

St. Mary's OTC Community Form – Narrative Responses

1. Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry that you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

The biggest success story in St. Mary's recent ministry is the restoration of our Sunday School program. In every step of our Discernment process, from *Story Day* to our *All Parish Survey* to the writing of our *Parish Profile*, the one consistent priority and goal that surfaced was our need to reach new people, especially families with children and youth, to incorporate them into the life of the church. Over several months this spring a dedicated group of parishioners revitalized the Sunday School classrooms, identified potential students and mailed out invitations. This summer, we implemented a successful summer *Vacation Bible School* program. And this fall, we had the kick-off of our renewed Sunday School program about 20 children ages Pre-K through high school. The parish has been super supportive in all aspects this success, working together to share the love of God.

2. Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship in your community.

On the whole, St. Mary's has retained a Traditional liturgical style using Rite II of the Book of Common Prayer. Our congregation values our traditional Anglican roots that engage all the senses in worship. We strongly hope we can bring back our choir and a full-time musical director to lead congregational singing and introduce some additional contemporary music at our family service (formerly at 10:00 am). We would also like to bring back our said Eucharist at 8:00 a.m. While we strongly value our traditional Episcopal liturgy, we hope we can strike a healthy balance between traditional orders of service and those that may appeal to younger parishioners.

3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

We have utilized a variety of methods to generate interest in and provide inclusion opportunities for our various ministries. Recently, the most effective method we have is our weekly newsletter, *The Bells of St. Mary*. Ministry liaisons submit requests for volunteers and follow up with sign-up sheets and announcements on Sunday morning. We have held a Ministry Fair to highlight our various ministries and generate interest. Probably the most effective practice we rely on for incorporating others in ministry is by personal contact and word of mouth. Most parishioners at St. Mary's know one another by name with over 60% of our congregation having been here for 15 years or longer. As we transition from being a more priest-led parish for many years, and return to a more lay-centered parish, we hope to encourage more participation from our members.

4. As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

Prayer groups and formal vehicles for fellowship (shared meals, house churches, Bible studies, book clubs) have all been part of St. Mary's history. We are currently a church in transition and restoration of pastoral programs to care of our spiritual, emotional and physical well-being is one of our primary goals. In addition to our weekly worship service, we have an active Stephen Ministry program providing one-to-one care to parishioners experiencing a difficult time in life. We have begun to reestablish our Lay Eucharistic Ministry program after COVID shutdown. Our *Story Day* exercise and *All-Parish Survey* highlighted the many vibrant programs and organizations woven into the fabric of St. Mary's parish throughout its history. We recognize any restoration should consider how best to be more inclusive and

realistic about the difficulties people face in participating (raising families, transportation, technical savvy).

5. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical community.

St. Mary's has a long tradition of providing financial and hands-on assistance to agencies and causes both in the Lompoc Valley, nationally and internationally. Even throughout the pandemic shutdown, our Outreach Ministry made monetary contributions of over \$10,000 to over a dozen local, regional and international relief programs. For over 15 years, our parish gave support to the Red Shirt Project on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation both monetarily and by sending volunteer youth ministers to complete needed projects on the reservation. We sent monthly donations of locally-grown Lompoc beans to the First Nations feeding program in Minnesota. Our parish responds generously to many other national and international disaster-needs when they occur from fires to floods and refugee relief. We have continued to make payments to the *Diocesan Mission Share Fund* even as our income has diminished since COVID shutdown.

6. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

St. Mary's campus is home to an independent non-profit organization, *Valley Haven*, that provides day services for aging and cognitively challenged adults. *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Al-Anon* groups meet there as well. One of our important ministries to those outside our worshipping community is the annual *First Responders Luncheon*, held in September to honor our local first responders. In addition to those who attend in person, we prepare over 100 meals for them to take back to their co-workers. We were active in a local *Feed the Hungry* program and continue to work with other local non-profits such as Catholic Charities and Good Samaritan on programs such as the *Angel Tree* project and *Dress 2 Learn*. For many years, St. Mary's Martha's Guild has hosted a Spring Tea, which has been very popular and gives us an opportunity to share our faith with the larger community.

7. Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past 5 years. Who can be contacted about this project?

For the last 5 years, St. Mary's has provided freshly cut Christmas trees, wreaths and garlands procured from vendors in Oregon at competitive prices to the Lompoc community. Any unsold items are donated to deserving military families at Vandenberg Space Force Base or other non-profits. The contact person for this ministry is Sheryl Murray.

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

The pandemic shutdown devastated St. Mary's. We are slowly recovering, recognizing a lay-led parish has been in our history for over 130 years. Our congregation understands what has been and what *can* be again as we look forward.

The need for virtual church affected us negatively and fellowship suffered without people physically in the pews. We responded slowly to the technical changes needed to stay connected with virtual services. Our system is now more reliable and we hope to add more volunteers to this valuable ministry.

75% of our parishioners are over age 55. Our focus is to grow the church and bring in younger parishioners and families. Restart of the Sunday School program is a first step. We strive to regrow in different ways to create an active, happy, place that people want to be part of, where everyone works together to share the love of God. We hope to cultivate more fellowship through social gatherings and small study groups to facilitate deeper friendships and community.

Our *Story Day* exercise was a catalyst for restoring fellowship at St. Mary's. The congregation embraced the motto instilled by our Interim Priest "*Rejoice, Keep the Faith, and Do the Little Things*"

9. What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?

Many years ago, St. Mary's adopted a faith-based budget and experienced a substantial increase in giving as a result. We were fortunate in 2012 to pay off a \$645,000 mortgage with help from the Diocese. Our projected annual income is based on estimated pledges, loose-plate offerings, planned fundraising and facility use (rentals). Our expenses are built on a more narrative budget where every dollar is linked to a category of items, including payroll, benefits, mission, and ministry. We recognize that developing a *Stewardship Program* to help parishioners understand the importance of financially supporting the ministry of the church is important to accomplishing our goals.

10. What is your worshipping community's experience of conflict? And how have you addressed it?

St. Mary's church history is very much a reflection of what was happening in Lompoc and the nation. There have been many "boom and bust" years. Thirty priests have served us over our 130 years, and we have faced social and political changes unequalled in the previous 100 years. The congregation has been splintered by societal forces (same-sex marriage, ordination of gays, politics) causing many to leave. Discussions among one another, tolerance for differing opinions and respecting the dignity of each of us has been the key (with time) to addressing these conflicts. We strongly want our clergy to avoid promoting a personal agenda and to keep political views outside of church-related functions.

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?

St. Mary's physical campus has moved 4 times in its 130-year history. Sometimes the move was just across the street. Other times, it was across town. Once the move had to be done over a weekend and we were forced to move into a warehouse and make it look like a Holy place. Our last move to our current location was the most traumatic for the congregation. We kept our community together and grew closer, but it was a 2-year process (from building to move-in) and some of our cherished items were lost in transit.

The loss of our former rector due to retirement (for health reasons) which followed the pandemic shutdown was perhaps the biggest challenge our current congregation has experienced. After reopening, we seemed to be a parish that had lost our way. For so long, we were a priest-centered congregation that, upon reopening, we found ourselves rudderless and without a sense of unity. We have not fully recovered, but we are on our way!

This time of recovery from COVID restrictions and pastoral transition has deepened our appreciation for all those volunteers who have and are working behind the scenes to make sure St. Mary's runs smoothly with meaningful worship services.

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

(Enter no more than four descriptions made up of one or two-words each. For example: administration, asset management, preaching, pastoral care)

- **PREACHING** – Uplifting, applicable
- **PASTORAL CARE** – Empathetic, inclusive
- **STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP** – Collaborative, visionary
- **CHANGE MANAGEMENT** – Tolerant, listener