

St. David's Episcopal Church, Austin

Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT)

Executive Summary

Fall 2025

OVERVIEW

We appreciate everyone's participation in the Parish Survey. Based on those results, a Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) for St. David's has been generated. We had excellent participation (322), representing 120% of our most recent average Sunday attendance (269). This level of participation enabled us to hear from a broad representation of our congregation. To ensure the CAT was based on valid, reliable and representative data, we wanted to achieve at least a 33% participation rate. We clearly more than met this threshold and are confident that the results reflect our congregation viewpoints.

Our responses were compared to the responses of the last 2800 congregations (nationally) that have participated in the CAT over the last 36 months. This data provides a benchmark for comparative purposes.

In undertaking the CAT, we have committed to undertaking what is necessary to continue to be a healthy and vibrant congregation for the future. There is much to celebrate, and of course, more work to do together as we engage in this time of pastoral transition.

CONGREGATION ASSESSMENT TOOL (CAT)

The CAT is designed to measure the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of our congregation through the measures of congregational climate, performance, and culture.

Congregational Climate

Research tells us that two characteristics are necessary to create a vital and healthy congregation – high levels of member satisfaction and energy. Satisfaction is a sense of joy, passionate commitment to mission/vision, strong sense of belonging and lack of discord in the congregation. While energy conveys the strength of engagement that compels people to be involved in the church's mission and ministries. For us, approximately 66% of responders are clearly satisfied with the current situation. Approximately 61% feel that there is a strong sense of purpose or energy and members are not just going through the motions in their ministry/activity. Additionally, over 25% of responders are 'on the fence.' This may represent anxiety or ambiguity in our current congregational condition. When congregations are anticipating/experiencing a major transition such as change in senior clergy leadership, they demonstrate higher levels of anxiety.

Our overall responses and based on comparisons to other congregations indicate that we are in a *Transformational Climate*. The more tangible expressions of a transformational climate include an external focus, a distinctive mission, and an influx of new people. While the intangible expressions describe a corporate spiritual zest, inspired worship, healthy/meaningful relationships, purposeful activity in the world and an atmosphere of well-being. Currently, transformational climate churches are those that are consistently growing.

Areas of Focus (Drivers)

To determine members' level of satisfaction and energy we focus on different areas or drivers. If members perceive we are performing well in these areas, the data suggests that their perception of their satisfaction or energy will go up. Likewise, if members perceive that these areas are not performing well, their satisfaction or energy levels will go down.

1. We feel most satisfied when: The worship services are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content (Area: Worship)
2. Persons who serve as leaders in our church are representative of the membership (Area: Governance)
3. In important decisions, adequate opportunity for consideration of different approaches is usually provided (Area: Governance)
4. Our Rector articulates a clear vision for our church and keeps it before the people in a compelling way (Area: Clergy)
5. The leaders of our church show a genuine concern to know what people are thinking when decisions need to be made (Area: Governance)

We feel most energized when:

1. The whole spirit of the congregation makes people want to get involved (Area: Morale)
2. Our church does a good job helping each member understand he or she is called to ministry (Area: Ministry)

Critical Success Factor

If our goal is to continue to be a transformational congregation, where do we look to most positively impact our member satisfaction? One factor emerges:

1. Provide competent and compassionate pastoral care in times of personal need.

Future Priorities/Aspirations

As our members look to our future, two priorities surface with the highest mean score that require improvements or additional energy. Four more are ranked high but not viewed as urgent. These top priorities indicate where to place our strategic energies for the future.

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people.
2. Make necessary changes to attract families with children and young people to our church.
3. Develop the spiritual generosity to financially support the ministry of the church.
4. Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.
5. Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.
6. Work to renew and revitalize the community around the church by creating coalitions and partnerships with other organizations.

The nature of these priorities demonstrates an important balance of internal and external focus.

Performance Areas

Our strengths and challenges are revealed and explained through the Performance Dashboard and Performance Indices. Our congregation was assessed in the following eight areas:

- Hospitality
- Morale
- Conflict Management
- Governance
- Spiritual Vitality
- Readiness for Ministry
- Engagement in Education
- Worship and Music

Regarding these eight indices, our responses indicate that we outperform national congregation averages in seven out of eight areas.

Hospitality measures the degree to which members perceive that the congregation is engaged in offering themselves and their resources to those who are new, different or in need. We believe that we have a friendly atmosphere of genuine care and concern and that we are prepared to welcome people from many different walks of life into our congregation. This is a key strength of our congregation.

Morale expresses our strong engagement in our communal life and our clear sense of purpose and mission as a congregation. This measure is strong

Conflict management measures the degree to which members believe that conflict is managed and, where possible, resolved. This is a most crucial area of strength: when conflict is evidenced, it can impact the entire focus of a congregation. We are demonstrating effectiveness in this area.

Governance measures the degree to which members believe that the decision-making structures and processes of the church are open to their concerns and input. Our rating indicates that the congregation positively perceives our governing leadership. This perception allows us to use our leadership in ways that move the congregation strategically forward, creatively re-thinking how we engage the needs of members as well as the needs of those we are trying to reach in our community. This measure represents many of our drivers of satisfaction.

Spiritual Vitality measures the degree to which members believe that their faith is central to their lives. This aspect of our congregation is average compared with other congregations. Most challenging for our members is “connecting our faith to other aspects of our lives.” Our score poses the questions: Is it possible for us to go spiritually deeper? How?

Readiness for Ministry registers our understanding of our call to serve. Our scores in this area are high compared with congregations nationally and represent a key area of strength.

Engagement in Education indicates that we are motivated toward life-long learning/formation, and our scores indicate that we value the high quality of our programming and our flexibility in providing this programming to meet the busy schedules of our members. Our scores are very high compared with other congregations.

Worship/Music is a primary indicator of congregation vitality, and essential for growth. Our music program is highly regarded, and our overall worship experience is strong. Our worship experience is the top driver of member satisfaction and must remain a key focus of excellence for our congregation.

Culture

- Eighty-five percent of the respondents indicate that we are theologically progressive, and less than 15% are theologically conservative. Comparatively, this measure demonstrates an average level of theological diversity in the congregation. This measure is important as we call a new Rector – requiring someone comfortable and experienced in theologically progressive congregational cultures.

- We are flexible as a congregation. In other words, we are willing to adjust or experiment in the ways we go about our ministry to meet the changing needs of our members and greater community, in our desire for growth and in our connection with younger people.
- Based on our level of flexibility and theological perspective, our congregation is called a “Magi” culture.
 - In general, Magi cultures are analytical, valuing deep knowledge, open discourse and intellectual curiosity. We are open to different faith journeys, demonstrating a welcoming inclusiveness. The analytic nature of Magi cultures makes them a powerful ally for those in need of advocacy.
 - Yet, if Magi cultures lose their mission focus, their strong intellectual focus may leave them open to retreating into esoteric debates causing them to be defined more by what they think than by what they do; they want to be all things to all people where members can become frustrated that discussion and its resulting decisions do not bring about the desired change. Magi cultures can over-think issues and avoid emotion.
 - Strategically, Magi cultures must be able to create a clear and compelling vision (more difficult for theologically progressive churches); engage in deep spiritual practices; and focus on hospitality. A difficult question for Magi cultures is: When does intellectual exploration become intellectualism, that is, a defense mechanism to avoid painful emotions?
 - New clergy leaders entering a Magi culture must have the skills of strong preaching and teaching; can relate intellectually AND can engage people emotionally to encourage safe vulnerable spaces for faith sharing that is natural and invitational; will further ministries rooted in justice and systemic change; and can help us connect our rituals and ministries to our mission.

Support for Newer Ministries

The final section of our survey asked people their thoughts toward a few ministries in our church that have emerged in the very recent past (advocacy) or are newer relative to some other efforts (community engagement, LGBTQ+). We found strong support for community engagement, with 82% of respondents marking “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked about the importance of having a committee to guide these efforts. Fully 72% agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of having an LGBTQ+ ministry. A majority (65%) agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of having a committee to discern when St. David’s should be involved in advocacy. People supported these ministries irrespective of whether they personally wanted to be involved in this work: fewer than half of respondents agreed or strongly that it was important that they personally be involved in either community engagement or advocacy.

THANK YOU

Again, thank you for your participation in this important exercise of self-study and future planning. We anticipate that ongoing discussions with parishioners will offer useful insight for addressing the areas highlighted by the CAT in an informed manner.

Our commitment is to continue to communicate with you as we proceed with the Rector Transition process. It is our intent to engage you as fully as possible during this time of transition.