

OTM Questions

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

Our community has proudly grown a strong drive-thru Ash Wednesday ministry, Ashes-to-Go, in recent years. This year we served over 2,000 community members and collected more than \$2,000 in donations. The ministry not only allowed new people in our community to receive prayers and blessings, but was also rewarding for all congregational volunteers who participated.

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

Our community offers a variety of engaging services to meet the needs of our diverse congregation, including: traditional services, virtual church, morning prayer, holiday services, and other unique services such as a Celtic Service and an instructional eucharist. In the past, we offered other unique services, such as a Taize service, and many parishioners have expressed an interest in reviving these offerings. We are also open to new ideas and expanding our worship offerings, including contemporary services.

3. **How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?**

We are a very welcoming and accepting congregation that is skilled at engaging new visitors. New members are often engaged in various projects, committees, and other aspects of parish life. We also recognize that we have a great opportunity to expand congregational involvement in our services and would welcome any and all ideas to allow new groups to participate more in our services/ministries. We are currently exploring ways to include more youth in our ministries and would like to revive prior in-service ministries, such as acolytes and the bell choir, as well as our annual ministry fair.

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

We are a group that finds comfort and peace in our church community - for many of us, it is a "third place" away from the demands of school, work, and home life. Like most Louisianians, we find ways to create a party in any type of fellowship and find joy in food, friends, family, football, and Mardi Gras. We also care for each other and walk together through peaks and valleys. Most members of our congregation would readily say they have a good friend - or friends - in the church!

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

Historically, we had several groups that were active on a Diocesan level but with the challenges in recent years brought by the pandemic, this involvement tapered off to some extent. However, we have remained involved in various activities for the Northshore Deanery and Diocese of Louisiana and have slowly started engaging in more opportunities on a regional and diocesan level. Members of our congregation have recently participated in Diocesan Youth Leader groups and discussions and our ECW has returned to the congregation. We also routinely send delegates to Diocesan Convention and have members of our congregation serving on, or who have expressed interest in serving on, boards and committees throughout the Diocese.

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

Beyond our worshipping community, we have multiple thriving ministries dedicated to supporting the unhoused and providing resources, including accommodations, food, and fellowship to families in need. We also hold our annual Ashes-to-Go ministry for all members of the community and typically engage in other community-wide initiatives, such as pet blessings, Christmas caroling, and Breakfast with Santa.

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

Within the past five years, two members of our congregation founded the "Do Something Project," which supports the unhoused on the Northshore and in New Orleans. We provide food, clothing, and toiletries to these individuals, along with regular visits and support. Contact: Michael Goss: 832-491-7007.

In addition, our congregation supports our free Little Food Pantry that was installed within the past five years. This resource allows all members of the community to stop by and obtain food and snacks as needed.

8. How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the future?

Currently, we have a strong focus on diligently stewarding our resources to ensure our church is financially sustainable for many years to come. We also have discussed working to expand our online church offerings and enhance our social media presence for future generations. Members of our congregation are also committed to remaining accepting of all individuals, and we pride ourselves

on being open minded and welcoming to people from various backgrounds. We also learn from each other and strive to be adaptable in our changing world.

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

We have a committee dedicated annually to our stewardship drive and ensuring its efficacy. This year, we utilized Bishop Curry's Walk in Love Program and increased our pledges year-over-year.

Our congregation leverages tithe.ly to ensure people can donate via credit card and online, in addition to accepting traditional donations through cash and check.

We have also expanded our focus on stewardship throughout the year, encouraging our congregation to contribute their time, talents, and treasure. In order to better facilitate non-monetary gifts, we plan to conduct a talent and interest survey early in 2025.

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

Like all groups of people with different backgrounds and varying personalities, conflict sometimes arises in our congregation. While no one enjoys conflict, we strive to address issues productively with one another and resolve conflicts before they fester and impact the larger group. Members of our congregation are encouraged to address conflict prayerfully, with an open mind and empathy for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

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

Change is often difficult. As the joke goes, you may never know how many Episcopalians it takes to change a light bulb because you can't change it! Someone's great-grandmother put it there 50 years ago...

In seriousness, though we have experienced varying levels of conflict and resistance to change in our church over the years, we have always come out on the other side stronger and united as a community. We have learned that we must have patience with each other and approach each other with open hearts and minds when change becomes difficult. The good of the greater congregation is more important than our own individual preferences.

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

While our church has developed a longer list of qualities we think are important in our new leaders, we have noticed some common themes in our discussions as a congregation. Four of the most frequently appearing gifts and skills include:

- Church Growth & Development
- Worship & Education
- Welcoming & Inclusivity
- Community Engagement & Pastoral Care