

Parish Profile



St. Mark's Church,  
Southborough, Massachusetts

Updated March 2010  
Version 1.1

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## *Introduction*

In May of 2009, St. Mark's Vestry commissioned the Parish Profile Committee to create a document that would fully represent our parish – how it is today and what we hope it will be in the future – as a first step in the search process for a new rector. Within these pages lie the results of that effort.

In creating this profile, we have gathered information from many sources within our congregation. We also conducted an extensive survey of parish members which examined all aspects of parish life, including what we love about St. Mark's, what we feel to be the requirements of a new rector and the theological direction we hope to pursue. We hope what is presented here will give all a sense of who we are at St. Mark's, our rich history in the community, our worship life, the many fellowship and outreach programs we foster, and our desires for our future.

It is important to note that we relied primarily on survey data to document our parishioners' intentions for St. Mark's. As such, it should be pointed out that the majority of survey respondents were those who pledge to the church and attend St. Mark's at least twice a month. Also, while parishioners over age 50 tend to be a smaller percentage of our parish (35%), just over half the survey responses (52%) came from this group while 48% came from parishioners age 50 and younger. In addition, although the parish is almost evenly split between males and females, a majority (64%) of the survey respondents were female.

All in all, we believe we have heard from a reasonable cross section of the parish: those who are eligible to complete the survey and those whose active involvement and pledge indicate a deep interest and commitment to the future of our parish.

## *Our Parish Today and in the Future*

St. Mark's is a warm, diverse and loving community of Christians brought together by a singular faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Over the last ten years, St. Mark's parish has become a vibrant, growing church. Our programs and rector have welcomed many new families of all backgrounds and age groups into our congregation. Today, our parish represents a diverse group of people who have worked to create a church community that builds upon common ground and yet respects individual differences.

In the following summary, we highlight the things that make our parish what it is today.

What do we love about St. Mark's?

- Our worship service
- A warm, friendly, and caring congregation
- A welcoming rector who provides spiritual support
- The fact that we feel God's presence in the people and in our rector
- The relevance of our rector's preaching/sermons

- The music
- Our beautiful church building

With respect to our weekly services, we enjoy the fact that our worship is...

- relevant and instructive
- peaceful
- supportive and faith-building
- restorative
- a good reminder to be mindful of others

When we engage in community together, our priorities for how we spend our time are...

- educating our children through 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Sunday school
- attending parish fellowship events
- worshiping together
- working on the financial stewardship of our church
- conducting outreach activities

And in the future, we hope our time together will be focused on ...

- worshiping together
- supporting each other during difficult times
- educating our children through 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Sunday school
- conducting outreach activities
- supporting each other in our spiritual lives
- educating our junior/senior high youth
- attending parish fellowship events

We are searching for a rector who will provide spiritual leadership in a compassionate and loving manner based on a Christ-centered and creedal commitment. We would like our rector to be focused on...

- building community across all services
- reaching and engaging all the people (elderly, families, young people) in our parish
- delivering scripture-based sermons in a relevant and inspiring manner
- growing stewardship and our church community
- teaching adults and helping parishioners to make Christian faith a part of everyday life
- working ecumenically and supporting laity in outside ministries
- providing pastoral support for parishioners, especially to those facing life challenges
- providing Christian education for our youth, especially after 6<sup>th</sup> grade

## *Our Perspective on Issues within TEC*

As part of our information gathering process, our parish survey also evaluated parishioner perspectives on current theological topics within The Episcopal Church (TEC). Parishioners were asked to respond to a series of statements by indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement presented, or could choose to respond to a statement as “undecided”. The theological topics presented were used to assess the level of knowledge about current differences between The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, the importance of agreement on central tenets of faith, and feelings about “open communion”, the authority of Scripture, gay and lesbian clergy and same-sex marriage.

As the survey results indicate below, parishioners have a wide range of interests, concerns and outlooks regarding the issues facing the Episcopal Church. People have chosen to be part of St. Mark’s Church for a variety of reasons, and many different things are important to different groups. What our survey did determine was that while there is no “consensus” position within the parish on questions that are dividing the whole Episcopal Church, St. Mark’s older parishioners *tend* to hold more traditional views concerning gay and lesbian clergy and same-sex unions than our younger parishioners. In addition, the men of our parish *tend* to hold more traditional views on these topics than women.

### Theological Views

SA–Strongly Agree    A–Agree    U–Undecided    D–Disagree    SD–Strongly Disagree

	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>1</b>	I am knowledgeable about differences in theological belief between The Episcopal Church and The Anglican Communion regarding certain fundamental tenets of our faith.	15%	44%	24%	14%	3%
<b>2</b>	The fact that there are differences in theological beliefs between The Episcopal Church and The Anglican Communion is of concern to me.	16%	32%	28%	17%	7%
<b>3</b>	I would like our rector to take a clear position on these theological issues.	14%	34%	33%	13%	6%
<b>4</b>	I believe the Nicene Creed (BCP p.358) to be literally true, not merely “figuratively” or “allegorically” true.	18%	47%	19%	11%	5%
<b>5</b>	Episcopal priests and bishops should administer Holy Communion only to those who are baptized (i.e. should not practice “Open Communion”, in which unbaptized individuals are invited to receive the Sacrament).	20%	31%	10%	25%	14%

<b>6</b>	Traditional interpretations of Holy Scripture should be given deference and authority, even if current social norms and practices subject traditional interpretations to question.	10%	32%	24%	23%	11%
<b>7</b>	I believe non-celibate gays and lesbians should be eligible for ordination as priests and consecration as bishops in our diocese.	16%	20%	16%	22%	26%
<b>8</b>	I believe a church ritual recognizing and blessing committed same-sex unions should be available in our diocese.	17%	25%	11%	17%	30%
<b>9</b>	I would support a decision to perform a church ritual for same-sex marriages here at St. Mark's.	15%	23%	11%	16%	35%
<b>10</b>	"You don't all have to profess exactly the same understandings of the central tenets of the faith. What's important is to worship together." <i>Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, San Diego Union-Tribune, April 5, 2008.</i>	19%	44%	12%	20%	5%
<b>11</b>	"There is no single biblical morality. The Holy Scriptures, written in antiquity, could not and did not foresee many of the ethical questions we face in our age." <i>A Statement from the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, March 13, 2007</i>	16%	37%	14%	23%	11%
<b>12</b>	"We who practice the Christian tradition understand him (Jesus) as our vehicle to the divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in an awfully small box." <i>Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, in Time Magazine interview 7/10/2006 in response to a question about belief in Jesus being the only way to get to heaven.</i>	18%	41%	14%	14%	13%
<b>13</b>	"In its broader construction, yes, human beings come to relationship with God largely through their experience of holiness in other human beings. But (I cannot affirm) in the narrow sense, that people can only come to relationship with God through consciously believing in Jesus." <i>Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, in Arkansas Democrat Gazette article 1/7/2007 in response to a question about affirming that no one comes to the Father except through the son.</i>	16%	31%	26%	15%	12%

In many ways, St. Mark's represents a microcosm of the Episcopal denomination as a whole. Views on a variety of topics range across a spectrum. Large numbers at St. Mark's are lifelong Episcopalians and express a love for the traditional liturgy. But moving beyond the attraction to Anglican liturgical traditions, there are areas of disagreement (acknowledged or otherwise) that have the potential to alienate many of our parishioners from St. Mark's.

Fortunately, although differences over difficult subjects are putting The Episcopal Church nationwide through a lot of pain, St. Mark's has managed to thrive. We are seeking a rector who will continue to guide us to deep levels of faith in Jesus Christ, and commitment to service in His name, while respecting and providing pastoral support to parishioners with diverse perspectives.

### *History of St. Mark's Church*

St. Mark's Church was formally incorporated in December, 1860. It was started by Joseph Burnett, a businessman, gentleman-farmer and visionary. As there were no Episcopal churches in the town in 1859 when Esther Burnett was born, Mr. Burnett arranged for the rector of St. Mark's Parish in Boston to baptize Esther in Southborough using Pilgrim Church's facilities. Esther's was the first official baptism in the register of the nascent "St. Mark's Church, Southborough". Thereafter several "Episcopal" services were held at the Burnett home, the Town Hall and the Pilgrim Church. As the need for "a home" became more pressing, Joseph Burnett converted a workshop building on his estate and this became the first meeting place of St. Mark's Church, Southborough

The current St. Mark's campus consists of the Church building, the Parish Hall, the Rectory and the Memorial Garden. The construction and expansion that brought our church property to its existing state has taken place over a period of approximately 150 years. In 1862, Joseph Burnett bought the property where St. Mark's now stands and deeded the property to the St. Mark's Corporation. The growth of the congregation over the years has required additions to the original structure. In 1890, the western section and the clock tower were added as a memorial to Helen Thompson Choate. In 1905, the church was again extended, this time to the east and dedicated as a memorial to Joseph Burnett, its founder and first Senior Warden. In addition, a chapel and choir robing rooms were added to the northeast end of the building, dedicated to Elizabeth Carlisle Choate. At the same time, the parish added several beautiful stained glass windows that were constructed by such renowned companies as Tiffany, Kempe, Maitland Armstrong and Phipps, Slocum & Co. of Boston.



St. Mark's Rectory has been remodeled several times and was last refurbished in 1997 to its present state. The Parish House also was completely rebuilt in 2002. The new building, much enlarged, was designed to meet the needs of a growing congregation. This structure provides space for the Bargain Box, which is a second-hand clothing shop run by parish volunteers, as well as administrative offices, church school, choir rehearsal and vestry meetings. In addition, a large beautiful hall is available for group meetings, e.g. Annual Meeting, the Church Fair and social gatherings. This room is also used

during the week by Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon and a Cub Scout troop. Allowing non-church groups to use the hall optimizes the use of the building, provides a valuable service to the community and garners goodwill for the Church.

Over the years, St. Mark's has been fortunate in the extended tenures of its rectors. From 1886 to 2009 the parish has only had seven pastors. The average tenure of our priests is eighteen years. As a group these pastors have created a legacy of stability, focus and tranquility that has served our parish well. It is noteworthy that in the last twenty years, at a time of shrinking congregations, St. Mark's has been able to restore the church buildings, rebuild the Parish House, seen an increase in the amount of money pledged and experienced growth from 75 families to nearly 300 families.

For a complete history of St. Mark's Church, as well as information on all aspects of our church life, please use this link to our website: <http://stmarkssouthborough.org/>

### *The Community*

Southborough, Massachusetts was chartered in 1737 and is a charming and attractive suburban town. It is located 30 miles west of Boston and is bisected north-south and east-west by state highways Rtes 85 and 9 respectively. Southborough is strategically placed near to the high-tech complexes of Marlborough and Westborough with easy access to Boston, Worcester and other points via highways 90, 495 and 290.

Southborough has experienced slow but controlled growth over the past 50 years which has seen the population expand from 5,000 to 10,000 residents over that period. The extensive reservoir system has limited the land available for development and the Planning and Zoning Boards have been selective in permitting the construction of only a few high tech and office park buildings. Southborough has been a center of education since 1865 when two prestigious private institutions, St. Mark's Preparatory School and shortly thereafter Fay School, were established by local resident and founder of St. Mark's Church, Joseph Burnett.

The Southborough Public School system has expanded over the years in response to population growth. It now comprises four schools which serve approximately 1600 children in grades kindergarten to junior high school. The high school population shares Algonquin Regional High School with Northborough, an adjoining town to the west of Southborough. A very high percentage of Southborough students go on to graduate from college. In addition, Southborough students have access to Assabet - the regional technical high school which serves several nearby towns. Graduates from Assabet go into the trades, industrial and service industries. Some also go on to college.

Hospitals of high quality are located in the nearby towns of Framingham, Natick, Milford, and Marlborough. The Milford and Marlborough facilities are teaching hospitals, affiliated with the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Residents of Southborough also have access to doctors at the Southborough Medical Center and at Charles River Medical Associates in Marlborough.

Southborough has a wide range of social, cultural and service organizations such as the Senior Center, Southborough Players, the Southborough Arts Center, the Historical Society and the Southborough Rotary Club. Recreational facilities are available for baseball, football, soccer, lacrosse, volleyball, ice hockey, ice skating and other sports.

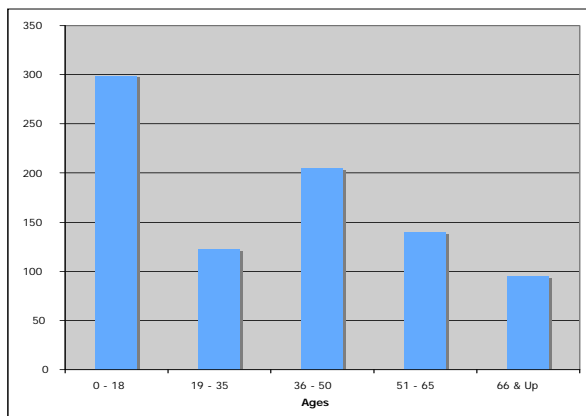
Local government is of the Town Meeting format with a Board of three Selectmen. The Annual Town Meeting is chaired by a Moderator, and the budget and other executive proposals are voted on at Town Meeting.

Because of its location with access to a road network and proximity to Boston and Worcester, Southborough has become a prime real estate venue. The assessed value of real and personal property, for FY2009, was \$2.2 billion. The average single family home was assessed at \$556,000 and the tax rate was set at \$14.16 per thousand. Recently MBTA Commuter rail service was established from Boston to Worcester with stops at Framingham, Ashland and Southborough. This has been a great boost for travel to Boston, Worcester and beyond and has enhanced Southborough as a desirable residential town.

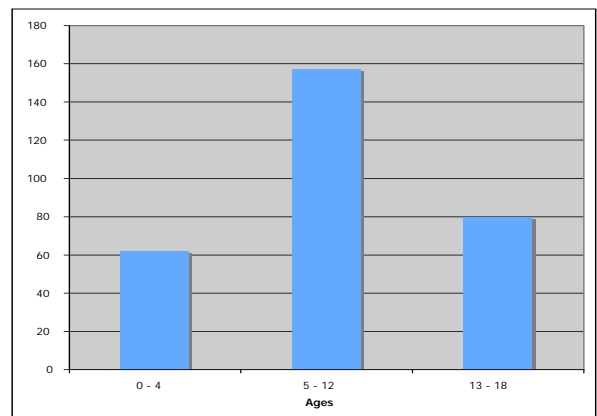
### *Parish Demographics and Financial Summary*

St. Mark’s Church is made up of 864 members (including children), represented by 274 families. We have 187 pledging units (families or singles). Members come from 28 different towns. Those from Southborough comprise 38% of parish families, while 62% come from other towns.

Our parish breakdown by age is as follows:



Parishioners of All Ages



Children

Our financial information for the most recent years is shown below:

	2007	2008	2009	2010 Budget
Operating Revenue	\$343,529	\$372,062	\$320,025	\$320,504
Operating Expenses	\$342,861	\$357,053	\$300,153	\$320,504
Total Cash and Investments	\$1,003,659	\$1,071,585	\$825,453	\$961,103

## Worship

Worshipping together is a priority for the parishioners of St Mark's church. Until the departure of our prior rector, the schedule of weekly worship services was as follows:

September through June:

Saturdays 4:30 Holy Eucharist Rite II  
Sundays 8:00 Holy Eucharist Rite II  
Sundays 9:00 Family Service  
Sundays 10:45 Holy Eucharist Rite II

July through August:

Sundays 8:00 Holy Eucharist Rite II  
Sundays 9:00 Holy Eucharist Rite II which is held outside in the Memorial Garden

Each of the four regular worship services offered at St. Mark's has traditionally had its own unique style and presentation. In general, parishioners seem to find a home within one of the services offered and attend that same service regularly when they come to worship. Parishioners surveyed mention that the Saturday 4:30 pm service is great for those with other commitments on Sundays. Respondents also enjoy the peacefulness of the 8:00 am service, the family/casual atmosphere of the 9:00 am service and the great music and traditional service at 10:45 am. Attendance at most of the services offered has been steady, with the Saturday 4:30 pm service attendance ranging from 6 to 30 people, the 8:00 am Sunday service averaging between 20 to 35 attendees, the 9:00 am Sunday family service attendance averaging 80 to 130, and the 10:45 am Sunday service ranging from 60 to 130 people. The Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) figures all services from for 2006 through 2009 average 225.

Although a portion of St. Mark's parishioners are away during the summer months, the outdoor services held in the Memorial Garden at 9:00 am from mid-June through Labor Day draw a regular crowd as well. Positive comments received indicated parishioners enjoy the lovely outdoor setting and casual, kid friendly environment. Some indicated, however, that the outdoor service is "too buggy and noisy" and is difficult for handicapped parishioners to attend. The average weekly attendance at this service is 20 to 40 people.

For the last five years, our parish has also averaged four weddings per year, eight funerals, nineteen baptisms and sixteen confirmations.

St. Mark's is fortunate to have a number of committed parishioners who help out with various aspects of our worship. For information on our Lectors, Chalice Administrators, Lay Eucharistic Ministers, Pastoral Visitors, acolytes, Altar Guild and Choir, please visit our website: <http://stmarkssouthborough.org/>.

### *Christian Education*

Over the last few years, the Christian Education program at St. Mark's has grown in scope, substance and participation.

Church school classes for those from pre-school through grade six meet for approximately 35 minutes from the end of the 9:00 am Family service, until approximately 10:30 am. Using the Virginia Theological Seminary curriculum, the classes are taught by a rotating group of volunteer parents throughout the year. Any parent who has a child enrolled in Church school is asked to teach for at least one two-month session during the year. The parish has many young families, with 50-70 children enrolled in the Church school program.

The Nursery room is staffed by two paid employees, and accepts children from infancy through age four. The Nursery typically accommodates up to six children each Sunday between 9:00 and noon to accommodate families attending the 9:00 and 10:45 services. Both the Church school and Nursery operate from September until early June.

St. Mark's welcomes all baptized children at the Eucharist. The parish's practice has been to offer a three session course (each session approximately one hour) to children age seven to prepare them for their first Communion. A six- to eight-week Confirmation class has traditionally been offered for young people in grade six and above

We frequently add special events to the Christian Education program. Some of the most popular events held annually include the summer Vacation Bible School and the Christmas Pageant. More information on these programs is available on our web site.

For the adults of the parish, St. Mark's offers an Adult Forum program held each Sunday between the 9:00 and 10:45 services, concurrent with the Church school classes for the children. This activity has appealed to many of our members and has provided discussion topics led by our rector, other parishioners or invited guest speakers. There is also a weekly Bible study on Tuesday mornings and an Adult Inquirers class for adults interested in being received into the Episcopal Church.

In the past, junior and senior high school youth groups, under the direction of interested parishioners, have sponsored food drives, visits to local retirement homes, volunteered at the local soup kitchen, assisted with baby-sitting duties during parish functions, provided presents and company for

local shut-ins during the holidays, and “adopted” a needy family each Christmas. The groups, while small, are quite close and consist of teenagers from the community as well as children of parishioners.

## Outreach

St. Mark’s Church has had a long history in the Ministry of Outreach and it continues to be a focus for our parish today. Outreach has been administered by a small committee which has varied in size from time to time. The current committee has eleven members.

Outreach projects are evaluated by the Outreach committee, recommended to the Vestry and when approved are funded from the Outreach budget. Some projects are also funded from the Bargain Box budget with the approval of the Vestry. The Bargain Box is our second-hand thrift shop, whose operation over the last 60 years has provided a wonderful outreach ministry to the community, and has funded many of St. Mark’s capital improvements and outreach efforts.

At St. Mark’s we are sensitive of the fact that the gift of money, although often necessary, is not sufficient unless it is wedded to personal commitment and hands-on service. Occasionally we present an Outreach Information Forum at which one or two Outreach projects are highlighted with speakers and audio-visual presentations, and materials from other projects are on display at various tables. Parishioners have an opportunity to be informed about the various projects and to volunteer to help any project which may interest them.

Over the years, St. Mark’s commitment to Outreach has provided support to a number of local, national and international organizations and individuals. Below is a partial list of ministries we support:

### Local community

- Provided groceries and financial support to the Southborough Food Pantry
- Prepared and served meals to people in need located in Marlborough and Boston
- Provided Christmas gifts to children in Marlborough and Framingham
- Provided clothing to a variety of local non-profit organizations
- Supported Straight Ahead Ministries, a youth prison and outplacement program, with money, clothing and mentoring

### National

- Supported the rebuilding of St. Mark’s Church in Gulfport, MS after it was leveled by Hurricane Katrina
- Provided financial support to My Grandfather’s Home for Children in North Carolina

### International

- Donated clothing to Sao Francisco Orphanage in Brazil
- Funded scholarships for the children and the building efforts for St. Matthias school in Deslandes, Haiti

It is hoped that a growing number of parishioners will take an active interest in Outreach and come to see it as a part of their journey in Christ.

### *Conclusion*

We hope that our Parish Profile gives you a sense of what St. Mark's Church is all about... a warm, diverse and loving community of Christians brought together by a singular faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that our profile will stir your interest and inspire you to join us in our walk in Christ.