

## The Future is Now (FIN) – Report

The committee was formed at the request of St Matthew's rector Rev. Dr. John McGinty. "It is perhaps my dearest wish to have our group, in consultation with others across Saint Matthew's, craft with some specificity but also flexibility a vision of the parish we would like to be in the near and further future. Such a vision might assist the Search Committee when they are called together, the Interim priest if that is the structure that is followed, and ultimately be of possible value to the eventual new Rector in relationship to this good and holy community. (Father John, email to the FIN committee 8-17-2023)"

To this end the committee decided to create a survey for the parishioners followed by listening sessions.

**The Survey:** The Survey consisted of four tables Labeled A = D. Parishioners were asked to rank items in importance to them with the item being most important to them as one. They were then asked to rank the most important item from each Table. A total of 45 people completed the survey. Eight parishioners submitted their responses on-line.

Table A - Percentage of Respondents Who Ranked Item As Most Important To St. Matthew's

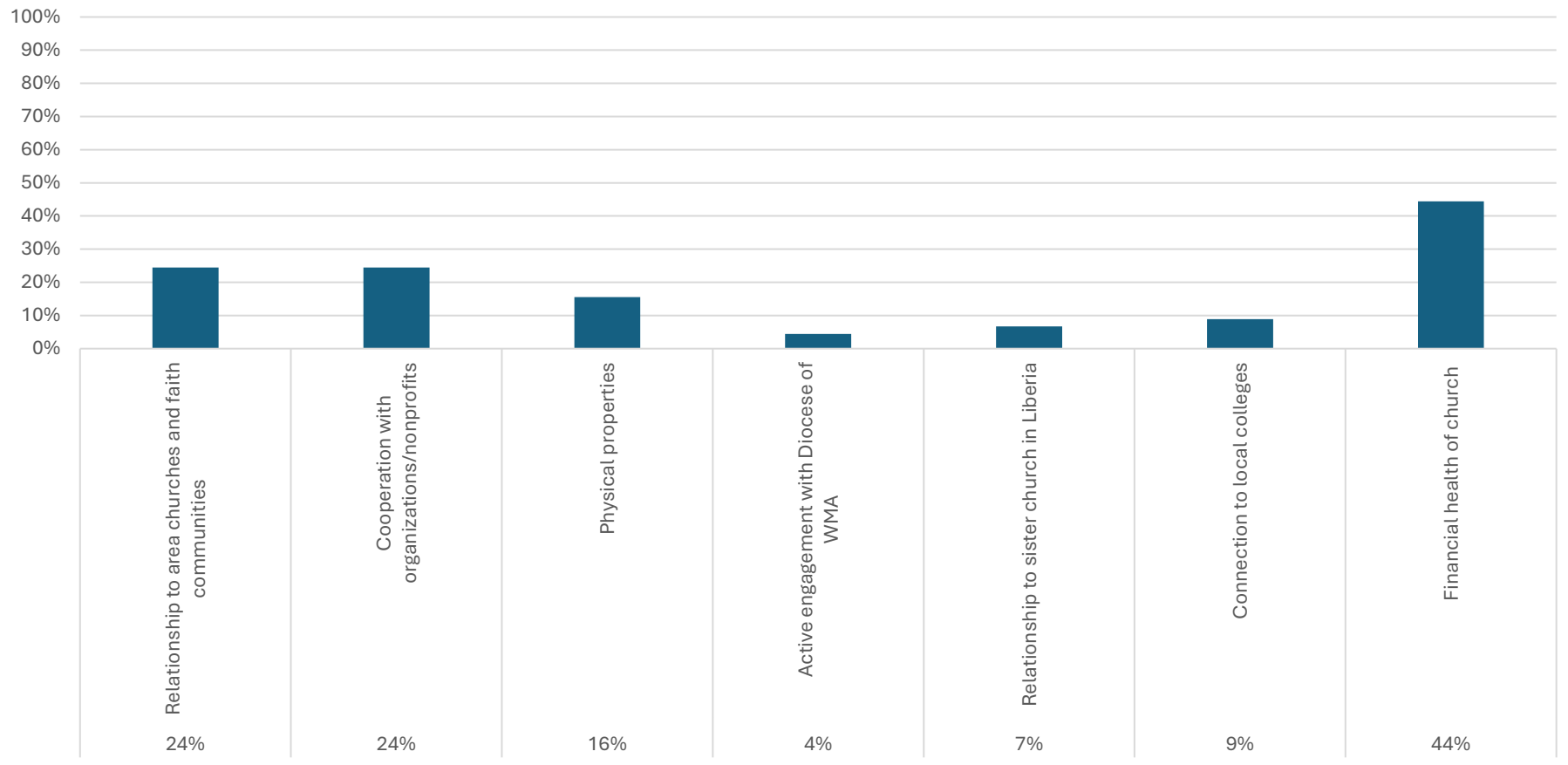


Table - C Percentage of Respondents Who Ranked Item As Most Important to St. Matthew's

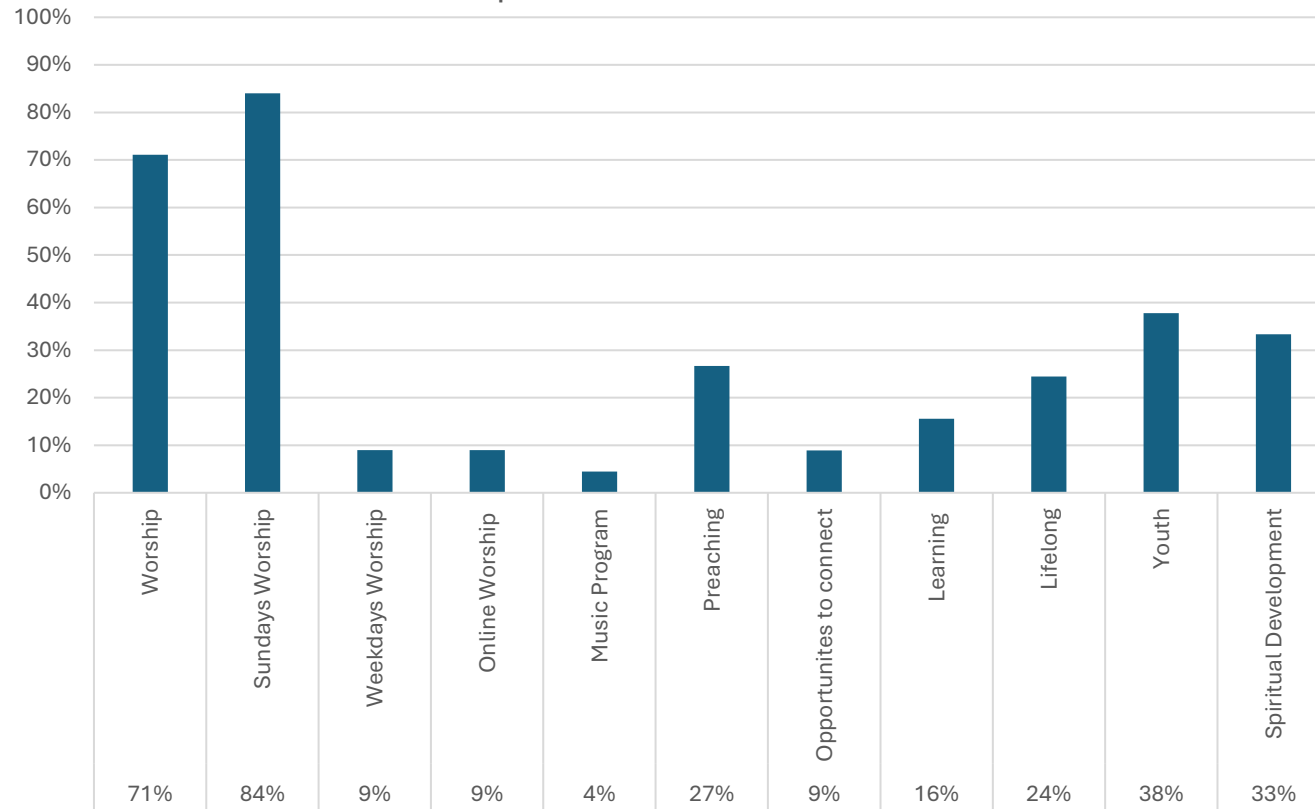
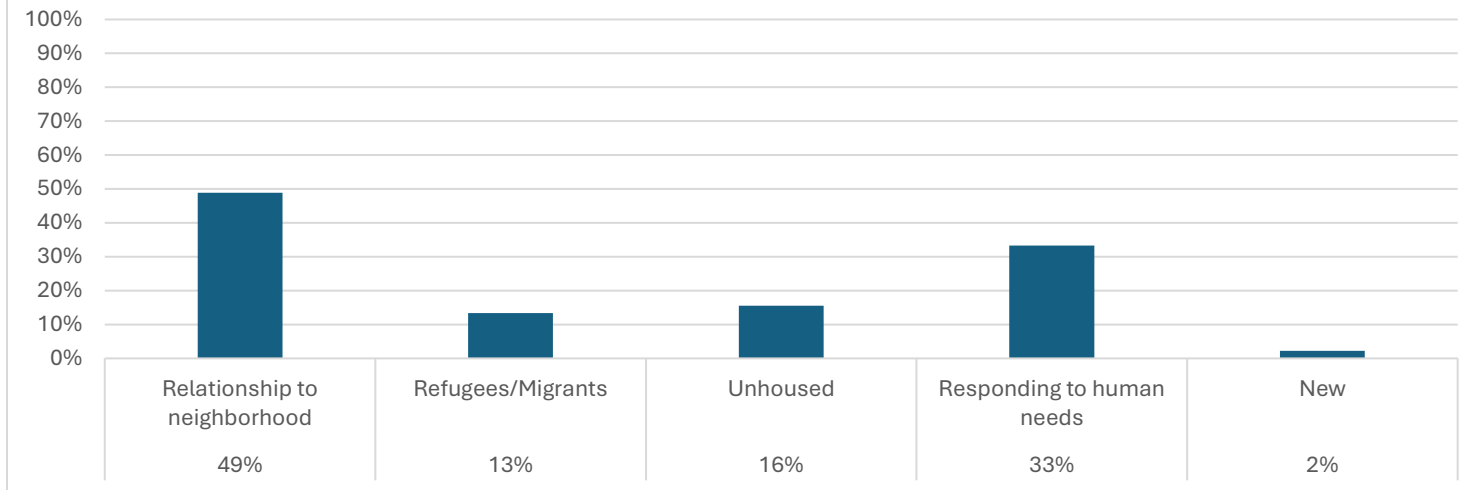
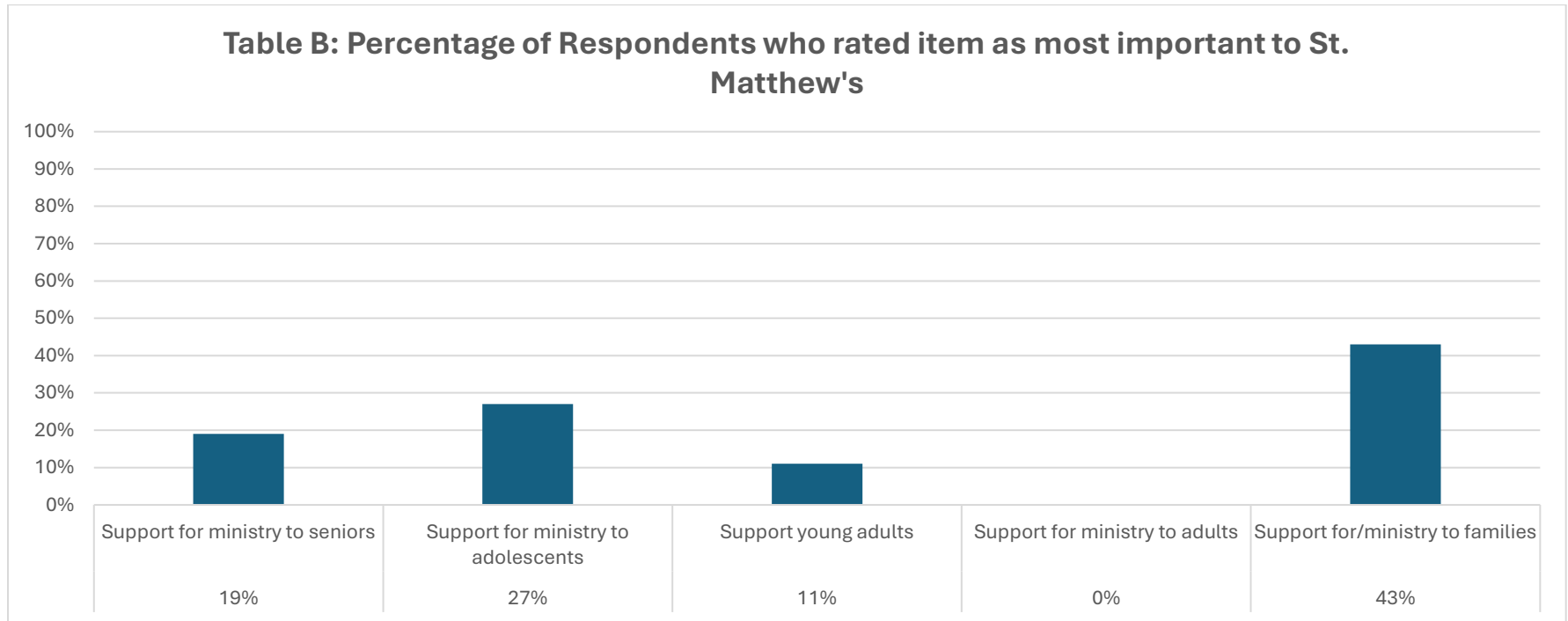


Table D - Percentage of Respondents Who Ranked Item As Most Important to St. Matthew's



**Write-ins:** Public Preaching; Each other; People Present; Outreach to in-active members; Service to veterans; Prayers for the people; Talent show for kids; Modern music; Youth Participation.

A total of 37 respondents ranked the most important item in each table. Results below.



**St Matthew's Parish**  
**Listening Session- Sunday February 4, 2024, Sunday February 11, and Monday evening February 12 by Zoom**  
**Responses**

**Note- \* indicates multiple responses**  
**Submitted by the FIN Committee**

**Questions:**

**1. What does St. Matthew's do well?**

- \*\*\*\*Welcoming (feeling that the parish is glad to have you here)- a warm, welcoming, and inviting community- "people come up and introduce themselves to us. There is an opportunity for everyone to be involved."
- \*\*Friendly
- Mission
- \*Hosting groups (utilizing the space well ex: AA groups)
- \*\*\*Outreach (especially to South Worcester)
- Teaches children about God
- Selecting good priests
- Serving at the altar
- Providing good communication and updates
- \*Providing food for everybody- the community, and 4 Corners, the Woo Fridge
- Fellowship
- Involving parishioners in church services
- Meaningful spiritual services
- Good location
- Keeping up the grounds and infrastructure
- \*\*Worship
- "Reflecting on the past, I think what they did well until the pandemic was teach my kids. The word of God, the 40-hour famine. Even if my child was a loner, she had the St Matthew's family. You knew your kid was going to grow up in faith knowing the word of God. One thing that helps church thrive is the people wanting to be parishioners. I appreciate the fact that the parishioners at SM have a passion for SM."
- Opportunities like the Book Club, opportunities to volunteer and to be engaged.

- A wide age range at the service

## **2. What brings parishioners together?**

- Church fair
- \*\*\*\*Coffee hour (the activity that draws the most)
- Wednesday book club
- Variety of activities
- Weekly cookout
- Food
- \*Fellowship and friendship
- Community
- Camaraderie
- \*Celebrations- multi-cultural gatherings
- Love and joy
- Understanding
- Love for each other
- Gospel
- \*Worship
- \*Serving my community
- The yard sale
- 4 Corners
- The knitting group
- Opportunities for discussion, reflection, contemplation- “these opportunities happened during coffee hour or volunteering.”
- The Quiet Day
- The Sunday service
- Bringing up the gifts

## **3. How does St. Matthew’s bring you comfort?**

- Inspiring message

- Intimacy of worship
- \*\*Supportive Community
- Fellowship
- \*Concern for each other (ex: calls from Festus, the Liberian community reaching out), “there for each other”
- \*\*Kind people- the people care, “there for each other”
- Togetherness
- The Woo fridge
- The prayer list and the prayer chain
- The beautiful building
- Memories, families, in-laws
- “a stronghold”, history
- A sense of belonging
- Father John is compassionate and caring and makes everyone feel special.
- Liturgy
- Age range is comforting
- Diversity
- “I like projects- doing things that have a beginning and an end”
- “Just being here, it is my happy place”
- “It is my second family”
- Great sermons including Mother Judith Lee (Interim priest)
- “In the years I have been here, if I am low, I can always count on SM for some help. When I have been sick, SM reached out to me. I see the comfort that others get from the community. SM has allowed me to go in and out as much as I want to. That’s a comfort to have the space to step back if I need to.”

**4. What did St. Matthew’s used to do that you miss doing now?**

- Supper clubs
- Bravehearts Games
- Multicultural events/dinners that bring the community together
- \*\*Youth Group- “ I saw a tremendous amount of growth in my kids and I miss that.”
- Men and Women’s organizations- (Mr. Mrs. And Ms. Clubs meeting once a month)
- Social activities
- Filled pews/membership



- Breakfasts
- Mother and Daughter Tea
- \*Pancake supper (Shrove Tuesday)
- Game and Family night
- Bowling
- Prayer tree and a tree of giving
- Church picnic- (originally at Bement or a State Park)- cookouts and games
- “I miss the *Life Worth Living* book.

**5. How could St. Matthew’s help support you and your family?**

- When struggling, SM cares for you
- Supportive, for example extra gifts at Christmas time
- More contact- for example robo calls or text messages
- By prayer (Prayer List)
- By Social Media
- Celebrating birthdays at coffee hour
- More activities for kids, young people, teens
- Summer programs- movies and board games for example
- “the age gap is bringing about a problem> it is difficult to run programs”
- Engaging in prayer- ex: days to come together and pray for each other
- Counseling and pastoral care
- Home communion
- Ministry to the shut-ins
- Holiday cards
- Book reads
- Small group study
- Groups that go to the hospital and care homes- to meet and talk to people
- Being there when we need support for example when a family member dies
- “They already are by giving us a wedding. I don’t know if they could do anything more.”
- “Just knowing SM is there is a comfort and that’s enough.”

## **6. What are the needs of the congregation? Present? Within 5-10 years?**

- \*Grow the congregation, encourage families to come to church as a family
- \*\*Encourage people to come in, fill up the pews
- Messy Church
- \*\*\*\*More young people, more Sunday School kids, grow the youth group and find a youth group leader
- Spiritual guidance
- The church will change in 5 years.
- Constant reconnection
- Fellowship
- \*Outreach
- More Eucharistic visitors, lay readers, and acolytes
- More participation
- \*\*Finding a new priest, a new rector, a new reverend
- More/longer office hours
- \*More parking and handicap parking
- “This is a challenging season, with people not entering the seminary and with a shortage of priests.”
- “We need to thrive, not just survive.”
- An area in the church set aside for young children and families with toys and pillows
- “The congregation is aging, and we need to expand.”
- We need “Evangelism- hearts on fire for Christ.”

## **7. Using your wildest imagination, what are our wants at St M for the next 5-10 years? How do you think we could get there?**

- Parking lot
- More weekly services
- \*A larger full choir
- Large print hymnals, bibles, and prayer books

- \*Young families- recruit families- “I would like to see the church get more creative and I don’t know what that looks like. Let the spirit move in a more creative way.”
- A lot more kids that play sports
- Evangelization
- Decorate the church
- Traveling for community work
- “We want this place to be a place of worship.”
- An active place in the community
- Bring in children to teach them and help them grow in the church
- Outreach for Members!!
- For the next priest to see family units and encourage family activities.
- \*Double the congregation in 10 years.
- Programs for young adults and young married couples
- More Liberian flavor in the services
- Sharing about culture
- “Every pew filled”
- More college students for example from Holy Cross and Clark University
- A transportation bus
- AC units for hot summer weather
- Sound amplification for the hard of hearing
- More instruction for Lay readers and Altar servers
- Instructed Eucharist (For example, when to stand, when to bow)
- A brief introduction before the service- announcing the pages and the opening hymn- a brief word of welcome
- Remove pews for wheelchairs
- “A bigger population with a vibrant youth group.
- Reach out to the homeless- “I appreciate the Fridge outside.”

**8. What has been talked about at St M but has never been done?**

- Buying the 3-Decker next door and tearing it down for parking
- Taking pews out to make room for wheelchairs/strollers
- “We need to know the needy to serve.”

- Getting the churches together again (ECOW and the Covenant with Sacred Heart St Catherine of Sweden)- services with other churches
- Bringing back the Epiphany dinner
- Getting youth involved more
- More services for college students in the area
- Advertising
- The Memorial Benches for Rick Townsend and Bengt Albinson
- Better communication and updates on financials etc.
- More info about the current vestry- Who is the vestry?
- A job description- for the counters, for the parishioners who take food baskets to SWNIC for example
- A photo album of the congregation- for example as a parish directory
- A Men's retreat

**9. How should St M become a stronger, more faithful, and more welcoming community? Re-word if necessary...How can St M become stronger and healthier?**

- By sending cards to shut-ins "We miss you."
- For visitors to a church service- in the service leaflet- "If you are a visitor to St Matthews, we invite you to join us at Coffee Hour. Please look for the table that has a floral arrangement. Our parishioners will know to welcome you at that table." (see Charlotte Townsend for more details)
- Add a laminated bookmark in the pew- place on the hook- with instructions for the service. Ex: Hymn numbers, L= Levas, instructions for receiving communion.
- \*Tithing helps financially, financial generosity
- \*More members- more people to do things
- Invite people, encourage people to come, ask more people to come
- More activities for children
- Outreach to parishioners
- Making the entrance more visible (The West Boylston prison makes numbers for addresses- see Deb Smyth for clarification)
- More youth

- More outreach to bring people in
- Visibility- “if we grow, it will show, we are getting stronger. As we get more people to participate in these services, we will get stronger.”

#### **10. Why do you continue to come to St M?**

- “It is meaningful in my life to be here.”
- Ritual
- Projects
- \*\*I like/I love St Matthews.
- Habit
- I like to help.
- Dennis calls me.
- \*\*SM is my home.
- My week starts here.
- \*\*”I love the fellowship here, the camaraderie”
- “This is my home away from home.”
- I am a cradle Episcopalian
- I love the worship here, how the service is constructed, the involvement of everyone in the service (young and old)
- An additional benefit- on my tax return
- \*SM has welcoming and well-established members
- Tradition
- The services and the physical building
- SM is a spiritual place
- “I was born and brought up here.”
- “People are just so friendly.”
- “I have been there since I was a little girl. I have been to other churches, and I just didn’t feel the camaraderie. My kids also feel like they fit in. St Matthews gave me my first scholarship while I was in medical school.”
- “Everyone is passionate about the church.”
- The formation opportunities

**11. In bringing up a conversation with a non-parishioner, what is St M known for? I belong to St M...it is .....(fill in the blank).**

- SM is a people church, good in the neighborhood, it recognizes the needs of the community and helps the community.
- SM is beautiful and awesome
- SM has resources to offer children, young people, and adults
- SM serves the community
- SM is known for its outreach to the neighborhood and the city
- SM is known for its traditional worship and faith
- SM is the big stone church by Rotmans
- SM has a beautiful altar
- SM is known for its people
- SM is known for its windows and the church design- (the pamphlets describing the windows need to be available again. The training for docents for the windows is an excellent idea. Tours of the church (for example during the church fair) should happen.
- “Church that will feel like you are home. Church that will make you get involved or not involved but you always have a place to go.”
- SM is warm, inviting and a welcoming community.
- SM is diverse and multicultural.
- SM- “they put their money where their mouth is. They speak the word and then they do the work.”
- “Come listen to the sermons. I need the enlightenment from the sermon before the week starts.”

**12. What connects St. Matthew’s to the world around us?**

- A welcome sign
- Tours of the church
- Feeding the community

- Our parishioners
- \*\*Our sister church in Liberia
- SM needs more communication with the world around us
- \*\*\*WooFridge
- The love shown by parishioners
- \*\*4 Corners ministry
- The AA groups and others that meet here
- Services on-line
- \*\*SWNIC- weekly donations, toys, clothing (at the holidays)
- Laundry Love
- A connection to the College of the Holy Cross
- Rachel's Table

### **13. How are we at St Matthew's to become better followers of Jesus?**

- By living the way of love
- By maintaining our Episcopal identity
- By hosting Bible studies
- By telling people how good the preacher is at teaching the Gospel
- By creating awareness of the need and of helping people
- By helping in the immigration process (Ex: a letter from the priest)
- "There were people before us who made the church this way for us to meet it that way. We need to continue their work and continue their legacy."
- By attending services
- By sharing knowledge
- By encouraging talents and gifts
- By involving the youth more
- With prayers
- By learning and reading the word of God daily

- With services
- With opportunities for spiritual direction
- By serving food
- \*By worshiping on-line
- “We are faithful followers of Christ.”
- By celebrating in the hall, and outside (Mass on the Grass)- There should be a big sign for outdoor worship
- “We need to be witnesses more often”
- By hosting cultural events (ex: an international dinner, movie night, parish picnics)
- How about a leaflet for children with simple instructions to follow the service?
- By offering Adult Sunday School- Adult Education and Bible Study, for example on a Sunday morning before the service or on an evening
- By staying connected through Social Media (FB for example)
- “On self-reflection- letting down my guard more and letting myself receive and give.”

## **Posters/Sticky Notes**

### **St Matthews is known for:**

- Caring for people and the right thing
- Caring for anyone no matter what
- Its great ability of sharing the word of God
- Inspiring people to share the word of God
- One of the twelve apostles, the first to respond to the call to follow Jesus
- Giving back to the community
- A messenger who spread Jesus and his teachings around the area
- Its outreach and mission



- Its neighborhood involvement
- Traditional and formal worship
- Music
- Sense of community and outreach
- Offering a space to community groups
- Food assistance

**St Matthews is:**

- Here for us
- Like a family
- The house of God
- Great fun, caring, it has good people
- Welcoming
- A beautiful edifice
- A symbol of hope for families