

St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Carmichael

Fall 2023 World Café Parish Discussion Results

Thank you very much, members of St. Michael's who participated in the World Café sessions, from the Vestry. You have contributed valuable ideas and input regarding the future of St. Michael's. Through the past two years the Vestry had often talked of renewing planning goals for our Parish, as it had been a few years since we set or adjusted our long-term goals. In the ever-changing world of a global pandemic, however, it seemed premature to set a stake in the ground, assess the present, and set goals for the future when so much was in flux. In June of 2023, as society began turning towards a new normal and after the government canceled the Public Health Emergency, the Vestry held a visioning and goal-setting retreat and proclaimed several broad goals to help steer the Parish on a path of continued success. The retreat left no time for the Vestry to assign specific and attainable objectives to the goals, however, and the Vestry determined that the ideas and experience of all Parish members would be crucial for crafting these objectives. Reverend Mary, Senior Warden Tammy Murray, and our Staff organized a series of World Café sessions to introduce the goals to the Parish and to receive input and ideas about objectives that could match them.

The sessions included two in-person meetings at St. Michael's and a third on-line via Zoom. At each one, attendees separated into small groups, or "tables" to consider the goals and offer ideas and observations, rotating the people at the tables after a given amount of time. Table hosts prompted the attendees with specific questions for each goal. As the next step, the Vestry will narrow this large set of diverse ideas into the list of objectives that best fit the goals and are the most feasible and achievable in a 3- to 5-year horizon. This is a summary of the results of these World Café meetings.

Goal 1: Member Ministry (Ministry to our existing members)—Optimize, increase, and evaluate opportunities to engage existing members to grow in God

What ministries resonate with you and keep you engaged?—Participants mentioned the liturgy, the weekly sermons, specialized ministries such as Centering Prayer, the Folsom Prison and Lay Eucharistic ministries; and activities such as coffee hour as ministries that resonate with them and keep them engaged. Some said that they feel welcome and safe in our community and that St. Michael's is like family to them.

What would you like to see?—Ideas included holding a "speed dating-style" ministry fair, football parties to make St. Michael's feel more relevant to the broader society, approaching the unhoused to find out what they need (tents, hygiene items, etc.) and providing it, a Taize-style service, community sing-alongs, and service to home-bound parishioners..

New ministry ideas—Participants suggested adding the Order of St. Luke International Healing Ministry and expanding healing ministry in general, spiritual gifts assessments and classes leading to invitations to ministry, renewed bereavement and pastoral care ministries, adding/re-creating a Renovare program with hybrid in-person and on-line meetings so that we can include young working people, game nights and potlucks for seniors with

transportation provided, a hybrid Zoom/in-person book club, and teen and young adult courses in the fundamentals of Christianity.

Goal 2: Spiritual Formation—Offer spiritual opportunities that draw us into a relationship with Jesus no matter where we are in our spiritual journey

Are there spiritual practices that resonate with you?—World Café goers mentioned that our Staff does a great job with liturgy and music, and mentioned outreach (Loaves and Fishes, Rise Against Hunger, Habitat for Humanity), Lenten practices, community dinners, the labyrinth, prayer groups, Bible Study, Education for Ministry, and other Christian education activities as important for their spiritual formation.

What would you like to see/ideas for ministry?—Ideas offered included spiritual gifts classes and classes in spiritual direction and discernment, training for lay pastoral care, adding Stevens Ministry Adult retreat, book studies, an all-Parish book read, special speakers, bringing Centering Prayer back to the building, a Taizé-style service, young adult ministries.

Goal 3: Neighborhood and New Members—Attract, engage, and develop our neighbors to become new members to grow in God

How could we go about inviting our neighbors?—Parishioners responded that the summer theater camp for kids was a great example of effective outreach and should be continued and that it is good to see more development of the Godly Play program, a favorite with kids. Ideas regarding ministries to the neighborhood were many and varied. One person said “kill them with kindness, they know we are here.” Others came up with suggestions such as starting a Mothers of Preschoolers group, offering child care, specifically inviting families from St. Michael’s Day School and Starr King K-8 School, putting out flyers in the neighborhood and signage at major intersections, outdoor music, offering a Thanksgiving “feed the hungry event,” senior pot lucks, game nights, tea dances and other musical events, holiday events, adding a QR code and web site link to the banner, providing transportation to church and events, offering more service opportunities and publicizing them to the neighbors, and assigning a parishioner designated to shepherd a new member to welcome them and answer questions

What practice has worked for you to invite your neighbors to church?—Parishioners were familiar with churches that built a playground and welcomed neighborhood children to play (though this is not feasible for St. Michael’s) and held a barbecue for students of a nearby college. Trunk or Treat helps to familiarize near neighbors with us. In the past we have invited St. Michael’s Day School families to attend church and some have done so. Some have brought their friends to church. Simply asking people to come and driving them to church can be effective. One said we should invite people “whenever there is food” and provide childcare. This has worked in the past.

What attracted you to St. Michael’s and why have you stayed?—Several said that St. Michael’s congregation is friendly and welcoming and that is what attracted them. Some have attended St. Michael’s because close relatives were already here. There is a feeling that the parish is like a family and that is why people remain.

Goal 4: All are Welcome—Promote Diversity, Equity, and inclusion (DEI)

What value have you found in other communities that are DEI?—State government and some private employers have placed an emphasis in DEI through hiring and training and have found this creates a larger pool of people from which to select employees and a more satisfied workforce. Some members said that education programs we've held at St. Michael's (including EfM and book discussion groups) have helped to gain a better understanding of DEI issues and solutions. We have to be flexible and welcoming to those who have different life experiences than we do. DEI is very important to young people today.

How could St. Michael's promote these values?—Ideas for enhancing DEI through ministries included keeping the Zoom service, forming ecumenical bonds and partnerships and visiting other churches, participating in diverse community activities, and holding an open house for the community. One idea was to host a support group for young adults with Parkinson's disease. Some said we should be conscious of the demographics in our neighborhood and we should love and serve them as our neighbors.

Goal 5: Children, Youth, and Young Adults—Offer opportunities for children, youth, and young adults to develop their spirituality, to grow in God

What are innovative ways to attract all three categories?—Participants responded that engaging people through events and service projects is a must. We could sponsor a service project or event about climate change. This is very important to young people. Virginia Theological Seminary has a public resource web site for Christian education that includes a wide variety of ideas. We should make a concerted effort to optimize web site items that could attract this group and generally enhance our visibility through technology. One person responded that young adults are leaving evangelical churches and that we could possibly host an "evangelical refugee group." We should adopt the "Keep Church Weird" approach of author Rachel Held Evans and we should find some way to communicate with local college students at Sacramento State University and American River College. Additional ideas included a movie night for young adults, dances and/or music or sing-ins once per month. The relationship with the St. Michael's School was cited as important. We should coordinate with School activities, and our Bishop should encourage more engagement between the Church and School communities. So many children and young adults have no experience with any religion. We could sponsor a field trip to various religious places (churches, synagogue mosque, temple).

What have you seen in other venues that has worked?—Parishioners responded that Godly Play and Theater Camp have worked in drawing youth and young adults here at St. Michael's. We should continue these activities. Bible camps, children's Christmas plays, and a youth choir have been popular elsewhere and may be low-key ways to attract unchurched children and their parents, who are looking for safe places for their children to be and grow. This takes lots of staffing and preparation and we should train more lay leaders in this area. Holding pizza nights for young people of the Day School and neighborhood could possibly help to attract youth and young adults. Could St. Michael's become a meeting place or retreat center for the Young Life ministry or establish an effective parent group and youth committees?

Goal 6: Green Team—With the National Church and Diocese, move towards carbon neutrality by 2030

How could we reduce our carbon footprint while increasing energy efficiency?—ideas included installing “smart” thermostats and motion-activated lighting and converting from incandescent to LED lighting. We could also convert our gas-powered HVAC system to an electric heat-pump and change our landscaping so that it uses a drip irrigation system with water-wise and native plants that are well-adapted to our summer droughts. We could also offer educational programs to promote energy efficiency and conservation among parishioners. We could encourage reduced use of gasoline-powered vehicles by setting up a locker for safe bicycle storage. St. Michael’s could also install a solar photovoltaic system to generate electrical power, as we have a good expanse of southern-facing roof.

What have you done personally to reduce your household carbon footprint?—Several people said they have changed from incandescent to LED lighting in their homes. Another reported changing from gas heat to electric heat pump and from gas oven/range to electric. A number of members have adopted hybrid or all-electric vehicles.

What have you done personally to increase sustainability (reuse, reuse, recycle)?—Parishioners by law are required to use recycle bins in most areas. Some have established backyard bins to compost organic waste for their own use. Some said they are changing to low-flow toilets and from sprinkler systems and lawns to drip irrigation and low water landscapes.

Goal 7: Expand Outreach Opportunities—Reaching out to those in need.

What outreach activities do you participate in currently at St. Michael’s or on your own?—St. Michael’s has done a good job with outreach since Reverend Mary has been here. Current activities cited included River City Food Bank, Helping Hands Laundry, Loaves and Fishes, Habitat for Humanity, Carmichael HART, and St. Matthew’s Community dinners.

What’s missing for you/ideas for expanding this ministry?—Participants suggested doing service projects in the neighborhood for older persons (weather proofing, planting trees, mowing lawns, cleaning garages, etc.). This could help to pull in and activate teenagers, model church-centered behavior, and demonstrate to the community what a church can do. We could organize trash pick-ups in local parks wearing tee-shirts with our name on them. Assisting people in navigating the healthcare system was also mentioned.