

## CONTINUING TO EXPLORE AND ARTICULATE YOUR CONGREGATION'S IDENTITY

Our goal is to begin to articulate our congregation's unique identity in compelling ways. We do this because we believe that congregations that choose to develop a solid identity *within* our overall core purpose of renewing people in their baptismal identity for ministry in the world have the greatest potential to deepen who they are and to make a compelling invitation to newcomers.

This process should be led by a small team of leaders, perhaps the vestry or group appointed by the vestry, and should include the insights and feedback of the broader congregation.

### **Information gathering through:**

*A series of facilitated small group conversations:*

- Conversation about what people most appreciate about their congregation as they have experienced it
- An exploration about the way in which a congregation is distinctive versus neighboring congregations (both Episcopal and other) and/or other activities that are an alternative to choosing the congregation (sports, family time, Sunday morning news programs, etc)
- Essential features of the congregation related to size, demographics, program, location and context, style of worship, ways of operating, connections to the community in terms of outreach or social justice initiatives.
- The ethos/personality/flavor of the congregation
- The values of the congregation
- The elements of the congregation's life that are not as fully developed, but, more fully formed, are a part of the congregation's "birthright," "destiny," and "calling."

*A series of individual interviews:*

Members of the leadership team conduct interviews with members of the congregation, being intentional about including a representative sample of the diversity of the congregation (younger, older, newer members, longtime members, married, single, divorced, parents of young children, grandparents, etc). Set aside forty-five minutes to an hour for each interview and take notes. Some questions to help guide the conversation and spark your curiosity:

- *What is your history/background with the congregation?*
- *What attracted you to the congregation? What prompted you to visit?*
- *How easy or hard was it to enter the life of the congregation? What made it easy or hard?*
- *What has caused you to stay?*
- *What renews you spiritually in the congregation?*
- *What effect has involvement in the congregation had on you in terms of who you are and how you feel or behave?*
- *What effect has involvement in the congregation had on your family life, work life, and/or civic life?*

- *Where have you seen God at work in the congregation?*
- *Is there a question you wish I'd asked you?*

Interviewers meet after the conclusion of the interviews to compare notes and identify common themes.

### *Telling "Stories" about your Congregation*

Your congregation's stories about itself can help provide deep insight into your identity and "deep gladness." In individual and group conversations, and looking at historical documents (created for an important anniversary, annual reports through the years, profiles from past search processes, old photo albums and other archival materials, etc), try and tease out:

- Your congregation's "given" stories: its origins, its name, its history (ups *and* downs), and its location
- Stories of people in the congregation: what stories of people's spiritual growth as fostered in the congregation are most engaging and moving?
- Your congregation's missional story: what stories related to the parish connecting to God's mission in and for the world are the most motivating? What stories related to the parish serving those in its context are most powerful?
- Stories of God moving in and through the congregation: what Biblical stories or stories from the church's tradition best express where the congregation is on its journey? What images for God best express the God encountered in the life of the congregation?

**Raw material generated from conversations, interviews, and storytelling** is given to a smaller group (including the clergy leader) to work out a draft identity statement. This statement should be brought to larger groups in the congregational for comments and feedback and edited before finalizing.

Your identity statement will ideally:

- articulate what makes you unique
- express what your members most appreciate about their congregation and what they would like their neighbors and friends to know about their church
- be short (no more than two or three concise sentences)
- be memorable (easily remembered by your leadership and members)
- be used on every available communication vehicle (newsletter, website, social media, etc.)
- help shape your communications, both internally and externally, including information and photography shared on your website and social media
- be used to train greeters and other key people who are in a position to be in dialogue with others about the congregation

**Questions or need guidance?** Please contact Meredith Kadet Sanderson, diocesan director of communications ([mksanderson@cnyepiscopal.org](mailto:mksanderson@cnyepiscopal.org)) or the Rev. Paul Frolick, director of the College for Congregational Development ([pfrolick@gmail.com](mailto:pfrolick@gmail.com)).