

New Sunday Morning Vision: Questions and Answers

Many parishioners wonderfully and helpfully responded to our request for input by writing or verbally reporting their advice, preferences, and analysis about Sunday mornings at All Saints. Here below is a compilation of the bulk of the comments, grouped by type. I have tried to honor every point with a response. The sheer number of topics demonstrates the complicated challenge presented and why reliance on prayer and God's guidance was so vital.

There will be some in our church family who still may not agree with our new Sunday morning format after reading all this. But at least the thinking and good faith effort behind the new vision will be fully disclosed and understood. Another important purpose of these Questions and Answers is to assure that every person's submission was honored and considered in the entire process.

Why change the service times?

Comments:

- The 9 o'clock service isn't broken, don't fix it.
- A late formal service with choir should be preserved.
- Are you trying to eliminate the late service?
- Are you trying to eliminate the 9 o'clock service?
- Give the new service arrangement a try until Christmas and see how it goes.
- We acknowledge that, no matter what we do, some will be glad, and some will not.
- It would be best to enter the 2018-19 program year with a reliable decision in place.
- There is a strong benefit by avoiding on-again, off-again changes.
- The Rector is expected to lead us in this.

Rector's Response:

The 9 o'clock service was not broken, but its growth has slowed. Our late service has been shrinking. We need to be honest, prayerful, bold, and obedient to make changes to better serve God and His Gospel. There are no sacred cows to be committed, sacrificial, mission minded Christians. While we certainly are not trying to eliminate any service, we are trying to do everything we can to be a more effective part of the Body of Christ.

I agree that it is better to enter the new year with a solid vision and mission plan. I disagree that we should do something tentatively or partially, such as changing again at Christmas. The Lord has used our summer experience and prayers to reveal to us a better way forward and His guidance in the matter. We should not be tepid, lukewarm, or halfhearted. I also agree that the Rector is in the hard position of having to make difficult decisions regularly and that a Rector must lead or get out of the way. I've done everything I can by way of prayer, thinking, seeking input, taking extensive counsel for wisdom, and working with others to plan the necessary steps of implementation. If the change turns out to be wrong, I would be the first

to acknowledge that. But we wouldn't be doing this in the first place if there were not clear guidance and direction in the Holy Spirit. It would be so, so much easier to just leave things as they were. But why leave things as they were when there is so much excitement, enthusiasm, and potential at hand! This is going to be great because God is great and He is the one leading us.

Will the service be mainly Rite I or Rite II?

Comments:

- Rite I is very important to me.
- Rite II is very important to me.
- There has always been a Rite I late service at All Saints.
- The Prayer of Humble Access of Rite I is very important to me.
- A combined service would need to alternate Rite I and Rite II by liturgical seasons.
- A combined service needs worship designed to honor both rites within one another.

Rector's Response

This was a big topic for many with some even responding emotionally. Fortunately, Rite I and Rite II, as well as contemporary worship (see more on this below), can be provided at All Saints. Our plan will be to use Rite II during ordinary liturgical times and Rite I during Advent, Lent, and for certain feast days, such as Pentecost. It is good to be flexible and to enjoy the fullness of our Anglican worship heritage. Some even suggested that we sometimes use the Morning Prayer services in the Book of Common Prayer. That's something we did at my last parish and it was enriching. Let's see what we can do.

By way of clarification, there has not been a forever Rite I late service at All Saints. Our late service was a Rite II service until 2008 or so. Overall in 2017 our three service times produced approximately 120 Rite I services and only 40 Rite II services.

I took very seriously the appreciation some expressed for each of the two rites and especially for the Prayer of Humble Access (*We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies . . .*) Our response was to create five or six different Sunday liturgies which include ample employment of the Prayer of Humble Access, as well as various other Rite I and Rite II features. Every service will be considered in a spirit of generosity and flexibility for the good of the entire parish family.

How will this affect Sunday School and the education hour?

Comments:

- If Sunday School is shifted from 10 to 9, attendance will decline.
- I like the flow of the hour between 9 and 11.

- Sunday School teachers and Choir members always miss education opportunities because of their own simultaneous ministries.
- Choir participation is itself a wonderful form of Christian education.
- Christian Education is absolutely vital and indispensable to our lives as Jesus' disciples.
- The 7:45 congregation could now spill into 9 o'clock education offerings for the first time.
- Even so, will the change negatively affect attendance at classes or forums overall?
- Will Sunday School teachers make the adjustment to 9 with us or not?
- Will there be an adult education offering after the 10 o'clock service for late attenders?
- Could we reassess around Christmastime and go back to the old way if advisable?

Rector's Response

Several people have wisely considered that Sunday School attendance might decline at first because of a time change. Our hope though is to see overall attendance increase at All Saints and consequently increase education attendance as an ongoing matter. Christian education is a vital part of our faith lives. It is important to say out loud that our devotion to our Lord and to Christian education goes far beyond a mere time change. Some devoted parishioners may like the new time better, others may not. But coming to learn about the Word of God will be our priority above all else. I pray that God will inspire every parent to evermore emphasize to their families the high and indispensable value of Christian biblical education for themselves and their children. Our Sunday School teachers are heroes who work hard, long, and sacrificially to present quality teachings to us all. Our appreciation and godly hearts are shown when we respond to be there with them.

Something important enough to repeat. Though changes of schedules could initially affect Sunday School attendance, it seems clear that the Lord is about to prosper our ministries across the board and that more and more people will ultimately be a part of our classes as months and years roll along. Expect the Lord to show up because He always does.

At which service will the choir sing?

Comments:

- From a Choir perspective, the combined service is what we have longed for.
- A combined service will help greatly with Choir recruiting generally, and with younger people especially.
- It would be wonderful to have hundreds of people receive the fruit of our Choir's hard work and preparation.
- Having the full Choir at our biggest service makes a huge difference.
- The volunteer Choir that sings at 9 is great.
- More children will participate in Choir ministry if they see the full Choir each week.

Rector's Response

The Choir has been a huge reason behind our increased worship power and spirit this summer. Many of our members who attended the 9 o'clock service would have loved to sing with the Choir or to have their children participate. But the late service did not work for their personal or family situation. The new service alignment solves that dilemma. We should expect to see several new faces in our choir loft, just as we have seen in our Summer Choir. This is a major positive.

What "style" of worship will All Saints have?

Comments:

- I like the summer combined service, but can we have praise music?
- People "religiously" attend 9 or 11 because they have strong style preferences.
- If we continue the summer format, we need an alternative lighter option.

Rector's Response

All Saints has long discussed the need for a Holy Communion service with a lighter approach. The terms "praise and worship" or "contemporary worship" often describe this type of service. Many of our people are passionate about it, as evidenced by the 114 who turned out for one of our many pilot services only a few months ago. It is your Rector's considered opinion that a service of this type could be the parish's biggest service in two or three years. It takes a lot to put together a praise service and ours will be inaugurated on the First Sunday of Advent, December 2. Very exciting!

Why combine the 9 o'clock and late services into one?

Comments:

- A full church encourages newcomers to come back, not thinly attended services.
- The combined service has created a lively, full church. That should be the priority.
- The late service is declining, but combining services isn't the way to fix it.
- The 11:15 is not as well attended as in the past and skews to an older age.
- Attendance has plateaued at 7:45 and 9 o'clock.
- We have a decidedly declining attendance at the 11:15 service.
- The combined summer service shows the unifying effect of a large single gathering.
- The combined service is inspiring and exciting, it feels like our annual parish retreats.
- The combined service is wonderful, it's like our big campaign dinner at the 4H Club.
- Having a combined service evermore makes our church one in the Lord.
- There is a lovely vibrancy to the new 10 o'clock service.
- I've been able to meet folks from the other service by the combined service.
- There's a tremendous energy at the new combined service.

Rector's Response

These are all comments that cause me to sit straight up and take notice. They also inspire and motivate our entire collection of clergy, staff, and leaders to take action. To sit still and do nothing in the face of these sobering realities would be irresponsible, disobedient, and lazy. God is helping us and showing us something new. We should be grateful and receive what is being offered. The changes will keep us off balance at first. Yet we are excited and even glad to do the hard work ahead.

It is a biblically fundamental truth that the Holy Spirit is present and powerful among inspired gatherings of God's people. This section is the easiest of all the criteria to consider. As to one particular point, I would state that there is nothing wrong with a service attended by mostly older people or people of any particular age. Yet, it is our desire to bring the generations together, as favored and championed in the Bible. Being together in the Lord is good. Being separated into smaller, siloed congregations is not as good. Our new service arrangement delivers the full benefit of this dynamic.

How do the changes affect parishioners of different ages? Young, old, in between?

Comments:

- Older parishioners have a hard time adjusting to changes.
- I don't like worshipping with children present.
- People who have been here for many decades must be considered in any decision.
- There is a vibrancy being all together, with all ages present, and the late service is not full.
- The combined service brings generations together in a new and exciting way.

Rector's Response:

The difficulties faced by our oldest and youngest family members are at the center of our hearts. Those faithful souls who have been the backbone of our parish for decades are so important to us, are deeply loved by us, and are to be given the respect, gratitude, and honor they deserve. At this stage of their lives, it is not easy for them to make changes or to come to church early. This is part of the reason other service time suggestions were passed by in favor of 10 o'clock. Some were simply too early for some members' benefit or too late for others. The new addition of adult education after our combined 10 o'clock service is yet another well-designed provision to lovingly and gladly serve and consider those who cannot come to church early.

One of our stated spiritual goals is to bring our generations together more and more. The Bible offers many examples of God's preference for intergenerational relationships.

How will this affect Holy Communion logistics?

Comments:

- I like to receive Communion at the High Altar, not at the portable altar.
- What is to become of the portable Altar used at the 9 o'clock service?
- Won't it take too long to administer Communion at one big service?

Rector's Response

We will not be using the portable Altar at our new traditional 10 o'clock service. The Altar may be used at our new Family Table service in the Great Hall. We shall see.

Communion will be administered during our traditional service at the High Altar, and also on the main floor at communion stations. Each parishioner will be free to receive the Sacrament where he or she desires. Everyone gets what they like in this case.

Is 10:00 a.m. the best time for the main worship service?

Comments:

- Personal circumstances, including age and health, make an earlier service difficult for some.
- Everyone being finished at church by 11:30 or 12:00 is much better than 12:30 or 1:00.
- A 10 o'clock service is better than 9 by miles on weekend mornings for families with kids.
- The time at 10 is excellent. That is, not too early and not too late.
- The 10 o'clock time works better for those with afternoon activities.

Rector's Response

You can readily see that there is no such thing as the perfect time for worship. We need to prayerfully select a time that serves the most people possible, without compromising our Gospel mission strategy. We all are called to bring a spirit of cooperation, generosity, and sacrifice for the good of the Church and our brothers and sisters. We are not consumers to be pleased, but servants to be humbled. After a few months at most, we will all be fine and good with a new routine well grooved. Personally, I feel that 10 a.m. is an optimal time for the main worship services at a large and vibrant church like All Saints. I also anticipate that the 7:45 service will grow because of our new Sunday alignment and will continue to be vibrant and faithfully attended.

What about seating? Is there enough room in the church nave?

Comments:

- The church will be too crowded if we combine the services beyond summer.
- Any crowding problem would be diminished once our Family Table service begins.

Rector's Response:

This is a practical and logistical problem, but it's good for us. Having our church full each Sunday would do nothing but good for the spirit, unity, and identity of our parish. And remember that we have a big church that holds a lot of people! Yes, there may be some inconvenience and some may not get their favorite pew at times. Any seating challenge will diminish once the Family Table service launches, taking a good number to the Great Hall. Until then, bigger gatherings will energize and inspire us. Let's trust the Lord in this. He is doing something new among us and it's going to be very exciting!

Will there still be brunch, also known as "Chef Glenn's Heavenly Banquet"?**Comments:**

- The meal served by Chef Glenn will have one unifying and joyful seating after a new 10 o'clock service.
- More of Glenn's Peruvian *lomo saltado*!
- Chef Glenn is awesome.

Rector's Response:

Chef Glenn Jahnsen IS INDEED awesome! The impact he has had on our parish is huge. Having our family gathered to break bread throughout Sunday mornings is a great ministry resulting in deeper relationships, opportunities to talk about the ministries of the church, and opportunities to embrace newcomers. That's a much bigger deal than one might think. If we have a large traditional service and a large Family Table service flowing into an even larger Sunday meal together, an even greater spirit of vibrancy, enthusiasm, excitement, and holiness will bless us all. It's going to be a weekly foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet for sure!