

# St. Mary the Virgin Community Data Story

## Purpose

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The aim of the *Community Data Story* is to provide church leaders with an initial overview of their church, its people, and the surrounding community. Who are the people that belong to, or are connected to, the congregation? How do they spend their time at church and in the community? What do they care about? What are the resources and constraints of the congregation? In what ways have these things changed over time? How does the congregation present itself to the outside world, and what are the community's needs?

It is common practice for people to answer these types of questions using their own experiences and perceptions. Although this is valuable, the *Community Data Story* approach uses information and evidence from three different sources to provide some alternative ways of beginning to answer these questions. Specifically, we use survey data from congregation members, operations data from the church itself, and census data from the local area. Collectively, these data sources offer congregation leaders and members a different type of perspective to see the congregation as it is positioned in the larger community. The report generated from these data sources does not offer “answers” or “wisdom” but instead reveals areas – possibly areas that had not been previously considered – where more information and discernment may be useful.

Especially in light of the profound changes these past two years have brought, we believe that many priorities, resources, concerns, and opportunities have shifted dramatically and that taking stock with evidence can be extremely valuable. We intend for this “high altitude view” of a congregation to foster conversation directed at beginning to answer the questions of *who* are we? *where* are we? and *how* do we show up in our community?

## Using this Report

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Depending on your congregation, we envision any number of approaches for using this information. For example, a small team of interested church leaders or members could receive this report, study it on their own time, and discuss their reflections in a series of several meetings. They might also decide to work through the report together, discussing the questions as they examine various pages. Alternatively, a larger group of congregation members could be divided and assigned to discuss one of the three areas (who are we, where are we, how do we show up in our community). Note-takers at each table could document the main points, and at the end of the meeting, the groups could share major themes and ideas for further exploration to the larger room.

Whatever the approach, the main emphasis is to use this information from the members, church, and community as a way to gain a different perspective, one that connects your church members and congregation with its community. More than the graphs themselves, the conversation this information motivates is of deepest value: sharing together how we interpret this information, what additional areas need to be collectively explored, and how we can use this to help discern our next steps together.

# Who Are We?

There are potentially hundreds of ways to describe a congregation. We differ, for example, by age, race, gender, occupation, ethnic background, income, skills and educational level. We differ in how we have participated at the church, how long we have attended, and whether we are a member or employee of the church. Our resources, priorities, staffing and services vary from congregation to congregation. All of these characteristics can influence our sense of belonging, our needs, and the gifts we have to share.

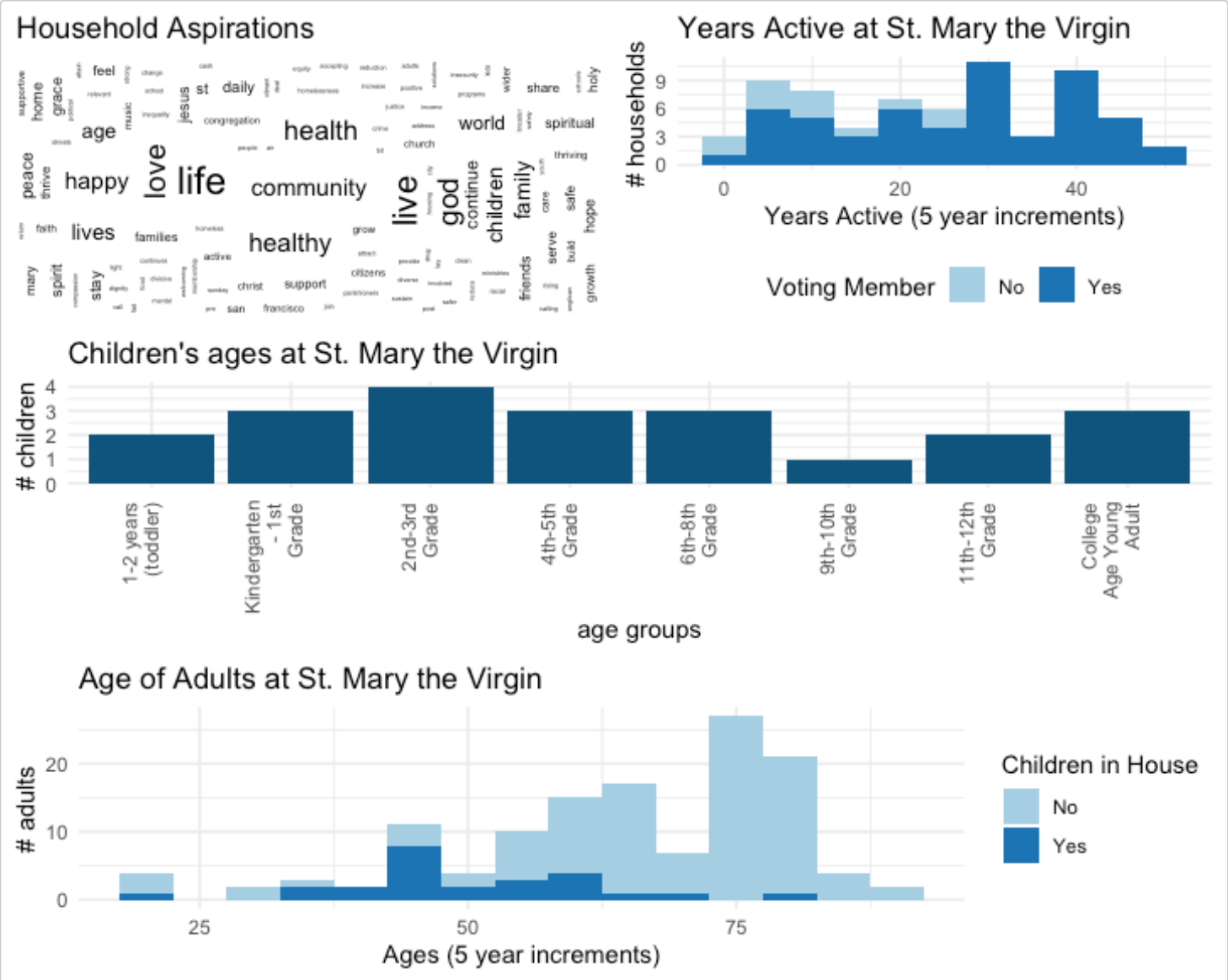
In this first section, we present a number of graphs that portray different characteristics of the people and resources that are part of your congregation. Obviously we cannot present information about every characteristic that is important to this topic. However, from the information we provide, we invite you to consider how these characteristics might affect different persons' needs, gifts, or relationships to the congregation. The reflection questions are intended to support your thinking and conversation along these lines.

Overall, the main goal of this first section is to prompt you to think first about the people and resources comprising your congregation, how that has changed in the past several years, and what that might imply for programming, equipping, outreach, invitation, and growth.

# Who Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

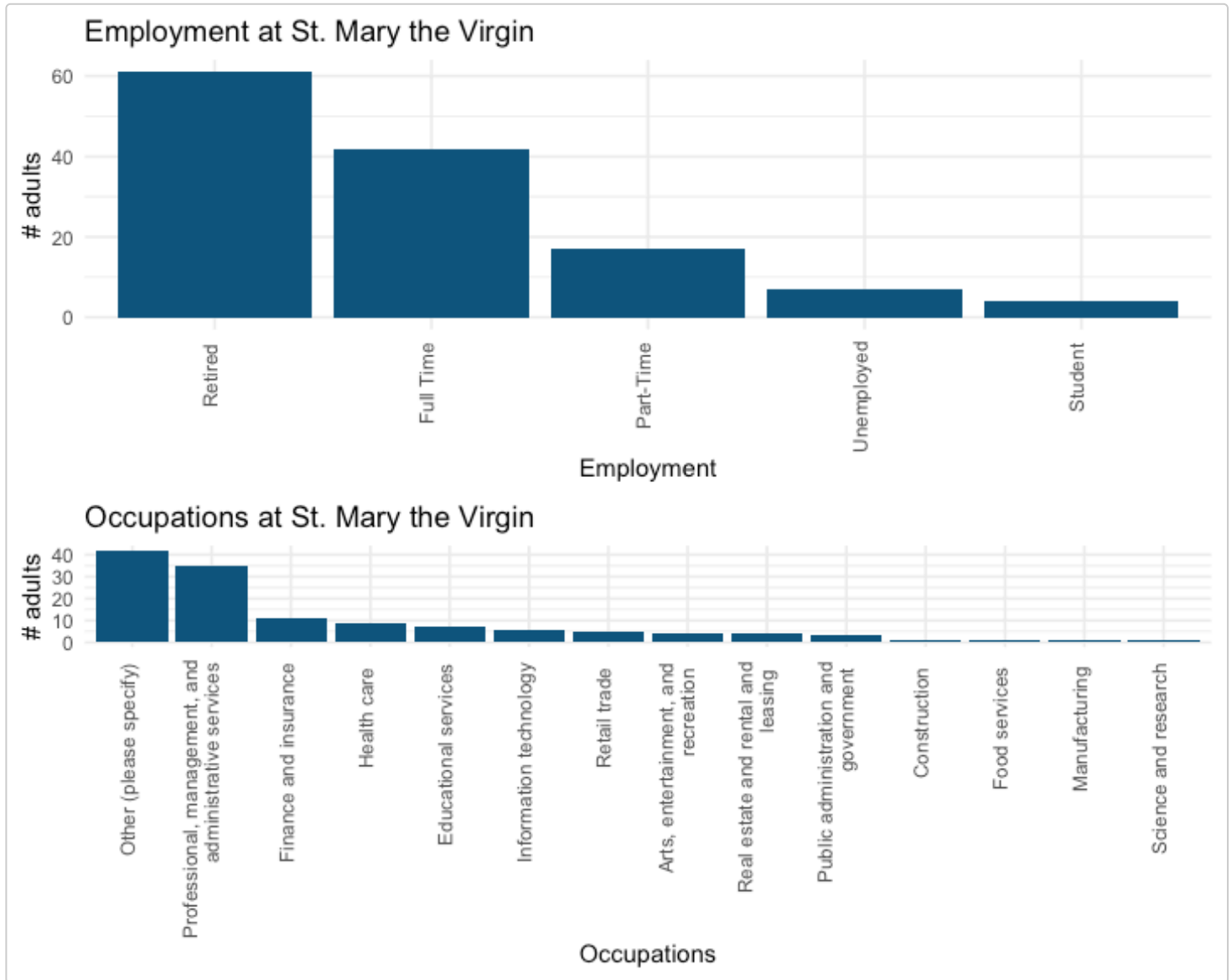
1. Looking at the word cloud, what words or phrases are prominent? As a collection, what 3 or 4 aspirations characterize your church members?
2. Consider the graph that shows the number of households who have been active in your congregation for varying lengths of time. What does this tell you about your church's ability to welcome new people? To cultivate membership? To retain members?
3. Look at the adult and children age distributions. What do you notice? What type of issues are likely to be important to the various age groups of your members? What does this suggest to you about programming and faith formation?



# Who Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

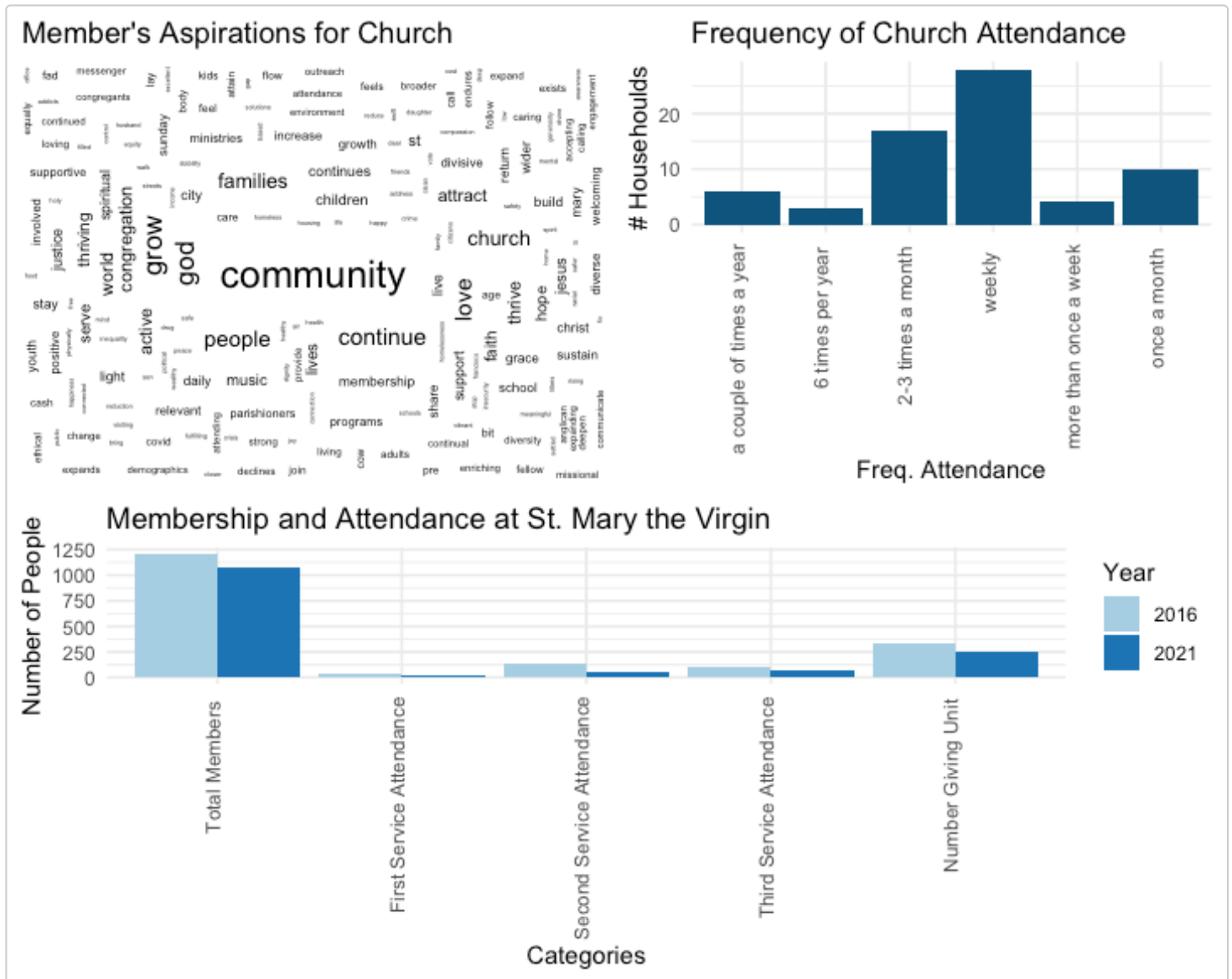
1. How would you characterize the employment status and employment areas of your church members? For example, do you have many people who work part-time? Are many or are few occupational areas represented?
2. What does this suggest to you about your church's capacity for outreach? For the types of ministries where you may have gifts to offer?



# Who Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

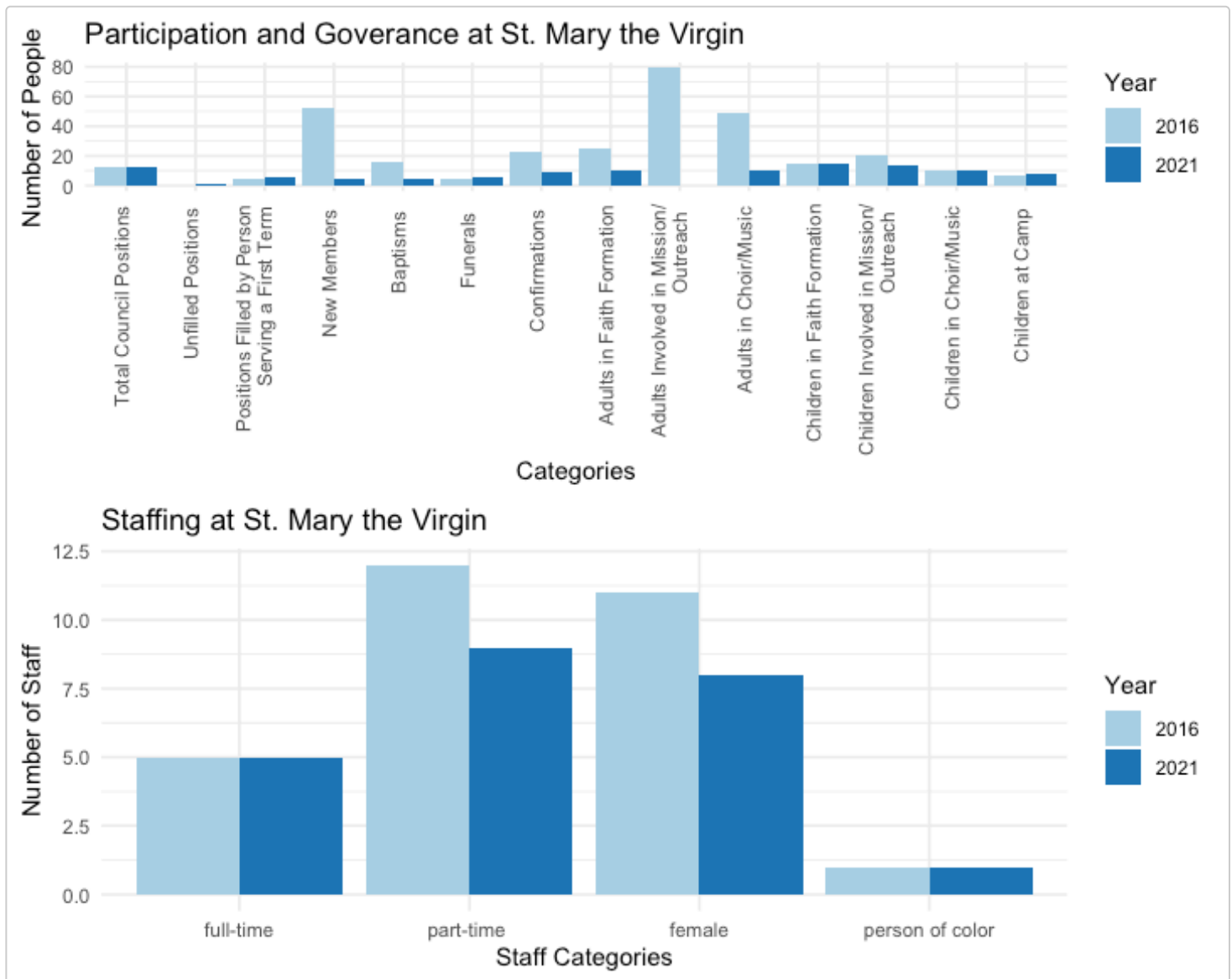
1. Study the word cloud that presents members' aspirations for your congregation. What stands out for you? In what ways does this reflect the mission and vision of your congregation? In what ways does it not?
2. Consider the graphs depicting worship attendance and service attendance by year. What does this tell you about your "average" worshiper? How has this changed over time?
3. Consider those worshipers who are not "average" – who might be represented by some of the smaller number of respondents. Who are those people? How are they included in the day-to-day life of your congregation? In what ways might they feel excluded?



# Who Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

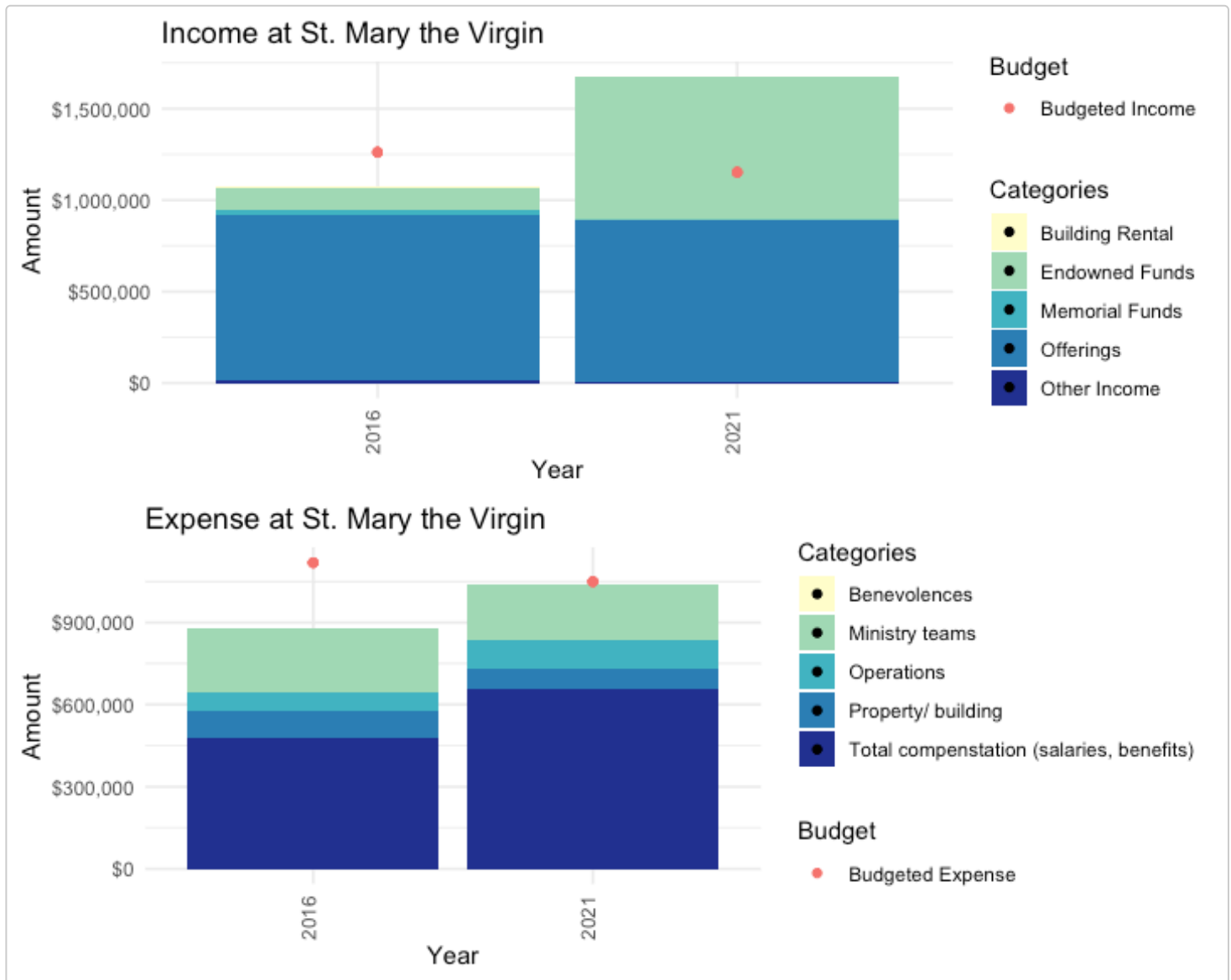
- The graph at the top shows the different ways members of your congregation have been involved over time.
  - Where have you seen growth? What has been responsible for this increase?
  - Where have you seen decline? What has been responsible for this decrease?
  - Do any of these changes suggest areas where it would be useful for you to gain additional information to more deeply understand the basis for the changes?
- In what ways has your staffing composition changed over time? How does the staffing composition align with your church's priorities? Where does it not align? What thoughts/ observations might benefit from additional conversation?



# Who Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Consider the sources of income and if/ how they have changed over time. Looking back at earlier graphs that depict characteristics of your church membership, attendance, or levels of involvement, what does this suggest for the future income revenue of your congregation?
2. Consider the categories of expenditure and if/how these have changed over time. Are these patterns of spending consistent with your congregation's priorities? If so, how? If not, in what ways?



# Where Are We?

To understand ourselves more fully, we need to see and understand our context – the neighborhoods and city in which we live. Although we have much individual choice and freedom in our country, it is also equally true that the people, issues, resources, and area-level concerns shape who we are. Collectively, they guide our choices about dozens of decisions – where we work, where we live, how and where we educate our children, what we purchase, and so forth. Our context influences our perceptions about opportunity, possibility, danger, and need. It draws our attention to what we deem to be important and deserving of our time and energy.

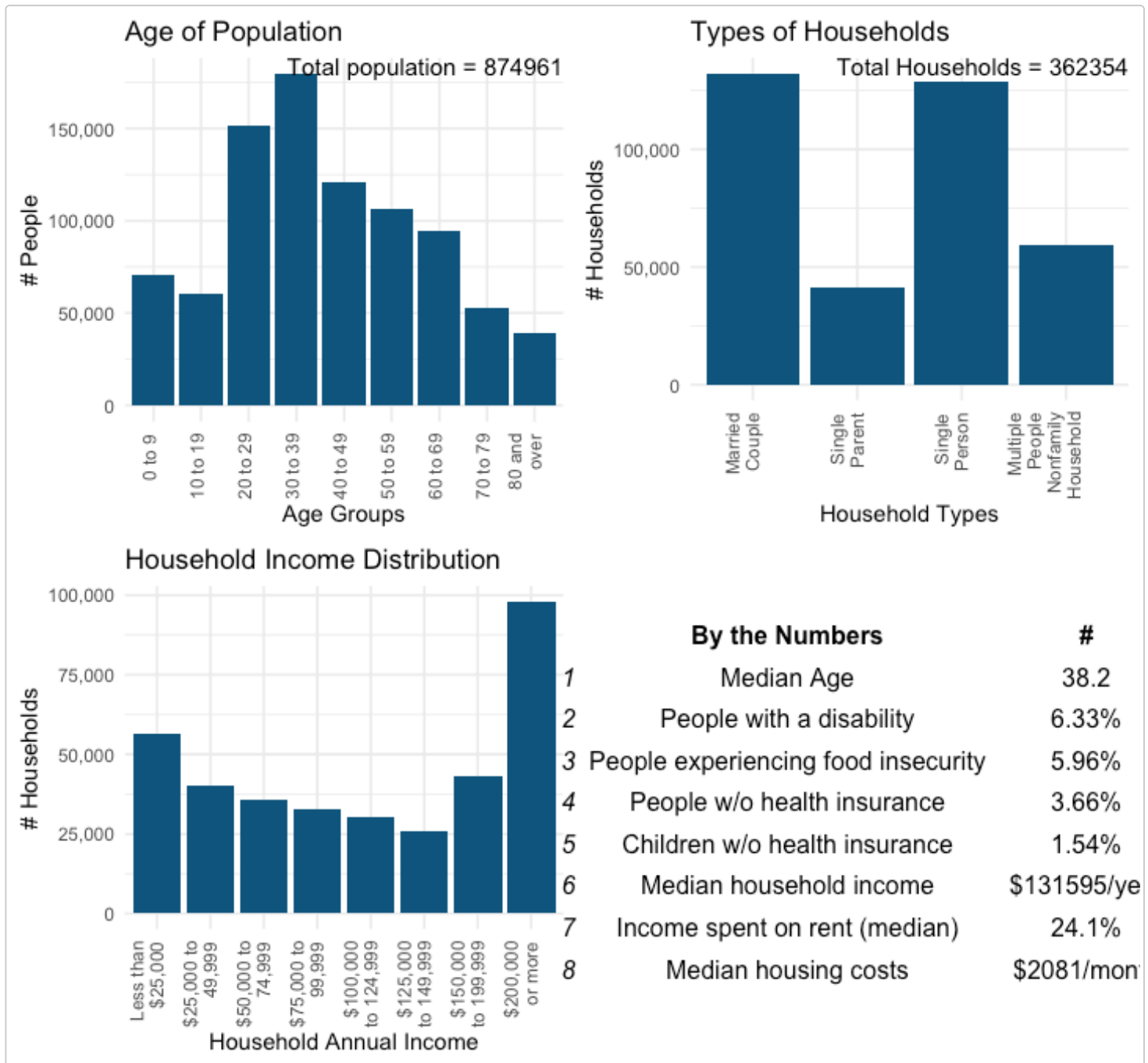
The next section of information is drawn from the 2019 5-Year American Communities Survey and presents several graphs and statistics about the local area where your congregation is located. As before, reflection questions on each page are intended to have you consider your context and how it might position you to see the people of your area and the opportunities and needs that surround your congregation. Use this information, as well as your own knowledge of your area, to help you develop an even greater awareness and depth of seeing as you discuss these questions with others.



# Where Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

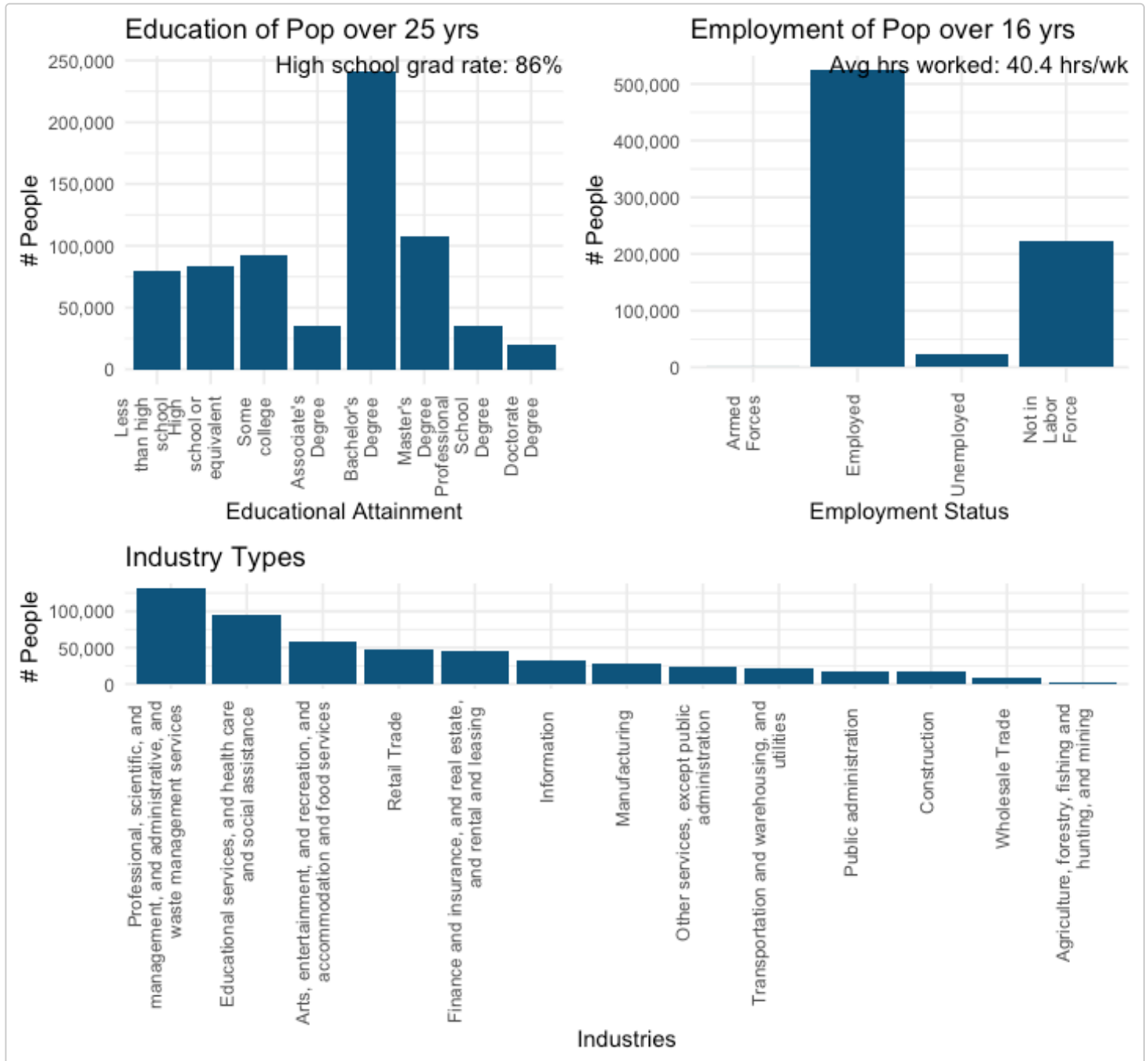
1. Examine each graph that describes your local area's demographic characteristics. What do you notice about age? Types of households? Annual income? What about the percentages of people in your community who struggle with food insecurity, housing costs, or health insurance?
2. Consider what these data tell you about the "average" person in your community as well as those with less common experiences. What do both perspectives suggest to you about your community's characteristics and needs?



# Where Are We?

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Examine these additional graphs that describe the education and employment-related characteristics of your local area. What do you notice? What types of strengths and vulnerabilities do people in your community face?
2. Combined with the other graphs and information, what stands out as a significant challenge or deep need of your local area?



# How Do We Show Up?

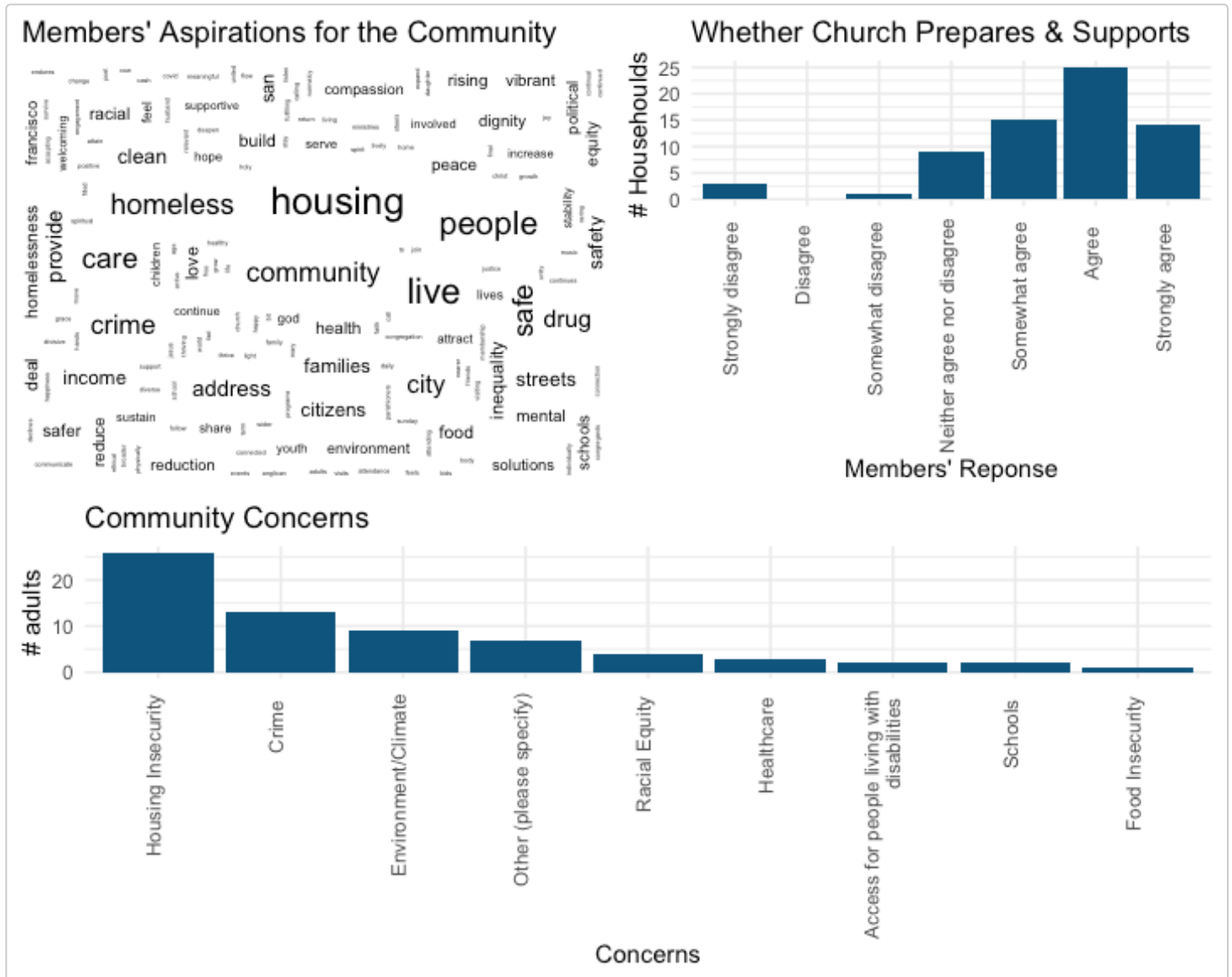
While earlier sections of this report focused on who and where we are, this last section provides information about the intersection of those two areas: how the members of your congregation and the church itself are involved in your local community. This may seem like unusual information to consider, and yet many churches talk about “equipping” and “sending” the people for ministry in their daily lives outside the walls of the church. In what ways is this already happening?

As before, these graphs are drawn from several different sources of information in an effort to present varied perspectives and generate conversation. In all of it, we invite you to consider multiple ways of understanding the patterns, listing the questions you have for further exploration, and contemplating the ways in which your congregation might be drawn more deeply into discerning its next steps..

# How Do We Show Up?

## Questions for Reflection:

1. What aspirations and concerns do members of the congregation have for the local area? Looking at the word cloud and community concerns, what deep needs and future possibilities might the congregation want to explore more fully?
2. Consider the responses to the question about the degree to which members report feeling that the church has prepared and supported them for their daily lives. What does it mean to prepare and support? Consider both ends of the spectrum - the experiences of those who feel very well prepared/supported and those who do not. How can the church most effectively prepare and support all of its members for daily life?



# How Do We Show Up?

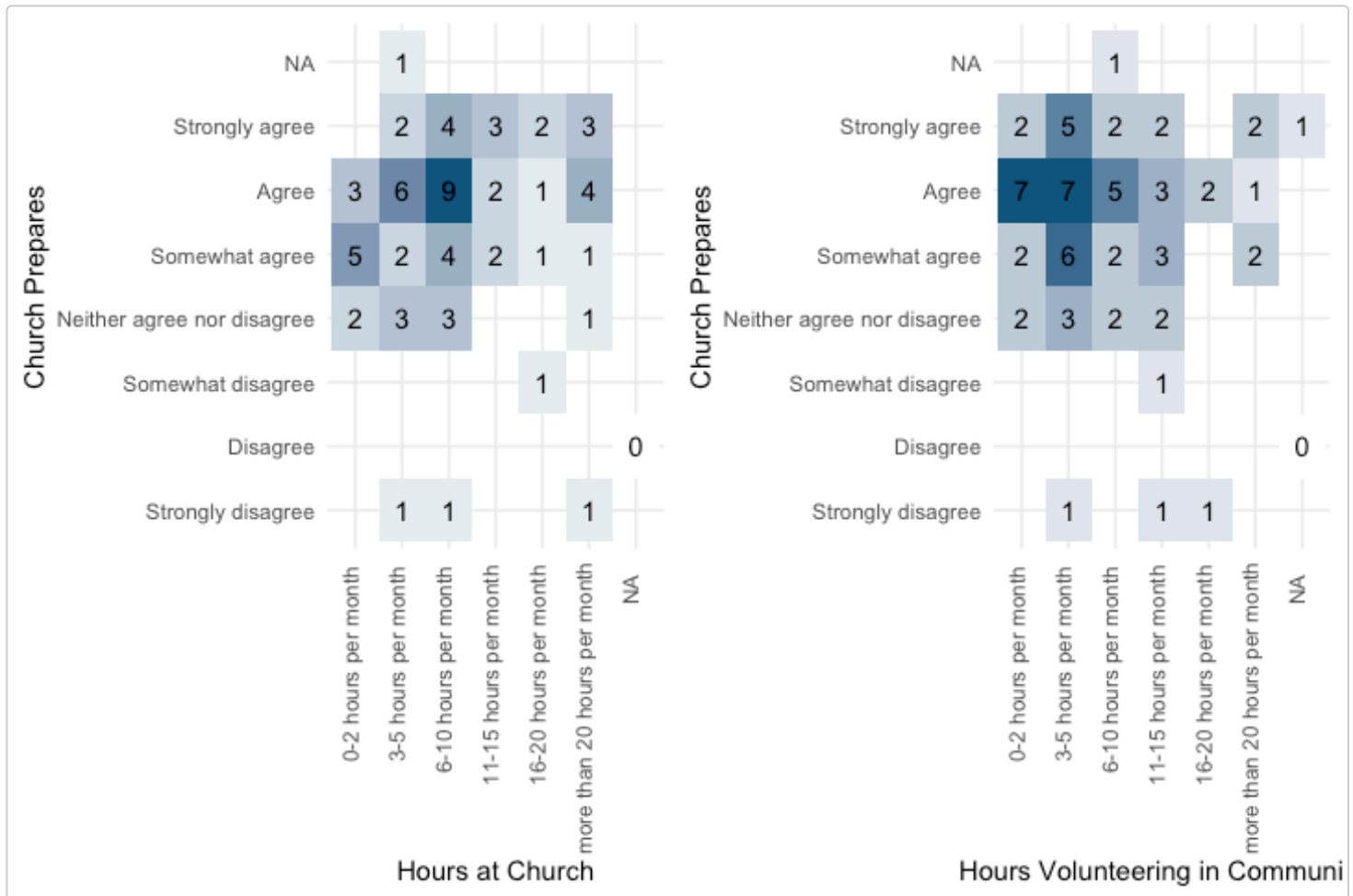
Recall your thoughts and discussion from the previous page related to the question that asked how much people reported feeling as though the church prepares and supports them for their daily lives. Remember that people could respond to this question on a scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

The following two graphs show how the answers to that question are connected with how much people volunteer. The left side graph shows the connection for volunteering at church. The right side graph shows the connection for volunteering in the community.

Take a minute to orient yourself to these graphs.

## Questions for Reflection:

- How does one’s feeling of being prepared and supported by the church relate to their involvements at the church? In the community?
  - What patterns do you notice?
  - What are possible reasons for these patterns?
- Are there ministries within the church that are connected to supporting the community that are not captured by these graphs?
- What does it mean to prepare and support members for their daily life? In what ways does this include involvement in the community? How does this compare to your members’ stated aspirations or community concerns?

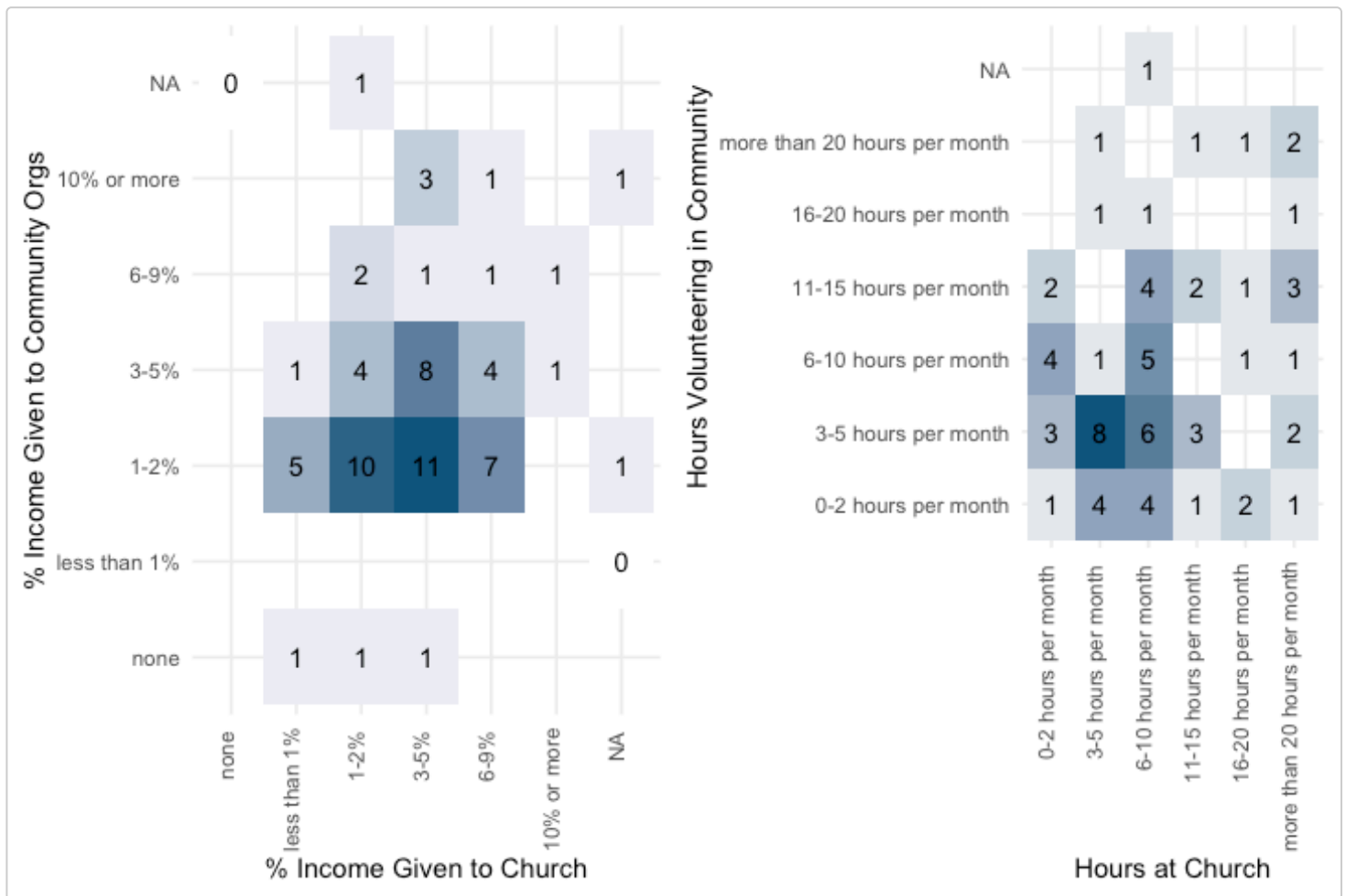


# How Do We Show Up?

The following graphs also connect people's responses between two different questions. The graph on the left illustrates how financial giving to the church and financial giving to the community are related; the graph on the right shows how volunteer time between the church and the community are related.

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Taking each graph in turn, what patterns do you notice? As a whole, what do these graphs convey about the priorities of your congregation? What factors or reasons may explain the relationships?
2. Are there ministries within the church that are connected to supporting the community that are not captured by these graphs?
3. Some people believe that giving of time and/or money is a “zero-sum game” – that giving to one area necessarily reduces the amount available for other areas. Do you believe this? Why or why not?
4. Do these financial and time-based snapshots of giving suggest a pattern that is consistent with the mission and vision of your congregation? Why or why not?



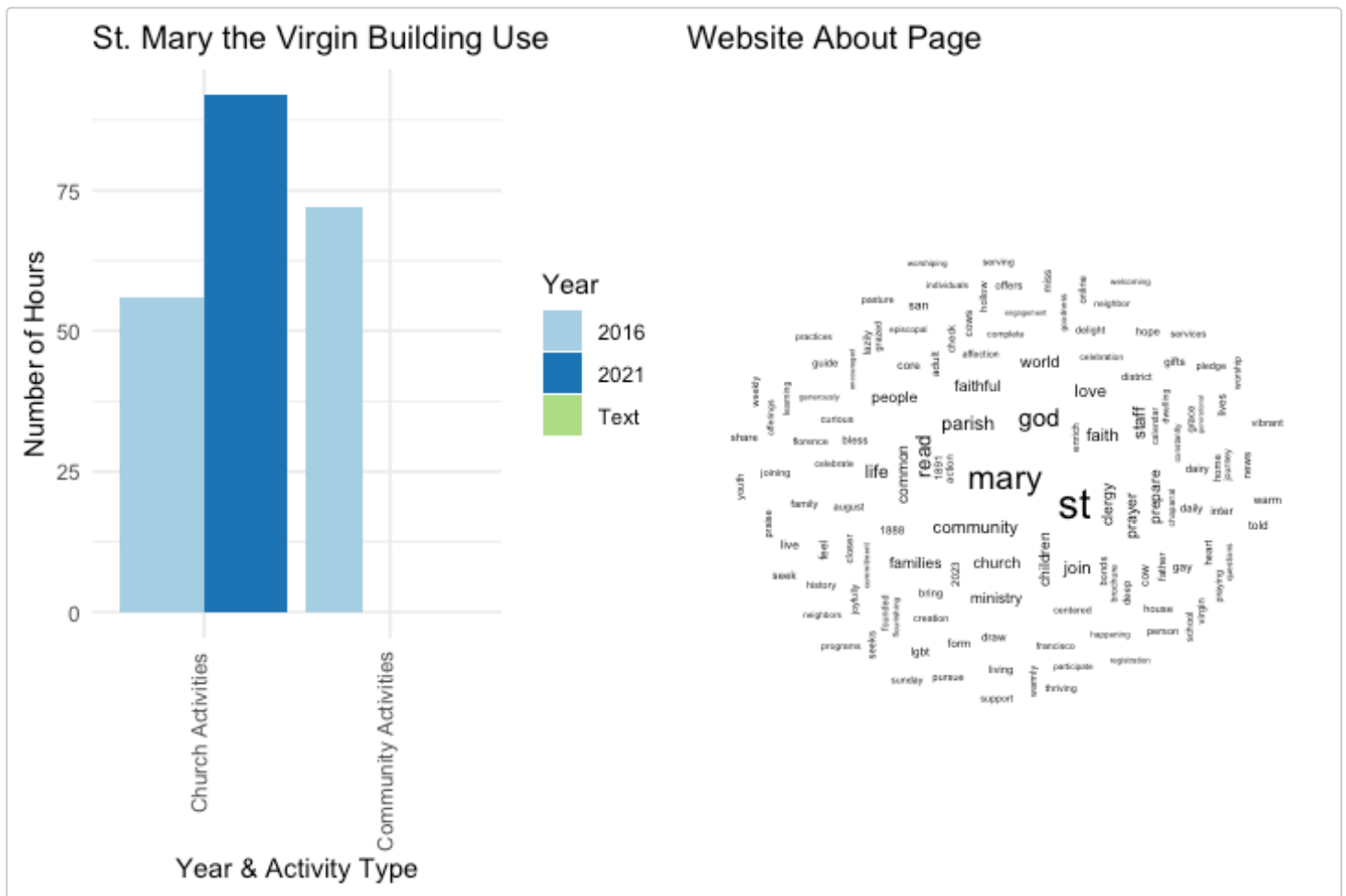
# How Do We Show Up?

The final graph illustrates how your church building is used in a typical month. For the two different years, it displays the number of hours the building was used for church activities (other than worship) versus community-based activities.

Last, we offer a word cloud constructed from your own congregation's website. These are the words you use to describe yourself to the outside world.

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Does this pattern of building use align with your expectations? With your congregation's priorities and concerns? Why or why not?
2. Consider the word cloud as a whole – the large words as well as the small ones. What does it communicate to others about your church? Does this align with how you see your congregation? Is this how you want others to see you? Why or why not?
3. Considering this graph and those from the previous pages, do you see areas where it would be useful to find out additional information? Have further conversation? Where might the Spirit be calling your congregation to deeper understanding?



# Vitality Practices

The Mission of the Episcopal Diocese of CA is to become God's Beloved Community and living this out through the Vitality Practices of Diversity (racial justice & reconciliation), Collaboration (abundant sharing), Community Embeddedness (engaging neighbors), Invitation (evangelism), and Sustainability (long-term thinking).

## Questions for Reflection:

1. Where do you think your church connects the best with these practices?
2. Which practice or practices do you think your church could grow in?
3. How could engaging these vitality practices enhance your mission and ministry as a congregation?

