



**A REPORT TO ST. TIMOTHY'S, DANVILLE,  
ABOUT ITS INTERVIEWS ON  
CONGREGATIONAL MISSION AND MINISTRY  
from  
The Congregational Discovery Reading Team  
Center for Church Innovation**

How to Use this Report

This report gives the major findings of a self-study by members of the congregation about the character of worship, education, and general involvement of members, as well as the congregation's responses to community and congregational changes. It is based on 24 interviews, gathered in spring 2023, by several members of the congregation.

We believe these findings should be taken seriously even though they are based on information from a moderate number of interviews. Leaders should consider their own reflections and use common sense about the issues raised in this report, building on the strengths of St. Timothy's, Danville, while addressing problem areas as opportunities for further growth as a congregation.

We believe that both the interviewers and those with whom they talked have the best interests of St. Timothy's, Danville, at heart and gave information they hope will help the congregation.

**Our recommendations are meant as questions, not to tell the congregation what to do.** We believe that the insights discovered in these interviews can benefit your future. We also believe the congregation's leadership has the wisdom and ability to best address its own situation.

All of the people who took time to answer these interview questions, and most certainly the Listening Leaders who did so many splendid interviews, should be commended for their willingness to think seriously about your congregation's members' past and present experiences of worship, learning, change, and mission. Such careful and helpful work will be of dramatic value as we all consider what God is up to in the community and what God is calling St. Timothy's, Danville, to do here. As we seek to build on strengths, we remember that God equips us for every good work and that we lead by the grace of God's gifts to us.

Questions asked in all interviews:

1. Tell how people participate in the life of this church.
2. Tell me about the learning opportunities here.
3. Describe this congregation to someone new.
4. Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in this congregation.
5. Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.
6. Describe an experience of profound worship you have had.
7. Tell about how you feel about changes in this congregation in the past 3-5 years. Are there any activities or aspects of the church you would and /or would not like to see return?
8. Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and other people were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled.

## **Question 1: Tell how people participate in the life of this church.**

**24 interviews, 53 remarks**

*(the number after a response indicates how many people mentioned it)*

volunteer roles - 13

(committees, teams, vestry, greeters, Stephen Ministers, choir, herb garden, etc.)

worship - 12

(including special seasonal worship attendance and helping with eucharist)

reaching out - 11

(Fruits of the Harvest, food drives, care packages for college students, Winter Nights Shelter, fund-raisers, etc.)

social connectedness/sense of community - 9

(coffee hour, strong mutual support, feeling of being an extended family, group activities)

spiritual growth and learning programs - 6

(book club, lecture series, Bible study)

mentioned once each (2): caring directly about individual people, engaging/attending to what matters to individuals/making people feel like they really matter

### ***recommended questions to consider:***

1. Of all the people on the congregation's participation roster, what percentage of people devote energy to inner life roles (nurture, worship, and social building), outer life roles (mission, social action, reaching out), and volunteer roles related to sustaining congregational operations (communication, finance, property and grounds, leadership teams) or have no participation in any of the above? How much overlap is there between volunteers in the different aspects? How are the current levels of participation divided differently among these than in the past? What is the trend for the future (including the segment with non-participation in any of the above)?
2. For individuals whose primary participation is Sunday morning, what networks of care exist to assure that any special needs they may experience are addressed by congregational care whether pastoral or care offered by lay initiatives?
3. It appears St. Timothy's has a shrinking circle of deeply involved core members and an expanding circle of people that feel connected but are not as intimately involved or as readily available for specific roles. How are long-held definitions of what it means to be "church" being challenged by this reality? How might you imagine St. Timothy's embracing or resisting this shift?

## **Question 2: Tell me about the learning opportunities here.**

24 interviews, 52 remarks

Bible studies - 9

sermons - 6

book group/book review - 4

non-specific comments that there are many and growing - 4

Lenten series with guest speakers - 3

Lenten lectionary with meditations by members - 2

we learn by observing the pastor's sermon style itself - 2

we learn by the behaviors of other people - 2

writing group - 2

(former) monthly senior citizens potluck - 2

mentioned once each (16): art shows, (former) quilting classes, use of videos, choir, being a mentor, being a crucifer, helping with food drive, Good News Hour, EFM, Learn By Doing, the weekly readings, children's liturgy, Spiritual Reflections

need more in-depth learning, need more learning about social issues, need more simple learning programs for young children

### ***recommended questions to consider:***

1. Several interviewees mention perceived deficits in regard to learning opportunities. Readers wonder if this is due to pastoral transitions, pandemic, reduced numbers, or other causes. What has caused less learning opportunities to be available, and was that about strategic decisions or situational realities?
2. What entity within the church directs and coordinates learning activities? Is learning and growth primarily lay or staff-propelled? How might this be different in the future than in the past?
3. To what extent are attendees accessing learning opportunities elsewhere that they formerly accessed through their church? What learning opportunities should most ideally be afforded through the church?
4. To what extent will technology broaden access to St. Timothy's' educational programming, and how will you assure continuing high touch if/when becoming more hi tech?

### **Question 3: Describe this congregation to someone new.**

24 interviews, 57 remarks

warmly inclusive - 15

diverse, relaxed, positive - 9

close, supportive, caring - 6

notably an older congregation - 5

many extremely committed, dedicated people - 3

liturgical/high church - 3

stable, long-term members - 2

sermons strongly focused on Scripture - 2

beautiful facility and grounds - 2 (location, labyrinth, columbarium, stations of the cross)

strong outreaches - 2 (AA, ACA, OA, FOTH, Noah's Ark)

mentioned once each (8): vibrant, great sermons, very Episcopal, meaningful activities, fun fund-raisers for outreach, strong activities for all ages, cares for children

worship feels bland right now

#### ***recommended questions to consider:***

1. The top responses describe qualities that embody the congregation's core values (inclusion, diversity, warmth, caring). How does a new person/new attender become aware of the core values and how they are embodied? What is the ideal for the future regarding how people learn the congregation's beliefs and values?
2. If you were devising promotional descriptions of St. Timothy's, what are the key aspects of this congregation that are most promotable? For what audience/s?

**Question 4: Tell a story about how you sense God's presence and activity in this congregation.**

24 interviews, 41 remarks

being strongly supported in a time of personal crisis - 4  
relatable sermons that speak to personal experience - 3  
resolution of contentious issues or staff issues - 3  
infectious dedication of members and vestry - 3  
through especially amazing individuals - 3  
rituals/rituals at times of transition - 3  
communion - 3  
feeling personally cared for by Susan and her style - 2  
participation in outreach ministries - 2  
music - 2

mentioned once each (13): constructing the labyrinth together, being involved, sense of sanctity in sanctuary, prayer groups, pre-Christmas concerts with school choirs, Easter vigil, the feeling of genuine love when passing the peace, a special Wednesday mass, prayers of the people, being in the herb garden, being a prayer minister, singing in choir, seeing the generosity of St. Timothy's people

***recommended questions to consider:***

1. God's presence at St. Timothy's is often experienced through the actions of other people (community/horizontal connections). If divine presence and activity are both vertical and horizontal, how do worship planners maximize both for the future?
2. God's presence and activity is sometimes experienced in "being" and sometimes in "doing." Which best fits the theology and identity of St. Timothy's?
3. People mention very sensory experiences related to herb garden, labyrinth, etc. There are less comments about sensory experiences in worship. How do worship planners incorporate the senses in designing meaningful worship/liturgy?

**Question 5: Tell a memory that gives you anxiety about the future of this congregation. Tell a memory that gives you hope.**

24 interviews, 62 remarks

Sources of anxiety (35)

no anxiety - 1

dwindling numbers - 9

aging congregation/lack of young people - 8

rector changes - 6 (including a reference to lack of empathy when a former rector experienced depression/resulting loss of members)

loss of meaningful worship/feels watered down - 2

people opting to view online instead of in person - 2

cost of living/younger people can't afford to live here - 2

mentioned once each (6): closedness/change resistance among our older people, over-reliance on faithful volunteers, decline of mainline/surge of evangelical and fundamentalist churches, casualness regarding no longer wearing masks (especially pastors), financial pressure regarding roof and lighting system, changing demographic of the area with fewer potential members

Sources of hope (26)

no hope - 0

new members/younger families joining - 6

younger priest, extremely hard-working, dynamic, able to attract younger people - 4

dedication of our faithful volunteers - 4

how inclusive we are - 2

mentioned once each (10): meaningful worship, meaningful children's liturgy, youth mission trips and reporting, return to in-person worship, sense of genuineness here, baptisms, Noah's Ark, new programs on mental health, inter-faith efforts, generous contributors,

***recommended questions to consider:***

1. How has St. Timothy's done grief rituals for aspects of past congregational life that have been lost and are not coming back or symbolized letting go of what once was?
2. It is not clear to readers if individual responses indicate widely shared hopes and anxieties. Are there commonly shared anxieties and hopes? How pervasive are they at St. Timothy's?
3. What serves to reinforce the anxieties? What serves to alleviate the anxieties? How are anxiety points already being addressed?
4. What cements the shared hopes? What diminishes the sense of shared hope?
5. In what ways is the current program life of St. Timothy's a logical extension of its past program or a radical change from its past program? How can positive aspects of the past be well celebrated whether continuing or discontinuing?



## **Question 6: Describe an experience of profound worship you have had.**

24 interviews, 36 remarks

none - 2

sermons - 5 (personal, meaningful, or one that I've never forgotten)

baptisms - 4 (observing them, when my children were baptized, when I was baptized)

memorial services - 3

music - 3 (choir, touched by use of a song in another language, music in general)

joy of being back in-person post-COVID - 3

special seasonal worship experiences - 3 (Christmas, Easter Vigil, Holy Week)

a personally potent, symbolic experience - 2

communing with God in nature - 2

experiencing loving support in a time of crisis - 2

Eucharist - 2

mentioned once each (5): summer camp, joy in serving in roles, a special outdoor worship event, in the garden/labyrinth, in a special interpersonal connection

### ***recommended questions to consider:***

1. Most of the profound worship experiences cited by interviewees were not related to regular weekly worship. Moving moments often engaged the senses. As in Q4, q3 above, in what ways might symbolism, rituals, and sensory experience enhance weekly worship and increase the likelihood of rich worship experience?
2. Profound worship speaks to everyday life experiences. What makes today's worship options feel most relevant? Irrelevant?
3. Profound worship stirs emotion. In what ways is St. Timothy's worship designed to evoke, express, and validate emotion? In what ways is the expression of emotion de-legitimized in St. Timothy's shared worship life?
4. For all of the above, who should be responsible for worship design and planning that incorporates the senses, is relevant, and invites appropriate emotional engagement? (If compared to a theater production, what are the church's stage crew, tech crew, producer, artistic director, etc.)

**Question 7: Tell about how you feel about changes in this congregation in the past 3-5 years. Are there any activities or aspects of the church you would and/or would not like to see return?**

24 interviews, 54 remarks

N/A - 3

Feel positively about (6)

mentioned once each (6): projection makes it easier to see, Todd and Susan have complementary gifts/styles, we have good collaboration post-COVID, video equipment, strong outreach, strong adaptability/resilience

Feel negatively about (19)

loss of diverse musical experiences and programs - 4  
dislike projection, powerpoint, worship via TV - 2  
loss of youth - 2

mentioned once each (11): staff reductions (music, office, youth), loss of sense of community, loss of members, current preaching/sermon style, loss of members, aging, Wednesday Mass Chapel, loss of Cursillo, lack of young people, loss of intergenerational experiences, loss of childcare and children's liturgy

Wish to see (26)

more musical diversity - 4  
return of small groups/Foyer groups - 4  
more outreach/community focus/return of FOTH - 4  
youth group - 2

mentioned once each (12): develop a women's support group, more sensory worship experience, more celebrations, return of prayer wall, return of senior ministry, return of Stephen Ministers, resume multi-age forum, return of senior group, resume children's choir, resume Saints and Sinners, resume Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, resume Bishop's Ranch retreats

*recommended questions to consider:*

1. A majority of comments have to do with changes of program, a perception of significant loss, and regret that church isn't what it once was. How do principles of grief apply to the congregation (not just to individuals) and are there ways to address the pervasive feelings of shared, common grief?
2. The congregation embraces diversity in some respects and avoids or resists diversity in musical expression. How is this internal dissonance around musical diversity being proactively addressed?
3. As new people are added to St. Timothy's, they bring their own set of expectations. How will the expectations of new people be expressed, clarified, and taken seriously for St. Timothy's planning purposes?
4. At St. Timothy's, how do strong individual preferences yield to the "will of the people" or "good of the whole?" What is the congregation's unique culture related to making individuals feel heard even if the majority goes a different direction? How do you see this happening most ideally for the future?

**Question 8: Tell about the ways people fight in this congregation. Tell about a situation where you and other people were involved in a problem at church and how it was handled.**

24 interviews, 36 remarks

not aware of any/not applicable/not ever involved - 11

what conflicts are about (10)

priest issues/transitions - 4

how to do things - 2

mentioned once each (4): Sacred Ground, personal differences, asking people to leave, inability to work together

how conflicts are handled (15)

backing away/withdrawing from participation/disengaging - 5

viscerally, vocally, and emotionally - 2

address directly by discussion and dialog - 2

enlist diocesan counsel - 2

hunker down/refuse to adapt - 2

mentioned once each (2): avoidance, allow space for people's uniqueness

***recommended questions to consider:***

1. What are the congregation's key ideals for handling wide-scale congregational conflict? Has a congregational conflict management plan been agreed upon?
2. How does the congregation deal with antagonistic trouble-makers consistent with its beliefs and values? What are the congregational accountability systems for divisive voices in the church?
3. Who is responsible for hearing out the people that withdraw from participation because of differences of opinion?