

Responses to OTM Narrative Questions

1. Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry which you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

During a recent Christ Church meeting, parishioners mentioned finding fulfillment and success in several seminal activities that can be summarized under the categories of resilience and outreach to the broader community. Our resilience during the Covid-19 epidemic was achieved by adapting to the dual needs of maintaining public health and safety while upholding our traditional practice of faith. Father Bill, his wife Kate and numerous individual parishioners were exemplary in their service and ministry through that difficult time, keeping us a functioning parish. Three annual parades pass by the church. We offer complimentary food and drinks (and restroom facilities) to parade goers giving material proof that the "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You." Twice Christ Church has hosted Bach-toberfest. This yearly event brings together church organists to play their favorite hymns, offering members of Indiana's Christian denominations an opportunity to sing together.

2. Describe your liturgical style & practice. If your community provides more than one type of worship service, please describe all.

Ordinarily, we have two traditional liturgical Sunday services, 8 a.m. (spoken) and 10:30 a.m. (spoken with music) that are usually Eucharists. The 8 a.m. service is sometimes Rite 1, and the 10:30 has been Rite II, except during Lent. Recently, during our transition our lay ministers have offered Morning Prayer when a priest is not available. As for our style of worship, the consensus is that Christ Church is "middle church," *via media*, but open to new perspectives on the practice of worship, within reason. We have several joint services with Zion Lutheran.

3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

Christ Episcopal is blessed to have so many who have given freely to maintain the ministries of the parish. We have a permanent organist who extends and enhances the music ministry. We have a small pickup choir that sings on special days. We have a dedicated altar guild, a video tech who maintains the streaming of the Sunday service, and parishioners who serve as acolytes, ushers, and coffee hour hosts. Our Lay Eucharistic ministers are also certified as

Lay Eucharistic Visitors. We have members who are good with numbers and budgets and watch over the financial side of the church so that faith necessities can be supported with resources. We have a working relationship with a retired Lutheran minister, Pastor Arlene Schweitzer, who currently serves as our Pastoral Associate. She leads Oremus, an interdenominational prayer group that includes Episcopal, Catholic, and other Protestant members. Oremus meets weekly.

4. As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

Christ Episcopal maintains a prayer list and has dedicated parishioners who are lay visitors. During the Covid shutdown, the Church began livestreaming the 10:30 service to preserve worship through the pandemic, but in the post-pandemic, livestreaming and recording on Facebook have allowed parishioners who are ill or in remote areas to participate spiritually. Our weekly hospitality hours create an opportunity for conversation and shared food and have resulted in a special closeness among us. Likewise, our community room has hosted many post funeral lunches over the years for the families and friends of deceased parishioners. Adult forum sessions held between services have explored a number of topics on spirituality and examined substantive books on the subject. A recent study was "The Book of Common Prayer". Our Thursday Oremus Prayer group, instituted ten years ago, has as its focus intercessional prayer, while its spring and fall retreats offer opportunities to share the Eucharist and to enjoy our ongoing fellowship.

5. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical region.

We participate in the Diocese of Pittsburgh by sending delegates to the conventions. Beyond that, Christ Church Indiana has a good relationship with the local Lutheran church and combines services with them on several occasions during the year. Our parish annually participates in the Salvation Army's Angel Tree program, providing Christmas gifts and food to needy children in Indiana County. We contribute money monthly to the only homeless shelter in the county.

6. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

Before the pandemic we annually prepared and served a meal at Shepherd's Heart in Pittsburgh. Shepherd's Heart houses 14 to 15 homeless veterans and ministers to people with addictions. We are resurrecting our Missions Committee as we recover from the post-pandemic passing of a key parishioner in that area and the necessary withdrawal of some of our most satisfying projects during the pandemic. The revived Mission Committee will be exploring possibilities for us to engage outside our immediate worshipping community.

7. Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

Marissa Bruno and Father Bill Geiger arranged for Christ Church to extend its music ministry in several ways. In conjunction with Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Organ Scholarship Committee, Christ Church hosted events that brought interdenominational organists and some of their congregants from the area for a spiritually uplifting experience for attendees. Christ Church hosted a service of Evensong conducted by the IUP choir. Marissa may be contacted by calling or emailing the church office. Phone – 724-465-6129. Email office@christchurchipa.org.

8. How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the future?

We are streaming the 10:30 service and saving it on Facebook for those who cannot attend synchronously. To broaden our online presence, we are developing our website to be more accessible and information rich. As a smaller church, our physical plant is underutilized. We are considering a number of projects to make our already attractive church building more utilitarian with the potential of hosting community groups and events. Examples include installing a chair lift to make our downstairs more accessible, adding benches to our memorial garden, and revitalizing our kitchens. Also, as the size of our church makes it difficult to maintain a full-time priest, we are responding to this by strengthening our sense of ownership/engagement, organizing a number of congregant-led committees (e.g. ministry, facilities, mission, hospitality), each with a designated liaison to the vestry.

9. What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?

If stewardship is giving of “time, talent and treasure,” Christ Church is an example of allocation of responsibility to maintain our material support to advance the teachings of Jesus. Some parishioners give seriously of their time and personal effort. They are hands-on stewards who allow the parish to continue by their many acts of sacrifice to make the Parish a functional tool in Christian practice. Parishioners have provided second mile giving beyond their pledges and regular giving when asked to support important projects such as a new organ, a new roof, or carpeting. Christ Church has been blessed with faithful financial support and able volunteers that keep our small but mighty congregation moving forward.

10. What is your worshipping community’s experience of conflict? And how have you addressed it?

We have not had much experience with serious conflict. We accept the fact that the Episcopal Church is not a place where everyone must agree with each other, except that we share a common agreement to follow the teaching of Christ to the best of our knowledge and ability. When disagreements arise, parishioners listen to each other in a spirit of mutual respect.

11. What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? And what did you learn?

Much change was required in finding appropriate responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, and Christ Church adapted to the challenge by modifying modes of worship and ways of administering the Eucharist to balance the needs of a complex parish. Secure in our core Christian values, we did not fight about the changes. Rather, we focused on pragmatic responses while preserving our primary mission to love God and regard the interest of our neighbor. We learned that Christ Church parish, though small in numbers, is cohesive in a crisis.