

20 March 2017

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Berkeley, CA: Office of Transitional Ministry Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers serve as a part of our parish's profile for those interested in the priest in charge position. The answers are the result of much discussion in parish forums and Vestry meetings over several months.

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

About four years ago, a thirty-nine-year-old member of the parish received a cancer diagnosis. He was a member of the choir, occasional organist, and former vestry member. The cancer was of a type that is usually treatable and we were at first optimistic. The congregation rallied around the parishioner and his wife, providing emotional and physical support to them both. Many members of the congregation assisted them with a broad range of activities, from transporting him to medical appointments, to providing equipment to make his life more comfortable, to providing companionship on days when his wife needed to work or travel for work and the doctors said he should not be left alone. The Prayer Shawl Ministry knitted him a warm scarf, which he wore for every chemo treatment. Clergy provided pastoral care, counseling, and companionship.

Despite the best efforts of the medical profession and prayers of family and friends, the cancer could not be controlled or lessened. Each new update spoke of metastasis to another area. At the same time that the parishioner received treatment, he planned his funeral. He selected all of the music to be performed, and the choir began the melancholy task of preparing to sing it. He chose friends he wanted especially to come and offer music at his funeral. He died in November 2016, and his funeral was in mid-December. Again, the Parish rallied around his wife and all their family.

The St. Mark's family offered rooms for family and friends who came for the funeral. The guilds all made sure the church was just the way he had wanted it to be. The head of the Flower Guild arranged the altar flowers to match the photo of a Dutch painting he had admired. The Altar Guild polished up each piece of brass and silver and pressed the linen. Each ministry that played a role in the service was outstanding. The music, lovingly prepared by all of the musicians, was stunning. Music as a force for healing, compassion, reflection, and transformation is a great strength in our community at St. Mark's. The funeral service itself was simply the most beautiful liturgy many of us could ever remember attending. As if a lovely funeral wasn't enough, it was followed by a champagne reception with all of the foods this parishioner had expressly asked the reception organizer to create. And people stayed and talked and reminisced for a couple of hours.

It was clear that everyone that day worked at the highest level to say good-bye with love and compassion. Family and friends outside the Parish were grateful and uniformly praised the care he had been given both throughout his illness and in the service honoring his life and death. This care—over the years of his illness and in the days following his death—exemplifies the strong spiritual, pastoral, and liturgical offerings of St. Mark's.

2. Describe your liturgical style and practice. If you provide more than one type of worship service, please describe them all.

St. Mark's is a liturgically aware church, centered in the Eucharist. The shared power of the liturgy makes this inclusive and varied parish a community. It is here that parishioners gain nourishment for their Christian witness in the world both as members of a parish and as individuals. A Sunday Choral Eucharist is usually chanted, and recently has included a creative Choral Mass Project. Services normally follow the *Book of Common Prayer* Rite II. Rite I is used to mark special occasions or seasons, such as Lent. *The Hymnal 1982*, *Wonder, Love, and Praise*, and *Voices Found* are used for congregational singing. Worshippers exhibit a wide range of piety, standing, sitting, or kneeling to suit their own style of prayer.

On Sunday there are two Eucharists. At 8:00 a.m. a simple spoken liturgy is held in the chapel with a sermon, but no music. At 10:00 a.m., the main service is held in the nave with music provided

by organ and choir. A coffee hour follows the second service, frequently followed by a forum.

During the week, a noon Eucharist is held on Wednesdays and Fridays, and on Thursdays a prayer group meets in the chapel in a contemplative service of centering prayer, intercession, and Compline. Eucharists with music are also scheduled on major feast days: Epiphany, All Souls, Ash Wednesday and Holy Week (Tenebrae, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Vigil either Saturday night or early Sunday morning). The community also gathers for memorial services with a Eucharist and music provided by the choir. Every second Sunday, September through June, a small choral group sings Evensong. This is followed by an organ recital and a festive reception.

All of the usual guilds are active at St. Mark's: Lay Eucharistic Ministers (LEMs), vergers, acolytes, readers, bidders, Flower Guild, and Altar Guild. However, this infrastructure is meagerly populated, with a few parishioners carrying a very heavy load. There is also a tendency toward perfectionism by these long-time leaders, sometimes driving others who might be interested in helping these ministries away. A broadly representative Worship Committee actively assists the rector in trying to ensure that worship at St. Mark's is a beautiful and meaningful experience. It is not always easy to make changes in the liturgy, even ones that stay within the parameters of our commitment to the values of classical Anglican liturgical praxis.

3. How do you practice incorporating others into ministry?

The many ministries of St. Mark's actively encourage the congregation to enhance their religious experience by finding a small community of like-minded people within the parish where each individual can share time, talent, and treasure to enrich the parish. However, as a parish, we could be more effective at incorporating others. Some are reluctant to make a time commitment; others are deterred by the requirement of training; for some ministries, the leader's temperament is a deterrent. Volunteers are too few for many ministries and there is a significant risk of burnout—which exacerbates the concerns about leadership.

Every Sunday a vestry host invites newcomers and those who would like to learn more about St. Mark's to confer at the Connections Table during coffee hour. In the past, St. Mark's has held a yearly ministry fair so that all parishioners could see the myriad opportunities for service. Recruiting is an ongoing issue, with most recruiting being done by the chairperson of a guild or committee. Training is offered within those ministries that have an established practice (e.g., LEMs, ushers, acolytes, and the choir). We need to do a better job of ensuring that volunteers feel supported, and that people understand the opportunity to be part of a mutually supportive and caring group that comes from service.

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

We believe a healthy parish is one where both the clergy and the congregants nourish and are being nourished. Traditionally, our parishioners have looked to the clergy to spearhead the effort to ensure the spiritual well-being of the parish. A Pastoral Care Committee, the choir, and other organizations at St. Mark's complement the clergy effort. In addition, many individuals volunteer to be listeners, chauffeurs, and other sources of help to parishioners in need.

The clergy fulfill their worship responsibilities through services large and small, office hours, and pastoral care. The interim rector has hosted a series of readings, study groups, and discussion opportunities. We hope for similar efforts to continue with our future clergy leaders. The priest's efforts need to be strongly supported by the non-stipendiary clergy, Eucharistic ministers, and the Worship Committee. Eucharist is taken frequently by parishioners to those unable to attend church because they are housebound or have disabilities. Small groups of available choristers also provide pastoral visits.

The parish is regularly invited to address the emotional and physical well-being of other parish members. At the 10:00 a.m. service and every weekday service there is usually an opportunity to ask for prayers of healing offered by both clergy and parishioners. The choir is a model of a deeply caring community within the parish, providing physical and emotional support and creating occasions for celebration and care for one another, the parish as a whole, and others outside the St. Mark's community. Clergy well-being and support are important concerns and responsibilities for

this parish.

St. Mark's recognizes that celebration is a key to emotional well-being. It recognizes members of the community in many ways, though it also recognizes that it still has much room to grow and develop in this area. We seek a leader who can help us increase and strengthen our care for one another, making it an even more important part of the parish's life.

5. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider church or geographical region?

As part of St. Mark's participation in the wider church, we provide the usual representatives to the Diocesan Convention and quarterly Deanery meetings. We have an ongoing relationship with the School for Deacons and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP). St. Mark's collects funds during a monthly "Inasmuch" offering, which is distributed to twelve charities, mostly in the Bay Area.

St. Mark's participates in a number of ecumenical activities. St. Mark's is a signatory to the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, which provides support to those seeking asylum from religious and physical persecution. We had been active in Berkeley Organizing Congregations for Action (BOCA) until their loss of leadership; now that they have been reformed, we hope to be active again. BOCA coordinates outreach efforts to help those in need in the Berkeley community. In addition, the rectors of the five area Episcopal churches (four in Berkeley, one in Albany) have been meeting to look at matters concerning social justice, diocesan issues, and the wider church.

St. Mark's hosts the Episcopal Chaplain to the University of California, providing office space. We support his ministry to the student body and host special events, including an enhanced welcome Coffee Hour at the start of the school year. During each finals week, we host ten days of Study Hall for Cal students, providing limitless coffee, snacks, free Wi-Fi, and a quiet place to study for their exams.

We share services every two years with the Jewish congregation of Temple Sinai, in Oakland. This started several years ago with the choirs of the two congregations preparing Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* together, at the urging and under the guidance of the music director at St. Mark's and the cantor at Temple Sinai (where our music director also leads the choir and plays for services). These services have been lovely celebrations across the faiths, with each subsequent offering being along a theme (Songs of Faith, Songs of Freedom, etc.). After the choirs prepare the music, it is offered first at Friday evening Shabbat services at the Temple, and then at Sunday afternoon Evensong services at St. Mark's. Large receptions have followed each service, at both locations, for the congregations to get to know each other socially.

St. Mark's large choir has offered services at Grace Cathedral, when requested. The choir makes a pilgrimage to England every three years, staying as choir-in-residence for one week each at two cathedrals, and singing daily Evensong and Sunday Eucharist (and sometimes sung Matins). This summer's pilgrimage will be to Ely and Bristol Cathedrals, and will comprise a total of fifteen church services.

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

St. Mark's hosts a number of outreach programs for the Berkeley area. For example, at least three ministries touch people from outside the parish: the choir, the monthly Hot Meals for the Hungry offering, and Sacred Space. The choir performs to other congregations as well as hospitals and places such as San Quentin. St. Mark's serves a hot meal once a month to 80-100 members of the Berkeley community in need. St. Mark's relies heavily on outside service organizations to provide the staffing to serve such a large group. The parish also hosts the Suitcase Clinic, a U.C. Berkeley student organization associated with the School of Public Health. The clinic offers clothing, food, counseling, and medical services to homeless youth. The Suitcase Clinic has recently opted to offer these services to all ages. Sacred Space is a program that involves parishioners who prepare and provide food for the homeless in the local area.

Worship services often provide special opportunities. For example, the mid-week noon Eucharists often lead to pastoral care for folks in the local Berkeley community. The special All Soul's service provides an opportunity for comfort and care both for members of our parish and for guests.

Finally, St. Mark's Eucharistic ministers and clergy visit nursing homes regularly.

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

We have developed two ministries of note within the last five years, one externally and one internally focused.

First, our Study Hall program was started about four years ago. Members of the congregation (a vestry member and a U.C. Berkeley student) saw a need for a study space for Cal students and envisioned a potential ministry by the parish to meet that need. This student was very well organized and enthusiastic. He devoted a lot of time advertising the program on campus and recruiting parishioners to provide food and act as monitors. The program was successful in two ways. First, it met a need of the student community during exams; second, it awoke the parish to this ministry. St. Mark's has continued to provide the Study Hall at the end of each semester, long after the founding student has graduated and left the Berkeley area. You can speak with Donn and Alda Morgan about this ministry.

Second, our Young Adults program was established recently. Several years ago, a number of students, graduate students, and people in their twenties joined the church choir, while there was also an influx of non-singers in the same age range in the general congregation. They banded together, calling themselves the twenty-thirty somethings (now known at the "Yada's," or young adults). They have formed a supportive community within the parish, undertaking a number of recreational activities (e.g., lunch out together after church, movies, campouts, etc.) and other responsibilities in the parish (hosting coffee hours). You can speak with Becky Blessing, or her spouse, Jeff Kouts, about this ministry.

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

Many parishioners do not have a clear vision of the church of the future or of how St. Mark's is preparing for it. While there is enthusiasm and motivation to carry on a wide variety of worship services and ministries at St. Mark's, the connection between these activities and the future church is not a topic we talk about often. We hope future clergy leaders will help us see and spell out the implications for the future of our mission and ministry, including a potential outreach to those who are "spiritual but not religious."

Some parishioners affirm the Episcopal Church as the church of the future because it is open and inclusive, ordaining women and those from the LGBT community. As a progressive parish, St. Mark's has fully embraced this inclusiveness. At the same time, it values traditional liturgy and sacred music. We do not try to be all things to all people. Instead, St. Mark's special emphasis on liturgy and sacred music draws people for the regular and special services, and to become members of the choir. We are often surprised at the number of non-parishioners who attend our special offerings, such as Lessons and Carols, the All Souls service, and Holy Week. St. Mark's is preparing for the future in part by preserving the values of the Anglican theological tradition (at least as found in liturgy and music), while being progressive on social issues.

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

Once a year, we ask pledges of the congregation for the ongoing financial support of the church. A few years ago, we added a section on the pledge card for people to pledge not only their "Treasure" (money), but also their "Time" and "Talents." This has allowed people to enumerate the many hours of unpaid volunteer labor that goes into making any church successful, not just the checks we write. For "mid-year" pledges, there are pledge cards in each pew, an occasional announcement is made, and notices are put in the weekly bulletin. It has been many years since St. Mark's has undertaken an Every Member Canvas, and one is urgently needed. One stumbling block to doing so has been the fact that the Stewardship Committee has for several years had very few members.

Whenever St. Mark's has needed to raise funds for a special project—a new floor, new sound system, organ rebuilt, etc.—the parish readily offers sufficient funds to accomplish the project, and

does so without delay or much coaxing. So we know there is latent goodwill to donate for projects. We could do more to show how essential ongoing annual financial support is, and the good that pledge moneys can accomplish (e.g., graphs, "why I pledge" testimonials, personal tributes, etc.). Sometimes St. Mark's seems apologetic about asking for money. A culture shift may be needed to ensure the church has the funds to sustain the internal and external programs of the parish.

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

Like many parishes, St. Mark's has some difficulty with alienating behaviors such as triangulating, bullying, and petty quarreling. We would benefit from some tools to work with these issues.

The last rector resigned in the face of ongoing issues that could not be resolved to the satisfaction of the vestry. The rector and the vestry carried through a yearlong process of trying to address these issues. This was handled in strict confidence between the rector and the vestry. An independent facilitator, recommended by the diocese, was brought in to work with the rector and the vestry. In the end, the rector resigned her position and an interim rector was brought in.

Partly as a result of the confidential nature of these negotiations, the rector's resignation came as a complete surprise to many at St. Mark's. Perhaps because there is a great deal of goodwill in the parish, and because some of the underlying problems with the rector's performance were not readily visible to many, something of a hullabaloo ensued. The vestry found this a wrenching experience, and a number of parishioners were upset with the way things were handled. As a result, the following steps were taken:

1. St. Mark's held a parish-wide forum. The rector, facilitator, and the vestry were present. All parties spoke to the issues publicly, answered questions, and entertained comments from the parishioners in attendance.
2. The interim rector scheduled small group sessions to allow people to voice the pains and concerns they experienced from ending this relationship with the rector. He also met parishioners on an individual basis.
3. The church held a series of forums on the past and future visions of mission and ministry that the parish has for St. Mark's.

The whole parish (parishioners, vestry, and clergy leadership) needs to continue to grow in its ability to address issues raised and caused by conflict (for example, communication and reconciliation).

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?*

Change has been effective when we have explained, planned for it, and included the parish, but has not gone well when we have not been inclusive or candid in our descriptions of who we are as a worshipping community. The congregation includes people who are extremely bright, talented, and caring, and change has gone well when we have tapped into these qualities. Change is more likely to go well if we inform the parish ahead of time and provided an opportunity for discussion. However, we tend to idealize ourselves, and to expect our ministers to be expert in many functions. Even minor changes can be problematic if there is no prior explanation or participation.

An example of change that went well was moving the baptismal font to the back of the nave in the center aisle. Plans were made, announced, and the physical space was marked so that people could easily understand the proposal. We encouraged comments, accepted suggestions, modified the proposal, and arrived at a much-improved physical layout that placed the font in a location that highlights the importance of baptism as part of our faith, while allowing adequate space for parishioners, choir, and persons serving to move freely.

We need to decide which leadership functions (worship leadership, pastoral care, administrative skills, parish building, outreach skills, etc.) are most important to us, and how we, as a parish, can effectively fill in with energy and devotion. It is unrealistic to expect the rector to be expert in all things and to have the time and energy to do them.

The clear lesson is (1) float the idea of a change to all interested groups; (2) encourage discussion, listening carefully to what is said; (3) develop consensus; and then (4) take action to implement the change.

12. Please provide 4–6 words (separated by commas) describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community?

Compassionate, Energetic, Communicator, Pastoral, Organized, Leader

The preceding words were used most frequently in a discussion at our 2017 Annual Meeting. As such, they reflect, perhaps, the broadest parish participation in answering these OTM questions. The choices made also reflect a rather clear and potentially divided opinion about what kind of skills we hope for in a priest. We hope for a pastorally sensitive person, on the one hand, and someone who brings clear administrative skills to the job, on the other. Other words lifted up at the Annual Meeting (mediator, empathy, musical, teacher, a people person) may help to fill out the picture of expectations or hopes found in these words. We hope our priest-in-charge will help us address the multitude of expectations we have for our clergy leaders in ways that are both realistic and congruent with our parish mission.