



St. Mark's Parish Profile

Episcopal Diocese of Missouri

St. Louis



Who We Were: St. Mark's History

In 1937, when construction began on St. Mark's Episcopal Church in the tree-lined neighborhood of St. Louis Hills, 5-year-old Lou Swallow watched from his front yard across the street. Lou and his family joined St. Mark's when it opened, and he remains a member today. For almost 90 years, St. Mark's has been a church home to generations of families, welcoming newcomers to the neighborhood, the city, and the Episcopal church.

The building itself best illustrates the history of St. Mark's. Its strikingly modern architecture generated immediate controversy. While its design won national acclaim for its architects, Frederick Dunn and Charles Nagel, the local community disagreed. One neighbor called it "gross, ugly, not churchy."

Perhaps St. Mark's most controversial feature then, and maybe its most beloved today, is

the series of eight long, narrow stained-glass windows. They were designed by Robert Harmon, a graduate of Washington University School of Art. Along the left side of the sanctuary, they depict Christ's life as told in the Gospel of St. Mark, while those along the right side depict where Christ is present in modern times, and where Christ is betrayed. Images of striking workers in overalls, American slaves, marching soldiers, bullets, and dollar signs illustrate the struggles that guided St. Mark's two founders, Missouri's bishop, the Right Rev. William Scarlett, and St. Mark's first priest, the Rev. Charles Coker Wilson: struggles for communal cooperation, for racial equality and social justice, and for opposition to totalitarianism. The windows boldly proclaim the church's commitment to the movement of God in the world. In Wilson's words, the church "must seek to awaken men from the lethargy of an indifferent and selfishly individualistic life ...While never partisan, she



must speak out against the evils and injustices in the community and nation.”

Wilson’s vision for St. Mark’s got him in trouble. His support for unions, racial equality, and social justice smacked of communism to many, and the FBI and St. Louis police’s “red squad” investigated him. While Wilson’s values as depicted in St. Mark’s windows reflect the anxieties of the 1930s, they are no less relevant today, and they continue to guide our commitment to social justice at St. Mark’s.

Since its founding, eight rectors have led St. Mark’s through many changes. While the sanctuary’s unique beauty remains, the church campus has been enhanced in meaningful ways. The 1950s saw the construction of a parish house and rectory on either side of the sanctuary. In 1991, a memorial garden was established to commemorate the lives of members of the St. Mark’s community who have passed into God’s kingdom. There, beneath the shade of a giant oak and against the gentle sound of our memorial fountain, we recently celebrated the life of our seventh rector, the Rev. Dr. Lydia Agnew Speller. In 2010, we dedicated our magnificent, newly constructed Juget-Sinclair 20-stop tracker organ, which fills the sanctuary with music each Sunday and attracts guest musicians from around the region.

Our church life has always been active, with a strong history of celebrating together. We’ve filled our parish hall with countless Christmas parties, receptions, pancake dinners, book clubs, flea markets, and more. In 1997, we hosted our first “Hearts, Hands and Voices,” bringing the neighborhood together through an annual festival of art, music, and architecture. (While the festival has been on hiatus for a few years, we plan to bring it back this year.) In 2009, we built a community garden in conjunction with Gateway Greening, with plots tended by both church members and neighbors.

While our members enjoy connecting socially with each other and the community, at the core of St. Mark’s has always been a call to service, not



just to those within our doors or neighborhood, but to all in need of God's justice and mercy. Over the decades, we've worked to embody that call in many ways. In 1981, St. Mark's began collecting food for pantries at local Christian ministries. In 2001, we started hosting birthday parties at St. Louis' juvenile detention center and holiday parties at a nearby low-income assisted-living facility. More recently, we've partnered with Isaiah 58, a cooperative ministry that provides services to low-income and unhoused city residents, and with Doorways, a local non-profit that provides affordable housing and related services to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Finally, at the heart of who we are and who we've always been, is our Baptismal Covenant to seek and serve Christ in all persons and love our neighbors as ourselves. St. Mark's has embodied that commitment in many ways. A sanctuary rug designed in 1940 by Beatrice Boot pleading for racial harmony hangs beside our altar. In 1974, a group of St. Mark's congregants held a letter-writing campaign advocating for the ordination of female priests. St. Mark's was also an early Oasis congregation, affirming our welcome for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Like many churches, St. Mark's struggled through the COVID pandemic. Closing our physical doors to hold virtual services, being physically isolated from each other and working through the uncertain process of returning to normal operations was difficult. But we emerged from the pandemic strong. We remained financially healthy, and by the time we reopened our red doors, we had actually increased our membership. We also better appreciate how meaningful our time together can be.

Throughout our history, as we've faced challenges, as we've undergone changes in leadership and membership, as we've reimagined what it means to serve God and each other, we've striven to act out Rev. Wilson's vision and be a church that loves kindness, does justice, and walks humbly with our God.



Who We Are: St. Mark's Today

Jesus set an example that wasn't always well received. The Gospels relay a message that hasn't always been taken as "good news." In our modern society, where people idolize social media celebrities, ignore the hurt in the world, and believe that everyone should just pull themselves up by their bootstraps, the idea of casting down the mighty and raising the lowly isn't a popular opinion. But at St. Mark's, we are crazy enough to believe that we can transform the world through God's love, justice, and peace.

We believe it, but we also believe we can't do it alone. One of the lessons COVID's isolation taught us is how God's voice is amplified in a supportive Christian community. We treasure the

connections we have built to each other even more after going through the grief of loss and separation. As we enter into our journey of finding a new spiritual leader, we look for someone who can support us as Beloved Community seeking to live into our commitment to love kindness, do justice, and walk humbly with God.

What St. Mark's Values

The search for a new rector has given St. Mark's an invaluable opportunity. As part of the process, we held discussions, listening to opinions from all members, from the children in Sunday School, to the elders who have

who have attended the church since they were in those classrooms themselves, to new attendees who don't yet consider themselves members yet. Prayerful discernment has allowed us to go beyond the level of a vision statement on our website to discover what is important to St. Mark's—what we cherish and hold as our core values.

One of the most important of these is PASTORAL CARE. We share with each other, care for each other, feel joy with each other in our celebrations, and comfort each other in our sorrows. We see Pastoral Care as a vocation of each member in our community, not just our leaders. However, we hope our new rector will see Pastoral Care as a primary focus, because it is the bedrock on which our community has formed.

Something many of our members who come from faith traditions other than the Episcopal Church notice when they first enter the walls of St. Mark's is a feeling of ACCEPTANCE. We believe, as Presiding Bishop Curry has so eloquently put it, "the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross are a sign of the very love of God reaching out to us all." We join the national church in its commitment to be an inclusive church. Some have come to us feeling rejected from their former church. They have found relief worshipping at St. Mark's, and leave feeling acceptance, grace and love. We welcome all to share bread and wine with us at Communion, as it is God's table, not our own. We are an Oasis congregation, welcoming or LGBTQ+ siblings. We joyfully welcome children to participate in worship. We have an elevator, designated parking and ramps that are accessible to those who have a disability. We welcome the uncertain and the seekers. We believe God loves us all, no exceptions.

Loving and supporting those within our own walls goes hand-in-hand with St. Mark's passion for SOCIAL JUSTICE ministries. Caring for our own members inevitably leads us to caring about the least of these in Christ's name. This means we partner with Isaiah 58 ministries, which serves low-income city residents through a food pantry, clothing closet, and utility assistance. We also support Doorways Interfaith Housing in its efforts to improve the quality of life of area residents who are HIV positive or have AIDS. We host birthday parties for incarcerated youth through Episcopal City Mission, hoping to show them through a meal, presents, and games that they are worthy of God's love. We celebrate holidays with the residents of Kasey Page Assisted Living. We provide food and Christmas gifts for area families who struggle through Feed My People. We join with our sisters and brothers at St. John's Episcopal Church to make sandwiches for their Peace Meal. Our deacon, the Rev. Jerre Birdsong, guides us in these and other opportunities.



Using our hands and resources to help others has led many of members of St. Mark's to speak out against the injustices that cause the inequities in our city and the greater world. While we don't always agree on all issues, ADVOCACY is a vital part of life at St. Mark's. We put our feet on the ground at the Walk Against Gun Violence, the Pride Parade, and the Labor Day Parade. We make pens, paper, and stamps available in our parish hall so members can write to their elected officials in support of issues like gun control and a living wage. Knowing that sometimes opinions can divide us rather unite us, we held a series of forums on what the church says about various social justice issues and allowed everyone to express their thoughts in a respectful way in a safe environment. We hope our new rector has the skill to lead us in difficult conversations when conflicts arise, enabling us to see Christ in all people, not just those with whom we agree.

LITURGY brings us together and defines us as a community of faith. While we did have an 8 a.m. service without music on Sundays pre-pandemic, we now have just one service at 10 a.m. Once a month, we have a healing service after regular worship. Our worship is both traditional and transformative. We consider ourselves "Broad" church—neither "high" or "low" church. We take the Bible seriously, but not literally. We chant, but don't usually burn incense. Our members appreciate thoughtful homilies that show how Christ's word applies to our daily lives. We welcome all to join us at Christ's table. Many lay people participate in ministry, as acolytes, lectors, chalice bearers, ushers, and greeters. While we offer nursery care and Godly Play for our youngest members and visitors, they are always welcome in church. We take joy in seeing them hold their hands out at Communion and in hearing their voices say the Lord's Prayer. There is a rocking chair and rug area with toys so those who bring their little ones to worship can nurse or engage them in activities when sitting in a pew is too restrictive. Outside of weekly worship, St. Mark's provides opportunities to grow in one's faith, including Kairos Sundays once a month that help people





learn about the workings of the Episcopal Church, book groups, Bible studies, and film series with discussions. Our rector will be supported by our deacon, the Rev. Jerre Birdsong, our priest associate, the Rev. Dr. Teresa Daniely, and our parish administrator, Melissa Engle. (We share Deacon Jerre with another church, Emmanuel Episcopal.)

With great acoustics and a wonderful Juget-Sinclair tracker organ, MUSIC plays an important part in St. Mark's worship and fellowship. We have a small but mighty choir with two to three voices on each of the four parts. Several of them have trained voices and extensive musical experience, which allows the choir to sing music ranging from Mozart, Ronald Arnatt, Bach, Tallis, Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, to spirituals from "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Our choir director and organist, Dr. Barbara Raedeke, is a faculty member at Washington University, so we often have the opportunity to enjoy the talents of guest musicians. Our organ also draws musicians for recitals in our sanctuary. Even the more musically challenged members of St. Mark's enjoy singing, and we have created musical parodies for our rector's retirement party and held sing-alongs for fun. And the annual Christmas Party always features a rousing all-hands-on-deck rendition of the "12 Days of Christmas."

Speaking of parties, St. Mark's loves to have FUN! We often look for any excuse to gather with good food and good company. In addition to the Christmas party, St. Mark's holds a walk around the neighborhood to see holiday lights, a Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, a Maundy Thursday soup supper, a celebration with bubbly and bonbons after the Saturday Easter Vigil, a reception and Egg Hunt after the Easter service, an opening day lunch, and potlucks on the fifth Sundays of the month. After the Sunday service, most everyone catches up on what's new in fellow parishoners' lives at coffee hour in the parish hall. We have an Episcopal Church Women group, and in the past have had a men's fellowship group. One of everyone's favorite recent additions to St. Mark's social life happens on the Sunday closest to Cinco de Mayo, when one of our members, Carlos, brings handmade tamales to share. We have also held trivia night and bowling fundraisers, and we are looking to bring back "Hearts, Hands and Voices," a block party for local artists.



About St. Mark's

St. Mark's is one of 41 parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, which is in Province V of the National Episcopal Church. The Rt. Rev. Deon Johnson was elected the 11th Bishop of the dioceses in 2020 on the first ballot.

St. Mark's celebrates Holy Eucharist every Sunday at 10 a.m., followed by coffee hour.

St. Mark's currently has 166 members from 70 to 80 households on its rolls. The average Sunday attendance is 55.* Although membership comes from not only the surrounding neighborhood, but also a wider area of both St. Louis city and county, the demographics of members generally reflect that of the neighborhood, although our average age skews older.

According to a recent survey answered by 58 members of St. Mark's, 50% have been members for 20 years or more. The majority of those surveyed (50 members) reported attending services at least two times a month.

St. Mark's is financially stable. Our members are generous with their donations, and we are not running a deficit. We have 47 pledging units with an average of pledge of \$3,700 a year. A successful capital campaign in 2016 allowed us to renovate the church bathrooms, fix the tuckpointing on the church, replace the wooden front doors, and do regular drone flyovers to check on the roof, which appears to be sound. We are also blessed with endowments in the amount of \$865,300, the interest from which has primarily been used to help fund operations. Our total budget for 2024 is \$229,000.*

As the first church of modern design in St. Louis, St. Mark's is listed as a City Landmark. It was dedicated in 1939 and draws visitors interested in its architecture, its unique stained-glass windows, and its Juget-Sinclair pipe organ.

In addition to the church, St Mark's has a parish hall built in 1955 and rectory finished in 1951. The parish hall houses the rector's office and the parish administrator's office. The large hall and kitchen are used for coffee hours after church every Sunday and for gatherings throughout the year, including our Christmas Party, wedding and funeral receptions, and parish events. There is a stage and audio visual equipment that have been used for performances. Groups can rent the hall, and a community AA group uses the facility for regular meetings. The rectory is a unique midcentury modern building with three bedrooms, two baths, a kitchen, a living/dining room with a fireplace, and a basement.



Neighbors often visit the grounds of St. Mark's campus, enjoying the lawn, the fountain, the shade around the memorial garden, and the large lion statue. Just behind the rectory, a community garden offers plots to rent for members and the neighbors. The children of St. Mark's have their own plot and have become enthusiastic gardeners.

*Stats about membership numbers, average Sunday attendance, pledging units, etc. come from the Parochial Report for 2023.

Our Neighborhood and City

St. Mark's Episcopal Church is located in the southwest part of St. Louis city on a residential street. In our ZIP code, 63109, there are 26,946 residents, the vast majority of whom (more than 90%) are U.S.-born citizens. More than 86% of residents live in the same house as they did the year before. The median age is 38 years, almost 89% of residents are white, and more than 83% hold white collar jobs. The majority of households, 80%, do not have children. Renters make up 35% of residents. The vast majority of residents have a car, with only 2.5% relying on public transportation. Fifty-four percent of children in the area attend private school. The median household income is more than \$51,000.

St. Louis Hills has the distinction of being the last large subdivision created in the city limits. The streets surrounding St. Mark's are filled with brick houses, often in a Tudor style, fronted with perfectly groomed front yards. It's a great place to walk, and you'll often see strollers and leashed furry friends on the sidewalks. Francis and Willmore Parks are close by, featuring playgrounds, tennis, pickleball, and racquetball courts, lakes, a bike trail, sports fields and a beer garden. Within walking distance or a short drive away, you'll find many restaurants, shops, schools, and churches.



St Louis is a great city for sports fans. Cardinals baseball is always popular. We also have a hockey team, the Blues, that won the Stanley Cup in 2019. Two recent additions to the pro sports scene, Saint Louis City Soccer Club and the St. Louis Battlehawks of the United Football League, draw huge crowds of ardent fans. Many locals also attend college games. If you prefer to play rather than watch, there are opportunities of every kind, from running in marathons to hitting the pickleball courts in local parks to playing 18 holes at one of the area's many public or private golf courses. You can walk, bike, picnic, play softball, practice yoga, and much more in one of the area's many parks—there are 108 just within the city limits, including the 1,300-acre Forest Park, and many more in the surrounding counties, including 55 dog parks. And of course, we have a national park that features the 630-foot symbol of the city, the Gateway Arch. The Great River Greenway connects 128 miles of trails in the city and surrounding counties. And if you venture out of the city/county area, rivers, lakes, campgrounds, hiking trails, and much more are just a short drive away.

Art abounds in the city. The St. Louis Art Museum is known for its outstanding and comprehensive collection spanning 5,000 years of cultures and genres, and it's free. A wide variety of performances are held through Dance St Louis, the St Louis Symphony, the Sheldon theater, the Black Rep, Jazz St. Louis and St. Louis Opera Theater (founded by the grandparents of a St Markan). The Fox Theater brings in current Broadway shows, and you can also watch musical theater under the stars at the outdoor Muny Opera (which even has a section of free seats). The St. Louis Shakespeare Festival attracts a large audience to its outdoor performances, and the St. Louis International Film Festival screens 300 films in 10 days in November. Many clubs and bars feature both local and national musicians in every genre.

Families can be entertained on the cheap in St. Louis, as many venues are free or low cost. The free St. Louis Zoo is top-ranked. Grant's Farm offers free

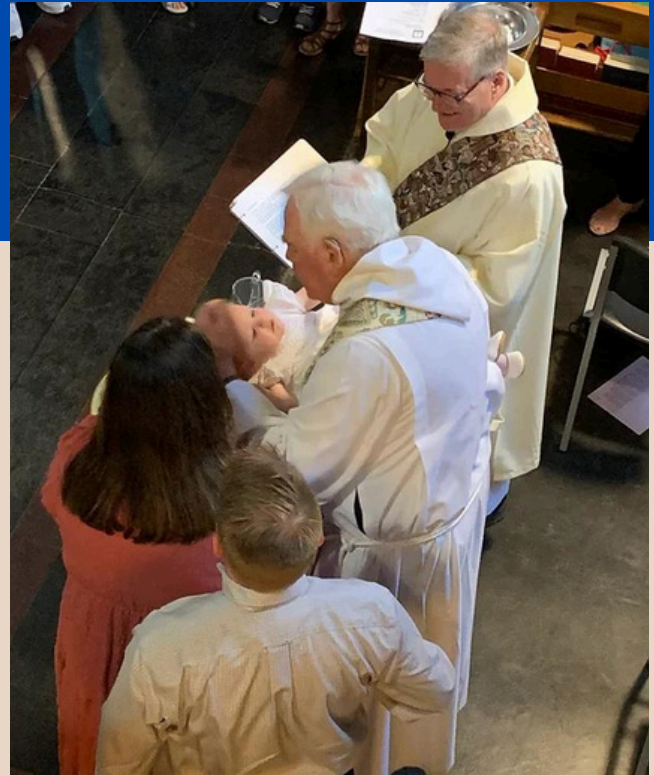
tours, a petting zoo, and free beer, for just a parking fee. The Missouri Botanical Garden does charge, but its 79 acres of displays including a Japanese garden and the Climatron geodesic dome greenhouse are well worth the admission price. The Garden also runs the Butterfly House and Shaw's Nature Reserve, which are outside of the city. Museums like the Magic House and the fabulous Science Center cater to children, and the City Museum, which is a place like no other filled with tunnels, elaborate mosaics, and the world's largest pair of underwear (!), appeals to all ages.

In recent years, St. Louis has become a great place for foodies. While St. Louis-style pizza is definitely an acquired taste, our culinary scene is impressive in its caliber and expansive in its diversity. From barbecue to innovative Ozark cuisine to modern East Asian plates to plant-forward fare to authentic Bosnian dishes (St. Louis has the largest Bosnian population outside of Bosnia), you can find it all. And with a brewing heritage that goes back to the 1800s and a selection of stellar microbreweries, St. Louis has been crowned America's Best Beer Scene numerous times.

St. Louis is home to many public, parochial, and private educational institutions at all levels. The healthcare sector employs the largest number of people in the area. The city is home to world-class medical institutions, including BJC and Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis University Hospital, and Logan Chiropractic College. Other large employers in the area include biotechnology, financial services, and telecommunications.

Despite its rich history, many opportunities, and a low-cost of living, St. Louis faces some challenges. While the region boasts a good quality of life and the St. Louis Hills neighborhood is safe, the city overall it is not immune to the issues of crime and racial inequality facing many larger cities. Also, while the state of Missouri is politically conservative and considered a "red" state, the city of St. Louis is largely liberal and "blue." This leads to many city residents feeling under-represented in our state government.





What Is God Calling Us to Be?: St. Mark's Future

Uniting us in worship, guiding our spiritual lives, and leading us in prayer so we can grow closer to God and each other is the central role of St. Mark's next rector. They should have a strong personal prayer practice. Their faith should be founded on a well-articulated theology that they can use to explain the liturgy. While we want to understand the history and background of the Word, we also want a preacher who can help us find a connection between the Gospel and our modern lives. We like homilies that make us think and challenge us to live into the lives Christ hopes for us. We want someone who can help us hear the guiding voice of the Holy Spirit and see the light that God shines in the deep shadows. We hope for someone who can help us find the image of Christ in all people.

During our recent conversations in anticipation of calling a new rector, many parishioners described St. Mark's as a home and their fellow members as family. While our

membership places a great value on taking care of each other, some have felt in the past that there was an unevenness in or lack of pastoral care received. While we realize that it's the responsibility of everyone in our parish to care for each other, not just the rector, we hope that our future rector is skilled at pastoral care and reinforces its importance. Every person is beloved by God, and we want every person who comes through St. Mark's red doors to feel comfortable, to feel welcome, and to feel valued.

Along with this, we would like our rector to follow up with visitors and to let people know they are missed when we don't see them for several Sundays. While many of our lay people currently take on these tasks, it would be helpful to have guidance in setting up a more systematic program of follow up.

God calls us to listen to and care for one another not only within the congregation, but



also outside it. While the neighborhood immediately surrounding St. Mark's is safe, stable, and largely affluent, we know we cannot isolate ourselves and ignore the problems that affect the greater St. Louis area, the state of Missouri, the United States, and the world. As Christians, we are called to stand with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. We hope to continue our work for social justice and our advocacy, and expand it. Many members have expressed a desire to participate in these ministries in a more hands-on way. For instance, since the pandemic we have not been able to join in-person with the youth in detention for birthday parties through Episcopal City Mission. While we still support them financially, we miss the joy we feel in sharing God's love with them in a more personal way. We hope our new rector will help us discern where our hands and feet can best be used to live out our call to help heal our broken world.

While we see the value in being a smaller congregation—the relationships formed, the family atmosphere, being able to call each other by name and know what is going on in each other's lives—we would like to invite more people into our joy. Thus, we see evangelizing as a priority. We want to have a healthy community that allows for everyone to be involved to the degree they want. We don't want to always call on the same people to volunteer and burn people out on ministries. As Episcopalians, we are not always comfortable with evangelizing. We hope for a rector who can guide us in how to share the love of Christ with others and who has the energy to keep our worship and ministry vital and relevant.

Many at St. Mark's hope for a more culturally diverse membership. However, this is a challenge given the racial divide of the city and the area's demographics. We are a reflection of the neighborhood in which we are located—mostly white, white collar, and U.S. born. Rather than pushing for diversity for our own sake, we aim to continue to focus on inclusion and making all feel welcome at St. Mark's.

Even though we are a smaller congregation, we would still like to have a variety of enriching programs. That can be hard to manage with fewer volunteers to organize and run them, so it may call for out-of-the-box thinking. For instance, we may not have enough teens to have a sustainable youth group, but perhaps we could partner with another Episcopal church or with churches of other denominations in the neighborhood to bring our youth together for activities like service projects or fellowship. Having an outgoing rector who is visible in the community and diocese and is aware of potential resources would help us form connections necessary to bridge the gap between our needs and our assets.

In the future, we hope to provide a wider variety of worship experiences and adult education. After COVID and since our rector retired, we have just one worship service and haven't had as many learning and study opportunities as we did pre-pandemic. There is interest in a regular adult education program on Sundays. In harmony with this, it would be good to have a rector who is skilled at bringing people together for difficult conversations. A few years ago, we had a series of forums on controversial issues, like gun control. It provided a safe space to discuss our opinions, learn the Episcopal Church's position, and figure out how God calls us to engage in the world around the issues. Many of us have deep friendships within the church that have formed over many years, but we don't always agree on everything. Knowing that we can disagree but remain in fellowship with one another is an important part of our call to respect the dignity of every human being.

St. Mark's deeply values the children of the parish. The young people in our church have expressed an interest in being more involved in the life of the church. They would like to take a more visible part in worship, and suggested leading a Sunday service a couple times a year and starting a children's choir. The children also recently proposed we build a playground on some of our unused outdoor space. Many members agree that this would be a visible sign of how the church welcomes children, but there is some disagreement and concern about how it would affect the appearance of the church grounds. A committee has been formed to decide how to best move forward with this idea. We want our children to feel they have a voice and are an important part of the body of Christ.

In our recent parish survey, we asked what St. Mark's should do less of. Although there were a few calls for less traditional music and occasional morning prayer, the overwhelming majority of respondents said they were happy with what the church is doing. While there is always room for improvement, we at St. Mark's think we have a pretty good thing going here. We hope to continue traveling the course we're on, with an eye toward growth and not becoming stagnant. We look forward to a future of continuing to love God, follow Jesus, and be a force for good in the world.



Thank You

Respectfully submitted,

The Rector Search Team at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in St. Louis, Missouri
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