

Church of the Holy Comforter
Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania



Parish Profile
Autumn, 2019



Mission and Vision

As members of the Body of Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out Our Lord's call to love God, love our neighbors, and share the Gospel through worship, prayer, mission, and the building of deep and lasting relationships in our community and the world.

Holy Comforter focuses most closely on the social needs of the local community and on the spiritual growth of a small but joyful congregation. The spiritual life of Holy Comforter is Gospel led, grounded in the Episcopal tradition, and nurtured by the caring community of parishioners who faithfully support the church through active volunteer leadership.

Our Direction for the Future

Provide Christian education and spiritual growth for children and adults, so that we may both deepen our own relationships with God and better equip ourselves to share the message of the Gospel with others in our community

Become more intentional in our welcoming of visitors and incorporating new members into the life of the parish.

Seek new ways to connect and build relationships with the community and the world, and to most effectively and lovingly meet their needs.

What We Seek in a Rector

Holy Comforter parish is seeking a Christ-centered priest with experience in pastoral ministry and capable of leading education. The Rector should be present to the congregation and potential new members both through outreach and visits, as well as through building educational opportunities in the parish.

Our Rector should be warm and welcoming, an inspirational preacher and leader of worship who can share the good news of Christ and show how to apply faith in our own lives. A good sense of humor and a personal commitment to spiritual growth are important to nurture the Holy Comforter church of today and into the future.

The ideal Rector would also have strong organizational skills, to be able to effectively mobilize and work closely with active lay volunteers in the congregation. The ability to build consensus and marshal resources and activity beyond the parish to include other area parishes, the Deanery, the Diocese, and the National Church is also important.

About Holy Comforter

Demographics and attendance

Regular attendance at Holy Comforter reached a low point in 2018 and has since begun to grow as a few young families with children have recently become members. Average Sunday attendance in 2018 was 48, and is 58 in 2019. A survey completed in the Winter of 2018 had a total of 38 respondents out of approximately 100 active parishioners.

The average age of the survey respondents is 61, with 48% aged 67 or older.

About 29% of the survey respondents live in the Drexel Hill community. About 21% live just beyond Drexel Hill with a commute time of 6 to 10 minutes to Holy Comforter. 50% of the survey respondents commute 15 minutes or more to Holy Comforter.

Survey responses indicate that 82% attend church weekly. This survey result may not be representative of the entire active membership as weekly attendance is lower than this would suggest. 85% attend the Sunday 10:00 am service and 15% attend the Sunday 8:00 am service.

Both survey and focus group discussions revealed a deep and joyful bond with Holy Comforter. The four top reasons cited for why people are members at Holy Comforter are:

1. Friendliness of parishioners (71%)
2. Personal relationships (53%)
3. Family tradition (53%)

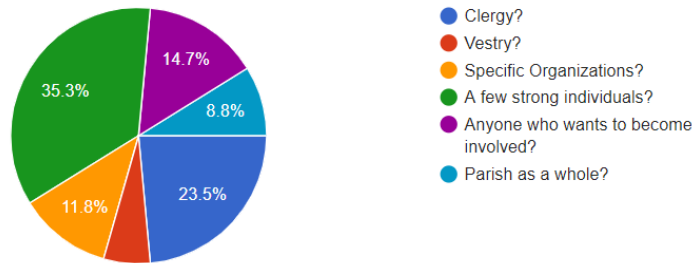
Survey respondents expressed diverse priorities for the importance of Church doctrine:

- 30% feel that a Biblical basis for belief is very important
- 62% feel that applying faith to daily living is very important
- 71% feel that the traditions of the Episcopal Church are very important
- 82% feel that applying doctrine to current social issues is very important

View of Parish Leadership:

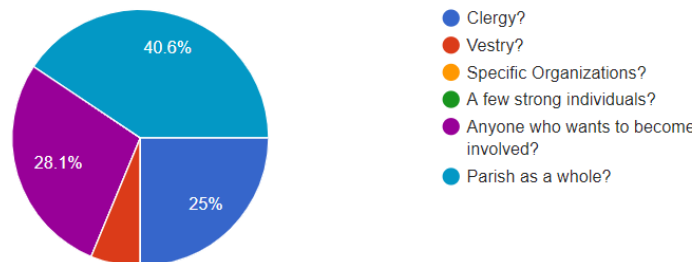
Do you see Holy Comforter's parish leadership as centered in;

34 responses



How would you LIKE to see it focused?

32 responses



Worship and Liturgy

Worship and liturgy are an important part of the life of Holy Comforter. We have two Sunday services: a spoken Rite I Eucharist at 8:00, and a choral Eucharist at 10:00. The liturgy at 10:00 has varied over the years, depending on the Rector. We have gone from having Eucharist on the first Sunday of the month and special feast days, to having the Eucharist every Sunday. For many

years, we had Rite I Eucharist on one Sunday each month, Rite II Eucharist on two Sundays, and Rite I Morning Prayer on one Sunday. For over a decade, we have had Eucharist every Sunday. Our most recent rector preferred Rite I, using it throughout the year except in Advent and Lent. Currently, we vary the liturgy from season to season, using Rite I, Rite II, and alternative liturgies.

On Wednesdays, a healing service with Eucharist is celebrated at 10:00 a.m., September through May. There are services on Christmas Eve (2), Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday (2), Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday (Easter Vigil).

Based on a survey of the parish, the Eucharist is very important to a large majority of the congregation. There is a slight preference for Rite I, but a general sense that a variety of liturgy is important.

Given the physical layout of the chancel and sanctuary, our priests have traditionally celebrated at the altar, rather than at a communion table.

Music

Holy Comforter's parishioners feel that music is a very important part of worship. We have a part-time Minister of Music, and a small but mighty choir. The 10:00 Sunday service, as well as special seasonal services, includes hymns and sung service music throughout the year, as well as a choir anthem September through Trinity Sunday. Both organ and piano are used in worship. The organ was installed in 1968 by Austin Organs, Inc. of Hartford, Connecticut.



Education

We are in a rebuilding year for our Sunday School/Christian Formation. Our youth Sunday School is being led by a volunteer with the assistance of two parents of children in the program. The volunteer is a retired elementary school teacher with expertise in the area of education. The weekly sessions include a lesson and an art activity. There are currently twelve students enrolled.

We have six students who have been preparing during this school year for Confirmation this coming October. Our priest-in-charge met with them throughout the year and followed the confirmation program, Confirm not Conform (CnC). Confirm not Conform is meant to be different from the traditional programs, passive curricula where "students attend, listen and memorize." CnC on the other hand "requires to speak up, debate and discover. The underlying message of the entire CnC program is that their voice is a gift from God. It is valid. It deserves to be heard. And it can make a difference, when both used alone and, even more powerfully, in community."

Staffing

In addition to a full-time priest and a part-time minister of music, Holy Comforter employs a part-time parish administrator. The Vestry is currently exploring the feasibility of hiring a part-time youth Christian education minister. We have not had a sexton in several years. We currently utilize a cleaning service.

Active Parish Groups

Acolytes – We have a dedicated group of acolytes who serve on the altar every Sunday and on special occasions under the leadership of our acolyte master. We currently have 8 young people who serve as acolytes and one adult who also serves and mentors the young acolytes.

Altar Guild – The Altar Guild consists of 12 monthly teams of 2 people who prepare the altar for each service during their month. They are responsible for Sunday services, baptisms, weddings and funerals. Additional responsibilities (performed by individuals or small groups) include filling oil candles, delivering Altar flowers to parish members, and preparations for holidays. The Altar Guild is led by the directress who also trains new members.

BADBOYS (originally Breakfast at Denny's, Best of the Young Seniors) – This senior men's group meets several times a year for breakfast and fellowship. The group was started in 1994 and has a tradition of providing assistance to those who need it, usually providing rides to appointments.

Lay Readers/Chalice Bearers – A dedicated group of lay readers and chalice bearers assist with all worship services, including serving the elements during Communion. Some of our members have been serving for many years and are available to assist new readers. Training is provided for new members and ongoing support is available to all lay readers.

Mission Team – The Mission Team coordinates and tracks all activities related to the current, ongoing ministries of the church. They also evaluate new appeals and make recommendations to the Vestry and clergy based on those evaluations. These may include appeals for ministries supported by our diocese. This committee ensures that our mission efforts are in alignment with our priorities and interests.

Choir – The choir sings at the 10:00 service beginning on Rally Day in September and ending on Trinity Sunday. This small but dedicated group also sings at special services throughout the year. The choir is led by Erin Sprague, our Minister of Music. The choir rehearses on Thursday evenings and always welcomes new members.

Property Team – The Property Team advises the Vestry on all major matters of property management of the church. They plan and execute all minor or urgent matters of property repair and routine property maintenance, within financial guidelines set by the Vestry.

Vestry – Vestry members are elected by the congregation and serve a 3-year term. The Vestry also includes an appointed Senior Warden and Accounting Warden. The Vestry governs the parish, dealing with both immediate and long-term issues.

Women of Holy Comforter – “To unite the Women of the Church in a program of worship, service, study and fellowship” is the overall mission of this active group. Meetings are held monthly from September to June and all women of the church are always welcome to attend. Annual events include a Christmas concert paired with packing cookies for homebound members, a Spring plant sale to raise money for our missions, and an Annual Tea in May. Other events include book discussions and social events.



Ministries and Outreach



Holy Comforter has a long history of serving the community through mission and outreach with the guidance and support of our Vestry, the Mission Team, and our vibrant women's group. Our active congregation supports parish activities including a Fall flea market, the Spring Vendors market, and in years past an Advent conspiracy program – all of which raise money for mission activities.

The main missions we actively support are the *Mothers' Home* in Darby, Pennsylvania, and the *Domestic Abuse Project* in Delaware County.

The *Mothers' Home* is a residence for pregnant women with minimal outside support. They provide a safe haven to vulnerable women while helping them acquire the skills to become self-sufficient, including parenting classes and job preparation. We work with the facility throughout the year, hosting special occasion dinners, donating food, diapers, and other baby items in addition to providing financial support for special projects.

Holy Comforter also supports the *Domestic Abuse Project*, collecting clothing, household supplies and toiletries. At Christmas we support the families by participating in a "giving tree". The ornaments describe items needed by the shelter or small gifts for children to give their parent. Parishioners select ornaments and donate the item named, and we deliver the items in time for Christmas.

The Holy Comforter church family also has a strong tradition of outreach serving not only its parishioners but also the community. The women's group hosts events throughout the year, including the popular Upper Darby High School Encore Singers Christmas concert. The men's group provides transportation to medical appointments. We host a Lenten series offering fellowship and education, some years in cooperation with another local Episcopal parish. We also offer a "brown bag" and prayer group for the women of the church.

There is a bread ministry where a volunteer picks up donations from Panera Bread and delivers them to the Church of the Holy Comforter. Other parishioners then deliver the donated bread to one or more destinations for people in need. The main destinations are *Chester Eastside Inc.*, a community service organization located at St. Paul's in Chester; *Missionaries of Charity* in Chester, which serves homeless women with children; and *Sojourners' Place* – a homeless shelter for men in Wilmington DE.



We also have several traditions that are open to the neighborhood, including the annual Easter egg hunt. With the beginning of the church school year the Rally Day procession with bagpipes begins services and is followed by a picnic.



A Brief History of Our Parish

The history of the Church of the Holy Comforter spans 151 years. The parish has been led by 24 missionaries-in-charge, priests-in-charge, and rectors. Their terms generally lasted about four years with several exceptions.

The parish traces its roots to the sparsely settled suburbs of West Philadelphia in 1863. Some of the older girls in a Sunday School class at the Church of the Savior, 38th and Ludlow Streets, saw the need for a mission Sunday School to serve the numerous children living “further out” in the wooded area along Haverford Avenue west of 40th Street. Under the patronage of the parent congregation, the Church of the Savior, the cornerstone of the Chapel of the Holy Comforter was laid on November 14, 1867, at Haverford Avenue and 48th Street. The chapel cost about \$5,000 and the first service was held in 1868.

There were 14 rectors or missionaries-in-charge from the founding of Holy Comforter in 1867 until 1920, when the Reverend Charles Wesley Schiffer became the missionary-in-charge and began the first of four long rectorships. During his tenure, in response to population shifts and financial pressures, the parish moved to the Aronimink area of Drexel Hill, several miles outside the city. The official consent to change the location to Burmont Road was given by Bishop Thomas Garland in 1928. The Diocese provided substantial help, with \$5,000 to pay for the land, \$15,000 to settle the mortgage on the old church, and a promise of \$25,000 toward the new building.

Drexel Hill was a fairly new community at this time with some housing and a lot of open space. The parish grew with the neighborhood and became free of debt in 1938. In January 1945 Holy Comforter applied for full parish status, which was confirmed by Bishop Oliver Hart.

In the fall of 1951, the Reverend James Gardner Hodder accepted the call to Holy Comforter, beginning the second long tenure. Early in 1952, construction of a new and larger church began next to the 1929 building. The first service was held on September 13, 1953. The original church became the parish house, home to the Sunday School and many other activities.



The highlight of the new church was and is a mural, “The Communion of Saints,” the work of parishioner Edward R. Grove, talented painter, sculptor, and engraver. Aided by his wife Jean and many parish volunteers, Grove labored for over six years and included many local individuals as models. The mural was dedicated on All Saints Day, November 1, 1958.

The Reverend Paul Wayne Lingle became Rector of Holy Comforter in 1961. His service of Installation was marked by the dedication of a newly completed religious education building.

In 1966, the Reverend William Roulston McKean, Jr. assumed leadership of the church and helped to usher in the second century of Christian ministry. The following year the parish celebrated its centenary with festivities and the publication of an extensive history of the church. Mr. McKean served for 27 years, the longest tenure of any rector. During his tenure, there were numerous improvements to the church buildings and grounds, including the addition of a columbarium in 1986. Mr. McKean retired in April 1993, an occasion marked by the celebration of his tenure.

The Reverend Christopher Moore joined us in December 1994 and served as our rector for nearly 12 years. Mr. Moore's years were characterized by his thoughtful preaching and teaching, consensus-building, and compassion. He renewed our connections to the Diocese and served a three-year term as Dean of the Conestoga Deanery. For two years, Holy Comforter enjoyed the presence of an assistant rector, the Reverend Donald Sehulster, who was especially gifted in his work with the youth of the parish.

Reverend Jonathan Mitchican served as our rector for 2008 to 2017. His ministry was characterized by inspirational sermons, preparation of our children for First Communion and Confirmation, book discussions, blogs, quiet days, Alpha, Advent Conspiracy and support of Living Water International. Father Jonathan's departure took us a bit by surprise and the initial months following his departure were challenging.

The Reverend Dr. Thomas Eoyang joined us late in 2017 as Priest-in-Charge. He has been a source of comfort and seeks to challenge us as we confront our search for where God is leading us. He highlights our strengths and gently guides us to newer understanding of the role of the church in this very secular age.

Property and Facilities

Holy Comforter Episcopal Church is located at the corner of Burmont Road and Bond Ave in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania. It is affectionately called "The church with the Mural".

The church, parish House, religious education building, and columbarium are on a 0.8 acre lot. The church and parish house are constructed of grey stone with peaked slate roofs. The religious education building is of concrete block construction with a flat roof. The new roof and church steeple were replaced in 2017. In 2019 the church installed a new 2-zone HVAC system for the church and the adjacent building complex. We have incorporated a "Warm and Dry" special offering to address the roof and other major repairs. This offering is indicative of the congregation's support of the church. The church shares a spacious block with a large elementary school and an administration building owned by the School District of Upper Darby.

The church proper has seating for approximately 300 people in the nave. It is furnished with oak pews and folding padded kneelers. Stained glass windows grace the side windows and the back of the church.

Throughout the years various parishioners donated several of these windows. The aisles and chancel are carpeted. Baptisms are performed at an ancient



baptismal font located in the front of the chancel adjacent to a piano. The chancel features a three-manual Austin pipe organ console and pews for the senior choir. The altar rail accommodates up to 18 people for communion before an altar of white Italian marble.

The parish house occupies the original church building and consists of the upper and lower parish halls. The upper parish hall is a large room suitable for classes, meetings, and other activities. Income is generated when this area is rented for wedding receptions, Alcoholics Anonymous, yoga classes, and other dance groups. Folding chairs are provided for 150 people. Adjoining the main hall are the rector's office, the parish administrator's office, a small chapel, and a library. Both the church and the upper parish hall are wheelchair accessible.

The lower parish hall in the basement can accommodate 120 people for dinners, special events, and meetings. It is equipped with folding tables and chairs. A fully equipped kitchen is adjacent to this area. During the week (5 days) this space is rented to a child care center (Small World Child Care Center).

The religious education building has 6 rooms on the upper level. These include a Youth room and a counting room, the Youth Director's office, a choir rehearsal room/boardroom (which can double as a classroom), a nursery, and a choir robing and music library room. The lower level has seven classrooms and a small supply room.

The columbarium encloses a pleasant memorial garden for in-ground interment of funeral urns. Each plot is one square foot in size and can accommodate two urns.

Finances

The parish operates on a calendar-year basis, using a budget approved by the Vestry in December and a cash basis accounting system. The primary sources of revenue are offerings and investment income/draw; the primary expense categories are personnel and property. The lion's share of the other revenue is day care center rent.

	2019 Budget	2018 Actual
Offerings	125,900	125,489
Investment income/draw	80,142	65,128
Other	28,630	22,650
Total Revenue	234,672	214,152
Personnel	161,900	148,545
Property	49,500	53,390
Other	23,272	12,217
Total Expense	234,672	214,152

The principal of the endowment fund is \$1,070,690, as of May 31, 2019. In past years, in order to meet expenses, we have had to draw more from investments than would be considered sustainable. One of our major challenges is how to reduce this excessive draw on the investments without sacrificing activities critical to Holy Comforter's mission.

The Diocese of Pennsylvania

The Church of the Holy Comforter is part of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. This diocese serves 134 congregations and spans 5 counties including Philadelphia, Montgomery, Bucks, Chester and Delaware Counties. The Right Reverend Daniel G.P. Gutierrez was elected bishop in March 2016. He is very dynamic and forward thinking, and under his leadership we are reminded of the joys and responsibilities we have as followers of Christ. In a diocese rich in

diversity we are called to unity as Christians. More information can be found at <https://www.diopa.org/>

Drexel Hill and the Surrounding communities

The Church of the Holy Comforter is located in the center of an established community with increasing diversity and a growing school age population. Three communities are within a mile or two of the church. The church is located in Drexel Hill which is part of Upper Darby Township,



a large township with a variety of housing styles and close proximity to Philadelphia. It is served by a large school district which offers many opportunities to thousands of students. Upper Darby School District information can be found at upperdarbysd.org. Havertown is close by and is served by the Haverford School District. Springfield, also just minutes away, is served by the Springfield School District. All three communities feature established housing on tree-lined streets with sidewalks and nearby public transportation.

For leisure and recreation, there are many parks and recreation facilities, including public and private swimming pools, tennis courts, golf courses, and ice skating rinks. Each community has a public library that is part of a statewide cooperative library system. There are also several local theater, choral, and orchestral groups.

Each community has its own police, fire, and ambulance services that are part of the "911" network. Service clubs such as Kiwanis, Mason, Lions, Optimist, and Rotary serve the community.

Holy Comforter is located within a residential area and next door to the local elementary school. Public transportation is within walking distance as are several businesses including small restaurants, service stations, and banks. Community groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and the Boy Scouts use our facilities for meetings. Zumba classes are held several nights a week.



Drexel Hill is located approximately 35 minutes from Center City Philadelphia, 20 minutes from the Philadelphia International Airport and 25 minutes from the main Philadelphia AMTRAK train station. Mass transit is provided in the suburbs by SEPTA trolleys and buses, which provide connections to Center City, the airport, and the train station.

