

St. John's Episcopal Church
225 French Street
Bangor, Maine

St. John's Episcopal Church in Bangor, Maine, is seeking a Priest-in-Charge for a three-year term following the planned departure of their Rector in October 2020. This will be either a three-quarters-time position or a full-time position. During the final six months of the Priest-in-Charge's call, the congregation will actively search for its next Rector. In order to enable the congregation and the Priest-in-Charge to do most effectively the work of the interim, the Priest-in-Charge will not be a candidate for Rector.

The Parish

St. John's is one of the earliest churches in the Diocese, first organized in the 1830s soon after Maine became a state. The congregation's first building was built of wood in the Gothic Revival style and was acclaimed as being especially true to Gothic design. The current building is a replica (though stone-clad) of the original, which burned in 1911. A look at the parish web site, stjohnsbangor.org, shows the classic beauty of the building, which would not look out of place in a small English city.

There are strong liturgical traditions at St. John's, and the congregation takes care to foster a faithfulness and practice of worship that befits the spaces they inhabit. Sunday liturgy is formal though not especially "high-church." Under non-COVID circumstances there is an early Rite 1 service, and a later, larger Rite 2 service with full choir and Christian Education and nursery programs; there are opportunities for fellowship or formation following both services. Open services of Morning and Evening Prayer are said every weekday, usually led by a member of the congregation, and a noon healing Eucharist is offered once a week. The choir is particularly important, both as a prominent aspect of worship and as a substantial part of the congregation's support and membership. Periodic Choral Evensongs have been a special offering in the congregation's shared life, and may be scheduled to coincide with major celebrations or commemorations. St. John's also has a strong group of Eucharistic visitors who take turns visiting homebound parishioners after Sunday services.

While the COVID-19 crisis has altered the schedule and mode of worship, near-daily online Morning Prayer services (via Zoom and YouTube) and occasional outdoor Evening Prayer services continue with a dedicated core of clergy, parishioners, and volunteers. Even with their inherent limitations, these new forms of worship reveal insights and opportunities.

St John's has several social service ministries. On the Second Saturday of the month it hosts lunch at no charge for anyone who needs physical or social sustenance, and is developing an on-site rummage resource center to supply the neighborhood with needed goods. The parish participates in and takes turns hosting an annual, interfaith Martin Luther King Day service. Members of the congregation serve monthly at the ecumenical soup kitchen, provide food to the area homeless shelter, and support the Episcopal Church's United Thank Offering. Parishioners

also participate substantially in a broad range of community, educational, and non-profit organizations.

There is an energetic program of youth and adult Christian education, including junior and senior youth groups and currently a five-student confirmation class. Adult programs are offered throughout the year. Offerings might be a book group, a close study of Scripture, a topical study such as one on forgiveness, or a dive into a question of social justice such as a study of race and racism. Members of the parish have also led and participated in the Education for Ministry (EFM) program for the past 12 years.

The Transition

St. John's has been served for thirteen years by the Rev. Marguerite (Rita) Steadman, who has brought the parish gifts of careful scholarship, passion for teaching, skillful pastoral care, and love of liturgy. Rita has now discerned that it is time for her to pursue new avenues for ministry, and for St. John's to seek new clergy leadership. Rita and her family plan to stay in Bangor, and her teenaged children may decide to remain connected to St. John's.

The Work Ahead

St. John's is seeking a Priest-in-Charge for an intentional period of discernment and redirection. The parish is facing a number of challenges:

- The stone church has some structural challenges due to deferred maintenance. Our Building Working Group has been working hard this year to address exterior safety issues and plans to work on the next steps ahead (including an ongoing maintenance program to keep the beautiful facilities available for years to come). The autumn 2020 removal of the top of the tower and additional work will require that St. John's enter into a capital campaign. St. John's has been working with ECF for the past few years to prepare us for this campaign. Repairing, restoring, or removing the tower are all expensive undertakings, any of which will present a challenge to the parish's finances.
- St. John's has been struggling in recent years to support a full-time priest. At the same time, it has a high number of paid staff colleagues for a congregation of its size; volunteer service is an undergirding tradition at St. John's but one that will need to grow. St. John's also needs to examine whether the execution of its mission and the current arrangement of its staffing are right, and if not, how they might best be reshaped.
- The music program has attracted charismatic leaders and loyal singers. The result has been enhanced worship for the congregation, deep memories for child choristers and a community of support among members. That program is in transition, as well; our priest will have to help us into a future that fulfills the promise of our past.
- The congregation's mission statement calls it to "make God's love known now and for generations to come through worship and service to all." This is a time for fresh thinking about what that might look like in the middle decades of the 21st century: what new things is it time to try? What old things is it time to say farewell to?

The congregation wants to work with a priest skilled in interim ministry, to help them address these challenges before they seek and begin to work with their next Rector.

The Context

Bangor is a small city located almost in the geographic center of Maine. Because there are other cities to the south, and none of substantial size to the north, it is culturally and economically identified with Northern Maine, a huge area of forests and farms stretching to the Canadian border on three sides.

The City of Bangor has a resident population of about 32,000 people (with up to 100,000 for a working population), which would make it a small town in most parts of the country. As the hub for all of northern Maine, it has a true urban character: there is a small downtown with early 20th-century office buildings, several hospitals including a major regional medical center, an international airport (with good connections to many destinations in the US), independent restaurants, art galleries and a spectacular small art museum. The city benefits from several institutions of higher learning, including the University of Maine and Husson University.

The city also hosts the strong Bangor Public Library, with 820 entries each day and a collection of 475,000 items.

The Kenduskeag Stream, really a small river, runs through a series of landscaped canals which shape the downtown, and feeds into the deep-water Penobscot River which forms the eastern border of the city. For centuries, the Penobscot River has served as a focal point for the Penobscot Indian Nation, the historic lumber industry, sea-run fisheries, hydropower, and outdoor recreational interests. Together with the coastal waters of Penobscot Bay, the river's role in connecting the region is only partially rivaled by the Interstate 95 Corridor and other regional transportation networks.

Ample outdoor recreation opportunities of all kinds, from boating to skiing to hiking and hunting and camping, are within easy reach, with Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park to the north and with the national gem that is Acadia National Park to the east, both within a 1-hour drive.

The Call

The parish needs someone who will draw out the energy and the strength of the parish with a combination of enthusiasm, patience, and faith.

St. John's needs a faithful, warm, supportive priest: neither a bulldozer nor a steamroller would be helpful.

At the same time, St. John's also needs a brave priest who will not be afraid to ask hard questions and will push the congregation to discern honest answers.

This will be hard work, but it is work that is worth doing. St. John's has resilience as a parish and has bounced back from past challenges. The congregation has a remarkable opportunity to make a huge difference in Bangor and beyond.

If you think you might be willing to share the love, the energy, and the deftness to help St. John's move from what will be to what could be, then we'd love to be in conversation with you. The way to open that conversation is to send a letter introducing yourself and explaining your interest, together with a resume and your OTM Portfolio, to:

The Rev. Canon Michael Ambler, Canon to the Ordinary
Episcopal Diocese of Maine
mambler@episcopalmaine.org

Canon Ambler would also be delighted to talk with you about St. John's, Bangor, or ministry in Maine; contact him at the address above and he'll happily arrange a time for a phone call.