

The Story of St. James Episcopal Church, Fergus Falls, Minnesota

The first Episcopal services were held in Fergus Falls in the spring of 1872 with Rev. George Steward officiating. In August of 1872, The Rt. Rev. Henry B. Whipple, Bishop of Minnesota stopped for a service on his way to White Earth Indian Reservation and appointed a committee to select a site for a church. St. James was built at the present site in 1882. The church was destroyed and rebuilt in 1919 after the historic cyclone ripped through Fergus Falls.

St. James is known in Fergus Falls as the *little church on Lake Alice* and has approximately 70 members with a core of 20 active members. The mission of St. James is, "To be the heart and hands of Christ in community." St. James has had a long-standing discrete presence in Fergus Falls. We are traditional, sometimes referred to as *low church* in our worship service because of the liturgy used, but yet a mix of traditional and contemporary music. Our faith community is unique when compared to many other churches because, despite widely differing political views, we come together to worship God, love each other, and work through divisive issues. We have a reputation for service through the sharing of our gifts, talents, and time. The location of our church is a gift that is shared with the community. St James partners with community organizations when various events are held in the Lake Alice community sharing our facility or as a host. Some examples of Lake Alice community events are: May Day basket deliveries, the annual block party, and the Lake Alice 100 bike event. Our faith community, prior to COVID, had welcomed families on Halloween night to come in for a treat and to warm up as they traveled around the lake trick-or-treating. Financially, the St. James faith community generously gives to a variety of community entities. The St. James Episcopal Church Women have organized a variety of fundraisers for community needs, continuing to manage an Emergency Children's Clothing Closet for Otter Tail County Human Services. St. James also has a talented and rich music community which is shared every Sunday and with special music events throughout the year. Members of St. James share their time in service to the grounds and building care of the St. James facility, and the needs of the Fergus Falls community.

St. James is building disciples by offering the community a spiritually safe space and place to explore and develop a relationship with Jesus through worship, education and service. St. James with the support of local Episcopal and ELCA clergy offers weekly services. An adult forum takes place weekly throughout the year offering exploration of a variety of aspects of faith. Service to the community is ever present from annual events to the maintenance of the only dog waste bag dispenser in Fergus Falls.

Our hope for the future is to be a faith community to a variety of people in Fergus Falls. Currently we have an aging population with less than 10 children as members. St. James would like to grow and have its membership grow with adults age 25-50, that would hopefully include children as well. St. James would like to see the number and type of services offered grow, to offer healing or other specialized services. Most importantly, meet the needs of people in our faith community and those that come through our door.

The following depicts the values of St. James members.



As St. James seeks after a permanent part-time priest, some themes have been identified regarding how we see them working together with our faith community

- A priest at St. James will have responsibilities split between providing spiritual leadership to the current parishioners and providing leadership for congregational growth
- The priest will be part-time and so he/she will need to be skilled at leading and delegating to the vestry, laity, and total ministry team
- The priest should be able and willing to work with other ministers and churches in town

Also based on input from many of our current parishioners, a clergy who would be a good fit for St. James would ideally have these gifts or talents:

- Be able to write and deliver sermons that relate the lectionary to today's world (relates how the bible is relevant now)
- Practice loving all people
- Be focussed on providing spiritual guidance
- Be knowledgeable about the bible
- Be passionate about pastoral care (visiting the sick, counseling, etc.)
- Be open (i.e. be curious and accepting of change)
- Be knowledgeable about historical facts (to relate to biblical stories)
- Have a sense of humor
- Understand the Episcopalian traditions
- Be caring
- Have creative ideas for new outreach and missions