Report on
The Listening Project

December 15, 2013
Dear friends,

This fall St. Alban’s has been listening!

We made good on our plan to listen to each other about God’s grace and gifts in our lives at St. Alban’s. Each parish household was given an opportunity to be in a personal, face-to-face conversation to express in a fresh way your experience, hopes and ideas for your church. And you were invited to consider the personal gifts of time, creativity, energy and resources you would like to pledge this year to see St. Alban’s dreams come alive.

We strongly believe that our life together at St. Alban’s will greatly benefit from this personal approach. Our relationships and community will be deepened as we continue to talk and to listen to each other. I have learned so much from all that you shared, and I am delighted that the results of the Listening Project can be shared now with you.

You had a lot to say to the Listening Project volunteers!

Thank you for your willing voices. And warm, warm thanks to all of the volunteer Listeners.

This report will give you a good overview of the Listening Project. I hope you’ll find it interesting! We will discuss it following worship on December 15th and again at the Annual Parish Meeting on Sunday, January 26, 2014. Importantly, that discussion of the report will include next steps -- how we as a parish might plan to address what we’ve learned through the Listening Project.

Blessings and thanks,

The Rev. Timothy A. Boggs
First, by the numbers...

31 volunteer listeners drawn from across the parish were able to personally contact 213 of the 271 households identified in the parish records.

The remaining 58 households were unreachable (43), or are still in process (15) of scheduling a visit. We estimate 21 of this group of 58 are no longer active in the parish.

For the remaining 250 active parish households, the listeners were able to hold 176 listening dialogs (141 meetings in person, 32 by phone, 3 by email), so

more than 70% of the parish households actively participated in the Listening Project - a GREAT response!

We would still love to include every parish household. So if you’d like to be part of the Listening Project be in touch with Fr. Tim or any member of the Stewardship Committee, chaired by Frank Governali.

What did the St Alban’s Listeners hear? You had thoughtful and personal things to say about every part of our parish life, including features that you loved and others that may need attention or cause you concern. Not surprisingly, you had many common and some conflicting points of view. This report breaks your observations into eleven categories; each section includes positive comments as well as areas that you feel need some attention. The report ends with some of your specific dreams and ideas.

Spirit

So many of you reveled in St. Alban’s healthy and generous spirit, pointing out “remarkable vitality, energy and warmth.” You noted that you were initially anxious about the transition to a new rector and were relieved by a “continuity of warmth,” and the “wide, thoughtful St. Alban’s welcome.” Many noted how accessible and friendly the leaders, clergy and worshippers are. Many, many referred to St. Alban’s as “home,” “a family,” an “extended family.” Your real delight at being part of the parish comes through. And our real caring for each other by both members and clergy was noted by so many.

Some pointed to areas that need attention. These include: making certain that we never become clique-like, reaching out more clearly and consistently to the newcomer or stranger, and sustaining an initial welcome beyond the first hello. Many feel that we should initiate more
frequent options for simple fellowship and times to deepen friendships. One said, “Let’s laugh together more!” Some felt that the coffee hour could be made both simpler and more intimate with places to sit and talk. One asked if we could “talk with a stranger before talking with an old friend.” Some expressed a concern that the busy parish program not intrude upon the welcome and comfort of those, young and old, who choose only to worship. Others are worried that any more parish growth could mean less personal connection with each other. There is a tangible concern that in our fresh and lively spirit we not lose our deep connection to the older members of the parish, that we be extra alert to their needs, styles and schedules. Others wonder what we can do to increase diversity of all sorts.

Worship & Music

The Listeners heard how much you value the tradition and practice of joyful worship at St. Albans. You seem genuinely delighted by the quality and stimulation in the preaching of all three of your clergy and the occasional guest. Several mentioned the Anglican, thoughtful and reasoned approach to faith. You widely appreciate the choir and choir director, with many noting that such fine character and quality of music is rare in Maine churches. There is a real gratitude for the hard work of the choirs and choir director, Jim Strand.

You note the great care and commitment and creativity of the Usher corps, the Altar Guild and the Flower Committee. The readers and chalice bearers have earned your admiration; their “many faces and voices at the altar are great!” And you have welcomed that the services start on time and include moments of silence.

Many noted the care and cleanliness of the worship space, linens, and vestments. Several noted the Open Communion practice and the “unusually warm welcome” to the table. The complete, unapologetic welcome of children and the creative new Family Service worship was noted. Many noted the presence of children at Communion and the new role of children as torch bearers and helpers. Wednesday morning and 5:30 service are appreciated by those attending.

Areas of concern include that “the Sunday announcements are way too long.” And that sometimes, “the whole service is too long.” Some wonder whether the flow of “traffic to the altar” shouldn’t be sped up and improved. A very few comments on behavior of children were noted. Several worry about “burn-out” in the worship volunteers and that this work can be stressful. And “volunteers must be rotated and supported.” Others expressed hope that the new occasional Family Service not intrude on the dignity and tradition of worship. Others worry that the church not become too “high” “sacramental” or “liturgically fussy.” Others defend traditional language and rites. Others have theological concerns about the Nicene Creed and the danger of Christian exclusivity in our prayer life.
You made lots of comments about music preferences. Some of you love the 1982 hymnal with its traditional hymns, many of English and European origins. But some found these selections too narrow, not “reflecting the 21st Century diversity of life” and asked for other sources for hymns. Some found some hymn choices “hard to sing,” and some thought some choices were too “esoteric” or even “dirge-like.” Some questioned the practice of the choir chanting of the psalm. Others asked for more uplifting and familiar, inspirational hymn choices. Others wonder why we don’t have more “old time American” hymns (not found in the hymnal) that reflect the mix of denominational backgrounds of the parish. A significant group asked for occasional “contemporary” hymns or hymns with easier folk or modern tunes.

**Children’s Ministry** (Infants through 4th grade)

Your appreciation of the St. Alban’s program for toddlers and children is simply amazing. So many of you praised the dedication, creativity and joy of Debbie Fisher and her recruitment and regular training of gifted volunteer Sunday School teachers. You noted her continual adaption and use of the classroom space and out of doors. Your confidence in the quality and character of the Children’s program was unabashed and several noted that the summertime Vacation Bible School has grown in size and focus; several welcomed that children from the wider community have been invited to VBS. Several of you noticed and welcomed the focus of Sunday School in teaching selected Biblical literacy while making the stories relevant to the child’s life. Many expressed joy at serving as teachers. One said, “It was the most spiritual thing I’ve done!” Some loved this year’s gift of a Bible to each child.

Many expressed approval of the increased role of music in the children’s program, noting a greatly improved Christmas pageant for example. Others wonder if we could stimulate a children’s choir.

Two initiatives of the Children’s ministry were appreciated, the Family Service and the parents conversations. “May they be continued?”

There is some worry that lessons might be too ecumenical, and expressed hope that the lessons would continue to be explicitly Christian, highlighting our faith’s clarity about the role of Christ.

**Youth program** (5th Grade through High School)

As noted below, the many, many gifts of Assistant Rector, the Rev. Kelly Moughty were widely appreciated. Her dedication, creativity and flexibility with the youth program much appreciated. Also, her diligence in recruiting and supporting teachers for the middle and high
school youth was noted by parents and teachers. The new “Connect” curriculum for 5th and 6th grades seems to be well received, and the fresh focus for older youth as well.

Some feel that greater attention needs to be paid to ensure that youth from all our towns are welcomed and incorporated. Some worry about a “Cape-centric” risk. Many hope that youth can be more engaged with service and outreach and that they are able to better schedule missions and retreats. Some worry about recruiting more volunteers and would like more parent involvement.

Clergy

The Listening Project learned that your clergy are apparently very well liked. One said, “They’ve got it right! Keep it up!” Another said, “Three of the best!” Another, “We’re in good hands!” And many note the warm relationship between the three clergy, which “sets a fine parish tone on the altar and off.” Some note, as one put it, “They each are willing to speak from the heart and share their own vulnerability.” Many expressed pleasure that all three voices were in the pulpit regularly and strongly.

Many noted that the leadership transition from two much-admired prior rectors (Fr. Jim Adams and Fr. John Balicki) has gone smoothly, and Fr. Tim seems to enjoy wide and enthusiastic support. Some appreciate a sense of “new life,” while others note energy, accessibility and reliable rector-presence during the week and on Sundays. Many noted the warm welcomes, “ready smile,” and non-anxious “pastoral presence, whenever requested.” A few noted particularly fine leadership of funerals and weddings. Others appreciate a confidence in the rector’s handling of administrative matters: “Smooth and efficient.” Some note the leadership of “a happy staff.” A few welcomed Fr. Tim’s greater engagement with the diocese and Bishop Lane, some citing the Safe Church program. Vestry members seem confident, and Tim’s recruitment of young clergy, consultant/volunteers, as needed and summer interns is noted. Several commented on the hospitality of the rectory and its care and active use. Some made special mention of their appreciation for Tim’s partner, James Schwartz. “He’s the best!” one enthused.

Simply put, Deacon Audrey and Rev. Kelly are widely loved!

So many folks acknowledged Audrey’s love and care of them and the constancy of her many and gifted ministries. Her “pastoral excellence” and “important encouragement in really hard times” is profound. “She is a gem,” was repeated again and again. Many could tell stories of important connection to Audrey.
Rev. Kelly enjoys wide-spread respect and affection, as well. She is known as “wise beyond her years…” “A feisty delight.” “I can’t believe she’s just been a priest for one year!” Kelly’s leadership and tenacity with the youth program is appreciated as hard work, well done. Her sermons are appreciated as her own voice and “always memorable.” Her “lively and warm” presence as Celebrant at Eucharist is widely appreciated.

**Concerns about the clergy:**

There is some understandable concern of how the parish would fare if Audrey were to retire or Kelly were to accept a more senior position at the end of her three-year commitment. Some worry that we’ve asked too much of Kelly and that “burn-out” is a risk. Others worry that the Rector is too “hard-charging” and will tire himself; some said he needs to “slow down.” Some would welcome more consultation.

**Program**

The programs/ministries of the parish seem to be very much appreciated, and Listeners heard widely about desires to become more involved in various options.

The revived **Health Ministry** and its offerings are admired. Programs such “The New Art of Dying, “Living Compass,” and the Parish Nurse (“terrific”) and the active St. Alban’s Cares team for meals and visits much appreciated.

The fresh initiative for parish **Communications** seems to have begun to meet a real need. There was delight in the new website and much appreciation for the weekly e-news. “So appealing,” said one; others echoed. Continuing to reach those who are off-line with parish news remains a concern. A few mentioned with thanks the gifted volunteer professionals who’ve contributed to the effort.

The Parish Office and **Administration** is much appreciated and perceived to be sensitive, responsive and efficient. Kirsten Helfrich continues to be well liked. One Listener heard that the office seemed less relaxed and welcoming than in the past, perhaps more business-like and busy.

The care and stewardship of **Buildings and Grounds** is widely appreciated and the Sexton, Greg Hicks and the B&G Committee share in appreciation. Many mentioned the fun of clean-up days.

Progress was noted with the **Memorial Garden** and the new seasonal initiatives for music and celebration are well liked. Several noted how cared-for the Memorial Garden is. Residue of the conflict over creating the garden may linger for some.
The two 2013 Summer Seminarians seem to have been really appreciated, Rik Pike serving in Maine and Lorenzo Lebrija in Haiti. Both had excellent interactions with parishioners and ministries.

Outreach

Many people noted with joy the partnership in Haiti with St. Luc’s Parish and School. The lay leadership, administration and communications success of this ministry seems to be very highly regarded. Some are concerned that the youth do not seem to be participants in the effort as in the past. Some wonder if youth could travel to Haiti. Some wonder if Haitian friends can come to us.

Many note their commitment to Essentials Pantry and Preble Street Soup Kitchen, expressing real joy and appreciation for the St. Alban’s role. There seems to be some early but strong interest in the Long Creek Youth Center ministry, with thanks for this new option.

Some are concerned that only a relatively small number of parishioners participate in Outreach. Others ask us to keep the poor in our constant prayers. Some are concerned about youth and their outreach. “How do we get more kids involved?”

Adult Formation

The Listeners heard that many at St. Alban’s appreciate the adult education and spiritual growth offerings. “I have had ‘aha moments’ again and again, thanks to the clergy of St. Alban’s.” There is a strong desire to continue and grow adult formation. Some noted Fr. Tim’s inquirers’ class as very helpful; others loved Rev. Kelly’s exploration of the Book of Common Prayer, others found the periodic Bible study “well done.” A few noted their transition from Roman Catholic traditions was aided by the rector and St. Alban’s study. Recent retreats were appreciated.

The guest teachers, including the Rev. Frank Wade and sociologist Priscilla Platt and seminarian Rik Pike were noted. The seasonal parish reader practice at Lent and Advent is liked by many. The occasional parent initiatives on “raising spiritual kids” were liked by those who attended.

Many noted the healthy prior tradition of St. Alban’s adult formation efforts, and cited Fr. Adam’s “Sacred Stories” and “Faith Matters” and Fr. Balicki’s substantive classes. Some remember specific Fr. John classes with great affection.

Some are concerned that not enough is being done in this area, and that offerings appear “episodic” and not often enough. One welcomed thoughtful gatherings that required “less
prep” and less reading, remembering the deep value of “Faith Matters,” which were more spontaneous. A few asked that the Library project be prioritized. The Listeners heard that there is a desire for expansion and refinement of Adult Formation at St. Alban’s and hopes that this could begin soon.

**Governance**

The Listeners heard of a healthy interest in the management of the parish. Many note the “well run” nature of St. Alban’s affairs. Others noted the open vestry meetings and the posting of meeting minutes and budget reports. Others commented on the collaborative and “healthy team” at the helm. The wardens, treasurer and rector seem “very engaged” and communicative to others. “We’re in good hands.” The wisdom of annually balanced budgets, reached without crisis-fundraising was mentioned by a few. The responsiveness of the office and the care of the buildings were noted.

With deep appreciation, a few worried that we ask too much of our Treasurer, Frank Governali.

Some would like a greater understanding of how leaders are chosen, and how the nominations to vestry are made. Some expressed concern that we not rely on only a few leaders and worried that too much was being done by a small group. “Spread the load.” Others hoped for even more transparency in parish life. One vestry member asked that we “ask more of our vestry members.” Some asked for greater financial detail in monthly reports. A few asked for a full report on the One Foundation campaign. Some are concerned that our stewardship needs a broader base and is too reliant of a smaller number of pledges.

**Dreams and ideas**

The Listeners heard that people love St. Alban’s and have many dreams and ideas for its ministries, mission and sense of community. These include (In no particular order):

- A children’s choir
- Continued warmth and caring
- An ongoing welcome of our oldest members
- Deeper spiritual growth
- Deeper Bible study
- Enhanced adult-ed
- “Let’s laugh together more!”
- Greater options for fellowship, such as dinners, picnics, outings
- Greater role of children in worship
• An alternative contemporary worship option on Sat or Sunday evening
• More relaxed coffee hour, quieter and comfortable setting
• Dynamic outreach “rock the boat, change the world.”
• More ecumenical identity
• More explicitly Christian identity
• Less churchy feel, more contemporary
• Something meaningful for young adults
• Greater diversity
• Parents’ group for sharing and growth
• A “talent database” to share our gifts
• More sharing of personal stories
• A “gardeners table” to share the fruits of our labors with each other
• Keep up sermons that “give easy access to great things”
• Regular retreats
• Youth retreats that “rock them”
• Regular small group conversations
• Regular Sunday forums to discuss issues and faith
• Expanded men’s group
• Worship at 10:00 a.m for more leisurely morning
• Better introduction of ministry leaders to the congregation

Pledges of Time, Talent and Treasure

The Listeners heard from you on your enthusiastic desire to bring your many gifts to St. Alban’s. These pledges included time and energy, creativity and muscles, and resources of all sorts.

Our computation of pledges for 2014 continues and will certainly be completed before the Parish Annual Meeting on January 26th. Please expect a full report then. For now, you should know two things:

• **Time and Talent** pledges are a key component of St. Alban’s life. This pledging reflects your commitment of energy and talent, essential ingredients to our parish life and the bringing of our Christ’s love to the world. And you have indeed made many such promises! The clergy, staff and lay leaders are preparing to call on you in the new year to discuss how best to use these incredibly important gifts, Stay tuned!

• **Financial Pledges** As of December 8th, 180 households have made financial pledges. This is excellent news and exceeds last year’s pledging to date in both number and funds.
Again, stay tuned for a full report, but based on conversations we’ve had, we expect that another 10 to 20 pledges are likely to arrive in the coming days. So, when we compare approximately 200 pledges to the 176 listening dialogs we had, it is clear that we have a high level of commitment and engagement from our parish family. And, compared with the approximately 250 active households comprising the St. Alban’s family, we’re at 80% participation in stewardship pledging. This is a strong level of participation, which can improve and probably will improve as we continue to have open conversations about what is needed to financially support the mission of St. Alban’s.

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<th>Pledge Receipts Through 5 Weeks Post Dedication Sunday</th>
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<th>12/9/12</th>
<th>12/8/13</th>
<th>Final Result</th>
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<tr>
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<th>Pledge Profile</th>
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<tr>
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<td>174</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>198</td>
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<tr>
<td># of previous year pledges not yet re-pledged</td>
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<td>Number of Pledges which are:</td>
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<td>Lower</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<td>New</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Total increases from Pledges that are Higher</td>
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What’s next?

So what will the leadership of the parish do with all the terrific in-put you provided the Listeners? They will act on it! And at the Annual Meeting January 26th, you can expect a further report on initial steps to nurture your perspectives in parish life. A few steps have already been taken. It is important that we not only listen but that we hear and act as needed. Some dreams of ours may not be feasible and some may not be widely shared...but many will be both.
But first, thank yous!

Big thanks to all who made the Listening Project so successful! Thanks to all of you who opened your homes and hearts to speak so candidly, warmly and wisely about your St. Alban’s!

Big thanks to Frank Governali and Mike Watson and the entire Stewardship Committee who designed and coordinated the entire project. Mike managed all the assignments and reporting with such grace and joy! As always, big thanks to Kirsten Helfrich who assisted Mike in managing all the progress reports.

Thanks also to Ainslie Wallace, a friend to St. Alban’s and a gifted development professional who graciously helped by training the Listeners.

And thanks to all the Listeners! When you see one, tell them that you so appreciate their commitment!

They are…

Candy Anderson
Jerry Angier
Bruce Babcock
Connie Babcock
Bill Bell
Don Bonoff
Jason Burks
Triss Critchfield
Jim Croft
Liz Davy
Peter Durgin
Gordon Gayer
Frank Governali
Philip Hamilton
Jerry Johnston
Kit Johnston

Mary Lancey
Julie Merriam
Peter Merrill
Michael Moore
Lisa Newbold
Erik Olsen
Nancy Pezzullo
Chris Pezzulo
Ed Rea
Nat Saltonstall
Anita Samuelsen
Kurt Shisler
Jen Tarling
Mike Watson
Michelle Whitney