

# PORTFOLIO NARRATIVE

## Christ Episcopal Church Pittsford (CECP)

The Rector Search Committee of CECP answered the questions below as part of our completion of the Parish Portfolio required by the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Rochester. The same questions are answered by both the parish seeking a rector and the clergy who are seeking a position. All answers have to contain less than 1200 characters. The Committee used the information gathered from the Listening Sessions (2022), the Parish Survey (2024) and the 2023 Annual Report to develop the narrative.



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

October 15, 2023 was seemingly a regular service, yet it represented so much more. On the surface, it was a Sunday service where the youth lead many of the functions: greeters, acolytes, ushers, chalice bearers, readers. This was the product of input we received in Listening Sessions (more about this later) where the congregation shared the idea of the youth being more integral in the service versus separated in Sunday School. It was the integration and excitement of the whole parish present in our chapel engaging in service together. There was a vibrancy in the sheer volume of our parish congregated together that was palpable. There was a felt sense that we were hitting a new stride in a changing world.

Further, it led to creating a Children's Chapel. This is when, one Sunday a month, our youth lead many of the functions of the service, while the younger children spend part of the service learning about various aspects of the service in a fun and engaging environment.

It was a normal Sunday yet represented the feedback of our parish coming to fruition, the engagement and vibrancy of our young and old coming together in fellowship, and set the course for a new future.

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

Our liturgical style is "Broad leaning to low". On Sundays, except during the summer, we offer two services: a spoken Holy Eucharist Rite I at 8 am and Holy Eucharist Rite II with full choir at 10 am. In the summer our tradition is to consolidate into one 9am service. Our practices include offering a variety of Prayers of the People, a [service bulletin](#) that includes all elements of worship to make it easy to follow and participate, a "relaxed" atmosphere where mistakes are taken in stride, flexibility about standing/kneeling, and everyone

**I have brought friends, neighbors and teenagers to your services, and all have left touched by the beautiful light and love that is felt by each and every one who attends. - Julie P.**

is welcome to communion regardless of faith tradition. All this to foster a welcoming, inclusive environment for visitors as well as long time members – even, on occasion, a few dogs! Children have the option to attend Sunday School, can serve as worship ministers, or attend Children's Chapel once a month. Our worship services are live-streamed and posted on [YouTube](#). Music has always been influential in our services, and we continue to offer music-oriented services, such as Evensong and Lessons and Carols.

We have explored Saturday services and tried services in local parks and are keen to try different types of services as the need arises.

### 3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

CECP thinks of ministry broadly and makes a concerted effort to integrate newcomers into our faith community. Opportunities to volunteer are frequently communicated with the most effective strategy being to simply reach out, which fills roles and builds relationships. Our faith community understands and respects that the busyness of active lives may preclude one from volunteering “today”, but that does not rule out joining in “tomorrow”.

**It's that sense of welcome, that we're a church family that's kept me here as well as the music, and just being involved in the life of the parish is just who I am in many ways, it's what I do." - David B.**

Examples of our ministries include greeters for every service, coffee hour after services, welcoming all to partake of the Eucharist, and collectively identifying new faces at worship. Parishioners are encouraged to participate as lay readers, ushers, greeters, acolytes, choir members, Sunday School teachers, and leadership roles on Vestry, standing committees and ad hoc ministries and committees. One parishioner spends a day a week baking cookies for the coffee hour.

Volunteering for these ministries includes training by “veteran” volunteers, who share their experience to help newcomers feel comfortable. These ministries are honored through private peer-to-peer recognition and encouragement and publicly through in-service recognition events.

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

We work to foster spiritual growth within one another. Our smaller groups promote deeper relationships and lead to people reaching out to help others when needs arise. Two examples are the choir and the ushers group.



The music director, section leaders (most of which are Eastman School of Music students), and choir members sing on Sundays. Outside church, they enjoy parties together, attend students’ concerts, and deliver CECP Christmas CDs to parishioners. During the shutdown, they met weekly on Zoom to discuss joys and heartaches, where to get vaccines, and trade recipes. This group is a cross section of young and old, and all come together to lift each other up.

We have a dedicated group of ushers who volunteer once a month. They step in to assist each other or trade times when needed, support each other at outside events (Alan’s daughter dancing in the Nutcracker) and meet for a fellowship dinner. CECP also started a sign-up board for participating each Sunday (Usher, Greeter, Lector) and name tags are used to help parishioners engage with each other.

Together, we support each other while working toward the needs of our whole church body.

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

Christ Church actively serves Christ by giving our time, talents and treasure to those in need in the community of greater Rochester and beyond. An CECP ambassador for each agency provides a personal touch and ensures that grants and gifts meet agency needs.

Two examples that we are proud of include our support of the [Cameron Community Ministries](#) and our Caregivers Luncheon. Cameron recently suffered a loss of funding that jeopardized their programs. As a long time beneficiary of CECP volunteers and grants, we provided a “bridge grant” to help them continue

uninterrupted. Our Caregivers Luncheon is celebrating 20 years of serving our parish and Rochester community. It is led by two lay leaders and fosters fellowship and support for deserving caregivers.

Additionally, we supported two recent events that were brought to our attention from parishioners.

1. Episcopal Diocese of Hawaii where wildfires had destroyed 2200 structures in Lahaina including their Episcopal Church.
2. Cheyenne River Reservation whose community kitchen had been seriously damaged by a car accident.

A full list of agencies and groups we support can be found in the [Outreach Committee section on our website](#).

## **6. Describe your worshipping communities' involvement in either the wider Church or geographical community.**

As the Cardinal Parish in the Rochester Diocese, CECP takes its community responsibility seriously, evidenced by active participation in Diocesan activities and roles, such as supporting members of the local divinity school (Libby Bakken, and others), Foundation and Operational Boards of the Episcopal Senior Life Community (CECP Treasurer Michael Lehman), and President of the Standing Committee for Bishop of Rochester election (CECP Director of Children's Education Liz Salamone). These roles are supported with ecumenical initiatives with neighboring churches, religious-based and secular community-wide services projects, and sponsorship of youth-centered opportunities like Vacation Bible School open to all.

The listening sessions have shown us that the congregation is looking forward to working with other local churches for activities, such as Cameron Community service, and MissionPalooza (youth mission services in Monroe and surrounding counties).

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

One theme resonating from our Listening Sessions (see Question 8) was Engagement - Fostering a Sense of Community. Our church clearly desired more fellowship. CECP responded with the renewal of a Parish Life Committee and the hosting of successful parish events.

We kicked off a liturgical year full of events with a Celebration Sunday picnic in September. Next, our All-Saints Potluck Supper brought a good crowd of all ages (Halloween costumes optional!) and included games, crafts and a Halloween costume contest and "parade". Other events: an English Tea prelude to Nine Lesson and Carols, Dinner and a Movie Night and a festive Shrove Tuesday celebration, with traditional Mardi Gras trimmings. There has been something for everyone! Each event was well attended (30-75 people) and each brought out kids, singles, families, extended families, and guests. In each case a different group of volunteers carried the load, a wonderful indicator of how invested our parishioners are in making Engagement a priority. Many hands make light work, but more importantly, they build strong communities.

Our Parish Life Committee Co-chairs are Libby Bakken and Joyce Porrey.

**"I look forward to youth group most every week as a time to learn more about our wonderful faith and the rich tapestry of ideas contained in the Bible...I value Christ Church a lot, it holds a very special place in my heart."  
- George A, 15**

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

In the Fall of 2022 CECP embarked on Listening Sessions designed to hear from the church community regarding ways we can shape the future of Christ Church. We sought to understand the impact of the COVID pandemic, changing demographics, declining church membership and to explore ways to strengthen engagement, expand experiences beyond Sundays, connect with parishioners in their day-to-day lives and make meaningful connections with the greater community. The Listening Sessions comprised both

group in-person and zoom sessions and individual sessions. Surveys were taken and a special vestry leadership session was held. All data was de-identified to maintain anonymity.

Analysis of the data uncovered four key themes; Spirituality, Engagement, Hospitality and Growth and resulted in a Proposed Initial Action Plan Remember, Renew, Rebuild. The Listening Sessions and its analysis reflect how CECP recognized the institutional and personal trauma of the pandemic and responded as a community; spirit driven and thoughtfully and professionally done. It has provided our parish with a spirit of hope and direction forward. A copy of [Shaping the Future of Christ Church](#) can be found on our website.

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

Our Stewardship Committee takes into account that “stewardship” goes well beyond an annual pledge — and is inclusive of sharing time and talents in addition to resources (where possible). That said, we don’t shy away from asking people to prayerfully consider what the church means to them and ensure their pledge is inline with their values. Our average pledge is about \$2,500 versus the average pledge for the diocese of about \$2,200 — about 13% higher.

We have traditionally had good success with personal one-to-one contact, by the Rector and by the parishioners. Commonly, and recently, we have simply mailed the pledges. In the past, parishioners have volunteered to deliver pledges 1:1 in meetings or delivering boxes of cookies and even in small group meetings. CECP demonstrates sensitivity and empathy to cycles of life and its impact on members ability to say “yes”. Honest conversations explaining why giving is or is not being done are the norm and supported.



Additionally, during the four Sundays following the delivery of pledge information, parishioners share what Christ Church means to them during Sunday service.

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

Our 1991 Mander Organ had experienced a premature decline in performance for several years. With the failure of the organ a digital organ was procured and the choir moved to the front of the church. This has created the conflict of where the choir and a new organ may be placed long term. While this conflict has not been resolved, there will not be a Capital Campaign in 2024 as we focus on renewing and rebuilding our community first.

CECP has formed an Organ Study Committee to analyze a direction forward. This committee is a cross-section of the staff and parishioners. After considerable research, the Committee reported three choices to the Vestry. This process is an example of how CECP addresses problems and potential conflict. The inclusion of talented parishioners and open communications, guided by our dedication to do God’s work, is how our community of faith works effectively.

One positive outcome is the closure of church during the pandemic caused us to use our digital organ in the production of on-line services. Combined with a virtual choir, we became one of the few churches in Rochester that prerecorded video for our services.



**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?**

CECP experienced multiple, simultaneous leadership transitions along with COVID: Rev Walters's, music director Dr. Baskeyfield's and forum leader Dr. Brummitt's moves; and Rev. Young's illness and departure. When it went well: Laity and staff worked cohesively, listening sessions engaged and focused our efforts on what mattered to our church, diocesan support made sure we had supply priests for an extended time. Transparent and frequent communication to the parish was vital. We found ways to care for Rev. Young emotionally and financially. Ron's celebration of ministry was a joyful, thankful and graceful closure for all and a transition to the future.

When it went poorly: People left due to lack of continuity, we were working in a vacuum, support wasn't there between Sundays, we did not know how long that would last.

What we learned: People wanted more engagement in ministry and community; our parish is more vibrant when we utilize all of our talents; that we are a strong, resourceful loving parish that can thrive even in hard times. Attendance has stabilized with growth a priority. We continue to be spirit-led and trust in God's love.

**12. If you were to identify the gifts/skills you need in leadership as you move into the future, which words would you use to best describe these gifts? (Note: Must not exceed 100 words maximum)**

Preacher - Delivers sermons deeply rooted in the Bible and its lessons, relevant and relatable to today. Provides a clear and thought provoking message. Delivered by one deeply rooted in their faith and connection with God and the Gospels.

Character - Connecting and engaging with the entire CECP community; youth, families and older members. Welcoming, inviting and energetic. Engaged with Pittsford and the wider Rochester community.

Leader - one who loves to learn, is committed to CECP, has proven financial and management skills, and fosters parishioners growth in our individual faith.

