

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Transforming lives through meaningful relationships
with God in Jesus Christ



St. Mark's Milwaukee is a healthy, diverse, and welcoming community of people who support one another's journey in Christian faith. We worship God through sharing liturgy and Holy Communion during church services, and through ministering to one another and to our surrounding community.

We are young and old; families, singles and couples; gay and straight. Coming from a variety of economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, we together represent a diverse array of perspectives and life experiences. Many of our members began their religious formation in other

denominations. The variety with which God has blessed us is part of the richness of our life together, and we say in as many ways as we can that we welcome all children of God to our church and to our communion rail.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and in the world. We believe that we are called, both as individuals and as a community, to share Christ's love with our neighbors. We do this by offering our prayers for those in need, by sharing the resources that God has entrusted to us, by studying scripture, by encouraging one another in the life of faith, by caring for creation, and by engaging in acts of love and justice in our neighborhood, our city, and beyond.

OUR SETTING

St. Mark's is located in a lovely urban area on Milwaukee's vibrant East Side, a neighborhood north of downtown bordered by Lake Michigan to the east and the Milwaukee River to the west. The East Side is known for its culture, beauty, historic architecture, diverse population, and nightlife.

The church is just off the main street (Downer Avenue) of a small retail district of shops, restaurants, an art cinema, and the city proper's only major independent bookstore. A few short blocks to our east, just beyond a highly desirable residential area of historic homes, is a beautiful Fredrick Law Olmstead-designed park that overlooks Lake Michigan.



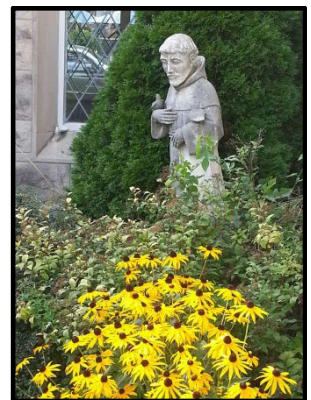
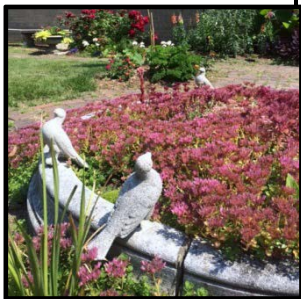
Within a five block radius are a major hospital, two fairly large senior retirement residences, the main University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM) campus with 30,000 students, three other Protestant churches, and a Catholic church. Less than a mile north along the lake is the suburb of Shorewood, whose school district consistently ranks as best or among the best in Wisconsin.

Also nearby and easily accessible are the Milwaukee Art Museum, downtown Milwaukee, Marquette University, the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, and many of Milwaukee’s best restaurants. We are on a major bus route and close to many bike paths connecting us to the city and beyond. This ideal location offers ample opportunities for community involvement and outreach, and it positions us well for continued growth.

OUR BUILDING

Our gathering place is a charming, century-old Gothic style building said to resemble an English country church. High vaulted ceilings with wooden trusses and stained-glass windows distinguish our nave, which seats 220 people, and an adjacent chapel. Cloisters enclose a courtyard memorial garden, a peaceful place where members of the congregation as well as the greater community can come to pray or simply reflect. This garden is lovingly tended by the Garden Guild, a group of devoted parishioners.

The adjacent Guild Hall houses our Thrift Shop, located in the basement; the office of a neighborhood outreach program called Eastside Senior Services; and rooms rented to a variety of groups for activities such as yoga, Alcoholics Anonymous, music lessons, dance classes, and UWM cooking classes.





PARISH LIFE

At St. Mark's, we support one another's efforts to "reach in" and discover our spiritual foundations, as well as to "reach out" and do God's work in the surrounding community and beyond.

Reaching In: Our Worship

Life at St. Mark's centers around our worship services. As a parish we value the depth of Episcopal worship and attempt to explore all that the *Book of Common Prayer* offers. At our 9:30 a.m. Sunday service, average attendance hovers near 80. Sunday School and youth group activities are held during the service, with children joining the congregation at the point of Holy Communion.

We value intellectually engaging sermons based on the lessons of the day, reflecting on the world around us, and challenging us to examine our relationship with God and our experience in the world. The sermon is often delivered in the center aisle, in the midst of the congregation, and sometimes from the pulpit, at the preacher's discretion.

Our lay leaders do traditional liturgical work: reading the lessons and prayers of the people, ushering, and serving as acolytes, chalice bearers and altar guild. After the service we adjourn to the Guild Hall for fellowship during a popular coffee hour—a good place to welcome newcomers.

Special services and events augment our worship. We host a Seder Supper each Maundy Thursday with a Eucharist and foot washing. We often organize a "watch" overnight to Good Friday. The rector has held special child-focused services on Good Friday and near Christmas. Sunday School children create and symbolically "bury" an Alleluia banner as Lent begins.

Music

Music adds immeasurably to the beauty of our worship together. Our musically literate congregation and active choir appreciate music from a variety of traditions, from Gregorian chant to modern jazz. The *Hymnal 1982* is used as a guide.



Our music director, a professional musician and composer, shares his gift for music as part of his ministry. He helps develop musically talented parish members, invites local musicians to serve as Artists in Residence, and creates opportunities for members of our parish family to contribute musically to our services.

Reaching In: Christian Formation



St. Mark's is deeply committed to Christian education and the nurturing of faith for members and guests of all ages.

Sunday School/Youth Formation

Our Sunday School is a small but vibrant community, serving children ages 4 to 17. For elementary school-aged children, our program is anchored in the guided "Buzz" curriculum from Group Publishing, which is easy for our teacher volunteers and engaging for their students. We augment it with various projects that teach

young people about service to the church community as well as about sharing their faith more broadly. Classes meet during the church service, with children joining their families for Holy Communion.

The Sunday Explorers program for middle and high school students mixes Diocese-recommended materials with service projects. The 2014–2015 program year culminated with an enthusiastically received Youth Sunday. Youngsters took on many roles that laity perform, from flower-arranging and lesson-reading to ushering and instrumental music—even a homily.



Our customary projects involving youngsters through the year include

- Fall and spring gardening, which teaches caring for the earth and beautifies our entrances and flower beds
- Collecting and wrapping Christmas gifts for Eastside Senior Services to distribute to clients
- Performing an annual Nativity pageant for the congregation
- Creating an *Alleluia* banner that we "bury" on the first Sunday of Lent and bring out to display over the altar at Easter
- Baking pretzels from scratch and collecting donated baked goods for a spring bake sale, the proceeds of which support a student in our sister parish, St. Marc's, in Jeannette, Haiti.



Adult Formation

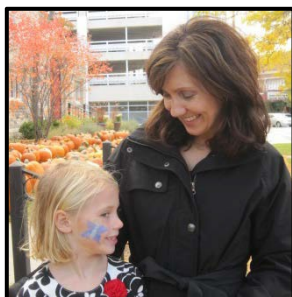
Adult formation at St. Mark's is led by a committee comprised of members of the congregation, our rector, and our deacon. Our mission with adult formation is to equip all believers with the tools to show God's love in our families, our church, our community, and the world. With that in mind, our committee

develops educational opportunities that speak to how we live as faithful Christians in the modern world.

The centerpiece of our adult formation program is Mark's Bistro, held on Thursday evenings during much of the program year. Parishioners and their guests gather for a meal, which encourages fellowship and prepares us to learn from one another as we share our beliefs as well as our doubts. Recent Bistro topics have included "The First 100 Years: The Church Then and Now"; a multi-part series on Parker Palmer's *Healing the Heart of Democracy*; "Mindful Eating: Food & Drink in the Bible," which included discussion of food preparation; "The Life and Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," and a variety of Advent activity nights.

Other adult formation options include a weekly Bible Study, a Women's Book Club, a new monthly Theology Pub, a monthly Men's Fellowship Breakfast, and an annual Men's Retreat. Our rectors have also offered an Inquirers' Class for people from other faith backgrounds or those who are searching for a new sense of commitment. Finally, Confirmation classes are offered in preparation for the Bishop's biennial visit.

Ongoing adult formation opportunities are an important part of our members' spiritual growth, and we open our hearts and minds to changing and developing new educational formats as new needs present themselves in the parish. For example, the parish also sponsors the Education for Ministry program at St. John's on the Lake, one of Milwaukee's premier retirement communities, located about a mile south of our church. EfM provides four years of instruction on the Old Testament, the New Testament, Church History, and Theology and Philosophy.





Reaching In: Finances and Stewardship

Our members give generously of both their time and talent. With a dedicated stewardship team and the parish's strong participation, St. Mark's sustains financial independence.

We recently celebrated a number of financial achievements:

- Moving from significant budget deficits in 2011 and 2012 to a small net balance at the end of both 2013 and 2014.
- Achieving 95 percent of our stewardship goal in 2013
- Establishing, through a parishioner's gift, a dedicated organ fund
- Establishing a true endowment fund with an untouchable principal

To achieve our goals of a consistently balanced budget and to grow the new endowment fund, we continue to encourage prayerful consideration of proportional giving and increases in contributions and pledges.

Our financial team includes a detail-oriented volunteer treasurer elected from the Vestry and a part-time bookkeeper who is trained as a CPA. Close to 75 percent of our members pledge regularly, and our average annual pledge typically exceeds the diocesan average. Our members have come through during special pledge requests, such as a campaign to cover expensive roof repairs, an additional spring "ask" to help balance the 2012 budget, and the recent replacement of our kitchen's commercial range.

Reaching In: The Rector and the People in Partnership

The St. Mark's laity takes significant responsibility in pastoral affairs. With the priest and the deacon, "Shepherds" develop one-to-one relationships with newcomers until they find their niche in the church. Our committed pastoral care team, with clergy oversight, keeps track of people who may be in greater need at any given time—the team writes notes, calls, and visits. Several Eucharistic ministers take communion to the homebound. A very active men's group prays with the Rector each Sunday before the service, and holds monthly breakfasts as well as a popular annual retreat.

We build fellowship as we work together on building and grounds projects. We may share a meal as we do pastoral and formation work. We have an active prayer chain with members who can lead the monthly healing service when a clergy member is not present.



Reaching Out: Year-Round Generosity

We raise funds for local, national, and international causes we care about. We extend ourselves socially in the community. We invite members of the community to join us for arts and holiday events. We volunteer for efforts we believe help create justice in the world.

Reaching Out: Inviting In

Members of St. Mark's reach into the community in many ways, with their time and talent as well as treasure.

- Our Thrift Shop, open two mornings a week, offers many useful items for very reasonable prices.
- We invite the public to frequent concerts given by our
- music director and our talented Artists in Residence.
- Exhibits of art work from parishioners and local artists grace the hallways and walls of our Guild Hall.
- On the first Friday in December, we join the Downer Avenue Merchants' Festive Friday by holding an open house that features St. Nicholas, music, crafts for kids, and a small merchandise fair.
- We have a regular relationship with The Gathering, a nonprofit hunger relief organization (founded in our Episcopal Diocese, but now independent). Our members serve dinner to 150–200 hungry people on selected Saturdays. At Thanksgiving, our parishioners roast and carve turkeys to provide a traditional dinner for the Gathering's guests. This year, the Sunday Explorers collected "dough" during coffee hour to make pumpkin pies for this dinner.



Reaching Out: Annual Fundraising

Some years ago, we removed the "outreach" line from the parish budget and initiated new events to raise funds to support a variety of nonprofit organizations. The results have nearly doubled our external giving from an average of approximately \$6,000 annually to a little over \$11,000 in 2014.

Certain outreach fundraising projects have become annual traditions at St. Mark's. In Spring, we hold a plant and flower sale for home gardens.



In Summer, the parish participates in the Downer Days cycling races by selling fresh roasted corn to spectators. That day we also run a small fair on our green space for children and sponsor a musical stage on which local musicians perform rock, jazz, pop, and classical pieces. In Fall, we sell pumpkins and gourds on our front lawn to parishioners and neighbors alike.

Our Outreach Committee distributes the money from all these sales to nonprofit organizations with missions that our

parishioners support and are involved in: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, aiding youthful runaways, treating and sheltering victims of domestic violence, supporting people in addiction recovery, tutoring children from inner city schools, and working with senior adults who seek independence. Each cause has volunteers from our parish who know its work intimately.

Reaching Out: Support for Specific Causes

Special efforts to raise money for specific causes each year increase the total giving that is distributed through the church or in the name of the church. In 2013, for example:

- Our Sunday School held an annual bake sale to raise money for school supplies for a young student at St. Marc's Episcopal Church in Jeannette, Haiti.
- The congregation responded to appeals from Episcopal Relief and Development for typhoon relief in the Philippines.
- The offering from our Easter Vigil was sent to The Gathering.
- We conducted an annual funding campaign for Common Ground.

Common Ground

Southeastern Wisconsin Common Ground, Inc., is a special cause for us because a number of our parishioners are actively involved in one or more of its initiatives. Common Ground (CG) is a community organizing nonprofit affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, which typically operates through church networks. CG's membership includes about 50 churches, synagogues, nonprofits, schools, and small businesses working together to bring creative solutions to pressing social problems.



Common Ground's recent major campaigns include

- Establishment of a nonprofit health care insurance cooperative offered on the federal health insurance exchange. More than 37,000 people have been enrolled since inception.
- Acquiring and rehabbing homes (more than 50 to date) in Milwaukee's Sherman Park neighborhood, then putting them back on the market using a clustered approach
- In its "Fair Play" campaign, opposing use of public money to fund a \$500 million arena for the Milwaukee's NBA team, advocating instead for tax dollars to be directed toward expanded and improved athletic and recreational facilities for Milwaukee parks and public schools.

As a member congregation, we support Common Ground from funds collected for outreach in an amount equal to at least one percent of our annual pledged income. Our parishioners also give of their own money and time, with several taking leadership roles in current issue campaigns.

OUR GROWING EDGES



In October 2014 our members gathered to identify our strengths and to discern the qualities we most desire in a new rector. Overwhelmingly, members said they appreciated the friendliness, the welcoming spirit, the hospitality, the sense of community, the spirit of belonging without cliques, and the diversity of our congregation. They appreciate the worship experience, including the fine preaching and the wonderful music. And they

appreciate our commitment to justice and the less fortunate. They like that we reach out to the neighborhood and to greater Milwaukee.

We, of course, would like a rector who will support us in these strengths and help us find new ways to apply them. We know we can grow in our efforts to serve God and our neighbors.

A new priest must come to know our talents and, combined with his or her talents, help us choose missions that we, together, can accomplish. Here are a few of our hopes, gathered from the membership, that serve as possible growing edges.

- ***A robust and consistent Sunday School program.*** St. Mark's is challenged in this area, mostly because of the currently small number of families with young children. We seek ways to attract this important demographic through new ideas and activities.⁹



Commitment to diversity. In our neighborhood live a significant portion of Milwaukee's LGBT population. While a rainbow sticker on the church sign illustrates that all are welcome, there has been little focused ministry to the LGBT population.

Enhanced relationships with UW–Milwaukee and Marquette University.

A number of students and faculty members from these nearby universities have worshipped with us over the years, but a concerted effort to

introduce the church to UWM and Marquette is needed. In the recent past, members volunteered for a twice yearly “chili feed” in collaboration with University Christian Ministries at UWM. There is a desire, however, to serve the student population in a more consistent and productive way.

- **Developing a deeper relational culture.** Our association with Common Ground encourages us to develop a relational culture within in our church and with our neighbors. This entails having one-on-one conversations to discover our fellow parishioners on a personal level and learn what is most important to them. Our conversations at church are often just scratching the surface. We need a deeper understanding of one another if we intend to live God's word and serve our neighbors.
- **Adult formation.** Our adult formation efforts need a greater number of participants. We would like strong direction and participation from the rector to be assured that themes and goals are consistent with those of the parish's spiritual development. In the recent past our rector presented an Inquirers Class as well as a confirmation class for young people and adults in anticipation of Bishop Miller's biennial Sunday visit to the parish (next in 2016).
- **Use of alternate liturgies.** While St. Mark's has offered a variety of services and types of music in the past, there is currently no Liturgy Committee that might help expand our ministries to accommodate the needs and concerns of our changing, largely unchurched, metropolitan neighborhood. Our previous rector experimented with a Sunday evening “Table Grace” service that took place around preparation of a community meal. While this service is no longer offered, with the leadership of our new rector it may be prudent to help create other new ministries and services.

Let Us Go Forth to Love and Serve the Lord...

No person can or should do all the work that is sometimes expected of one church and its congregational leaders. No church can embody the entire Christian mission. With a rector who possesses the vision, leadership, flexibility, and ability to share her or his ministries with us, and with the commitment and collaboration of our parishioners, St. Mark's will do itself proud in our corner of the world.

