

## Characteristics of Membership

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Our group was tasked with investigating church records to determine patterns in membership and attendance at Trinity over the past 30 years; to understand what “membership” means to Trinity and to understand age breakdown of the Trinity membership; to differentiate active, continually attending members from less frequent and inactive members; and to investigate in detail what attracts new members to Trinity, and what causes people to leave.

**1. Data on Membership:** Following a precipitous decline in membership in 1994-1997, membership stabilized over the subsequent years, and has been growing at an average rate of 1.9% per year since that time. The church saw an increase in membership larger than 5% in 2006, 2008, and 2011.

**Implications for visioning:** Clearly a significant loss of confidence in leadership impacted Trinity in a negative way prior to the arrival of Pastor Kathie in the mid-90s. Subsequently, for the last 20 years, Trinity has done a good job “bucking the trend” of reduced mainline Protestant church attendance. Also, dramatic growth is unlikely to occur at Trinity, given the reduction in population in town (reduced school enrollments). However, there is a stability to the numbers that suggests Trinity’s ability to endure and to continue to serve the community over the long haul.

**2. Categories of Membership:** The Episcopal Church designates several categories of membership, including “member”, “adult member”, “communicant”, and “voting member”. However, our group was unable to locate data other than adult members and youth members in any given year. As a result, we were not able to draw conclusions about which of the members are attending regularly and which are inactive or dormant.

**Implications for visioning:** The visioning team may want to discuss whether or not these categories are meaningful, given that much of the feedback received from interviews (below) indicates that the sense of being welcomed, at the front door and at the altar, is what drew them to Trinity, regardless of their “standing”. Nonetheless, it may be beneficial to track Sunday attendance and communion, so we have a better idea of who we are serving.

**3. Age Profile:** Trinity’s “core membership” consists of two groups: families with children and youths, and adults over the age of 50. Together these groups make up more than 80% of the congregation. On the other hand, thirty-somethings are virtually absent from the membership.

***Implications for Visioning:*** While it's healthy to maintain the hope of new members and welcome fresh ideas to better serve existing members, it's probably unrealistic to expect that young people from their mid-20s to late 30s prior to having kids will be meaningfully attracted to Trinity's offerings. Along these same lines, we should be doubling-down on supporting our children and youth ministries, and making sure that adult members' needs are being met as well.

**4. Reasons for Departures:** Data from the past 20 years indicates that among the people who have left Trinity, more have been the result of moves out of the area rather than transfers in membership.

***Implications for Visioning:*** We are a strong parish that retains members and attracts new members going against the grain of national trends. Also, Trinity's membership will inevitably correspond with larger demographic trends.

**5. What New Members Like:** Among the six new families contacted, Trinity received rave reviews – we are perceived to be a loving, kind, open-minded community, with strengths in outreach and pastoral care; a diverse and vibrant, active membership; faithful to tradition in liturgy and music; with a strong family focus and excellent children and youth programs, including youth opportunities to participate in music and choirs.

***Implications for Visioning:*** Trinity's strong efforts in music, childrens and youth ministries are recognized, and are working to attract active new members. We are good stewards to our beautiful traditions. Our ability to be open-minded even as we hold to our traditions should be embraced as a strength and strategy moving forward.

**6. Serving our Adult Community:** Two of the interviews with new members, and one of the recent departures, said that Trinity could be a friendlier place. People feel very welcome in worship, but less welcomed socially. Among adults especially, the chance to make new friends is important, and there is a perception that we are falling short in this area.

***Implications for Visioning:*** Create more social opportunities for adults at Trinity.

**7. Interviews with Former Members:** Interviews were conducted with individuals who still live in the area but have joined another church or dropped membership in any church. The same three questions were asked and the summary is below.

Trinity's Strengths: Several interviewees reported that the people/congregation were Trinity's strength. Music, Pastor Kathie's sermons and Taize were also mentioned as strengths. Memorable Moments: Funerals - outpour of support from Trinity members, daughter's baptism, love and support shown while in hospital.

**Implications:** Trinity's congregation is giving and supportive in the time of need and a positive impression remains with those who have left Trinity.

Weaknesses & Challenges: Interviewees stated that the same people do the all the work which leads to a closed group mentality making it difficult to break into existing groups and lack of new ideas. Multiple issues with leadership were expressed around confidentiality, not addressing issues straight on, and lack of balance between personal and professional life.

**Implications:** As we move forward in the Visioning process we need to make sure we are including and giving the congregation the option of contributing to and being a part of the results. The Visioning Team needs to be clear considering attributes needed when developing a staffing model.

What can Trinity do different in the future? More collaboration between Pastor and Vestry with better-shared communication along with balancing out work that needs to get done. It was also suggested that Trinity needs new leadership.

**Implications:** See "Weaknesses & Challenges".

Additional Comments: Interviewees in general were still very fond of Trinity as a whole and express well wishes for the Visioning process and even when a negative comment was made about the Pastor, it was balanced out with positive