

## THE ST. ALBAN'S DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

The Discernment Committee at St. Alban's is one of the groups involved in the search process for a new rector. This committee's charge was to gather information from the congregation for two distinct purposes:

- To help the Search Committee, Vestry and Bishop know as much as possible about us as a church in order to call the "best" candidate to lead us into the future.
- To provide insight about St. Alban's Church to potential candidates to ensure a proper "fit" between a candidate and a new church home.

The committee of nine was a cross-section of the parish: 8:00 and 10:00 attendees, high school student, young adult, preschool and Sunday school teachers, middle-aged and retired. It met to clarify its role and responsibilities and to discuss the methods it would use to accomplish its charge of "assessing the current state of the church and its future aspirations." Every effort was made to communicate with a wide sample of parishioners from both congregations through individual email surveys, on-site group discussions, town hall-style meetings (Sunday mornings) and mid-week dessert gatherings, during March and April.

The committee's findings are summarized in the following three sections:

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- Membership Survey p. 12

### **Discernment Committee**

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## NARRATIVE ABOUT ST. ALBAN'S

St. Alban's is a Christ-centered church that appeals to parishioners for its warmth and friendliness. An oft heard comment is "Family."

Adhering to a traditional foundation in liturgy and music, the pageantry of the Episcopal Church is apparent in St. Alban's commitment to the sacraments, Bible, prayer book and hymns. In the words of one parishioner, "I feel like I've gone to church!" Sermons focus on Christ's message with application to today's world, yet avoid political stances on divisive issues.

Quality describes its music program which incorporates traditional church music punctuated by innovative selections of religious significance. Parishioners, young and old, are encouraged to join the choir and/or handbell choir. Historical significance is honored and shared when timely and appropriate.

Children are valued at St. Alban's. A strong Sunday School program focuses on Christian education, from Godly Play at the preschool level, to Confirmation classes and high schoolers' discussions of contemporary issues within the context of their Christian faith. Youth Group is geared for 6th grade through high school and offers many opportunities for community service, social activities and fundraising for special ski weekends and tri-annual trips to Sandy Point, Wisconsin. The annual Christmas pageant not only features much of the young talent at St. Alban's, but also welcomes the creative works of older students who have written and directed the plays. For the young at heart, adult Bible study is offered each Sunday morning between services.

St. Alban's does not try to be all things to all people. Instead, what it does, it does well. Many ministries are available for finding the right fit. New ones grow from the bottom up, rather than being dictated from the top down. There are activities to fit every personality, strength and talent.

Our parish on Old Sabino Canyon Road is a spiritual family for a congregation diverse in age and backgrounds, yet inclusive in commitment to caring for others in its ministries that serve one another and through its outreach programs within the community. Strong lay leadership works cohesively with the clergy and staff to assess and address the needs of the church. Fiscally sound, the church operates within its means and saves for future projects. In return, the congregation is generous with its time, talents and treasure.

Last but not least, the clergy of St. Alban's is committed to pastoral care, a ministry very important to its parishioners. In the true spirit of Christian love, those who belong to St. Alban's take care of one another and understand why many call St. Alban's their spiritual home.

## GROUP MEETINGS SUMMARY

The St. Alban's Discernment Committee met with members of the congregation in 18 scheduled meetings between February and April. Six of the gatherings were open to all and 12 were scheduled with the organized groups within the church. The participants were asked to express their thoughts, succinctly and positively, in two areas of discussion:

What draws you to St. Alban's? What are its strengths?

What do you see as future aspirations/opportunities?

From the notes taken, it was clear to see that there were many recurring themes where there was a consensus of opinion. Summaries of these findings follow:

### **Staff**

Two continuing full-time paid staff members (Associate Priest for Pastoral Care and Director of Music) are currently assisted by an Interim Priest and an Administrative Assistant, augmented by a few other part-time employees and a devoted team of volunteers. The staff is competent, communicates effectively and coordinates well with one another, thus making all functions of the church flow smoothly.

Strong lay leadership (e.g. vestry, youth advisor and many other volunteers) exists to extend the work the paid staff does; however, there is strong vocal support for the new Rector to pay special attention to "developing more (and younger and stronger) lay leadership throughout the entire parish."

The pastoral care ministry is extremely important to parishioners and they are very comforted by that which Fr. Sumith provides. It's almost as if the two—Fr. Sumith and the term Pastoral Care—are synonymous. He leads the Wednesday healing services and LEV, makes in-home and hospital visits, and his spiritual gifts, love and competence encourage others.

Additionally, he conducts special services like the weekly Chapel for preschool and the annual blessing of the animals.

Staff members are respected and appreciated, as evidenced by the following comments: “My family has recently gone through a very difficult time: Fr. Sumith was a key factor in helping us deal with the blows life was throwing at us.” “Steve does an amazing job with beautiful music which is relevant to the scripture and teaching of each Sunday.” There is a lot of praise for Steve Keyl’s music program, “his competent leadership” and “people want to be involved.”

Future staff needs cited are paid positions for a Youth Minister and a Parish Life Facilitator. The youth would like more clergy involvement in Youth Group. There is a call for more church retreats.

Suggestions for the future include “a realignment of some staff responsibilities and creating open-ended job descriptions so as to not limit staff potential”; “refresh the church bylaws to avoid potential conflicts”; “review salaries for all staff members via benchmarking with other community churches”; “additional paid staff support.”

## **Facilities**

St. Alban’s original facility was completed in 1973. Since then, a new sanctuary, classrooms and extended columbarium have been added. Many parishioners noted that “St. Alban’s is in a beautiful setting and in a good location;” “some think the sanctuary has an amphitheater feel as well.” Many persons (both staff and congregants) are acutely aware of the “need for additional office space” and “new, directional signage for the entire campus.” Other ideas to consider once a building project commences:

- Parish hall acoustics

- Pass-through between kitchen and parish hall
- Closed circuit TV ability in parish hall
- Cry room
- Avoid getting an organ with too large a sound for the sanctuary
- Covered veranda on east side of sanctuary, running north-south, and equipped with speakers. Chairs could be set up to accommodate overflow at special services.
- Outside chapel for worship when main church is closed
- A room designated for Godly Play
- Enhancements to beautify the courtyard

It should be noted that a proposed model of the church may be seen in the Parish Hall.

The combination of staff and facilities is one of the greatest assets St. Alban's has.

### **Sermons**

The Bible is the foundation for sermons that teach, praise and correlate to real-life experiences. The sermons focus on Christ's message, not political issues of the day. "We don't talk politics; we talk God." They prod, they encourage, they challenge. Real world applications of the Bible remind us to have God in our lives and ask his help for others and ourselves.

Stewardship sermons do not pressure the congregation; they address goals and projections and then simply ask that each individual or family unit pledge according to ability.

### **Liturgy**

The liturgy follows the church calendar. The Book of Common Prayer is the source for all services. The Holy Eucharist is celebrated weekly. St. Alban's congregants seem to expect and

seek the ritual and pageantry of the Episcopal Church. Views were expressed for “baptisms to be part of regular services again” and Morning Prayer services to be held quarterly. Major innovative changes are not desired, but many parishioners are amenable to an occasional non-traditional service.

### **Music**

The music program supports spirituality and worship. Under the capable direction of Steve Keyl, it is traditional, yet diverse. Participation is open to all, and over the years has grown from the traditional weekly adult choir with organ accompaniment to feature a children’s choir, solos, piano, harpsichord, handbells and stringed instruments. Many a time, the congregation erupts in applause after a selection performed by the choir that is truly inspirational. While the Hymnal is the preferred cornerstone, some parishioners expressed the desire for contemporary music selections that would appeal to the youth and others.

### **Sunday School**

A strong Sunday School program for preschool through high school provides age-appropriate curriculum, supported by a strong cadre of volunteer teachers. However, it was cited that there is a need to grow the leadership pool of teachers as well as regular attendance. Parishioners enjoy the entrance of children into church at the Sunday School hymn, but some wish that children could also be present for the Passing of the Peace. Suggestions included offering more opportunities for children to worship at their own level, such as a monthly children’s sermon or a children’s chapel, and teaching children time-honored hymns such as *Jesus Loves Me* and *Jesus Loves the Little Children*.

Confirmation classes are taught in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, though there were a couple of comments about directing this class toward 7<sup>th</sup> graders. Middle and high school curriculum is student driven and is considered a strong force for retention of that age group. Vacation Bible School is offered during the 10:00 service in the month of June for preschoolers through 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Older students assist parent volunteers who lead the biblically-based craft-type classes.

### **Youth Activities**

In tandem with Sunday School are other opportunities for youth involvement which foster the feeling that they are an important, integral part of the church and are key to the “generational” feel of St. Alban’s. The success of these programs—Acolyte, Young People’s Choir, Youth Handbell Choir, Youth Group, Youth Sunday and the Christmas Pageant—facilitates the organic growth of the parish.

“Expanded opportunities for youth participation are desired. Identifying young leaders early and creating leadership roles for younger members of the congregation were cited as potential ways to achieve this.” Exploring Chapel Rock’s youth programs, better acolyte training and the desire for a youth minister that could devote the time and resources to the continuation and improvement of what is currently in place were suggested. Many recognize that the children are the future of the church.

The youth see themselves as very much a part of the church family, where everyone is friendly and all are treated with respect. Bonds of friendship are forged over the years and the teenagers become a tight-knit group though they attend different middle and high schools.

### **Parish Life and Social Activities**

St. Alban’s is a welcoming church that has been described by parishioners as “family centered,” “a family of families,” and “a group that supports one another as if we were family.” The multi-

generational congregation includes families that span three decades. Members generally feel “at home” here and see themselves as welcoming anyone who would like to attend,

This is a church without drama or divisive conflict and members prefer it that way. Parishioners have voiced their preference for neutrality of political stances and expressed a conservative ideology regarding alternative lifestyles and sexual practices. A variety of ministries are available to parishioners and supported with their time and money; members are encouraged to initiate new opportunities when they see a need.

Outside of Sunday worship, all families are invited to monthly Family Fun Nights and other special events. Many would like the opportunity for other social gatherings, including breakfasts, fellowship dinner groups, picnics, and coffee service (to bridge the hour between 8:00 and 10:00 services). The reinstatement of a Parish Life Facilitator on staff would expedite these opportunities and might revive the traditions of Trick or Trunk and Chapel Rock (or other family camp/retreat). Evening Bible study and a pictorial church directory were also requested.

## **Outreach**

Outreach is seen as recognizing and responding to needs of the community— both near and far — and by serving those needs with time, talent and (monetary) treasure. Outreach is a ministry of relationships, reaching out to relate to and take care of others on some level; this practice is viewed as vitally important within St. Alban’s. Outreach provides a link to accomplishing God’s mission as well as providing a sense of comfort, value, compassion and grounding to parishioners.

There are a number of ministries that involve and support members of this congregation, such as Grief Support, Memorial Reception Committee and Women’s Bible Study; there are many other community agencies to which only annual donations are given. Many persons

mentioned the value of the pastoral care ministries of the clergy and Lay Eucharistic Visitors (LEV) to homebound and hospitalized parishioners. A few others noted the “need to take better care of our senior members,” those in need of counsel or assistance, and an organized method for welcoming newcomers to St. Alban’s.

Reaching out to the broader community, most parishioners believe that Outreach projects are “diverse and well-chosen,” and provide adequate opportunities for personal involvement and/or financial contributions; however, “more information and publicity is needed to keep parishioners up to date in this area.” St. Alban’s recognizes itself as a “caring, supportive and generous church;” it can respond quickly and efficiently to requests for help with projects of local, national or global appeal.

In addition to Sunday worship, successful relationship programs (outreach, pastoral care and welcoming of newcomers) will continue to keep parishioners involved in and appreciative of St. Alban’s Church.

## **Membership**

Membership retention, recruitment, and diversity are important future goals that were often mentioned. Many parishioners feel the aging of our congregation and note the need to grow our population of young/single adults and families. Others mentioned that they don’t want the church to get too large and impersonal. Quality, not quantity was heard more than once.

St. Alban’s Preschool and Kindergarten is an introduction to the church for many families. Communicating what St. Alban’s has to offer is an area that can be improved. Visitors, newcomers and members alike would benefit from “pew pamphlets” that would delineate ongoing ministries and programs and ways to get involved. Forming a Welcome Committee that would follow up with newcomers merited much interest. Improving and promoting the St.

Alban's website would widen its circle of influence and add the word "Welcome" and web address to the monument sign on Sabino Canyon Road.

In conclusion, it is anticipated that nearly half of the congregation at St. Alban's contributed to the discernment process in some way, either through participation in a town hall or group meeting, by completing a survey, by sharing a comment in the Discernment Committee box, or whispering into the ear of a Committee member. It has been the goal of the Discernment Committee to faithfully convey the expressed strengths of our parish and aspirations and opportunities for the future of St. Alban's.

## ST. ALBAN'S PARISH SURVEY SUMMARY

The purpose of the survey was to allow all parishioners an opportunity to express their individual views about what they see as the current strengths and future aspirations of St. Alban's and what attributes they would like to see in a new rector. It also contained specific questions about service preferences, music and education programs, pastoral care and other ministries, and number of years at St. Alban's. Additionally, the survey gave church members the opportunity to submit the name and credentials of any potential candidate that they might wish to have considered. The survey was emailed to 316 households and was also available at the church in paper form. Decision Support, Inc. compiled the results of the 78 surveys submitted.

### **Question #1: "What do you like most about St. Alban's?"**

#### **Most repeated answers:**

Family oriented  
Friendly  
Choir/Music programs for kids and adults  
Children's and Youth programs  
Financially Stable/Conservative  
Homilies applicable to today and now  
Lack of political agenda  
Warmth of congregation toward each other  
Traditional rather than contemporary

#### **Quotables:**

"The reverence, friendliness, and kindness of the congregation"  
"The family-centered atmosphere and the inclusive, non-partisan environment"  
"Thoughtful sermons delivered in conversational style"  
"The focus is kept on coming together as a community to worship and not on church politics"  
"It's our church!"  
"A wonderful example of Christian living"  
"Strong liturgy with Episcopal traditions upheld but not legalistic in it's approach to ministry"

### **Question #2: "What would make your experience at St. Alban's better?"**

**Most repeated answers:**

Parish directory  
Coffee hour and/or other all church activities (**most repeated:** to blur the lines between 8 and 10 AM services)  
More families with children  
Children's services held semi-regularly  
Contemporary music to keep younger members involved  
Baptisms done during services  
Newcomer events

**Quotables:**

"More contemporary music to keep our younger people involved."  
"I have always felt very much at home"  
"The continuation of the past will make our experience better."  
"That I were younger and could experience and enjoy more activities in St. Alban's"

**Question #3: I would prefer that the new rector of St. Alban's has or is..."**

**Most repeated answers:**

Money management skills  
One who treats everyone equally and is welcoming of everyone  
Gifted preacher and administrator  
Sense of humor  
One who won't implement changes too quickly  
Approachable and compassionate  
Married (man) with children

**Quotables:**

"Someone who is welcoming of every child of God."  
"The kind of person who would want to come over to my house to share a meal."  
"A gentle strength in sharing God's word clearly and applying it to our everyday lives."

"Someone who won't make too many changes, gives wonderful sermons, and won't rock our steady boat!"

**Questions regarding the new rector:**

Almost half the respondents would like the new rector to have between 10-15 years experience as a rector and three-quarters want person to have at least 5 years experience.

Over half say that gender is not important, a strong third prefer a male and very small preference for female. Note: In written responses to questions, frequently the rector was described as a married man with children.

Over half say that age is not important, but a third prefer someone over 45.

Two-thirds prefer that the rector believes that "activities and decisions can be delegated with supervision.

The three most important attributes of the new rector are:

- Demonstrated financial management skills
- Effective sermon delivery
- Leadership/Vision

**Questions regarding the service:**

Almost everyone prefers a traditional Sunday service. Although a majority would like to see an occasional innovative service, over a third say no.

Half find sermons that “use personal experience and life examples” the most meaningful.

Almost everyone finds music to be important to the service and half say that music is very important.

**General question regarding other ministries:**

The most important are:

- Outreach
- Youth Group/Sunday School
- Pastoral Care

**Specific questions regarding Music and Pastoral Care:**

- It is important to almost everyone and very important to the majority.

Number of years at St. Alban’s:

Responses were represented among six groupings, from less than 5 years to 25 years or more. The largest cluster, a quarter of the respondents, have been at St. Alban’s for 6 to 10 years.

**Final questions: These questions offered parishioners the opportunity to give the name and credentials of a potential candidate.**

No parishioner named a candidate.