

## Denominations and Their Congregations

**Work Team:** Craig Van Gelder

**1. Trinity as Historical “Village” Congregation:** Trinity as a “type” of congregation fits into the “village church” period of time historically, meaning it was built and developed to serve a local geographic community through living and ministering as a set of inter-related extended families. Aspects of this pattern continue today, though Trinity has also developed some regional draw. The village type of church functions best in supporting families raising children, “attracting” Episcopalians moving into the area who transfer membership, and also receiving into membership persons from other Christian traditions looking for a church home.

**Implications:** How viable is Trinity’s current identity and approach to ministry for sustaining Trinity’s long-term future? Are there any alternative approaches available? What changes might be required to adjust Trinity’s identity and approach to ministry?

**2. Decline of Denominational and Diocesan Influence and Resources:** As a mainline denomination, the Episcopal Church peaked out in the 1960s in membership growth and has been in a gradual decline since that time. This means that: (a) there are fewer Episcopal persons in the general population, especially younger ones, (b) the median age of existing Episcopalians is getting older—typically 55-65 today; and (c) that resources and programming from the denomination and diocese levels have greatly diminished over time.

**Implications:** Trinity’s long-term future as a viable congregation will likely require reaching persons of little, no, or different faiths and nurturing them into an “Episcopal” faith identity. To do this well would mean that Trinity would need to go through what is known as “type transition”—recoding to some extent its historical DNA.

**3. Living in Times of Disruption and the Great Unraveling:** The larger culture within which Trinity lives has experienced great disruption over the past half century leading to fragmentation of shared “stories, values, and identities,” and a significant increase in diversity. The logic and strengths of the historical Episcopal narrative of being a chaplain to the larger culture have been greatly eroded.

**Implications:** Congregations like Trinity are now increasingly having to discover and cultivate a “local contextual” Episcopal identity which makes sense as a “faith story” to those persons living within the communities it seeks to serve who are not necessarily familiar with the Episcopalian story.