

# Our Calling, Our Campus Report to the Parish



August 2021

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# Executive Summary

God has been calling the people of Christ Church to worship, serve, and celebrate together for almost 250 years. Today we are an anchor in Alexandria, a spiritual home, a center for outreach, and a steady reminder of God's presence in our community.

As the Covid-19 pandemic pushed us to pivot, Christ Church found new ways to meet God's call in service to one another and our neighbors. Throughout the challenges and opportunities of virtual church life, it was hard not to reflect on the words of the Rev. Carl Daw, sung in the hymn commissioned for our 240<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *Not the Building But the People*:

*Yet we know that long before us,  
Others worshiped in this place,  
Leaving us a hallowed mem'ry,  
Full of promise, full of grace.  
Though we cherish their example,  
We must live in our own day,  
Learning how to help our neighbor,  
Living what we sing and pray.<sup>1</sup>*

Emerging from the cocoon of 2020, we have a once in a generation opportunity to listen deeply for God's presence. We are being called in new directions and invited to continue to find creative ways to worship, serve, and grow together. This opportunity overlaps with the potential redesign of our campus as we prepare to remodel the parish halls in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Ross building.

The Our Calling, Our Campus team led a discernment process in the spring of 2021 that consisted of two rounds of small-group discussions via Zoom and two all-parish surveys. The focus of the first round of discussions and surveys was delving into what it is that makes Christ Church a vibrant worship community and where parishioners have experienced God in our community. The second round looked more deeply at where members of the parish feel God calling us today.

The love of and appreciation for Christ Church was readily apparent across the conversations. We find shared joy in worshiping together, celebrating with music, building a welcoming and caring community within our parish and doing the hard work beyond our walls of making the world a better place for all people. We choose to be defined as a vibrant, active parish.

Despite the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic, parishioners feel a deep connection to our community, which was evident in how Christ Church and the Outreach Committee responded to the increased needs of Alexandria. In fact, it was clear that many members feel closer to the parish today than they did pre-pandemic. For many in the parish, being pushed out of our traditional worship, outreach and activities and into new venues to face unknown challenges brought us together and made our connections richer. Many members found themselves able to participate in

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virtual committees and groups for the first time, without the barrier of traveling to Old Town keeping them from engaging.

Conversely, there were many who felt disconnected or unable to fully embrace the transition to virtual worship. Parishioners miss the opportunity for deep connection that is easier to facilitate with in-person interactions. Many commented on the presence of young families and intergenerational experiences as being important parts of our parish life and there was a recognition that the on-line experience is less suited to children's ministries. There is a huge pent-up demand to return to Shrinemont, Dinner Church, Sunday Breakfast and other community building events. Across the board, parishioners are excited to return to being together in-person, with varying degrees of concern for when and how that happens.

When asked to dream about what Christ Church can do as it enters its next 250 years, parishioners were almost unanimous in their enthusiasm for Christ Church's role as a center for our community. From locating a free clinic on campus to creating an entrepreneurial incubator for people of color, God is clearly calling Christ Church to engage directly in living out our mission through our campus. Ensuring that our space is as vibrant and reflective of the joy of Christ's love Monday through Saturday as it is on Sunday morning is clearly in our hearts and prayers.

The Our Calling, Our Campus project identified four clear next steps:

1. *Understanding Our Campus.* It has been almost 18 months since many parishioners last set foot on our campus. At the same time, the pandemic has shaped how we use our campus in our ministries. In conversation, it was clear that many parishioners do not have a clear picture of the campus as it exists and is used today.

In order to make an educated decision about the disposition of the Fowler House/Ross building and the remodeling of the two parish halls, we encourage the Vestry to arrange campus tours. We also strongly encourage all parishioners -whether you have been a 50+ year member or are new to the parish – to take advantage of the opportunity to tour the campus. Experiencing the layout, aging infrastructure, and current use of our campus first-hand is informative and essential to making informed decisions.

2. *Understanding Our Campus Finances.* Across the board, parishioners expressed confusion about the way the Fowler House/Ross building's finances affect our overall operating budget. They also requested more information about the capital expenses associated with maintaining or updating the Fowler House/Ross building, as well as some perspective on anticipated renovations to the parish halls. Understanding the financial impact of the Ross building on the broader parish is important to making clear, thoughtful decisions about the building's future.

We recommend that the Finance & Stewardship Committees jointly prepare educational sessions for the parish to clearly explain the effects of the current Ross building agreement on our finances, to describe the anticipated capital expenses to maintain the status quo, and to lay out the implications of assuming full use of the building (without associated revenues), continuing an agreement with Ross or a similar entity, or entering into a 99-year ground lease or sale of the property.

One positive finding of the survey was broad parish support for a capital campaign to address our campus's needs. The level of enthusiasm for a possible campaign was reassuring.

3. *Bringing Our Calling to Our Campus.* In our conversations and surveys, the parish expressed a clear call to use our campus as a place of service to the community. Ideas ranged from a Mengo-style free clinic to an affordable daycare center, from a community kitchen to a business incubator for people of color, and everything in between. We feel called to be God's hands and legs in service to our community.

As we look to renovate our campus, we must first identify what community, specifically, we feel called to serve and what that community's needs are. In what ways can Christ Church add value to the community? How can we avoid inflicting our best intentions on those we feel called to serve and instead meet real community needs?

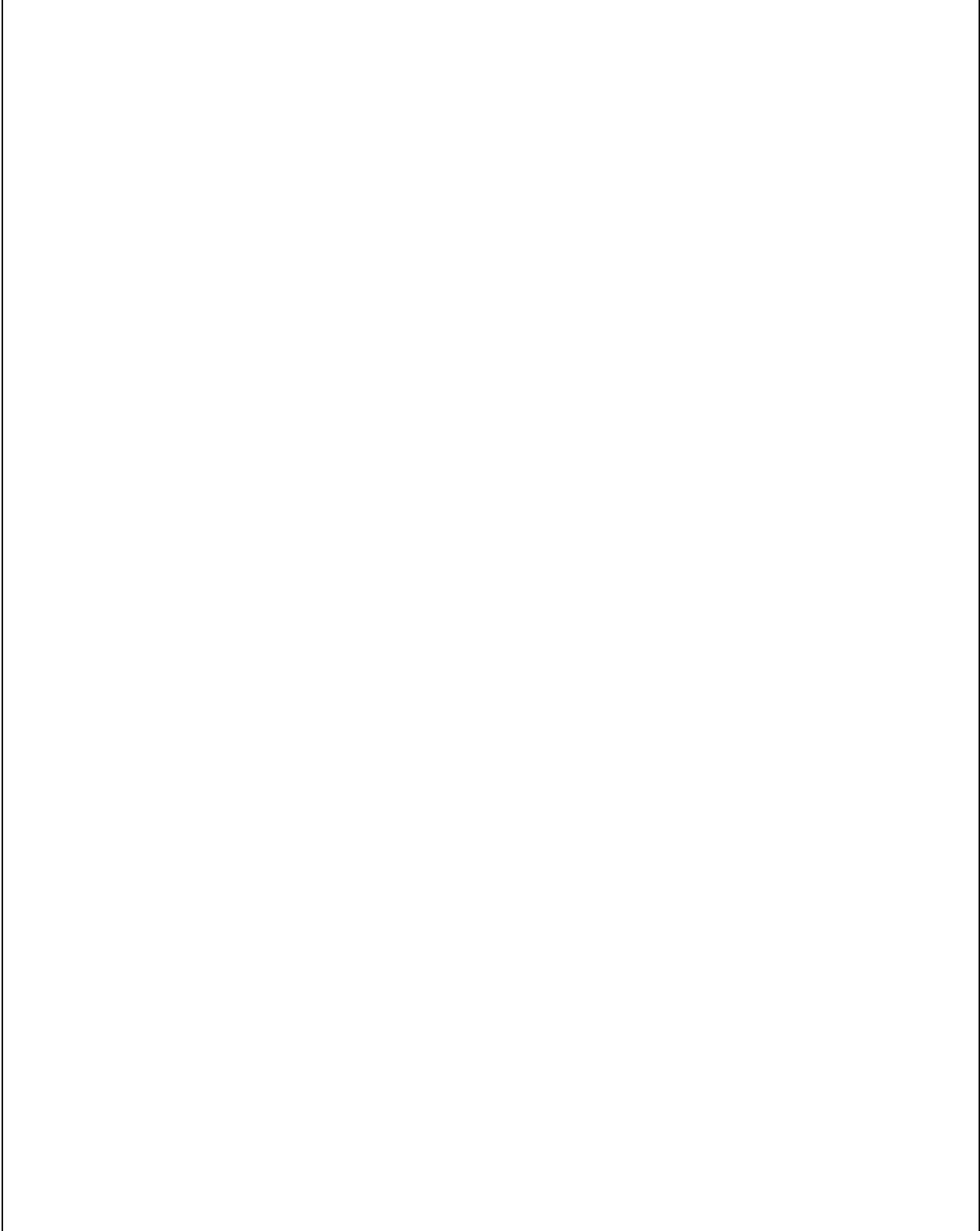
Additionally, we recommend that the entire campus be reviewed for how well it serves our calling. We should not limit our thinking about campus renovations to just the Ross building; the entire campus is available to serve our mission.

4. *Thoughtfully Blending Gathering Opportunities:* Operating virtually for over a year introduced us to new ways of staying connected and conducting our ministries. While Zoom was not a panacea for all – small group ministries/committees, which are a major part of our parish life, benefited particularly by the ability to meet on-line. Several parishioners expressed that they have newfound ability to engage in the work of the parish only because of online meetings, which enabled them to avoid commute time, parking issues, and family or work conflicts. Additionally, On-Line church and Zoom coffee hour proved to be a welcome resource for those who would have been unable to attend for reasons other than the pandemic (e.g., health issues or seasonal relocations).

Moving forward, parish leaders need to consider how best to incorporate the positive aspects of these tools as we plan for meetings, worship, and fellowship opportunities. This represents a marked shift in operating practice and deserves thoughtful consideration. To the extent we want to expand our capacity for online or hybrid worship and meetings, we should invest in the technology to support this new way of gathering. Flexible gathering and meeting formats may decrease the demand for meeting space on our campus, opening new opportunities for our campus to support God's call to Christ Church.

Attached to this report we have provided summaries of key findings from the focus groups and surveys. We encourage the parish to read and reflect on the information provided, and to pray for the wisdom of our parish leaders as they explore how we live into God's call moving into our next 250 years.

*Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



# Focus Group Findings



*In May & June of 2021, as our community was emerging from a year and a half in “pandemic-mode,” and readying to return to more normal activities, we undertook a series of small group conversations with parishioners. These conversations occurred in two parts, with the first session focused broadly on gaining a strategic perspective of what is important to us as a parish and the second part more focused on specific issues related to what we learned from the past year and a half of largely virtual worship & meetings and how we might best use our properties in support of our ministries and mission. Approximately one hundred parishioners participated in one or both segments. Below is a summary of what was learned from these conversations.*

## **PART I**

### **CLOSER TO GOD: MINISTRIES THAT CREATE ENERGY & BRING JOY**

What comes across overall in these conversations is the broad array of ministries and activities that create the fabric of our parish and bring forth energy and joy. Parishioners are passionately committed to “active involvement” in all aspects of our church life. Starting with worship – “liturgy brings me closer to God” and there is an appreciation for “enthusiastic” sermons. Music too is an important part of our church experience, whether as a member of the choir or a member of the congregation: “*I am moved by the presence of beautiful music.*” Many are deeply committed to mission and outreach activities, speaking of “getting out there and DOING in the community, the country and the world.”

Also important are the events (both large and small) that bring us together in community. The larger gatherings (Shrinemont, Dinner Church, Sunday Breakfast) are heralded for making us “a welcoming community,” by “pushing me beyond my usual circle of friends, and creating intergenerational opportunities that bring us together as a larger whole.” At the same time, smaller group ministries (bible study, covenant class, chancel chapter, 20s/30s group, history committee, vestry, Al-anon, book groups) allow us to form deeper connections spiritually and personally. Zoom coffee hour actually accomplished both – with the success of the random “breakout rooms.” With Zoom, “we have learned more about each other.”

The role we play in Alexandria as a leader in serving those in need – primarily (though by no means exclusively) through the Lazarus Program -- is an important part of what defines our parish. Many people participate in this community ministry and there is a sense that we don’t always step back to appreciate the whole of what we accomplish. “We have an outsized impact that doesn’t get celebrated internally enough.”

Our work in support of social justice is also of importance to parishioners. Our support and advocacy for the LGBTQ community is part of our identity. The Sacred Ground program “brings spirituality to intransigent national and local issues.” “We need to keep listening, engaging, discussing issues... [and] be more than just words.”

## **MEMORIES AND STORIES**

When parishioners talk about who we are as a parish and what we value, we talk about what we do and the ministries and organizations with which we are most directly engaged. Our memories are often centered around the “holy” moments – such as a worship service or sacramental celebration:

- The moment when everyone stands as we sing Emmanuel at Christmas,
- This year’s sunrise service, when we were able to be together in person,
- Christmas & Easter services and associated events (watching my daughter fix the star; feeling the music as we sing lessons & carols)
- The time when the clergy helped me to give my parent a beautiful death,
- Baptism of my children; ordination of my daughter; my confirmation
- Singing a funeral hymn chosen specially by Jason for my son
- My first welcome to the Church by a parishioner – “we are so glad you are here.”
- A time when one of our youth read a lesson – or played an instrument as part of the service
- “Knowing I was where I was supposed to be, at peace and connected, as I had the rare opportunity to sit alone in a pew, as my husband cared for our active children at home
- Watching clergy guide children through the loss of their beloved pet

Of course, some special memories do link to our engagement in church ministries

- Coming to the Church in the middle of the week and seeing all that we do for the community
- The pleasure of being a docent and understanding that Christ Church is a safe place for people of very different nationalities, religious & political views. “We help make a better world.”
- Gathering events: Shrinemont, Shepherding Groups, 20s/30s groups
- Participation in bible study or Education for Ministry
- Greeting visitors - as a docent, member of Stewards of the Dirt, or of the gift shop staff,
- Connecting with the children of Our Little Roses
- Participating in church leadership and planning initiatives

And some link to memorable events in our Parish or national history

- All Parish Vote on April 7, 1997 to acquire the Fowler House
- Bishop Tutu’s sermon
- Post 9/11 when clergy were available at all hours to provide solace

## HOPES & DREAMS

Broadly speaking, our hopes and dreams center around our continued development as a community of faith – focusing on how we can expand our horizons, grow & learn, and make life meaningful for ourselves and for others – at home and abroad. We see ourselves as a Church that exhibits courage and love, while staying rooted in a deep spiritual life. “Rev. Noelle challenges us to make greater strides – to stretch ourselves.”

We want to live into the phrase: All are Welcome Here. We are a church that has energy & enthusiasm. Our pews should be “bursting at the seams.” We want to remain a welcoming place for families and youth, for members of the LBGTQ communities. We want to continue our efforts to discuss hard subjects, including systemic racism and racial inequality and commit to understanding our own role - past, present and future. We want to become a more diverse congregation – by showing up as a parish that is welcoming and engaged in a way that is welcoming.

As we think about the worship experience, we want to be “a church that fearlessly proclaims the radical love of Christ.” We are looking for spiritual zeal *and* the liturgy is a major factor in our

appreciation of who we are as Episcopalians. A deep appreciation for music threads through our conversation – whether through participation in the choir or as witness to the music that surrounds us. “All worshipping together, singing and glorifying God.”

Mission and Outreach are important components of our identity as a parish. “We are a vibrant parish making a difference in the community” and “offering hope to the world, through our global reach.” As we consider how to make the best use of our facilities, many would like to see Christ Church as a community center in Alexandria – a center for caring. “Joy is where you get the community of caring.” As we move forward, there is a strong belief that Christ Church should work in *partnership* with the City of Alexandria and with other parishes as we explore how to best serve our community and our mission partners.

We are fortunate to have a strong team of clergy and staff to provide steady leadership across a broad array of ministries (worship, pastoral care, faith formation, music, youth programs, outreach & mission). At the same time, we have a broad array of lay leaders who add their talents and commitment to the mix. It is important to promote “an ethos of inclusion in all we do – demystifying the decision-making processes” and continuously inviting new people into positions of responsibility.

Christ Church is a beautiful church building steeped in history and a vibrant parish that “takes the best of its past and present and is hungry to move into the future.”

## **PART II**

### **WALK AROUND VIEW OF OUR CAMPUS**

Overwhelmingly, our campus conveys a sense of history – “we exude history” said one parishioner. In part, because of that history, we have the sense that we belong to the city of Alexandria, the commonwealth of Virginia and our nation. “This is a place that we share.” *But – that isn’t the important part of who we are.*

The activity that you see on our campus varies drastically based on when you are there. On Sundays we show up as a vibrant worship community. During the week, visitors are likely to hear many languages spoken as tourists visit, Alexandria’s foot travelers traverse the grounds, our Stewards of the Dirt community works its magic with the gardens and we welcome those we serve through Church ministries and & community programs (Lazarus, New Neighbors English Language Learner program, Al-Anon). The diversity of people in the churchyard is much broader during the week than on Sundays.

Many expressed how wonderful the outdoor services have been and how they hope that we can find a way to continue them. By having services outside, we may invite more people to come inside and join in parish worship.

Our grounds are beautiful, with well-tended gardens – bringing “joy & light” to all. Most see the campus as welcoming, with our open gates – and the banners that are placed on the fence. Several did share that the presence of the iron fence created an initial barrier to their willingness to enter – so the signs and banners do make a difference by clearly expressing our values and helping us appear “less stuffy.” Some shared their plans to have their remains interred in the churchyard, when the time comes.

When thinking about the larger campus, many commented on how little of it they have actually seen. Those without younger children may never have experienced the Fowler House spaces. Very few people have seen all that is available in the parish halls. Some people shared thoughts about the needs of families – ranging from how wonderful the Fowler House space is for Sunday school – to a concern that we are hiding the children in the basement.

We honor the past, but we are “focused on the present and the future.” “I think many people are surprised that we are not a museum – but a “thriving religious community.”

### **Challenges/Opportunities:**

- Honor our history, while staying focused on serving the parish and community in the present and the future
- Increase knowledge & utilization of all available spaces across the campus.
- Improve awareness of all that takes place on our campus during the week
- Strengthen our leadership role in Alexandria’s initiatives to help the underserved

### **POST PANDEMIC “REENTRY” CONSIDERATIONS**

#### *We Are More Than Our Buildings*

Church Online has been of enormous value and needs to continue. There was a keen appreciation for the extraordinary efforts that the clergy and staff undertook to create a meaningful worship experience. The videos, the choir productions, the incorporation of extraordinary guests – be they bishops, other priests, or representatives of our mission communities all contributed to make the virtual experience meaningful. In addition to the Sunday services, there has been a keen appreciation for the week-day Facebook Live services of Morning Prayer and Compline – where parishioners could also participate in leading worship.

While a few people expressed frustrations with Zoom fatigue – or took the opportunity to “attend” other online services (such as that offered by the National Cathedral), most valued the opportunity to continue to worship as a community through this time. Many want the option for Church Online to continue, sharing that it makes services available to those who may be out of town or incapacitated in some way, and can be used as a tool for evangelism.

As noted earlier, many particularly value the outdoor services and suggested that we do more outdoor events such as concerts or evensong.

There is pride in just how much the parish was able to accomplish with respect to missions and ministries. With the leadership of key staff, parishioners regrouped and found ways to support a hurting Alexandria community and to stay engaged with our overseas missions. Melanie Gray was “a force of nature” – building coalitions of people within and beyond the parish to serve the larger community. Several remarked on the success of her model of recruiting and empowering leaders.

There is also appreciation for all the ways the church leadership has reached out to connect individually, through phone calls and through listening sessions – such as the ones undertaken for Our Calling, Our Campus. It is a way to draw in more voices.

And... parishioners, first experiences back in Church after many months' absence were often "emotional." Being able to celebrate communion and participate fully in the rituals of our worship is deeply important.

### *Zoom!*

Setting aside Zoom fatigue, there is an almost universal desire to be able to continue to attend committee meetings using this platform. Not having to work around commuting and parking issues is a huge plus day and night. Some people shared that without Zoom they simply could not participate in Church committee work due to work/family responsibilities. Many felt the Zoom meetings were more convenient and more productive. One person observed – "I like the way that everyone in a zoom group gets a chance to talk." And "I really like being able to see everyone's faces." It worked for book groups, bible study, Sacred Ground, EFM, and even a virtual mission trip to Our Little Roses in Honduras.

Zoom Coffee hour was an enormous hit with those who attended. Those who did not participate were somewhat mystified by the comments of those who had. The random breakout rooms enabled people to connect with people they had seen in church or in the churchyard forever, but never formed a connection with, since we all seem to gravitate to people we already know.

Having said that, there is also a recognition that Zoom is not right for everything. Programs such as Stewards of the Dirt and the Lazarus ministry cannot be accomplished via Zoom. "We've learned that the fantasy of an all virtual world doesn't work." Different activities need different formats. And in many instances, there "is no substitute for active participation." One person framed it: "Virtual worship is to church as IV fluids are to food." And there is a sense that we cannot "build community as firmly without physical presence."

### *Fellowship & Community Building*

People want to return to social interaction – through the Sunday breakfasts or Dinner Church experiences and through Shrinemont. There was a recurring request to "bring back Shepherding Groups." Shepherding Groups were in place thirty years ago - with the parish divided up by zip-code/neighborhood, usually around 10-15 family units in each group. The groups met 3-4 times a year at each other's homes for pot-luck dinners. Deep friendships were created, cutting across generations and other committee/activity groupings.

One recurring refrain is the importance of the intergenerational experience at Church. This sentiment cuts across all age groups and communities of interest. This is an important part of the appreciation of Dinner Church, Sunday Breakfast, Shrinemont and other gatherings.

Additionally, many suggested strengthening our ties with other parishes and organizations across Alexandria. (including: Meade Memorial, Alfred Street Baptist, Temple Beth El, City of Alexandria, and nonprofits that serve the residents of Alexandria.)

### *Children & Families*

Families with young children were constantly making choices about how to engage their children with the Church. What came through these conversations was the value of flexibility and having

multiple options. There was a keen appreciation for Children's Chapel – but also a recognition that it is difficult, if not impossible, to manage both adult church and children's church. At the same time – having a virtual church option enabled attendance that is often hard in non-Covid times because of scheduling conflicts for the kids' activities. And parents of young children were especially appreciative of the services in the churchyard.

### *Technology*

The virtual experiences of church brought home the need for greatly improved online and web-based communications tools. Even as the pandemic subsides, the opportunity to use virtual tools more effectively grow. We need a serious upgrade to our capabilities and our web-based communications methods. We should think through what will be needed to support hybrid (virtual & in person) meetings/gatherings.

### **Challenges/Opportunities:**

- Even as we regather in person, seek to expand our use of virtual/web-based tools for worship and for meetings. Suggest creating a committee to make recommendations on what needs to be done and how to accomplish it.
- Multi-generational gatherings are greatly valued – be they large groups like Shrinemont and Dinner Church or Sunday Breakfast. Consider recreating something like the Shepherding Groups of old.
- Look for flexible ways that families & children can engage with parish life.
- Continue to build on Melanie Gray's model for engaging parishioners in mission & ministry.

## **CAMPUS ASPIRATIONS**

### *All Are Welcome Here*

We want our Church to be welcoming to all people. We want to be a congregation that reflects the diversity of our community and works with the city and other parishes (including predominantly Black churches) in our community to share in worship and bible study and to serve those in need.

### *Use our Facility Resources in Support of Missions & Ministries and the Needs of Alexandrians*

In large measure, we want to use our spaces in support of social or economic programs that would provide services to our community and “make the world a better place”

Ideas included:

- Community Center for Expanded Lazarus Program;
- Teen Center,
- Center for Racial Reconciliation,
- Community meeting space; expanded meeting space for programs such as Al Anon, Boy Scouts;
- Office/community center for Alexandria's non-profits, with individual office space and shared meeting rooms, event spaces, and an auditorium
- Pop Up Offices for small entrepreneurial business
- Affordable Housing for Seniors, transitional housing for adult men, visiting religious scholars, or whomever needs housing.

- Kitchen to cook meals for the homeless
- Food Pantry
- School (Head Start Program; pre-school) with co-located health services) or a music school
- Affordable Child Care
- Book store/tea house (e.g., Church of Our Savior).

At the same time, one parishioner cautioned: Putting together a community center is a “white fix-it thing.” Going on to say: we “need to LISTEN to see what the need is.” And another noted, that Alexandria isn’t just about Old Town – the faith community can help with the challenges in the West End.

When thinking about ideas that might also improve our church life, ideas included:

- A large auditorium
- A café
- Sunday School (for children) that is on the FIRST floor
- A museum where we can share our history and expanded gift shop
- “Parking, Parking, Parking!”

### **Making Better Use of Our Campus**

*Almost no-one has a clear sense of what space we actually have and how it is used today.*

One person shared that they had attended Christ Church for nine months before even realizing the Fowler House existed. Beyond the Meade Room, the Library & the Auditorium, most parishioners are unaware of the spaces available and how they are used. Those with children (or who are in the choir) have a working knowledge of the Fowler House – but others have never been there. Very few have visited the “basement” since Fowler House was opened.

With this lack of awareness, it becomes very difficult for people to understand whether we have too much space or not enough. There is agreement that we should think about all the ways our campus is used – and not just what happens on Sunday.

Additionally, as church leaders signal the potential for decreased available space when the property is redeveloped, there is a general sense that the space in the Parish House is not sufficient to create a welcoming Sunday School – or provide for English Language Learning.

#### *Shortcomings of the Existing Parish Halls*

As more use is made of the space available in the Parish Halls, there are some clear shortcomings that raise concerns, chiefly the lack of elevators and bathrooms. In general, our spaces are not at all well designed to accommodate individuals with mobility challenges. There is no restroom even close to the Church that is equipped to support diaper changes or wheelchairs. Additionally, there is concern that the church infrastructure will not support the level of technology desired for our gathering spaces. And – it was noted that most of the rooms are not identified in a way that it makes it possible to easily find them.

*The Churchyard and grounds are beautiful and welcoming*

Much credit is given to Stewards of the Dirt (SOD) for the work to keep the churchyard “an oasis of peace.” One suggestion was made to turn an “out of the way” corner into a vegetable garden so that fresh vegetables could be added to the food pantry.

### *Architecture & Design*

As we look forward to the potential redevelopment of the property housing Fowler House/Ross Building several suggestions were made about the potential architecture & design:

- Keep Church spaces above ground and, if possible contiguous to & integrated with the Parish Hall spaces
- Make our spaces flexible and configurable
- Staff need natural light – their space needs to reflect that we value all they do for us
- Put our mission and ministry space front and center so it reflects who we are
- Build in a capability for technology that supports remote participation and virtual media
- Don’t mess with the current architecture/ambiance
- Don’t put a giant building next to our campus (and take away our sunlight!)

### **Capacity Building/Financial Literacy**

The role that the Fowler House/Ross Building plays (present and future) in our parish life raises many different viewpoints. There is a strong sense that we should be able to do more with this property:

- “The buildings are “free to use”; why can’t we do more with them?”
- “Why not develop the property ourselves? The risk is scary, but we have a chance to be bold!”
- “We need to get innovative!”
- “The dreams were so big when we bought it, but it didn’t come through

*And there is a concern that “we can never get this property back, if we let it go.”*

At the same time, there is a recognition that the parish is dependent on revenues generated by the property. Many of the suggestions made for how we might use the property did contain revenue generating opportunities. And a few people raised the possibility of selling the property to fund the renovation of the Parish Halls and/or to generate revenues to support our missions – including acquiring property elsewhere that would be suitable for supporting our ministries.

It also was evident that most do not have a clear picture of what the parish finances are and the role that the Fowler House/Ross Building plays in those finances. *“The parish needs to take a deeper dive into our finances. We need to all understand how much we spend in \$ and energy to maintain all of our facilities.”*

### **Challenges Opportunities:**

- Develop a strategy that enables the parish to fully use our campus (buildings and gardens) in support of our missions and ministries.
- Offer tours of our campus and buildings to all parishioners so that they have a greater understanding of CC’s real property;



- Consider creating a system to identify rooms so they can be more easily found.
- Fully consider the downside to any proposal to reduce our access to space Fowler House/Ross Building.
- Our ability to “live into our campus” is tied to what we can afford; greater understanding of how CC manages its financial portfolio is key to building our capacity to be the church described in Our Campus Our Calling.

# Survey Findings

**Overview:**

Two all-parish surveys were conducted to supplement the focus group sessions and provide more parish engagement. The first survey was sent out in May following the first set of focus groups and contained 24 questions focused on the “Our Calling” portion. There were 155 respondents to Survey 1, and the average length of time to complete was 28 minutes. The second survey was sent out in June following the second set of focus groups and contained 21 questions focused on the “Our Campus” portion. There were 89 respondents to Survey 2, and the average length time to complete was 16 minutes. Having these large numbers of responses for both surveys demonstrate parish-wide interest in the topic and builds confidence that the survey results should reasonably reflect views of the wider parish population.

**Survey 1 Findings: “Our Calling”**

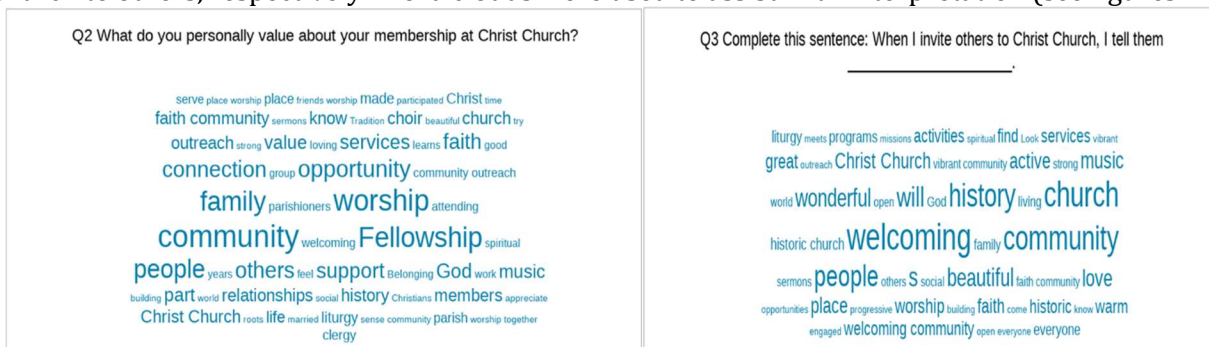
The results discussed in this section are based upon questions asked in the survey to provide a picture of the following about where Christ Church feels God is calling our parish to be present and serve.

- What feeds our spirituality and connection to God and/or the church?
- How do we describe our calling to the world?
- What do we perceive our parish community to be to ourselves and others?
- How are we called back into community?

The first question set the stage for the overall survey and asked the respondents to describe their relationship with Christ Church by selecting four choices out of 15 provided. The top four phrases are listed in the figure immediately below and provide an initial reflection of what will be similar responses later in this survey and the second survey across a variety of topics related to the parish and campus.

Top Four Phrases:	
1 Engaging in Prayer & Worship (66%)	Our Relationship with God
2 Developing Spirituality (52%)	
3 Supporting Community Outreach (44%)	Our Relationship with our Neighbor
4 Creating Fellowship (42%)	

Questions 2 and 3 offered an opportunity to provide narrative statements by the respondents to describe what they valued about being a member of Christ Church and how they describe Christ Church to others, respectively. Word clouds were used to assist with interpretation (see figures

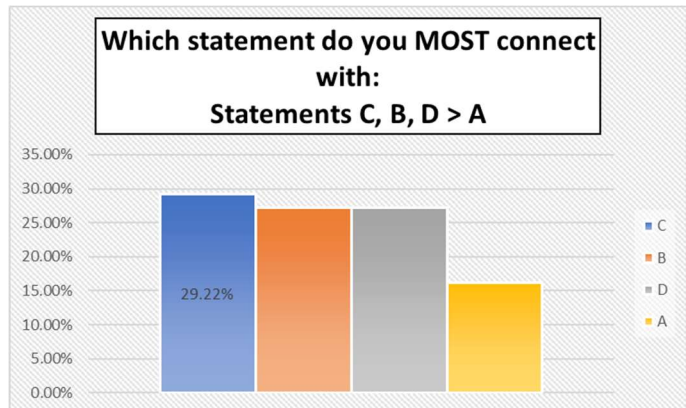


immediately below.) In summary, the top three values cited about Christ Church centered on community, worship and fellowship, while the three top descriptors of the church were welcoming, church, and community.

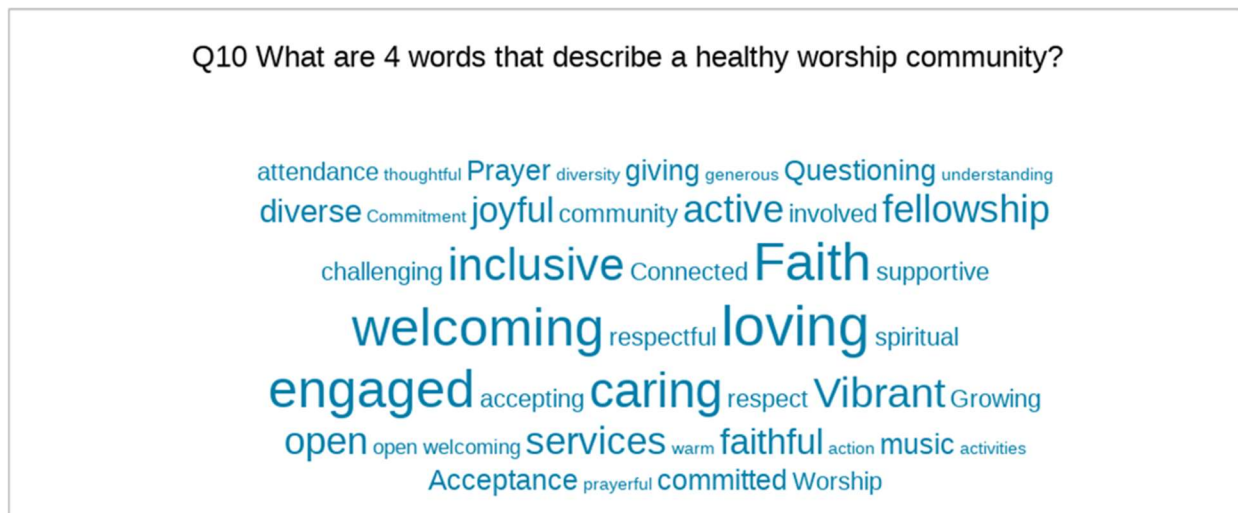
Another way to determine how a church sees itself is through a mission statement. In question 4, the below four statements were provided to determine which statement the respondent connected the most with.

- A) Christ Church seeks to serve God through service, to our local community, our nation, and to God’s people across the world. **(16.23%)**
- B) Christ Church seeks to embody God’s unbounded love by nurturing, empowering, and lifting you up, whoever you are and wherever you find yourself. **(27.27%)**
- C) Christ Church is a vibrant church and the spiritual home to an inclusive and active congregation. **(29.22%)**
- D) For more than 200 years, Christ Church has served the Alexandria community through worship, education, outreach, and Christian fellowship **(27.27%)**

Statements C, B and D generated a similar response rate, while Statement A had a weaker response rate. See the figure to the right. Although, Statement C received the highest percentage value, this value was within 2% of the next highest response. A clearly favored statement was unable to be determined by this survey.



Respondents were also asked to provide four words that describe a healthy worship community. The top four descriptors were Loving (19%), Faith (13%), Engaged (13%) and Welcoming (13%). Several additional descriptors were submitted as narrative responses and can be found in the figure immediately below.



Another tool in the self-assessment box is to ask ourselves what we believe we do well. Worship, music, outreach and community were the most cited words visualized in the word cloud below. Several other different descriptors were also included from the narrative responses that is a testament to how much Christ Church accomplishes in general and the diversity of the activities.

Q19 What do we (Christ Church) do really well?

beautiful outreach mission Offer Trying need Create Fellowship provide people  
 music fellowship well church support education program children  
 community mission music serve Worship take  
 outreach liturgy music services liturgy welcoming  
 ministry great Many sermons lots better hospitality care youth  
 Preaching really think Welcome people building

The word cloud below, resulting from the narrative responses to question 12, shows the range of thoughts, ideas, and values describing how Christ Church is being called into service. To summarize further, a desire to be a welcoming, active, open, caring and inclusive church was expressed by many. There was either uncertainty about how Christ Church is perceived in the community or if the church was perceived as being anything other than an historic location and tourist stop.

Q12 How would you like Christ Church to be known in the community? Does that align with how you think Christ Church is perceived?

church perceived think perceived way great place worship giving many ways social question  
 engaging living Christ Church perceived neighbors history stand many setting CC  
 change parish presence want sure Christ Church known may others feel Yes Christ  
 US warm love love God Alexandria members caring minded seen  
 well open seeks need support people fellowship  
 welcoming museum church Christian  
 community make think one known still place  
 mission active rich Christ Church Friendly leader beacon  
 inclusive faith outreach God perceived spiritual historic continuing  
 congregation yet community outreach aligns strong partner social justice  
 believe also working come puts service activities think perceived leadership helping  
 sure perceived vibrant perceived way hope Episcopal church perception us known

The responses in the word cloud below for question 17 reflects how Christ Church is currently being called into service for disenfranchised and underserved populations. Most of these activities include Christ Church outreach programs such as the Lazarus ministry, Carpenter Shelter, English Language Learning, Food pantry, AA/Al Anon, and Bag lunch.

Q17 What work do we do at Christ Church that supports and serves disenfranchised persons, enhances equity and promotes racial equality?

much equity promotes racial provide support Carpenter Shelter Outreach programs aware  
food pantry make ESL learn mission also community Christ  
promote racial equality justice church etc Christ Church English  
food outreach missions ministries others need people  
Lazarus ministry various work Alexandria  
Lazarus believe sure congregation support racial equality  
help Food bank programs AA immigrant way think equity  
Carpenter Shelter important Outreach resources know beyond groups  
serving many Bag lunch Christ Child enhances equity promotes better area

As we begin to come back together and the pandemic recedes, there is interest in determining what are the top five priorities for in-person activities. Question 7 explored this concept by asking about these priorities. The top five priorities are: Worship, Church, Fellowship, Service and Community. More discreet activities can be observed in the word cloud below.

Q7 What are your priorities for participation when we can resume in-person activities?

support will continue small groups faith formation build outdoor services events Bible study  
gatherings back meetings resume Sunday serving opportunities others  
attend volunteer singing Attend services person Sunday services  
service attendance church return worship work  
fellowship coffee hour community DOK  
participating Ushering music way will learning continue Eucharist  
activities looking forward in-person Christ Church group attend in-person communion  
services regularly outreach don t know helping children

Additional considerations regarding activities that could be engaged in by the Christ Church community were proposed in this survey. In reviewing the narrative statements for question 16, the respondents suggested that Christ Church should continue to address needs by listening to and working with the community, supporting and partnering with groups and organizations that provide services, and understand its own past in order to learn from it and engage in reconciliation initiatives. The word cloud below provides additional synopsized words for consideration.

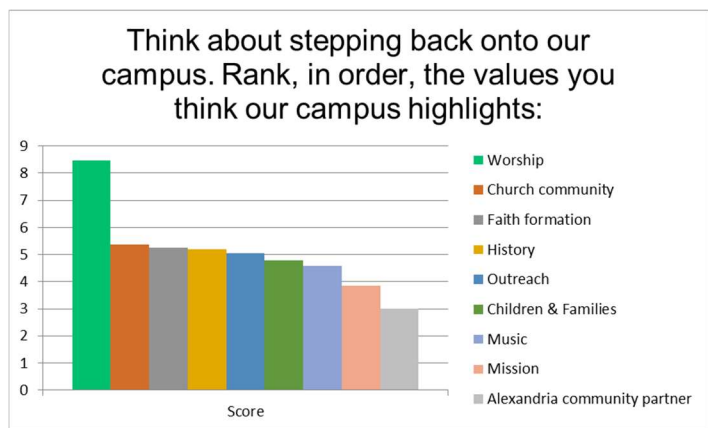
**Survey 2 Findings: “Our Campus”**

Q16 Complete this sentence: To address inequity and injustice in our community, Christ Church should \_\_\_\_\_.

The results discussed in this section are based upon questions asked in the survey to provide a picture of the following about the Christ Church campus:

- What values are reflected outwardly?
- What do we hope visitors experience?
- What should be celebrated?
- What are the virtual (online) impacts?
- What does the physical campus need?
- What are we willing to support?

Question 1 results showed that the Christ Church campus is perceived to highlight “Worship” as the primary value (see figure to the right,) and significantly more so than the rest of the other values that were available as choices. This strong response to “Worship” is consistent with the main function of the church and other questions from Survey 1



inquiring about what feeds people spiritually. The rest of the value choices elicited comparable scores, which indicates that there was more variation among the respondents for ranking these values. Additionally, although the value “Alexandria community partner” generated a slightly weaker response compared to the rest of the values, the generosity of spirit to these partners was demonstrated in a Survey 1 question where 78% of the respondents affirmed that prioritizing

space for community programs (e.g., ELL, Lazarus, AA/Al Anon) reflects a desire to continue these relationships. Christ Church cares about the community in which it resides.

In order to better understand what the Parish hopes anyone might experience when visiting the campus, question 2 was asked to select up to three of several different descriptors (see figure to the left.)



The top three choices selected were: Welcomed (95% of respondents), Included (70%), and Inspired (56%). Follow-up question 3 inquired how the respondents feel when visiting the campus determined that the top three choices were the same as what was hoped for, and in the same priority order (Welcomed, Included, Inspired); however, the “Part of history” choice

gained nearly 20 percentage points that reduced the overall response to the rest of the choices. This change in response between the desired experience and what is felt indicates that the campus’ physical presence leaves an impression on people.

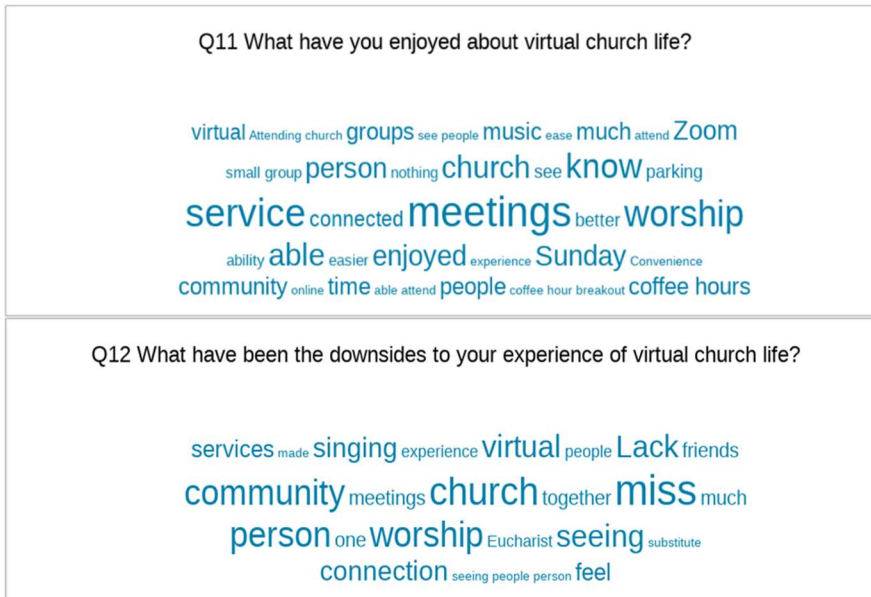
In 2023, Christ Church will be celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. When asked to provide thoughts about the values that should be highlighted to our parish and the public, the response was varied, wide-ranging and generally consistent with responses to other survey questions. Below figure shows a word cloud that was generated to assist with interpreting the narrative responses. In addition to community, worship, and welcoming values, the responses also highlighted history, inclusion/inclusiveness, church, service and so many other characteristics shown above that should be included in the upcoming celebration. The narrative responses were thoughtful, expansive and joyful in their expression, and it is clear how valued Christ Church is by the parish.





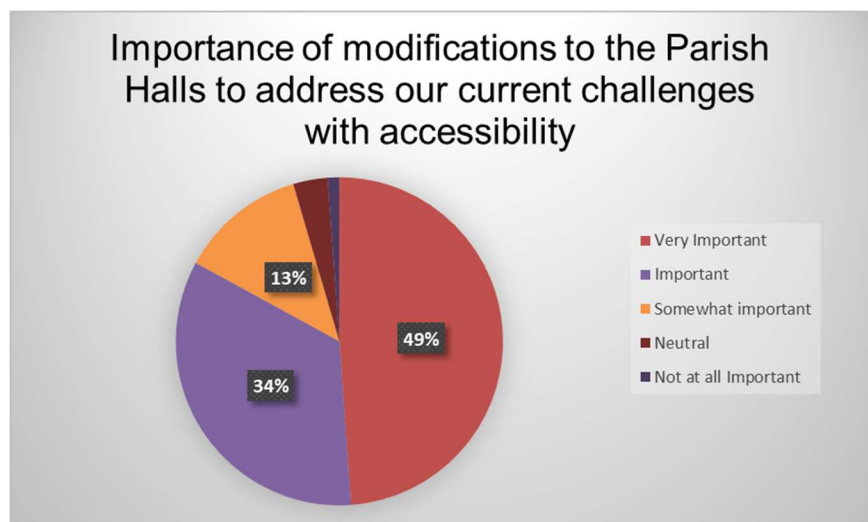
The last couple of years of this multi-century journey have been challenged by a pandemic that required the church to pivot into a new way of connecting, mostly through online resources and technologies. In this survey, the goal was to explore what the parish appreciated about and

struggled with using remote (virtual) communications. The following two word cloud figures to the right visually summarize these findings. Being able to attend services/worship during the pandemic when no one was able to be in person was valued, and especially the musical offerings and choir. Responses also offered that the virtual coffee hours with breakout sessions facilitated people meeting more parishioners than they would have normally. Some

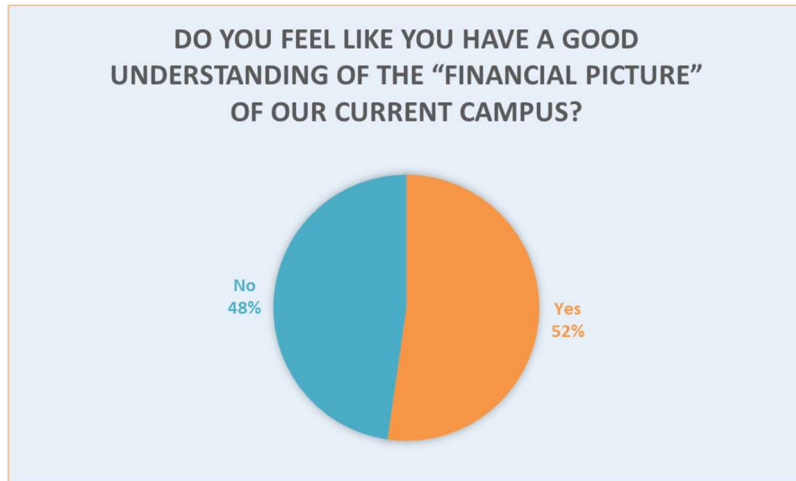


respondents were even relieved to not have to worry about driving to and parking in Old Town, as online church was more convenient. Overall, people primarily missed connecting with other people, singing, and receiving the Eucharist.

As the church continues to slowly reintroduce a variety of in-person activities back to the campus, another goal of the survey was to assess the parish’s thoughts about the status of the campus and upcoming resources that would be needed to update the campus to reflect the values expressed earlier. Question 6 asked respondents to select the level of importance associated with the statement “Modifications to the Parish Halls to address our current challenges with accessibility should be a priority (e.g., commercial grade elevators, ramps, accessible bathroom facilities).” The results in the figure below show that 83% respondents find it important to address campus accessibility, while 3% were neutral and 1% suggested it was an unimportant priority for the church. Furthermore, nearly 50% of the respondents concluded the modifications to the Parish Halls to be very important.



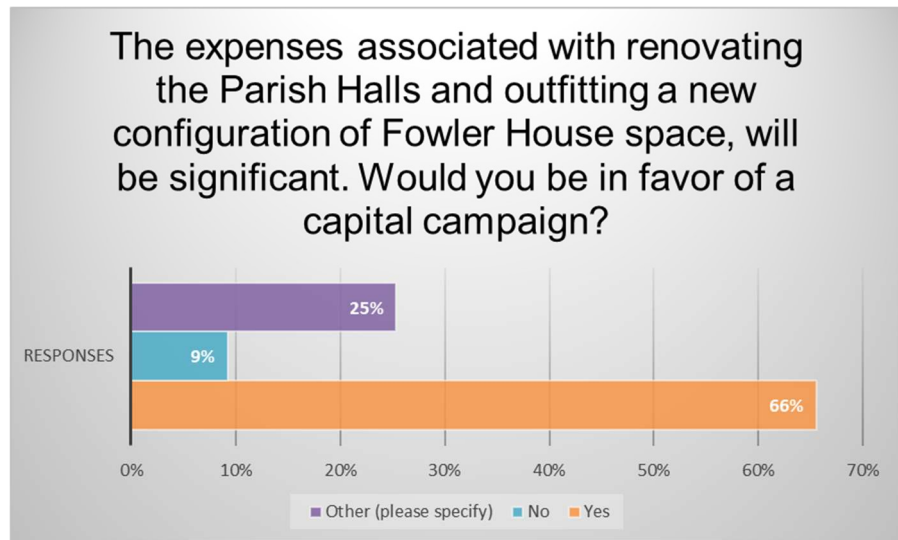
Undertaking a renovation of any building and especially older buildings like those on our campus that will need to be updated to current building codes will have a significant cost associated with it. With ongoing discussions surrounding the Fowler House/Ross Building portion of the campus that is separate from but connected to the Parish Halls and campus usage, question 16 was posed to elucidate how knowledgeable parishioners feel they are about Christ Church finances. The figure to the left shows that a little more than half of the respondents feel that they have a good



understanding of the financial picture. Follow-up activities are being planned to provide further information to the parish regarding Christ Church finances.

A natural follow-on question to the financial health of the parish, is the willingness of the parish to participate in fundraising efforts (e.g., capital campaign) to update the campus property. Particular interest is with respect to renovating the Parish Halls and

building out a new configuration of the Fowler House space with the **current** development strategy that has been planned for a few years. This does not include any consideration of the main church building. Question 19 (see figure below) provided an opportunity for the respondents to express their willingness to participate in a capital campaign, which was found to be 66% in favor of a capital campaign.



What is interesting regarding both of these sets of numbers is that more respondents were willing to participate in a capital campaign, even if they might not fully understand the church's financial picture. That shows a sense of some optimism regarding where Christ Church is headed.