



## Christ Episcopal Church

*Bay St. Louis, Mississippi*

### **Parish Profile Survey Results**

In August 2021, the Christ Church Rector Search Committee prepared a survey to collect data and input from the Christ Church community. The survey was completed by both online responses and paper responses. The Christ Church Parish Survey received 59 responses, 64% of the 92 individuals and families to whom the survey was sent. Survey respondents could complete the survey for themselves and individuals or as families.

This document contains a summary of the results and identifies some trends surrounding who we are, how we like to worship, and what we're looking for in our next rector.

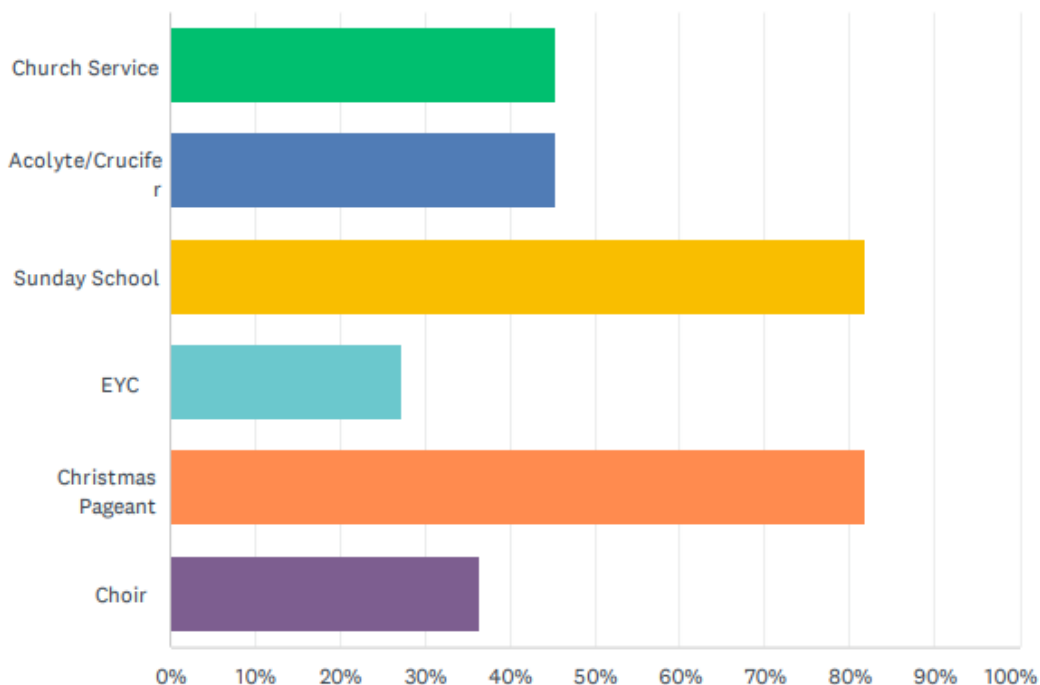
#### **Who We Are**

- The 59 responses represented 108 adult individuals with 26 dependent children identified.
- More respondents were female (53 total) than male (44) with 2 identifying as non-binary and 9 who didn't answer this particular question. The slightly more female responses than male is similar to the Sunday service attendance.
- Survey respondents ranged in age from 29 to 87 with an average age of 62.
- Most of our parishioners grew up in New Orleans, the Mississippi Coastal area, and the Southeastern U.S. (with a large showing from Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia). A small contingent of parishioners have moved to the area from across the United States including Washington State, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Texas.
- The survey respondents were evenly split between retired individuals (52%) and individuals who are still in the workforce (47%). Of the working respondents, most indicated full-time positions.
- We represent a diverse background of occupations with the largest percentages coming from self-employment, education, law, and healthcare.

- Our parishioners include a mix of cradle Episcopalians and converts from other religions. 61 of the 108 parishioners have been Episcopalians for more than 20 years. Of the respondents who did not grow up Episcopalian, individuals had most commonly converted from the Catholic and Methodist denominations.
- Respondents years attending Christ Church was evenly spread with 41 responses from parishioner who have attended Christ Church for 10 years or greater and 41 responses from parishioners who have attended for less than 5 years. This indicates that we have a strong group of long-time parishioners and a strong group of newer parishioners.
- 75% of respondents said they feel connected to Christ Church as their Church home. This question received many additional comments from respondents about Christ Church being a family and how the parish has become family. One respondent said, ‘Love is in evidence here’.

## Parish Summary- Young Families and Children

As mentioned above, 26 children were identified in the survey in addition to the 108 adults represented 15 survey participants answered the questions about dependent children and their interest in involvement. The children identified by adult participants ranged in age from less than 1 to 17. Christ Church has a growing number of families with children. Below is a table of the interest in activities for children:



In a later survey question, participants were asked about areas of improvement for Christ Church and a desire for more children, more kid involvement in the service, and attracting younger families was a common theme among the responses.

## How We Worship

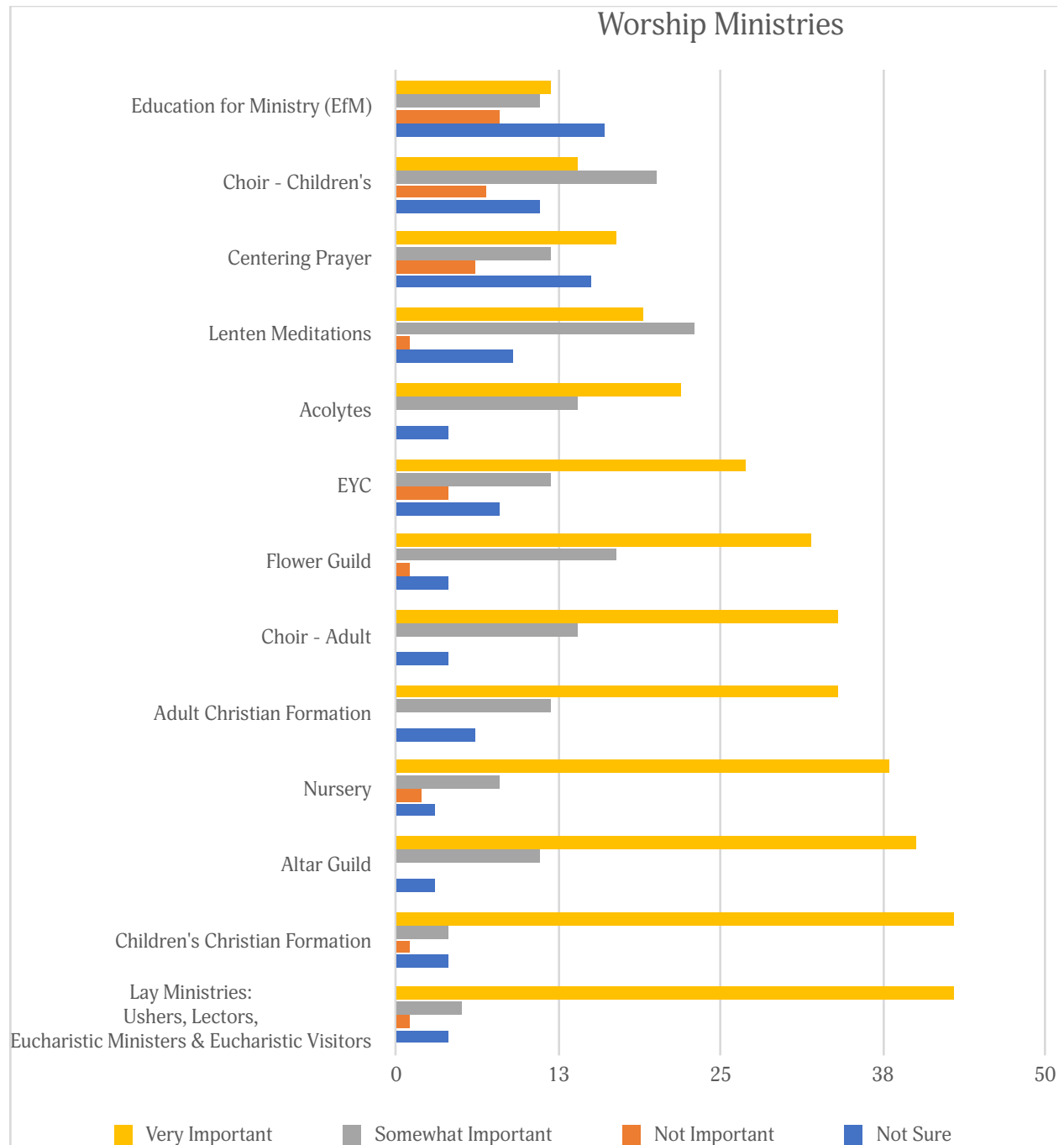
Christ Church, like the community that it serves, sees itself as a welcoming, loving, and open congregation that embraces a “come as you are” mentality. Below are the highlights of our survey responses regarding worship:

- Respondents were asked to share their involvement and attendance at Christ Church prior to Covid-19. 63% attend church at least 3 times per month.
- Christ Church has long held a single Sunday morning service at 10:00 A.M. Necessitated by COVID-19, an additional 8:30 outside service was added as permitted by the Bishop during 2020 and 2021. 63% of survey respondents preferred the 10:00 service while 26% of respondents preferred the 8:30 outside service.
- Christ Church has, at times, held a mid-week healing service. 62% of Participants rarely attended a mid-week service.
- Our responses when asked about the current worship style reflects the diversity of our desired worship style, with equal responses suggesting a preference for high church and low church. While some respondents asked for more “smells and bells” and “too relaxed/informal” others asked for more contemporary services with specific comments about “no chanting, bells, or smells” and “too traditional”. To go along with the desire for more high and low church were comments from other who noted an appreciation for a range of service styles.
- The greatest strengths of the church included the physical appearance, the style of worship, and welcoming newcomers.
- The areas with the greatest “needs improvement” responses were size of congregation, Children’s Christian Ed Programs, fellowship, and stewardship.

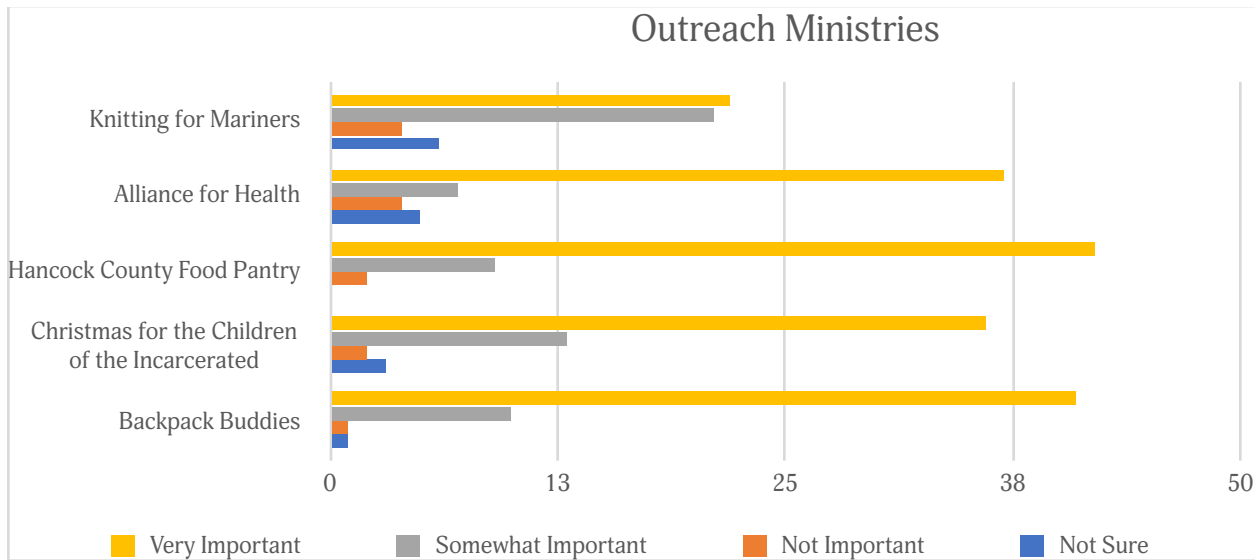
In open ended questions about areas of improvement, there were many responses that referenced needing more children and more youth. There are also comments throughout the survey about Christ Church being a welcoming place, especially for newcomers. Most comments said how welcomed parishioners felt however there were a few comments that noted a need to be more welcoming.

## Parish Life and Ministries

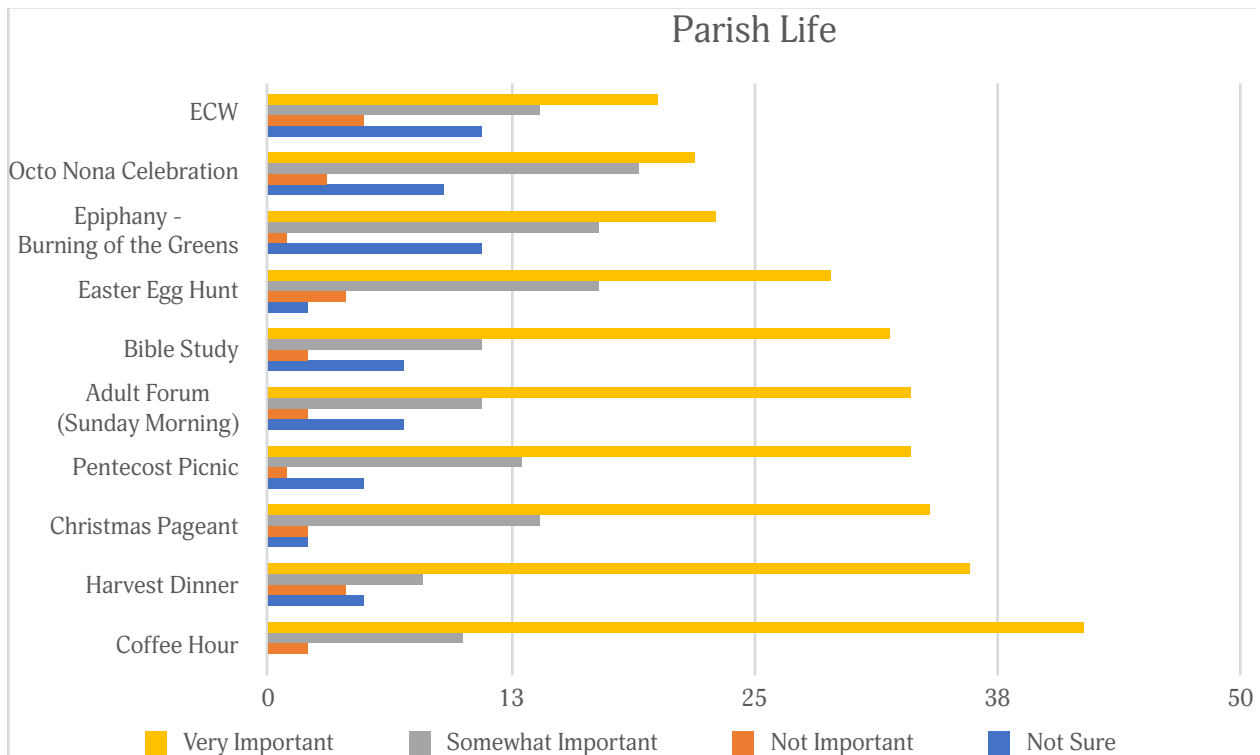
Parishioners were asked to rate the importance of our current worship ministries. Results are included in the graph below.



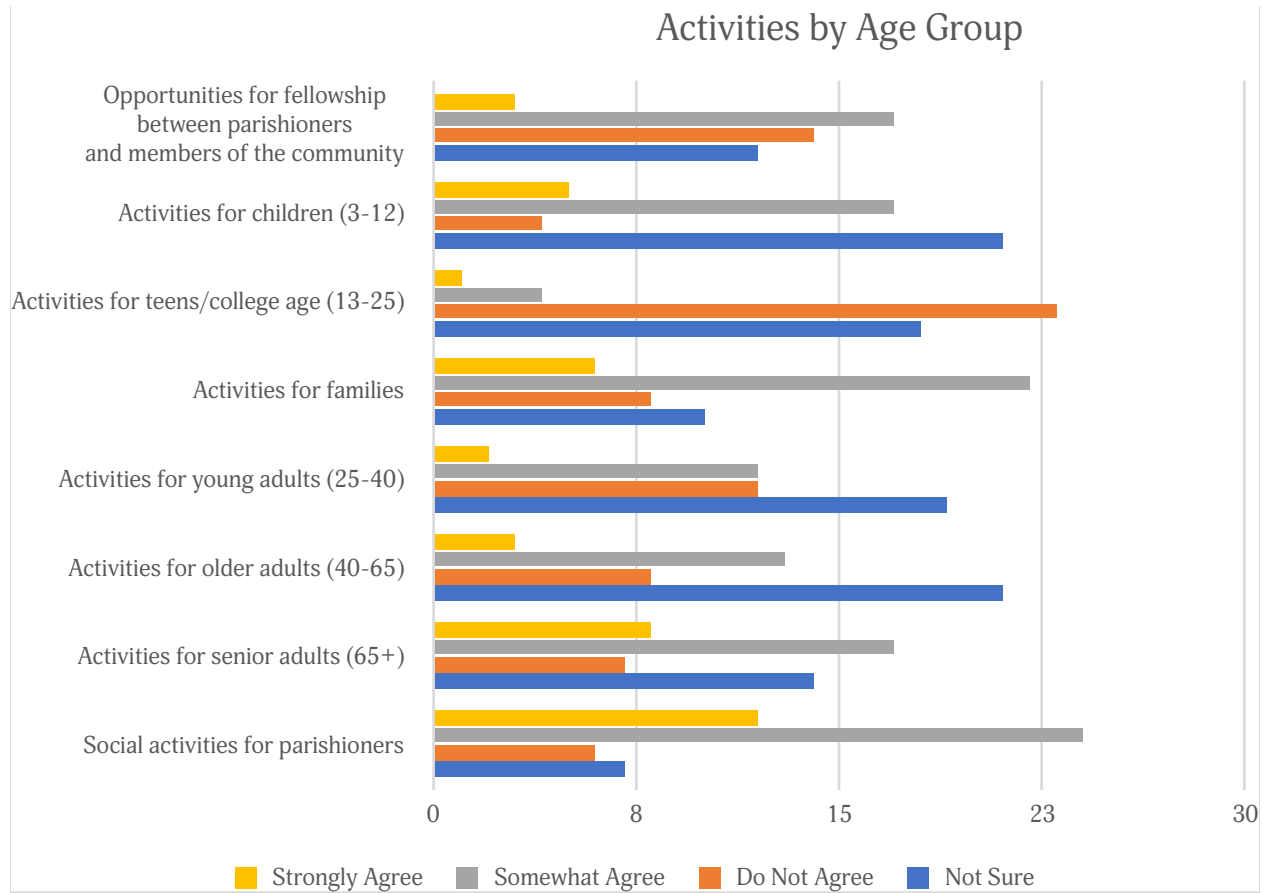
Parishioners were asked to rate the importance of our outreach ministries. All our outreach ministries have been ranked as “very important” Responses are included in the graph below:



Survey respondents were asked about importance of our annual Parish Life Activities. Among the most important parish life activities were coffee hour, Harvest Dinner, and the Christmas pageant. Responses are in the table below:



Parishioners were asked if Christ Church provides adequate opportunities for fellowship and formation activities by age group.



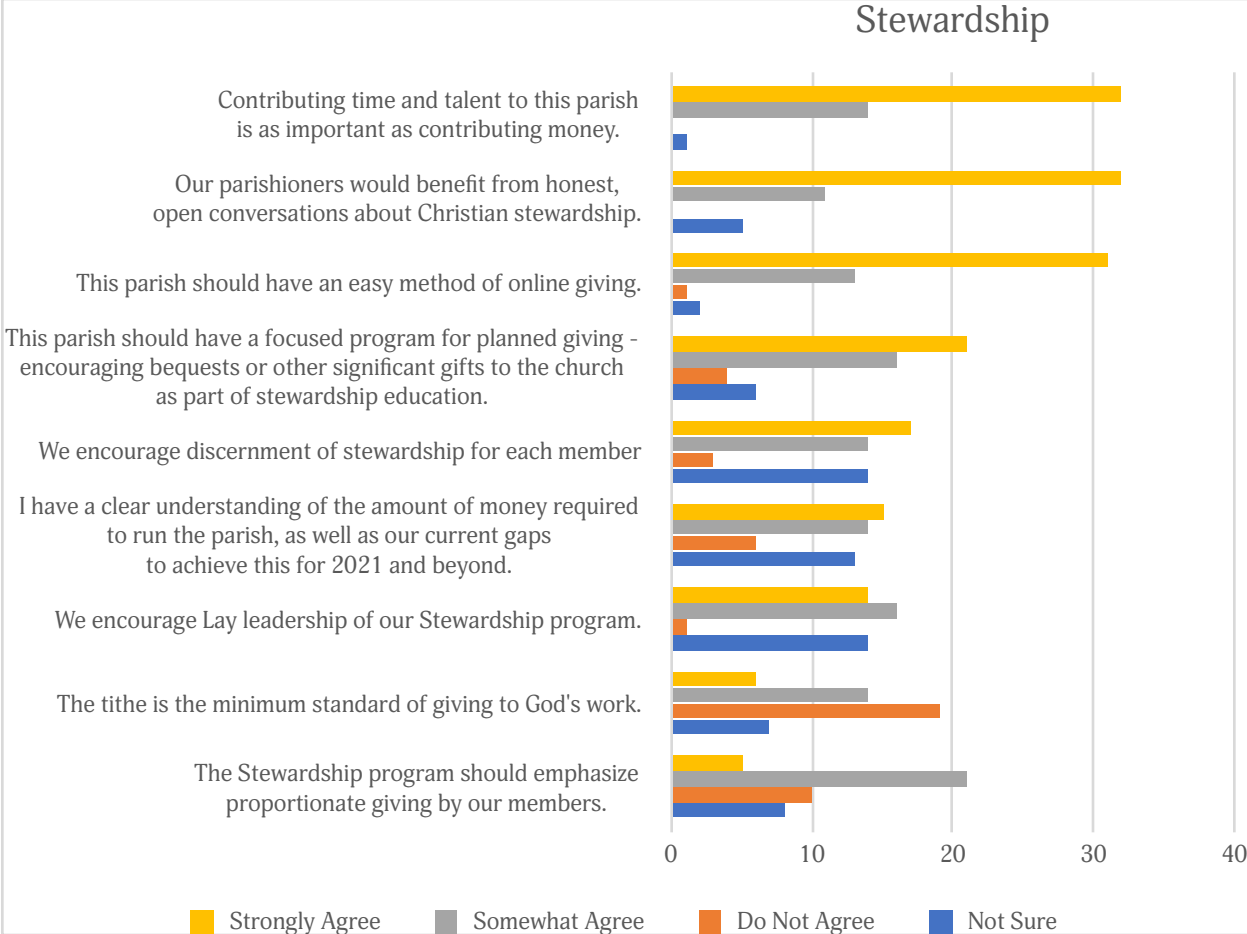
The parish agrees that we have opportunities for improvement for fellowship within ages.

Several resounding responses to an open-ended question about what activities should be started or re-started included:

- More frequent periodic post-service pot-luck dinners, church picnics, and/or progressive dinners
- 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday at 4
- Acolytes and Acolyte training

# Giving and Stewardship

The portion of the survey that covered stewardship made clear, with 67% of respondents strongly agreeing, that our parish would benefit from honest, open conversations about stewardship. There was also a strong response for a need to have a method for online giving. The full response from the stewardship portion of the survey is included in the table below.



The open-ended portion of the survey asking for additional thoughts or comments about stewardship further supported the responses that many in the congregation do not feel well informed about church finances.

Christ Church has had stable, consistent pledge and plate contributions averaging around \$160,000 annually for the previous 10 years (according to our parochial reports). 2020 brought decrease to our pledge and plate with Covid-19 making in-person worship unavailable compounded by the death of our priest.

## **Our Next Rector**

The next sections of the survey invite parishioners to share their preference for our next rector. Survey participants were asked to rank the following 6 categories in terms of importance in our next rector. It should be noted that all the topics below are important to have a well-rounded rector, however ranking these from the parishioner's perspective is necessary for the search committee to be able to prioritize strengths or prospective rector candidates.

### ***Parish Administration***

- Administration: Ability to manage the affairs of the parish
- Capital Development: Ability to organize and lead a capital development campaign
- Church Growth and Development: Ability to reshape existing programs and develop new
- Stewardship: Ability to lead/inspire in the development/use of individual/congregational resources

### ***Worship***

- Worship: Ability to plan and conduct worship services as a central event of the congregation
- Preaching: Ability to make scripture relevant to people's lives through clarity in preaching
- Theology: Ability to demonstrate and impart a disciplined understanding of biblical and historical revelation and the recognition of God's activity in the world.

### ***Adult Education***

- Adult Christian Education: Ability to develop and lead programs
- Spiritual Growth: Ability to lead others in the formation and development of a deeper spiritual life
- Music Ministry: Ability to support ministry through a comprehensive music program

### ***Youth Education & Growth***

- Youth Christian Education: Ability to develop a program
- Youth Group Development: Ability to inspire young people and incorporate them into the full life and ministry of the church

### ***Pastoral Care & Support***

- Pastoral Care: Ability to care for people so that they feel nurtured, including hospital, nursing home, hospice, and home visitation
- Conflict Management & Resolution: Ability to understand and work with systems and groups in conflict



- Short Term Counseling: Ability to help parishioners with problems, both personal and spiritual
- Crisis Ministry: Ability to provide care to people at critical points in their lives

**Community**

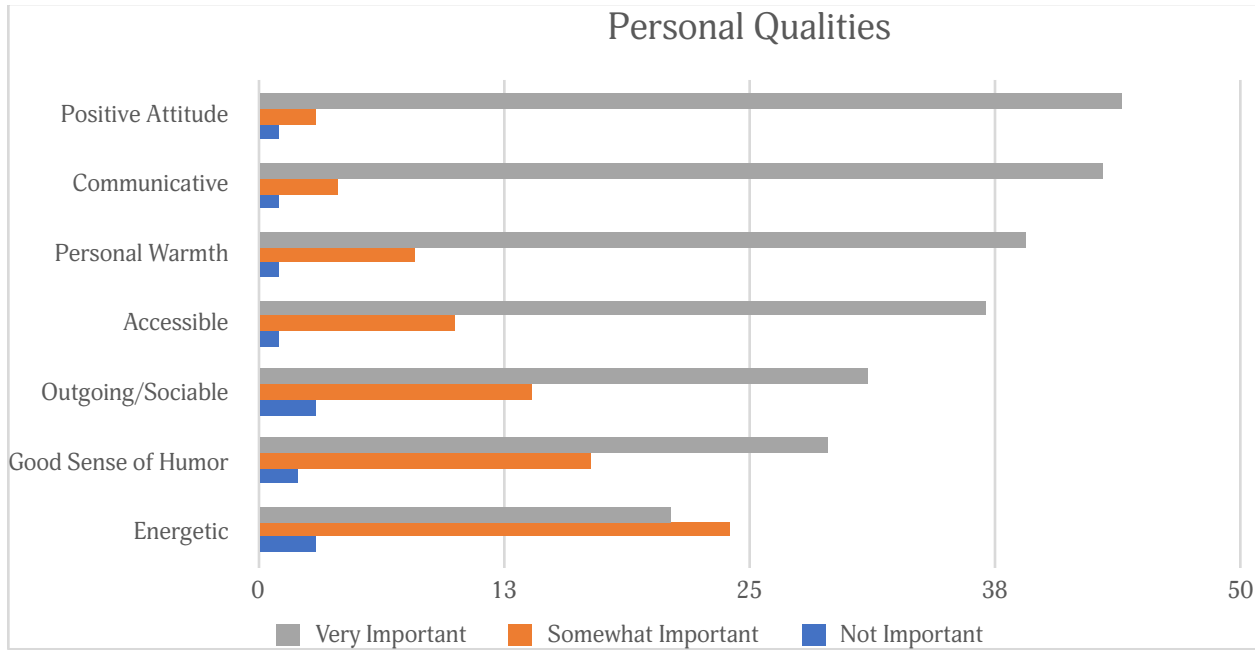
- Community Involvement: Active awareness of and participation in community events
- Social Justice Ministry: Ability to help parishioners become aware of, understand, and address social issues
- Outreach: Ability to inspire parishioners to serve person in need outside of the congregation

As defined above, worship was by far the most important ministry strength of our next rector. Parish Administration was the second highest ranked strength. Pastoral care was a close 3<sup>rd</sup> to parish administration. Youth Education and growth was 4<sup>th</sup>. Adult Education was 5<sup>th</sup>. Community was a clear 6<sup>th</sup>.

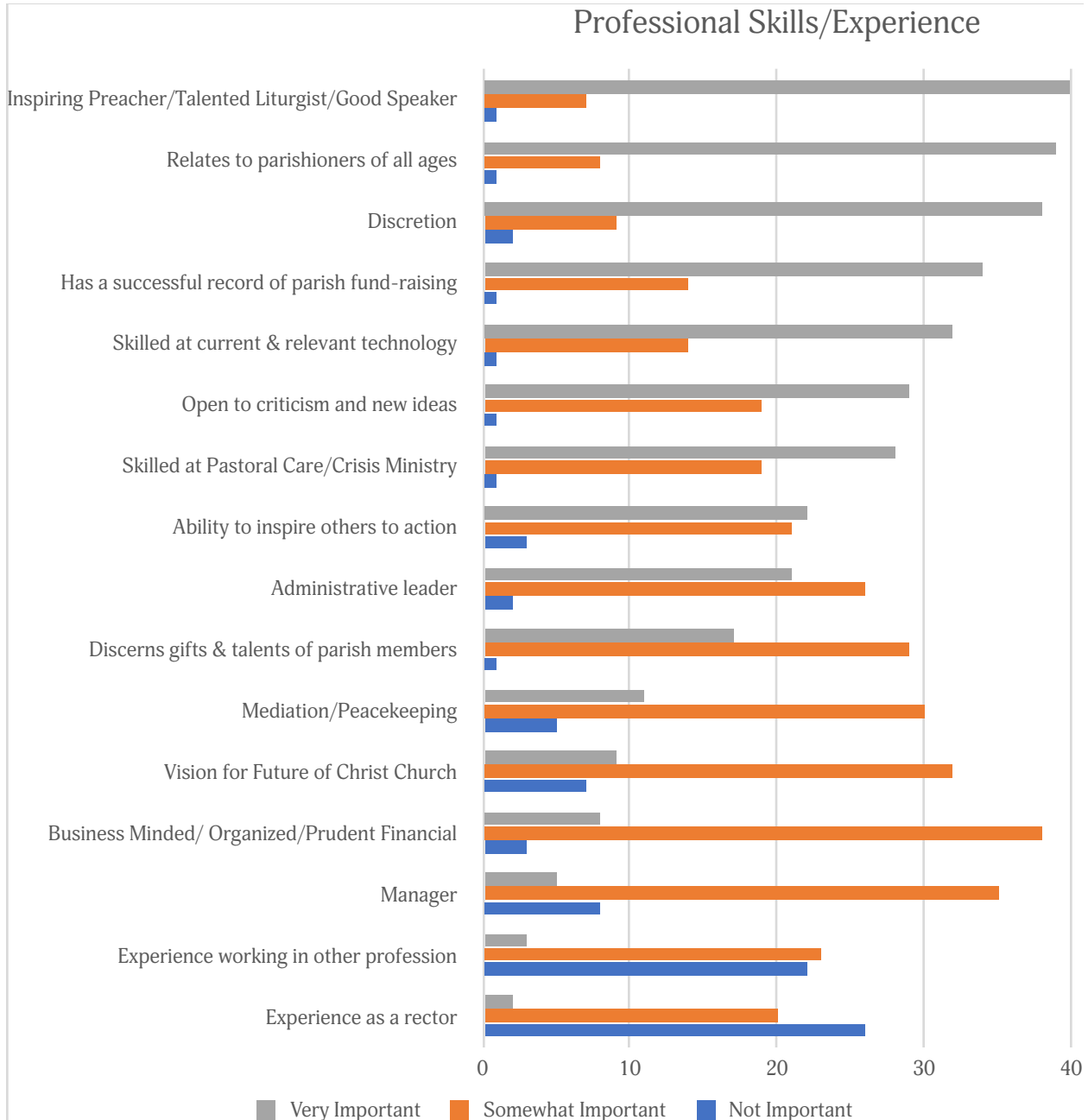
The full data set for the rankings is included below:

		Rank					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Ministry Strength</b>	Worship	33	5	3	3	0	3
	Pastoral Care and Support	5	11	10	6	10	4
	Parish Administration	4	18	8	6	2	6
	Youth Education and Growth	3	8	15	12	7	2
	Adult Education	1	4	11	12	13	7
	Community	2	1	1	7	14	22

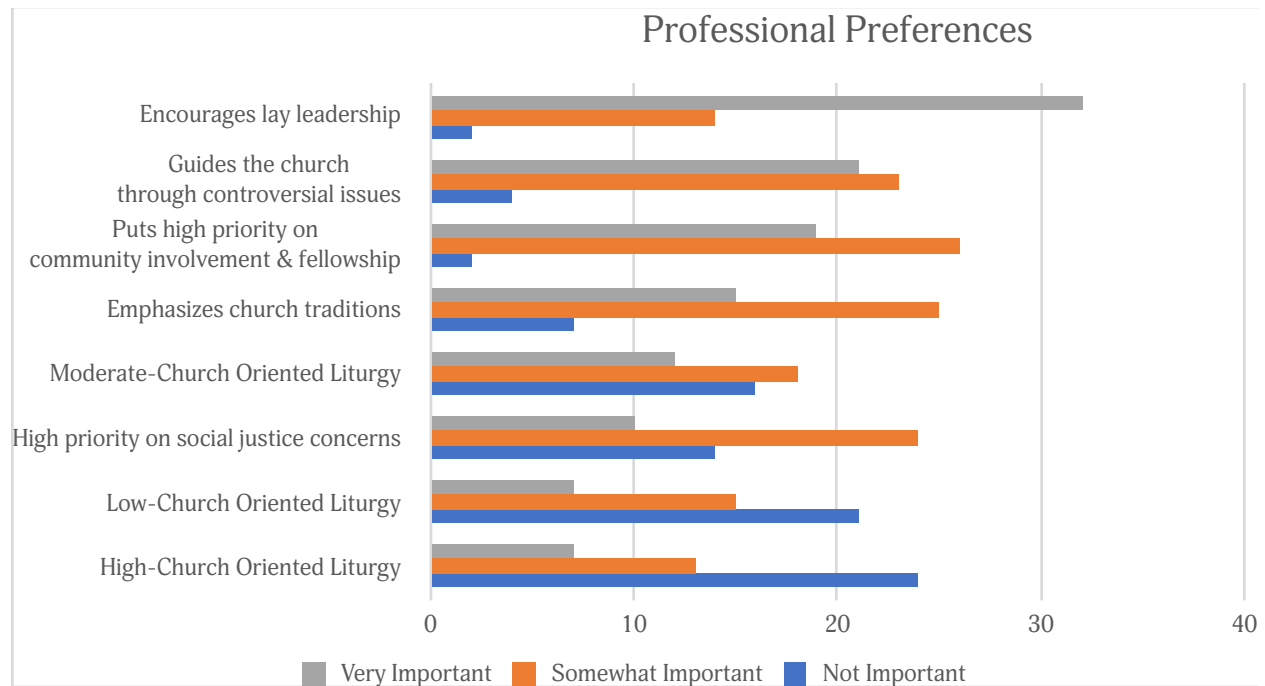
The survey asked parishioners to state the importance of personal qualities for our next rector.



Parishioners rated the importance of professional skill and experience. The top ranking skills or experiences support the strength rating with inspiring preacher (Worship), relates to parishioners of all ages (Pastoral Care), discretion (Pastoral Care and Administration) and successful record of parish fund-raising (within Administration) ranks as the most important skills.



Professional preferences of our next rector were ranked on importance. The responses to these questions support the variety of worship mentioned earlier in this summary document. Our Christ Church parishioners have no consistent leaning towards high or low church. The survey points to a desire for a good liturgist who will encourage lay persons and guide the church through controversy with warmth, love, a positive attitude, and good communication.



## Challenges and Quotes

The most common responses to the question of our greatest challenge as a parish were growth and fundraising.

- “Growing”, “Increasing membership”, “Keeping young members”, “Need youth/teen programs”, “membership especially children...”, “Lack of growth”
- “Pledges”, “Fundraising”, “Inadequate funding”, “financial stability”

Additional comments on our challenges included:

- “Finding a person who wants to be with us for the long haul... enjoys being with and getting to know the congregation...”
- “Leadership”

One thing about this parish that we should NOT change included the quotes below:

- “Welcoming all”, “welcoming overall feeling”, “welcoming environment to those who come to worship”, “Spirit of the community... a very welcoming community of members”, “Friendly welcoming approach to newcomers”, “our warmth”
- “Worship”, “Worship being the centerpiece”, “

- “Our easy-going culture and open and loving community”, “Fun-loving attitude”, “Inclusiveness”, “Our relationships with each other”
- “... The Sense that we are all on a journey and no one has all the answers”

One thing that we SHOULD change:

- “Clergy stability”
- “We SHOULD find a priest while will love us and stay with us”
- “more social justice oriented”
- “utilize our property more”
- restart fellowship activities

Parishioners were asked what it would mean to them to have a full-time priest. The responses varied between comments about having a priest to re-engage with Coast Episcopal School, stability and potential longevity of a full-time priest, and Christ Church being a spiritual home to concerns that a full-time priest is outside of the current budget. Parishioners were also asked about their willingness to give specifically for a full-time priest. 53% of the responses were somewhat likely and 24% were very likely. While there was a large percentage willing to increase giving there were also comments and questions about the church financial reports and a need to stay within the budget.

The most important thing we need from our new rector:

- “Stability”
- “Love. Someone to love us and stay with us”
- “Commitment to stay”
- “We need a rector to accept and love our parish”
- “A good spiritual leader”
- “One who will love our church and our members”
- “Someone who wants to be here to love us and share life with us”
- “Willing to enjoy our way of life”
- “Understanding where Mississippians in 2021”
- “Understanding of the culture of the MS Gulf Coast”

## Summary

Christ Church appreciates a variety of worship styles and values the diverse views from everyone in the parish family. There’s a desire to have more fellowship opportunities and to grow and attract more youth. Christ Church is seeking a new rector that has a strength for worship and meaningful sermons. Someone who can connect to our parishioners and challenge us to grow spiritually. At the heart of all these survey answers, there’s a deep love for our church and the Christ Church family.