



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

1. Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry which you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

In order to expand our horizons beyond Sunday morning, there are several offerings that have been successful at St. John's from a faithful and committed group. A few years ago, a weekly Bible Study group was formed that evolved beyond the Bible. It expanded to book studies on mystics, Christian writers, meditations, and other things to enhance our horizons and support spiritual growth. This is open to all, and some attend virtually from other states. This is a continuing, successful ministry with a dedicated group of faithfuls. We also created some spaces on the property to grow vegetables to donate to the local food bank. We donate more than 700 pounds of food each season, which adds to our weekly food collections. As always, it is fulfilling to help feed the hungry, which is a growing problem everywhere. Taize services were added to both the Advent and Lenten seasons. We call upon the Holy Spirit, to be with us in the room, and enter into the hearts and lives of those who attend. With the repetitive chant and prayer, it helps carry people through their week with focus and calm. Positive feedback is always received on this. These are all part of our commitment to serving Jesus.

2. Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship services provided by your community.

As a blend of traditional liturgical traditions, we hold both Rite 1 and Rite 2 Holy Eucharists on Sundays, with Rite 2 being a family Choral Eucharist. Incense is used on high holidays, and at other times deemed appropriate. We use the 1982 Hymnal. However, with a strong music program, Music Director, Organist, and a choir which includes professionals, anthems and alternate music is offered weekly. Concerts are also offered during the year, often including professional musicians, choirs from other churches, and others from the community. Recognizing that children represent the future, we are committed to enhancing our church school program. With a strong basis in Godly Play for children grades K-3, we hope to create interacting/engaging programs for youth and teens, to keep them involved, and to attract young families to the church. Last year, Rite 2 and church school were offered virtually. Currently, the church is open for one family service on Sundays, also available virtually. Services are recorded live, and also made available for future viewing. In normal times, we also offered a Thursday Eucharist at noon. Hopefully, this and our Rite 1 service can be offered again soon.



3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

We have a dedicated group of volunteers at St. John's who are true leaders. Typically, the ministry leaders can spot those who might be interested in their particular service, and sometimes people just inquire and sign up. Often when the clergy has conversations with people, he/she can determine what gifts they have and inquire as to whether they would be interested in something particular. When we offer "Great Welcome Sunday", we welcome all newcomers and offer sign-up sheets for all the ministries for those interested to sign up. Lay Eucharistic Ministers and Visitors are trained by the priest.

We have a 30-year relationship with L'Eglise de L'Epiphanie, a mission of the ECCT and our in-house Haitian Community, which began as an outreach mission of St. John's. They normally hold separate worship, but we often share in service together. Also worshipping in our space is La Iglesia Betania, a Spanish speaking community with whom we hope to merge with in the near future. We often share with both these congregations in worship (sometimes multi-lingual), liturgy, and other ministries such as flower arranging, fellowship and celebrations.

4. As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

Pastoral care is key here at St. John's. The Women's Group, the Vestry and other individuals are diligent in making sure the community is cared for, either by phone calls, personal visits, virtual calls, or simply by little blessings sent via text message. We listen to fears and concerns and pray for God's guidance. We run errands and do curbside visits. Unfortunately, the Eucharistic visitations have been held up for some time and we have been unable to provide Communion for the homebound. The elderly especially, appreciate these things, yet all still yearn for a priest to talk to at times. Covid boosted the work of all to make sure all aspects of our well-being are cared for. As to fellowship, we have multiple events where the people enjoy personal contact and being together, that has been sorely missed during Covid; weekly coffee hour for snacks and conversation, the Pentecost picnic which is a fun time for all, Lenten programs with prayer and food and fellowship, and an annual High Tea that was held via Zoom last year, as was Candlelight Taize. We have a truly caring community who loves being together, taking care of each other, always empowering each other to keep the faith.



5. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical community.

Following God's call to mission, a sampling of our work:

St. John's Community Foundation-grants over \$200K/yr to over 45 non-profits to address basic needs, education, crisis services, economic opportunity. Also provides substantial financial support to subsidize housing in the community

Haiti Mission-a proactive 13 yr. partnership with a parish in L'Acul, Haiti providing expertise, guidance and financial support for their clinic and school. Annual trips are taken with medical personnel and students

Community Interfaith Thanksgiving Dinner-hosted by St. John's, in collaboration with other churches; open to the community

Community Thrift shop-provides discounted goods to the underserved. Profits go to non-profits serving same

Drives-food, coats, underwear, backpacks-support for homeless, veterans, kids, cancer centers

Homes for the Brave – financial support for Veterans' homelessness

Day laborers-provide monthly lunches and info.

Nurse Program-nurse parishioners provide med care and support to shelters and homeless in Bridgeport area through SVH Med Mission, as well as provide med services at soup kitchens and pantries

Refugees- support a family through Interfaith Refugee Settlement Prog.

6. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

Much of the pastoral care beyond our worshipping community is done on an individual basis, in our work, our volunteerism, or among our inner circles. One of our leaders goes to Starbucks and talks to random people over tea, and hands out little angels. She also distributes the Forward Day by Day to people in Jamaica and Canada who do not have computer access, and cannot afford to buy the booklets. Some of us work in health care, and see people on a daily basis offering spiritual comfort, as well as the physical care they need. One of our ladies saw someone in the grocery store who looked desperate and sad. She approached the woman, and asked if she could use some prayer. The woman was very grateful, calmed down and was brought to tears. Some belong to on-line spiritual healing groups and pray nationally. Some participate in "Healing Hands". Our former Associate Rector offered Daily Morning Coffee podcasts, open to all, with spiritual messages and prayers.



7. Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

The past 5 years have been challenging for St. John's to initiate new ministries, between our rector preparing for retirement, the call, and subsequent retirement, of a new Priest in Charge, as well as the retirement of our Senior Associate Rector. However, in light of what was happening in the country, we felt called by the Holy Spirit to do more to help spark awareness and understanding. When Stamford was holding a rally in town against gun violence, we joined educators and others to create awareness and educate students. We also established a Racial Healing Program. This group was established to seek God's call to have a better understanding of each other, and deepen our relationship as a beloved community, through an active dedication to anti-racism. As a multigenerational and multi-ethnic church, we seek to go beyond being a welcoming and inclusive place of worship to actively dismantling racism through creative ministry, healing dialogue, justice, and public programs. The contact for this group is Mr. Terrence Green at greent318@yahoo.com.

8. How are you preparing yourself for the Church of the future?

St. John's is a diverse parish, sharing in the love and teachings of Jesus Christ, open to and accepting of all. We have a long history of outreach to the wider community, a great music program, a strong relationship with the Haitian and Spanish congregations who share our worship space, and a successful Godly Play program for our youngsters. But with the decline in numbers overall, especially young families, we need to change and enhance these programs to be able to draw more people. We want to institute an interactive, engaging curriculum for the older kids and teens. We hope that with a more modern approach to teaching, and an expanded music program, we will attract that group. We hope to continue an engaged and cooperative community with La Betania, working toward a possible merger of our two parishes, reaching out to a wider Latino community. We want to develop more interfaith programs, with an effort to reach the surrounding neighborhood, the University, and the younger population entering Stamford. This, along with advancing our technology, engaging in social justice, and allowing multi-use of our space, gives hope to growing a vibrant, faith community at SJ and in Stamford.



9. What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?

We have tried many types of stewardship campaigns over the years and have not found one that works better than another. There is much giving of time and talent at St. John's, but it is difficult to stress the importance of giving financially, when the church has sizeable income from outside sources. Typically, there is communication to build awareness among the parish of the importance of their responsibility to the Lord. Financial gifts are important to do God's work, both in the church and in the world, and our giving does not support our expenses. Separate stewardship letters are sent out from the Wardens and clergy, with pledge cards enclosed. Emphasis is always put on our Christian responsibility, rather than the needs of the church. Sometimes there is a giving day where the pledge cards are collected during service. Other times they are mailed. Each year, testimonies are offered from several parishioners as to why they give to St. John's. This seems to work well. People have responded well to on-line giving, rather than using envelopes. Currently, there is no actual Planned Giving program in place, however there are parishioners who have put plans in place for St. John's.

10. What is your worshipping community's experience of conflict? And how have you addressed it?

Normally, when there is conflict among parishioners, we tend to approach it from an "agree to disagree" attitude. Typically, we speak the truth in love to each other, and resolve things ourselves. When that does not seem feasible, the conflicting parties will meet with the priest and/or a consultant to come to either a mutual understanding, or a true resolution. Basically, we all have a commonality in our faith and our love for the Lord, which when we remember to put Him first, tends to work things out. In any case, there is always a mutual respect for one another when going through any kind of turmoil.

Recently there was a conflict between several parishioners regarding a person of questionable integrity who became a staff member and was working with the children. Because a couple of the people were friends with this person, they were supportive of him, where others saw a problem. After several "incidents" by this person, and much conversation, the "friends" were able to see more clearly, and the situation was resolved between the conflicting parties, and the relationship mended.

11. What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? And what did you learn?

The people of St. John's are accepting and resilient, and know God's hand is in all things. Some changes for the better over the last few years were: the incorporation of



youth in the liturgy, recognition of birthdays and anniversaries during worship, new technology, offering Taize, hosting an indoor/outdoor Christmas Village sharing with other congregations and reaching a wider community. Having to go virtual, was successful for the most part, but was daunting for the elderly with no access. With the elimination of both the Thursday noon, and 8:00AM services, we lost an important part of worship, which attracted a dedicated group of faithfuls. Our current Youth Christian Ed program is struggling, and our church school is shrinking. We learned that we need a new path to attract youth and teens which will bring new families. We also need to improve our inclusion of the Haitian and Spanish communities in all aspects of our worship and program to follow God's calling. One of the most unsettling changes and learning experiences for St. John's, is that after having only 11 Rectors in 275 years, we now are searching for our second Rector/PIC in the last 3 years.

12. Please provide four words or phrases describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.

Pastoral and compassionate
Strong communicator
Spiritual Visionary
An Open and Loving heart

Please provide a link to your worshipping community's website: stjohns-stamford.org

Current Senior Warden Name: *Eugene Zacharewicz*

Current Senior Warden phone number and email: *917-723-4504, zacharewicz@gmail.com*

Previous Senior Warden: *Kathi Bacchi*

Previous Senior Warden phone number and email: *516-382-0339, kbacch1@aol.com*

Parish Leader Name: *Olive Grant*

Parish Leader Ministry: *Women's Group*

Parish Leader phone number and email: *203-252-6245, olive.grant15@gmail.com*

Local Community Leader Name: 2 names



Denise Williams - Director of Inspirica - from Homeless to Home (originally St. Luke's Lifeworks, spawned from St. John's, and a large part of our financial outreach) - dwilliams@Inspiricact.org - 203-XXX-XXXX

Elizabeth (Betty) McOsker - Executive Director of Over 60 Club - leases program space from St. John's - theover60club@gmail.com - 203-XXX-XXXX