

Parish Profile Narrative Responses

St. David's Episcopal Church

1) Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry which you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

There are moments in 2022 when many at St. David's realized we have received the amazing grace of God. It came in fits and starts, this realization that God is good all the time, even in the middle of a pandemic. Our struggles learning and screaming about Zoom and our sweating with colleagues from nearby churches to feed our neighbors is worth it. At some point, our missing the wine during in-person Communion, or praying for Spiritual Communion with our friends on computer screens became a realized blessing. Our outreach and our community is faithful. Our being afraid of getting Covid-19 and lining up for shots and boosters actually boosted our community spirit. We realize in faith our attempts to be church in a crisis are accepted and counted as righteous by the Spirit walking with us. We are bold to say we've fulfilled our pandemic calling; it feels like Jesus has accepted us (warts and all) and allows St. David's to look to our future as faithful servant leaders in Brown County, IN. To that end, our interim rector is helping us describe our current mission and ministries in a systematic way to help welcome our new rector into a continuing, evolving mutual ministry.

2) Describe your liturgical style & practice. If your community provides more than one type of worship service, please describe all.

St. David's is a faithful, eclectic parish church where many have chosen the Episcopal Church as adults. At 9:30 Sunday morning and 5:00 Wednesday evening worship we use the Book of Common Prayer Rite II service, changing options with the seasons. Sunday is adaptable traditional with printed service bulletin, music variety, singing, processions, pastoral prayers, and sermon. Wednesday is a smaller group seated around the altar with discussion on the readings and how they relate to the world. In both services, the words and message of Jesus remind us of who and whose we are. Our deacon and lay readers do Morning or Evening Prayer or Compline if the priest is absent. We have an active Lay Eucharistic Visitor team. Our worship space is flexible with altar, baby grand piano, pipe organ console, and chair seating, all movable to accommodate special services and programs. We stand for prayers and may use kneelers for communion. We have special liturgical and community events for Advent, Christmas, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. We're thankful for baptisms and weddings and celebrate life together at funerals and offer our Chapel Garden and Commonbarium for burial.

3) How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

One of our recent Sunday bulletins begins, “Whatever brings you here today, we hope that you will find Saint David’s to be a place of refreshment and renewal...” Whether you’re carefully reading this sentence as a first-time attendee who knows little about the church, or a long-time member skipping over this first page to find the opening hymn number, the greeting is the same. No matter where you are on your spiritual path, no matter your background or beliefs, St. David’s welcomes you to learn and grow with us. We meet you where you are on that journey.

Critically, the liturgy is not exclusive to those who are already familiar with services- knowledgeable members and clergy are happy to explain or instruct, aspiring to create a permission structure where it’s ok to not know things. Our Sunday services conclude with announcements, and hospitality continues with food and conversation during coffee hour or shared meals. These informal discussions allow people to understand each other’s, “whatever brings you here today.” We incorporate all in ministry by understanding those individual needs, identifying common experiences, sharing stories, and supporting one another as a community.

4) As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

One of the core tenets of the St. David's community is to care for one another as Christ has taught us.

We prayerfully lift each other up during times of both strife and celebration, and offer pastoral care to those who are ill or suffering - even offering hand-knitted prayer shawls as a part of that care. We also offer opportunities to discuss spiritual concepts and ideas in group settings, through avenues such as group book studies, post-service discussions, and our beloved Pub Theology series.

From a physical perspective, we have regular group activities that enrich our bodies and spirits alike - examples include regular highway cleanups, recent implementation of Holy Hikes, and offering plenty of playground activities for our children.

Among all of this, music seems to weave its way through nearly every facet of our community - from our worship music to hosting the Bean Blossom Music Series concerts six times a year, which brings together members of our local community with members of our church community through the beauty of music.

St. David's is rooted in spreading the love of God, not only to each other, but also to our broader community and to our environment.

5) Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical region?

A recent survey of our members was conducted to get a broad view of St. David's community engagement. The results reflect a great diversity of thought and interests. Involvement ranges from financial support through deep engagement in these organizations.

St. David's is involved in public health; we are workers and volunteers with public utilities, community centers, medical facilities, and organizations that collect/distribute food.

St. David's is involved in education; we are tutors, teachers, and fundraisers for a wide range of schools and non-profit orgs.

St. David's is involved in social justice and equality; we provide legal assistance, financial aid, and time to groups focused on race, LGBTQ+ issues, poverty, and those affected by war, homelessness, or incarceration.

St. David's is involved in missions, engaging with the diocese, attending events at Waycross, and facilitating social/theological retreats.

St. David's is involved in environmental efforts, from creation care programs to supporting the Humane Society, recycling efforts, and state/local parks.

St. David's is involved in our community culture, we are artists, actors, writers, and musicians.

6) How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

Pastoral care is provided through emotional, social, and spiritual support of the congregation and wider community. This can look like spiritual counseling on personal issues, conflict mediation, or providing financial assistance on rent or bills through the discretionary fund or other means. The expectation is for our pastor to lead and coordinate this activity, but there is a wide support network in the church that can help with meals, doctor appointment coordination, cards, visits, transport, or other accommodations for those who are sick or struggling.

We also try to make the church a safe space for growth, education, and community-building, hosting events like pollinator day camp, concerts, a strawberry festival, and euchre nights, among other events. There are several families with young children in the church, but we see a significant opportunity for growth of Sunday school programming and other activities that engage the families and kids in our area.

7) Tell about a ministry that your worshiping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

We started the Northern Brown County Food Alliance soon after the COVID pandemic started in 2020. The group meets almost every week to plan/coordinate food distribution to people in need in Brown County. The principal way this is done is by helping Kim Robinson, the Brown County COAD director, staff the pop-up pantries around the county that occur roughly monthly. Also St. Vincent de Paul in Brown County has secured a refrigerated truck for food pickup in Indianapolis and elsewhere, so they are instrumental in making food available to people in need as well.

There is also limited food home delivery to people in need. This has gotten underway more recently and some St. David's parishioners are involved with this service.

A second ministry that has been started in the last five years is "Creation Care". This is a few workshops/lessons/hands-on learning sessions for children about the environment and caring for it.

Donna Niednagel can be contacted about the Northern Brown County Food Alliance and Cori McCabe can be contacted about the "Creation Care" programs.

8) How are you preparing yourself for the Church of the future?

Amidst the noise and chaos of modern society, we at St. David's acknowledge that we play an important role in providing respite and opportunities for spiritual growth, for believers and non-believers alike. We recognize that there is a need to engage our community and beyond in ways that aren't always religious, but invoke a sense of growth and understanding nonetheless. After all, Jesus himself spent much time among those outside of his 'bubble', and the Church body and spirit cannot grow without doing so ourselves.

We regularly host seasonal outreach activities to attract people to join us as we grow - examples include our annual Pollinator Camp for children, our Strawberry Festival and Harvest Festival, solstice luminary walks, and blessing services for animals and bikes. We provide opportunities for use of our space, and invite people to join us for concerts and other activities in our gathering place.

There is a common understanding among our community that inclusivity, diversity, and empathy should remain at the forefront of the Church's mission, without which we cannot hope to remain relevant. The activities that we host and partake in reflect those principles.

9) What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?

“Every Perfect Gift Comes from God Above” was the theme of the Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) campaign used by St. David’s last fall, coming out from pandemic isolation. Week after week, we reminded ourselves through stories and testimonials that with God’s help we would continue to thrive after almost two years of Zoom. St. David’s has always been generous, especially after we completed a 2009 capital campaign that pledged 10% of every dollar raised to outreach. Even in lean years, we keep a steady line item for outreach in the annual budget and host additional fund-raising events that help fund projects that serve others. For stewardship campaigns, we survey committees for budget input, create a dream budget that stretches us financially, and create a narrative budget sent with a personalized letter from the chair to all, beginning a three-week campaign. Personalized letters from the priest and senior warden follow while we continue stories, testimonials, prayers, and a stewardship themed song. For 2022, pledges came in 3% higher than our dream budget, and we joyfully, with prayers of thanksgiving and praise for every perfect gift, added 3% to our dream budget.

10. What is your worshipping community's experience of conflict? How have you addressed it?

The community of St. David's has come to recognize that conflict, while uncomfortable, is a necessary process for a community of any size. However, if we allow it to, conflict can ultimately lead us to a path of growth and understanding. One such example is when our vestry made the decision to terminate our weekly farmer's market. This decision swiftly created a number of hurt feelings and brought several interpersonal conflicts to the surface, which we have continued to work through even to this day. While the decision conclusively created some rifts amongst our community, it also allowed us to regroup and establish even better ways to serve the needs of our community through the efforts of the Brown County Food Alliance, which is a coalition that we helped establish during the Covid-19 pandemic to help feed individuals in need. At St. David's, we have come to know that conflict is a process, but can often be a blessing in disguise - if we allow it to be.

11) What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? What did you learn?

- The defacement of our church. Before we knew that our organist did it, we were able to bring our community together to hold a service and wash the tags off the church building. This we did well. Once it was known that our organist was the culprit, the diocese largely took over although some parishioners met with the then-fired organist.

- Our priest's firing by the bishop following a Title IV proceeding. We did not rise to the occasion; there was little to no transparency and no honest public communication. The congregation took no opportunity to have an open conversation among ourselves, although there were many private discussions. After an open forum with the bishop, no further meetings were held. Later a consultant was called in to smooth things over, but some thought there was no opportunity for honesty. They felt silenced. Others felt that the diocese was there for us. Some felt the consultant was there to tamp things down, which had little to do with how we, as parishioners, were feeling.

- What did we learn? We have trouble admitting we're wrong and saying "I'm sorry". We also struggle to communicate honestly with the diocese and among ourselves at times.

12) Please provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community. [Enter no more than four descriptions made up of one or two words each. For example: administration, asset management, preaching, pastoral care.]

- Community-Minded
- Empathetic Listener
- Servant Leader
- Spiritual Teacher