



Discernment Conversations: Summary of Cottage Meeting Trends and Comments

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Introduction

During October and November 2021, more than 100 Cathedral parishioners and Friends of the Cathedral participated in Discernment conversations, organized into ten separate small groups, or “cottage meetings.”

In the cottage meetings, participants were presented with five tailored questions, designed to guide conversation. These conversations were robust and engaged, reflecting the commitment of the Cathedral community and a willingness to engage in discussion about priorities for the Cathedral’s future. Most of these conversations raised matters that were discussed during the Reentry Committee’s meetings and discussions with parishioners in the spring of 2021. However, the cottage meetings went further in providing a clear series of impressions from the congregation that will help frame and focus further deliberation in the months ahead as the Cathedral considers undertaking a capital campaign.

Cottage meetings are an important component of Discernment processes; they draw attention to potential projects that could be funded through a capital campaign.

With this feedback, the Vestry and Organ Committee will provide the congregation with information regarding the scope of each project and why each project is important to the future ministry and outreach of the Cathedral. The more the

congregation is fully informed of the scope and timeline of given projects, the more likely they will be to financially support them.

Following this period in the Discernment process, where the congregation is engaged and invited to help shape the vision of the capital campaign, a formal Feasibility Study will be completed. This Feasibility Study will evaluate which projects the congregation might be willing to support in a capital campaign. Only after the Feasibility Study affirms that the congregation is willing to support a capital campaign can a solicitation of gifts and pledges be carried out.

Each of these three phases will be evaluated by the Vestry, who will, after careful consideration, determine how best to proceed.

A warm word of thanks is extended to everyone who assisted in organizing these Discernment Conversations, especially those who hosted, facilitated, or served as scribe at these meetings.

Responses to the Five Cottage Meeting Questions

Recurring themes and trends are highlighted in this summary report. Isolated comments that did not receive widespread affirmation are not included.

Question 1: Why did you decide to make the Cathedral your spiritual home?

- The Cathedral is a spiritual home open to people from diverse religious backgrounds or no religious affiliation, or families of two faiths. This exemplifies the Episcopal church's openness, as does having female priests, and a woman as Dean (former Dean Laird).
- The Cathedral provides fellowship, continuity, and comfort that conveys a sense of 'home away from home', especially for those who grew up in the Episcopal church.

- The Cathedral has a loving sense of community/family that is inclusive, tolerant, and warmly welcomes all, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, former Roman Catholics, etc.
- Incredible organ and choral music, found in few/no other places in Paris, is a gateway to joining the Cathedral.
- The Cathedral practices progressive theology, good liturgy, and worship with traditional hymns and good sermons.
- The Cathedral provides an open invitation to communion and pastoral care from the clergy.
- Parishioners create friendship and relationship bonds that result from being part of the community, whether you are an expat or a French speaker.
- The beauty of the Cathedral and its traditions are evident when in the space, and offer a sense of peace, which makes it a very special place.

Question 2: What do we as the Cathedral community/Friends of the Cathedral do well, and what could we do more of?

- The online live streaming of services and other events is outstanding and should be maintained and expanded.
- The Sunday School is thriving and youth ministry is doing well.
- All facets of the music program are a powerful ministry. The Choir and Paris Choral Society are excellent and bring new people into the Cathedral. Children's music is important too.
- Trinité Magazine is very inspiring and educational.
- The sandwich ministry has been transformational for those who volunteer and those who are serviced.
- We could improve our publicity of events. How can we be more visible and what groups should be targeted for outreach in Paris beyond the 8th arrondissement? Different people want/need different things—how can we reach out to everyone?

- Welcoming of newcomers could be more thorough and immediate. The Dean (former Dean Laird) does a great job with the newcomers' lunches. These are a very important part of welcoming newcomers and must continue. We should develop a step-by-step process for how to welcome people, and recruit a lay volunteer to coordinate and lead this initiative (we do not have anyone leading this at present).
- There is a real need for more fellowship opportunities, especially during COVID. Perhaps online social events and regular 'meet ups' besides coffee hour should be created.
- We should increase the number of volunteers by asking people to do specific things—this will help foster a sense of belonging.
- We should support worship and outreach in French in new ways, perhaps by translating sermons into French.
- More people need to be involved in pastoral care.
- We should find a way to keep the Cathedral doors open during concerts and at other times.
- We should be clear and communicative on our vision for how the Cathedral will grow. If there is no vision for this, we should create one.
- Despite excellent online worship offerings, it is still hard not to feel isolated during COVID. We must take advantage of opportunities for welcome, fellowship, and building relationships.

Question 3: What role does music and the organ play in the life and worship of the Cathedral, and as a tool for outreach that brings people in to experience it?

- The organ is central to music at the Cathedral, especially in choral offerings. Interest in organ music grew during COVID as evidenced by the online recitals, which should be expanded.

- The Lessons and Carols service offers an opportunity to draw in new people, especially French speakers, of whom there are many who attend that service and the Messiah Sing-Along.
- Renovation of the organ has been a longstanding issue. It encompasses more than just the organ and includes ceiling work and acoustical issues. Perhaps we should make a video that can be shared about why the organ needs restoration, how it will be done, and what the costs will be.
- The range of musical concerts and events can be expanded by renovating the organ and improving the acoustics in the Cathedral.
- Information and updates about the costs and scope of the organ project need to be shared widely so that as many people as possible understand the full context and see the extensive research that has been conducted.
- Opportunities to offer new musical events or programs should be explored, e.g. commissioning composers to create new works and then performing them.
- Outreach to the Haitian community needs to be considered.

Question 4: How do you imagine our future as the Cathedral community (your vision), given all that we have experienced in the recent past?

- The organ work remains critical to the future of the Cathedral.
- Worship, programming, and activities should be streamed online so they reach a wider audience that might not be able to attend in person. This needs to be a part of our future.
- Ways to reconnect in person need to be part of our way to get back together as a community.
- We need to engage the Friends of the Cathedral in more ways than simply for fundraising purposes. How can Friends be connected to outreach activities, for example? Friends also need ways to connect with each other—maybe we should create a Friends directory?

- The Cathedral's place in the Episcopal Church, the Convocation, the Anglican Communion, and as representing American values in Paris needs to be considered.
- How should we brand ourselves as a community? Not everyone understands what "Episcopal" means. Our identity as Christians and our values of inclusivity, openness, and strong music offerings are perhaps some elements we should emphasize more.
- Programs for children, youth, and families with children are an important part of who we are as a community. These activities need to be continued and strengthened.

Question 5: Are there other needs that you value and should be considered for inclusion as part of a proposed capital campaign?

- Increase the existing endowment and create separate endowments for music, building maintenance, and perhaps clergy/staff costs. An emergency/reserve fund might also be important.
- Consider replacing the historic pews with chairs, as has been done elsewhere (e.g., The National Cathedral in Washington D.C. and St. Bart's in New York City). There could be benefits for the acoustics of the space, and there will be flexibility to arrange chairs in the space to accommodate many more different types of events.
- Dance might be an exciting new way of adding to worship services and other programs.
- The Parish Hall acoustics still are too loud and should be attended to.
- There are several funds and Cathedral-affiliated organizations people can donate to, and it is not clear which funds and organizations support which causes. This needs to be clarified and communicated before we attempt to establish a music endowment or raise money for the organ project.