

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

Discernment Survey Summer 2024

Introduction

A core step in our diocese-directed discernment process was to construct a St. Mary's parish profile that will be available to prospective candidates as part of the job posting. This parish profile offers information to candidates about who we are, what we are being called to do in the coming years, and the specific skills and experience we would like to see in our new rector.

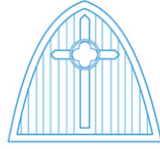
To inform our committee's work and our parish profile, we conducted a survey of the St. Mary's parish over the time period of late June - early July 2024. Over 10 percent of our parish participated, sharing thoughtful reflections, feedback, and hopes for the future. All of the survey submissions hold value and will factor into our discernment committee work ahead, and they have been embraced by the Vestry.

Key Themes: The people, the place, the worship, and the work are four aspects of what makes St. Mary's "St. Mary's", and they are tightly bound together by the shared values of hospitality, belonging, kindness, and the core conviction that we are all human, all imperfect, all yearning to be made whole by the grace of God.

Survey Insights

Who We Are

The portion of our St. Mary's parish that responded to the survey provided insights that our committee believes are largely representative of the full St. Mary's congregation. Our parish has a large and engaged population of members that have been a part of the St. Mary's community for decades (see chart 1). That complements our more recent membership growth in attracting young families to our community (chart 2). And while St. Mary's remains a church that attracts nearby neighborhood residents, there are many members of the parish that drive 10, 15, even 20+ minutes to engage in our worship services / ministries multiple times a month (chart 3 & 4).



ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Chart 1:

How long have you attended St. Mary's?

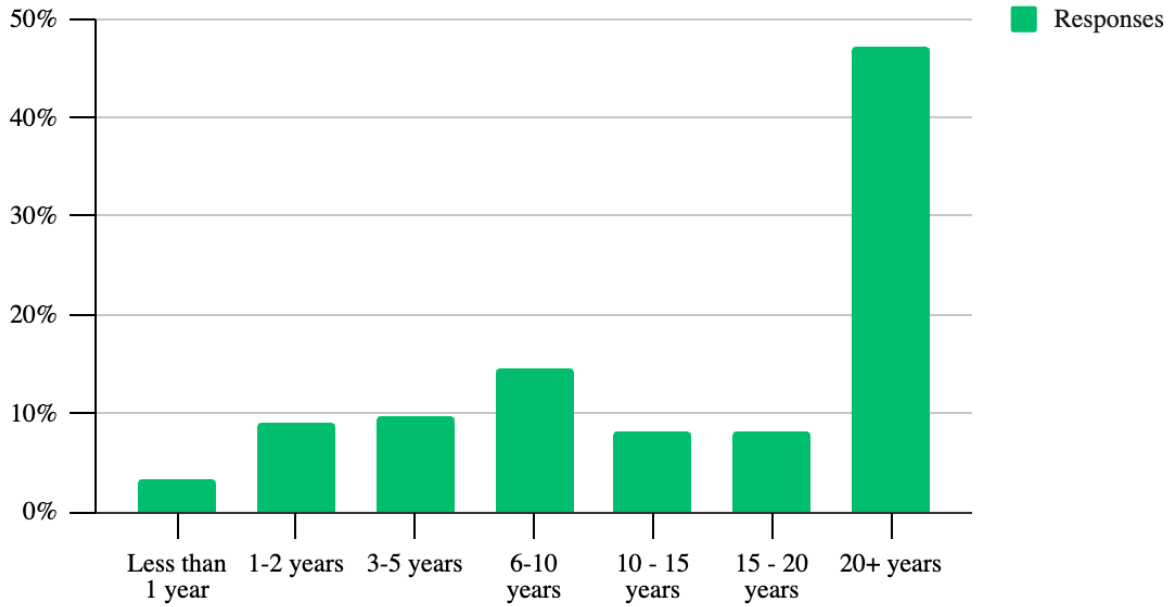
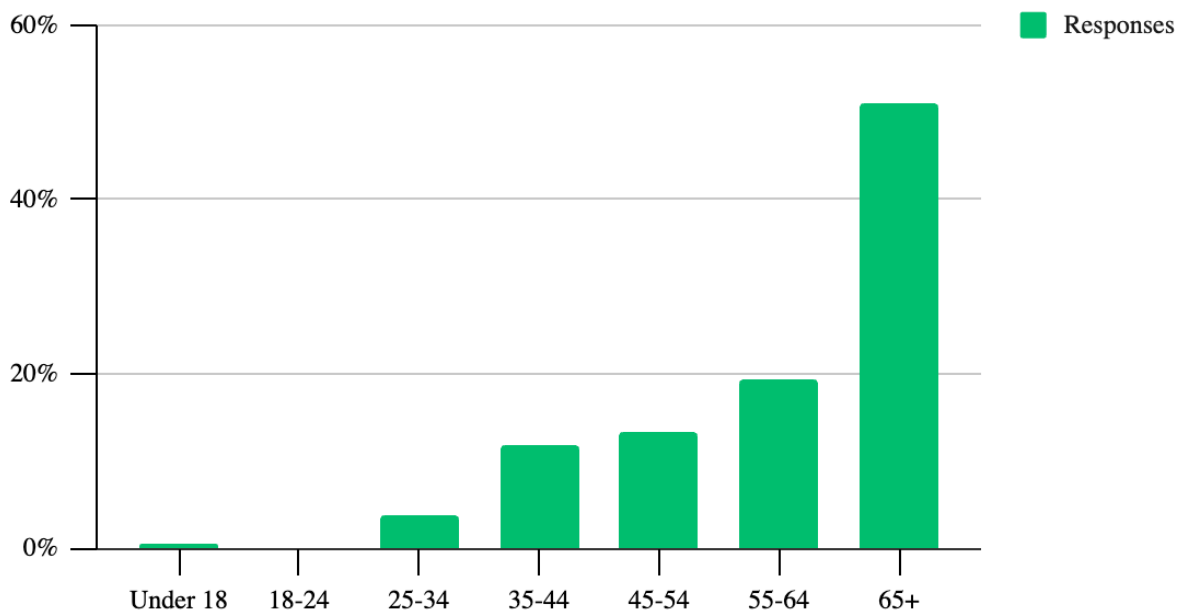


Chart 2:

What is your age group?



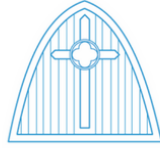


Chart 3:

What is the approximate distance you travel to come to St. Mary's?

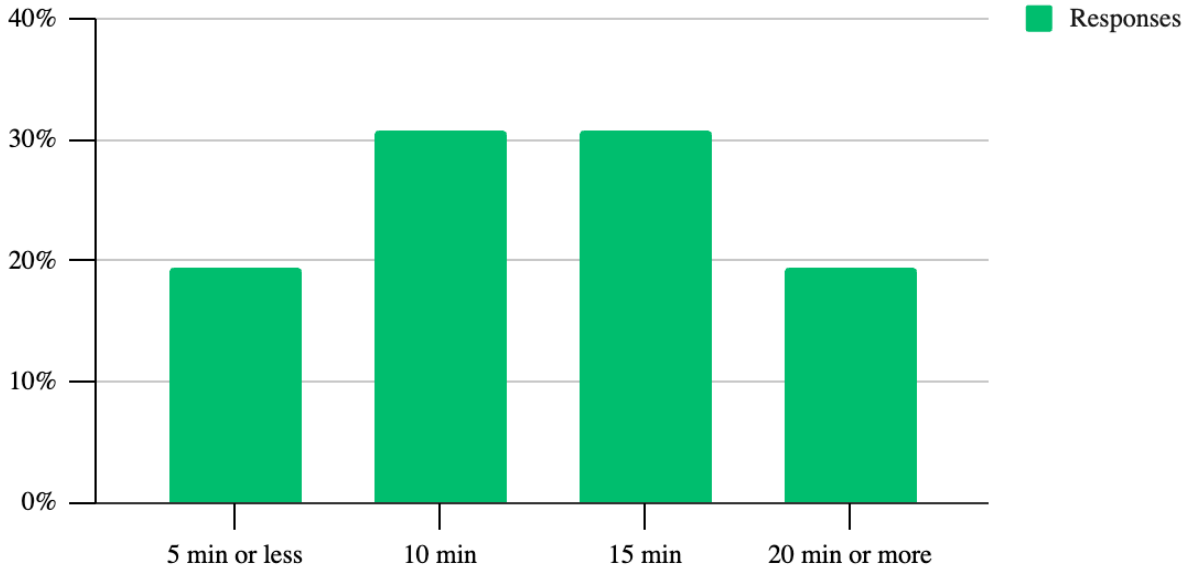
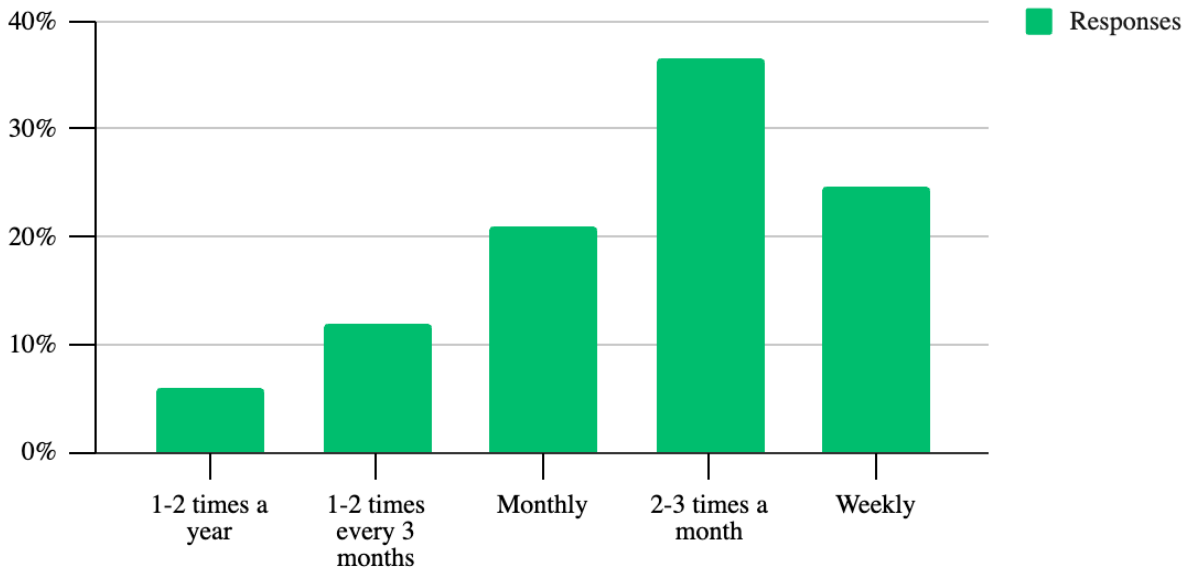
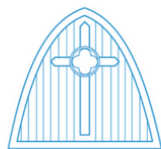


Chart 4:

On average, how frequently do you attend Sunday services at St. Mary's?





ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

We next asked our parishioners to share what attracted them to St. Mary's, as well as what keeps them coming back. It was heartwarming to see themes emerge of the community we've created, the church buildings and grounds, the comfortable style of worship, and the ministry work of St. Mary's.

Top Reasons We Came To St. Mary's

- Attracted to St. Mary's reputation and history
- Sampled several churches in the area and preferred St. Mary's
- Recommended by a friend
- My family attends
- Nearest Episcopal Church to my home
- The youth program (Sunday School and/or Youth Group)

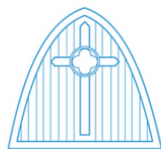
Top Reasons Why We Continue To Attend St. Mary's

- The St. Mary's community
- The clergy
- The style of worship
- Loyalty to St. Mary's
- Opportunities to serve the church, neighborhood and local community
- Fellowship and social activities
- Loyalty to the Episcopal Church
- Opportunities for spiritual growth (Bible study, adult forum, etc.)
- Children/youth activities
- I participate in one or more activities (choir, Sunday School, outreach, etc.)
- The music

We also sought to understand what is of importance to our parishioners in terms of the skills and qualities of a rector. The answers we received informed our committee work to craft a job posting and search process that reflects the needs and hopes of our parish.

Top Qualities Most Important To Us In A Sermon

- Touches directly on my everyday life
- Is spiritually moving and inspirational
- Is challenging and thought-provoking
- Makes me reflect on issues and events that go beyond my personal life and local community



ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

- Sets forth a clear faith position as a guide for making decisions and living a faithful life
- Is carefully composed and skillfully delivered
- Is biblically based and illustrated
- Is comforting and reassuring
- Obviously flows from the depth of the preacher's own personal faith and spiritual convictions
- Sets forth various sides of an issue without advocating one position as the only Christian position

Top Characteristics We Most Value In A Rector

- Personality
- Sense of Humor
- Preaching ability
- Accessibility
- Humility
- Heart of a Servant
- Apolitical approach
- Pastoral Care

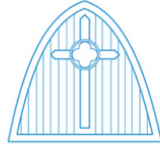
Top Skills & Expertise We Most Value In A Rector

- Relational pastor (focus on building church community)
- Collaborative with members and staff
- Decision making reflects flexibility and respect for members and other clergy
- Theologian knowledgeable in scripture
- Management and organization skills
- Gives special attention to Christian education for youth

Finally, we sought to capture both the challenges we anticipate and the hopes of our parishioners as we together look ahead. The anticipated challenges we heard helped us to align our job posting and search approach to focus on candidates with the appropriate talents and experience for what we expect to navigate in the future.

The Key Challenges We Anticipate For St. Mary's Over The Next Five Years

- Maintaining our strong sense of community as we grow
- Remaining apolitical and welcoming of all in an increasingly politicized world
- Financial stability and stewardship



ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

- Managing our growth well
- Attracting and retaining young families

A Selection Of The Hopes We Have For St. Mary's Over The Next Five Years

A sampling of the quotes shared by St. Mary's parishioners in our survey:

- "My hope for St. Mary's is that we continue to focus on what we at St. Mary's hold most dear: the People, The Place, the Worship and the Work."
- "My hope is that we work together to live into the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that the welcoming and JOYFUL spirit of the people who attend is never dampened!"
- "That it continues to be a church and community full of God's love."
- "My hope for St. Mary's in the future is not necessarily growth in numbers but growth in a vital spirit and a true sense of community. A place where children as well as adults of all ages feel a closeness to God and each other. A place where the joys of fellowship, stewardship and outreach are experienced and encouraged by all. Also a place where the staff and clergy feel appreciated and inspired to help the congregation feel God's goodness and grace."

The hopes and dreams of our parishioners grounded our work in God's love and grace, reinforcing the specialness of what is and always will be St. Mary's.

~~~