

Cathedral Church of St. Peter

Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT)

Executive Summary

Fall 2023

Overview

Thank you for your excellent participation (304) representing 89% of our most recent average Sunday attendance. This level of participation enabled us to hear from and respond to a broad base of our congregation. We exceeded the threshold of 33% participation which provides us with valid, reliable and representative data. We are confident that the results reflect our entire congregation.

Additionally, our responses are compared to the responses of the last 2500 congregations (nationally) that have participated in the CAT over the last 24-36 months. Although every congregation is unique because of history, geography, size and denomination, congregations do hold much in common. This information provides a benchmark for comparative purposes helping us understand how we are typical and how we are exceptional compared with other churches at this moment in time.

The CAT is designed to measure the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of our congregation through the measures of congregational climate, culture and performance milestones.

Congregational Climate

Research tells us that two characteristics are necessary to create a vital congregation – high levels of member satisfaction and energy. Satisfaction is the sense of peaceful contentment, joy and lack of discord in the congregation. Energy is force of engagement, the spirit of the congregation that makes people want to be involved in its mission and ministries. For us, approximately 60% of responders are clearly satisfied with how things are here. Approximately 55% feel that there is a compelling sense of purpose or energy and members are not just going through the motions in their ministry/activity. Notably, in the measures of satisfaction and energy about one-third of responders are ‘on the fence.’ This indicates that people are waiting to see what is going to happen next before affirmatively stating whether they are clearly satisfied or energized. Also, this may represent anxiety or ambiguity in our congregational system during this time of transition. Compared to other congregations nationally, our member satisfaction and member energy are high.

Overall, these measures indicate that we experience what is called a *Transformational Climate*. Transformational churches have discovered ways to be vibrant and healthy in spite of national or local trends. The more tangible expressions include an external focus, a distinctive mission, and an influx of new

people; more intangible expressions describe a corporate spiritual zest, inspired worship, healthy relationships, purposeful activity in the world and an atmosphere of well-being. We have learned that currently about 20-25% of congregations nationally are Transformational.

Areas of Focus (Drivers)

To determine how satisfied/energized people are here, we focus on different areas or drivers. If people perceive we are performing well in these areas then the data suggests that their perception of their satisfaction or energy will go up. Likewise, if people perceive that these areas are not performing well, then their satisfaction or energy levels will go down.

Our drivers of satisfaction are:

1. Problems between groups in this church are usually resolved through mutual effort (Conflict Management)
2. The leaders of our church show a genuine concern to know what people are thinking when decisions need to be made (Governance)
3. Persons who serve as leaders in our church are representative of the membership (Governance)
4. The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content (Worship)

Our drivers of energy are:

1. Our church prepares our members for ministry by helping them discern their gifts (Ministry)
2. There frequently is not a small group of members that opposes what the majority want to do (Conflict Management)

Again, drivers tell us what's on the minds of our members, and they suggest areas where making changes may have the biggest impact.

Future Priorities/Aspirations

As our members look to our future, a number of major priorities emerged. These priorities indicate where additional energy should be placed to achieve our future vision for the congregation. The top six are:

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people.
2. Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
3. Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people in times of need.

4. Make necessary changes to attract families with children and young people in our church.
5. Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society.
6. Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.

The importance that we place on these priorities is quite high (and actually there are nine priorities that achieve a high priority rating). Our work is to more carefully discern which of these ministries take the highest priority now and which will wait. Notably, the nature of these priorities has a balance of internal and external focus. A characteristic of a vital and transformational congregation is its predominant external focus. Our priorities demonstrate a need to address some internal aspects of our communal life.

Unique to our younger members is their desire for the church to be more active in ministries of social justice and to strengthen the process by which they are called and equipped for ministry and leadership in the church.

Performance Areas

Our strengths and challenges are revealed and explained through the Performance Dashboard and Performance Indices. You assessed our congregation in the following eight areas:

- Hospitality
- Morale
- Conflict Management
- Governance
- Spiritual Vitality
- Readiness for Ministry
- Engagement in Education
- Worship and Music

According to responses to questions around these eight indices, seven of the eight score higher than most congregations nationally.

Hospitality measures the degree to which members perceive that the congregation is engaged in offering themselves and their resources to folks who are new, different or in need. We believe that we have a friendly atmosphere of genuine care and concern and are prepared to welcome persons from many difference walks of life into our congregation. This is the one index where we do not compare as favorably to other congregations. While we are positive about our hospitality both internally with one another and externally to those we seek to reach, we are not as emphatically positive. This is one area where further discussion is needed because as we know, this ministry is essential to our relationships and to our desire for growth.

Morale expresses our strong engagement in our communal life and our clear sense of purpose and mission as a congregation. This measure is strong in spite of the challenging experiences of COVID and our transition time. This area demonstrates one of the strongest attributes.

Conflict management measures the degree to which members believe that conflict is managed and, where possible, resolved. This area and how we function in conflict management is a critical driver of our satisfaction and energy. It is a strong attribute that we must continue to nurture.

Governance measures the degree to which members believe that the decision-making structures and processes of the church are open to their concerns and input. Our rating indicates that the congregation positively perceives Chapter leadership. This perception allows us to use our leadership in ways that move the congregation strategically forward, creatively re-thinking how we engage the needs of members as well as the needs of those we are trying to reach in our community. This area is of high importance since it is a driver of satisfaction.

Spiritual Vitality measures the degree to which members believe that their faith is central to their lives. We scored quite well here. Unique to this index is its direct correlation to financial giving to the church. Research shows that the closer people feel to God, the more they contribute to their churches. The percent of annual household income given to our church is 1.56%, below the national average for the Episcopal church (2.3%). The good news relates to our household incomes and the capacity for giving to the church. Our scores in spiritual vitality are an invitation for us to find ways to go deeper spiritually and go deeper in our generosity.

Readiness for Ministry registers our understanding of our baptismal call to serve. This, too, is another area of great strength for us and speaks to our ministry-focus. This area is an important priority in terms of giving more attention to equipping our younger members for ministry and leadership.

Engagement in Education: We are motivated toward life-long learning/formation, and our scores indicate that we value the high quality of our programming and our flexibility in providing this programming. Another important strength.

Worship/Music is a primary indicator of congregation vitality, and essential for growth. Our music program and our overall worship experience are very strong, ranked at the 97th percentile compared with other congregations. Our worship experience is a driver of our member satisfaction and vital to our top priorities related to growth.

What else did we learn?

Our congregation's culture:

- We remain theologically progressive, yet with about one-quarter of us are more theologically conservative. Our ability to hold this diversity respectfully

under one large tent is an important strength that may be welcoming to those looking for a new parish home.

- Our flexibility style registers the degree to which, as a congregation, we are willing to make adjustments or experiment with the ways we go about our ministry to connect with our local context. Our overall survey results suggest that we seek renewal and growth; our culture is only somewhat aligned with these goals – indicating that we are not totally comfortable with innovation and change. This is an area that invites ongoing conversation. How might we continue to go about renewal as a “somewhat flexible” congregation? In incremental ways? How might we experiment with new ways in aspects of our congregational life and learn from those experiments? Research indicates that adaptability to our context, like any organization, is essential to our ability to grow and thrive as a congregation.
- In correlating Theological perspective and Flexibility, we have learned that we are both a “Paraclete” and a “Magi” culture.
- Magi cultures are analytic, valuing deep knowledge, open discourse and intellectual curiosity. The analytic nature of Magi cultures makes them a powerful ally for those in need of advocacy. Yet, if they lose their missional focus, their strong intellectual focus may leave them open to retreating into esoteric debates causing them to be defined more by what they think than by what they do; members can become frustrated that decisions do not bring about action or change.
- Paraclete cultures are by nature healing. They focus on inclusivity and welcome diversity. Yet they are attached to structure, ritual and routine, sometimes to their detriment.
- Both of these cultures easily over-commit and are subject to burn out in trying to be everything to everyone. Thus we must sharpen our discernment skills and our relational skills to make the sometimes difficult decisions about what we cannot do. Our work is to create a clear vision rather than a “to-do list” and develop spiritual practices that are meaningful and incorporate relationship building and discernment.
- Our culture has implications for the skills and abilities of our next Dean. Our culture requires someone who excels in preaching and teaching, relates well intellectually yet engages people emotionally; someone who can help us build our capacity for faith sharing and story-telling; and someone who is experienced in shifting a culture toward more flexibility, adaptability and innovation.

Please add whatever results from your other supplemental questions that feel important to this report.

In undertaking the CAT at this time of transition, we commit to what is necessary to maintain and stretch our vibrant congregation for the future. In particular, that we better align our culture (flexibility/innovation) with our aspirations. There is much to celebrate, and of course, ongoing work to do together.