

2. How do the stewardship practices and allocation of financial resources of the congregation or organization reflect your priorities for mission?

Advent is dedicated to helping those outside our walls, not just through words and deeds, but through financial support. As a congregation, we pledge 12% of our annual budget (and in any event, no less than the previous year) to Mission Giving and Benevolence. For two years in a row (2014 and 2015), we have provided the largest financial support of any congregation to the Metropolitan New York Synod.

Also, through the congregation's decision in 2009 to establish an endowed Mission Fund (thanks to a very generous bequest), we provide long term support of church and community ministries including spreading the gospel by extending the social mission of the church, providing long term mission support, and cultivating future generosity. We have an active stewardship committee which organizes annual campaigns. We encourage growing towards tithing. As we continually strive to do more, we are committed to growing our annual financial stewardship.

**Self-Study Item 4: Three significant events in the history of our congregation.**

1. The construction of our building, 1900. A gifted and visionary German-American congregation built a worship space that is feels almost baroque in its elegance and refinement. Its glory is a stained glass Tiffany window masterpiece, depicting Christ's triumphant return: an angel breaks a sword over her knee, ushering in a reign of peace. Coordinated design elements unite the sanctuary, and an ebullient celestial blue sets off the detailed white stonework and blue/green mosaic of the altar. Throughout the congregation's and the neighborhood's financial ups and downs, Advent's sanctuary has been a reminder of, and inspiration toward, the glories that are possible with God.
2. The ministry of Pastor John Gensel, 1960's. Pastor Gensel's urban ministry, preaching through the artistic and popular vernacular of the day, defined Advent's inclination to reach people where they are. A ministry of touching people in their daily lives, speaking their language and responding to them on their terms, now seems built into Advent's DNA. One major element of his work included ministering specifically to jazz musicians who worked late into the night and usually missed worship the next morning. Pastor Gensel spent a lot of late nights in jazz clubs. A second element during Pastor Gensel's ministry was the recruitment of a Spanish speaking parish worker, who connected Advent to mostly Puerto Rican people who had recently moved to New York City. Our Sunday School grew tremendously during this era.
3. Growth of congregation and leadership infrastructure, 2000-2016. As the Upper West Side's fortunes rebounded, so did Advent's congregation. Under strong leadership from Pastors Laura King and Elise Brown, we were able to attract new members and begin implementing a broad-based leadership

structure that draws on the many talents of our members. While this is always a work in process, our new pastor stands to inherit a solid foundation of congregational leadership and visioning.

6. Has your congregation or organization had significant conflict in recent history and, if so, what have you learned from that experience?

Advent is a growing, thriving and serving congregation. For a thirty-year period from the early 1970s through the 1990s, Advent struggled with low membership and an aging facility. The faithful and dedicated witness of our members and visionary pastoral and lay leadership helped lift the congregation from this valley. Key in this renaissance was the formation of a partnership with Broadway United Church of Christ (BUCC). BUCC funded the renovations of Advent's building in exchange for a 20-year residency agreement, later extended to 40 years. Through God's grace and this partnership, many new avenues opened for Advent's mission and ministries, including emphasis on outreach, hospitality, invitation and giving.

We had hoped that our partnership with BUCC would extend beyond the building into mission and ministry together. Sadly, the relationship between the congregations never progressed much beyond a limited calendar of some joint worship services. After 20 years together, differences between our visions for the future of our congregations became greater than our common cause, and both congregations voted to end our covenant. BUCC will vacate our building in September 2016.

Advent is proud of the way its leadership committed to open dialogue and outreach throughout the BUCC conflict. We ultimately realized, though, that cultural differences—between active and passive congregational models, between histories of volunteer leadership and paid leadership, and between financial scarcity and financial affluence—could stymie progress even between congregations with many shared beliefs and goals. We learned that we are stronger and more resilient than we had realized. We learned that building a true partnership means building multiple personal relationships, and not just authoring similar vision statements.