

# St. John's

Episcopal Church

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**EXTRA! EXTRA!**  
PARISH PROFILE EDITION  
MARCH 2020

A Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts: [www.diocesewma.org](http://www.diocesewma.org)

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## FROM THE VESTRY St. John's is "Given to Hospitality."

We want to be radically welcoming and have undertaken physical transformation of our spaces to ensure they are fully accessible to all who gather here. Our interim period has helped us find flexibility to try new things in liturgy, formation, and use of our spaces. We are eager to develop our own spirituality, and to be even more accommodating of seekers. Different forms of worship, and additional formation programs, have expanded our view of what it means to be active-duty Christians. Our new rector will find a community of intelligent, energetic parishioners ready to explore new ideas and to grow!

Our church established the community feeding program and the homeless shelter and continues to participate in these efforts along with many others. We are a typical Episcopal church in our zeal for community ministry, and the involvement of many in a large variety of ministries is significant. We'd like to tie this good work into a more conscious rendering of doing God's work in the community as members of St. John's: "Doing the Gospel."

Our three teenage youth groups influence our flexibility for change, as teens' needs change by the half-generation. Our smallest children worship on Sundays from the "praground" right up front. Church school children join the service each week and take on their own ministries, like preparing the ashes for Ash Wednesday for all downtown Northampton churches. We have long welcomed LGBTQ+ persons and are gender-inclusive. Our youth groups welcome youth from other churches into their extra-curricular activities, and we are actively engaged in common ministries and worship with other congregations in town, as well as with other Episcopal churches in the Pioneer Valley.

We are all busy people, and we know that our desire to expand opportunities for our own spiritual development through Christian formation activities will be mitigated by the pressures of our daily lives. We seek a leader who will corral our energy, help guide us to fulfilling lives as Christians, and will lead us all in enhanced pastoral care.

# GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY

## "Feed My Sheep"

John 21:15-17

*"What do I need to do, as I go about my days at St John's, to ensure that this place will continue to grow and flourish?"*

Lee Anderson speaks to a member of the Parish Profile Committee while preparing for the day's community meal. He stands in the brand-new kitchen at St. John's, sleeves rolled up and hands sunk in a huge bowl tossing collard greens with tomatoes, oil, and spices.

The meal offered three noondays a week at St. John's is open to all—some come to eat, some also for the fellowship, some simply to serve. The MANNA program was started here at St. John's 33 years ago. Lee has been with it since his first days here 12 years ago, now serving as creative chef, volunteer organizer, encourager, and treasurer.

This is Lee's story. It is also our story. We have watched him and marveled at his growth.

The church has been almost his whole life ever since that early weekday morning when he was driving by St. John's on his way to work.

“ **Something that was not me drew me here, and then something drew me back. I think it is the force of goodness. I call it God.** ”

As Lee entered, the sanctuary was empty but for David Hentz, a retired military veteran who in recent years had taken vows in the Order of Julian of Norwich. He was seated way up under the dome of the apse, alone, reciting aloud the service of Morning Prayer. David offered him a prayer book and Lee hesitantly joined in the recitations and prayers. Afterward they conversed and embraced. Lee's story and St. John's story changed that day.

When he first joined MANNA as a volunteer, it looked like a scrappy, make-do "soup kitchen" with a lot of heart and spunk and loyal volunteers. Canned food from the Food Bank was being prepared and served out of a cramped and dilapidated kitchen in the windowless basement referred to as the "undercroft."

Now the MANNA community meal is prepared and served upstairs from a sparkling kitchen, with a walk-in cooler, and the tables are arranged in the renovated front parlor, a bright, warm space that still holds its elegance with rich wainscoting, original to this 127-year-old building.

The menu is now a farm-to-table organic dining experience. Generous farmers deliver seasonal vegetables from our Valley's abundance. Cooked squash, fresh green salads with mint, and fresh fruit are all now a normal part of MANNA's offerings.

A self-employed small business owner, Lee quickly became part of the leadership team at the church, taking on—in addition to MANNA duties—increasing responsibilities for building maintenance, finances, pastoral visits, and more.

Lee was by no means the only one to get the ambitious building program started; but many feel that the impetus, the vision, and the endurance to see it through were modeled by the one who came off the street to embrace this place and the people in it.

*"I remember Bishop Scruton asking us where is the church going if you stay put, stay steady, as you are—it may not look like it, but you will be dying," he said. The Bishop understood that St. John's was being called to change and grow. What does the church want to be in 10, 20, 50 years? What would be happening in our world and what would our church need to look like to serve people? 'Given to Hospitality' is carved above our sanctuary entrance, so this meditation of welcoming the stranger has been central to our ministry from the start. Current needs were pressing and crying out for the expansion.*

*We could not serve a person in a wheelchair downstairs when MANNA was housed in the basement. Cooking and serving in that space was already strained to its limits. MANNA was simply unsustainable in its cramped, code-violating space that had always been seen as temporary. The choice before us was take the risk and live into a vision of growth or make do with our limitations, and stagnate.*

*Had we not taken the risk, St. John's could certainly be congratulated for being prudent by keeping the numbers on paper safely acceptable. But would we simply become a little club, whose service to others went nowhere beyond those already inside? It was St. John's who launched MANNA, and St. John's who led in an interfaith effort to start the cot shelter here. This is who we are and we are proud of it."*

## FROM THE PARISH PROFILE COMMITTEE

Tasked with interpreting the Fall 2019 survey and preparing our parish profile, we engaged in several forms of listening and information gathering. The profile committee invited everyone in the community to offer reflections on their personal experiences and their perspectives on the life of the community. Many have contributed essays (included in whole or part) that are seen as integral to our work. We attended coffee hours after both services for relaxed conversations with our fellow parishioners. We also offered a festive afternoon "Hospitality-Tea"—another opportunity to be heard while enjoying treats and Christmas carols. We've met often to prayerfully dig in to the data and the dreams. We found it best to keep the profile largely in the very words of the many different voices we heard. We hope you find yourself inspired by the pages that follow.

*We are Judson Brown, Ruth Henderson, Priscilla Lane, Madeleine Leone, Catherine Linberg, and Jennifer Reid.*

# A New Start

The people of St. John's are eager for a new start and a fresh and dynamic vision for ministries and mission to go with an expanded and more accessible building and facilities.

The new facility, at a cost of \$2.5 million—which involved taking on debt—represents a fiscal challenge as well as an exciting opportunity for growth and expansion. The new and improved building is a resource to a broad cross-section of the community with benefits accruing both to the wider community and to the church.

The people of St. John's are looking to find ways to grow in diversity, to attract new members by demonstrating the relevance and power of the Gospel to address both deeply personal and social concerns. We need to attract and engage youth and young families inspired by a minister with a modern- and forward-looking perspective. With God's grace, St. John's will demonstrate our commitment to both the deeply personal and broadly social concerns of the Gospel.

We want to embrace the new that is at the heart of the Good News: the call for a new humanity and a new creation. We want to explore new expressions of spirituality in order to be responsive to seekers across all religious divides (the Emmaus study group, Lectio Divina, and the Taizé contemplative service are examples of this). We are eager to have the new space as well as our gorgeous, resonant, Romanesque sanctuary employed for the expression of the creative arts in the belief that creative art and religious feeling issue from the same Source.

At the same time we are committed to the strength and beauty—and, yes, even the complicated rituals—of Anglican tradition. We are reminded that Jesus said

“bring out from your storeroom things both old and new.”



# To Equip the Saints for Ministry

Ephesians 4:12

During the construction people were contributing their time, talent, and treasure to complete an expansion of the building that includes a new kitchen, new meeting rooms, multiple bathrooms, a shower, and an elevator making the entire premises accessible. It was hard not to notice that in addition to our rector retiring, several active members chose to leave—which can be common during a transition. In moving forward, we aspire to elevate the importance of self-care for the rector and our lay volunteers. Over-extended people often feel alone, unheard, and frustrated. In the future, let us use this building and the difficult lessons learned to revitalize our ministries, to better affirm each other, to enthusiastically welcome newcomers, and truly aspire to walk in love.

Given the challenges that define our times, the church is a haven for meaningful relationships. It invites active and sincere engagement with others in community building. St. John's has many opportunities for such participation, and the profile committee believes that every avenue of participation is vital to the health of the whole community.

Participation does not necessarily involve a formal “ministry.” Simple attendance at worship and engaging in fellowship hour may be fine for some. Still it is often in and through the shared endeavor of a small group or ministry that participation deepens and flowers into Christian friendships.



# Sanctuary & Nourishment

A conversation with David Rosenberger

The rainbow flag at the entrance of our church is both a symbol of welcoming and acceptance. For many, it is the only reason to continue through the doors. David Rosenberger, a longtime parishioner, has always had the heart of a caretaker, evidenced by his many years working as a social worker in hospice care and as an RN. He considers the sign over the entranceway “GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY” as an opportunity to help visitors feel comfortable—particularly during the first five minutes.

*“We are missing the bigger story if we don't see that people are hurting and in need of our support. Many are asking ‘Where do I fit in? Will this church provide a sanctuary to ease my pain?’ That sign should always be the thrust of what we do and how we behave. It is a doorway into the deeper understanding of loving your neighbor as yourself and to loving God.”*

*Nourishment is the center of everything. If we don't nourish ourselves through Christ, we are missing out. Nourishment from the Holy Table is nourishment for our soul. I came to St. John's because the Episcopal Church supports the gay community. I didn't realize how much I had missed church until I walked through that front door for the first time, so many years ago. I discovered people who have become like family to me. It was never a gay thing; but rather a human thing. We are really all not that different.*

*As time passes, with aging and illness at my door, I still struggle finding ways to be useful. I don't have the answers, but continue striving to both give and receive nourishment and sanctuary for myself and others.”*



**The mission of  
St. John's Church, Northampton,**  
is to show forth the Way of Love embodied in Christ Jesus, through: regular worship, prayer, and Christian formation within the traditions of the Episcopal Church growing an inclusive, welcoming, and diverse community committed to peace, justice, hope, and loving service of our neighbors.

*Approved by the Vestry February 29, 2020*

**WORSHIP** in the church's exquisite sanctuary is central to the life of St. John's. The worship space has been freshly painted and a sprinkler system has been installed as part of the recent building project. A new ramp will allow anyone using an assistive mobility device to reach all parts of the space.

*"To me the most essential aspect of our corporate life at St. John's is our service of worship including—in addition to our regular Sunday services of Holy Eucharist—baptisms, weddings, memorial services and celebrations of other holy days in the church year."*

“ **We can undertake to do all kinds of things besides this, but if worship is not at the center of what we do there is little need for us to exist.**” —Ron Perera

# WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Worship is central but not in a single mode for the people of St. John's with their diverse interests and preferences. We currently offer several distinct options:

The “eight o'clockers” prefer a quieter, perhaps more prayerful, and more intimate service, and they value the close relationships that develop in this context.

## The Essence of the Early Service

*"This service fits the needs of a distinct subset of the congregation. It can mean ease in reaching out to every other person in attendance when Passing the Peace and sometimes includes a deeply felt, 'How are you?' to be followed up on after the service.*

*It feels as if each of us there is committed to each other's well-being. Several 'ambassadors' will follow up when one of us is absent without a pre-announced reason for the absence. We are 'Care Givers' as well as 'Care Takers,' giving and receiving care out of concern for our fellow beloveds. We know one another well enough in general to witness the divine in each other and in this sacred space.*

*When the service is over I leave feeling a peace which passes understanding.* —Judy Misterka

## The Ten O'Clock Service Includes Music

*"Music is a vital part of who we are in the main services of corporate worship. Music, particularly organ music, is both a vehicle for worship and an aid to worship. Why the organ? Quite simply because the organ is closely identified with the very architectural and acoustical fabric of church buildings and composers over many ages have composed church music for it. It sounds glorious in large resonant spaces, and it can serve for both the most intimate music as well as the grandest."* —Ron Perera

St. John's is blessed with the services of our organist and choirmaster Grant Moss, who is a faculty member at Smith College and an organ recitalist. The choir at present is reduced in numbers and is looking for revitalization—as in fact are several of the other worship ministries, including the Altar Guild and acolytes.

## Annie Rodgers Joyfully Prays Twice

"He who sings prays twice"—St. Augustine

*"For me, singing in the choir is an experience of the senses. I hear the other three parts dancing around my own part. The music is around me. The music goes into me. The music goes through me. Unlike other genres of music, what is the most extraordinary part of singing liturgical music is the way the words and music are woven together to become prayer. For me, it is one way that I pray. Therefore, I am mindful of what I am doing. Stand or sit erect. Breathe. Pay attention to the words. Watch the organist. Listen to others. Listen to my body. Sing it the best of my ability. That is the physicality of singing. There is also the emotional component and the spiritual component of singing. When the words and music marry and swirl in the air, I am lifted to a different plane. I am often moved to tears.*

*For me, singing in the choir is a joyous endeavor, and*

“ **it asks the best of me that I can offer. It's why I love singing in the choir.**”

## Fellowship Continues after the Services

Coffee hour fellowship provides a critical venue for visitors to be welcomed and for parishioners to socialize. This ministry has been led by a single committed individual, Gwendolyn Greene, over the last few years. Recently a dedicated committee has stepped up to share the load for this pivotal ministry. Sue Kucharski orchestrates the gathering after the eight o'clock service. “Our hope is that the sense of comradeship and fellowship created during this ministry will encourage new people to return again. I believe as Christians we all have different gifts from God, and we should use those gifts to serve others. No task is too small in this service.” —Gwendolyn Greene

## HELP WANTED: PREACHER

**A WORD ON PREACHING:** Elder and Smith College professor emeritus Don Robinson in his notes to the committee took care to emphasize the gifted preachers St. John's has had and also the versatility of our pulpit. For example: Sermons in sign language were given when the Rev. Richard Mahaffy, who grew up in the church, was still here. (Dick, a graduate of the Clarke School for the Deaf, was critical to the establishment of a ministry to the deaf by the previous rector.) Our Priest Associate (now posted in China), theoretical physicist the Rev. Dr. Michael Ramsey-Musolf's sermons uniquely grafted cutting-edge quantum mechanics and cosmology into the Bible texts. St. John's also has encouraged lay preaching. St. John's hopes the next rector will be a gifted preacher.

## Tamsin Jones Farmer Takes Liturgy and Lectoring Seriously

"My most meaningful moments at St. John's have come through the liturgy. It happens that sometimes I have come to church on a Sunday out of a sense of duty, yet feeling despair and deep sadness over some event shaking the country or the world—there has been much to despair over in the past few years. And yet, on occasion, there has been something in the liturgy or in the assigned scripture readings for the day, or in the choice of hymn, that has spoken to my hurting spirit in a very precise way, a gift of grace. I believe this is the strength and wisdom of the liturgical traditions of Christianity—that they enable us to enter into a river of wisdom and the insight of a community of people that transcends place, time, language, and culture. And in moments of grace that deep and rich (and diverse) tradition gives us just what we needed to hear.

“ **I want to read in such a way that all can hear what they need to hear from it and in such a way that the words are what they remember, not me.** ”



## First Wednesdays for Taizé

The once-monthly Taizé candlelit and contemplative service has attracted parishioners as well as many from outside the congregation. “I would say the strength of Taizé is our offering a service of a different and much-needed kind at a time when it is most needed. Because it's led by laypeople (a core strength), it allows the rector an opportunity to worship with us with minimal involvement. Taizé is one of my favorite styles of music, and the tradition of communal singing is so moving to me that it keeps me driving the hour and fifteen minutes from Williamstown each month.” —Alexander Bryan

## Wednesdays in the Chapel

A mid-week midday Eucharist serves a small group who value the quiet, the intimacy, and the community of their gathering. We have reclaimed the west transept (which was during construction home to temporary offices, storage, and much sprinkler work) and found there a chapel of truly lovely proportions for this service.

# OUR YOUTH:

## ALIVE IN THE GREAT, GREEN, GROWING TIME



### Godly Play Spirals through Primary and Secondary Education

Not surprisingly in a college town and in a parish located literally on campus, St. John's religious education program for youth is an unquestionable strength and clearly provides not only the students but equally their teachers with meaningful experiences. Our programs have at their core the Montessori-inspired Godly Play curriculum offered from Pre-K through high school graduation.

“**Godly Play has been a big part of my childhood. I love it very much, and I do miss not having it every Sunday now that I'm getting ready for pilgrimage. I grew up listening to the stories and I love them very much.**” —Sophie, age 15

We have two newly painted classrooms dedicated to Godly Play for primary grades, a brand-new conference room with cabinets full of Godly Play materials for the younger teens, as well as a dedicated space for teens in confirmation class and readying for their pilgrimage.

It is hard to overestimate how deeply woven into the church's corporate experience over many years is this tradition of the pilgrimage. It has changed many lives, as several essay writers witness. The church supports professional staff for religious education and has a gifted and inspired leader in parishioner Olivia Leone.

### A View from the Vestry — Emma Barnes

*“Throughout my time at St. John's, I have flourished as a young person in the church. When I was ten and experienced my first Sunday with Godly Play, I told my dad that this church was the one. Ever since then, I have loved learning and growing with the other members of my youth group here.*

*The community has been extremely supportive of me. My most recent endeavor has been serving as the only youth member of the vestry for 2019. At my first vestry meeting I was invited to write a prayer for transition. Here is the prayer that I wrote, which we say together now every Sunday:*

*‘Dear Heavenly Father, Please guide us with Your wisdom and be with us as we look for a new rector. Grant us patience and grace as a congregation, so that we may be unified in this time of transition. As our parish changes, grant us the courage and openness that we need to stay true to ourselves, while keeping You present in all that we do. All this we ask in the name of Your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.’*

### Maddy Leone Loves Leading the Acolytes

*“Being an acolyte at St. John's has been one of the most rewarding things for me. At the age of ten I decided to become a junior acolyte—meaning that I wore blue and assisted the senior acolyte. I slowly climbed the ranks from torchbearer to crucifer, to bishop's helper, and finally now I'm head acolyte.*

*As a junior in high school, I have many activities and commitments to fulfill. It seems that being a teen heavily involved in church is a rare occurrence; but here at St. John's we teens are deeply involved. Having the experience to serve at God's table and to serve a congregation that has become my second family is one of the best gifts God has given me.”*

### A Pilgrim Wonders:

Am I really inclusive?

Do I see God in everyone I meet?

I think it's fair to say that none of us were overly confident that the answers to these questions could be found in San Francisco. However, perhaps contradictory to our ambivalence toward what was to come, our 2019 pilgrimage to San Francisco was a psychologically and spiritually transformative experience none of us were entirely prepared for.

Our spiritual journey began in the early morning of Tuesday, July 9, and although navigating the airport was a bit hectic, we all thrummed with excitement for what was set ahead of us. And for good reason, too. Throughout the week, we planned and discovered an abundance of new themes, environments and activities, including getting cultured at the GLBT History Museum, exploring the story of Alcatraz Island, finding inner peace in the Berkeley Rose Garden, touring Grace Cathedral, collectively working to serve a community meal, and delving into the art of forest bathing in the Redwood parks.

In order to support collaboration, fullness and open-mindedness, we unitedly separated ourselves from our phones during the entire week, the sole exception being for photography. It was quite a drastic adjustment; however, this allowed for deeper individual connection with each other, our surroundings, and God, no matter where we went.

Within each one of these activities planned during the week, not only were we able to communicate and connect with each other on a deeper level, but we found things within ourselves that we didn't necessarily expect. Every day we discovered experiences that introduced us to different perspectives and our--sometimes unanticipated--prejudices toward others, explored themes that moved us in inexplicable ways, engaged in community projects that challenged our own individual definitions of inclusivity, and found God in unpredictable places and people.

The nightly discussions we had--sometimes lasting over an hour--allowed us to express our own opinions and personal reflections about the day's discoveries of ourselves and of God in a space of safety and non-judgment. These discussions provided comfort physically as well as mentally and encouraged inclusivity within our group.

The little, less extravagant things were what I found to move me the most over the course of our pilgrimage. Collaboratively working to put food on the table every day, afternoons spent silently reading in the sun, deep discussions lasting late into the night, laughing through unorganized games of volleyball, navigating through the aisles of the supermarket with an overflowing shopping cart, and simply being unanimously supportive of each other throughout the week.

I personally was taken aback, to be honest, by how much I discovered about myself and my perspective when it comes to other people, as well as my ability--albeit unknown at first--to see God in people and places. Although it was frustrating at times to realize how judgmental I could be, it served as a way to realize and change the perspective I had unknowingly adopted. In addition, nothing was contrived or forcibly created; instead, I found that the moments in which I felt God were scattered and spontaneous, making them all the more memorable. Each one of us lived moments with ourselves, each other, and God that will remain unforgettable.

—Simone Gosnell

## Moe McElligott Plays the Holy Spirit

*“Several years ago during a sermon at St. John’s, I was asked to play the role of the Holy Spirit. I flitted in and out of the pews, asking a few parishioners why St. John’s was important in their lives—what were the gifts and blessings they had received as members of our church community. Their answers were wonderfully varied and powerful affirmations of God’s love for them.*

*I have always envisioned the Holy Spirit as this amazing breath of creativity--revealing endless possibilities of God’s Grace. If I were to cast someone in the role of the Holy Spirit, it would have been our late parishioner Mary Diamond. She epitomized the Holy Spirit at work in the small but mighty ways of everyday life. She was always ready with that “not-so-random act of kindness,” and with a word of encouragement. She saw us as God does—full of possibilities to love, and to lift up others in that love.*

*As we move forward into the new year and a new decade, the Holy Spirit continues to illuminate our journey of transition and change, while reminding us of the importance of gratitude for the past blessings that have made us who we are: God’s beloved community.*

*I believe Mary’s inspiration is with us on our journey.*

“I know the Holy Spirit’s creative and loving breath will continue to gently guide us forward.”

# WE LOVE TO SERVE

## Hospitality to & with Our Nearest Neighbors

As seems only appropriate for a church where “Given to Hospitality” is chiseled in the lunette over the front doors, the heart of our church is our kitchen. St. John’s, like Jesus, wants first and foremost to feed people, and we take this command literally.

### A View from the Kitchen

The main room in the household of God, as in any other household, is the kitchen, and the brand-new kitchen at St. John’s has finally been approved through all the various regulatory hoops. It is time at last for the kitchen to do what the Gospel mandates, to “feed the five thousand,”—or, in this case, the 663 Smith College students who showed up between 10 PM and 1 AM this past Saturday night (December 14, 2019), bleary-eyed from their finals study marathons, to be served pancakes and sausage and bacon and juice and fruit by a spirited team of parishioners. Strong coffee helped most everyone through.

This servers’ group was a real rag-tag community: teenagers and little kids, retirees and business folk, professors and social workers. The kitchen was a royal riot of classic rock, hilarious laughter, pancake batter overflowing great pouring jugs, clouds of atomized pork grease, the smell of burnt, sticky places where the syrup missed the cruets, and the roar of the commercial washer.

A great cheer went up each time a 50th diner was announced. (We knew by the pre-count of the plates.) This year was a Harry Potter theme, and so one of the movies was playing on a large screen at the end of the hall. There was a happy buzz of conversation at the tables. And with the parlors fairly bursting, dozens ate with their plates on their laps in the sanctuary. Sanctuary and nourishment, again.

“Given to Hospitality” is the motto of the church. The whole community, rich and poor, students and workers and unemployed, housed and homeless, is welcome to partake.



## Money Matters

For many years, St. John’s balanced its operating budget with income from our endowment (nearly \$1.5 million) and from a cell phone company that leases space on our tower. We are directing that income to meeting annual payments on the \$1 million loan we undertook to complete our building project (with about \$23,000 remaining annually to offset the operating budget of \$400,000) and have determined that we must raise additional gift revenue to meet the budget. In our first year of this effort, we foresee a shortfall based on pledges alone, as we experience the normal situation of churches in transition of having fewer pledging units this year. We are also investigating moving to a year-round, abundance-based stewardship program, and together with the non-pledgers, are tracking their financial contributions to learn how this model may affect our operating budget revenue.

[Click here for the 2019 Treasurer’s Report](#)

## We Are Surrounded by Smith College

This strong showing of hospitality to Smith students represents a foundation upon which a much broader campus ministry could be built, according to many in the parish. The church sits right at the center of the campus—now with a more pronounced footprint than ever. St. John’s has a long and interesting tradition of welcoming and ministering to Smith students. Here is something old ready to be made new.

Don Robinson points out “The Smith College campus literally surrounds our own: indeed, our property is the only land within their bounds that is not owned by the college.”

“This is both an opportunity and a challenge—and we currently do not make the most of it.”

## Spiritual Tips for Beyond Sundays

Eleanor Jones meets many past and present parishioners at Stop and Shop, the Hospice Shop where she volunteers, or wherever she goes. She is approachable and down-to-earth and believes we can all do the same by just being members of the St. John’s community.

Asking if she still goes to St. John’s, people sometimes confide in her that they have not recently been in church. When they offer reasons for not attending, Eleanor gives the same response;

“You are always welcome at St. John’s. Come when you can. And they often do.”

Eleanor also has had experience as part of a previous Search Committee. The most important thing she remembers about the process was prayer, both individually and as a group. “It was powerful.” Really listening to each other and seeking the way together through prayer reminds us that God is always present to support and guide us, as we search for our new rector.

# SHARING & CARING

## Christian Formation

Offerings and opportunities for adult formation and education have surged and ebbed through the decades at St. John's. As of our Fall 2019 survey, responding members aged 35 or better are united in a high priority expressed as "provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age." Here follow the options for adults at present:

**MEN'S BIBLE STUDY**, a gently moderated open discussion with a large component of fellowship, has been meeting weekly early Wednesday mornings for more than a dozen years.

A tiny group carries on a tradition of gathering **FRIDAYS** mid-morning to delve into the scriptures for the next Sunday.

**EMMAUS** meets Wednesday evenings after a potluck to explore spirituality in a spectrum and theology as a practical and relevant endeavor. It too has been dependent upon inspired rotating lay leadership—which comes and goes. Lately our interim rector has taken a turn leading.

“For a decade, the Emmaus Group has provided a welcoming, intimate space for parish members and visitors to build closer relationships while exploring the deep questions of Christian life.

We're committed to healthy communication and compassionate listening to one another. We've supported one another through illness and bereavement, and celebrated milestones. For me personally, the group in its earliest years was an oasis of kindness during a time of family estrangement. I was privileged to lead it for two years, during which I was blessed by the patient encouragement of my fellow members as I learned how to hold space for strong emotions and diverse views.” —Jendi Reiter

**LECTIO DIVINA** is a weekly offering that invites participants to listen deeply to what the Word is saying to them. This is a powerful group discipline that has attracted an ever-growing community.

“Lectio Divina is at the heart of my faith practice, and I thank God in prayer for the fellowship of all members especially for our leader (Craig Hammond, Evangelist for the Diocese of Western Mass.) whose honest, gentle, generous spirit makes Christ's presence in our midst palpable. Soon after starting Lectio I found renewed meaning in the daily reading of scripture and now for the first time in my adult life I am devoted to doing readings from both the Old and New Testaments. I am ever-inspired by the multiple connections between them.

“My life is a busy one; but I find this calm, contemplative time with God's word essential now to my very being.

It also helps me appreciate the infinite riches of our group reading, as I find I gain new perspectives and insights from everyone. Our words resonate with me long after our time together. I attend St John's most every Sunday and have of course often encountered the idea of seeking to see Jesus in other people. However, it is only since I became a member of the Lectio circle that I now have some grasp of what it is to truly experience seeing Jesus in each and every soul.” —Barbara Kellum

Two other daytime ministries housed here are our dedicated and creative team of fiber artisans who create the beautiful prayer shawls we give to each person at baptism or when in need of comfort; and our team of “holy folders” who help in the office with folding our worship bulletins week in and week out. What a delight it is to make a difference in these very quiet, hands-on ways.

# CARING & SHARING

## Outreach & Social Justice

St. John's parishioners volunteer monthly in small teams to provide a nourishing home-cooked meal to residents at the Inter-faith Cot Shelter.

We contribute groceries each week to the Northampton Survival Center. “It's pretty thrilling to hear the rumble of the wagon bringing those offerings forward for a blessing along with our offering plates each Sunday at 10 AM. Some kids vie for the chance to push and pull the wagon.”

Parishioners provide gifts at Christmas and put on a Christmas party for moms and children at the Grace House program in town. A few years ago a team from St. John's built a storage shed for Grace House—affording those in the program a decent place to store belongings while staying there.

For the past several years, a dedicated group designed a “Longest Night” program—a service for those who grieve or struggle as Christmas approaches. The music and readings they've selected have been a comforting blessing to the wider community.

The St. John's Circle of Care has provided basic support and encouragement to a refugee family from Congo and a young Guatemalan refugee over the last three years.

St. John's is an affirming community that every year has an enthusiastic contingent marching in the Gay Pride Parade in the city.

Our Social Justice and Creation Care groups have waned of late, since their leader, our Priest Associate is undertaking work in China.

A Worship on Wheels ministry ended after the death of the organizer. A half dozen of us formerly visited local assisted living and nursing homes once or twice a month with a short, song-filled service of worship.

**St. John's has had a lot going on in outreach; but leadership, coordination, and level of participation all could use strengthening. Notably from the Fall 2019 survey, outreach to the marginalized in society was the top priority among respondents aged under 35.**



## Joy to the World December at St. John's

Throughout the year a dedicated band of (mostly) women meet regularly to brainstorm and create handmade items for the annual Christmas Fair, which is an extremely popular event throughout the area—and one of the events like the annual *Messiah* sing, that the church is widely known for.

A good percentage of the congregation rallies every year to put on the event, serving up soup and hot cider, playing Santa Claus, singing carols, staffing the legendary homemade cookie walk. The spirit of the whole community working joyfully together side-by-side is evident every year at the fair.

“This year was particularly exciting . . . since the fair was held for the first time in the parish house's newly refurbished rooms. Many shoppers commented that they enjoyed the new spaces and joined with us in our joy that the fair was 'home.'” —Penny Johnson

# SPECIAL OFFERINGS

## The Flowering of the Church

by Susan Roy



When I joined St. John's in the fall of 1980, my youngest was only a couple of months old, and I was looking for an easy way to be a part of the church community. As a trained florist, that way was to become a member of the flower guild. St. John's Church is the last one in town to continue the tradition of having the altar decorated each week by a group of volunteers. What I discovered then, and continue to find, is a group of men and women who, with the work of their hands, make the formal church more accessible via the

personal touches they add to liturgical and other aspects of community gatherings. They make lovely arrangements, and plant gardens, weed, rake, redesign the grounds. They cook pancakes and mac and cheese and food for coffee hour. They spend five years planning and implementing the construction of a new parish house to meet our needs in the coming years. Our church continues to try and find the potential in new and older members who at some point in often busy lives, find a spot in our community where they can make a contribution to our long-term goals and hopes. We are not always successful, and many of us tire of the effort, but our greatest flowering is the growth in spirit which some achieve when, with the support of friends made and kept, we push forward with the goals we set for the future. It can be exhausting and challenging, but we have fed and encouraged and supported a lot of folks in our town over the years, and our church continues to be a place where Hope has a shape and a direction.

## Lead Us, Great Creator

As we prepared for the dedication of our new building, we were blessed with the offering of Ron Perera in the form of this hymn. It could be added easily to any hymnal in the Church section; but we treasure it as it was specifically written for us. It was thrilling to crowd into the new parlors after the 10 o'clock service to learn it as a community. Choir members had had a head start, and they knew the parts already, Children pressed in close. Ron himself directed. We set our cups and snacks down and found the words and the tune so apt: "Help us make this church a gift to our community," indeed.

For St. John's Church, Northampton MA  
LEAD US, GREAT CREATOR

Ronald Perera (b. 1941)

1. Lead us, great Cre - a - tor, mak - er of all things new; Fire our hearts with pas - sion, dai - ly our strength re -  
2. Let your word be spo - ken, let your word be sung; Let bright ban - ners flow - ing from eve - ry wall be  
3. Joy - ful - ly we praise you, spir - it of grace di - vine, Au - thor of sal - va - tion, pre - sent in bread and

new. Bind us in com - mun - ion, join - ing wills with thee;  
hung. Both in prayer - ful - qui - et and in hymns of praise,  
wine; Once in flesh a - mong us, now en - throned a - bove;

Help us make this church a gift to our com - mun - i - ty.  
Let us make this house of God a home for all our days.  
Send to all who wor - ship here thy pre - cious gift of love.

"Saint John"  
Text: Ronald Perera (b. 1941)

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## Why We Support St. John's

by Leah Carrasquillo

My husband, Matt, and I were received as Episcopalians in our mid-20s, after feeling like the faith we were raised in did not fit with our world view and progressive beliefs on social justice, women's issues, and inclusion of our LGBTQ friends.

Being new to the area, we were looking for a church that felt like a spiritual home in which to raise a family. The first thing I noticed about St. John's was the rainbow flag out front, and how genuinely welcoming and warm everyone is. People introduce themselves, people are kind and nonjudgmental, people pour out of the pews at the exchange of the Peace and make genuine connections.

Quite simply, we support St. John's because St. John's supports our family: We are grateful. And Stewardship to us, is also an investment: We are hopeful. Investing in what is truly GOOD in our community is a wise allocation of our resources. We lift up and give light to what we want to leave for our children and for their children. We will never be able to repay you for all that you have done for us, but we will be better for trying.



## The Value of St. John's

by Lyn Horan

I started attending St John's Episcopal Church-Northampton in 2005—2007, then returned when we moved back to MA in 2011.

In times when this country is experiencing a steady decline in participation in organized religion, and a crisis of faith, I have been pleased to see St. John's increase its inclusiveness. St. John's has been willing to discuss and act on supporting many marginalized communities (LGBTQ, race, the impoverished, and the disabled) in direct and meaningful ways, among our parishioners and beyond into our greater community. We have a strong children's education program that reinforces that inclusivity both by them and through them.

These issues and their solutions are complex and never easy, but I have learned much through sharing experiences, adult education, and persistence of application in real-time of Christ's teachings that retain their relevance in contemporary times. These are often discussions of discomfort, and even some disagreement, but this congregation and leaders have shown persistence and great courage as they know this is an ongoing journey.

The results of our efforts have resulted in many closer relationships with God and each other and we never forget to celebrate using and sharing the gifts of art and music that we have been given to reinforce the value of the diversity that God has created.

Individually, for me, what has been most striking has been St John's recent initiatives to address the needs of the disabled, especially physical accessibility. St. John's made a huge financial and literal commitment through their recent building and restoration to provide an elevator, accessible bathrooms, and enlarged community spaces.

Being wheelchair bound, I can't emphasize enough what this means to folks like myself. Now we can not only partake in church services, classes, and celebrations, but it will enable us to participate in a way that allows us to give back.

Often, when I advocate for accessibility rights for people who are disabled, the able-bodied person will say, "Well, we don't have anyone that's disabled or in a wheelchair here." And I will respond, gently, "Did you ever think about how many you might have if your building was a place they could get into?" How will we ever know what we're missing until we open those metaphoric and literal doors?

Now more than ever, with so much confusion of hate and fear, we need a closer relationship with God and each other. I believe that St. John's is taking up Bishop Curry's call to "Prayerful Action" with true commitment and sacrifice.

# WE SEEK

We asked at the end of a longish survey in the Fall of 2019 "What information or opinions do you want to share with the Parish Profile and/or Search Committee?" Here follow a few responses, with bold added by the committee.

"Children and youth are central to a growing church community. Please look for **someone with a passion and skill in working with youth and children.**"

"As a person who has served previously in the capacity of reverend at a church, and observed the many devoted and loving souls doing this work, I believe great care needs to be exercised in the expectation of what one individual (albeit an important one) brings to an individual parish. Perhaps **the greatest attribute for parish priests going forward is the ability to support and foster lay servant leaders that need to be spearheading the work of the church** (rather than the priest spearheading the work of the church). As Paul writes, we are a body, and our head is not a priest, but Christ, and ALL members are crucial in the functioning of the body. This is not typically the mindset of the people of God. A tall order indeed, but certainly something to aim toward."

"I acknowledge that being 28 I'm coming from a particular (and underrepresented) perspective. That being said, **I really think that enriching ministry to college students and young adults should be one of the top priorities of this search.** Aside from just wanting to have more age diversity, we need young people to be members of the church if we want it to continue to be viable in future generations. Any other ministries depend on the church existing and being financially viable; and I don't see how we can do that without more young adults in the membership. **I would be particularly interested in candidates with specific experience/expertise with college and young adult age groups.**"

"My experience at St. John's has been much too much emphasis on a traditional theology and not enough emphasis on a building of community. It's a mindset. It permeates almost everything. I have been much less involved in this church than with two previous churches because of this. **I'd love to see a new minister who could bring about a renewed energy and a loving, caring, and joyful spirit of community permeating the living body we call the church.**"

"**St. John's is positioned to rock this part of the world. We know we can fulfill a great need for spiritual growth and development in our region. Let's find a dynamic, intelligent, compassionate leader who can guide us. We can train and support a rector in administrative areas, and build their management skills if necessary. We can't train for that dynamic, high-energy, outward-looking set of characteristics that our next rector must have in order to be successful at this time and in this place.**"

"**I think it is critical that the new rector fits with the church and community. We live in a welcoming community, and I think is necessary that the new rector embraces that.**"

"**Sincerity, realness, and humor are important qualities** (which our interim also embodies) that I hope we can find in a new rector."

"We want a rector who can actively take risks and keep the momentum going. **And just as importantly, we need the next minister to be able to offer pastoral care, naturally.** To offer to come to our houses when we are sick. To visit us in the hospital and let us know we are important members of our beautiful St. John's, Northampton. We need a rector to support each of us, personally, as we support those who come through our doors."

"St. John's is a place of great ideas; but we need to inspire members to step up to more lay leadership on specific projects. **An important goal is to increase pledging enough** so that we are not dependent on endowment interest for the basic running of church operations."

"**We need to do more outreach to college students and especially single 20- and 30-year-olds.**"

# WE OFFER

New England

[www.discovernewengland.org](http://www.discovernewengland.org)

Western Massachusetts

[www.explorewesternma.com](http://www.explorewesternma.com)

Hampshire County

[www.visithampshirecounty.com](http://www.visithampshirecounty.com)

Northampton

[www.explorenorthampton.com](http://www.explorenorthampton.com)

Easthampton

[www.easthamptonma.gov](http://www.easthamptonma.gov)

Museums 10

[www.museums10.org](http://www.museums10.org)

Five Colleges

[www.fivecolleges.edu](http://www.fivecolleges.edu)

*especially* Smith College

[www.smith.edu](http://www.smith.edu)

30 Minutes to Springfield

1 Hour to the Berkshires

2 Hours to Boston

Farm Culture, Food Culture, and the Arts

Collaborative Local Clergy and Churches

Professional and Committed Staff

and a Vibrant and Welcoming Membership

Learn more by visiting our website:

[www.stjohnsnorthampton.org](http://www.stjohnsnorthampton.org)

for calendars, updates,

and a growing gallery of photos



Built in 2007, our rectory has 3 bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms in nearly 1700 sq. ft. The house is on a one-third acre corner lot with a finished basement, a 2-car garage, and a large yard. Easthampton Public Schools for K—12 youngsters.

*"Easthampton is an up-and-coming town with necessary amenities, as well as many local attractions and events. Has a great community feel."*

—comment from a local resident

**WHAT IF...**  
half of us bought just one \$50 grocery card each week?

it would **increase** our ability to **serve** those around us by **\$10,400** annually

Grocery Gift Cards are available for purchase on Sundays after church and throughout the week in the office. St. John's receives 5% of sales, which increases our ability to serve those around us. Thank you for your support!



