



CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

BLUEFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA

Parish Profile 2022





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A Prayer of Transition

*Dear God, we ask for Mercy and Grace in this journey.
We commit to the process of finding a new rector for our parish,
and that it will be in your name and to your glory.*

*We ask for insight and self-reflection, that we may know our
needs, and that we may properly envision a future together,
uplifting all and seeing the incredible possibilities that you will
share with us.*

*We pray for the members of the Search Committee, the Vestry,
and our interim Rector, as well as our bishops and their staff,
that all may be blessed and guided in this search process.*

*Open our eyes and our hearts to all possibilities, and lead us
with your wisdom. May your Glory shine through us in this
mission we are undertaking. In Christ's name we pray.*

Amen.



This prayer was the first priority of our Rector Search Committee, who developed it in a collegial process of finding consensus. Members of the Committee have prayed it at every meeting, and the entire congregation has prayed it at every service since its adoption. It memorializes our belief

that our task is to discern God's will for Christ Episcopal Church and to find the person that God is calling to serve as its next Rector. The theme of the search process is from *Revelation 21:5* : "*See, I am making all things new.*" Our Rector Search Committee adopted this theme after discovering that it happened to be in the Epistle for the Sunday on which the "Envisioning Our Future" event was

already scheduled, and it seemed to reinforce the notion that our work is Spirit-driven. As a Vestry member reflected, "Our church is thankful for its beginnings and history, and for all our previous members and priests. At this juncture though, we look outward and forward – toward a kind of fresh start. This provides an opportunity for us to step back and think about the most essential elements of our worship and work together and how we can best move into the future as Christ Episcopal Church."



CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

BLUEFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA

Who We Are

Christ Episcopal Church is a Family.

We are Christian believers who love our beautiful and centuries-old Episcopal rituals and services. Some of us are Episcopalian from the crib, some of us even grew up attending this very church, and some of us have come to the Episcopal Church after years of searching. What we share is love of our worship service and our Book of Common Prayer, both of which strengthen and energize us for our ministries of outreach to a surrounding community rich with natural beauty and economic revitalization, but one still facing challenges posed by proximity to the Appalachian coalfields.

We are hopeful that the Covid pandemic is ebbing, and we are more than ready to return to activities we limited and even canceled to protect the health and wellbeing of our parishioners. We are joyful to be once again singing hymns together during Sunday morning services and sharing conversation during post-service coffee hours. We eagerly anticipate returning to the full Eucharistic sacrament and resuming the hot breakfast once served at our monthly food pantries, even though we never stopped distributing grocery bags of food, along with kerosene vouchers in winter months.

We think our strengths are many, particularly in three key areas:

1

The addition of new members during recent years despite national trends, and the retention via streamed services of healthy attendance and participation in Sunday services during Covid.

2

A strong and sustainable financial position, including substantial endowments that are prudently managed and have not been used for operating expenses, which enables us to continue our ministries while envisioning how to expand them.

3

Strong evidence of revitalization and economic growth in Bluefield, W.Va., and neighboring Bluefield, Va., including new businesses and three local colleges.



CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

BLUEFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA

Core Values and Characteristics of Christ Episcopal Church

We are a Eucharistically centered parish that cherishes the Book of Common Prayer, its traditional liturgy, and the great hymns of the Church. We love the sense of community and family that permeates the parish, with strong and non-judgmental connections with each other.

We long to return to the opportunities for gathering and fellowship that we enjoyed before the pandemic. We have a strong desire to be open and welcoming to all who walk in our doors, and we love to be a visible presence in the Bluefield area, both to serve the larger community and as a form of evangelism. We are committed to social outreach through our food pantry and our support of the Bluefield Union Mission and other community organizations. We are passionate about including a strong fellowship component in our outreach ministries, both with ourselves and those whom we serve. We expect good preaching that is theologically sound and connects to our daily lives from a priest who is approachable, compassionate, and possessed of a good sense of humor.



Our Membership BY NUMBERS

- Increase from 205 in 2020 to 209 as of the end of 2021
- Unlike many parishes in this Diocese and throughout the Episcopal Church, membership at Christ Church has been stable or has increased slightly over the past 10 years.
- Average Sunday attendance trended upward during the years before the pandemic, also bucking the Diocesan and nationwide trend, from 46 in 2011 to 56 in 2019.
- The 2020 average Sunday attendance of 53 is not a meaningful number since only the first two months were counted for us and all Episcopal churches due to the onset of the pandemic.
- As with most parishes, average Sunday attendance in 2021 declined, with many parishioners choosing to participate through our live streamed and recorded services. ASA was 36 in 2021.



Parish Demographic INFORMATION

In 2021 the former Rector developed and implemented a parish survey, not connected to the current transition. 56 parishioners responded. The following information is based on the results of this survey:

AGE RANGE OF PARISHIONERS RESPONDING:

- Between the ages of **25 and 44: 11%**
- Age **65 and over: 54%**
- Between the ages of **45 and 64: 35%**

Due to the nature of the survey, information about children was not captured. There are several children in the parish, some of whom are with us on most Sundays.

GENDER OF PARISHIONERS RESPONDING:

- Female: **54%**
- Male: **41%**
- Other or declined to answer: **5%**



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Our Location

Bluefield, W.Va., is a city of 9,658 people, though the population of the micropolitan area including [Bluefield, W.Va.](#), and Bluefield, Va., exceeds 100,000.



NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL PARK 📍

The location's attractions include tree-lined neighborhood streets, a downtown enjoying the buzz of new restaurants and businesses, and hiking trails, both inside city limits at Lotito City Park and throughout the surrounding area, including nearby access to the Appalachian Trail. Also close by are biking trails along the New River and the Virginia Creeper trail, whitewater rafting at the [New River Gorge National Park](#), snow skiing at [Winterplace](#), and boating in [Flat Top](#) and [Claytor Lakes](#). ATV trails are abundant, as well as breweries, local honey producers, and restaurants.

The three local colleges with a combined student population of nearly 5,000 are among the top employers in the area. Two are West Virginia public institutions located in Mercer County: [Bluefield State University](#), an HBCU, and [Concord](#)

[University](#), in Athens, W.Va. [Bluefield University](#), which merged with Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg, Va., is a private institution.

The [Historic Granada Theater](#) located downtown recently completed an extensive restoration and reopened without debt in August 2021, thanks to robust support and funding by local citizens. The Granada shows films four days a week, presents several music performances a year, and rents its beautiful auditorium and adjacent spaces to private groups for conferences, dance recitals, band concerts, parties, and weddings.



Credit: WV Tourism

HATFIELD MCCOY TRAILS 📍



HISTORIC GRANADA THEATER 📍

Within walking distance from the Granada Theater are several places to eat and grab a drink, as well as another historic city building, the [Bluefield Arts Center](#), which is owned by the city and houses [David's Downtown](#), a restaurant open for lunch and available for private parties; the Paine Gallery, which features exhibits by local and regional artists; and two floors of office space leased by Intuit, which located operations in Bluefield in 2020 and also occupies space across the street in a former bank building now repurposed as the [Intuit/Alorica Prosperity Hub](#).

Bluefield is served by Princeton Community Hospital, an affiliate of West Virginia University Medicine, in nearby Princeton, W.Va. and the PCH Bluefield Emergency Department in Bluefield. Educational and recreational activities for our children abound, including the Bluefield Youth Theater and the Fine Arts Community School at Bluefield University, three local dance studios, preschool programs, and many youth sports programs.



Our Diocese



Seated (left to right) Bishops Klusmeyer, Curry and Cowden, with fellow Bishops standing

The [Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia](#) is also going through a time of transition. Our Diocesan Bishop, the Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer, 7th Bishop of West Virginia, will retire on October 14, 2022, exactly 21 years after his consecration as Bishop. The Rt. Rev. Matthew Cowden, Bishop Coadjutor, will become the 8th Bishop of West Virginia upon Bishop Klusmeyer's retirement.

Bishop Cowden was ordained and consecrated Bishop on March 12, 2022 in the Chapel of West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, W.Va. Bishop Klusmeyer was also ordained and consecrated at the same location on October 13, 2001.

The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop, served as chief consecrator,

joined by Bishop Klusmeyer and five other Bishops as co-consecrators, in a grand and glorious service filled with music provided by a combined choir from many parishes of the Diocese.

The [Diocese of West Virginia](#), founded in 1877 after separating from the Diocese of Virginia after the formation of the State of West Virginia, covers the entire State and includes 65 parishes. Diocesan House is located in Charleston, the State Capitol.

Christ Episcopal Church enjoys a close and collegial relationship with the



Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and Bishop Coadjutor Matthew Cowden



Bishop Curry and Bishop Klusmeyer, far right, lay hands on Matthew Cowden

Diocese. Bishop Klusmeyer traveled to Bluefield to meet with the Rector Search Committee, and Bishop Coadjutor Cowden came to Bluefield to participate in our Community Vigil for Ukraine and to lead our Sunday morning worship.



Our Property

Construction of the present church was completed just two years after a devastating fire in 1919 destroyed the original wooden church on Christmas Day. Noted Bluefield Architect Alex B. Mahood designed the replacement stone church from classic gothic designs, including soaring ribs with pinnacles and spires reaching heavenward, as used in European cathedrals. In the nave, the stones seem weightless as pitched beams vault upward and the expansive interior is washed with color from the beautiful stained-glass windows. The common theme of each window is a portrayal of Christ during various aspects of His earthly ministry. The leafy tracery and ornamental openwork of the upper regions of the stained glass depict the biblical symbols of faith. The walls of the nave are the same exterior gray stone brought to a smooth buff finish. The woodwork is of selected black walnut.

Stone for the construction of the church was provided by The McDermott Stone Company, of McDermott, Ohio, which provided the stone for the 1958 addition and for the reconstruction of the church's front porch in 1998.

Our large, three-level complex includes the worship space, narthex, offices, library, music room, chapel, sacristy, and nursery on the main level. Downstairs is located a large parish hall known as Rowley Hall, a kitchen, storage space, a children's chapel, and children's Sunday School rooms. The top floor has classrooms and further storage space.

A memorial garden in an interior courtyard has a free-standing columbarium, niches for the interment of ashes beneath a granite stone walkway, flower beds, and a memorial water fountain.

The church benefits from two parking lots that are adjacent to the church building.



Our Ministries

Worship

Christ Church is Eucharistically centered, and our worship is rooted in the Book of Common Prayer and traditional service music and hymns.



We are “broad church” with some higher church leanings, such as Sanctus bells and the occasional use of incense on major feast days. In a 2021 survey, 59% of respondents indicated a preference for broad church style, 25% indicated high church, and 11% low church. Asked about preference for Rite I vs. Rite II, 31% indicated Rite I, and 69% indicated Rite II.

Concerning music, 67% of survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement “music is important to my worship experience,” 27% agreed, and 6% neither agreed nor disagreed. Our recent Envisioning Our Future event suggested a strong preference on the part of our congregation for traditional

liturgy and music. In addition to our organist and choir, we occasionally have a duo of musicians from our parish who play early traditional music on authentic traditional stringed instruments. We also have had a tradition, pre-pandemic, of occasional evensong that we hope to resume.

A committed Altar Guild and a strong corps of acolytes (currently all adults), lectors, and intercessors support Worship. Due to the pandemic, one person serves as both the sole lector and intercessor. Three parishioners committed to training and livestreaming our worship services and making them available on our Facebook page. Before the pandemic we would periodically commission a Lay Eucharistic Minister to take the sacrament from the worship service to a homebound member of the congregation, a tradition we hope to resume.

The beauty of our well-maintained worship space supports prayerful yet spirited worship that is at the very heart of Christ Episcopal Church.





Music

We select service music and hymns for our 10:00 a.m. Sunday services from the 1982 hymnal according to the lectionary, and our choir participates in the services and often sings special anthems.

We also have a service on Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas Eve, for which anthems are chosen. In the chancel we have a Moeller organ with seven ranks, installed in 1976; a 2004 Yamaha baby grand piano; and a Schulmerich Bells carillon installed in 2003. The bells can peal or toll, and the carillon plays hymns automatically from the roof speaker or at the organ console.

Every day at noon, the carillon automatically plays "O When the Saints Go Marching In," according to the request of a longtime parishioner who gave the carillon to the church. A Baldwin spinet piano is in the choir room, and a Baldwin electric organ is downstairs in Rowley Hall.

In addition to Sunday morning and special services, we have enjoyed many choral and instrumental concerts in our church.





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Altar Guild

Dedicated members of the church serve under the direction of the Rector to prepare the altar for all services. They are responsible for setting up and caring for the vestments, linens and vessels in the nave, sanctuary, and sacristy, and anywhere else worship may take place, whether in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning, at a City Park shelter for our annual Church Picnic, or in our parking lot for our annual Blessing of the Animals service.

Altar guild members also deliver flowers to the sick and the homebound.





Christian Education

Children's Ministry

It is our hope that the children of Christ Church feel loved and welcomed as we gather for age-appropriate fellowship, prayer, service, and study of the Scriptures in Sunday School rooms and our Children's Chapel. The main curricula have included *Weaving God's Promises*, *Godly Play*, and our own creation, Sunday School Outside the Box – lessons on monthly themes including baptism, the altar, church history, prayer, and music. Before the pandemic, Sunday School was from 10:00 to about 10:45, when children joined their families in the nave for the Eucharist.

When the pandemic necessitated that we close our doors to in-person Sunday morning services and stream them instead, we adapted by transforming our children's ministry into the delivery to their homes of monthly packages containing Scripture stories and materials to help families learn, create, and celebrate their faith together. Six of the packages contained items related to The Abundant Life Garden Project offered by Episcopal Relief and Development. During drops in our county's Covid infection rates, we held in-person fellowship gatherings, including a Service of Thanksgiving, an inside-the-church scavenger hunt, and a simple meal, all while masked and socially distanced. Last December we held a special Children's Evening Prayer Service for the Feast of St. Nicholas.

Activities in addition to Sunday morning classes have included Christmas pageants, creating nativity floats for the city's Christmas Parade, Vacation Bible School, helping with our food pantry, making food and cards for homebound members, assisting with an annual church clean-up day, helping with the



Highland Educational Project in McDowell County, dramatic presentations of Bible stories, a Sunday evening youth group, and the Amazing Bible Race for youth and adult Sunday School.

Adult Formation

Adults have enjoyed the Adult Bible Study that met over coffee before the Sunday service. Though these informal meetings were discontinued when the pandemic forced us to close our in-person Sunday services, we are very interested in resuming them under the leadership of a new Rector. Recently, during the Lenten season, church members and friends enjoyed a program of Wednesday night sessions during which our interim Rector led us on a Lenten journey through five essential tenets of our Faith.

Daughters of the King (DOK)

St. Margaret of Scotland Daughters of the King are Christian women and girls between the ages of 7 and 107, both lay and ordained, who desire a closer walk with the Lord. Daughters of the King are strengthened through the discipline of prayer and supported through the companionship of sisters at different stages of the Christian journey. The nine DOK members at Christ Church include two members from Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Bluefield.



Parish Life

The Parish Life Committee organizes and encourages volunteers to help with functions, events, and activities for the parish, including dinners, coffee hours, picnics, and special receptions. Members also take care of the church's memorial garden.





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Episcopal Church Women (ECW)

Though Covid restrictions have downsized activity the past two years, ECW is a strong and involved organization of Christ Church eager to resume activity with five to six dinner meetings a year open to all women in the parish.

The gathering includes a meal, a short devotion or evening prayer, and a brief business meeting. Activities include supporting the Church Periodical Club, a ministry providing religious and secular written materials to organizations that cannot otherwise obtain them, and The United Thank Offering. Recent projects have included refurbishing the church nursery and donating children's books for distribution at West Virginia Bridge Day, held every October on the nearby New River Gorge Bridge, in which thousands of spectators walk across the bridge and watch serious BASE jumpers fly 876 feet into the Gorge below and rappellers ascend and descend from the catwalk. ECW also prepares and delivers meals to sick and homebound parish members. A long-standing tradition is baking and delivering cookies to elderly and homebound parish members at Christmas.





Episcopal Church Men (ECM)

Pre-pandemic, the ECM held a monthly dinner meeting to share fellowship. The group contributes to building and grounds projects, and its primary fundraiser has been the Shrove Tuesday pancake supper. The group has supported the Mercer County Fellowship Home, a state-operated residence in Bluefield for men recovering from substance abuse.

Periodically, ECM has hosted residents for supper in Rowley Hall and purchased a dozen iPads for their use a couple of years ago. ECM also has supported the Bluefield Union Mission, which is open 24-hours-a-day to help families in need, and the Wade Center, a non-profit organization serving children, youth, and their families and housed in a former school in the heart of downtown Bluefield.



Episcopal Church Men (ECM) serving at our Pancake Supper.



Outreach

The Outreach program provides food assistance to those in need in the communities of Bluefield, W.Va., Bluefield, Va., and the surrounding area through its food pantry. On the third Thursday of each month, food pantry volunteers distribute a large grocery bag to people who are mostly over 60, with limited incomes. The bags include cans of meat, tuna fish, corn, and beans; boxes of pasta, cereal, and instant macaroni and cheese; and toilet paper delivered to the church from a local grocery store and then sorted and bagged by church volunteers. The food pantry distributes 40 to 60 bags of groceries a month, but in winter months this number can exceed 100.



The food pantry also distributes kerosene vouchers for home heating during winter months, and other items, such as clothing and toiletries. Before Covid, the food pantry also provided breakfast and plans to reestablish this as Covid restrictions are relaxed. The Outreach program provides dinners twice a month at the Bluefield Union Mission, and before Covid, volunteers periodically cooked and served dinners to the Men's Fellowship Home. Every summer we host and feed ministry groups – an adult group and a youth group – from St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, who stay in Bluefield while doing home repair projects for low-income families in the Bluefield area.



Stewardship

Stewardship permeates our church life as we endeavor to give back to God in grateful Thanksgiving for all that we are and all that we have.

Throughout the year, we encourage members to contribute time, talents, and treasure for the good of the church and community. We communicate opportunities to serve in our church's ministries – including but by no means limited to worship, choir, Altar Guild, Parish Life, and our food pantry – from the Vestry, the senior warden, committee chairs, or the Rector through weekly mail, emails, and service announcements.

We make financial requests for special projects and for budget support. For example, in the past two years, during a national pandemic, church members contributed almost half the \$200,000 cost of replacing our 100-year-old steam boiler heating system with a modern and efficient heating/cooling system. We funded the balance from an endowment without invading the principal.

Covid changed annual stewardship procedures. A past program of home visits, parish meals, direct mail, and appeals during the worship service – including designated members explaining personal reasons for their stewardship – transitioned to Rector requests during the service and a letter from the senior warden with pledge cards.



Publications

The Rainbow is our monthly full-color newsletter that volunteers write, produce, and distribute in an emailed electronic version, though a small number of parishioners still receive a printed copy by mail. The Rainbow typically includes a letter from the Rector, a calendar with services and other church activities for that month, Vestry minutes, and a feature story highlighting a church member or a special event.

Our interim Rector distributes a weekly newsletter, News from Christ Episcopal Church, electronically by email every Friday to communicate the interim Rector's message, the service bulletin for Sunday, and activities scheduled for the week ahead.

We also have a Facebook page at the account name Christ Episcopal Church – Bluefield, West Virginia, liked by 440 Facebook users.

Looking Forward

On Sunday, May 15, 36 members of Christ Church gathered for our **Envisioning Our Future** event, held in the context of Holy Eucharist.

This event, a “summit” in appreciative inquiry terms, gathered information about the core values of our parish, hopes and dreams for our future, and the essential characteristics of the person we believe God is calling to walk with us as our next Rector. Our transition theme, **“See, I am making all things new,”** comes from the Epistle appointed for this Sunday, the Fifth Sunday of Easter. Following the event, we provided parishioners who were unable to attend the opportunity to respond to the same questions we addressed with the in-person attendees.



The description of our core values – what makes Christ Episcopal Church unique and described earlier in “Who We Are” – and our hopes and dreams for the future come primarily from what we discerned at the Envisioning Our Future gathering.

The essential characteristics of our next Rector were developed considering our core values. We believe we need a person who will be comfortable with who we are as a parish, and who we believe is the person God is calling to help us turn our hopes and dreams into reality in the coming years.





Our Hopes and Dreams for the Future

Like most parishes, we have a strong desire to attract more younger adults and families with children. We recognize the challenges in doing so, as well as the need to reach out to older adults such as recent retirees who have the time and energy to become engaged in the life of our parish. We hope to have more of our regular parishioners who stopped attending during the pandemic return to in-person worship and engagement, as well as to pursue other forms of Episcopal evangelism (non-coercive, non-threatening, inviting, and welcoming) to carry out our strong desire to grow our parish. We also recognize the opportunities for campus ministry with our three very local universities. We want to increase our current outreach ministries, such as our food pantry and our work with the Bluefield Union Mission, and we want to explore new opportunities for outreach and community engagement. Closer to home, we want more opportunities for Christian formation for children and adults, more fellowship activities, and better care for our elderly and homebound parishioners.

Essential Characteristics of the Person God is Calling to Serve as Our Next Rector

We believe God is calling someone who is comfortable with our core values and who would be passionate and energetic about working with us to make our hopes and dreams a reality over the next few years.



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If you are uncomfortable with traditional liturgy and hymnody, or if you want to transform us into a very high or low church style, this is probably not where God is calling you. If you want to walk with parishioners who love each other without judgment, who love God and Christ Church, God may be calling you here. If you have a sound theological education and can preach engaging sermons that connect the Gospel with our daily lives, God may be calling you here. If you have strong leadership skills, if you are able to inspire others to ministry in the church and community, and if you are a calm, non-anxious presence with a good sense of humor, God may be calling you here. If you are energetic and passionate about your ministry and the love of God and neighbor, God may be calling you here. If you want to provide pastoral care to those in need, particularly our homebound parishioners, and feel called to engage parishioners in assisting with pastoral care, God may be calling you here. If you want to live in a developing community with a relatively low cost of living, a good and affordable housing stock, abundant recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities, God may be calling you here.

Christ Episcopal Church presents an unusual opportunity for ministry. We have a unique blend of urban and small-town ministry. We are a highly stable parish that was able to buck the trend of declining membership and attendance before the pandemic. We are financially secure and make wise use of endowments that are prudently managed. We have a beautiful worship space in a large building that has been well maintained. Our members are committed to the parish and to outreach and evangelism to the community. We recognize that our Rector cannot do it all and that we need to live into our baptismal covenant and exercise strong lay ministry.



Addendum

Answers to Questions Required by the Episcopal Church Office of Transition Ministry

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

It seemed a very discouraging moment for our church, as for many others, when the Covid pandemic interrupted our season of Lenten services and shut our doors in March 2020. Immediately, our Rector and church leaders began assembling a plan for streaming Sunday morning services to take us through that first year of periodic spikes in local infection rates. A most meaningful bright spot was Easter morning in 2021, when our Rector held a drive-by Easter service. The determination to share the joy of rebirth despite necessary restrictions lifted the spirits of so many. As one congregant expressed it, "Fr. Chad's appearance on the church front porch provided welcomed and much needed assurance during that bewildering time. It brought to mind Christ's words, *"Lo, I am with you always..." Matthew 28-20 KJV.*

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

Christ Church is Eucharistically centered, and our worship is rooted in the Book of Common Prayer and traditional service music and hymns. We are "broad church" with some higher church leanings such as Sanctus bells and occasional use of incense on major feast days. In a 2021 survey before the transition, 59% of respondents indicated a preference for broad church style, 25% indicated high church, and 11% low church. Asked about preference for Rite I vs. Rite II, 31% indicated Rite I and 69% indicated Rite II.

Concerning music, 67% of survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement “music is important to my worship experience,” 27% agreed, and 6% neither agreed nor disagreed. Our recent Envisioning Our Future event suggests a strong preference on the part of our congregation for traditional liturgy and music. In addition to our organist and choir, we occasionally have a duo of musicians from our parish who play early traditional music on authentic traditional stringed instruments. We also have had a tradition, pre-pandemic, of occasional evensong that we hope will resume in the future.

Worship is supported by a committed Altar Guild and a strong corps of acolytes (currently all adults), lectors and intercessors. Due to the pandemic, one person serves as both the sole lector and intercessor. Three parishioners are trained and committed to livestreaming our worship services and making them available on our Facebook page. Before the pandemic we would periodically commission a Lay Eucharistic Minister to take the sacrament from the worship service to a homebound member of the congregation, a tradition we hope to resume in the future.

The beauty of our well-maintained worship space supports prayerful yet spirited worship that is at the very heart of Christ Episcopal Church.

3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

General appeals through bulletins, emails, and service announcements make known our need for members to get involved in Choir, Acolyte, Lay reading, Altar Guild, ECM, ECW, DOK, videoing services on Facebook, serving meals at our local Union Mission, and distributing grocery bags and kerosene vouchers at our monthly Food Pantry. Various ministry leaders consider the gifts and talents of parishioners and make individual contacts, talking with newcomers about their interests and matching them with ministry opportunities in the church, and providing appropriate orientation and training.

Though Covid has curtailed many in-person projects and social activities such as after-service Coffee Hours that help involve new members and visitors, as well as members of nearby churches, we have had our share of new members join in the past couple of years. We engage them in the life of the parish as quickly as possible, and training is always available for new participants in our ministries.

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

The predictability of the service in the Episcopal Church is important to the emotional well-being of our parishioners. The quiet nature of our service (in comparison to many other denominations) is also spiritually, emotionally, and physically nurturing in a world of constant noise, confusion, and overstimulation. We have held meditation/contemplative prayer workshops as well as silent retreat days, and we have also brought in a labyrinth to support spiritual practice. Yoga classes held in our downstairs Rowley Hall and group hikes in the nearby Appalachian Trail have also enhanced spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

Our chapter of Daughters of the King (DOK) provides spiritual and emotional support for women in our church, while monthly Men's dinners have provided the same for men. We have coffee hour every Sunday. Pre-pandemic, parishioners enjoyed our Canterbury Club, gathering for a meal at a member's home every month or so. We also have special celebrations that are often catered for important holidays and receptions for special moments in the lives of our parishioners. We have a parish picnic each summer and many other gatherings that create a sense of community and bonding for members of our parish. A sense of community is extremely important for the emotional, physical, and spiritual health of our members and our parish has a very strong sense of community.

Our parish nurse helps determine church policies concerning physical health,

which has been especially important during the pandemic, and, of course, our Rector before the transition and our interim Rector now are readily available to parishioners experiencing emotional or spiritual need.

An abundance of research indicates that helping others is good for mental health and spiritual well-being, and thus our outreach programs are beneficial for emotional and spiritual health of participants as we seek to make a difference in the lives of others.

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

Our parish has a food pantry that supplies groceries and fuel vouchers for people in our community who are in need, and church members prepare and serve food at the local Union Mission. We provide meals and baskets of “goodies” for the Fellowship Home, a local residence for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. We have an annual outdoor community picnic for low-income people who live in the neighborhood surrounding our church.

Our priest and parishioners have participated in educational sessions at a local college concerning the Episcopal Church’s perspective on LGBTQ+ issues. This is especially important for young people who may feel they are not welcome in the Christian community because of their sexual and gender orientations.

Another outreach activity has been a parishioner and priest providing support for people who have been troubled by disturbing teaching from churches they attended in childhood. This is a way in which members of the community can learn that Christianity can be loving, nonjudgmental, and life-affirming rather than punitive and scary.

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

Our members have enthusiastically answered calls to involve ourselves in activities and projects that connect us with the wider Church and our geographical region of Appalachia. We have sent church leaders and volunteers, including youth groups, to the Highlands Education Project (HEP) in McDowell County (one of the nation's poorest counties) for summer mission work. Every year we have a Blessings of the Animals service to which we invite the public. We send delegates to the annual Diocesan convention, several of us traveled to Roanoke, Va. to hear Presiding Bishop Michael Curry give a rousing sermon, and we participated in the recent consecration of Bishop Coadjutor Matthew Cowden. We have sent many of our Christ Church children and teenagers to attend our Diocese's Peterkin Camp in Romney, W.Va., and several have become counselors.

Locally, we work with other churches of other denominations, most notably our very close neighboring churches – Emmanuel Lutheran Church and First Presbyterian Church – in a number of initiatives including children's ministry and activities.

Examples of our recruiting others to join a project we spearheaded include the recent Community Prayer Vigil for Ukraine we sponsored in which we invited churches of other denominations and faiths, including the Jewish and Muslim communities, to join us in prayer and song. Wind chill temperatures below freezing did not stop a crowd including Bluefield city leaders from joining us in a public space downtown. Following the recent tragic loss of innocent life at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, we reached out to the wider community through local news media and Facebook to include them in a Prayer Service for the Victims of the Texas Shooting. Several members of the wider community joined us, including a school teacher, retired school principal and a mental health worker.

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, we led other local Christian churches in joining with local Jewish, Muslim, and Baha'i faith communities at the Islamic Society of Appalachian Region – the Muslim Mosque in our area – for an Interfaith service of prayer and reflection followed by a potluck meal. Although this event was over 20 years ago, it grew into an important annual interfaith gathering and connection that continued until being upended by the pandemic.

7. Tell about a ministry that your worshiping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

In May 2017, Christ Church initiated the Holy Innocents Project, a collaboration between our church and Bluefield Regional Medical Center to train volunteers in a critical ministry to rock and console babies born at the hospital addicted to drugs. Led by our Rector, 17 parishioners and several people we recruited from other churches completed applications, were screened, received the necessary vaccinations and health checks, and attended several training sessions to learn about neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), which can cause inconsolable crying, irritability, sleep disturbances, feeding disturbances, feeding difficulties, and digestive issues. Physical touch has been linked to improved quality of life for infants suffering withdrawal symptoms. Our training materials informed us that 14 of every 100 babies born in West Virginia have been exposed to at least one substance during pregnancy, and we knew substance abuse to be a critical problem in our region, too often exacerbated by coal-mining related injuries. The Holy Innocents Project was part of our vision at Christ Church to minister to those with substance abuse issues in our greater community. Unfortunately, the program ended before volunteers could begin hospital shifts due to an administrative decision by the hospital. Although we could not continue this initiative, it represents our desire to minister to the challenged and underserved in our community, as evidenced

in other initiatives, such as opening our Rowley Hall to AA meetings and providing meals and Christmas treats to residents of the Fellowship Home, a home for drug- and alcohol-addicted men.

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

Our transition is all about preparing ourselves to be the Church of the Future, summarized in our theme from Revelation, "See, I am making all things new." We are open to the Holy Spirit as we move forward. The call of our new Rector will be an important but only one step in our preparation for the future.

While we want to stay rooted in our core values as summarized in our Parish Profile, we are excited about our hopes and dreams for the future, also outlined in the Parish Profile. We of course want to explore expansion of our technology – the manner in which we make our worship accessible electronically and our various ways of communicating through older platforms such as Facebook and potentially newer platforms that may be more appealing to younger generations. And we look forward to more robust outreach initiatives, such as the possibility of onsite health and counseling programs. Such efforts would not only be much needed ways of seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, but would also be a great way of more fully utilizing our large campus complex.

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

Stewardship permeates our church life. Throughout the year, members are encouraged to contribute their time, talents, and treasure for the good of the church and community. Opportunities to serve are communicated weekly from the vestry, the senior warden, committee chairs, or the rector through mail, emails, and service announcements.

Parishioners respond well to occasional financial requests for special projects. For example, in the past two years, in spite of the pandemic, church members contributed nearly half of the \$200,000 cost of replacing our 100-year-old steam boiler heating system with a modern and efficient heating/cooling system.

Covid changed annual stewardship procedures. A past program of home visits, parish meals, direct mail, and appeals during the worship service, including designated members explaining personal reasons for their stewardship, transitioned to Rector requests during the service and a letter from the senior warden, including pledge cards. We look forward to the return of a more robust stewardship approach.

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

We are generally conflict-free, though occasionally we may disagree about best practices. Not unlike most other churches, the Covid pandemic has tested us. A small minority of members were unwilling to vaccinate and wear masks, which became a problem when we re-opened our doors to Sunday morning services and endeavored to comply with direction from our Bishop to require masks and social distancing. A few objected to online meetings for groups such as the Vestry. Strategies to make it easier to comply with these policies helped ease the tension. Masks are readily available in the narthex just before entering the sanctuary. To physically distance us during worship, every other pew was roped off and our Rector during this time made whimsical signs with Biblical references, which were clipped to the ropes. Volunteers eagerly trained to operate video equipment to livestream services via Facebook. A member of our Vestry, a nursing professor at a local college, became our parish nurse, encouraging vaccinations and mask wearing in Sunday bulletins and newsletters and by her own example. The Rector was

always ready to listen to parishioners vent their frustrations with timetables on returning to in-person services and coffee hours, removing the mask requirement, and once again permitting hymn singing, even as we continued to comply with Diocesan instructions.

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?

Difficult changes have included the restrictions necessitated during the pandemic and the loss of a popular and well-regarded Rector. We dealt with pandemic-forced changes as described in Question #10. As far as the loss of a beloved Rector, we are dealing with this in a process of search for a new Rector that has proved to be very positive, constructive, and reaffirming as we revisit our shared love of our church and our ministries, as well as our vision for how we want to grow in the future.

Beginning in 2018, a major change occurred when St. Mary's Episcopal Church in our neighboring town of Bluefield, Va., closed and its members elected to join our church. St. Mary's was a small, close-knit, and very dedicated congregation that understandably mourned deeply the loss of their beloved church home. The process of merger was protracted and complex, but ultimately it was achieved. Christ Church members were of course happy to gain new members, but challenges existed, especially for St. Mary's parishioners who had held leadership positions. We worked hard to integrate St. Mary's members into the life and ministries of our church. St. Mary's members transferred their self-standing columbarium to our memorial garden. One strategy was to feature a St. Mary's member in each monthly issue of The Rainbow. Another was to pair a Christ Church member with a St. Mary's member to co-host Sunday morning coffee hours. We named a meeting room the St. Mary's Conference Room.

We strive to find creative solutions to challenges. As one of our Vestry members said, "In general, our congregation has had a relationship of trust with the priest and vestry, so that people are respectful and willing to embrace change, believing there will be a benefit." As another one of our Vestry members commented, "Change is inevitable, but CEC keeps a focus on the love of Christ, which never changes."

12. Please provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshiping community.

Energy, passion and compassion; theologically sound; leader and inspirer; calm, non-anxious presence; sense of humor; pastoral heart; engaged with community; effective preacher; passion for social outreach



CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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