

## What We Heard: Reflections from Our Listening Sessions

Over the past several weeks, members of the St. James community gathered in listening sessions to reflect on who we are, what we have experienced together, and what we hope for in the future. What emerged across these conversations was a picture of a congregation marked by deep relationships, resilience, shared ministry, and hope for renewal.

### We Are a Deeply Relational Community

Again and again, people described St. James as a place of belonging—a community where people feel welcomed, known, and connected. Relationships formed through worship, fellowship, music, shared meals, coffee-hour conversations, study groups, and everyday acts of care were consistently named as central to the life of the parish.

Music continues to be one of the great strengths of St. James, enriching worship and helping people feel connected both spiritually and relationally. Many also spoke about the importance of lay participation and leadership, recognizing the many gifts already present within the congregation and the strong culture of shared ministry that has helped sustain the church through seasons of change. **At its heart, St. James was repeatedly described as a place where people feel at home.**

### We Are Navigating Change While Hoping for Renewal

The listening sessions also reflected honesty about the challenges facing the congregation. Participants spoke openly about the effects of the pandemic years, leadership transitions, pastoral care concerns, and the realities of being an aging congregation in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

At the same time, these conversations revealed not discouragement, but hope. There is a shared desire for renewal, growth, and a more intergenerational future. Many expressed a longing to see younger families, children, teens, and people from diverse backgrounds become part of the life of the parish.

Participants also voiced a desire for new opportunities for connection and engagement beyond traditional Sunday-morning patterns, including fellowship gatherings, outreach initiatives, educational opportunities, intergenerational activities, and creative forms of worship and community building.

Throughout the conversations, there was a clear sense that St. James does not simply want to preserve what already exists, but to continue growing into what God may be calling the community to become.

## **We Long for Strong Pastoral Presence and Collaborative Leadership**

A strong and consistent theme throughout the listening sessions was the desire for compassionate pastoral presence and relational leadership. People expressed the importance of feeling known, cared for, accompanied, and supported—particularly during times of illness, grief, transition, and personal challenge.

There was also a strong affirmation of collaborative leadership. The congregation values leaders who recognize and support the gifts already present within the parish and who are able to work in partnership with lay leaders, ministry teams, and volunteers.

Participants described hopes for future leadership that is spiritually grounded, relational, compassionate, community-oriented, and able to communicate clearly while helping strengthen connection within the parish. There was also recognition that sustaining healthy ministry requires shared responsibility, healthy boundaries, and ongoing support for both clergy and lay leadership. **Above all, many expressed a hope for leadership rooted in love, openness, humility, and authentic human connection.**

## **We Hope to Deepen Our Connection Beyond Our Walls**

Many conversations reflected a desire for St. James to become more visible, accessible, and engaged within the wider community. Participants spoke about outreach, hospitality, communication, and creating welcoming entry points for people who may not already feel connected to church life.

Participants also spoke about growing in the love and knowledge of God while continuing to practice hospitality, openness, and mutual respect across traditions, including with the Mandir community that shares our space.

Also expressed was a desire to strengthen communication within the parish and expand the church's presence through outreach, fellowship, service, and community partnerships. There was also a strong hope for creating spaces where people of all ages and backgrounds can experience belonging, spiritual growth, meaningful relationships, and opportunities to use their gifts in service to others.

## **Closing Reflection**

The listening sessions revealed a congregation that cares deeply about one another and about the future of St. James. Across many voices and experiences emerged a shared hope for a welcoming, spiritually grounded community rooted in love, shared ministry, and the future God is still unfolding before us.