

“Seeking Our Call”

A Parish-Wide Discernment

Sundays, 9:15-10:15 a.m. in the sanctuary
February 3 – May 5, 2019
(excluding Palm Sunday and Easter)

Plus one Saturday morning workshop session:
Saturday, March 30, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Sunday, Feb. 3 – Annual Parish Meeting

Sunday, Feb. 10 – Congregational Guiding Scriptures

To Do Before This Class:

- Read “Congregational Guiding Scriptures” in this packet, or Session 20 of *Faith Leader*, Book III (p. 51-54).
- Pick a Congregational Guiding Scripture that you think best reflects where God is calling St. John’s to ministry. Write it down, along with the chapter and verse where it is found in the Bible. You will share it with the group in class.

Be prepared to speak about:

- How your scripture connects to the spiritual gifts you are aware of at St. John’s
- How your scripture may help St. John’s to discern our call to ministry.

Sunday, Feb. 17 – NO CLASS (Helpful Shop grants luncheon after 10:30 service)

Sunday, Feb. 24 – Five Values that Characterize My Church (Part 1)

In this session, we will share the words we chose for St. John’s five values and talk about why we chose them. A facilitator will make a list and note with tick marks which words were chosen by more than one person in the group.

To Do Before This Class:

- In this packet, read through the descriptions of the five types of values (conceptual, interpersonal, experiential, negative, and objects of value) and select one word or phrase that summarizes St. John’s value in each of these areas

Sunday, March 3 – Five Values that Characterize My Church (Part 2)

As a group, we will group the various words together into a few words or phrases and define some overarching themes of what St. John’s values.

To Do Before This Class:

- Continue thinking about the values you chose and the ones you heard shared in class last week, and think about any common themes you see among them.

Sunday, March 10 – “My Church is Called To...” (Part 1)

In this session, we will create a history wall and find connections between our past and present and project into the future. We will also list the current ministries of the parish.

To Do Before This Class:

- Read Session 20 of *Faith Leader*, Book III (p. 51-54) or the Cliff Notes version in this packet
- Read the written history of St. John’s (and think about everything you can remember about the church’s history since you became part of this congregation. Note any particular significant events.)
- Make a list of all the current ministries at St. John’s that you can think of (the website might be helpful for sparking your memory)

Sunday, March 17 – “My Church is Called To...” (Part 2)

In this session, we will each share brief statements about where each of us believes God is calling St. John’s.

To Do Before This Class:

- Write a brief paragraph stating where you feel God is calling St. John’s to ministry. Your view of your church’s call may reflect ministries already in place, or it may focus on the need for a new ministry.

Sunday, March 24 – Current Reality

In this session, we will list the strengths and resources of our parish, the challenges we face, the potential benefits and purposes of our ministry call and the potential dangers.

To Do Before This Class:

- Review the documentation from the previous sessions on “Congregational Guiding Scriptures,” “Five Values That Characterize My Church,” and “My Church is Called To.” These will be posted on the parish website. Spend some time thinking about the parish’s current reality (see above in italics.)

SATURDAY, March 30, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. – Visioning Workshop

In this longer workshop, we will create a multifaceted yet focused vision for what will be in place in the parish in the next 3-5 years.

To Do Before This Class:

- Review the documentation from the previous sessions on “Congregational Guiding Scriptures,” “Five Values That Characterize My Church,” and “My Church is Called To.” These will be posted on the parish website, along with the Current Reality Scan from our last session.
- Contemplate what you would like to see in place at St. John’s in the next 3-5 years. Given our Current Reality, is this actually doable?

Sunday, March 31 – Creating a Parish Statement of Purpose, Focus, and Direction & Choosing a Congregational Guiding Scripture

To Do Before This Class:

- Review the church’s current “Vision, Mission, and Values” – the document we create today will replace that document
- Review the scripture passages suggested at the Feb. 10 session as congregational guiding scriptures for St. John’s. We’ll attempt to choose a congregational guiding scripture in this session. (If we don’t get there, we’ll finish next week.)
- Review the NEW Vision document and how it fits with the various suggested scriptural passages

Sunday, April 7 – Creating a Parish Statement of Purpose, Focus, and Direction & Choosing a Congregational Guiding Scripture (Part 2)

To Do Before This Class:

- Review the document “What is an Action Plan.”
- Be thinking about key steps that can be taken in the area of work you are most interested in.
- Call someone you think is key to successfully achieving our Vision to invite them to participate. Example: Parents and the worship committee would need to be part of planning around youth engagement.

April 14 & 21– NO CLASS (Palm Sunday & Easter Day)

Sunday, April 28 – Action Planning, Part 1

Smaller subgroups will work on specifics to be accomplished and when in each of the vision areas.

To Do Before This Class:

- Review the NEW Vision. If you missed last time, determine which vision element you are most interested in working on. Where can your particular spiritual gifts apply?
- Is there someone who is key to getting one of the items done? Invite them to join you.

Sunday, May 5 – Action Planning, Part 2

Each subgroup will report out to the whole planning group. A calendar of accomplishments will be created on the wall and consideration given to coordination, structural organization, communication, and leadership.

To Do Before This Class:

- Review the documents and think strategically. How can we be most effective in the way we work?

June 23 – Observance of the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist

Celebration of:

- 130th Anniversary of St. John’s Founding (June 1889)
- 10th Anniversary of the Move to Aptos (June 2009)
- Our NEW Vision!

Congregational Guiding Scriptures (for Feb. 10 session)

“Cliff Notes version” adapted for St. John’s

You’ve seen it before, the use of a guiding scripture. Perhaps it was a capital campaign for the church, which bore the tag line, “For Such a Time as This...” Or you may have seen a short piece of scripture used as a theme for a national event – a women’s convocation entitled “In Memory of Her,” or a denominational gathering that proclaimed “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.”

In most congregations, we use scripture this way from time to time, but how many churches have an ongoing relationship with a particular scripture? How often do we own and live a scripture over time, rather than just for a month-long stewardship campaign or a six-day national event?

In this session, we will consider what scripture each of us would suggest our church select as a Congregational Guiding Scripture, a scriptural “motto” or “tag line.”

If we have the entirety of the Bible for our edification, why should we choose just one scripture for our congregation? While we would always want to have a broad knowledge of the Bible, we can grow spiritually by taking one piece of scripture and connecting with it deeply through all four spiritual types – by thinking it, feeling it, being it, and doing it.

Does one particular scripture passage seem to show up a lot in the life of our church? During the coming weeks, pay attention to where and how your congregation uses scripture. You will want to take particular notice of worship; the newsletter, brochures, or other written pieces; recruitment efforts, design or décor of the building; and so forth.

In some cases, we can spot a pattern in a congregation’s use of scripture. Does it prefer Old Testament scriptures to New Testament? Stories to teachings? Is there a theme or common “God Word” that shows up frequently?

As you consider your choice for a Congregational Guiding Scripture, explore whether you feel your choice should reflect who your congregation is at this time or who God is calling you to be in the future. Do you need a scripture for the present or for what is to come?

Note whether your choice is an analytical one or a gut instinct. Does your choice reflect your own agenda or is it reflective of a vision or mission statement your congregation is working under? (*We’ll be re-evaluating those as part of this discernment process as well, so you don’t have to be too tied to the current vision or mission statements.*)

Does your congregation practice this scripture? Or could it practice this scripture in the future? Does this scripture support or challenge any glimmers you may have about where God may be calling us as a congregation to serve?

Finally, we should acknowledge that we are selecting a “canon within a canon.” More than one scripture might speak to a congregation’s call at a given time. The Congregational Guiding Scripture isn’t meant to exclude other scriptures; rather, it provides a means for the congregation to connect, not only with its call, but with the Bible as a whole.

Assignment:

Pick a Congregational Guiding Scripture that you think best reflects where God is calling St. John’s to ministry. We will share these in class on Feb. 10 at 9:15.

Be prepared to speak about:

- How your scripture connects to the spiritual gifts you are aware of at St. John’s
- How your scripture may help St. John’s to discern our call to ministry.

Five Values That Characterize My Church (for Feb. 24 session)

“Cliff Notes version” adapted for St. John’s

Writing teacher Alicia Rasley identifies five categories of values that define who we are. The five categories are: conceptual values, interpersonal values, experiential values, objects of value, and negative values. These five values can also define the identity of a local congregation.

Before our session on Feb. 24, read through the detailed descriptions of the five values and prepare a list of five words that describe St. John’s values. Using the spaces following the description of each value, choose one word to express that core value for St. John’s. In the space below the value, write a brief paragraph explaining your choice.

Conceptual Value

These types of values are expressed in overarching terms – truth, freedom, love, righteousness, honor, etc. What conceptual value best describes St. John’s? It could be anything from forgiveness to justice, purity to unity, faithfulness to independence. You do not have to personally agree with this value; you are describing the value, not prescribing it. Once you have identified the value, use the written paragraph to explain why you believe this to be St. John’s conceptual value. We don’t hold values for abstract reasons. What specific teachings, experiences, or situations do you think formed this value in St. John’s?

St. John’s Conceptual Value:

I chose this value because...

Interpersonal Value

When it comes to interaction between members, what does St. John's value? What does it practice? Is there an emphasis on family, friendship, mentors, or leaders? Is your church welcoming, distant, reserved, or overenthusiastic? Once you have identified the value, use your written paragraph to give examples of how you have seen this value in action. For now, focus on a positive interpersonal value. Is your church especially forgiving? Does it excel at being an open community?

St. John's Interpersonal Value:

An example of this is...

Experiential Value

Conceptual and interpersonal values motivate our actions. They drive us toward certain goals and behaviors. At St. John's, what experiences are valued? Examples of these values include worship, testimony, service, administration, prayer, fellowship, and so forth. In your written paragraph, note any connections between what you've identified as the experiential value and the conceptual and interpersonal values in your congregation.

St. John's Experiential Value:

This experiential value arises from...

Objects of Value

Name the one object your congregation values most. This should be a material object and not a person or persons. What one object would devastate St. John's if it were lost? It might be the building, the altar, the baptismal font, the bell tower, the historical records, the computers in the office, etc. In your written paragraph, describe why the object is so important to the congregation.

St. John's Object of Value:

We value this object because...

Negative Values

A negative value is one that the congregation really shouldn't value at all. It may be destructive or dysfunctional. The negative value illustrates your congregation's imperfections. Negative values such as denial, addiction, gossip, cliques, and grudges serve a short-term purpose but are ultimately harmful. These values, though not conducive to the long-term health of a congregation, do point to where a congregation needs to change and grow. In your short paragraph, identify what the negative value provides in the short-term as well as how it is destructive over time.

St. John's Negative Value:

This value allows us to...

This value prevents us from...

“My Church is Called To...” (for March 17 session)

“Cliff Notes version” adapted for St. John’s

Each Christian congregation is unique. Just as individuals are given gifts to build up the body of Christ, so, too, congregations are gifted for specific work. Too often, we have tried the one-size-fits-all approach to church life. We make the mistake of believing that there is one right way to “be church.”

Churches vary as widely as the individuals who comprise them. Healthy, growing congregations share a common secret. They have identified the unique work God is calling them to do, and they go about doing it.

Called Communities in the Scriptures

We have only to look to the Bible to understand how God has called not only individuals but communities of people to do his work. The Old Testament gives us the panoramic story of God’s creation of a Chosen People. We hear the stories from Abraham to the return from exile, and in those stories we understand how God called and continued to call the Hebrews to be a light to the world.

In the New Testament, we witness Jesus building his apostolic community. Then we watch as the first Christian communities are formed after the resurrection. We see how the gospel went out into the world, moving beyond Jerusalem and Judah as Paul preached to the Gentiles. Soon, the Christian message seeded communities throughout the known world.

Paul’s letters show us the uniqueness of each of the communities to whom he wrote. God called each of these new communities to accomplish a specific ministry in their time and place. The Corinthians had to blend their incredibly diverse cultural backgrounds of the members of their church. The Thessalonians wrestled with how to understand the end times that they believed were rapidly approaching. For the Christians in Rome, Paul had to address the most critical issue of his day: whether Gentile Christians must become Jews to follow Christ, and the relationship of Christianity and Judaism.

In all of these instances, we see God calling a particular people in a certain time and place. While each community found itself in unique circumstances with its own challenges, they all shared the common experience of being called by God to serve a divine purpose.

The Three Tasks of Christian Community

The Greek word *koinonia*, or community, exemplified the special nature of the body of Christ. The word implied a fellowship or partnership among the members for the mutual benefit of all. Congregations, as the body of Christ in a particular time and place, are called to be living examples of God’s community.

Essentially, God calls churches to do three things. As a result of their particular gifts and call, a congregation may emphasize or excel in one particular area. Your church's strength in one or more of these tasks may provide an important clue to uncovering God's call for your congregation.

The tasks of Christian community include:

Proclaiming the Gospel

Each congregation must proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to its members as well as to the world. This proclamation, or kerygma as it is called in Greek, embodies the core message of the Christian community. This core message appears in the various sermons and letters of the New Testament. It includes the call for repentance and faith in Jesus, the promise of forgiveness, the story of Jesus' life, condemnation, death, resurrection, and ascension as the fulfillment of Scripture and the way to salvation.

The minister preaches the good news of Jesus Christ from the pulpit in worship, but all of us spread the kerygma in a variety of ways. The liturgies we employ and the vows we make in the most important moments of life – baptisms, weddings, and funerals – are another way we proclaim our faith in the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Whether we are sharing our personal faith experience with one person or one hundred, the power of our story of Jesus Christ preaches as effectively as any sermon.

What's more, our personal and communal behavior proclaims the good news through action rather than words. We witness for Jesus Christ when we act as he would have acted.

Training Disciples

Our efforts to help people develop their faith fall under this task of community. Activities of teaching, nurture, and mentoring help believers to know the content of the faith and provide role models for the living out of that faith. We nurture believers through each stage of life, from the cradle to the grave, as they wrestle with questions and celebrate their discoveries. In formal ways, through Sunday schools, catechism, confirmation classes, Bible studies, or book studies, we train believers to be better disciples for Jesus Christ. We also use informal methods, especially interpersonal relationships, to train by example and by care.

Serving Others

God calls Christians to serve individuals within their own congregation, but also to care for all of God's children. The proper balance of pastoral care for our own members with outreach to the world can be difficult to discover and maintain, but effective Christian communities do just that. Activities that fulfill this task include visiting the sick and the imprisoned, feeding the hungry, providing clothing and shelter to the disadvantaged, and offering spiritual and emotional nurture to the hurting. In all these activities, we remember Jesus's words from Matthew 25:40, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist, Aptos, CA

Types of Christian Communities

Any one of the spiritual gifts we discussed earlier in the year might be used in these three areas of Christian community. A congregation might exhibit many spiritual gifts, but they may find their gifts cluster in a particular area. For example:

Hospitality

The gift of welcoming the stranger might be used to make newcomers to worship feel at home (proclaiming). It might be used to serve a meal to the homeless (serving) or to a group gathered for Bible study (training).

Giving

This gift of sharing money sacrificially might be evidenced in what is placed in the offering plate on Sunday morning (proclaiming), by contributing funds to build a house for Habitat for Humanity (serving), or by funding and leading a mission vacation Bible school to an underserved community (training).

Compassion

The gift of responding to others' mental, physical and spiritual distress with empathy and effectiveness could be shown in the intercessory prayers offered in worship (proclaiming), by offering a pastoral counseling service or referrals (serving), or by providing classes for those who are grieving or going through divorce (training).

Discovering my Church's Call

Consider how St. John's exhibits the three tasks of Christian community through the exercise of our spiritual gifts. How do we proclaim the gospel? What activities help to train and nurture disciples of Jesus Christ? In what ways do we serve our members and the world?

Just as an individual Christian's call to ministry arises from the spiritual gifts God has bestowed on that person, so, too, a congregation's call to ministry can be found at the convergence of the spiritual gifts of its members. To discover the future ministries to which God may be calling your congregation, you may find it helpful to look at the history of your particular church and to get a good feel for your church's present situation and activities.

My Congregation: Past, Present, and Future

Just as in personal discernment, in congregational discernment we must look to the past and examine the present to find clues about our future. Take some time to review your church's history. Read the "Written history of St. John's" document. You might want to take time to look through the church's historical archives. Why was St. John's begun? What have been its high points? Its lows? Longtime members are another excellent source for uncovering the historical calling of your congregation.

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In addition to informing yourself about your congregation's history, you should be aware of all the ministries your congregation currently performs. Gather brochures, visit the church website, or interview your pastor or other church staff. Make sure you have a broad understanding of your church's current activities that fulfill the three tasks of Christian community: to preach the gospel, train disciples, and serve others.

Congregational Spiritual Type

Earlier this fall, we took an inventory to assess both our own spiritual type (thinking, feeling, being or doing) as well as our view of our congregation's spiritual type. If you did not fill out the inventory then, please do so now by taking the inventory online.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdCV_IMuxgy598H2o9aAHBrUdngTkKlfHDAftf4pZqXvfZ5vg/viewform

We will use these results in the next two sessions.