalance of power and numbers between whites and Latinos, feelings about bi-lingual events/language, conflict within Guadalupe)

former priest firing - 4

personal grievances - 4

lack of forthright, clear communication - 3

mentioned once each (6): breaches of confidentiality, political differences, clash of priorities, past differences with diocese (not current), resistance to change, authorization (if you agree to do something, do it, then it gets criticized as if you didn't have the right to carry it out)

How handled (16):

gossip, triangulation, passive aggression, and non-direct communication - 3

leave the church - 3

grumble and gripe - 3

talk it out/discuss openly - 3

ignore the person or the problem - 2

mentioned once each (2): use a moderator/third party, internalize our limitations as a moral failure/refuse to accept our limits

recommended questions to consider:

1. Does Trinity have (or, how might Trinity develop for the future) a conflict management protocol stating agreed values (this is what we believe about congregational conflict) and approaches (here's how we intend to manage conflict)?
2. How do you understand and describe the shifting balance of power within Trinity's congregational life, and how do you intentionally discuss it and what it implies for designing workflows and assigning decision-making and tasks?
3. As the emerging Trinity becomes more socioeconomically diverse, in what forums can you openly discuss how behaviors serve to reinforce socioeconomic divides and what specific behaviors straddle or overcome socioeconomic divides? How might Trinity unite a diverse population into a deep sense of oneness? How do the same principles apply to overcoming the secular/religious right cultural difference in our culture? (Or, how can Trinity best model being a microcosm of a new world it dreams of?)
4. In its life as a church family, how will Trinity create a counter-culture to the social media-induced culture that aggregates personal opinion into camps and, instead, shape a common understanding of identity, mission, directions, etc.?
5. What would most lend Trinity the sense of being mighty, vital, alive in the next five years of its congregational life? How is that similar to or different from its past marks or identifiers of prospering?

Question 7: Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.

24 interviews, xx remarks

Sources of Anxiety (28)

declining numbers/low participation - 11

loss of community/not like pre-pandemic - 3

lack of kids and generational outreach - 3

lack of financial support/potential financial inviability - 2

mentioned once each (9): abruptly changing rules, just wish I could be more active, an underlying unresolved issue, past abrupt priest change & what IF it happened again, loss of ethnic flavor in Guadalupe service, arbitrary relocation of Oacaca's shrine without negotiation, worry about congregational viability, outmoded forms of catechism, leadership directions

Sources of Hope (21)

new priest Filimon is relatable; Rev. Julia is a positive & resourceful people person - 5

seeing younger families and kids - 3

baptisms - 2

possibility of constructive change - 2

our tenacity/ways we've survived in the past - 2

mentioned once each (7): Latino congregation, present positive lay and staff leadership, devoted people, Seder, new people, feeling personal guidance happening here, just experiencing Trinity

recommended questions to consider

1. As you review the entire report, in what ways are the sources of hope aligned with the answers to the previous questions? In what ways are the stated hopes disconnected from the present reality as described by the congregational interviews?
2. What symbolizes the hope for the future? How might the church discover symbolic ways to message about its future? How can Trinity forge cohesion through symbols and rituals? How is that qualitatively different from promotional messaging or advertising?
3. How do you imagine fostering hope and deepening engagement in non-programmatic ways? (meaning NOT associated with age-related programming, educational programming, social programming as may have been the pattern in the past)

Question 8: Tell us about your religious upbringing. What are two or three things you have liked about church in the past that we don't do now (Trinity, or other); how might we begin doing these things ourselves?

24 interviews, 36 remarks

comments about eclectic past and finding a true home at Trinity - 7

miss celebrating the festivals and Latino traditions (Virgin's Christmas, posada) - 6

miss the variety of events we've discontinued - 5

miss the early service/wish we would make the effort to have it - 4

miss seeing youth - 3

miss strong congregational singing - 2

miss having opportunities to do things together - 2

mentioned once each (7): wish we would engage more people in visiting the sick, encourage parents to instill faith in their children, have non-religious events to relate to the community, offer community connections like blessing of the firefighters, omit the children's sermon, offer a class to strengthen hymn singing, have communication forums for discussion

recommended questions to consider:

1. As Trinity deals with strong individual opinions, how does the church shape and weave those individual opinions into shared understandings? What processes of interaction shift it from "this I believe or want" into "this WE believe, want, imagine?"
2. How is Trinity presently discovering ways that its emerging strands of diversity add timbre, grain, character and become strength here at Trinity while the same differences serve to divide people in other contexts? How is Trinity not only thinking differently but actually behaving differently?
3. Readers observe that responses tend to project responsibility onto someone else. How can an owned/shared sense of WE come to permeate Trinity's future?
4. For Episcopalians, what shapes a sense of being a covenant community? What does it mean to have a shared community of faith life together in a church as members of a religious order might? Do you notice new ways in which that quality of shared life is presently emerging within Trinity?