



# THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
FIFTH AVENUE AT TENTH STREET

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May 6, 2013

## PARISH ROUND TABLE RESULTS ANNOUNCED

As part of the Rector Search Committee's endeavor to listen to the various voices in Ascension's parish family, two round-table discussions were held Sunday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013. These conversations also afforded congregants an opportunity to hear each other's opinions, thoughts and concerns. The results of these discussions will help to inform the Parish Profile now in preparation by the Rector Search Committee. This summary is intended to provide some an overview of the individual topics brought up in the discussions.

### THE ROUND TABLE PROCESS

There were six tables of discussion at each session, twelve tables in total. Approximately 70 to 75 congregants participated. Four questions were used to guide conversations at each table and a note taker recorded the responses:

1. What do you want the new rector to know about our parish?
2. What do you want to change or see happen in the parish?
3. What do you want to keep the same?
4. Is there anything that hasn't been addressed that you would like to discuss?

Each table then shared with the entire group the three most important themes or ideas that came out of their discussion. These themes have been posted on the bulletin board in the Parish Hall.

### SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

There was a marked consistency in the themes expressed by participants at both sessions. For example, there was virtually unanimous agreement on the character of our congregation, which was described in some form by all twelve tables as diverse, sophisticated, urban, complex, creative, artistic, and inclusive. Among the top priorities for Ascension's future are:

Outreach to the community: Nine tables reported that there should be more outreach to the broader New York community and the area surrounding Ascension, as well as to members of the congregation. "The church should be a resource for the community." Participants felt that giving more to the broader community should be multi-faceted and made suggestions such as: broadening musical and educational programs; exploiting the beautiful church building and public rooms in a renovated rectory; holding events for families and children; ecumenical activities; and increasing the use of social media. Likewise, discussion members said that there should be more educational programs and group activities for congregants. The feeling is this will help keep "the loving family feeling of the Parish while we grow." In addition, improving the financial situation for our food pantry and other services for the needy should be a focus.

Maintain “cultural integrity” while being open to change: Nine tables reported that they want to retain the beauty and excellence of liturgy, music, and art in the church, while exploring fresh new ideas. There was general agreement that people like our “broad church” liturgy, embracing high and low church traditions (both Rites I and II). There was interest in expanding the range and variety of musical offerings while maintaining current high standards.

Children and families: Eight tables expressed a desire to bring in more families with children and teenagers. Several tables mentioned children’s and teens’ needs in one way or another in their discussions. Recurring suggestions include: the formation of a children’s choir and “interesting, exciting and fun” activities to attract families and children. Other suggestions were providing day care, a nursery school, a choir school, children’s confirmation program, Sunday 9am childcare, and Sunday School. “Kids add so much to a Parish.”

Desired characteristics of the new rector: Six tables commented specifically on the desired characteristics of the new rector. According to the various comments, the new rector should be energetic and charismatic and have good leadership skills. For example, s/he should –

- understand that s/he will have a partnership with a strong lay leadership;
- be an inspiring speaker, crafting sermons that are relevant to everyday lives. We “demand an intelligent sermon that speaks to our spirituality as well as our intellect.” “The preaching needs to be on the same level as the music and building;”
- help the Parish build on its achievements and help it grow;
- “invigorate and encourage us to take personal responsibility for our spiritual growth and maturity;”
- be a good fit with our culture: urban, diverse, musical;
- be youthful in spirit, dynamic, smart and eager, a good listener;
- be visible with Ascension Outreach programs;
- maintain contact between the clergy and individuals in the parish;
- provide opportunities for new people to get involved;
- understand how Ascension differs from other Episcopal churches in the area;
- interface with other community groups, academic community, NYU, seminary, etc.;
- be a strong administrator and financial manager.

Growth: Growth of the Parish is a continuing theme touching on several different aspects of parish life, including the growth of numbers in the congregation, more families and children, more diversity (although diversity is often mentioned as a parish asset), and greater visibility in the community.

Other areas that were consistently mentioned by participants are: focus on pastoral care, updating church administration, financial stability, and increased fundraising.

Overall, there was an extraordinary degree of consensus about the things we cherish and wish to conserve, opportunities for change and growth, and our vision for the future of our parish.

The Rector Search Committee wishes to thank everyone who participated in the round table discussions for dedicating time to this important process, and for your intelligent and thoughtful comments. If you have any questions about this report, please contact one of the search committee members. Meredith Ward, Chair; Eve Beglarian, Barbara Burns, Peter Clark, Janet Fisher, Ned Fitch, Sirkka Kyle, Jennifer Lemaigre, Ethan Mandel. Email: [search@ascensionnyc.org](mailto:search@ascensionnyc.org).