

NOTE: Due to the size of the document and to maintain confidentiality, the raw data used to create this summary is only available for review in the church office.

Combined Listening Session Summary Report

Church of St. Paul in the Desert, Palm Springs, California

The Search Process Team of the Transition Committee developed and administered a series of listening sessions for members of the Church of St. Paul in the Desert. The sessions were designed to collect responses to five questions. Parishioners were randomly seated at tables with facilitators. One of the parishioners was asked to take notes. Those notes were collected and became data for the summary report. Because of COVID-19 precautions, our next two scheduled sessions were postponed and then cancelled. The team, after weeks of waiting, decided to administer a second listening session via email with the original questions and instructions. Those responses were combined into the report below. The responses to *Question 5, "What else is in your heart that hasn't been shared?"* were added to the summary of the appropriate questions 1-4. The original respondents' answers to all questions are available online on our website www.stpaulsps.org under Transition Update.

Question 1: Who are we as the Church of St. Paul in the Desert?

We believe we reflect our parish mission statement: "We are a welcoming, empowering, supportive community." We also believe we reflect our Diocesan mission statement: "We are a missionary community." But we acknowledge that we sometimes fall short with all of this. We describe ourselves as nice, warm, delightful, caring, friendly, open, family, sociable, accepting, inclusive, diverse, progressive, liberal and comfortable – a jigsaw puzzle of wants and needs. Some of us are still mourning the departure of the former rector of 31 years. We also describe ourselves as above average, but not outstanding, in our welcoming – sometimes cliquish, staid and slow to welcome outsiders – especially during holidays. We can be timid or uncertain at times about how to "follow Jesus Christ in his life of fearless love for the world."

We wear our faith comfortably, but we are uncomfortable with evangelism. We share our prayer needs openly in our worship services. We are diverse in the sense that we openly and actively minister to the LGBTQ community. We are multi-racial and work on reaching out to the African American community and the Hispanic community, but with limited success. We have the same struggle with children in our congregation. We try, but while trying, we have lost several families with younger children to other local congregations because we just have not had sufficient numbers to get an active group going. Our largest demographic is middle aged and older Gay males. Snowbirds and visitors to the area are an active part of our Sunday worship and our parish life and during "the season" make up a large percentage of the

congregation. During the summer months, our congregation takes on a different "feel" being smaller in number and with fewer activities.

We are great singers, but we are not known for our music. We speak of loving our traditional liturgy and being the Episcopal presence in the Coachella Valley. Most of us have our favorite worship service which we regularly attend. As a result, we are sometimes segregated or segmented. We are an oasis for people who are not welcome at other churches. We see ourselves as leaders in the community, holding up values of welcoming people on the fringes of the community and helping those in need (feeding and caring for the homeless, supporting Desert Aids Project, etc.) Many of us are active in the various ministries of the parish. We are a refuge, a place of peace and sanctuary. We love and enjoy our campus and facilities, and we are stewards of its care and maintenance. (We know our Parish Hall is past due for a complete overhaul.) Our facility is a wonderful place to worship and serve. It is actively used by our congregation and by community support groups.

Question 2: Who are our neighbors?

We believe that everyone and anyone is our neighbor. We have closer relationships with some of our neighbors than others. We work and share and talk with these neighbors on a regular basis: Temple Isaiah (Reformed and Conservative Jewish) just around the corner; as well as other faith communities in the area like Bloom in the Desert (UCC), St. Margaret's Episcopal (Palm Desert), and others. We count our Palm Springs civic leadership and our proximity businesses as close neighbors. We support our neighborhood schools (around 73,000 students in the Coachella Valley) with donations and volunteers (reading tutors). We have held services in some of our local board and care facilities for years. Desert Blind and Handicapped (which provides transportation) was started at St. Paul's and continues to be supported by members of the parish.

We spend time with our homeless neighbors, feeding them out of our church kitchen daily, through the ministry of Well in the Desert (which also operates a food pantry). We host these neighbors once a week in our parish hall and our family socializes with them as well as feeds them. AA, NA, OA, and several other 12-step programs are neighbors who visit us nearly every day, often several times a day. We support a children's ranch, a church camp, and diocesan missions, like St. Luke's North Park, and Episcopal Relief. From the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, HIV positive folks have been our dear neighbors (Desert AIDS Project). The participation of St. Paul's in the AIDS Walk, Gay Rodeo, Pride Parade, Transgender Day of Remembrance, and other LGBTQ events and organizations make it obvious that these are our good neighbors.

St. Paul's is located between an economically blessed neighborhood, and the business district. These are our physical neighbors. North Palm Springs is a very short distance away. It is largely African American, and we host an annual Martin Luther King, Jr. community service at St. Paul, sharing our facility with several of the historical Black churches in town. We also march in the Black History Parade in February. We love our Veteran neighbors and march in the Veterans Day Parade, too. We love our Hispanic neighbors and have launched a Latino ministry hoping to reach unchurched or disenfranchised Christian Latinos in the area. Some of our neighbors are from surrounding desert communities; some are Canadian or Northern/Mid-western US snowbirds who visit us annually; some are tourists coming for vacations or special events. We welcome single, divorced, displaced, immigrant, homeless, wealthy and poor neighbors from all walks of life, from all races, whatever their sexual identity, and wherever they are in their spiritual journey. They are all our neighbors, and we love them. We are neighbors to anyone we encounter who needs compassion, love, or an ear to listen.

Question 3: What is God calling me (us) to do right now?

The call of God in our lives is as varied as the individuals who have answered. One important observation is that it seems that we all believe God is calling us to something, whether we have a clear understanding of what that is, or not.

We believe we are called to let go of what doesn't matter and focus on what does. We are called to be balanced, to love and accept others, to be more active in our faith, to live and lead by example. We believe we are called to improve parish finances and encourage others to do the same. We are called to listen to the Holy Spirit. We are called to participate in the Liturgy, to assess and discern what is working and what isn't.

God is calling us to take care of ourselves, to help others find their place with God and the church. God is calling us to keep Christ as our center, to be more prayerful, to serve those in need in the community. God wants us to share our time and our talents, to have an open heart and to embrace change. We are being called to put God first and to love our neighbors. We are called to be grateful, to intercede for others, and to deepen our understanding of God. God is calling us to be more welcoming and to share our faith with others. God is calling us to take part in Bible study. We are called to be a voice for the voiceless.

God is calling us to prayer and outreach. God is calling on us to stay positive and to live in gratitude. We are being called to be aware of whatever changes the COVID-19 pandemic might bring about and how we need to adapt our ministries as a result. We are called to hang on and to be an example. God is calling us to live out our Baptismal Covenant as disciples of Jesus. God is calling us to make ourselves available.

Question 4: How can our new rector help us do what God is calling us to do?

We believe the new rector God is bringing us will help us do what God is calling us to do. Our new rector will help us through Relationship, through Leadership, through Worship and Liturgy, and through Outreach and Evangelism.

We yearn for a healthy and wholesome relationship with our new rector. To us that means that our rector will be fun to work with and let us get to know them as a person. We hope they will be humble and emotionally intelligent and mature. We would love for them to really listen to us, to understand us and our experience and our point of view. We hope they are appreciative of volunteers and will say so. We don't want them to try to fix what isn't broken. And we hope they will actively and clearly communicate things like what is needed (money, talents, gifts, ideas, activities, work, and opportunities to serve). And of course, we hope they will also communicate what they want and need from us.

The new rector God is bringing us will be a Leader, who will help us do what God is calling us to do. We hope they will be the kind of leader who will empower us to do the work, sharing responsibility with the Laity, modeling mutual ministry. We want them to help us and our newcomers to discover and use our gifts. They will help us discern what God's call for us is. Our new rector will be visionary and an innovator who will help us fulfill our mission and our goals. They will listen, direct, participate, minister to us and love us. They will accept diversity and encourage it. Our new rector will have a balance of both spiritual knowledge and practical knowledge. They will exercise a decentralized leadership, letting the teams do the ministry without trying to control everything or micromanage. Our new rector will be open and progressive, while valuing tradition. At the same time, our new rector will represent us well in the community as an image of who we are.

We hope and believe that our new rector will help us do what God is calling us to do by their Preaching and Teaching. They will encourage, direct, teach, and train us. They will promote and motivate active participation. While our new rector should have strong values, which are reflected in preaching, some of us are uncomfortable with bringing political positions to the pulpit. That inspirational preaching and teaching will empower us to do the work of the ministry.

Our new rector will center our life around Worship and Liturgy. They will have a love for the liturgical traditions of our church and lead us to experience God's presence in worship. Our new rector will promote good music. They will be sensitive to the widely diverse experience and viewpoints of our parishioners and visitors on liturgical matters, being open to ideas from the laity regarding liturgy and worship. Our new rector will be aware of the schedules of

working people, as well as older members who are not able to drive after dark. They will also be aware of the large number of disenfranchised Roman Catholics who would love to be welcome in a church where they would be comfortable. We would love to see a revitalization of our liturgical life. They will keep us altar-centered with all our ministry flowing out of worship and the Eucharist.

Our new rector will model and train us, motivate us and empower us for Outreach, Evangelism and Service. That outreach and service will involve interfacing with our larger community (nursing homes, civic groups, business community, schools, city government, etc.) We hope they will help us attract younger families with children. We expect active participation in social justice issues. Our outreach includes working hand in hand with other faith communities even sharing services or classroom settings. Because so much communication is web based these days, we need our new rector to be proficient with Social Media and other web-based solutions for outreach and for training. The changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic makes it urgent that our new rector will be one who can be creative in adapting to our new situation. Our new rector will be able to communicate easily with "outsiders" without the use of "Episcopal-speak" or insider jargon. We would gladly welcome a new rector who might represent those we are trying to reach: Hispanic/Latino, African American, LGBTQ, former Roman Catholic, Immigrant, et al.

We know this is a tall order. We are convinced that God has already chosen our new rector. We really do not expect perfection and we are a forgiven and loved people who are called to forgive and love others. We will also love and forgive our new rector. We earnestly hope that our new rector will have a great sense of humor.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Search Process Team