

WORSHIP IN COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO QUESTIONS

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

We are proudest of our congregation's ability to draw together and care for each other in the absence of an interim or full time rector. We have suffered the loss of several congregants, and our worship leaders have coordinated our efforts to support the grieving families. At the same time, our Loaves and Fishes ministry continues to provide hundreds of meals monthly to the needy, and enriches the devotion and purpose of all who participate. Equally, we have begun several initiatives which promise to recruit more young families with children, including our updated Sunday School program. During this time, when we lack a rector, we have reflected on the state of our congregation, prayerfully studying our dynamics and health. We are blessed to be able to say that Christ Episcopal Church is a strong, self-sufficient community of believers, and we are eager to meet whoever God sends to us.

2. How are you preparing yourselves for the church of the future?

Several projects at our church will foster a strong, spiritual future. Our finances have been given a stable foundation. By the efforts of our vestry members, we have begun intensive repairs to our properties. The renovation of our rectory, creating a beautiful home for a future rector, represents only the most significant of these projects.

Additionally, we have entirely redesigned our Sunday School program. Dedicated parents run our Sunday School, and they have adjusted the schedule of programs and lesson to accommodate the often hectic lifestyle of modern families. These programs, including boat races at the Smith River and movie nights, have drawn families from outside our church, and encourage a new generation of believers. Between our prudent care for our resources, and our efforts at growing a multi-generational congregation, we are poised to succeed as a church in the twenty-first century.

3. Provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.

Our lay leaders must continue to show, by word and example, dedication, enthusiasm and joy in worship. Our lay ministry must be ready to be led when our new rector arrives. Our leadership, including the vestry, must be creative and flexible, willing to work with our new rector.

Our future rector, whoever she or he may be, will need many skills. Enthusiasm and joy in worship are essential, as we hope to build our congregation and thrive for another generation. Compassion, love, and care for everyone will help this new rector build connections with our congregation, and encourage our further devotion. Tolerance, and a willingness to listen, will help maintain our congregation's respect for everyone's opinion, no matter how different it might be. Especially important will be the ability to communicate effectively with all members of the congregation.

4. Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship services provided by your community.

Our liturgical style is traditional. We hold two services on Sunday morning; at 8:00 am, we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, Rite One, and at 10:30 a.m., a Rite Two service. We have experimented with contemporary music and style of worship, and it has been well received. Contemporary services are usually held once every quarter. Our worship tradition for Advent tends to be more joyful and preparatory than penitent. Our tradition for Easter is deeply penitent during Holy Week, and an exuberantly joyful Easter Day.

5. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

Our church has adapted to the changes in our congregation by incorporating ever more members into worship. While many churches have aging populations and decline into apathy, we have a still-vigorous congregation that actively participates and volunteers. We have lay readers participate in every service for the reading of lessons, psalms, and prayers of the people. In the absence of an interim or a full-time rector, on those occasions when we do not have supply priests, we have lay persons lead morning prayer. We have a dedicated group of acolytes and chalice bearers, and an Altar Guild which decorates our church for every service. To the extent this question addresses ministry other than worship, there are very few people in our church who do not participate in one or more of our various ministries including mission, outreach, Christian education, pastoral care – in short, all phases of church life.

6. As a worshiping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional, and physical well being?

Our community is especially adept at caring for those who suffer in our congregation. While regular worship, Christian education, and participation in the many ministries of the church help the most able of our flock, there are many special services that we provide, routinely, which make our church extraordinary. The Bereavement Committee, with many other volunteers, brings food, offers support and condolence, and organizes the complicated funeral service. For those members who are unable to attend church, we provide home visits, including administration of the Eucharist, and prayerful conversation. We also offer healing services routinely, after regular Sunday service. As many of our members grow older, these services have become essential, and demonstrate our commitment to each other.

Additionally, we also host a variety of special events, including a well-attended gala dinner, called Fall Flavors. Every Sunday we have fellowship between our two services, as well as Book Clubs, Men's and Women's Clubs, and other casual gatherings. We hope to develop events of this sort, to encourage fellowship and bonding between our congregants.

7. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshiping community?

Our Loaves and Fishes ministry, a regular monthly dinner, provides an opportunity to feed less fortunate people in our community. We open our church to them, providing them with comfort

and support, and invite them to our Sunday services. Our church also hosts other community dinners throughout the year, especially at holidays, which are very well-sponsored and well-attended. Every Sunday we offer up prayers and support for those not only in our church but in the community who face sorrow, need, or adversity.

On an institutional scale, we also substantially contribute to Grace Network. Grace Network is a local charitable organization, which collects contributions so that the needy can seek out a single source for help, rather than soliciting many different churches. We have also sponsored service trips, to communities in Appalachia and Costa Rica. Finally, our Mission Committee donates almost \$10,000 annually to nonprofit organizations, part of our mission to help support the local community.

8. Describe your worshiping community's involvement in either the wider church or geographic region.

The church has maintained a connection with the Diocese. Our participation in the youth programs offered by the Diocese have been especially fruitful, and have enriched the spirituality of our young congregants. Additionally, we have a sister church in England, All Saints Church in Keighley. We have hosted their priest, and have enjoyed our connection to this church. We hope that our new rector will help us to sustain an open, communicative relationship with the Diocese officers and our fellow churches.

9. Tell about a ministry that your worshiping community has initiated in the past five years.

Our church has started a Men's Club, a group for the male parishioners to listen to speakers, enjoy a meal, and share in fellowship. Prominent public figures and community leaders speak, providing insight on the issues that confront our area. Additionally, this is a self-sustaining ministry, which indicates the investment our male parishioners are willing to make, to keep this program active .

Another example of recent ministry is the Prayer in Ministry booth sponsored by the church at the last two Oktoberfests in downtown Martinsville. Our most recent priest suggested this, and it proved tremendously successful. Together with church members, he blessed and prayed with the passersby who came to the booth. Balloons were distributed to children and blessings and prayers were offered to all visitors. It opened our congregation up to a wonderfully positive interaction, and showed our community a more intimate face of our church. The high level of interest around this booth, and widespread discussion afterwards, suggest that it was quite successful.

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

Historically, our church's congregation was blessed with extreme prosperity. However, economic challenges in our community have left no family untouched. Now, rather than relying on a few fabulously wealthy families to support our needs, we are growing into a church where each

member contributes to meet the collective need. Most members donate money and service, and our vestry consistently supports the church. Vestry members personally place phone calls and write letters to encourage members to donate money or effort, and we have had a tremendous response. Many families increased their pledges since last year, and our fundraising dinners continue to provide a tremendous benefit. We remain a financially stable church, and rise to the occasion to meet special needs.

11. What is your worshiping community's experience of conflict? How have you addressed it?

Our church is not preoccupied by the debates that divide the church nationally and internationally. We have suffered no schism over issues such as the ordination of women and the blessing of same sex unions. Moreover, when a rector has tried to stridently revive these controversies, our congregation has balked. Roughly fifteen years ago, we called a rector, but quickly discovered that our views about tolerance and inclusiveness were inconsistent with his personal views. His leaving disappointed some; but caused no lasting conflict. As in any small church, with generations of families attending and a long history of worship, there are occasionally squabbles. These usually center around an issue specific to our community - whether to renovate the rectory, whether contemporary services are appropriate, or whether a chalice pours too much wine at communion. However, these disagreements do not rise to the significance of a quarrel, much less an intense clash. Despite some minor exchanges, we remain generally welcoming and inclusive.

12. What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? (When has it gone well and when it has gone poorly and what did you learn?)

We have learned that transparency is essential to productive change. Recently, we confronted dissension in our church over the renovation of the rectory. A two-story house from the 1940s, this home hosted several different rectors across the decades. However, the church began to use it as a rental property, and eventually the rectory fell into a state of semi-disrepair, requiring serious work. Some members, including those on vestry, argued vehemently in favor of tearing the building down. Others suggested that we renovate the rectory to attract a new family. A local architectural council judged that we could not tear it down, so we devoted our efforts to fully restoring the building. A vestry member who works in construction has devoted significant hours of time and skill to restoration, and members are volunteering to work on particular rooms in the house. At this point, the rectory is almost entirely remade. After Sunday services, a gathering was hosted in the rectory, and members were heard enthusing about the beauty of the restored house. It is a testament to our congregation's ability to coordinate our efforts, and our excitement to welcome a new rector into our fold.