

ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, CAPITOL HILL

PARISH PROFILE
2011

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MISSION STATEMENT

“ St. Mark's Episcopal Church is an open community, welcoming people wherever they are on their faith journey. We celebrate the gifts of God that empower us to engage boldly in the struggles of life and to care for others with love, justice, and compassion. ”



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The parish was founded in 1867 as a mission to Federal workers on Capitol Hill. After holding services in a small frame building located across Third Street from our present location, the congregation built our current Late Victorian Neo-Romanesque church in two phases, begun in 1888 and completed in 1894. The church flourished at the turn of the century and served as the Pro-Cathedral (1896-1902) of the Washington Diocese, during construction of the present-day Washington National Cathedral.

In our recent history, the clergy who have shared with us in the shaping of our communal life are the Rev. Paul Abernathy, our Rector since 1998; his predecessor, the Rev. Jim Adams (1966-96); and his predecessor, the Rev. Bill Baxter (1954-66). Bill Baxter's assignment when he came to St. Mark's was to guide the congregation through its closing as attendance had dwindled severely. Instead, he made a number of innovative changes that revitalized the congregation, improved attendance, and forestalled the notion of closing the





church. Jim Adams, during his thirty years here, enhanced the programs begun by Bill Baxter, most notably the adult Christian Education program. St. Mark's traditions continue to thrive, with Paul Abernathy, including our education program. He recently challenged the parish to become more fully engaged with the world beyond our doors. We have begun the process of discovering what this will mean for us. This year, Paul and the Vestry have voted to launch a Capital Campaign that is about more than just bricks and mortar to build new offices and meeting space. It will be a springboard for making the parish more accessible and sustainable in the long term.

We continue to evolve and grow, and our current attempt to redefine our mission is normal behavior for this parish. St. Mark's is a community of people trying to make sense of our lives in a religious context of Judeo-Christian values while learning to become ever more inclusive. If we are not already, we wish to become a truly open and loving, progressive Christian community.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

St. Mark's is enriched by a history of both valuing and questioning beliefs. Some of us believe in a benevolent God, some in a personal God, and some aren't quite sure about God at all. We find more value in being confronted with questions that lead to deeper questions than in being presented with traditional answers. An overwhelming majority of the parish believes that God exists, whether as creator, deity or a spiritual force. Others in the community believe that Jesus is the Son of God, suggesting some degree of traditional Christian belief; some are skeptics and agnostics. We also welcome people of other faiths.

The people of St. Mark's attach great importance to being open to a wide range of spiritual beliefs, and to welcoming everyone. Moreover, it is important to us that we continue to have open



discussion of our religious beliefs, and we welcome having our assumptions challenged. We embrace reverence and irreverence, believers and skeptics, and traditional and non-traditional families. We find satisfaction in our practice of open discussions of controversial issues.

Rather than polarizing our community, notions of skepticism and belief exist as a necessary, almost comfortable, tension within most of us. In the main, nearly all accept that they are on a faith journey... a journey for greater understanding of themselves and the world around them and fulfillment of the responsibilities thereby implied.



No doubt many find St Mark's somewhat unorthodox in our interpretations of the Gospel, in our liturgy, as well as in our Christian Education discipline. However, St Mark's believes that, in providing a progressive and life-giving home to all those who pass over our doorstep, we give everyone the opportunity to belong. Our collective goal is to be conscious at all times that the way we behave toward one another, both within our community and beyond, is the fullest expression of what we truly believe.

LEADERSHIP AND SHARED MINISTRY: LAITY/CLERGY/VESTRY

For many years the ethos of St. Mark's has centered on a vision of ministry shared by laity and clergy. The Rector is responsible for hiring, supervising, and discharging the staff. In addition to

the Assistant/Associate Rector, current staff positions include Director of Music, Director of Youth and Family Ministries, Parish Administrator for Finance and Membership, Parish Administrator for Programs and Facilities, Bookkeeper, and Maintenance Contractor.

The policymaking body is the Vestry, which consists of a Senior and a Junior Warden, elected annually with a term limit of two consecutive years, and nine Vestry members, who serve staggered three-year terms, and the Rector. Elections are usually contested and held at the well-attended annual parish meeting, which takes place during Lent.



GOVERNANCE AND THE FIVE PILLARS OF COMMUNAL LIFE AT ST MARK'S

Our governance structure works through five "Pillars." Lay members chair each of these pillars and all of our activities are placed under one of these pillars. Pillar chairpersons make governance decisions within the limits of their delegated authority. When an issue goes beyond the limits of their authority, pillar chairpersons call on the Rector and/or the Vestry. This actually works quite simply in practice. Semi-autonomous groups reach their own decisions and direct their own efforts unless a new initiative requires Pillar and/or Vestry approval. When necessary, the Vestry is apprised of the issues and renders its decision, for or against the initiative. Whenever the Vestry deems necessary, it turns the matter over to the parish for its consideration and discussion. When discussion creates consensus, the Vestry formalizes the new policy. For example, we discussed, studied and held town meetings



on the issue of blessing of same-sex unions. More than a year after we began, we adopted our policy of blessing same-sex unions, and later, when the D.C. Council passed a law legalizing same-sex marriage, sanctioned the conduct of same-sex marriages at St. Mark's.

The five pillars are Worship, Christian Education, Outreach, Arts, and Parish Life. Youth activities, other than Sunday school, are not part of the Pillar structure and have their own organizational structure and leadership, under the aegis of the youth director. Young people are often invited to participate in the Pillar activities, in whatever ways are appropriate.



I. WORSHIP

St. Mark's offers three services on Sunday, at 9 a.m., 11:15 a.m., and 5 p.m. in the nave, and one at noon on Thursday, in our chapel. We celebrate the Holy Eucharist at all four services, generally using Rite II. The Sunday services are held in the round with a central altar; the chancel serves as home for the organ and choir. The newest addition to our worship service is a Children's Chapel at 9 a.m. Songs, drawings that are prayers and a confession ritual are part of this hands-on, kid-friendly gathering, led by clergy and with musical accompaniment. After a simple service of prayer and song, children return to the nave for communion.



“ Our “Sermon Seminar” following the 9 a.m. service on Sunday is unusual and deserves special mention. About 9:45 a.m., when teachers and children leave for Sunday School, the congregation enjoys a lively, social 15 minutes before reassembling for announcements, readings, and the sermon. After the sermon, all have an opportunity to respond to the preacher and congregation with whatever has come up for them. This tradition has engaged many, including a few who come early before the 11:15 a.m. service, finding the lively exchange of ideas at Sermon Seminar deepens their Sunday worship experience. ”

Worship planning is a collaborative effort among the clergy, the music director, and the laity. The Worship Pillar is chaired by two lay people who coordinate many aspects of worship planning and execution. The Liturgy Planning Team, meeting monthly, dreams its way into designing our worship services and assists with sermon planning by discussing the appointed readings and sharing personal reactions. The writing of the sermon is the task

of the preacher, making whatever use of the planning input she/he finds relevant. We value preaching that is, most importantly, grounded in the issues and concerns of our personal life experience and relevant to our daily lives. We look for sermons that are illuminated by scripture, intellectually-stimulating, theologically-based, and encourage the preacher to draw on his or her own life experience.

The laity performs many functions during worship services: preparing the altar, acolyting, reading the Hebrew scripture and Epistle, leading the Prayers of the People, providing the bread and the wine for Communion, and passing the Communion cups. We do not license our lay assistants, accepting all who volunteer and providing training as necessary. Our adult Chancel Choir and Boys and Girls' Choir enhance our worship on a regular basis.

“ St. Mark’s practices an open Communion. In the invitation to Communion our presiding clergy will say, “Wherever you have come from, wherever you are going, whatever you believe, whatever you do not believe, you are welcome at this table. For, though we celebrate according to the rituals of the Episcopal Church, this is God’s meal, not our own. As such, we place no restrictions upon it.” ”



II. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

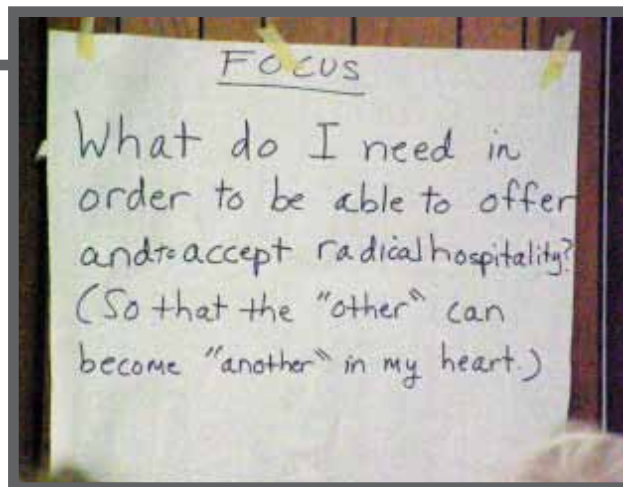
Our approach to Christian Education began in 1956 when Rector Bill Baxter asked the Rev. Dr. Charles Penniman, then Director of the Education Center in St. Louis, to help St. Mark’s create an Adult Confirmation class. For Dr. Penniman, human existence is marked by the pressure of events that require us to make life and death decisions, decisions by which we seek to make sense out of our lives. Paraphrasing Archbishop William Temple, Penniman emphasized that religion is inherently a dynamic activity we are all engaged in: seeking to make sense out of what appears to us as inherently nonsense. The theological task of exploring this aspect of our lives Penniman called “functional education” because it aims to help people function in their lives.

Functional education is both an issue-centered theology and a pedagogical method for planning and facilitating conversations in youth and adult classes. It is used as a tool to explore issues and concerns relevant to our current lives. It helps us discover connections among Biblical lore, beliefs, and doctrine with the choices we face in our own lives. This approach involves three key elements: the experiential (our lives as actually lived), the biblical (engaging the stories of our religious tradition), and the spiritual (our search for meaning in an ambiguous world).



The Christian Education Pillar is chaired by four lay Co-Directors, serving two-year terms, whose job it is to design both the Sunday School and Adult Education program. The Christian Education Co-Directors then recruit over one hundred volunteers who teach and supervise the classes. This year there have been 278 adults taking, leading, and supervising adult functional classes; 237 adults participating in bible and religious studies classes; and 129 registered children, adult leaders and supervisors in our Sunday School program. Christian Education at St. Mark’s encompasses both functional and non-functional

classes, including the Montessori-based Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (offered for our youngest children), three weekly Bible classes, Education For Ministry (EFM), workshops, retreats, meditation and lecture series. It is a dynamic program in which new courses continue to emerge and evolve, including our two core adult gateway courses, Introduction to St. Mark's and the Life, Community and Faith (LCF) class. In 2010-11 the program's focus is "to engage in our shared search for meaning and belonging." This extensive program has been lay-led and financially self-supporting for over forty years.



III. OUTREACH



Founded as a mission church, St. Mark's served the surrounding community in many ways during its first half century, including founding other mission churches on the Hill. In the 1960's, with the rise of gentrification, the church used arts activities as a bridge between the races, rented the parish hall to a Head Start program, and helped found the Capitol Hill Group Ministry (CHGM), an important social services program in our neighborhood. Currently our greatest outreach financial commitment supports the CHGM in addressing the needs of low-income and homeless families in the neighborhood. In recent years there has been an upsurge of activity and interest in the Outreach Pillar, lay-led by two co-chairs who head the Outreach Board. This committee holds fundraisers, and disburses the funds raised, as well as those allocated from the Vestry for outreach. Programs are reviewed annually for parish participation, effectiveness, and need. Most of our parish projects operate in conjunction with larger organizations, which gladly

accept our labor and financial support. A few efforts are strictly "in-house" and change over time as new initiatives arise. All told, Outreach lists over twenty different programs. The following is a list of some of our current major activities.

- * The Shelter Project: In conjunction with Capitol Hill Group Ministry, our shelter project provides overnight accommodation and meals for one or two homeless families in July and August. Each family has a private room at night and new shower facilities have recently been installed to support the project.
- * Partner Arms Housing: Transitional Housing Corporation assists homeless families who wish to have their own housing. Parishioners furnish a low-cost apartment for a family to live in for up to two years. During that time each family member receives support in counseling, therapy and life skills.
- * The Honduras Committee: Started and shepherded for twenty years by St. Mark's parishioners, the Honduras Committee sends senior high youth, along with adult leaders, on a two-week service trip to Honduras. This is an opportunity most of our youth look forward to as





they come of age. Additionally, adult trips are also regularly held. As a result of this effort, St. Mark's has entered into a covenant relationship with Sustainable Harvest International in Honduras.

* The Soup Kitchen: The nearby Church of the Brethren runs a soup kitchen for the homeless that is open six days a week. One Sunday per month St. Mark's parishioners bring an average of 30 casseroles to church. A small group of volunteers delivers them to the Church of the Brethren and stays on for one to two hours preparing additional food for the next day.

* The Lenten Mite Box: Each year, prior to Ash Wednesday, we provide a booklet which gives a daily fact regarding poverty and suffering, and a suggestion for related giving. For example, if we mention the lack of electricity in a developing nation, we might suggest that the family give \$.25 for each television set in their home. Usually these funds are donated to a pre-selected charitable cause.

IV. ARTS

St. Mark's has a history of integrating dance, drama and creative expression into our worship services. The St. Mark's Players were founded in 1983 to provide an opportunity for parishioners and actors from the Washington area to perform relevant drama in our beautiful, historic space. An expansion of an earlier Chancel Drama program, this group has grown to performing works of great artistic and technical challenge, as well as often provoking much thought and discussion. This year the Players are performing one musical and two plays in our nave.

The St. Mark's Dance Studio began in the 1960's and while it is under the Arts Pillar it is also, in part, an outreach effort. Low-cost ballet and jazz dance lessons are offered for children and adults. Adult parishioners and a few of the older students occasionally perform liturgical dance as part of our worship.

The Music Studio has offered low-cost lessons in piano, voice and organ. Occasionally, we offer concert performances by visiting artists, as well as Evensong and an annual choir concert by our Chancel Choir. St. Mark's has been one of the major venues for the Early Music Festival since its inception. Our Director of Music is in the process of developing a new music program.

The Yoga Studio offers a schedule of weekly classes and has been self-supporting for over 30 years. Visual Arts promotes our visual artists by mounting seasonal exhibitions in the church. A writers' group and a photography group are also active.



V. PARISH LIFE

The Parish Life Pillar organizes events that bring us together outside of Sunday morning services. Parish Life has no regularly-scheduled meetings; instead its two lay chairs identify and meet with volunteers responsible for each activity. Some of our social events are related to other Pillars; we mark Maundy Thursday with a Tenebrae

service preceded by a foot washing liturgy and a large potluck supper; we celebrate the Shelter Project with a dinner for the families sheltered and all of the volunteers. We have committees, both ad hoc and standing, that organize special events such as dinners, dances, the annual Crab Feast, Mardi Gras, and the parish-wide picnic.

“ One of our distinctive institutions is the Winged Lion Pub, open Sundays after the 11:15 a.m. service. Each week volunteers prepare lunch for those wishing to stay, often

80 to 100 folks. Wine, juices, iced tea and other beverages are available but the unique item is our very own Winged Lion Beer, brewed and bottled by parishioners. Our parish brewmeister often prepares special flavored beers for holidays and special events. Pub Lunch has become an important opportunity for us to share in fellowship and to build community. Newcomers are welcomed with a free lunch. ”



Many social groups have formed for people with common interests: the St. Mark's Reading Group, the Film Club, the Third Agers (60+), the Lambda Lions (for gays and lesbians), the 20/30's Group and Woman to Woman. There are also a number of small private groups, men's, women's, couples, book, travel, investment, and others, created and sustained by parishioners who perceived a need .

Once a year, in early June, about 100-150 adults and children travel to our annual lay-led parish retreat. It is a chance for the community to get away, renew

acquaintances, and make new friends, but most importantly, it is a time to wrestle with significant themes in a series of large and small group settings. It is a gathering which renews both the spiritual and social fabric of the parish.





YOUTH

St. Mark's is blessed with a large number of young people. In 2010-11 about 100 children are registered for Sunday School classes from Pre-K through 12th grade. There are currently 135 children active in youth activities. The full-time Director of Youth and Family Ministries plans and oversees youth activities separate from Sunday School. The Youth Director coordinates with parish lay leaders to incorporate the needs and interests of youth into the full range of activities of all five Pillars. Our young people serve as acolytes, occasional readers during worship services, sing in the Boys and Girls' Choir, perform in St. Mark's Players productions, prepare bag lunches for the homeless, travel with our teen Honduras service trips to share their energy and skills with others, and participate with their families in our June weekend parish retreat.

WHO WE ARE

The St. Mark's community of around 750 adults and 132 children includes a large number of 60+ seniors with a longtime commitment as well as a dynamically-growing group of young families with children and young professionals. The parish has 367 pledging units. Those 22 to 59 years of age represent 43% of the pledging members and those over the age of 60, many of whom have attended St. Mark's for decades, represent 56% of pledging members. These two groups both enrich and draw on the resources of our community in very different ways.

Recent focus of the 9 a.m. service to meet the needs of families with children has resulted in increasing numbers of children and younger adults in the parish. Launched in fall 2009, the 5 p.m. service draws a different demographic of people of mixed ages, attracted to a simple service that is more contemplative. The average total attendance of all Sunday services is 284 persons.



Approximately 40 percent of our members live on Capitol Hill, and the remainder comes from neighborhoods across the larger metropolitan area of Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland. Some members live far away and participate in parish life through occasional visits and our St. Mark's e-group.

Statistically, approximately.....

- * 55% of our members are female... 45% are male
- * 22% of members have children in the home
- * 78% are married or have partners...22% are single
- * 60% have an annual household income of \$100,000+
- * 25% grew up as Episcopalians...
- * 50% as other Protestants
- * 20% have attended St. Mark's for fewer than 5 years
- * 17% have been members for over 30 years



CHALLENGES

St. Mark's parish looks for new ways to meet present and anticipated challenges. Today these are the challenges we face:

- * To design and realize our dream for our upcoming Capital Campaign to expand and enhance our office and meeting space.
- * To create more ways for our parish to become more fully engaged with the wider world.
- * To support and grow our active membership in numbers, diversity, and commitment.

For more information, visit our website at www.stmarks.net, and print out our detailed 2009-2010 Strategy at www.stmarks.net/assets/pdf/strategy_large.pdf.

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