

St. Martin's Episcopal Church Fairlee, Vermont

Letter of Ministry Goals March 2014

Our Mission Statement: *St. Martin's Episcopal Church is a community of faith and trust, seeking to encounter God and to follow Jesus in service to others.*

St. Martin's Church is currently searching for an individual to serve as a priest in partnership. This is a half time position that we propose to compensate accordingly. This document provides a description of our parish and the community in which it exists and concludes with a statement of our goals for a new priest.

Located on a beautiful site on Lake Morey Road in Fairlee, Vermont, St. Martin's is an inclusive and welcoming congregation composed of people of various ages and diverse backgrounds. Most of the parishioners are year-round residents of the Upper Valley, but there are a few who are with us only in the summer.

We are rooted in the Episcopal tradition and welcome all people regardless of their previous church background. We strive to be a faith community that offers nourishing worship, warm fellowship, and steady encouragement to people who want to live as Christians in the modern world. [<http://stmartinsvt.wordpress.com/>.]

A quick sketch of St. Martin's at this moment shows a stable congregation at a crossroads preparing to deal with some inevitable and striking change. John Morris, our popular, loved, and respected rector of 11 years, has just retired. The extended congregation of St. Martin's numbers about 80 individuals with 30 to 40 in attendance on a given Sunday. Our congregation is drawn from over 15 Vermont and New Hampshire towns with some parishioners traveling more than 20 miles to attend Sunday service. Our wide geographic diversity can make evening meetings and even pastoral care difficult, particularly in winter.

Until recently the ages of our parishioners ranged from infants to over 100. Sadly, in 2012, Julia Fifield, a founding member, former senior warden and great friend to all of us, died at the age of 107. We have a significant number of retired or nearly retired individuals among us, including two retired Episcopal priests. We also have welcomed in recent years a number of families with young children who have become increasingly involved in our parish life.

Long-range Planning Committee Established

In 2012 the St. Martin's vestry, recognizing that John Morris was nearing retirement, appointed a long-range planning committee and charged its members with examining the following three topics: St. Martin's today, parish financial health, and future clergy leadership. The results of the planning committee's work remain relevant today and are discussed in more detail below.

In addition to the three main topics, the committee also had wide-ranging discussions about the future of the Church in general. The committee recognized that the Church of the future will be quite different from the Church of the past. The committee also considered how American culture is changing in significant ways and that, especially in the Northeast, an increasing part of the population shows little interest in participating in the life of the various community churches. In the spring of 2012, in an attempt to understand some of these changes, five or six parishioners participated in a six-session evening program using Phyllis Tickle's "Embracing Emerging Christianity" DVD program as a focus for discussion.

History of St. Martin's

Initial services were conducted in 1963 in the Fairlee Town Hall by clergy from St. Paul's White River Junction and St. Barnabas' Norwich. Land for the new parish building was given by the Ward family, the owners of the nearby Lake Morey Inn. The first service in the newly built church was held at 7 p.m. on St. Martin's Day (Monday, November 11) in 1963 with Hayward Crewe presiding and 27 people in attendance. St. Martin's Chapel was officially dedicated by the Rt. Reverend Harvey Butterfield, Bishop of Vermont, on Saturday, November 17, 1963, at 4 p.m. More than 150 people attended the dedication.

A variety of clergy served St. Martin's in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the Rev. DeWitt Mallary and the Rev. Jeffery Rowthorn. In the fall of 1971 the Rev. Bill Atkinson began his service as priest in charge at St. Martin's Chapel. An occasional guest celebrant and preacher in the summers during Bill's tenure was the Rev. Pete Kelsey.

Bill Atkinson completed his tour at St. Martin's in November 1984 and was succeeded by the Rev. Karen Sheldon, who served until June 1987. During that time the name of the parish became "St. Martin's Church." After Karen departed, various guest clergy took the services; and there were also Morning Prayer services led by lay readers, including Julia Fifield and Bob Jones.

The Rev. Carlyle Meacham served as rector from February 1988 until June 1991. The Rev. Norman Runnion became rector in June 1993, serving until his retirement in October 2001. In May 1999 the newly built "gathering room" was dedicated.

In March 2002 the Rev. John Morris was appointed priest in charge by Bishop Tom Ely. In December 2004 John was called to be rector. A capital campaign was held in 2008 to raise funds for a new pipe organ and for refurbishing the worship space. The organ was built by Peter Walker of Brattleboro, Vermont, and was dedicated in October 2010.

Among John Morris' many accomplishments during his 11+ year tenure at St. Martin's was the establishment of a vibrant youth ministry. The centerpiece is a Eucharistic service for young children held in the church at 9:15 a.m. (before the regular 10 a.m. service) on the first Sunday of every month. He also organized a series of joint gatherings where the whole congregation, with an emphasis on families, periodically met for breakfast and an informal worship service in the gathering room before proceeding into the church to celebrate the Eucharist together. An important future objective for the parish is to strengthen and grow the youth ministry program. John Morris retired on November 1, 2013.

Worship at St. Martin's

Eucharistic worship is the center of our parish life. Each week we have a Sunday service with Holy Communion at 10 a.m. We use Rite I on the first Sunday of the month and alternate among other forms on the remaining Sundays. Music is extremely important to each service, as is the participation of various members of the congregation for reading, chalice-bearing, and the like. On the first Sunday of each month, we have an additional service at 9:15 a.m. that is focused on children and their families and to which all are invited.

Matt Wiencke has been our organist since 1995. Matt's musical talent and the new organ dedicated in 2010 together represent a great strength of the parish and an important component we hope to build upon liturgically. There is interest in expanding the music program to include children's performances and perhaps a choir.

The Vestry

St. Martin's Vestry is currently composed of six lay members and, in the absence of a permanent priest, is chaired by Senior Warden Ann Davis. The vestry provides overall leadership in making and implementing church policy. The church treasurer normally attends meetings as a non-voting member and also serves as clerk.

Support Personnel

To help maintain our church facility, the vestry has hired a part-time custodian who lives in close proximity to the church and who checks on its status several times a week. We have also engaged the part-time services of a secretary who prepares the bulletin each week in collaboration with the church organist and the priest who will be leading the worship services for the coming Sunday.

Outreach and Parish Life

The congregation reaches out to one another and to our communities in a variety of ways. The coffee hour held after each church service provides an opportunity for us to gather in a relaxed social setting while enjoying refreshments provided by volunteers. The sense of community experienced on Sundays is seen to carry over into daily life throughout the week. There is a perceived need, however, to revive a more organized way to respond to the needs of parishioners and others who are ill or who face other personal problems. As in many parishes, we face the challenge of finding ways to reach out to youth and of harnessing their enthusiasm to reach out to the broader community.

Over the past five years parishioners have formed a number of small study groups in an attempt to facilitate adult spiritual growth and understanding. These meetings have covered a wide range of topics and authors: Karen Armstrong's *Case for God*, Mary Oliver's poetry, Marcus Borg's "Embracing an Adult Faith," Brother David Steindl-Rast's *Deeper Than Words*, and the practice of "Insight Meditation." Last September the newly formed parish spirituality committee organized a "pilgrimage" of parish members, aged one year to eighty-five, for a communal walk after the Sunday service from St. Martin's Church to the Fairlee Community Church of Christ to deliver a new supply of food for the food pantry housed there [see <http://stmartinsvt.wordpress.com/parish-photos-2/our-pilgrimage-to-fairlees-communityfood-pantry/>].

Our annual operating budget for 2014 includes \$2,500 designated for outreach programs. Projects to which we regularly contribute include: Episcopal Relief and Development—\$500; Hospice/Visiting Nurse—\$500; Red Stocking—\$500; and DHMC Chaplaincy—\$250.

In addition to monetary contributions, we collect food at the first service of every month. This collection goes to food shelves in the towns of Bradford and West Fairlee, from which they are distributed to people in need in the surrounding areas.

Other Parish Statistics

The following membership and attendance figures are as reported in our 2013 Parochial Report:

Total active baptized members	85
All communicants in good standing	70
Communicants in good standing under 16	18
Average Sunday attendance	36

The following stewardship and financial information for 2013 is drawn from that same report:

Number of signed pledges	31
Total dollar amount pledged	\$72,000
Total operating revenues	\$103,236
Total operating expenses	\$95,311
Total cash on hand 12/31/2013	\$8,883
Total investments at market value 2/31/2013	\$335,316

Parish Finances

2013 was a financially positive year for St. Martin's. Our net worth increased by about \$50,000 from \$294,123 to \$344,198. During the year our investment account at the Ledyard Bank increased by about 17% to a total of about \$335,000. At the same time pledge, plate, and other contribution revenues were much higher than anticipated. At the end of December income exceeded expenses by \$7,391. We are very grateful to parish members and others who made it all possible.

In 2014 we estimate our total expenses will be about \$94,000 and our pledge and other income about \$78,000. We plan to transfer \$16,000 from our capital account to make up the difference.

Since 2003 our policy has been to use 4% of the year-end investment portfolio value for parish operating expenses. For example, in 2013 we transferred about \$15,000 from the portfolio for this purpose. If more funds are needed to balance the budget, we have from time to time reluctantly found it necessary to make supplemental withdrawals from the investment portfolio. For instance, in 2012 we needed to withdraw an additional almost 4% from the endowment to meet that year's shortfall.

In 2012 the St. Martin's Long-range Planning Committee examined the parish financial situation and concluded that our financial posture had become a matter for priority concern and attention. The committee advised the vestry that we were in an increasingly precarious financial situation that merits swift action.

The committee shared its concerns with the congregation at a special meeting in October 2012 with the result that parishioners were asked to consider raising their pledges for 2013 by a considerable amount over the previous year. We were encouraged with the result. Nearly half of the 31 pledges received were increased and the need for a supplemental withdrawal decreased accordingly.

Nonetheless, our financial posture continues to be a concern to us, and we are constantly looking for ways to achieve a more balanced budget that does not require large supplemental withdrawals from our investment account.

Our Community

The Upper Connecticut River Valley abounds in beautiful farms, fields, mountains, and woodlands. The Upper Valley is also intellectually rich and culturally vibrant, in part because of the proximity of Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH, some 20 miles from our church, but also because of many other institutions in our area and the many creative people who live here. We are fortunate to have Dartmouth's excellent medical center as one of our outstanding sources of health care. These factors have attracted the many retirees who live in our community, full time or part time, in addition to the substantial majority of people who are actively engaged in a great variety of occupations, full time or part time. Some of our neighbors come from families that have been here for many generations; others have moved here more recently to work or to retire. We believe that all have found the community to be very welcoming—regardless of their race, ethnic or religious background, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. St. Martin's embraces that welcoming spirit, and we look forward to drawing more of our neighbors into our church.

It would be very wrong, however, to overlook the fact that numerous people in our community are facing serious challenges, particularly in the current difficult economy. There are many instances of homelessness, hunger, substance addiction, family violence, and many of the other ills that come with poverty and deprivation. There is widespread need for public assistance, including food shelves, homeless shelters, and subsidized breakfast and lunch programs in some of our local public schools. This state of affairs offers us opportunities to help those in our community who are facing such challenges, and there is always scope to increase what we do in that effort.

The nearest similar sized Episcopal parish is St. Barnabas in Norwich, Vermont, about 15 miles away; and the nearest large Episcopal parish is St. Thomas in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Looking Forward—Our Ministry Goals for the Future

In June 2012 the Long-range Planning Committee distributed a parish survey to the congregation. We received 27 completed surveys. Three questions posed in the survey along with some key responses follow:

- **What attracted you to St. Martin's?**
 - Proximity/location
 - Liked the priest/sermons
 - Warm, friendly community
 - Small size
 - Referral from friends
 - Saw the church building and liked it
 - Looking for an Episcopal church
- **What continues to attract you to St. Martin's?**
 - The community/fellowship/warm feelings/friendliness
 - The liturgy/music/sermons/priest
 - Location
- **What is a recent parish ministry that you recognize as one of success and fulfillment?**
 - Tropical Storm Irene relief
 - Presence of young families and children
 - Breakfast/worship events
 - Donations to local food needs
 - Working together to care for memorial garden
 - Parishioners playing music during worship service
 - New organ
 - Hosting hospice bereavement support group

Recent discussions between the ministry discernment committee and the vestry included the following:

Youth Ministry Initiative: Using John Morris' youth ministry program as a base, we believe there is significant potential to grow the membership of families with young children in our parish, and we will look to a new priest to lead and expand that important effort with the strong support of families that are already here working toward that goal. As we grow our youth program, we also want to infuse it with new energy and inspiration and guide it towards a more structured worship format for young families. To that end, we will look for a priest who can connect with the children and their families and can put teachings into a language to which the children can relate. We also have an interest in exploring ways in which the children might be incorporated into the musical portion of the services.

In a parish meeting held on March 2, 2014, we discussed our Ministry Goals, and there was agreement among those present that we should seek a priest who will nurture and challenge our congregation as we strive to grow in our faith.

We are searching for a priest in partnership who can respond to the diverse backgrounds and needs of the individuals in our parish in the following ways:

- ***As a Preacher***—St. Martin's desires a priest who can provide thought-provoking, uplifting sermons that make the Gospel come alive through illustrations that are applicable to our own lives and who has the ability to lead and encourage and guide us in the formation and development of a deeper spiritual life with a solid intellectual foundation. We want a priest who can lead our worship services with dignity and warmth, balancing the desire of some parishioners for erudite homilies with the equally valid need to engage everyone, including children.
- ***As a Pastoral Care Giver***—We want a minister who will be a good listener and a thoughtful and loving counselor to all members of the congregation. We seek a minister who will lead us as a congregation in responding quickly and compassionately to the individual and collective needs of our parishioners and the community, especially those who may be in crisis or gravely ill.
- ***As a Teacher***—The parish desires a wise guide to aid us in the spiritual formation of our youth, in their engagement in the church with their families, and in their participation in increased religious education.
- ***As a Leader & Friend***—Finally, we are seeking an individual who, while leading us spiritually and in friendship, will also provide organizational and administrative leadership to the parish and lead us in judicious growth; one who can teach, delegate authority to members of the congregation and share responsibilities with the vestry and other parish organizations.