

Worship Survey, St. Peter & St. Paul, Fall 2018

We conducted a survey about worship at St. Peter & St. Paul between September 20 and November 7, 2018. We used 16 questions to understand demographics and inquire about worship style, music and schedules.

Respondents

185 people responded online and in writing. 78% of those who responded were over age 50; 95% were over age 40. None were in their 20s. Though we are thin on folks in their 20s and 30s, this hole in the survey should be noted when making use of the results. The ratio of responses to the three services roughly matches the ratio of average attendance at those services (68% 10:30 AM, 16% 8AM, 10% Saturday). 65% of responses came from those who attend nearly every week; 22% from those attending 2-3 times per month.

General results: a consistent variety of opinion

Anecdotally, we have heard a variety of interests and values about the design of our worship services. We hoped that the survey would shed light on this variety, and perhaps reveal hidden synergies (such as a clear preference on a specific question, or matching a desired change to a particular service time). The results, however, showed exactly what we had been feeling: a small majority of folks are comfortable with the way things are, and the rest are divided among many options they might like to see. This leaves us with few clear adaptations to try. In fact, in almost all potential groupings (by age, or by service times, or by frequency of attending, or by those with kids or not), liturgical and musical preferences varied according to a similar distribution.

Change

The only clear strong preference came in the question about making a change. 69% are comfortable with our liturgy as it is; 7% are against any changes to their service. **That is 76% who like things as they are.** This is the strongest opinion in the whole survey. Note that comfort with the status quo does not mean a lack of creativity or willingness to try new things. Answers to other questions showed a greater variety, where only a slight majority stood out. Those advocating a change included an interest in praise and worship music (seven comments) and an interest in dropping or reducing the sung prayer for the nation (five comments).

Insights

A few insights did emerge. Appreciation for **Holy Communion** is strong in the parish, and is clearly an essential element of our weekly services. **Liturgical style and music** is also important (though specific preferences vary), and **preaching** is both valued and appreciated.

There is a general favor given to **“high church” or “formal but simple” style**, though some of the regular elements associated with high church had modest importance (incense, sanctus bells, or chant). When asked what might be the best style for unchurched people, high church style dropped in favor of “low church, simple.” While 67% were not opposed to incense, at least on special occasions, 20% do not find it helpful, and 4% cannot attend when incense is used. Care should be taken when we use incense. Preferences of Rite are consistent across services and other demographic groupings: **52% like the mix we have**, 24% prefer Rite II, 14% prefer Rite I.

Those who attend infrequently have no interest in nursery or earlier service times. Those who attend with kids and/or teens strongly prefer later service times (chiefly 10:30), and many like high church style; most like high church or “formal but simple.”

Music

Music is an excellent example of the consistent variation of a range of views. **54% like the current mix of music we have.** The remaining 46% are divided among preferences of various different styles: 11% folk, 9% plainsong chant, 9% classical anthems, 5% newer music. These ratios are roughly consistent across schedules, ages, family status, etc. No one option has a clear strong preference: the majority is only a slim majority, and the alternatives each have only small interest. In some ways, this confirms the importance of the right mix of styles. In the comments, several people suggested various patterns of mixing extremes in the same service or week by week. That approach is generally unsuccessful in the experience of the wider church. Careful planning and seasonal variation may be the best way to balance a diverse musical pallet.

Schedule

Preferences for service times generally line up with our current schedule. As predicted, there is some interest hovering around 9:30 AM, but not as strongly as expected. 10:30 is still the preferred time. Our current design purposefully places Sunday School near that sweet spot between the services, while allowing the two services to be scheduled between 8AM and 10:30.

Sunday Nights

There is some willingness to try something new on Sunday evenings (40 respondents or 22%). Among them, they lean more toward families and more toward a less formal style of liturgy and music. However, the difference is not stark—just a slight variation on the consistency found across other demographic differences. Concerns were raised about interference with youth group; likewise respondents would want to have Sunday school programming to make Sunday nights work. Those interested in Sunday nights include some folks from the Saturday night service. However, most Saturday night attenders responding prefer their current schedule.

Discernment going forward

Please continue to pray for God’s guidance of our stewardship of our liturgies. If you did not respond to the survey (or if you have more to say), please feel free to contact the Rector to share your thoughts. We are blessed with a variety of backgrounds and experiences of worship, and we are blessed with a generous supply of forbearance with one another as we seek to come together to glorify God in the community’s worship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Worship Survey Statistics At A Glance:

Respondents:

95% over age 40; 78% over age 50
26% come with children and/or youth
68% attend 10:30, 16% attend 8:00; 10% attend Saturday night
65% attend every week they are in town; 22% attend 2-3 times per month

Priorities in choosing a service:

60% include Communion
55% include Liturgical Style
48% include Music and 48% include preaching

Preferred service times:

10:30: 33%; 10AM: 15%, 8AM: 11%, Saturday at 5:30: 6% (5% said Sunday at 5PM)
22% (40 respondents) would be interested in Sunday nights for the right style.

Style and Rite:

45% high church, 23% formal-simple, 20% a seasonal mix, 12% low church, 1% contemporary
52% a mix of Rite I & II, 24% Rite II, 14% Rite I
51% find Sanctus bells helpful; 14% say not helpful
11% say incense is helpful for worship; 57% only for special occasions;
20% say incense is not helpful, 4% cannot come if incense is used.

Musical preferences (in a consistent variation across demographics and schedules):

54% the mix of styles we have
11% folk music
9% plainsong chant
9% classical choral anthems
5% newer contemporary music

“For you, what is the most effective element of worship at St. Peter & St. Paul?”

In response to this open-ended question:

32% of responses made reference to Communion or Eucharist
27% made reference to sermons or preaching
16% made reference to music
8% made reference to liturgy

“What change, if any, would most empower your prayers and praises of God?”

69%: “no change, I am fine as-is”
7%: “I am very much against any changes to the service I attend”
14%: “I have an idea for us to consider”
11%: “I very much want a certain change”

Among the 40 respondents offering a change, seven asked for “Praise & Worship” music, six asked for contemporary music, and five asked to drop or reduce the sung prayer for the nation. Other suggestions varied.