

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH



# WELCOME!

## COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

**PREPARED BY**  
St. Mary's Search Committee  
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St. Mary's welcomes all into a full community life, including those who doubt and question, without requiring them to surrender their doubts or questions. Everyone is in, no exceptions.

Our community is at an inflection point. We have a history of resilience and thoughtful reinvention. We are preparing the ground for a new phase of our church's life and are looking for a priest to take those steps with us.



## Worship

There are key ways in which Saint Marians worship that are core to our community's identity:

- We value inspirational and challenging sermons that connect us to each other and connect our community to the world.
- We welcome all to receive sacraments – the open table is absolutely foundational. This is God's table, not ours.
- We embrace wisdom from other faiths, traditions, and life experiences, while actively connecting to scripture and the words and ideas of our Anglican ancestors.

Our community stretches across diverse worship experiences, each offering its own style and approach. We deeply value intergenerational relationships and all-ages access to and participation in worship.

Church does not start or stop at the doors of the building. The world, and what's happening in it, is embraced and explored in our liturgies. Activism and community service are part of our relationship with God. We take what we experience in church out into the world.

Our love, support, and celebration of each other and our lives is embedded in our worship. Our Sunday services include a unique time of blessings and thanksgiving, when members of the community open up to each other and share our needs, our joys, and our griefs.

## Strengths

Our key strengths will help us achieve the vision of where we want to be:

- We are grounded in a strongly-shared progressive theology\*, across all worship styles.
- We are inclusive and welcoming.
- We are a church to which people bring the whole complexity of their selves and lives.
- We have strong youth programming with dynamic leadership.
- We truly enjoy being with each other, and we strive to fold newcomers in to a joyful community.



We are creative and self-reliant, especially bringing out new ways to worship and engage during times of change (from priest sabbaticals to transitions). Our building's well-maintained physical structure is a blessing from our ancestors. Our sanctuary was recently renovated. The building is an asset to the community, filled with a mutually-invested community of renters. In 2020, we installed solar panels. In 2021, we upgraded our technology to support ongoing online access to worship services. Our ancestors were excellent financial stewards, leaving us with meaningful reserves.

\*We see scripture as the human experience of the divine, not dictated by God; we do not focus on the need for conversion in social change. Jesus is *our* way, not *the* way; we have a dynamic relationship to the historic declarations of the church.

## Ongoing Challenges

St. Mary's continues to work through both systemic and situational obstacles. Our recent past – and our present – are filled with seismic shifts and startling changes, including frequent changes in leadership. Our membership has decreased, and the daily work relies heavily on a core group. Some are tired. We continue to unearth lingering mistrust and unresolved hurt, both within St. Mary's and between St. Mary's and ECMN. Once robust and vibrant community structures for connection, engagement, and activism are deeply strained, despite our shared passions in the world and our deep love for each other. Our annual operating budget has a persistent deficit, due to the difference between the costs of what we want to offer and our current annual income. We are evaluating what stewardship looks like in the 21st century and are excited to build a new approach for ongoing financial sustainability.

## What We Seek From Our Next Priest

We need a priest who will provide consistent, energetic leadership and inspirational preaching. We want our leaders to be authentic, express vulnerability, and value our personal experiences of God's love in the world. St. Mary's leaders recognize the oppressive systems that have afforded many of us easy access to God's universal abundance while blocking others' access to that abundance. We ask our leaders to help us discern and motivate our personal and community actions in response. We need a priest who embraces and helps us grow our progressive theology, in support of building the Beloved Community.

We are looking for a nimble and flexible partner in strategic leadership to work for renewal and growth. We seek a priest who can coach and empower existing lay leaders and help create paths for new leaders to emerge. We deeply value the skills that allow a priest to discern the spot(s) in our community that fit each individual, and to help fold them into that spot.

Our new priest will model and support a healthy balance between work and time for restoration. Entering into a mutual community covenant, we will care for ourselves and support each other by:

- Maintaining a full personal life outside of our community;
- Building sincere and meaningful connections within the community; and
- Discerning where each person needs to be in the cycle of engagement, growth, and rest.

## Our Vision for the Future

Recognizing our challenges, we are striving for our community's reinvention and renewal. To move through this moment, we need to tap into our resilience and establish strong finances and administrative systems to support us going forward. We need to discern our way through the challenges of being the church in the world and find our place in the Twin Cities/Minnesota.

We seek a priest to help imagine the path for St Mary's in the 21st century - from changes to Sunday morning worship to designing other ways to manifest the church in the world. Our community holds a generation- spanning history of making room for the experiences of others; of valuing different paths towards God, spiritual life, community worship, and community action; of responding to changing needs; and of holding space for all these different expressions within a single community. Our multiple worship experiences are a key example of this ethic. We are ready to take these embedded values into other areas of community life, which will likely include improving and building options for connection and community beyond the worship service. We need someone to help guide and direct us, and to walk with us as we discern which elements of our history are still useful for our journey and which elements it is right and good to release.

