

Responses to the OTM Questions
St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Bexley, OH
July 2023

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

St. Alban's provides extraordinarily nutritious meals for over 160 homeless men of the Columbus community. Our congregants buy and gather the stores and prepare them both in the church's kitchen and in their homes. The food is then delivered by St. Alban's members to the homeless shelter and served to the many in need. Our meals are eagerly awaited. By sharing our treasures of labor and culinary skills through this monthly ministry, we provide for our community's disadvantaged, channeling our love to them and fulfilling the Grace of the Holy Spirit. As we come together in this ministry, we find spiritual success, fulfillment and an appreciation for one another, reminding us of the parable of Jesus feeding the multitude. Through this ministry, satisfaction and peace are assured both for the needy and for us.

2. Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship services provided by your congregation.

St. Alban's is grounded and strengthened in the worship of God. Our liturgical style lies somewhere in the middle of the low church/high church spectrum centering on the Book of Common Prayer and the Eucharist. We have always had a love of music inspired and created for worship. Our dynamic music program is a vital part of our worship. Our Director of Music Ministry leads our choir which consists of members of the congregation, choral scholars and music students from local schools, a mainstay at our 10:30 service. In addition to the weekly worship service music, our choir prepares special music to follow the seasons of the church year. In the fall, St. Alban's will be returning to its historical two Sunday worship services, an 8:00 am Rite I service and a 10:30 am Rite II service. In our worship we use a service booklet supplemented by a weekly bulletin, both of which follow the Book of Common Prayer. Our 10:30 am Rite II service is also streamed live via Facebook for those who cannot attend in person. In addition, we have a 10:30 Jubilee children's service with the children then joining the rest of the congregation at an appointed time. Morning Prayer is prayed on Wednesdays at 9:00 am.

3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

The members of St. Alban's are eager to welcome new members to our congregation and to the circles of our ministries. We know that this is God's will and the lifeblood of our church. Congregants are encouraged to welcome those interested in joining our church through personal contact, both by our members and our rector. Coffee hour after our church service is a time when those investigating St. Alban's may be personally welcomed and encouraged to return. Within St. Alban's, congregants can find multifarious ministries and are encouraged to engage their abilities to the service of the Holy Spirit. Part of our Strategic Plan is directed to discovering the talents of our congregants and asking them to become part of our Registry of Treasures. When a ministry arises needing a particular talent or skill, congregants are matched through the registry, finding the member that is best able to apply their treasures to accomplish the ministry's mission at hand. We realize that some are reserved. Although wanting to join a ministry, their timidity keeps them away. Our ministry leaders take the initiative of personally inviting all to join and provide a welcoming experience.

4) As a congregation, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

At St. Alban's, we believe that taking care of ourselves and each other enables us to accomplish our mission as a congregation with energy and enthusiasm. Connecting with each other in a myriad of ways strengthens us as individuals and as a group. Whether it be through weekly fellowship opportunities, worship, meditation in the memorial garden and in the labyrinth, or in-home communion and contact with shut-ins, we reach out in support of one other. Our Faith Formation Committee makes and distributes St. Alban's @Home bags for worship at home. We listen, share hugs and show up. We care for ourselves by being surrounded by this loving congregation. We are fortunate to have a deacon and a lay pastoral associate, who provide additional support. Our members also take great joy in giving, which, in turn, renews us. Perhaps the best way we take care of ourselves is through individual and corporate prayer. We recognize that our connectedness to God is essential for a healthy earthly existence. We strive to be reflections of God's love for us in the ways we care for ourselves and others.

5. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your congregation?

St. Alban's has several outlets for pastoral care beyond our congregation, both organized and independent. Our outreach groups include Building Responsibility Equality And Dignity (B.R.E.A.D.), Partners In Ministry In Liberia (P.I.M.I.L.), Pastoral Care Committee, and Social Concerns Committee. B.R.E.A.D. is a community organization that works to stop violence, seek out environmental justice, establish affordable housing, and several other missions. P.I.M.I.L. works to provide assistance programs to families in Liberia who live below the United Nations defined poverty level. Our Pastoral Care Committee visits our congregants who may not be able to attend services in person. Members offer prayer, Eucharist and conversation. The Social Concerns Committee is dedicated to financially support community efforts in Bexley, Columbus, and beyond. In addition to these well-established organizations, we have several members who go out into the community on their own volition. These acts include neighborhood block groups, praying for those not in our congregation, charity contributions, providing food, providing transportation, and personal contact.

6. Describe your congregation's involvement in either the wider church or geographical region.

One of our core values is community and connection. Our church's involvement in the geographical region includes our hometown of Bexley, Columbus, and the surrounding neighborhoods. Examples of the involvement include: our Social Concerns Committee which works closely with various organizations to assist people in need through grants and donations; members of our congregation gathering to prepare, cook and serve an evening meal at a homeless shelter (see Question 1); and donation of our time at the Columbus Early Learning Center helping with the community garden and other events (see Question 7). Our "Wise Women" gather 3 times a year for fellowship and provide support to community social concerns. Our education building is used by various community organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and community exercise classes. During the pandemic school after-care programs were looking for a safe location and we again shared space in our education building. We host the annual Pete Lowder Memorial Turkey Trot on Thanksgiving morning. This event raises funds for the Mid-Ohio Food Collective to help feed the hungry in our community.

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

St. Alban's parish has strengthened its commitment to "Loving God and Neighbor" in the past five years through outreach to children, staff, families and neighbors at the Champion Avenue Columbus Early Learning Center (CELC). CELC is one of the oldest early learning centers in the Midwest and the Champion Avenue location serves children in Poindexter Village, which is an important site for the ongoing preservation work of Columbus' Black history and culture. Our ministry supports CELC through tending a community garden, organizing food pantry bags to give to families in collaboration with another local church food bank, and even cleaning/organizing classrooms with teachers. Parishioners were able to continue this ministry during Covid restrictions as the community garden is outdoors. While parishioners harvest vegetables, neighbors or parents often stop to chat. CELC's chef prepares the produce to feed the children and they look forward to observing the garden-to-table process, especially when it means salsa! Christine Overway is the contact for the community garden ministry.

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

To prepare for the Church of the future, we will be non-judgmental and loving. We will work together to be flexible, patient, and inclusive. We will be thoughtful and introspective as we maintain the goals of our mission. Simply welcoming all who come to our door will not be enough. We will connect with people in the community to establish trusting, personal relationships. It is through these connections that others will find a home within our church. Several of St. Alban's congregants express an excited willingness to change. This goes hand-in-hand with the church-wide desire to incorporate youth into our congregation as much as possible, for we realize the importance of bringing young families into our church. We have learned that an online presence can be a forever way of worshiping. But with the ease that the continuing development of technology brings, we want to ensure our human necessity for connection is upheld with fellowship and in-person worship. The Church of the future will need us to find more commonalities, with less focus on our differences. We are hoping to find a new rector who can partner with us and lead us into the future.

9. What is your congregation's practice of stewardship and how does shape the life of your congregation?

St. Alban's practice of stewardship is focused on the development of time, talent and treasure of its members and is expressed individually and corporately. Members participate in the annual request for pledges of support for the operation of the church. These funds are augmented by proceeds from our endowment funds which provide for special programs and funding for grants to community organizations that serve people in need. The St. Alban's Creation Care Ministry was re-constituted in January 2022. Participants all carry the same love of God's creation, wishing to continuously improve our care of what God has created. The ministry currently addresses energy use, recycling and the reduction of single use plastics and paper. St. Alban's members use their time and talent to support the spiritual and communal life of the church through a multitude of ministries.

10. What is your congregation's experience of conflict? And how have you handled it?

With a hundred-year history, we have had our share of conflict. Typically, we are a harmonious congregation that relies on private conversations to resolve personal disputes. We rely on the established institutions such as committees and the Vestry to create solutions to congregational problems. Infrequently, individuals may form coalitions to raise issues

regarding liturgical or parish management issues. Several years ago, concerns about allocations to and from the endowment funds were raised during an annual meeting. They were resolved by the Vestry. Our relationship with the Diocese of Southern Ohio has not always congenial. Currently it is positive and evolving. We increasingly make use of Diocesan resources, are involved in Diocesan committees, and benefit from Diocesan staff. Issues with the Diocesan assessment have been resolved through on-going discussion.

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

During the COVID pandemic, St. Alban's followed the Diocesan directives to not meet in person. In this period, St. Alban's rector, wardens, vestry, and ministers developed ways to continue worship, fellowship and support. Through on-line church services, including the addition of a Monday Compline service, we continued to worship together. Worship-at-home bags were developed for Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter so we could be involved in communal activities in a safe way. Many meetings were transitioned to Zoom, allowing the opportunity to see and interact with one another. A recorded special Christmas service involving congregants of all ages was produced and shared. The labyrinth was used for various services and for a vigil to bring attention to racial discrimination and its ongoing effects to our society. Once in-person, masked and distanced worship was allowed, we began a careful process of returning to the church building. Although we are now able to attend in-person, we also include livestream worship each Sunday to reach those who cannot attend services.

12. Please provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your congregation.

- Compassionate and empathetic
- Strong, Scripture based preaching
- Emotional maturity and confidence
- Collaborative leadership approach to the life of the congregation

Prepared by the Search Committee
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