

OTM Narrative Questions

1. Describe a moment in your congregation's recent ministry which you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

Our congregation feels strongly about our mission to help those in our local community who are in need. One of these ministries is our Senior Lunch program. Once a month we offer a free lunch and program to any Seniors in our area who would like to get out and enjoy fellowship and a nourishing meal. Each month we serve 40-45 seniors, many regulars and always some new faces. The money and volunteers come from our parishioners. We quietly ask for a free will offering from these Seniors who are attending the lunch. Any money we receive is quietly given to the manager of the cafeteria at the local school. She uses the money to quietly pay for a School Lunch for any student who for any reason is not able to purchase or bring his/her lunch. This is a joyful way for us to "play it forward" and provide a way for quite an array of people to have their bodies nourished and their souls filled with joy for doing good for others.

2. Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship services provided by your congregation.

The liturgical style of our church is open, relaxed yet liturgical. We follow the Book of Common Prayer and have a Communion Service each Sunday morning at 10:00. The Service is led by our Rector, and assisted by Lay Readers and one of our two Deacons. Our congregation is made up of many different denominations, but we all seem comfortable with the traditional style of the Communion Service. We appreciate the prayers and the lessons from the Bible. We look forward to a thoughtful and personalized sermon by our Rector which gives us something to take out into the world each week. We are a close knit congregation, considering ourselves one big family, but welcoming to all newcomers. We are open to trying new things and being stretched a little on any given Sunday, but there seems to be great comfort in returning to what we know. An important part of our worship service is the Peace. We look at this time in the service as a way to joyfully greet our fellow parishioners and anyone who is visiting our church. Music is also an important part of our worship service. On Wednesday mornings, we have an intimate Morning Prayer Service, led by a Deacon in our congregation.

3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

Formally, we look for opportunities to have visiting ministers to broaden our experiences. Being in a small town sometimes limits our resources, but recently we have had a Hospice Chaplain and the leader of D.R.E.A.M (a ministry for the Dominican Republic). Informally, almost everyone in our congregation is involved in ministry of some sort. Ministering within our congregation is done by the Choir, the Lay Readers, our Church Secretary (who is also our music director and a "jack of all trades") and many people who are involved in Pastoral Care. We look at the ministry of Pastoral Care as a calling for all of us. Through our Mission Committee, we have found a wonderful variety of ways to minister to people in our community. There is STAR which is a personal needs closet open to those in need, Senior Lunch, Nature Camp for children in the Summer, Camp Chick which is a Camp sponsored by our Diocese, Jubilate Scholarships (Jubilate is the Pre-School/Day Care Center in our building next to the Church), Scholarships for higher education. Like so many rural churches, we are always watching our budget so most of our ministry is done by the hard work and generous spirit of our congregation.

4. As a congregation, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

Our spiritual well being is complimented by our Rector, our experience in our church services, small discussion groups at coffee hour, and interacting with each other. As a congregation, we believe in "effective" pastoral care, pastoral care that meets the special needs of those in our congregation and in our community. We do this in many ways, i.e. visiting others, taking food to those who are in need, emails to everyone asking for prayers and help, praying for each other in church and at home, calls to say hello. We feel that our spiritual well-being is supported by where we live. There is much "beauty in the nature" around us. This beauty is evidence of God's gifts. Several years ago, thanks to the generosity of our parishioners, we were able to put a large window in the front of our sanctuary, bringing this natural beauty into our service. The physical well-being of the church physical plant itself is handled by parishioners whenever possible. Our Jr. Warden has a big job. We do not formally measure our well-being. Our Mission Committee tries to keep a handle on just how much we can do as a small parish. We do not lack for new ideas, so we must constantly take the pulse of our congregation.

5. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your congregation?

Our missions ministry and outreach to those in our community is a very important part of our church. Everyone is involved either through time or money. S.T.A.R. which stands for Sharing Together Area Resources is a program which provides personal needs items for those in our area who are trying to make it on their own but need extra help. Jubilate Pre-School/Day Care leases space in our Annex building, which is part of our Church property. We fund scholarships to Jubilate for children in the area so that their parents can work outside the home and the children can get the opportunity to attend Pre-School. We participate in an Interdenominational organization in our immediate area with our time and money. We have a Nature Center and a Camp is held for children ages 6-10. Scholarships are available. Senior Lunch provides a free lunch and chance for socialization to all seniors in our area once a month. In addition, we support the local backpack program, School Lunches, the Salvation Army scarf program, Hospice, and anywhere we can find a need on the local level.

6. Describe your congregation's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical region.

In being a small church, we expend most of our resources locally, either through our own church or through the local group of churches. Our last three Rectors have been involved with the Diocese as Dean's of the Northern Convocation and as members of the Commission on Ministry. Camp Chickagami is a camp sponsored by the Diocese of Eastern Michigan. We provide scholarships for several area children to attend. We try and answer the call when the Diocese points out a need in the larger world such as providing water for the residents of Flint. We send delegates to the Diocese Convention each year. We attend workshops when they are within a reasonable driving distance for us. Several of our members went to the Dominican Republic twice to help build a church. We have just sent money to pay for two kitchens in the Dominican. We are fortunate to have two Deacons/Chaplains in our congregation. They bring us needs in the community which they observe, and they work as Chaplains in the Hospital and with Hospice. We enjoy being part of the wider church but we feel our first responsibility is to our own community. This is where the majority of our funds and energies go.

7. Tell about a ministry that your congregation has initiated in the past five years.

On a monthly basis (from 4-6 pm on Sunday afternoon), we hold Messy Church. We advertise it in the local paper and with flyers throughout the community. Our goal is to provide a welcoming, Christian based opportunity for families to get together and share time together in a church setting. There is a theme, based on a Bible lesson. We do crafts, have a lesson together in the church and share a meal. We usually have about 40 people there, about 1/3 of them children. We are reaching people who would not ordinarily go to church on Sunday morning but want a Christian based activity for their family or themselves. Sometimes it is as simple as someone needs a good meal.

8. How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the future?

We feel that the Church of the future needs to provide a spiritual place for all ages to come together to worship and have their "batteries" recharged as they lead their lives and try to do the things God would like us to do. For the older generation, there is the need for feeling secure in the church environment they grew up in. For the younger generation, there is the need for a flexible church that offers them security, love and a path to follow. Pastoral care is one of the ways we are preparing for the church of the future. People need to feel that there is a place they can turn to in time of need. In our church and our community, we hope to provide the feeling that there is a friend available when you need one and that you might enjoy helping others with that friend. Providing activities like Messy Church, Sunday School, Nature Camp are ways that we are looking to bring young families into our church. We are actively looking for ways to involve others and reach out to them. All churches seem to be facing the same problems. In our new Interdenominational Group we hope to brainstorm together and come up with things that help all of us. As Christians, this is not a competition but a universal mission.

9. What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your congregation?

Each fall we have a Stewardship campaign, talking about tithing and giving back to the church. We send out pledge cards accompanied by a letter from our Rector and our Senior Warden. Not all of our parishioners are interested in making a pledge. But we believe that almost all of them are committed to being good stewards of God and giving back to the church as they are able. Giving of your time and talents and resources as you are able is a good description of the attitude of our congregation toward stewardship. Like many churches in our area, half of our congregation are "snow birds" so it is a challenge to keep our pastoral care and monetary commitments on an even keel. Each spring there is new life injected into our congregation as our summer residents return and become once again part of our ongoing commitment to pastoral care inside and outside of our parish. We are committed to stewardship to the Diocese also. Our past rectors were actively contributing to Diocese needs, and we make a tithe to the Diocese each year.

10. What is your congregation's experience of conflict? And how have you addressed it?

We have an older congregation and most of our conflict has been around change. If there is a change the Vestry is considering, we send informative letters and have open meetings to bring the information to the congregation. We hope that being open is a way to avoid conflict or at least resolve it. Most of our congregation did not grow up as an Episcopalian. It is our sense of community within ourselves and to the outside community that seems to attract people to our church. And as a community, we try to be inclusive and address conflicts. We appreciate a Rector who considers him/her self part of the congregation. All of us are encouraged to have new ideas and to share them with each other. The

Vestry then has the responsibility to listen to others and make the best decision they can for the congregation as a whole. We try to use our Senior Warden as a shield to identify areas of conflict and notify the Rector so the Rector can be a mediator in the conflict. We try to be open with the congregation and keep them informed, making them feel part of the decision making process.

11. What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? And what did you learn?

As we stated before, change could be a hard thing for our congregation. We need to put energy into young families and more modern ways, but at the same time, we do not want to lose the energy we put into the people who make up our congregation presently. They have expectations and needs which have a right to be ministered to. An instance of change is when we built the building next to the church which now houses the Jubilate Pre-School/Day Care. Part of the congregation wanted a Senior Center or Senior Housing facility instead. Though there is definitely a need for that in our community, we decided on helping the younger families and the majority of the congregation agreed. Another example of change in our church was when we had a Rector who wanted to introduce folk guitar music into the service and also wanted to remove the middle of the prayer rail to make the altar seem more accessible to the congregation. We actually lost a few parishioners over these changes but most of us adopted a wait and see approach and were happy with the changes, once we got used to them. We realize that the world is a different place, and we have to make accommodations for our future. We have grown as a parish in the last few years and seem to be more adaptable.

12. Please provide a few words (up to 6) describing the gifts and skill essential to the future priest in your congregation.

Spiritual guide; Traditional yet worldly and current; A rapport with all ages
Personalized sermons relative to today's world; Pastoral Care inside and outside our church
Appreciates the Ritual; Sense of humor; Open minded