



Regathering Survey

Survey Response, Analysis and other Relevant Data

Survey Creation and Responses

The Regathering Survey was sent electronically to the congregation on Friday September 4th. The survey was sent to 213 email addresses. The email was opened by 103 unique email accounts yielding a 48.1% open rate. There was a 18.7% unique click rate. 1 survey reminder email was sent.

The survey was also mailed via USPS on Friday September 4th to 20 households who the Pastoral Care team has identified as not have consistent access to email.

At the close of business on Friday September 18, a total of 68 surveys were received. 62 were received using the electronic submission form, 6 were received by the church office and directly entered. The name field was optional however utilized by many participants, 2 participants completed the survey twice. Their second submissions were deleted. 1 survey was incomplete (received in paper) and was deleted.

This analysis is based upon the **65** surveys which were received within the 2 week response period and determined usable for data analysis. 41% of respondents included an optional name on the survey.

Demographics of Survey Responses

The survey was completed by an overall representative sample of the active members of CHC's congregation. 59% of surveys were completed by individuals who identified as "individuals who attend church by myself." The remaining responses were divided between "couples" (33%) and "families" (7%).

74% of participants identified attending the 10:00 service with the remaining equally split between 8:00 only and attendees of both services. This data is roughly in line with overall attendance records for both services accumulated over the past 3 years.

The significant majority of responses were gathered by those members who would be classified as regular attendees (see Figure 1). 63% of responses indicated that these members attended on a weekly basis (blue column) prior to March 2020. An additional 22% of responses identified attending every other week. Together this makes up 85% of respondents. It should therefore be assumed that those participating in this survey make up a core of Holy Comforter congregants. External data indicates that congregants who attend church services 2 or more times a month place a high value on the role of organized religion in their lives.¹ We can then extrapolate from this data the conclusion that *the majority of survey respondents highly value religion including*

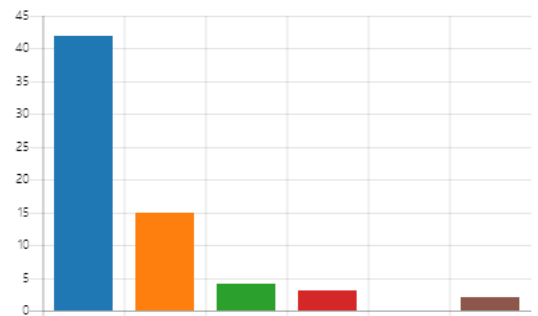


Figure 1

¹ Pew Research Foundation, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/attendance-at-religious-services/>



the Church of the Holy Comforter in their lives. This conclusion is further supported by giving records since March 2020.²

Respondents also continue to engage CHC using virtual services since March 2020 (see Figure 2). 55% of respondents report that they watch virtual Sunday liturgies each week.

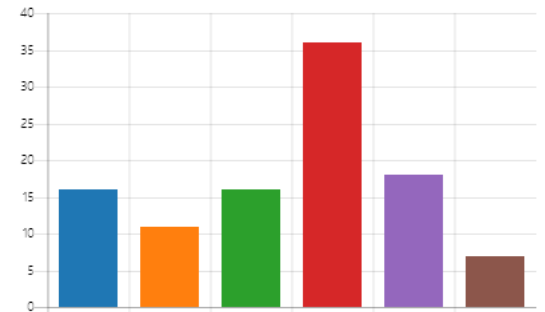
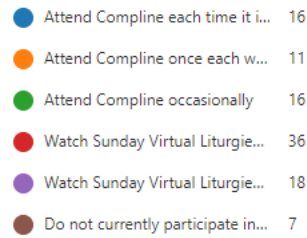


Figure 2

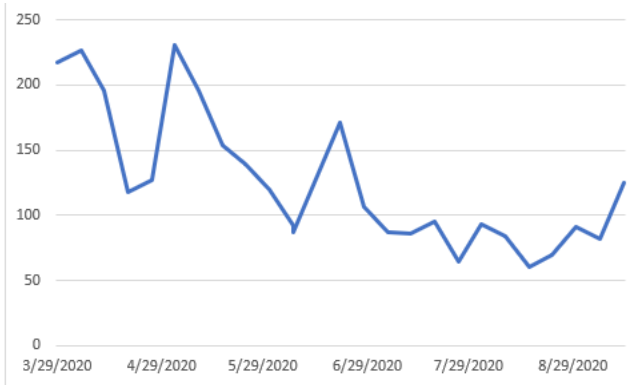


Figure 3

Attendance at weekly evening compline services, while a decline since April-May 2020, still constitutes on average 25-30 participants each service.³

While there has been a decline in Virtual Sunday service watch rates (see Figure 3), there still is an average of 124.8 views per Sunday service.⁴ It should also be noted that the first three Sundays when a Virtual liturgy were produced included Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday when there would be an anticipated higher than normal view rate. CHC’s average Sunday attendance is given as 111.⁵

Additionally, the low numbers seen on some Sundays during the summer is in line with normal attendance

patterns for Sundays during the summer. No Sunday virtual service has had statistically significant low attendance numbers when compared to normal attendance patterns.⁶

Data clearly establishes the conclusion that *participants in this survey are continuing to engage in organized religious activities.*

7 respondents on the survey identified as not participating at all in CHC activities since March 2020. These 7 respondents included both mail in (2) and electronic (5) submissions.

Reasons for Church Attendance

The survey asked respondents to evaluate their reasons for participating in Church in 2 separate questions. The first question asked general information on their reasons for participating in “church.” We will define church as

² Pledge collections for January-August 2020 are trending above budgeted levels

³ Zoom participants list and direct counts of attendees

⁴ YouTube view count data

⁵ 2018 Parochial Report data as submitted to the Diocese of Maryland

⁶ Records of Church attendance



organized Christian religious activities. A second question asked respondents to specifically address their reasons for attending CHC as a religious institution.

These questions were asked separately for various planning purposes. Reasons for attendance at an individual congregation are often vastly different than the overall rationale for religious attendance. Personal preferences on style of worship, especially for mainline Protestants, and clergy style, especially for Evangelical Protestants, have significant impacts upon individual attendance patterns.⁷ In attempting to attract new members, and retain existing members, it is vitally important to understand not only their reasons for doing “church” but also for participating in an individual congregation.

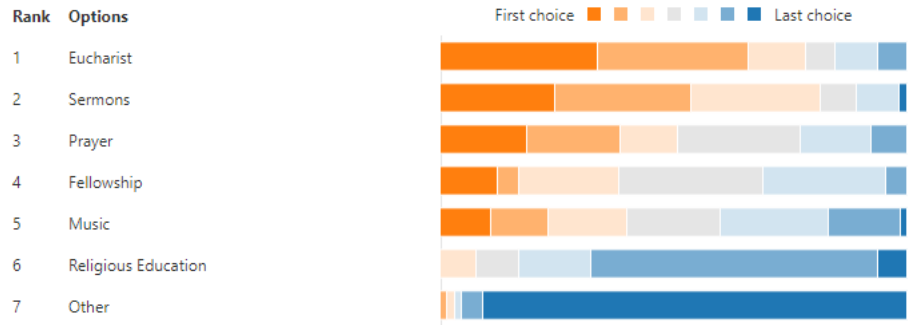


Figure 4

Survey respondents were asked to rank 7 identified (inclusive of “other”) reasons for Church attendance (see Figure 4). Respondents identified participation in the Eucharist as a highly important aspect of participation in church activities. 65% of respondents placed the Eucharist in one of the highest 2 ranks when describing their reasons for church attendance. This is in line with other data gathered by the Episcopal Church.⁸ Music was reported as a highly important reason for attending church by only 22% of respondents. The vast majority of respondents placed music in the middle rankings. This is surprising given previous controversy at CHC regarding music. These previous controversies would have indicated that music plays a primary role in church motivation for a large portion of the congregation. However, the data does not indicate this.

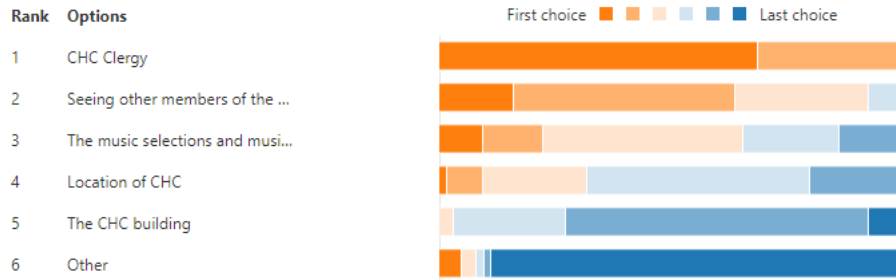


Figure 5

Survey respondents were also asked to rank 6 identified (inclusive of “other”) reasons for attending CHC specifically (see Figure 5). 100% of respondents identified CHC clergy in their top 2 reasons for attending CHC. This data clearly supports the conclusion that *close and continual interaction with CHC clergy is vital for maintaining individual pastoral and spiritual health but also for the sustained vitality of the CHC community.*

Geographical reasons (“location of the CHC” and “the CHC building”) were ranked in the bottom positions by the majority of respondents. This is indicative that *church members are more concerned with programming rather than physical location for continued participation in CHC activities.*

⁷ Pew Research Foundation

⁸ The Episcopal Cafe



Regathering

Respondents were asked regarding their plans for regathering. These were responses were based upon example surveys created by other Episcopal Churches in the Diocese of Maryland and then modified for individual Church of the Holy Comforter use. The 4 responses for this question were based upon potential opening plans that had been previously discussed:

1. “After a Vaccine or effective treatment for COVID-19 is developed” – this would be the most conservative approach for regathering. Per Diocesan guidelines, virtual services are required by congregations who choose to regather until this point is reached
2. “Immediately when Holy Comforter offers services, assuming social distancing practices are followed” – this is the most aggressive approach. This response is designed to extract respondents for have a strong and fervent desire for immediate regathering
3. “In the near future (by the middle of October), assuming social distancing practices are followed” – this is a more moderate approach. Considering the required steps before an in-person service could be arranged, early October would be the earlier a service could be held. This response is not designed to elicit time based responses, rather is designed to understand the strength of a respondent’s desire to return. Respondents who indicate this choice have a desire to return however there is no immediacy to their actual return
4. Potentially in the late fall or early winter, assuming social distancing practices are followed” – this response is for those who want more information before making a decision to return. These respondents do not want to be the first to regather and want to see how trends continue before making a decision.

Survey responses were mixed and did not generate any strong conclusions, particularly when coupled with other information in this report (see Figure 6).

While a strong majority (79%) indicate a desire to return before the end of the Pandemic, we cannot offer a conclusion based on the timing based upon this data. Approximately 2/3 of respondents indicate that there is a desire to return this fall.

In analyzing demographics of respondents who wish to regather immediately several conclusions can be drawn. 76% of respondents who indicated a immediate desire to return attend CHC on a weekly basis. A further 75% of these respondents classified the Eucharist in their top reasons for attending Church. We should note that 35% of this group ranked music highly, which is higher than the overall total.

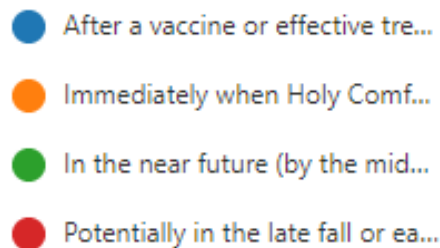


Figure 6

Respondents who indicate a desire to return to church are asked regarding their understanding of the implications of potential regathering. 4 questions are asked regarding implications of regathering:

1. “I realize that worship will be different, including no congregational singing, and am willing to commit to masks, sanitizer and other social distancing behaviors to keep myself and other safe”- this question refers to the actual atmosphere of a service itself
2. “I would be willing to pre-register for worship prior to services” – this question asks about an individual’s willingness to pre-plan and is an indication into an individual’s understanding of the logistical needs for a service to take place. Leadership discussions have indicated that it will be needed to have pre-registration for services
3. “I understand that in order for in-person Sunday services to occur at least 4 fully trained ushers would need to be available. If you are willing to be trained as an usher, please contact either Will Shaw or Chris Tang+” – this questions does not ask about an individual respondent’s ability to be an usher, rather their understanding that there are numerous logistical and personnel requirements for a service to take place
4. “I understand that the addition of in-person services will potentially reduce the quality of virtual offerings.” – The Rector and Dr. Skinner have both conveyed that it will be impossible to retain the same quality of virtual offerings if in-person services will restart. This has been conveyed to the congregation before. Various live streaming and other technical options are being explored but all of these will have reduced audio visual quality than what is being currently produced.

Together these 4 questions can calculate a respondent’s level of understanding regarding the implications and the preparatory actions surrounding regathering. Only 38% of respondents indicate that they understand these implications.

Desire to Regather

Respondents who indicate a desire to regather at some point prior to the development of a vaccine were asked to describe the intensity of their desire to return (see Figure 7). 52% of all respondents who desire to return describe that desire as “strong.” 72% of the respondents who characterized this desire to return as strong also planned to return “immediately when Holy Comforter offers services.” This core sample will be examined in more detail later in this report.

Analysis of those who identified that they do not currently participate in any Holy Comforter based church activity indicates that 71% of these respondents have a strong desire to regather. The vast majority of that group indicated that they would want to immediately regather. This group includes the sole respondent who identified “location of CHC” as their highest ranked reason for attending Holy Comforter.



Figure 7



Current Satisfaction Levels

The desire to regather must be evaluated when compared to current satisfaction levels. We evaluate respondents on the basis of need as opposed to desire. Respondents were asked to evaluate the level which their “spiritual needs are being met with virtual services.” (See Figure 8). An overwhelming percentage (72%) of congregants indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with this the assessment.

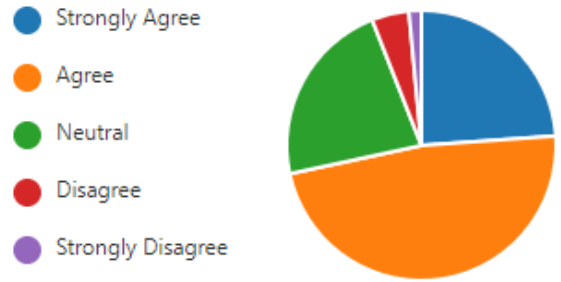


Figure 8

Planning needs to target those individuals who indicated that they disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. 4

responses indicate that their spiritual needs are not being met. All of these respondents identified their desire to regather as strong and 3 of these respondents express a desire to attend services immediately when Holy Comforter regathers.

Those describing their current satisfaction as neutral comprise 22% of the total. 53% of this group expresses a desire to attend services immediately when Holy Comforter regathers. This group also includes members who do not want to regather until a vaccine is developed and members who want to regather potentially in the late fall or winter.

Future Planning

Respondents who indicated they would like to regather prior to the development of a vaccine and indicated a lukewarm or stronger desire to regather were asked regarding service times. (See Figure 9) The intent of this question is to determine if individuals who expressed a desire to regather would be willing to attend a mid-week Eucharist. This would allow attention to be played to the current virtual offerings.

No members of this group identified that they would prefer to attend a mid-week service. 53% identified that they would only be able to attend a Sunday service.

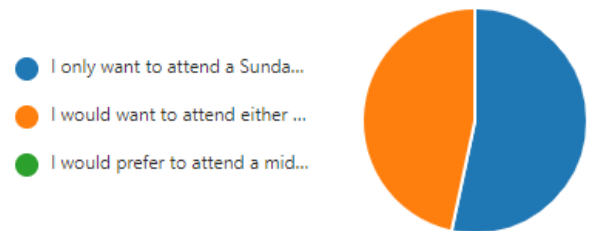


Figure 9

However, when filtering the responses more details emerge. Only 38% of respondents who identified as wanting to attend services immediately upon regathering and their desire to regather as strong are only able to attend a Sunday service. 71% of this group identifies that uses the term “neutral” to describe their reaction to the statement that their “spiritual needs are being met with virtual services.” All respondents (3 total) who identifies that their spiritual needs are not being met and express a plan to regather quickly are available to either a mid-week or Sunday service. It is therefore possible to make the conclusion that *a mid-week in person service will reach those congregants who are least satisfied with current offerings.*

Additional questions were asked regarding future virtual offerings. Respondents indicated some desire for additional virtual fellowship events (see Figure 10) and less but still existing desire for future virtual educational

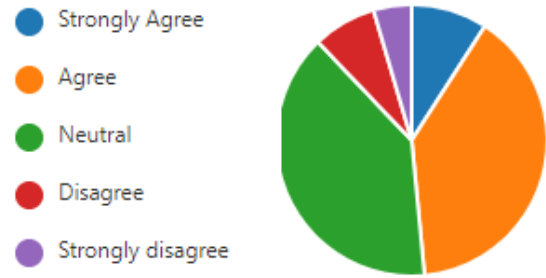


Figure 10

events (see Figure 11). We can evaluate due to the sizable “neutral” positions for both questions, that members of the congregation may attend these events but that the majority are not expressing significant desire for these forms of activities. Respondents who identify a desire to attend future virtual fellowship events tend (61%) to place seeing members of CHC congregation in the highest ranks of their reasons for attending CHC. These members also tend to attend church on a weekly basis (61%)

No respondent who identified a desire for future virtual education programs identified as a family. Additionally, none of this group highlighted religious education as a top reason for church attendance.

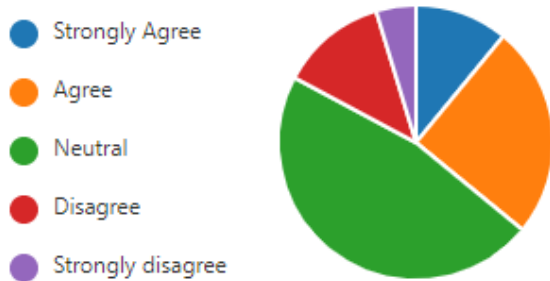


Figure 11

Respondents were given space to make written suggestions for virtual offerings. The majority of these comments (17 received in total) stated specific ideas for future liturgies. These will be compiled and shared with the clergy, staff and Worship Commission for future virtual service offerings.

Concluding Comments

Considering the overall data, it is impossible to state that this survey constitutes a mandate towards any specific regathering action. We believe that there is a fervent desire for regathering for in-person liturgical purposes however the majority of the congregation considers their spiritual needs satisfied. It is clear from the data presented in this report as well as guidelines from the Diocese of Maryland that there will be the need for virtual liturgies for the foreseeable future.⁹ Attendance and satisfaction from Virtual offerings has been high across the past 6 months. Careful cost-benefit analysis is required to determine the value of in-person worship services while still providing essential virtual offerings.

Respectfully submitted,

William Shaw
 Registrar
 9.21.2020

⁹ Diocese of Maryland Regathering Guidelines