

# Ministry Portfolio Questions

*(Must be no more than 1,200 characters, including spaces)*

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

In 2017, our congregation welcomed a neighboring church – Zion Lutheran – to join us in worship as Zion’s church underwent a major building renovation. Initially, Zion’s congregation had planned to worship twice a month with St. Stephen’s, sharing our church space and Episcopal liturgy, and twice a month alone in our auditorium space using the Lutheran service. After just a few weeks, it became clear that there was no need for separate spaces, liturgies, or congregations.

Instead, for the next 8 months, the services became a week-to-week, jazz-like blend of liturgies, approaches, and practices. Some Sundays we would adhere closely to the “Episcopal way.” Other Sundays, we would take a more Lutheran approach. And many weeks the service would employ elements from both traditions.

As a congregation, we stretched ourselves during this period in ways that continue to bless us. Liturgically, it was a fascinating and refreshing journey. Socially, people in both congregations made many new friends in Christ. From a formation perspective, it was a blessing to hear two gifted preachers. St. Stephen’s was challenged to offer hospitality in new and deeper ways, and we rose to that challenge. (1,198 characters including spaces)

## 2. How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the future?

For the past 24 months, most of our energy has been focused on the present and near-present moment: preparing for and managing a 4-month Rector's sabbatical; processing our Rector's retirement announcement; saying farewell; finding and welcoming an interim Rector; initiating the search process; dealing with a public health emergency. It's been a whirlwind.

And yet in many ways we've been sowing the seeds of the Church of the future for years. The organizational and personal "stretching" we did in welcoming Zion a few years ago may have given us glimpses of what the future could look like.

It's more ecumenical. It focuses on our strengths. It serves real community needs. It provides opportunities for people to discover and employ their gifts. It connects with unchurched folks.

Parish-wide listening sessions held in early 2020 as part of the profile development process yielded several popular themes:

- Invest time and attention nurturing our life together as a parish family.
- Develop spiritual practices for the larger community.
- Build on our musical strengths and heritage; explore a variety of styles.
- Study and practice creation care more deeply.

(1,160 characters)

**3. Please provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.**

- Discerning – gifted in helping people recognize their spiritual gifts
- Pastoral/Compassionate
- Visionary/Creative – and able to help others develop their own sense of vision/creativity
- Trusting/Mindful/Present
- Clear, Consistent Communicator
- Honest about their own shortcomings and willing to ask for help
- Collaborative
- Effectively encourage people to move out of their comfort zones – and willing to move out of one’s own
- Able to focus on “inputs/efforts/participation” and then let go of “outcomes/results”
- Enduring sense of gratitude
- Understands the power of sabbath
- Understands the power of action, even before it’s “ready”
- Ability to share credit
- Ability to shoulder responsibility
- Ability to deescalate tense situations
- Ability to let tense situations resolve themselves
- Ability to help people connect giving/stewardship with deeper theological themes
- Ability to set clear, reasonable boundaries
- Ability to make exceptions to clear, reasonable boundaries
- Excellent teacher
- Genuinely curious
- Open to experimentation
- Patient
- Prayerful
- Ability to hold fast
- Ability to surrender
- Kind
- Unafraid to ruffle feathers
- Celebrate unapologetically
- Careful listener

(1,187)

#### **4. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?**

St. Stephen's employs many of the typical mainline church practices for incorporating people in ministry. Each year we hold a ministry fair. All ministries are invited to display information and answer questions about their service offerings. Likewise, all members are invited to attend the fair, ask questions about our various ministries, and learn more about what participation entails.

Ministry leaders also welcome new members via community announcements and personal invitation. Not surprisingly, the latter method is our most effective form of incorporation.

As in many churches, it's common at St. Stephen's for active members to participate in multiple ministries. We rejoice that people feel inspired to invest significant time and talent in the community. At the same time, we understand that over-reliance on a core of committed folks can lead to burn out and a narrowing of parish vision.

There appears to be a real thirst among parishioners for help identifying their spiritual gifts and opportunities to explore those gifts. This thirst represents a significant challenge – and a significant opportunity – for St. Stephen's. (1,137)

**5. As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being?**

St. Stephen's is fortunate to be at what many feel is a sweet spot for church size. We're small enough to maintain a family feel and a palpable sense of intimacy. At the same time, St. Stephen's has the resources to support robust ministry offerings. Both of these blessings help the community address our spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.

Two examples: teams of lay people offer prayers for healing each week at our Sunday service. Similarly, St. Stephen's has teams of lay pastoral care providers/visitors who call on shut-ins, hospital patients, nursing home residents, and others.

St. Stephen's also has a long tradition of engaging our faith with intellectual rigor. Adult formation opportunities are generally well-attended, and there remains a deep well-spring of interest in thoughtful exploration of scripture, faith, and theology.

In sum, St. Stephen's is grateful for dedicated lay- and clergy-led pastoral care, for active and attentive lay leaders, and for an engaged and supportive congregation. We're good at recognizing boundaries while offering deep and abiding kindness and compassion to one another. (1,130 characters)

6. **How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?**

For nearly four decades, St. Stephen's has maintained a weekly hot meal program ("**St. Stephen's Table**") for people in the Pittsfield community. The program currently serves dinner on Thursday and Friday evenings and lunch on the fourth Saturday of the month. The parish provides the entire financial budget for this ministry, including the salary of a professional program coordinator. Volunteers include both parishioners and community members.

St. Stephen's also supports these ministries with pledges of financial assistance, volunteer participation, or other in-kind contributions:

- **Laundry Love** - See question 9 below.
- **Cathedral of the Beloved** - An outdoor community where people can come to know the joy of being God's beloved.
- **Habitat for Humanity** – Bronze level sponsor of Central Berkshire chapter.
- **Thanksgiving Angels** – Collaboration of 19 organizations that provides more than 1,450 families with food to celebrate a Thanksgiving meal in their own homes.
- **12-Step Programs** – Provides space for 15 different meetings each week.
- **Rector's Discretionary Fund** – Financial support for emergency situations that arise frequently in the context of an urban ministry. (1,173 characters)

**7. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical region?**

St. Stephen's maintains a vigorous presence in the Berkshire region and beyond. Recently this presence has been most actively expressed by the parish's involvement in **Berkshire Interfaith Organizing (BIO)**, a consortium of 19 congregations throughout the county which seeks solutions to social justice inequities by building relationships, forming alliances, and speaking truth to power. Current issues being addressed by BIO include racial and immigrant justice and inadequate transportation opportunities. St. Stephen's is a founding member of BIO.

The parish participates in a variety of other regional, national, and global efforts:

- **Berkshire Immigrant Center (BIC)** – This vital community organization calls the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of our Parish House home. The parish receives rental income from BIC at a below-market rate.
- **Berkshire County Arc** – For several years the parish's weekday building maintenance has been provided by a crew from Berkshire County Arc. St. Stephen's has been recognized by the Arc as an employer of the year.
- **Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts** – As one of its larger congregations, we are proud to support the diocese's many innovative initiatives. (1,179)

**8. Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?**

In April 2015, St. Stephen's launched the first [Laundry Love](#) initiative in western Massachusetts. Since then, the program has offered the gift of clean clothing and bedding to the community every month. The effort has evolved over the years; it is now a partnership between St. Stephen's, Zion Lutheran Church, and Cathedral of the Beloved, an outdoor community of faith in Pittsfield. Please contact Sarah Morrison, Parish Administrator at [smorrison@ststephenspittsfield.org](mailto:smorrison@ststephenspittsfield.org) or 413.448.8276 for more information. (513 characters)

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

St. Stephen's has long employed a traditional approach to stewardship – one common to many Episcopal churches. A designated stewardship committee, supported by the vestry and clergy, develops a fall campaign centered around a relevant theme. Leading up to ingathering Sunday, various theme-related offerings are shared with the congregation, including personal testimonials at weekly services, printed and digital brochures, parish events such as dinners and small group gatherings, sermons, and more.

Our 2020 stewardship campaign generated an 8.5% increase in pledge dollars vs. 2019 (+\$17,252). 46 people increased their pledges and 10 people pledged for the first time.

This traditional approach to stewardship has served the parish well. At the same time, there is clearly an interest in – even a hunger for – a deeper experience of stewardship that connects giving, personal faith, and community. Ideally this would be a year-round practice anchored unflinchingly in Christ's teachings. (991 characters)

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

In general, St. Stephen's has not experienced a great deal of conflict. When we have, we've tended to address it via conventional methods: we've deferred to the Rector and/or we've tried to avoid conflict or deny it exists.

This pattern is changing, however. Evidence of this change can be seen in how a conflict that erupted over the summer of 2018 was handled. In the spring of 2018, our Rector made the decision to move St. Stephen's Sunday worship for the coming summer to Zion Lutheran's new space.

This was an unpopular decision. The extent of the discontent grew over the summer, even as we shared Zion's worship space and liturgy.

In response to this growing concern and disapproval, St. Stephen's Wardens held multiple listening sessions to allow people to express their opinions and simply be heard. Ultimately, no change in the summer worship plan was made – St. Stephen's returned to worshipping in our own church in the fall as our Rector left on her planned sabbatical. But a healthy dynamic had been established by leadership taking the time to listen actively, intentionally, and openly to parishioners' concerns. (1,127 characters)

**12. 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?**

Not surprisingly, our experience with change has been complex. The two experiences with Zion Lutheran described above/earlier provide valuable clues about the natures of these complexities.

On the one hand, when we had the opportunity to host Zion for several months, change was largely embraced. And we grew as a result of these changes.

On the other hand, when our Rector requested that the parish change the venue and liturgy for our Sunday service over a summer, change was resisted. And we grew as a result of these changes.

Perhaps there are a few lessons to draw from both experiences:

- To the extent possible, plans for change should have broad-based support. Changes thrust upon the parish with little input will likely face challenging paths.
- Plans for change should be rooted in an appealing, even heroic vision. Change, by definition, requires sacrifice. This sacrifice needs to be explained, even justified.
- Plans and preparations for change should be communicated clearly, thoughtfully, and consistently.
- It's not always possible for change to be incremental, but small successes, combined with a compelling vision, can build momentum and confidence to tackle bigger changes. (1,190 characters)