

**ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
AUGUSTA, MAINE**



DISCERNMENT GROUP SESSION

JULY 19, 2009

DISCERNMENT GROUP SESSION

Members of the parish were invited to join together for brunch after the Sunday service and then to participate in a discernment session. The discernment session was promoted in the parish bulletin, in the parish newsletter and an email reminder was sent. Thirty-five people (including two group facilitators) were present. Parishioners sat at five tables with a table facilitator and recorder at each.

The discernment session started with prayer and a reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 12:4-12. Members were then asked to pray and reflect on the scripture reading. Next, a person at each table read the Gospel and parishioners spent time discussing the meaning of the passage in their small groups. Following the prayer and reflection time, the group facilitator reviewed the purpose for the gathering and the process to be used. Six questions were to be asked. After the group facilitator read the question, parishioners were asked to pray and reflect on the question for one minute. The table facilitator then read the question to them again and using various group process techniques spent four minutes eliciting responses. After each question, the recorder would present the findings from that group. All responses were written on newsprint which were posted on the walls of the Great Hall. At the end of the session, parishioners were thanked for their participation, the Senior Warden closed with prayer and Deacon Rebecca Grant dismissed the gathering. At that point, parishioners had an opportunity to review the responses that were posted and to add further comments or thoughts they had discerned from their participation.

The questions and responses are listed on the following pages. The direction to question #2 was for parishioners to visually respond so each participant was given a marker to draw or write their response. The words written on the newsprint are included and I have attempted to describe the non-written responses.

Table facilitators received training on the morning of the discernment group to review the questions, receive group process training and to answer process questions. Two recorders participated in the training.

The responses have not been grouped or been analyzed, thus similar responses may be documented more than once. Content analysis should be conducted from the responses to discern themes by question and across all questions. The questions were not pretested but have good face validity. The group facilitators monitored the table discussions and believe that there is significant interrater reliability and a high level of validity to the responses.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Riddick

Group Facilitators:
Joseph Riddick
The Rev. Rebecca Grant

Table Facilitators:
Pat Bamforth
Tom Barden
Skip Ernst
Walter Ernst
Jim Melcher

Table Reporters:
The Rev. Richard Bamforth
Tina Barden
Marcia Butterfield
Nancy Finnegan
Connie McDonald

Respondents

Lynn Allerding
Marcia Butterfield
Al Cook
Donna Cook
Louis Dussault
Sue Dussault
Sue Ernst
Nancy Finnegan
Rachel Lenardson
Gary Mann
Kathy Mann
Tina Mann
Paula Mathias
Connie McDonald
Jim Melcher

Don Oakes
Carol Oakes
Bill O'Connor
Elmer Praul
Lorelei Robie
Kirk Silver
Laura Silver
Marilyn Tedesco
Hugo Tenhuner
Vince Tschamler
Gwen White
Peter White
Cathy Williams
Mary Yost

Question 1. Why does St. Mark's exist in the Augusta community?

- ❖ God given reason – historically important – doing well in charitable ways
- ❖ There is something beyond us – thrilled with outreach there is now
- ❖ We cannot “outgive” God – need to ask God to help us grow
- ❖ Group of people who have banded together – money is an issue – good outreach but cannot continue if church does not exist
- ❖ Our ancestors were forethoughtful
- ❖ Historical reasons
- ❖ Witness to community
- ❖ What is our specific function?
- ❖ The church is socially active
- ❖ We are ignorant of our history
- ❖ Some of us are like fish out of water
- ❖ Food for hungry
- ❖ Clothing for needy
- ❖ We have a mission to community
- ❖ We are needed
- ❖ Because forefathers had a passion
- ❖ Because there is a need for outreach and inreach
- ❖ Passion has sustained – a strong core of dedicated people continues
- ❖ Congregation has shown leadership through ups and downs
- ❖ Somebody built it – rebellion from English church
- ❖ In 1850s Augusta community needed Episcopal Church in capital city
- ❖ Now most community service oriented church in Augusta area
- ❖ Need it for people to get together
- ❖ To fill a need not being met in area, does a lot of community service (like AA)
- ❖ For traditional worship
- ❖ For donations to serve
- ❖ Not necessarily same reasons to exist – past and present
- ❖ Times changes, priorities of society change
- ❖ Provide communion and fellowship
- ❖ Serve the poor

Question 2. If St. Mark's doubled its membership, what would it look like?

(the following words were written on the newsprint)

- ❖ Fewer people= smaller funding, less service to community and more space
- ❖ More people = more funds, more service to community and less space
- ❖ Full house
- ❖ Fireworks
- ❖ Larger choir
- ❖ Improve maintenance of buildings
- ❖ Reach more people
- ❖ Utilize building better
- ❖ Stronger parish
- ❖ Families
- ❖ Children
- ❖ Larger choir
- ❖ Building repair
- ❖ More money
- ❖ Different services
- ❖ Challenges do not end
- ❖ Very diverse
- ❖ More activity in and around the church buildings and surrounding community
- ❖ More visible community
- ❖ More programs
- ❖ Grounds could be better decorated more flowers
- ❖ Might look more diverse
- ❖ Less leaky roof
- ❖ More gifts, more dollars
- ❖ Buy the empty lot next door
- ❖ Fewer holes in plaster
- ❖ It would be more luxurious to offer more to parishioners like friendly get togethers, to help people less fortunate come to grips with their lives
- ❖ Better the community – the ability to help more people
- ❖ Being able to care or focus on more diverse groups
- ❖ More busy church
- ❖ More updates
- ❖ All services in church in winter
- ❖ More speakers and participants in church activities
- ❖ Larger donations
- ❖ Possible more services
- ❖ Learning center

- ❖ Wide open doors
- ❖ Kindergarten classes
- ❖ Many more young families
- ❖ Greater diversity
- ❖ Strengthening each other to reach out to others
- ❖ Full pews if people singing God's praises
- ❖ Children – Sunday School
- ❖ Positive balance sheet
- ❖ Even with double membership, the church would remain as is unless the Holy Spirit became our leader and teacher
- ❖ Waves over banks

(the drawings are described – the meanings are open to further investigation and interpretation)

- ❖ Choir loft filled with members
- ❖ Nave of church filled with parishioners
- ❖ Balance sheets with positive and negatives (positive sheet much larger)
- ❖ A circle of diverse individuals all smiling
- ❖ Families of various sizes and colors
- ❖ The doors blown off the church because it is overflowing
- ❖ Church members in the church and in the community
- ❖ Full house of parishioners
- ❖ A car speeding along
- ❖ Fireworks lighting the sky
- ❖ A bee hive buzzing with activity
- ❖ Smiling face saying – no leaks
- ❖ Church on top of the world
- ❖ Families – bread – Holy Spirit – Church: all moving outward yet connected
- ❖ Wide open doors
- ❖ A small cross growing into a large cross that is glowing
- ❖ A large cross above the church
- ❖ Pews filled with parishioners
- ❖ Radiant sun sending out beams of light in all directions from a red hot center
- ❖ Circle of parishioners holding hands but looking out to see those in need

Question 3. Why should St. Mark's continue to exist in Augusta?

- ❖ Have a mission for community
- ❖ Because I want it to be here, it is my spiritual home
- ❖ Facilities are conducive to serving our mission
- ❖ Area merger possibilities
- ❖ People in community need outreach services
- ❖ Provide Episcopal presence in community which in turn provide for need of community and our own needs as Episcopalians
- ❖ Church is Bride of Christ – should be one church, one body for Lord to work through – to work with His ideas and not ours
- ❖ Episcopal Church – because I chose to be an Episcopalian
- ❖ Without St. Mark's, Jesus won't exist here
- ❖ Because some of us grew up here
- ❖ Because this is where we are comfortable
- ❖ There would be lost souls without St. Mark's
- ❖ Because people survive because we are here and we are our brother's keeper
- ❖ We are a constant in this community and relied upon
- ❖ Historic presentation
- ❖ Connection/obligation to our forbearers
- ❖ Link to past
- ❖ Obligation to preserve what we have been given
- ❖ A group to share outlook and outreach
- ❖ Small but our ancestors expect us to
- ❖ A history to be more fully realized
- ❖ A center for arts and music
- ❖ People depend on us
- ❖ If not, people will go elsewhere
- ❖ It is our community
- ❖ The church should always have a footprint in Augusta even if a different facility should be considered
- ❖ Because we need the strength of St. Mark's for each of us
- ❖ Because of the friendliness and we are people who like to eat good food and we have a great pastor
- ❖ To keep Episcopal faith in this community
- ❖ To fulfill our mission
- ❖ Needed connection and stability on a daily basis, like a rock
- ❖ Meets spiritual needs and friendship
- ❖ No other protestant communion
- ❖ Connect with people you wouldn't normally see in the community
- ❖ Provide communion and fellowship
- ❖ Serve the poor

Question 4. What has to happen for St. Mark's to grow and prosper in Augusta?

- ❖ Everyone attempt to bring someone unchurched to St. Marks
- ❖ Have more than one service
- ❖ Activities at different time for different people exp. Episcopal Women's Group
- ❖ Continually meet changing needs of those attending
- ❖ We need a system to reach out into the community - to reach current youth, be more modern
- ❖ War takes people away
- ❖ Economy may keep people away and from giving financially
- ❖ Economic stress can increase spiritual needs
- ❖ If city grows our congregation would grow
- ❖ Get word out more and be more flexible in how we attract people
- ❖ We need to be sure that we are doing what God wants us to do
- ❖ Need prayer groups to find out what God's will is
- ❖ Continue to do what we are doing re: outreach – things we are doing right
- ❖ Individual commitment to Holy Spirit
- ❖ Money
- ❖ Invite people
- ❖ Church must get excited
- ❖ Share our "secret"
- ❖ Don't like word "advertise" but do things like press releases and mailings and open house Sunday, newsletters that come out consistently
- ❖ Personal testimonies and pamphlet
- ❖ Something that connects Addie's Attic and food bank and public supper with St. Mark's
- ❖ Augusta and Central Maine need to grow
- ❖ More appeal to youth
- ❖ More recent books in library
- ❖ More program to lure different people
- ❖ Without child care young families won't come back
- ❖ Each needs to invite others
- ❖ Win the Megamillion
- ❖ Activities that call attention to others
- ❖ Network of small groups to integrate new folks and strengthen ourselves
- ❖ Parking
- ❖ More student groups and prayer groups
- ❖ We need to be more educated ourselves - why we do what we do
- ❖ More fun opportunities
- ❖ More ice cream
- ❖ A football team

- ❖ A parish bookstore
- ❖ Give Sunday back to families – reestablish “Blue Laws”
- ❖ Increase our music outreach – organ
- ❖ Get in touch with today’s world – use web more, videotape sermons, appeal to all ages
- ❖ Modernize the service music, be eclectic
- ❖ Build parking garage and charge public during the week
- ❖ Provide services that the community perceives it needs

Question 5. What are your spiritual needs that St. Mark's needs to address?

- ❖ More visitations among family and supportive friends
- ❖ Want to feel joy and hope following service
- ❖ Want to feel renewed
- ❖ Feeling of belonging to a community
- ❖ We miss Doxology
- ❖ Modernize music
- ❖ Sermons that connect Jesus' teaching to today's world and challenges
- ❖ Spiritual needs are addressed for me
- ❖ Sermons with everyday situations, more understandable, practical
- ❖ Live music, Christian bands
- ❖ Use of layman's terms
- ❖ Daily focus, spiritual direction
- ❖ Write on a paper/program what your needs for the week will be
- ❖ Meet needs of busy families
- ❖ To increase faith
- ❖ Faith in the justice system
- ❖ Continue the opening arms of the church
- ❖ Triplet prayer groups
- ❖ Children centered spiritual experiences
- ❖ Sunday school and kids activities
- ❖ People in transition – need to grow as persons of faith
- ❖ Friendship and deeper relations with God
- ❖ Discernment of where I am and how to find the way
- ❖ Artful liturgy that speaks
- ❖ Emotional support
- ❖ Visitation program for the immobile and handicapped
- ❖ Experience of God in different ways
- ❖ Hunger for learning
- ❖ Down to earth sermons that speak to where we are
- ❖ More Bible study and encouraging each other
- ❖ To help me grow in Christ, longing for deep Christian fellowship
- ❖ To strengthen my faith
- ❖ Already done it
- ❖ Growth in knowledge, sense of connection
- ❖ Atmosphere for prayer, meditation, worship and traditional. We have been turned off by churches in the area that have abandoned traditional services and music

Question 6. What one gift or talent will you give to St. Mark's during the coming year that you are not currently giving?

- ❖ Participate more in existing programs
- ❖ Become reader
- ❖ I don't dance
- ❖ Try to be more connected to people at church
- ❖ Discernment – deaconate
- ❖ More money
- ❖ Find a contractor to help repair the building
- ❖ Teach Sunday school
- ❖ Visit the homebound or sick
- ❖ Pray more every day
- ❖ Slow down and listen more
- ❖ Care for myself
- ❖ Pray for the full power of the Holy Spirit – will pray every day
- ❖ Crochet until the cows come home – make a prayer shawl
- ❖ Help to better convey the St. Mark's story to community
- ❖ Invite a friend to church
- ❖ More time/help with facilities
- ❖ Help more with food events
- ❖ Offer time to Addie's Attic
- ❖ Help regularly with public suppers
- ❖ Help with grounds upkeep
- ❖ Call and I shall come!
- ❖ Hospital visitations
- ❖ Help to clean or prepare
- ❖ Write thank you notes to donors to the Essentials Pantry
- ❖ Plant bulbs
- ❖ Usher/greeter
- ❖ Teach on Christian Art, Gospel of Luke, our Anglican Heritage
- ❖ Praying more regularly
- ❖ Medical expertise, time and organizational skills