

# St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

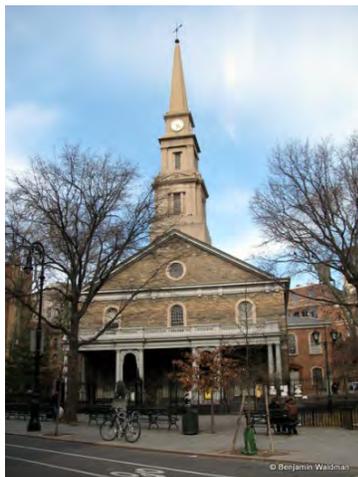


## Parish Profile 2022

# MISSION

## Mission

As a diverse and inclusive Episcopal Church on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery is committed to expressing God's love through worship and music, social justice activism, service, education, and celebration of the arts. The congregation practices radical welcome, accepting all who wish to experience God as part of a loving and active community. Wherever anyone may be in their religious or spiritual journey, of whatever faith or background, everyone is invited to join us as we work to live out God's love in the world.



## About St. Mark's

St. Mark's is a church with a history as long and meandering as the history of European settlement in Manhattan. It is the oldest site of continuous Christian worship in New York City and the burial site of Peter Stuyvesant and other major historical figures. Today St. Mark's is a progressive Episcopal Church located in an historic landmarked building, a center for modern dance, ballet, poetry, and a community gathering space for the Lower East Side. (Please see Appendix 1 for an expanded history.)

# WORSHIP AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

*St. Mark's nourishes me most richly through the liturgies that we celebrate each Sunday and throughout the year. Each element of the liturgy is intentional and well-crafted in order to enhance our worship of God, but for me the centerpiece, and most spiritually nurturing elements of the liturgical structure are the Homily and the Eucharist. The preaching that I love at St. Mark's is strong, bold, prophetic, intellectually rigorous, topical, expository, socially aware, scripturally based, historically nuanced, and Christ-centered.*

*—Comment from Parish Survey*

A St. Mark's Sunday service is both rooted in the Episcopal tradition and celebratory of the creativity and the diversity of the congregation. Many feel strongly that this balance is what makes the worship meaningful to them.

Approximately 40% of the regular congregants have attended St. Mark's for 2-5 years, approx. 15% have attended 5-10 years, and more than 20% have attended ten or more years. Located where we are, we include a large number of people for whom New York may not be a permanent home. This balance between newcomers and long-time attendees ensures that there is continuity as well as evolution.

Everything a person needs in order to participate in the service is in the Sunday Service Booklet, including the text of the readings and the hymns. The first thing someone looking at the bulletin will see is this statement: "Welcome. Church might be something you do often or have wanted to do for a while. It may be kind of scary or really exciting for you. We want you to feel comfortable being here; please know that you are most welcome. The St. Mark's community



considers this unconditional welcome to be a vital part of the parish identity. Perhaps the strongest symbol of welcome at St. Mark's is that the church is set up in the round, with the altar in the center. There is no barrier between the clergy and the congregants, and no matter where one sits they are a part of the circle. During communion we stand in a tighter circle around the altar and pass the sacraments from person to person, connecting the entire

congregation. COVID-19 has forced us to alter the manner in which the sacraments are passed during communion, bread is still passed from one to another, however, the chalice is administered by the celebrant. As the accompanying photo illustrates, there are no pews in the Sanctuary. Carpeted risers were constructed around the Sanctuary perimeter, and moveable chairs are used. The Sanctuary is a flexible physical space that allows us to worship in the round and frees us to incorporate varied musical styles into our Sunday worship.

Music is a powerful and integral part of worship at St. Mark's. We incorporate jazz, blues, gospel, and other musical genres into the Anglican musical tradition for the purpose of nurturing spirituality and inspiring social justice. The choir is made up of volunteers who rehearse for the hour before the service. Soloists and musicians often join the choir, adding breadth and depth to the music selections. There is a grand piano in the Sanctuary and also one in the Parish Hall (the organ was destroyed in the 1978 fire and never replaced). For special services, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pride Day, the choir has additional rehearsals. Good Friday Blues is a St. Mark's tradition, developed over twenty years ago by Bishop Cathy Roskam and Jeannine Otis, our Music Director. A variety of instrumental, choral and solo blues pieces set the Good Friday liturgy—sermons, prayers, veneration of the cross, and communion from reserved sacrament—into a professionally-acted presentation of John's gospel in a powerfully moving way. It draws 250-300 people every year.

We use inclusive terms for God and sing rather than recite the Creed so as to accommodate this gender-neutral language. However, we respect the language we find in Scripture (e.g. The Lord's Prayer, which we also sing each Sunday) as part of our commitment to faithfully engage with and encounter the text as it comes to us. The Prayers of the People are said in a call-and-response fashion, led by a lay reader. When we reach the names of those for whom additional prayers have been asked we say those names aloud in unison, and every week the number of those killed or injured by guns in the United States that year is read off.

*St. Mark's is a place where your whole being is welcomed. We bring our hearts and our minds to worship. This acceptance makes the church feel like a safe place to be vulnerable in worship and encounter God.*

*—Comment from Parish Survey*

Members of the congregation take on the tasks of recruiting and scheduling activities such as readers, ushers, and the Altar Guild. The organizer of an activity communicates with volunteers via email and Basecamp, usually scheduling several months in advance. (See table below.)

<b>Community Involvement in Worship Leadership</b> <i>(Percentage of 77 Survey Responses)</i>	
Readers	27.3%
Ushers	20.8%
Altar Guild	29.9%
Acolytes	11.7%
Choir and Music	26%

When asked what the most important aspects of worship at St. Mark's, the community has responded especially strongly to three things: the community, the preaching, and the liturgy. Many people state that they feel nourished by sermons that challenge them, particularly when

framed by current events and the issues that affect both the St. Mark's community and the world. People regularly come from all five boroughs, New Jersey, and Connecticut to worship at St. Mark's, to be challenged, called to action, comforted, and spiritually nourished. A relatively small percentage of the congregation lives within walking distance and so many commit to a lengthy commute in order to attend worship at St. Mark's.

## PARISH LIFE

### CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The members of this church are generally active and educated. We value opportunities to discuss the Bible and its current relevance to our lives. Bible study has been held before Sunday service. Groups of four to eight have met, for four to six weeks, to discuss specific sections of the Bible. These series have occurred four times in each of the two years prior to the onset of COVID-19. A number of parishioners are interested in additional study, but it is often difficult to find meeting times that work for those who are interested.

Christian education has additionally been extended to people attending our church by the Rector in small groups. This happens two or three times a year, as necessary, when people express curiosity on the meaning of baptism or confirmation in the Church, or are interested in being formally received in the congregation. This could be expanded to include members who are interested, for example, in the Episcopal Church USA's relationship to the Anglican Communion and its implications.

*Bible study at St. Mark's has encouraged me to take a slower, more deliberative approach to my reading to better understand and discern the message and warnings Jesus and his disciples left us about the effect of empire/ government on the lives of people, how we are to live our lives and how we are to interact with others, particularly those less fortunate.*  
 –Comment from Parish Survey

**Church School** has not been well attended in the past few years and currently there are no children who come to services on a regular basis. There is general agreement that the parish needs to attract and engage families with children to attend St. Mark's. This indicates a need to reach out to our neighborhood and assure we have programs ready that will enrich the lives of children while imparting a loving Christian message.

## ACTIVITIES

Our congregation is comprised of activists in a number of issues, including issues of racism, gender-identity, and economic justice. We like to be challenged to action in pursuit of justice. We like to hear from leaders in these struggles who can bring us information from other parts of these movements. Our congregation celebrates marriage as gender-neutral and all couples wishing to solemnize their vows are welcome to be wed at St. Mark's after appropriate pre-marital counseling.



### Annual Events/Celebrations

Each year our parish holds a **Martin Luther King dinner** on his holiday in January. This is open to the community. Past speakers have discussed reconciliation, reparations, gun violence, and mass incarcerations with emphasis on the African-American experience.

We hold a **Pride Mass** on the last Sunday in June to coordinate with Gay Pride week in New York City. Our disco ball is a favorite! Marchers head to the Pride March together after the service.

**Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner** has been a social gathering for years, often accompanied by jazz music. We include the burning of palms and our past cares in a short service in the garden. We have had anywhere between 20 - 80 people attend in recent years.



In the fall we traditionally have the blessing of animals on **St. Francis Day**. Some Easter services have been followed by a pot-luck lunch in the parish hall or other festive gathering. Easter festivities also often include an **Easter Egg Hunt** on Saturday (this year's hunt attracted 100 neighborhood children). We have a **Homecoming celebration** in September that includes an outdoor barbecue in the garden. There are other occasions that are celebrated with a cook-out in the garden, such as **St. Mark's Day**.

### Community Building Activities

**Coffee Hour:** New York City has an active, diverse, and sometimes transient population. We frequently have visitors attend services at St. Mark's who are in the city from other states and countries. As the congregation welcomes these visitors, we also display our church as a safe and sacred place. Our coffee hour after Sunday service is a vital time for us to connect socially as we have just re-connected spiritually in Communion. We convert our central altar table to an

*The community has been nurturing. Meeting new people after service during coffee hour and at pot lucks I think has brought me closer with people in the church and gives me a sense of belonging to a spiritual community. More social events outside of church would be good—just to get together or to participate in events or outreach programs.*

*—Comment from Parish Survey*

open table for all those who have gathered. This is also the time we get to know our visitors, what brings them to St Mark's, and their spiritual journey.

Many varied activities have been enjoyed by our congregation. In the past few years we have had **pot-luck dinners**, hosted by members from Lower Manhattan, Harlem, Brooklyn and Staten Island, in their apartments. We have an **old-time band** that gathers and plays for services on occasion. Work parties for the **gardens** are scheduled in season, both to prepare the gardens for Spring and to settle them for Fall.

### Social Service & Social Justice Activities

*A strong sense of community [is a core value]. A commitment to living out the social justice message of the Gospel. A sense of involvement in the world outside us—in our community, our nation, our world. A recognition of the need to celebrate our diversity and inclusion in our worship, music and ministry.*

*—Comment from Parish Survey*



There is currently a Black Lives Matter banner on display in the East yard of St Mark's. (A larger one on the fence, pictured here, was stolen in the middle of the night.) Many members have participated in demonstrations and protest marches in and around New York City to protest the deaths of minorities at the hands of police officers.

A letter-writing campaign in support of Amnesty International was previously held and was quite successful. We have partnered with Rural Migrant Ministries for fundraisers, trips to legislators in Albany, and phone campaigns in support of farm workers. Our Lenten book discussion groups are often based on books focused on the importance of economic and racial diversity and are usually well attended. There appears to be lively interest in developing a project to challenge racism in our community.

**Pastoral Care** is an area where the leadership of our next priest will be highly valued. There are many in our congregation who desire support with life's burdens. Special contact for those dealing with illness or infirmity is important, and our parish network could be better organized for this mission.

St. Mark's needs a spiritual, supportive, intelligent, activist leader to guide us in the many interests of our parish. We hope for a collaborative and challenging relationship with our next priest. We embrace liberation theology, and work for God's justice and love in our lives.

## COMMUNICATIONS

St. Mark's employs a variety of ways to keep in contact with members of the Congregation and friends:

**Weekly E-mail Newsletter:** A weekly e-mail newsletter is sent to Congregation members, friends and visitors who've signed cards requesting to keep in touch. It is sent through MailChimp, a service that allows recipients to unsubscribe automatically if they do not wish to receive it. Currently, more than 600 people receive the weekly email newsletter, which contains reminders of events or activities at St. Mark's in the coming week and includes a message from the priest. It also includes links to material on the church's web site and other sources. It is generally sent out on Thursdays by the office administrator.

**Weekly Service Booklet:** All those attending Sunday services receive a Service Booklet that contains the entire service – prayers, music, readings – and includes written announcements as well as messages from the Diocese. People are encouraged to take it home. At the service itself, certain announcements are highlighted by the celebrant or other members of the congregation.

**Website:** St. Mark's website at [www.stmarksbowery.org](http://www.stmarksbowery.org) contains information on current activities at St. Mark's, as well as an archive of sermons and music performed at Sunday services. A number of congregation members have remarked that they came to a Sunday service at St. Mark's after listening to a sermon on the website. Other congregation members have said that they often re-listen to the Sunday sermon during the week. The website was re-designed under the leadership of Rev. Winnie Varghese, who updated it regularly. Currently, updates are performed by our part time Priest Associate, but at present there is no official webmaster.

**Facebook:** St. Mark's has a Facebook page, which currently contains information about Church activities and activities of our resident arts projects. Since the transition, a member of the Vestry has been posting to Facebook. We also maintain a Facebook group for interested members of our community who can post items of interest or engage in discussion with other members, as well as a page for Social Justice information and topics maintained by group members.

**Basecamp:** Basecamp is an internet-based document-sharing and communications site used extensively by staff, the Vestry, and worship leaders (acolytes, readers, ushers, etc.) and the Search Committee. Depending on a person's involvement, he/she is given access to certain areas of Basecamp. Acolytes, ushers and readers can go to Basecamp to sign up for a particular Sunday or to send an email. For example, if an acolyte finds out on a Saturday that she cannot attend the Sunday service, she can send an email to all the other acolytes to find someone who can fill in.

The Vestry uses Basecamp extensively as a way to communicate with each other. All documents that the Vestry members need to do their work are posted on Basecamp, e.g. Minutes of Meetings, financial documents, materials that relate to matters on a Vestry agenda, etc. There are also Basecamp sections for committees, such as the Finance Committee, Buildings and Grounds Committee, and Music and Worship Committee. The Sunday Service Booklets are posted on Basecamp, providing an easy way to see how past services were conducted.

**Sunday Coffee Hour:** This time provides an important opportunity for members of the congregation to communicate with each other, especially those who may be working together on a committee or project.

# CHURCH OVERVIEW

## Some Recent History and Its Impact on the Present

Two aspects of St. Mark's history impact heavily on the present. The first is its relationship with the arts, dating back to the rectorship of Rev. William Norman Guthrie (1911-37). Guthrie revitalized a flagging congregation by bringing the arts into worship and opening up the church to performances of dance, music and poetry, often to the dismay of the Bishop. When Rev. Michael Allen became Rector in 1959, he too reached out to the increasing numbers of poets, writers, dancers, musicians, actors and playwrights who had moved to the Lower East Side. The establishment of the St. Mark's Poetry Project, and later Danspace and theater groups, at the church as collaborators with St. Mark's occurred during his tenure.



The second aspect that impacted heavily on the present was the designation of St. Mark's as an historic landmark in 1966. Ten years later, however, a disastrous fire severely damaged the Sanctuary. The Committee to Save St. Mark's (comprised of many people involved with the arts projects) raised money for the restoration. In 1988, another fire damaged the Ernest Flagg Rectory. Again, the St. Mark's Historic Landmark Fund (which grew out of the Committee to Save St. Mark's) agreed to raise money to renovate the building in exchange for a 20-year lease.

Today, the church is still home to three arts projects, which have leases on the space that they use. While the income from the arts projects and the re-development of the rectory as an historic preservation center has enabled the church to secure much-needed income and to have an apartment for the rector, the relationship to the arts projects has

evolved from a close collaboration to a more formal, albeit friendly, arrangement for sharing space. The 20-year lease on the Rectory expired in 2019, and now that building provides significant income.

## THE VESTRY

The Vestry is composed of ten members who serve staggered three-year terms. The Vestry includes a mix of long-term and newer congregants and its members bring a wide range of skill and experience to administer the church:

- Leith Barton, Former Model, Freelance Children's Activity Coordinator
- Sarah Coco, Esq., Attorney, Simpson, Thatcher and Bartlett, LLP
- Margaret Farris, Elementary School Teacher, New York City D.O.E
- Mark Graham, MDiv., Executive Director - The Redemption Center
- Mary Beth Griggs, Science Editor, The Verge
- Elisabeth Jacobs - Warden, Retired Hospital Administrator – Cornell Medical Center
- Robert Kershaw, Retired Circuit Court Judge, Senior Judge since February 2022, Judge-in-Charge, Juvenile Division
- Mary-Margret Little - *Warden*, Tech Executive, T-Rex
- Morgan Roper, Vice President, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, BNY Mellon
- Anthony Turner, Voice Professor – Wagner College, Performing Artist

**Vestry Committees:** The Vestry has the following committees:

- **Finance Committee:** currently composed of the Treasurer, a Warden (who has prior finance and accounting experience), former warden and a parishioner (who is a retired accountant); ideally it includes the Treasurer, one warden, the Rector, and a congregation member with particular financial skills. The Finance Committee regularly monitors the financial condition of the church, develops a budget, oversees the annual stewardship campaign, and assists with preparing materials for the audit.
- **Building & Grounds Committee:** generally made up of people who have interest and some qualifications in building maintenance or construction; currently composed of a Warden, and two vestry members. This committee deals with the nuts and bolts of maintaining the property and addresses both long-term and immediate challenges. This committee worked extensively with architects, the NYC Landmarks Commission and Community Board 3 to develop the ramp project described below and the recently completed gutter project.
- **Worship Committee:** generally composed of Rector/priest-in-charge, at least one Vestry member, music director, any associate or assisting priests (currently The Rev. Paul Feuerstein), seminarian (if we have one), and interested members of the congregation.
- **Capital campaign committee (ad hoc):** currently there is no committee, however it is usually composed of three Vestry members and one congregation member with fundraising expertise. ramp.

## PHYSICAL PLANT

St. Mark's campus includes the Sanctuary, Parish Hall, East Yard, West Yard, and the Ernest Flagg Rectory. Three resident arts projects share the space:

- Danspace, which holds performances in the Sanctuary Thursday through Saturday evenings during their season, which generally runs from September through May. It has an office on the second floor of the Sanctuary.
- The Poetry Project, which has readings in the Parish Hall on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, with workshops on Tuesday and Thursday. It also has an office on the second floor of the Sanctuary and storage space in the basement.
- The New York Ballet Theater, which offers classes for children and adults during the day in the former theater space on the second floor of the parish hall.

The Ernest Flagg Rectory currently houses:

- A 1200-square-foot apartment on the third floor for the Rector
- The Neighborhood Preservation Center, operated by the St. Mark's Historic Landmark Fund, on the first floor
- The Historic Districts Council and the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation on the second floor



Both the Parish Hall and Sanctuary are also used for concerts, events and meetings, as well as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) site. Both the East and West Yards are burial grounds. When the yards were renovated in the '70s, the West Yard was landscaped with undulating ivy-covered mounds covering the burial vaults. The West Yard remains a peaceful and contemplative site, and is used extensively in the warmer months for after-church coffee hour, barbecues, an annual Easter Egg hunt, and other events. The East Yard is more open, with the old gravestones embedded in the ground. The East Yard is used for an annual

commemoration of the Day of the Dead organized by Mano a Mano, a Mexican cultural organization. For the past nine years between Palm Sunday and Easter, the East Yard has been filled with bamboo crosses bearing tee shirts with the names of someone killed during the previous year by gun violence. For the church's bicentennial in 1999, the fence surrounding the property held a series of images encased in watertight frames detailing the history of St. Mark's. From time to time, the Fence displays banners and provides a way for St. Mark's to make a public statement on important issues, such as the Black Lives Matter banner.

## HISTORIC AND CURRENT CHALLENGES TO MAINTAINING THE SITE

Maintaining the site has been a continual challenge. Although the church's finances have improved and stabilized considerably in the past decade, there have been times when the church ran at a deficit, not paying bills on time and continually deferring maintenance. The growth of the congregation over the past 25 years, the renegotiation of leases with the arts projects, better oversight and planning on the part of the Vestry Finance Committee, and some successes in capital fundraising have enabled St. Mark's to stabilize its finances and take on sorely needed capital projects. For example, over the past two decades, the church has been able to replace the boiler; install a new dimming system and updated controls in the Sanctuary; install snow guards on the roof and make minor repairs on the slate roof; purchase two new induction/electric ranges for the kitchen (obviating the need for an expensive fire suppression system), purchase two refrigerators for the food pantry, and install a water meter to comply with city regulations. In 2012, St. Mark's was invited to participate in the Partners in Preservation challenge grant, sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express, in which landmarked sites reached out to their constituencies and asked them to vote on Facebook for their project. St. Mark's was awarded the full amount of its request -- \$135,000 -- which was used to renovate the Portico roof and cast iron columns, which had badly deteriorated.



### Current Capital Projects

The Vestry and congregation decided to leverage the funds from the Partners in Preservation grant to fulfill a long-standing goal of building a permanent accessibility ramp. St. Mark's spent a year working with architects to design a ramp that would successfully

blend with the historic character of the building and win approval of both the New York City Landmarks Commission and Community Board 3. Approval was given in 2014 and additional support in the amount of \$183,131 was secured from congregational pledges, a New York Landmarks Conservancy grant, and a NY Episcopal Diocese loan. The work was completed by the Fall of 2016. (See “Ramp It Up” campaign materials in Appendix)

### **Other Major Capital Needs**

Despite many repairs over the years, the roof gutters that were never correctly configured during the renovation of the Sanctuary caused leaks as evidenced by damage to the plaster and paint on the balcony’s ceiling and walls. This work was just completed in September 2022, at a cost of \$441,000. With the exception of the Peter Stuyvesant stained glass window, which was refurbished in 2015 with donations from the Holland Dames, all of the stained glass windows on the lower level need to be restored. Panes of glass have come loose on several windows. It is estimated that it will cost in excess of \$20,000 or more per window to restore them. The fence surrounding the property and its granite base are in need of restoration. Pieces of the fence have fallen off, the granite base is leaning outward and pieces of it have cracked and fallen off. It is estimated that it would cost more than \$1 million to restore the fence. Other problems include the inaccessible gutter on the north side of the Parish Hall, which needs to be replaced. There has been considerable deferred maintenance, most notably the need to repaint the wooden trim of the Sanctuary and Parish Hall, plastering and painting of the interior Sanctuary, and replacing the wooden louvers in the clock tower, which were poorly designed. The carpeting on the floor and risers of the Sanctuary also needs to be replaced.

## **FINANCIAL BACKGROUND**

The overall financial situation of the church has improved in recent years.

### **Staffing**

Current staff includes a two part-time Priest Associates, a full time Property Manager, a full-time Sexton, a part-time Music Director, a Sunday Sexton and a Parish Administrator who works approximately 30 hours per week.

### **Stewardship**

Each year in the fall St. Mark’s conducts a stewardship campaign to encourage members to make a realizable pledge. A series of announcements and personal testimonies are made during the announcement section of Sunday services. The amount of money pledged during the stewardship campaign is used to create the next year’s budget.



### **Capital Campaign**

A capital campaign is currently being considered to raise funds to complete the gutter work on the 11<sup>th</sup> street side of the parish.

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## t. Mark's Landmark Fund and the Rectory Building



As detailed above, the St. Mark's Landmark Fund grew out of the Committee to Save St. Mark's. The Fund was the major force in raising funds for the renovation of the Church after the disastrous fire in 1978. When fire damaged the Rectory in 1990, the insurance payment only covered exterior repairs. The St. Mark's Landmark Fund proposed taking charge of the interior renovation in exchange for a 20-year lease. Around that time, the Fund had expanded its mission and prioritized setting up the Neighborhood Preservation Center to promote preservation throughout the city. The Rectory renovation included a Rector's apartment on the third floor of the building. Since this apartment was not used by the part-time priests in charge and interim priests for many years,

it was rented and became an important source of revenue for the church at a time when the church's finances needed to be stabilized in order to get Diocesan approval to call a full-time priest in charge and eventually a Rector.

The priest in charge/Rector and the Treasurer or another member of the Vestry are ex-officio members of the board of directors of the Fund. Over the past 20 years, the Fund received donations from the Dutch government to renovate the gate and archway to the West Yard, a project that was completed in 2014. The Fund has provided modest funds for capital expenses, but has not aggressively raised funds to support the many capital needs of the Church, preferring to focus on developing the Neighborhood Preservation Center.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

*"Comfort the afflicted & afflict the comfortable"*

### WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT ST. MARK'S AND WANT TO CONTINUE

Our Parish Survey and two Town Hall Meetings, in which a large percentage of congregants participated, provided a wealth of information on what St. Mark's means to current members, what aspects of worship and congregational life members want to see continue, and what qualities we hope the next Rector will have.

While St. Mark's may be considered an unorthodox community (as far as Episcopal churches go), we are not a laboratory for open-ended experimentation and exploration. We are unconventional in many ways, but our unique conventions and style of worship have been carefully crafted and honed over many years. While we feel strongly about the way that we do things each Sunday, we are not rigid and closed off to change. We are willing to be challenged, but are more receptive to change if it is thoughtfully conceived, clearly communicated, competently implemented, and remains rooted in our Christian and Episcopal heritage. We want a Priest who will, as a preliminary matter, get to know us and

how we tick. When a level of trust is established the flock will more readily follow the shepherd in new directions.

The following are some of the key elements revealed in the surveys and Town Halls, with a representative sampling of comments from those events.

**Our liturgy and worshipping in the round** – Sitting in the round and celebrating communion in a circle -- serving each other around the altar table--is a beloved part of our worship and a living symbol of the unity of our community. In our Parish Survey and Town Hall meetings, many members expressed how important this is. For example:

- *The Eucharist nurtures me spiritually by reminding me that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. As I celebrate this mystery each week, in an inclusive circle with my Sisters and Brothers, I am sometimes moved to tears. Services at St Mark's, at their best, remind me who I am, whose I am, and how those things should shape the way I live and move -- as an individual and as a member of a religious body -- in our sadly broken world.*
- *I love being part of the circle and seeing others in the community. I feel it more seeing their faces as opposed to their backs.*
- *There is power and energy in the circle. I have the ability to be who I am in that circle and not my role.*

**We value sermons that are challenging and disruptive, that keep us active and generate discussions.**

We cherish inspiring sermons that are firmly grounded in the day's readings but which speak powerfully to issues important to our community. Sermons were recorded and posted on the web site, and many congregants remarked that they listened to them again during the week. In our Parish Survey, 94% of congregants said preaching was among the most important aspects of worship.

- *I started coming to St. Mark's five years ago because it reminded me that the world's values were not God's values. I was spending a lot of time among very competitive people, and it was grounding to come to church and remember there was more to life than cover letters. Winnie's sermons really helped at first because she had a way not of explaining away uncomfortable texts but rather of engaging fully with the Christian tradition to show that it really was about love. Her sermons never let you off the hook, but they presented you with the right hook.*
- *St. Mark's nourishes me most richly through the liturgies that we celebrate each Sunday and throughout the year. Each element of the liturgy is intentional and well-crafted in order to enhance our worship of God, but for me the centerpiece, and most spiritually nurturing elements of the liturgical structure are the Homily and the Eucharist. The preaching that I love at St Mark's is strong, bold, prophetic, intellectually rigorous, topical, expository, socially aware, scripturally based, historically nuanced, and Christ-centered.*
- *Sermons are freeing, in your face, and challenge authority.*
- *Sermons have challenging messages that make you think about and see the world and your place in it differently.*

- *St. Mark's has an inclusive liturgy. There is room for the Holy Spirit and powerful sermons shake you out of your comfort zone but are also helpful.*

**We love the wealth of music** from all traditions that is a vital part of our service. In our Parish Survey, two-thirds of respondents included music as among the most important elements of our worship, both in terms of congregational singing and the soloists who perform. Some comments:

- *Music is amazing, moving and has great diversity. Jeannine and the people she gets to perform are great.*
- *The music under Jeannine is one of the best church music experiences I've ever had. It often moves me in a deeply spiritual way. I love that we have a diversity of musical forms and such talented singers and musicians.*
- *Services like Good Friday Blues and memorials are special.*
- *The music and the worship service at St. Marks are incredibly nurturing--it gives me a space to breathe and think, space away from the rest of the life, and a chance to be and be present simply as a person....*

**We are committed to offering a radical welcome.** All congregants appreciate the radical welcome and younger people in particular have remarked that St. Mark's represents a safe space and a stable anchor within the chaos of New York City.

- *St. Mark's is a place where your whole being is welcomed. We bring our hearts and our minds to worship. This acceptance makes the church feel like a safe place to be vulnerable in worship and encounter God.*
- *I believe the very core value of St. Mark's is its inclusivity - the fact that it really does invite everybody to take part, and that it works for social justice in the world.*
- *The experience a person has when they first come is important. Years ago, a group of Buddhist monks who came to observe the service were welcomed into the circle, took communion and said it was the most profound experience they had in their travels to witness other religious services.*
- *You are welcome wherever you are in your spiritual journey.*
- *St. Mark's is inclusive – you can bring newcomers or people who may not be comfortable in a more formal service.*

**We are committed to social justice.** The theme of St. Mark's commitment to social justice recurred repeatedly throughout the comments made in the Parish Survey and at our two Town Hall meetings. There is general consensus that we would like a priest who can guide us in liberation theology and awareness of current social issues. We like opportunities for involvement in current actions, including collaborations with other congregations and groups.

- *I love the emphasis on social justice, and also for the applications of social justice not just in the public, external world but also in the context of my personal faith journey.*
- *Social justice and a progressive outlook in the world is something I see as a core value of the congregation. Fighting for justice for minorities and people who don't have a voice is something that we care deeply about. I think this is also reflected in the way most things are approached - from the way we accept visitors and new members to the committee we have for social justice to the campaign for the accessibility ramp.*
- *To me St. Mark's is a community deeply rooted in our Christian faith and Episcopal heritage. We are neither ashamed of those identities, nor are we unwilling to call out the Church regarding things that we have historically gotten wrong. As an outgrowth of that solid grounding, we are radically inclusive, and firmly committed to social engagement, activism, and change.*

## Other Recurring Themes

**Relating to the community while continuing to be a church destination.** As the demographic data above indicate, approximately 23% of congregation members live in the immediate neighborhood and can walk to church. A significant number travel from upper Manhattan and the other boroughs and from New Jersey. We want to continue to be a church destination, but at the same time attract more people from the immediate neighborhood, particularly families. It is not uncommon that couples who live in the immediate neighborhood move away after having a child because their apartments are too small and they cannot find anything larger that is affordable. However, there are still many families in the community and interest within the congregation on finding ways to attract them and to have interesting programs for children. Transience is also an issue, with many people living in New York for a few years and then moving away for employment or other reasons.

**Building community.** The descriptions of worship and parish life in this Profile all speak to the importance of building community through the way we welcome people, worship, foster participation in worship and activities, and interact with each other. There is clear agreement that all of these things should continue to be developed by the next Rector. Many members want to see St. Mark's grow in numbers without losing the intimacy that we currently have.

**A competent administrator.** Members realize that St. Mark's, although small, is a complex place to manage and maintain. We need an individual who not only leads us spiritually, but who is a skilled administrator who can maintain and enhance relationships with the arts and cultural organizations that share our space. It is also important that the next Rector be capable of addressing the requirements of a landmarked site and generating resources to maintain the site.

**A collaborator.** The congregation has great trust in our Vestry and lay leadership, who have taken on difficult responsibilities in transition periods and who have done an excellent job of "holding things together." Many of our lay leaders have long experience dealing with the various aspects of the church, and we need the next priest to be a true collaborator. Our priest will need to know when to ask, and who to ask, for help.

**Pastoral Care.** Another recurrent theme throughout the Parish Profile and Town Halls was the need for greater attention to individual members who are sick or who otherwise need the community's support. While there are several parishioners who visit members who are homebound or in nursing homes, this is an area that many people feel needs a more consistent and organized approach.

**Incorporating seminarians.** Over the past several years St. Mark's has officially hosted a number of seminarians from Union and General Seminaries, and these individuals have enriched our community in many ways. We like to support Seminarians and spark their interest in our church.

## THE QUALITIES OF THE NEXT PRIEST-IN-CHARGE

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, the following attributes of a P.I.C. were rated 7 or higher in our Parish Survey:

- Passion for social justice and an active connection with larger social issues locally, nationally, and globally.
- Presents challenging, progressive, and socially-aware sermons.
- Actively supports and promotes cultural and racial diversity, communicates well with members of all races and backgrounds, and is able to address a broad range of concerns.
- Has a sense of humor, even under pressure.
- Pastoral skills: exhibits a pastoral presence, provides counseling, makes frequent contact with or visits to parishioners who need support.
- Knowledge of how to grow a congregation: fundraising, programming, and outreach.
- Commitment to connecting with and serving the local community.
- Ability to empower lay leaders and encourage participation in St. Mark's programs and parish life.
- Ability to enrich and deepen the spiritual life of the St. Mark's community.
- Welcoming and social.
- Committed to the active support and inclusion of those of all gender identities and sexual orientations.
- Enthusiastic and energetic.
- Attends to his/her own spiritual life, and is a model for the community.
- Administrative skills: can manage an office and supervise personnel.
- Ability to maintain relationships and administer contracts with tenants of St. Mark's.
- Has an appreciation for the arts and music and actively works to incorporate them into the worship and community life of St. Mark's. Financial skills: knows basic accounting and budget management.

Some representative comments on what we hope for in our next P.I.C. follow:

*I hope the next priest will have a prophetic voice and can speak powerfully during their sermons on issues important to our community. I'd like for them to be a good steward of the finances and the grounds, making sure that the rectory is returned to the church on time and that the space can be used as a source of income and for church priorities. I hope that the next priest would be able to grow the community further and, in doing so, allow us to have a more diverse congregation and a more diverse repertoire of committees and services that come out of the church. It would be nice for St. Mark's to*

*become again an institution in the East Village with a presence in the community, not just as a landmark building but as a place that people look to for leadership, community organizing, and help.*

*I hope they will build on what we have started, by emphasizing our openness to people who are searching, our diversity, and our connection to social justice issues. I hope they also are a model for living in community and have a pastoral presence – showing us how to be warm and loving to each other, and to encourage spiritual growth. Most of all, they need to be very smart/savvy and able to encourage people to take leadership positions.*

*I hope our next priest will both help us to implement and find tangible ways to become more politically active and engaged in our community and to confront the larger social justice issues and also to foster additional ways to nurture and develop our community. I think developing more pastoral care services and opportunities for spiritual growth will be particularly important.*

*It is important to focus on maintaining and building the congregation. Key to that is having excellent preaching and a well-executed Sunday service that makes people want to come back and formally join, along with opportunities for people to participate – in the service itself as well as in social justice activities. I would like to see the priest develop better ways of reaching out to the immediate community, especially to families with children. Few families with children come because there is nothing for the kids.*

*Continue to be guided by both justice and Episcopal tradition. I believe the religious tradition of this church—liturgy, Bible stories, etc.—lend it power. Causes and goals are vital, but we are more than a political movement. Continue to pull the stories and character of the East Village into what we do. I don't even live in the East Village, and I think this is important. Young Brooklynites are wonderful (I am one!), but the folks who have lived nearby and worshipped for decades have so much to give and should remain a core part of our congregation.*