

God's Church | Our Story

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS UPDATE

DISCOVERY PHASE

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH, ASHEVILLE

JANUARY – JUNE 2026



More than 100 parishioners gathered for a Trinity Conversations dinner in Tuton Hall this spring.

Trinity staff and a selected Core Team of parishioners and staff began meeting in the fall of 2025 to learn about the philosophy and applications of the Appreciative Inquiry approach to organizational development, applying their learnings to selecting the theme of **God's Church, Our Story: What has God been doing among us – and where is God calling us next?**

The AI process has been guided and assisted throughout by the Core Team, who met weekly to co-design events and then debrief the results. As a result, a total of approximately 300 parishioners and staff participated in four Discovery events that took place over three months, April through June 2026:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| April 29 | Dinner in Tuton Hall for 100-plus people |
| May 20 | Dinner in Tuton Hall for 100-plus people |
| June 14 | Sunday after-church brunch in the Clark Room for 30 people |
| June 28 | Afternoon Zoom conversation for 10 people |

300

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

4

DISCOVERY EVENTS

1,000+

CONVERSATION NOTES

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

Conversation and Connection

The most important aspect of Trinity's Appreciative Inquiry process so far has been the opportunity for conversations and connections among participants. Anyone at Trinity could register and attend. Wonderful meals were served at the in-person events; themed conversations took place, and everyone present was heard from within three-hour formats. The event team made sure that people were pre-assigned to tables with others they may not know well.

Feedback from participants afterward was very positive, both in terms of appreciation for opportunities to meet new people and for being asked to weigh in on topics important to the church's future.



In pairs, participants interviewed one another using the Trinity Conversations guide, then shared their partner's story with their table.

In pairs, participants interviewed one another using an interview guide prepared for the topic (see the questions at right). They then shared their partner's responses with the rest of their table of eight and posted discussion outcomes.

Conversations focused on Trinity's **strengths** through the years and on what makes the community unique. Participants also told personal stories of **high points** in their own experiences at Trinity as well as what they want more of — an opportunity to express **wishes** for the future, both individually and organizationally.

The themes the interviews identified will determine what the Trinity congregation will continue to study through their conversations in the upcoming Dream and Design phases of the AI process.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Trinity Conversations

The four questions every pair explored together.

1 Your History at Trinity

How long have you been coming to Trinity? What drew you here in the first place?

2 High Point Story

Recall a time at Trinity when you felt most connected and grateful to be a part of this church community. What was happening? Who was involved? What made a difference for you and touched you deeply about the experience? Capture the highlights of your story on the yellow insert provided.

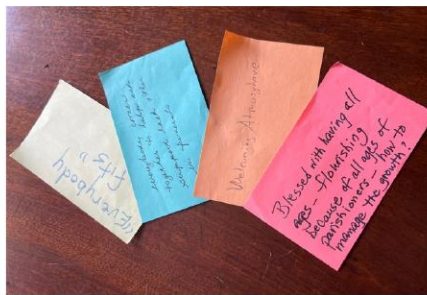
3 The Best of Trinity

Trinity has been serving God and our community and congregation in Asheville since 1848. In your experience, what are Trinity's key strengths that have brought it to this point in its history and must continue into the future? Where do those strengths most show up now at Trinity? Name three.

4 Discovering the Future Together

What do you want more of at Trinity? What three wishes do you have for Trinity to best continue answering God's call and flourishing into the future — for individuals, for the congregation and for the Asheville community?

What Did We Discover?



A few of the thousand-plus notes:
 "Everybody fits," "Welcoming atmosphere,"
 "Blessed with having all ages."

The participants generated more than a thousand conversation notes on post-its from their discussions, and the Core Team and facilitators read every one of them (more than once), discovering key themes and proposed directions. The facilitators and Core Team did not suggest particular areas of conversation, such as Finances, Worship Services or Learning. When answers from all events were sorted, they fell into an easy set of key categories that will inform the rest of our work together.

The process revealed an outpouring of appreciation for and identification of Trinity's many strengths, built over almost 200 years of care and participation, as well as a clear compilation of **twenty-four categories of strengths, wishes and hopes** for the future.

STRENGTHS									
BELONGING	210	WORSHIP	94	CLERGY & STAFF	84	PROGRAMS/FORMATION	62	BUILDINGS & GROUNDS	16
Welcoming	70	Services / Liturgy	30	Clergy Leadership	24	Adults	10	Location and History	11
Outreach	42	Music	39	Staff Leadership	23	Youth	23	Facilities	5
Community	41	General Worship	25	Overall Leadership	30	Children	29		
Inclusiveness	18			Fiscal Responsibility	7				
Social Connections	17								
Church of the Advocate	17								
Pastoral Care	5								
WISHES									
BELONGING	149	WORSHIP	66	CLERGY & STAFF	80	PROGRAMS/FORMATION	100	BUILDINGS & GROUNDS	56
Outreach	42	Music	28	Staffing	22	Adults	55	Earth Care	4
Church of the Advocate	30	General Worship	25	Church of the Advocate	30	Youth	13	Parking	12
Diversity	29	Services / Liturgy	13	Leadership & Support	28	Children	16	Maintenance	17
Community Connection	16					Children & Youth	16	Security	6
Welcoming	14							Building Access	13
Church Connection	13							Technology	4
Pastoral Care	5								

Where the Discovery themes fell: number of mentions by category and theme across all four events. Full spreadsheets: docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Kci03cRPKNClYGEggg1_-GgplcgfEblwh4qyt7s2Jfa

Of the many **Strengths** named, **Welcoming** accrued the highest number of mentions, with participants repeating how important the welcoming atmosphere has been for them and for others new to Trinity.

The process uncovered a very respected and admired clergy and staff. The most frequently mentioned **Wishes** in that category were a desire for more staffing and volunteers to support expansion of Child, Youth and Adult Formation programming, and more contact with Church Street and other local churches.

The Wish outcomes indicated a widespread desire for more **social connection and learning opportunities**, enhancing and connecting the community in even more ways.

Participants commented on their love of the historic buildings and desire for enhancements that would provide greater **accessibility** and, of course, additional **parking**.

A more detailed accounting of the Discovery Phase is in process.

LOOKING AHEAD

What's Next

The Core Team will continue to steer the process along with Trinity staff, with Appreciative Inquiry coaching from **Scott White** and consultant **Sallie Lee**. Building on Discovery outcomes, the AI Team is moving forward with the next Appreciative stages of **Dream** and **Design** this fall, where a diverse group of 30–50 parishioners will be invited to consider and hone the key dreams and directions that emerged from Trinity Conversations into viable project design proposals.

Key results and learnings will be featured on a large bulletin board near Tuton Hall, with a linked website where anyone can access recorded outcomes, quotes, stories, photos and emergent next steps.

THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY JOURNEY

DISCOVERY · JAN–JUN 2026

Four Trinity Conversations gathered approximately 300 parishioners and staff to name our strengths, high points and wishes. **Complete.**

STAY INFORMED

Watch the bulletin board near Tuton Hall and the linked website for outcomes, quotes, stories and photos.

DREAM & DESIGN · FALL 2026

A diverse group of 30–50 parishioners will shape the key dreams and directions into viable project proposals.

EXPLORE THE DATA

Spreadsheets of themes compiled from the Discovery events are available online — see the link on page 3.

GUIDING THE PROCESS

The Core Team

Anne Bleynat
Debbie Cox
Mark Daddona
Nancy Dexter

Susan Edwards
Jeff Imes
Barbara Matthews
Jason McKowen

Amy Peterson
Nanette Popa
Mike Reardon
Scott White

Consultant: Sallie Lee

Program Support: Jo Rice

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH · ASHEVILLE

God's Church, Our Story is Trinity's Appreciative Inquiry process, guided by a Core Team of parishioners and staff. Serving God and our community since 1848.