A Description of St. John’s Episcopal Church, Logan, Utah

St. John’s is a congregation that welcomes all into a full community life.

No matter where you are on your faith journey, where you are from, or what questions and uncertainties you have, you are always welcome at St John’s. We are a community that has assembled to make the journey of faith together. You need not be a member in order to worship with us or to participate in our ministries.

We are people of the Incarnation. We believe God so loved humanity—indeed the entire creation—that God chose to pour Godself into human flesh: Jesus. Jesus thus is fully God and fully human. We believe God loves us, and that our bodies, words, thoughts and ideas, each carry potential to be used for God’s purposes. We feel God readily hears alike our praise, fear, anger, joy, and uncertainty. We believe God wants us to think for ourselves. We believe God yearns to be in relationship with us. We find both joy and mystery in worshiping God.

Our Easter 2021 service sums up the strengths of St. John’s. After a year without in-person worship and half a year without a priest, the Eucharist was celebrated in-person. The church was full to CoVid capacity, with seventy people happy to be back in our spiritual home. We feel we have survived and been strengthened by the pandemic, and we are ready for new leadership.

Worship

Worship is at the core of our community’s identity, built around the liturgies in the Book of Common Prayer. We primarily use Rite II, *Enriching Our Worship,* Taizé and other forms, enhancing our spiritual lives and celebrating the feasts of the Church with moving ritual.

The Eucharist is important to our worship lives, and we celebrate it every Sunday. For many years, we had 9 am children’s’ service and a traditional 11 am service on Sundays. About four years ago the Bishop’s Committee and Vicar decided to move to a single 10 am service to ensure that all the members of the congregation knew one another. Going to a single service has created some tension between the need for including kids and desires for a meditative atmosphere. A Wednesday evening service for healing has also been part of our tradition, with Eucharist and anointing for heeling. We welcome all who feel called to receive the Eucharist.

We deeply value inspirational and intellectually enlightening sermons that direct us as Christians and inform our relationship to the world. Accessible theology well-preached is very important to us.

Morning Prayer was held at St. John’s six days a week, until the pandemic.

Covid stopped our congregational worship in March of 2020, and our Vicar, the Rev. Dr. Steve Sturgeon, following his wife’s change in career, moved from Logan in October 2020. Since then, our lay leaders, with the blessing of the Bishop, have organized worship using a live Zoom service on Sunday mornings. A form of Morning Prayer, worship includes meditations on the scriptures offered by different members of the congregation. Those services reveal a great deal about the St. John’s community They can be viewed on St. John’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYcxw_t8QTv9mEcW-aqjNdA>. To these Sunday services we added lay-led Zoom meditation groups, Zoom book groups, Zoom “coffee hour,” and pastoral care with regular calls to parishioners. The St. John’s community is alive and well. Our Covid experience has strengthened us and allowed us to discover our talents.

St. John’s has a deep liturgical music tradition, enhanced by small endowments that occasionally bring student performers from USU to augment our fine organists’ work. This includes supporting the 6 Choral Scholars from Utah State University who perform Evensong or at important feasts several times a year.

Community

Church does not start or stop at the red doors of our building. The world, and what’s happening in it, is embraced and explored in our liturgies. Activism and community service are part of our relationship with God. We take what we experience in church out into the world. For St. John’s this has meant engagement with the Cache Community Food Pantry, refugee programs, the Cache Community Connections interfaith group. We use our building for twelve-step programs and other forms of outreach. Our large and enthusiastic Girl Scout troop is the only one in Cache Valley. Our Knitting Group is ecumenical, and we participate in the Ecumenical Youth Group. We are a seven-day-a-week church. The Logan Pride Alliance has its office on our campus, and it is an important part of our ministry to support the LGBTQ community. We expect our new priest will continue and expand this engagement with world.

St. John’s has a strong relationship with the Diocese of Utah, and several parishioners serve on Diocesan boards. In return, the Diocese has been very supportive of St. John’s.

Strengths

Due to the size of St John’s there is a strong sense of family and that family recognizes the need for everyone to work together to keep St John’s viable.  During the past year of Covid, this sense of family has never been stronger.  The strength of our parish has been demonstrated on a daily basis with a constant work of so many members.  When our priest moved on in October, it became the work of our parish to keep St John’s alive, and we all feel the satisfaction of our efforts in not only staying alive, but of growing. St. John’s is a stable, fiscally healthy community with great potential for growth. Our region is growing and becoming more diverse, giving us new opportunities to help those who seek and serve Christ.

We are blessed to have strong lay leadership that will welcome the leadership a priest can provide.

Our community is demographically diverse. The median age at Sunday services, pre-Covid, was about 35. We have several young families, though the number of teenagers is low at this moment. There are some college students and other younger people who are active in the parish, serving on the Bishop’s Committee and other ministries. We hope to grow St. John’s relationship to the Utah State University campus, participating in the Interfaith Alliance and other ministries.

Through the year, different communities worship at St, John’s. When Utah State University is in session, we have student congregants. In the summers, which are mild, dry, and beautiful, we are joined by the Summer Citizens, people who migrate from Arizona each summer to get out of the heat and into the mountain air. The University brings new congregants to us from all over each fall, and we have families who have worshiped with us since the 1880s. Our next priest should enjoy the diversity of their needs and their varied natures.

We have responded to our community’s needs with new ministries. One of the most exciting aspects of ministry is when someone within the parish develops an idea and offers it to others. One such ministry has been a meditation group. Meditation is offered so people can slow down and contemplate spirituality during certain times of the church year. Advent and Lent are the liturgical times in which our meditation group meets. Additionally, we have held summer meditation groups where we often sit outside and contemplate the vast natural beauty and stillness of Northern Utah. Meditation groups provide an opportunity to learn about the history of Christian contemplative practice, while engaging our personal sense of spirituality in new and inspiring ways. This group has been open to members of other churches in the valley, as well as community members, and thus allows us an opportunity to become acquainted with others in a meaningful way.

Our campus was significantly expanded twenty years ago, incorporating our 1909 church, and giving us a modern, well-maintained, facility in which to worship and work. St. John’s buildings are owned free and clear. Our annual pledge drive only needs to pay for operations, and contributions to the Building Fund (for maintenance and repairs). We do not foresee the need for a capital campaign.

Technically, St. John’s is a “mission congregation” which means we receive financial support from the Diocese, currently about $35,000 a year.  It is our intention, and that of the Diocese, that St. John’s will become a fully independent parish.   For the last several years, Diocesan funding has decreased about 10%, and congregant's pledges have made up the difference.   There is, however, no fixed date by which we must achieve independence.

Each year we hold a Stewardship drive. Pledge cards are distributed physically and electronically, inviting members of the parish to indicate the time, talent and treasure they wish to offer for the next fiscal year. On four Sundays before the ingathering of the pledges, members of the community speak to the congregation about the current needs of the parish, our budget situation, and our duty to help support St. John’s. In addition, we hold a very successful rummage sale most years, eliciting large donations of things and time. The rummage sale yield is matched by donors, and all of it goes into the building fund.

Our Vision for the Future

We recognize the ways in which some of the historic models for “church” no longer speak to us, but we recognize that the historical depth of human experience embodied in worship helps us navigate our contemporary needs. Churches that do not speak to human needs will die, so our new priest will work with us to adapt to changing times while keeping the deep keel of faith beneath us.

This is especially true in serving all our demographics. We need to meet the challenge of youth education. We want to diversify our adult education, serving diverse interests. Much of our adult education has been led by the academics amongst us, and we understand that what they can provide does not appeal to all. Importantly, we recognize that we have a strong pastoral care team that needs nurturing. St. John’s must use the new technologies that we now have to enrich and serve our communities, increasing our social media presence.

What St. John's is Looking for in a Priest

Our next priest should be a person whose creative imagination empowers the laity to be engaged with St. John’s and its missions.

Our priest should be a skilled leader who can bring valuable ideas to us, lending moral authority to the community’s goals.

The laity of St. John’s want to be involved in keeping our community healthy. Our new priest will support and encourage their desire, recognizing that people who are involved in leadership and work become stronger members of the church.

Our new priest should be interested in expanding our ministry to Utah State University. A focus group of student members of the parish told us “There are students at USU, both undergraduate and graduate students, who are searching for an understanding and affirming way to explore their spirituality. A priest will find a group of spiritually curious and socially engaged young people searching for a way to make a difference in their community. We are especially dedicated to building an affirming and inclusive church community where young people, especially LGBTQ+ individuals, feel safe and supported in exploring their spiritual path. Our student population is passionate about social justice and community action, and we strive to find outlets for their passion through service to the community while at the same time being together with like-minded, spiritual individuals.”

Our new priest should lead the pastoral care team, able to provide the professional counseling that only a priest can.

In short, we need a priest to help imagine the path for St John’s in the 21st century - from our worship services to the many ways we manifest the church in the world. We take these embedded values into other areas of community life and envision ways of improving and building options for connection and community beyond the worship service. We need our priest to help guide and direct us, and to walk with us in our lives as we seek and serve Christ.