

# St. Mark's Episcopal Church Augusta, ME



Maintaining and Growing God's Church  
Review of Discussions Since July 2009

November 2009



This document is an overview of intentional discussions held at St. Mark's Episcopal Church since July 2009 with members of the congregation, the lay leadership and clergy to vision God's work in his church in Augusta. It is a summary document and is therefore not inclusive of all meetings, discussions or actions taken.

Parish Meeting  
July 19, 2009

A parish luncheon and focus group was held on July 19, 2009. Thirty-five members were present and participated in a discernment process which included five small group discussions. Following the meeting, the group notes were compiled and made available to all members of the congregation.

Six questions were asked during the meeting:

1. Why does St. Mark's exist in the Augusta community?
2. If St. Mark's doubled its membership what would it look like?
3. Why should St. Mark's continue to exist in this community?
4. What has to happen for St. Mark's to grow and prosper in Augusta?
5. What are your spiritual needs that St. Mark's needs to address?
6. What one gift or talent will you give to St. Mark's during the coming year that you are not currently giving?

Findings:

- ❖ Church is of historical importance and we have an obligation to maintain the building.
- ❖ St. Mark's is a witness of God to the community of Augusta.
- ❖ Serve the poor; provide communion and fellowship to the needy.
- ❖ Times have changed as have priorities of the community.
- ❖ Increased membership would provide for better utilization of the buildings, more services, more families and children, and more programming.
- ❖ Challenges do not end and increasing the membership does not necessarily mean that we won't be challenged in new and different ways.
- ❖ Even with doubling membership, the church will remain as it is unless the Holy Spirit becomes our leader and teacher.
- ❖ There would be lost souls without St. Mark's.
- ❖ Obligation to preserve what we have been given.
- ❖ Keep Episcopal faith in this community.
- ❖ Look at possibility of merging ministries with other churches.
- ❖ We are a constant in the community and are relied upon for outreach.
- ❖ We need a system to reach into the community to grow the church.

- ❖ Individual commitment to the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Without child care families won't come back.
- ❖ We need to be more educated ourselves: why do we do what we do.
- ❖ Get in touch with today's world – use web more, videotape sermons, appeal to all ages.
- ❖ Provide services that the community perceives it needs.
- ❖ Want to feel renewed, joyful and hopeful after services.
- ❖ More visitations among church family.
- ❖ Experience of God in different ways.
- ❖ Help me grow in knowledge, in Christ and long for deep Christian fellowship and a sense of connection.

#### Gifts offered by members of the congregation for 2009-2010

- ❖ Participate more in existing programs
- ❖ Become a reader
- ❖ Connect to people at church
- ❖ Greater financial giving
- ❖ Teach Sunday School
- ❖ Visit the homebound, hospitalized and sick
- ❖ Pray more each day
- ❖ Care for myself
- ❖ Crochet until the cows come home
- ❖ Convey the St. Mark's story to the community
- ❖ Invite a friend to church
- ❖ Help more with events
- ❖ Call and I shall come!
- ❖ Medical expertise, time and organizational skills
- ❖ Pray for the full power of the Holy Spirit

Sunday Worship Service  
Congregational Discussion  
September 20, 2009

The congregation gathered for Sunday morning worship in the church. Chairs were set circling the nave altar. A discussion was held in the place of a sermon. Discussion leaders were The Rev. Elizabeth Miller (Priest), The Rev. Dick Bamforth (Assisting Priest), The Rev. Rebecca Grant (Deacon) and Skip Ernst (Senior Warden).

Comments reflected below were made during the discussion and are not ranked or prioritized but come from the natural flow of the conversation.

- ❖ We are not alone in facing the issue of a shrinking congregation. Other churches are facing diminishing attendance.
- ❖ We need to provide transportation to those who cannot otherwise come to church.
- ❖ We are not to blame for the changes in society.
- ❖ In Maine, only 1 in 80 people go to church.
- ❖ Don't be afraid to ask people to come to church.
- ❖ It is important how we frame our ministry. Share it in a positive way.
- ❖ We have experienced some growth. Growth is slow, just not enough new members to offset the financial needs.
- ❖ Small prayer groups and a prayer chain are important and will help us to get well acquainted.
- ❖ Our buildings are on the national registry for historic places. We have restrictions on what we can do with our buildings.
- ❖ Episcopalians persuade people to come together. Our bishop cannot force congregations to merge.
- ❖ There are models of congregational sharing of worship times and priests that should be explored.
- ❖ What does God want us to do right now, right here? We must focus on God's will.
- ❖ I feel upset when the only discussion is about financial problems and not ministry.
- ❖ We are at a cross road and need to make hard decisions. The choices are up to all of us.

Vestry Meeting  
September 29, 2009

The vestry met in special session to continue planning for the future of the parish and spent time discussing what was most important to the parish community. Members of the parish were invited to attend the meeting and were asked for input.

After discussion, those convened were asked to identify the most important ministries in St. Mark's. Items identified included:

- ❖ Worship
- ❖ Pastoral Inreach
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Facility management
- ❖ Relationship with other Episcopal Churches
- ❖ Financial Relationship with diocese
- ❖ Altar Guild
- ❖ Meet emotional and spiritual needs of congregation and community
- ❖ Outreach
- ❖ Music
- ❖ Administrative support
- ❖ Center of prayer
- ❖ Community (ies)
- ❖ Evangelism
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ 3 building, different functions
- ❖ Priestly leadership
- ❖ Congregation

After preparing the list, Elizabeth+ asked members to identify the top four areas that the vestry should focus on during the coming year. The top four areas (not ranked) included:

- ❖ Worship
- ❖ Priestly Leadership
- ❖ Center of Prayer
- ❖ Meet emotional and spiritual needs of congregation and community

Vestry Meeting  
October 19, 2009

At the vestry meeting members were asked to develop short and long term goals for the parish. The short term goals were to be considered for inclusion in the 2010 plan for church activities and should be reflected in the stewardship plan for the parish. Those convened identified 12 short terms goals for the parish:

1. Have a Stewardship Committee to plan a campaign that breaks down how pledge monies are used and what it costs to run the St. Mark's. Share that information with the congregation.
2. Attract one new member a month to the parish
3. Develop a program to support new members.
4. Plan a monthly youth ministry event.
5. Have an energy audit completed on the three buildings.
6. Explore consolidating resources with other churches.
7. Develop a "Lower & Layer" program. (reduce the temperature in the church and dress warmly).
8. Reduce the amount of funds taken from endowment by 50%.
9. Build expectation that church will be above the average pledge of churches in the diocese.
10. Bring the priest's salary into compliance with diocesan minimums.
11. Develop prayer groups among congregants.
12. Develop a plan to build congregational commitment to short and long term goals for the parish.

The long terms goals (5 year plan) for the parish include:

1. Operate with a balanced budget.
2. Build a program that will include doubling pledge income.
3. Develop a stewardship program that includes regular contributions to the endowment fund.
4. Set a goal for fund raising for an Endowment Campaign.
5. Increase Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) to double the 2010 ASA.
6. Develop and provide programming for children.
7. Provide education for adults.
8. Provide a variety of mission opportunities for congregants.
9. Build a sense of community both within the walls of St. Mark's and in the Augusta community.
10. Buildings will be repaired and "Green"

Vestry Meeting  
October 20, 2009

During its regularly scheduled meeting, the vestry members reviewed the goals from the prior meeting and had further discussion on implementation; specifically about a stewardship campaign.

Specific actions taken include:

- ❖ Appointment of a finance committee.
- ❖ Plans to hold a ministry fair and luncheon on November 15 to give parishioners an opportunity to talk with people who provide ministry at St. Mark's church.
- ❖ Plans for an Ingathering Sunday on November 22.
- ❖ The finance committee will build a budget that includes taking 50% less from the endowment fund than was taken in 2009.
- ❖ Meet with the Bishop in November to review steps taken to date and to discuss further steps that need immediate attention.