

A Demographic Narrative for St. James in the City

We include two versions of a demographic analysis produced by the diocesan software: one showing the characteristics of the top ten zip codes from which we draw our current congregation; and the other focused on the population in a one-mile radius around the church—a distance we chose as within walking distance. We think the two analyses illuminate each other, though neither captures entirely the current demographics of the parish. We therefore attach this narrative to gloss the two not entirely consistent analyses.

Describing Who We Now Are

St. James draws parishioners from all over the Los Angeles basin. In the City of Los Angeles alone our congregants come from 42 different zip codes. Our parish is even more broadly inclusive, with parishioners in at least a score of zip codes belonging to separate municipalities, from Long Beach to Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Culver City, Inglewood, Glendale, Pasadena—and more. Some parishioners travel scores of miles to reach the church; others could easily walk, and a few (even in Los Angeles!) do.

Physically the church's structures sit at the intersection of two demographically different parts of Los Angeles: Hancock Park, an older, prosperous community that once supplied almost all of St. James' congregation; and Koreatown, an area that not only includes a number of first- and second-generation Korean immigrants but also a large Hispanic population. As a consequence, a standard radius approach would imply—somewhat deceptively—that St. James was a microcosm of Los Angeles. More on this theme in the next section.

That's inaccurate in a couple of ways. First, though St. James enjoys enormous congregational diversity (though we can't prove it, several experienced observers have told us that we are the most ethnically diverse Episcopal parish in the U.S.), we do not have many members of the largest single ethnic/linguistic group in greater Los Angeles—Hispanics. There are historical and diocesan reasons for this, including the presence of a nearby Spanish language Episcopal parish; it's nevertheless a point worth noting.

We do, however, enjoy large groups of parishioners whose heritage is African (chiefly Nigeria and Sierra Leone), Korean (including both first- and second-generation immigrants), Caribbean, African-American, Anglo and others that fall into a none-of-the-above category.

Still another form of diversity involves immigrant status—a term we use in a very broad sense, encompassing anyone not born in Los Angeles. Because the City has for decades been a magnet for those from all over the country and the world, we probably have fewer parishioners who grew up here than do many other parishes. Some were born in other countries; others in other parts of the U.S.

We are also diverse in income, wealth, and occupations. We have several faithful congregants who are either homeless or nearly so, and we have others who doubtless fall into the now-notorious top 1% category. We have a broad array of vocations represented including teachers, small business-persons, journalists, physicians, delivery persons, salespeople, those in

various film, television, and digital occupations (collectively known as “the industry” in Los Angeles), retirees, and what used to be called homemakers.

This diversity across multiple vectors is both a blessing and a challenge. On one hand it enables us to comprehend in full measure the multiplicity of the Kingdom of God: no problem for us to understand Paul’s message about Jew and Gentile alike! On the other hand, as Paul also noted, Jew and Gentile can sometimes misunderstand or fail to appreciate each other properly. As the reader will see in other parts of this portfolio one of the challenges we face is how best to communicate across these many groups; that challenge is the other side of the blessing of diversity that we enjoy. Another, related challenge is how to find ways of gathering the dispersed members at times other than on already-crowded Sunday morning—a special problem given L.A.’s notorious traffic.

Opportunities

Beyond our current characteristics lie opportunities. As noted above, the least-well represented demographic among those close to us are Hispanics. Whatever the reasons for this feature, there are surely opportunities for increased growth in this potential constituency. And, given the proximity of Koreatown, we could enjoy an even greater number of Korean congregants, perhaps especially among the second-generation English speakers who would welcome the chance to connect to a church which has substantial numbers of persons their parents’ age (including, in some cases, their actual parents!). We could (and should) also do better at attracting some of the very wealthy in the zip codes contiguous to the church, many of whom would welcome the chance to be part of a genuinely diverse congregation—rather than just talking to people who look exactly like them.

One interesting respect in which we are *less* diverse than the rest of the state: both our 1-mile radius and our zip codes have populations better-educated (measured by achievement of a B.A.) than the California state average. For a communion with a tradition of learned clergy and a liturgy and musical tradition that, in some forms, is best appreciated with some historical background that presents another opportunity for recruitment.