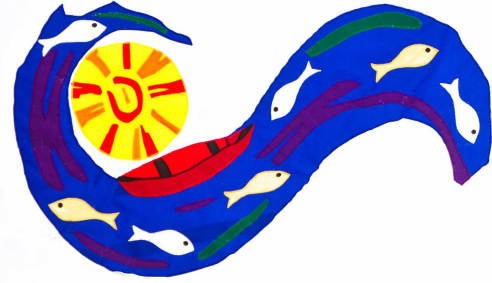


Parish Profile

Spirit of the Wilderness
Episcopal Church
Grand Marais/Cook County, MN
26 Oct., 2023



*Inviting Mystery, Embracing
Compassion, Encountering Christ.*

Global: The Spirit of the Wilderness EC, a small but dynamic fellowship located in Grand Marais/Cook County, Minnesota, is seeking a leadership partner to help move us forward doing God’s work in our beloved community.

Background:

In 2007 a local couple ran an advertisement in the local newspaper seeking interest in forming an Episcopal Church. Numerous responses came from within the county and beyond.

In a leap of faith the group rented space on Sundays in the historic Maple Hill Church, located within the grounds of a century-old cemetery. We have continued this practice to the present time. NOT owning a building provides many advantages and opportunities, including the financial flexibility to serve the larger community. However the congregation has been good stewards of the building, continuously improving technology, functionality, and more.



Soon thereafter, the Rev. Dr. Mary Ellen Ashcroft became half-time Vicar. Already a home owner, and resident of Cook County, the lack of housing availability in the area was not a deterring problem. Mary Ellen has

recently retired, prompting a long process of discernment relative to what the next ministry model at Spirit of the Wilderness would look like.

Since the beginning the lay leadership and participation have been pervasive. For example, members of the congregation plan innovative AV-enhanced services, perform music, author and deliver weekly homilies, craft and deliver a weekly newsletter, and drive the hybrid ZOOM/in-person technology. A typical current Sunday will have 15 - 20 congregants in the pews, and 5 - 10 ZOOM attendees (from all over the county, country, and world). There is an abiding love for animals in the community, and well-behaved dogs are frequent pew occupants. Like many small and aging congregations, we are lacking in having children/youth actively involved.



Current Ministries:

For a small parish, the Spirit of the Wilderness has an extensive and very visible role in the larger community. In all cases we are seeking to sustain or enhance their impact within SOTW as well as in the community at large.

a.) The establishment and continuing organizational host/sponsor of a monthly Ruby's Pantry which feeds approximately 200 families/month. No other faith community in Cook County was willing to assume the responsibility to launch this program.

b.) We annually organize and run a very popular 3 to 4 week special Art Show at the Johnson Heritage Post (Cook County Historical Society). A theme is set and invitations are extended throughout the community, including youth participation. A speaker artist is part of the extensive opening of the show.

c.) We participate visibly in environmental issues, economic justice, LGBT+/gay pride marches, host a prayer tree at the annual Grand Marais Art Show, etc. We host an annual Thanksgiving Dinner (in July) for up to 100 international student workers.

d.) Our members serve on numerous local boards and committees including: the Cook County Community Fund, Care Partners, Cook County Higher Education, local housing investment and development, locals schools (charter and ISD), Restorative Justice, End of Life compassionate training, and many more.

e.) Current Committees include: Worship Development, Stewardship, Art Show, etc.

f.) A number of 'Small Groups' meet on a regular basis, for prayer, study, nourishment, and hospitality. These have become an important part of the functioning of the parish.



Moving Forward:

The Parish is steadfastly and earnestly attempting to determine what the next ministry will look like. There are many possibilities, and we are open to God's direction and guidance.

For example(s):

1.) A local ordained minister (Episcopal, Lutheran, etc.) who already owns property and lives in Cook County ... who would be amenable to a part-time position, similar to our previous vicar.

2.) Someone who is willing and able to move to Cook County and provide approximately half-time ministry. Perhaps a bi-vocational minister and/or someone with strong /partner spousal support. This may be a challenge given the county housing shortage.

3.) Lay-run services, using various innovative forms of Morning Prayer, most Sundays each month with planning, implementation, homilies, etc. by members of the congregations as described above. "Total Ministry" is not under consideration.

4.) Eucharistic Services once, or perhaps twice a month, with Clergy presiding/preaching from many possible sources:

a.) Local ordained Clergy who volunteer their services from time-to-time.

b.) Visiting Clergy provided by the ECM, on an occasional basis. This would be stipendiary.

c.) Clergy from throughout the state/country who would love to be engaged with the congregation in exchange for several days of provided housing in this beautiful part of the country, and a small stipend.

d.) Clergy who would commit to once a month, long term participation. Perhaps owning seasonal vacation homes in the area.

5.) A model still to be discovered.

Part-Time Ministry Tasks/Needs:

1. Collaborative leadership with the Bishop's Committee in supporting and strengthening existing ministries (see above).
2. Creative leadership around developing additional ministry opportunities and collaborators.
3. Assistance maximizing lay participation and support.
4. Presiding/Preaching (occasional need)
5. Help in pastoral care and visitation
6. Help Develop/Re-energize Youth and Family Ministry
7. A clear Christ-centered approach, especially in these times of troubling national conflict. Inclusivity of *all* is paramount.
8. Help continue to build community
9. Excitement surrounding development and implementation of creative worship
10. Support for a very active congregation which nonetheless is aging and at the edge of our ability to provide all necessary support and services to the community and each other

Our Process:

During Mary Ellen's last sabbatical leave, a UCCM Minister, the Rev. Anne Swallow Gillis served as interim minister and effectively led the congregation through an extensive self-study, anticipating her eventual retirement. We have also been strongly supported by the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, Bishop Craig Loya, and ECM consultants who have led retreats of the Bishop's Committee, and the larger congregations.

The Larger Community:

Cook County is known as a tourist and retirement community, but it is much more than that. We have a population of 5,617 full-time residents that are 86% white and predominantly English-speaking. Most of our diversity is found in the Grand Portage Indian Reservation. The Grand Portage Band is an integral and vital part of the Cook County community. Our summertime population can swell to many times the number of full-time residents with family seasonal cabins, resorts, and summer workers. Part-timers, full-timers, and visitors are drawn to Cook County to enjoy our natural beauty and get outdoors. Cook County has an aging population. There is a shortage of younger workers and a shortage of affordable housing. For many working households there is the necessity of multiple jobs and long work hours to make ends meet in our tourist-oriented economy with high housing and living costs.

**Financial:**

The parish's finances are in excellent shape, with significant contributions to local causes of importance, including the Good Samaritan Fund. Details will be shared with potential candidates.

We warmly invite discussions of possible interest in a clergy role at Spirit of the Wilderness. Please contact either of the Wardens.

Contact and other Information:

Senior Warden: Carol Stender (cstender51@gmail.com)

Junior Warden: Milan Schmidt (milanschmidtmd@gmail.com)

View recent issues of our weekly newsletter: [Click Here](#)

Recent example clergy homily: [Click Here](#)

Recent example lay homily: [Click Here](#)

Who We Are (2020) Special short video prepared to introduce the congregation to the then new Bishop Craig Loya: [Click Here](#)

Bishop's Committee & Officers:

Carol Stender (Sr. Warden)

cstender51@gmail.com

Milan Schmidt (Jr. Warden)

milanschmidtmd@gmail.com

Marcia Roepke (Secretary)

Karl Hansen (Treasurer)

Karen Halbersleben

Shawn Howe

Chris Meehan

Howard Hedstrom

SaraJane Tompkins

David Coleman (Past Sr. Warden/Non-Voting)

Bob Padzieski (Conv. Alternate/Non-Voting)

Lee Stewart (Conv. Delegate/Non-Voting)