



Report to the Parish December 15, 2024

The Rev. Becky Rowell

Norms

Please:

- Refrain from verbal or nonverbal expressions of support or disagreement
- Hold your questions or comments until the end of the presentation, before the liturgy concludes
- Speak and listen respectfully



Norms

During the Questions and Comments:

- Address the questions and comments to me rather than talking to each other
- When speaking, use specific “I statements” and speak only for yourself
- Live into our baptismal vows to respect the dignity of every human being



What Brought Us Here

- Former Rector Joe Woodfin proposed that Lighthouse, a LGBTQ+ youth support group, be allowed to use church space. The group would not be a ministry of St. Peter's
- A posting by Lighthouse announced the affiliation via social media before Fr. Joe had an opportunity to speak with Vestry or broader parish about it



What Brought Us Here

- The reaction to Lighthouse was mixed. More concern was expressed than support
- Lighthouse later insisted that they be a ministry of St. Peter's
- Ultimately, the Vestry voted against the proposal but considered offering a St. Peter's led LGBTQ+ youth support group



What Brought Us Here

- This Vestry action also proved contentious with parishioners expressing support for or displeasure with the decision
- Before moving forward with the proposed ministry, the Vestry committed to listening sessions to further understand congregational thoughts on this type of ministry



What Brought Us Here

- During this time, someone in the parish filed a Title IV complaint. The complaint was found to be without merit and dismissed at the first step of the investigation.
- Fr. Joe unexpectedly resigned and left the parish in July.



What Brought Us Here

- Fr. Joe's departure, surprised, disappointed, and saddened many parishioners
- Given the concerns regarding his leaving, the Vestry decided to expand the listening sessions from focusing solely on the LGBTQ+ support group to including thoughts on the current state of the parish and the desired future of St. Peter's



What Brought Us Here

- The sessions became the first step in calling a new rector
- The Vestry asked that the Rev. Becky Rowell work with the parish in facilitating the listening sessions

Structure of Listening Sessions

- The first listening session was held on Sept 15 and the last on Oct 30
- A total of 17 sessions was held, each limited to a maximum of 12 people
- Separate sessions were held for Vestry, staff, and youth

Structure of Listening Sessions

- Seven individuals who were not able to attend an in-person session were interviewed by phone
- A total of 175 individuals participated
- Senior Warden Ken Saitow, Fr. Doug, and a member of the Vestry attended most of the sessions as observers



Structure of Listening Sessions

- The responses were transcribed and analyzed for dominant themes
- Responses are reported in aggregate with no attribution to any individual
- The Youth Group agreed to allow me to reference their remarks as a group



Questions Asked

1. Where do you think we are today as a parish? Describe St. Peter's today.



Questions Asked

2. What kind of church do we dream of being? What would have to change to make St. Peter's your dream church?

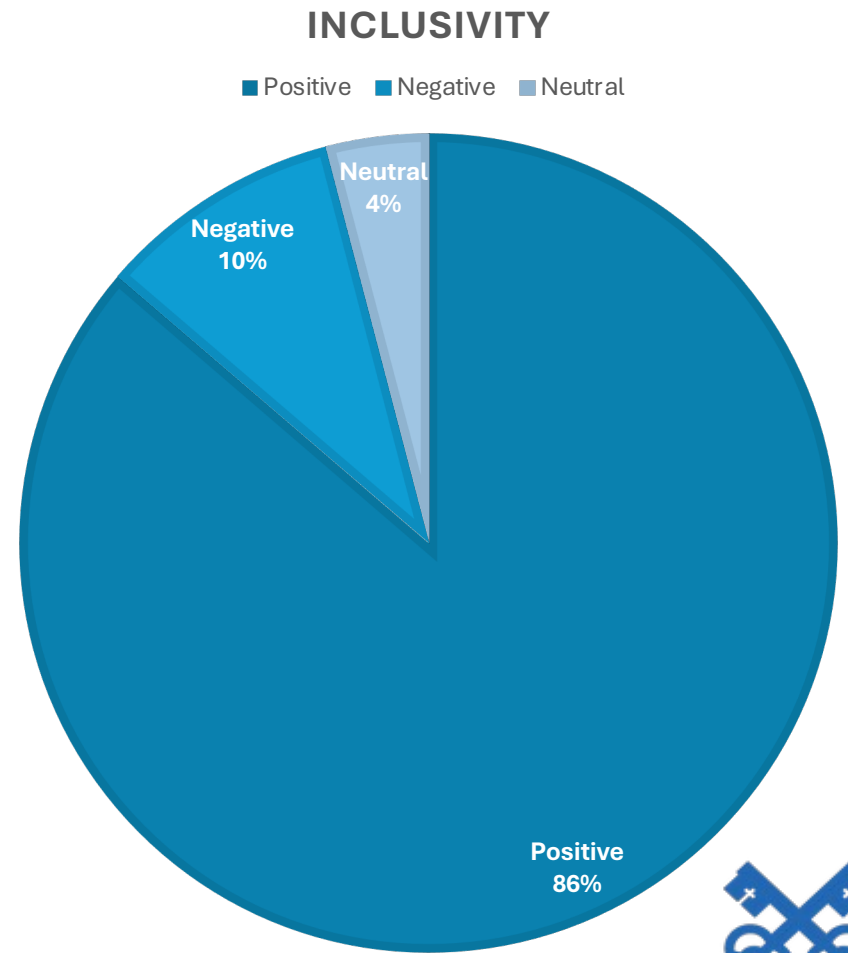


Questions Asked

3. How does inclusivity, including the LGBTQ+ community, fit into the future of St. Peter's? Since the Lighthouse issue brought us to this point, how does an LGBTQ+ youth support group, fit into the future of St. Peter's?

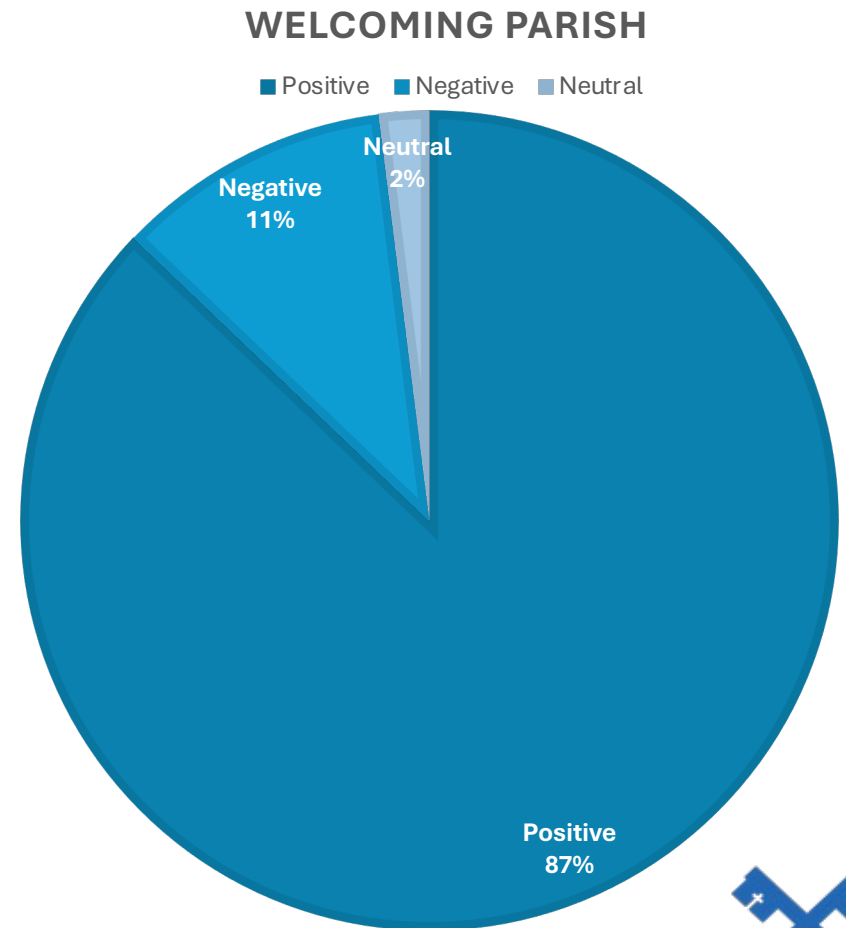
What Saint Peter's Said

We have been or are an inclusive parish.
We want to be more inclusive, excluding no one.



What Saint Peter's Said

We welcome
any who come
in our doors



What Saint Peter's Said

- We take seriously and try to live the Great Shema

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.



What Saint Peter's Said

- We wish to have more transparency in all aspects of our community life
- We are very active in outreach programs to the community and wish to do more
- We want to have more fellowship and formation activities to get to know one another



What Saint Peter's Said

- There is a small group of people working behind the scenes to promote its agenda
- Fr. Joe is beloved by many and is missed. Others feel differently.
- We are divided and are a microcosm of society
- St. Peter's is described as a safe place



What Saint Peter's Said

- Youth Group
 - adults are proud of the youth group and its work
 - the youth welcome and support everyone
 - reinstate the OWL program



What Saint Peter's Said

- Youth Group
 - the youth trust Jacob and their lay leaders
 - the youth said the church needs to be more like them

What Saint Peter's Said

- LGBTQ+ community
 - many people are grateful that gay individuals and families are part of this parish
 - gay families are appreciative of a church where they are welcomed and can feel safe



What Saint Peter's Said

- LGBTQ+ community
 - everyone welcomed here
 - support for LGBTQ+ support group
 - little support for Lighthouse
 - old people need to change their minds



Observations

- St. Peter's has a history of conflict around inclusivity issues
- St. Peter's again experienced conflict due to the Lighthouse issue
- Many did not know what was happening in the parish, particularly in regard to Fr. Joe's departure

Observations

- The Lighthouse proposal could have been better planned
- A few lay leaders again attempted to steer the issue behind the scenes
- Genuine efforts were made by the Vestry to inform about the Lighthouse issue and to solicit input from the congregation

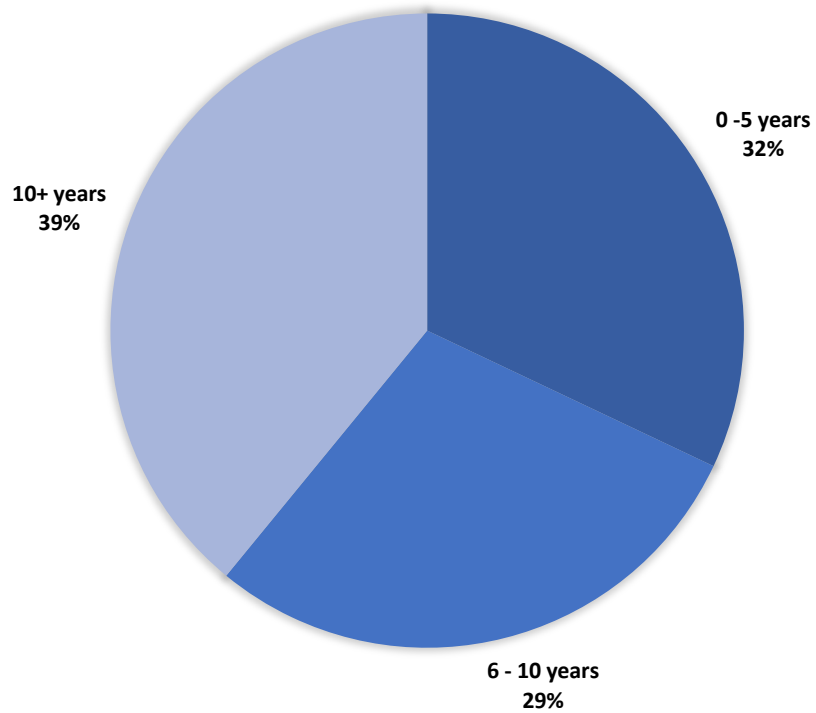
Observations

- The last few years have been a time of high anxiety that has contributed to this conflict
 - divisive national and state elections
 - Diocese of Florida issues
 - St. Peter's clergy turnover
 - the after-effects of covid and church growth

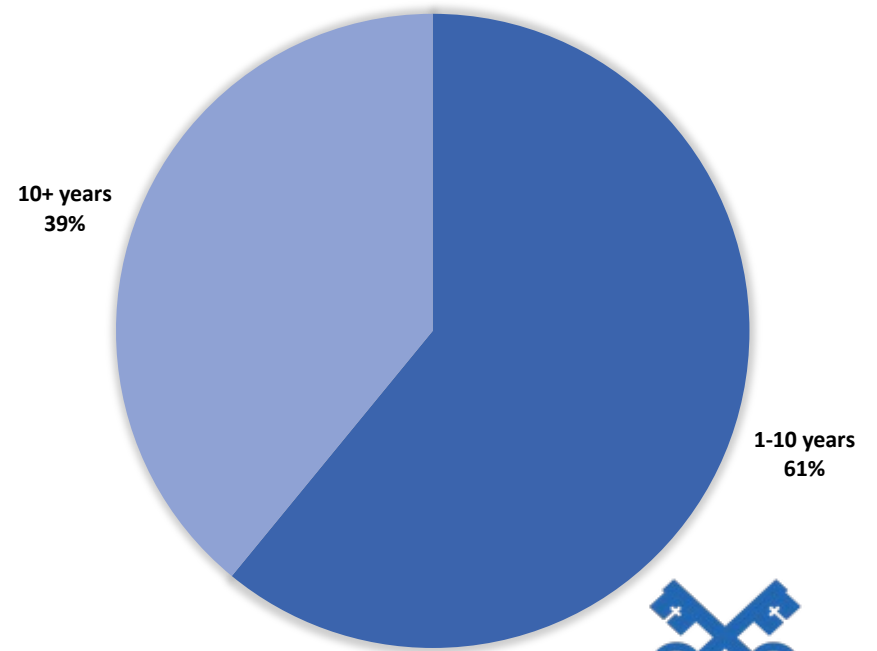


What Saint Peter's Said

PARTICIPANT TENURE



PARTICIPANT TENURE



Observations

- Good news in this conflict:
 - optimism
 - attendance and giving have not dramatically declined
 - don't want this to happen again

Observations

- Good news in this conflict:
 - want to learn constructive ways to agree to disagree
 - you have maintained your work in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ
 - what you are arguing about

Thoughts on Moving Forward

- Honor the deliberative process of the Vestry and acknowledge that Vestry decisions have been thoughtfully, prayerfully considered and made through God's grace
- Conflict transformation skills training for the Vestry, lay leaders and any interested parishioners



Thoughts on Moving Forward

- Change management training for leadership
- Allow time for healing before calling your next rector
- Increase the number of intergenerational social gatherings
- Accept that St. Peter's can not go back to the way it was and is now a changed church



Thoughts on Moving Forward

- Be honest and open about your history
- Encourage the small group working behind the scenes to come forward
- Stay in relationship with each other, even those you disagree with

Thoughts on Moving Forward

- Allow the need for support groups of any kind to evolve organically
- Time of healing
- Conflict is holy ground



Questions and Comments