

THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION Parish Questionnaire Results

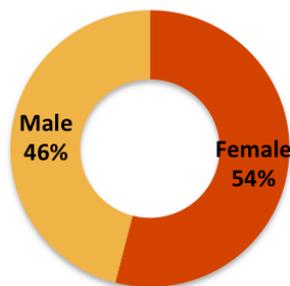
Earlier this year, the Rector Search Committee prepared a questionnaire to assist us in compiling a thorough and accurate parish profile based on feedback from the entire Ascension community. The congregation was given six weeks to complete the survey, which was made available in both an online or paper format. A total of 113 responses were submitted out of a membership of 167, a participation rate of 68% of the congregation.

Much of the demographic information gathered from members—age, background, education, for example—will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the parish, or who has spent a few Sunday afternoons at coffee hour. Other trends may be unexpected, such as how frequently respondents used the word "traditional" to describe their preferred style of worship. Finally, the questionnaires revealed a broad consensus among parishioners about the things we value, and the areas in which we see opportunities for growth and change. The following report presents a summary of the results.

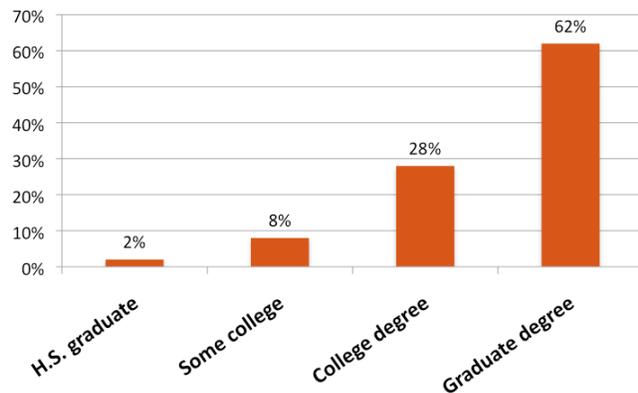
Who We Are

Ascension's congregation is, for the most part, made up of long-time New York area residents who come from diverse backgrounds. Most (67%) have lived here for more than 20 years and most live in the neighborhood of Ascension (58% live within 20 blocks). Still, a significant number travel some distance to get to church. The congregation is largely older (59% over 55, only 7% under 35), with slightly more women (54%) than men (46%), and highly educated: 62% have a graduate or professional degree and another 28% have a bachelor's degree.

Gender



Highest Level of Education



Most respondents say they are currently working, with about half employed full-time and another 20% being self-employed. Occupations include accounting, e-commerce, entertainment, finance, health care, horticulture, human resources, insurance, law, marketing, non-profits, publishing, psychotherapy, and real estate. The largest concentration of parishioners is in the arts (art/music), followed by education.

While this is a relatively affluent congregation – fully 60% of respondents say their annual gross household income exceeds \$100,000 – it is by no means wealthy. A significant number of parishioners (20%) report their income as between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 15% report income under \$50,000.

Parishioners tend to come to church as singles, rather than as couples or families: less than half of the congregation (42%) is married, while another 20% say they are in a committed relationship. However, of the 62% of parishioners who are either married or in a committed relationship, just 58% say their spouse/partner also attends Ascension. That's only about a third of the total congregation who attend church with a spouse/partner, an indication, perhaps, of how families are navigating differences around faith. About a third (35%) identify as LGBT.

An ongoing and predominant concern among parishioners has been the lack of families with young children and teens, and the survey responses bear this out. 60% have no children, 26% have children over 21, and only about 14% have children under the age of 20. Only 13% of respondents say their children attend Ascension.

Half of the respondents are cradle Episcopalians and half come from other faith traditions. Of that number, most have come from other Protestant denominations (27%) or Roman Catholicism (13%). The remaining 10% have come from a variety of other traditions including Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, or no religious background.

How We Worship

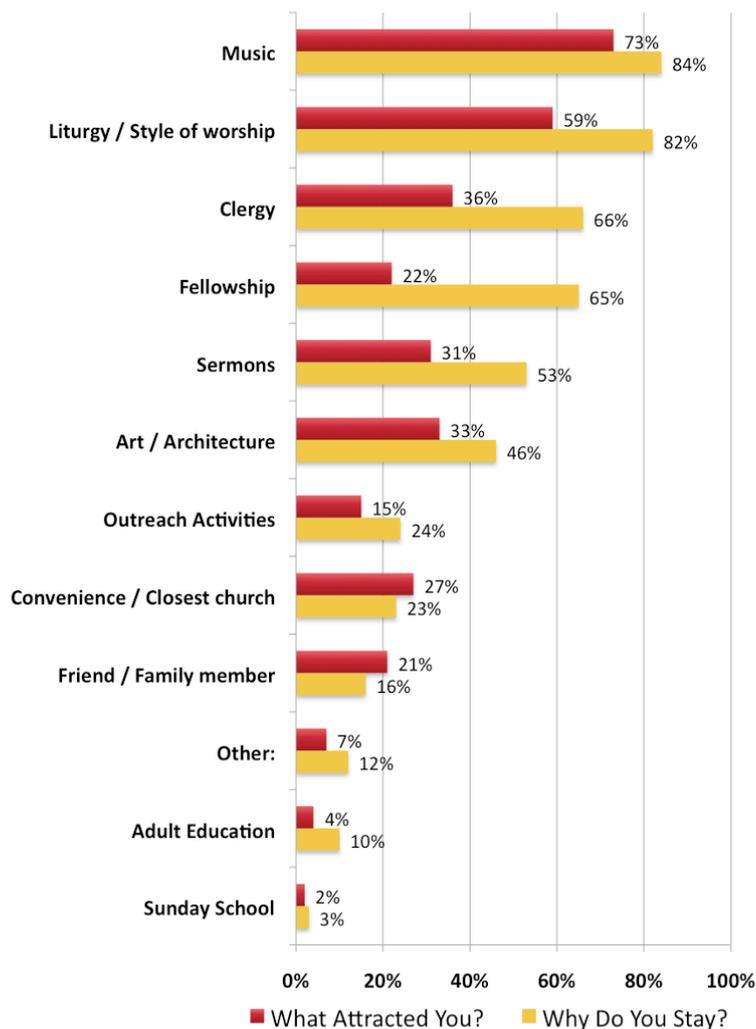
Ascension's parishioners are a dedicated and attentive group of worshipers who value tradition, history, and a sense of continuity, while also cherishing our open and loving community. An overwhelming majority (90%) are happy with the broad church liturgy celebrated at Ascension. Comments suggest that while parishioners strongly prefer a “traditional” style of worship, they also enjoy the “welcoming,” “inclusive,” and “accessible” atmosphere at Ascension. When it comes to liturgy, balance seems to be our watchword. Rite I and Rite II services are considered to be equally important. Many respondents appreciate the use of both low and high church elements, as well as both spoken and sung services.

Almost half say they attend church at least once a week and another 29% say they attend 2 to 3 times a month. Half have been members for more than ten years and 27% have been attending for more than 20 years. The vast majority (88%) attend the 11:00 a.m. Sunday Eucharist. Responses indicate that liturgy, sermons and Holy Week services are of the greatest importance in the spiritual life of parishioners, as well as choir and instrumental music. Respondents are also looking for further opportunities for worship, especially Evensong, Morning Prayer, and centering prayer.

Our Parish Life and Ministry

Not surprisingly, music and liturgy played a very prominent role in initially attracting parishioners to Ascension and are the primary reasons they stay. Clergy, fellowship, sermons and art/architecture are also major reasons why respondents remain at Ascension, while very few consider adult education and Sunday school to be significant factors.

What Attracted You & Why Do You Stay at Ascension?



Parishioners strongly agree that Ascension’s greatest strengths lie in its music, liturgy, fellowship, strong lay leadership, and open and loving community. At the same time, respondents feel that there is room for improvement in welcoming newcomers, neighborhood relations, adult education programs, and pastoral care.

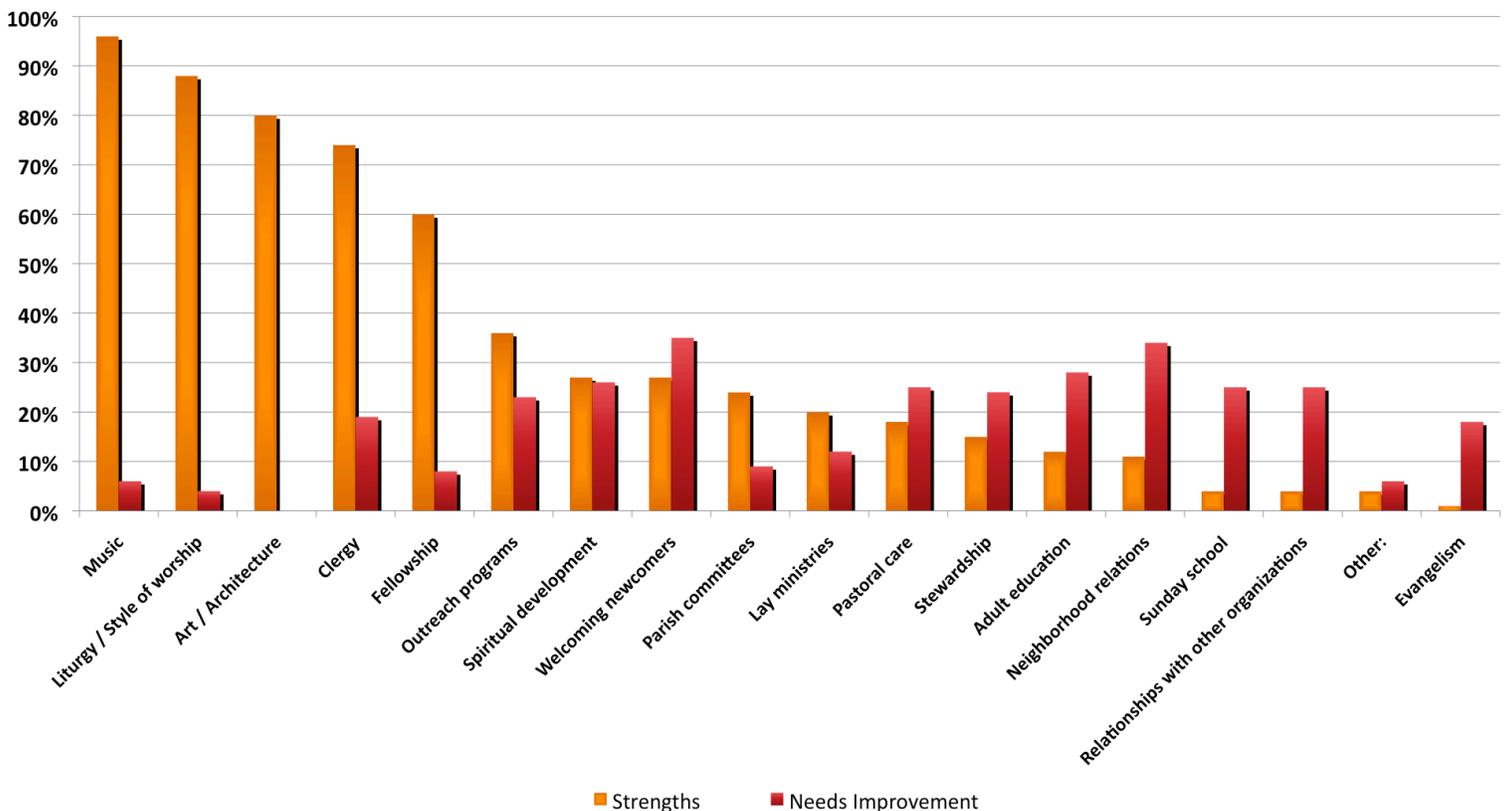
59% of respondents reported attending educational offerings at least occasionally. Many would like to see an expansion of adult education, including offerings pertaining to church history, rector-led scripture studies, and interfaith lectures.

Generally, respondents feel that Ascension is effective at keeping parishioners informed. Over 80% favorably regard the parish’s Constant Contact e-mail newsletter and notices in the weekly bulletin. The bulletin board in the parish hall is viewed as a less effective form of communication.

Survey respondents see a variety of challenges facing the parish in the next ten years, including:

- Maintaining and growing Ascension’s membership
- Reducing the parish’s debt and achieving financial security
- Revitalizing the parish’s outreach programs
- Attracting and engaging younger members

Strengths and Areas Needing Improvement by Percentage



Finances and Stewardship

While almost half of respondents are “very aware” of Ascension’s financial condition and needs, the majority (54%) feel that the parish does not do enough to encourage stewardship.

At the same time, the majority (68%) of respondents report contributing less than 5% of their annual gross income to Ascension.

Rector Qualities

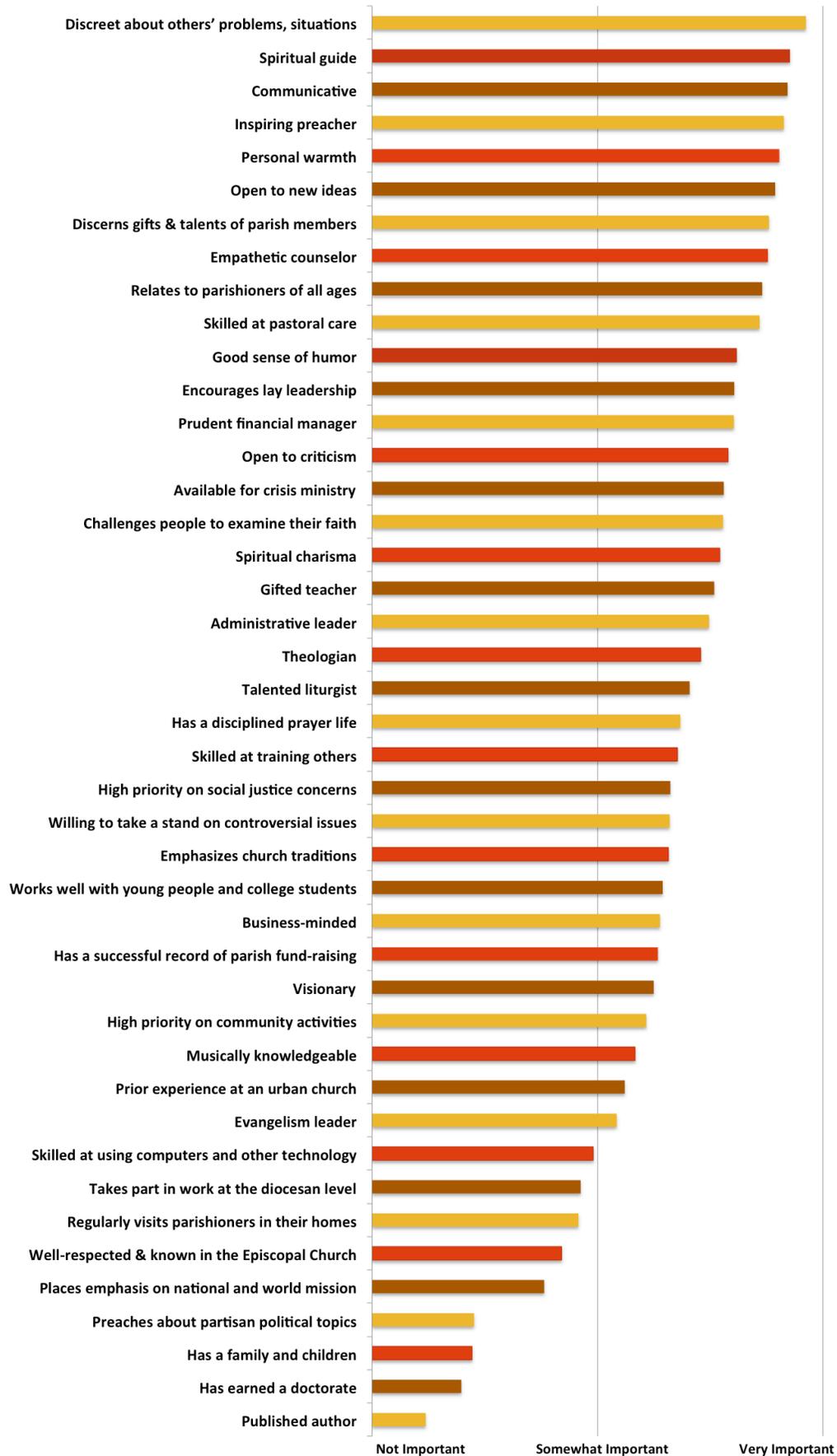
According to the questionnaire, the most desired styles, skills and traits sought in Ascension’s next rector are:

- Discretion about others’ problems and situations
- Spiritual guide
- Communicative
- Inspiring preacher
- Personal warmth
- Open to new ideas

Few deem it important that our next rector:

- Have a family and children
- Have earned a doctorate
- Be a published author
- Preach about partisan political topics
- Place an emphasis on national and world mission
- Regularly visit parishioners in their homes

Important Styles, Skills, and Traits of the Next Rector



Highlights from the Open-Ended Questions

What I value most about Ascension is...

- “Our welcoming and open attitude towards people from all different spiritual backgrounds, lifestyles and social strata.”
- “The quality of the liturgy and the music, which are closely related, and the diverse community of interesting, good-hearted people on a spiritual journey together.”
- “The fellowship and the value parishioners place on their worship experience at Ascension. For many parishioners, Ascension is a major part of their lives.”
- “I really appreciate Ascension as a place where I can go to escape from all the stresses and worries of my everyday life, and become closer to God.”
- “Its acceptance and nurturing of my heart and soul.”

If I could change one thing about Ascension, it would be...

- “Greater relatedness to the needs of the world”
- “Increasing our social media use to reach many other people, rather than our own membership. We have so much to offer, and not enough exposure to the rest of world.”
- “That it not be such a well-kept secret. We should toot our own horn more often and loudly!”

What would you want the next rector to know about Ascension?

- “Ascension is a group of enthusiastic, open people who want to grow and to participate in activities together. We are diverse and accepting, ... intelligent and accomplished, leading active, successful lives in New York.”
- “That its people need someone who is there for them personally, and who can raise up lay people for leadership in ministry both in liturgy and in care for others.”

- “Its historical significance in the city and how many great people are involved in its daily life.”
- “That we have a strong community here, and we have a strong sense of optimism about our future—even though we have financial needs.”
- “It is going to take a lot of energy and a team player to move Ascension to the next level, and that is expected from the next rector, so they better be prepared.”

Rector Search Committee Members: Meredith Ward, Chair; Eve Beglarian, Barbara Burns, Peter Clark, Janet Fisher, Ned Fitch, Sirkka Kyle, Jennifer Lemaigre, Ethan Mandel.

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