

**Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT)
Executive Summary**

**St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Stuart
March 2022**

Overview

We had very good participation by our congregation in completing the CAT (see the Appendix for statistical information). The high level of participation enabled us to hear from a broad base of our congregation across all our services, and we are confident that the results reflect the views of our congregation, on the whole.

The CAT also compared our responses to those of 250 congregations (nationally) that participated in the CAT over the last 20-22 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.

The CAT is designed to measure the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of St. Mary's through the measures of congregational climate, culture and performance milestones.

What did we learn?

Our Climate: Member satisfaction and member energy reveal the most about a congregation's health, morale and vitality.

Church climate is measured by two indicators: *Satisfaction* (sense of well-being, peace, joy, lack of discord); and *Energy* (force of engagement in mission). We learned that compared to other congregations, Satisfaction and Energy are very high at St. Mary's. Our responses to questions on Satisfaction and Energy define us as a "*transformational*" church. Transformational churches have:

- Discovered ways to be vibrant and healthy in spite of national trends.
- An external focus, a distinctive mission, and an influx of people who bear witness to transformation.
- Spiritual zest, inspired worship, healthy and meaningful relationships and purposeful activity in the world
- A real opportunity to transform the lives of those we touch through ministry.

Only 25% of all congregations who have participated in the CAT across the country are transformational churches and St. Mary's is one of them!

This is very positive feedback, and yet the good news is that we are transformational and the bad news is that we are transformational. By this we mean, it would be quite easy to rest on our laurels and become self-satisfied or complacent by not seeing the need to continue to adapt and change to meet the needs of those we serve and those we want to reach in the community. This is a trap that we want to avoid.

The climate, culture and spiritual vitality of our congregation lend to our financial giving. Being a transformational church places a stewardship responsibility on our shoulders. The CAT revealed that our average contribution to St. Mary's per household is about \$3,900. This represents an average percent of household income given to the church of 2.78%. While this is slightly over the national average in the Episcopal church (2.5%), our household income profile demonstrates that this is one area that St. Mary's is underperforming.

We learned what drives the overall satisfaction of our members.

When CAT respondents are asked about how they feel things are going in their church overall, they generally don't think about the entire array of ministries and qualities that characterize the congregation. Instead, they focus on a relatively small number of things. What members focus on is unique to each congregation. These areas of focus are called 'drivers.' We are most satisfied when these things are happening well. Our drivers of satisfaction are:

- Persons who serve in leadership are representative of the membership.
- Being part of the St. Mary's community has given new meaning to their lives.
- In important decisions, adequate opportunity for consideration of different approaches is usually provided.
- St. Mary's provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry within the church and to the world.
- St. Mary's does a good job supporting persons in ministry reminding them that they are making a difference.

Our Culture: How we operate.

- We have trust and high regard for our clergy and lay leaders.
- We lean slightly towards being theologically conservative, yet are quite theologically diverse. This characteristic is a strength in that we welcome and are enriched by members who have varying spiritual/faith journeys.
- We have developed a very adaptive culture - St. Mary's is willing to make adjustments in the way we go about our ministry. The more flexible a congregation is, the more likely it is to adapt to the changing needs of members, as well as the changing needs of those served in the community. A less flexible church is more likely to believe that a particular style is central to its identity. Therefore, the more adaptable a church is, the healthier and more vital it becomes. Our responses to the

questions on flexibility place us in the 90th percentile among congregations nationally.

- A conservative-adaptive congregation is known as having a “Performance” culture. Performance cultures are:
 - Ultimately concerned with an experiential faith presented in a way that people find accessible and compelling.
 - Bridges between traditional understandings of beliefs and contemporary life experiences.
 - Innovative in ways that open people to alternative ways of looking at life.
 - Concerned with what works now and discovering ways to increase the impact of their message rather than changing the basic message.

Our strengths are many and are revealed and explained through the Performance Dashboard and Performance Indices.

The CAT measures the following 8 performance areas. Our strengths are highlighted below, based on our percentile rank with the CAT benchmark congregations:

- Hospitality (77th percentile – meaning that we scored higher than 77% of the churches to which we were compared)
- Morale (98th percentile)
- Conflict Management (83rd percentile)
- Governance (85th percentile)
- Spiritual Vitality (70th percentile)
- Readiness for Ministry (93rd percentile)
- Engagement in Education (88th percentile)
- Worship and Music (97th percentile)

The ways in which our congregation answered questions about these 8 indices places us in the top 25% of congregations nationally.

We also learned St. Mary’s priorities and aspirations for the future – where we want additional energy placed to enhance or improve our ministries.

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people.
- Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
- Make necessary changes to attract families and young people.
- Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation.
- Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society.

- Strengthen the process by which members are called and equipped for leadership.

It is interesting to note that St. Mary's is considered a "*regional*" church because over 65% of its members live 5-15 miles from St. Mary's. It will be important to keep this in mind as we strive to achieve our priorities and aspirations.

The prioritization as indicated above shows a balance of internal and external focus. We understand that there are some aspects of our internal congregation that we want to enhance, yet maintain a vision for serving/reaching others.

Two of our top three priorities are related to congregational growth. Another point of congregational conversation: Why do we want to grow? Our answers to this question will reveal our intentions and our concerns. Do we want to grow to share our experiences of faith (an abundance mindset) *or* because we need others to ensure future growth (a scarcity mindset)?

Three of the top priorities are shared by all age groups in our congregation. Unique to our younger members is their desire to deepen their sense of connection to God and one another through stronger worship services. This finding is worthy of fuller conversation. Since our third highest priority calls for making necessary changes to attract young people to our church, it is important that we understand their experience of worship and how it can be strengthened to meet their particular needs.

Another aspect of our congregational life is related to our "relational fabric" or in other words, the importance of being together apart from our Sunday worship. In this area we scored on the low side. Perhaps it is due to our experience of being apart during COVID. Yet it will be important to better understand if COVID did impact our relationships, and what we will do to strengthen them coming out of COVID.

In terms of the dynamics of this transition time, we demonstrate that we are more willing to be involved, more willing to take on additional responsibilities, and more willing to give more financially.

Finally, we learned the critical abilities of our next Rector.

The CAT also asked respondents to rank nine different skills for our next Rector. The five highest ranked skills, in order of importance, are:

- Preaching – the capacity to inspire and connect people to God's word.
- Strategic leadership – the capacity to cast a vision and lead St. Mary's toward realization of its vision.

- Pastoral care – the capacity to engage people empathetically and care for persons in time of need.
- Teaching/Training – the capacity to deepen understanding, form character and equip members with new skills.
- Change management – the capacity to lead a church through a significant and necessary period of change.

Our profile as a ‘transformational’ and ‘performance’ church also suggests that we seek a Rector with the following additional characteristics and skills:

- The ability to optimize a large array of St. Mary’s resources.
- Vision and flexibility in serving the greater community.
- Comfort with sharing the leadership of St. Mary’s with its members.
- The ability to bridge traditional understandings of Christian beliefs and contemporary life experiences.

Overall. St. Mary’s is a strong and thriving congregation. Parishioners have taken ownership of our baptismal call through our involvement in the varied and numerous ministries of this congregation. We are motivated in our responsibility for life-long learning and formation. There is much to celebrate and for which to be grateful. And we are left with some important things to ponder about our future. Our pondering and prayer will take us into the next phase of this journey.

If you would like the full copy of the CAT results, please contact Cindy Eaton at cyn2412@gmail.com or 386-264-1648.

APPENDIX
Demographic Data of Survey Respondents

Response Rate:

Number of Completions	275
Average Weekend Attendance	211
Response rate	130%

Breakdown of Total Responses by Service:

Saturday 5 pm	11.26%
Sunday 7:30 am	6.93%
Sunday 9 am CFW	42.86%
Sunday 10 am	38.96%

Financial Giving by Service (as percentage of household income)

Saturday 5 pm	3.32%
Sunday 7:30 am	3.70%
Sunday 9 am CFW	2.57%
Sunday 10 am	2.61%

Gender:

Male	37%
Female	63%

Age

65+	71%
55-64	12%
45-54	8%
35-44	7%
25-34	1%
Under 24	0%

Distance to St. Mary's

1-8 blocks	4%
1-2 miles	9%
3-4 miles	17%
5-9 miles	50%
10-15 miles	16%
Over 15 miles	5%