

St. James Episcopal Church Fergus Falls, Minnesota



Our Church

St. James is a small, but vitally alive, congregation located in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, on the south shore of Lake Alice just a block north of downtown. Established in 1872, its original building was leveled when a devastating cyclone destroyed much of the city, including the church, in 1919. The bell from the church is purported to still be buried in the muck of the lake, along with many other artifacts. The processional cross also ended up in the lake, but was retrieved, albeit with a slight curve in its shape. It is still in use as a reminder of God's faithfulness to his people.

Known as the "little church on Lake Alice," St. James was rebuilt in the years following the cyclone. A later addition adjacent to the undercroft houses classrooms and church offices. The church is a beautiful place to worship with its stained-glass windows, dark wood, and vaulted ceiling. Congregational singing accompanied by our outstanding pipe organ fills the church with beautiful music.

Our history is a story of God's blessings, but it is not the end of the story. God continues to bless us in many ways as we strive to "be the heart and hands of Christ" in our neighborhood and community. Our small congregation is generous with both time and money. We host an annual



block party, Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, distribute May baskets to our neighbors around Lake Alice, host a Halloween party, which is often attended by over more than 800 kids and parents. We contribute time and money to Meals by Wheels, our local food shelf, and the Salvation Army. We raise money for the Salvation Army Angel Tree Christmas gifts. Students at the Alternative Learning School then purchase gifts for their age group giving them the opportunity to experience the joy of giving. The Episcopal Church Women raise funds for and manage the Childrens Emergency Clothing Closet, which provides new clothing for children removed from homes to foster care by Ottertail County Childrens Services. We raise funds for "Stuff the Bus," which provides school supplies and backpacks for children in public school, and our "No Bake Bake Sale" brings in money for other projects.

In the past 10 years or so, we have met challenges such as COVID and declining attendance, as many churches have. But God has been faithful, and we have seen slow but steady growth, including 11 new members in 2025. Average attendance falls between 25 and 35. We are mostly an older congregation. We have a well-attended adult Sunday Forum before the service. We fellowship after services with coffee time.

For the past three years, we have had a part-time pastor who, because of active and effective lay leadership, has been able to focus more on the needs of members. We believe the partnership is working very well.

We strive to be a community marked by hospitality and mutual respect. People consistently share that they feel welcome here, able to ask questions, express differing viewpoints, and grow in faith without fear of judgment. We continue to attract individuals and families who are seeking an authentic, inclusive church home. We believe that Christ died for all, and our response is to welcome, love, and respect others regardless of their beliefs.

Our hope for the future is to continue to grow in both faith and numbers and to continue to be a vital congregation into the next generation and beyond. We are



Photos—Page 1: Celebrating the Eucharist on Palm Sunday; One of seven stained glass windows in the sanctuary; Christmas at St. James.

Page 2: Block party in August; Friends and neighbors at the block party; after-church fellowship treats;

Page 3: Eleven new members in 2025; Father George Schulenberg (retired) visiting with new members and their family; Chamber Orchestra concert.

encouraged by our slow but steady growth, but our challenge is to continue to invite people to join our faith community.

We are looking for a priest/pastor who welcomes collaborating with lay leadership. Someone willing to work with others in the community. One who will visit the homebound. We are confident the Lord will provide the right person to lead us.

St. James Member Survey

A recent survey of more than 20 members identifies the following qualities as most important for a priest. Of the 30 qualities identified, the following were ranked highest by about 80 percent of the members surveyed.

- Be caring
- Have Biblical knowledge
- Be passionate about the message
- Love people
- Focus on spiritual guidance
- Write and deliver relatable sermons
- Know history
- Understand Episcopal traditions

Our Town

With a population of about 14,000, Fergus Falls is located in west-central Minnesota in the heart of lakes country. Our city is known as an arts destination, with two art galleries, a historical museum, a childrens museum and many opportunities for music appreciation including A Center for the Arts Concert Series, Civic Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra, MState, the Fergus Falls Concert Association, and high school productions. A Center for the Arts does a children’s theater production in the summer. There are many opportunities for sports fans as well with high school and MState games. Our local YMCA offers programs for all ages. It is a city of beautiful parks, including a new waterpark. Pebble Lake is located on the edge of the city and features both a swimming beach and a public golf course. Larger lakes are nearby for fishing, boating and swimming.