

St. Bartholomew's Church in Yarmouth, Maine  
Office of Transition Ministries Portfolio

August 26, 2021

1. Describe a moment in your worshiping community's recent ministry that you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

The pandemic has called for creative action over the last 18 months. Virtual services were quickly offered in the spring of 2020, and our choir learned to use an app already popular with young people around the world to sing apart, but together, providing us with beautiful music for every service. Our Rector answered another call the first week of January 2021. A Transitional Worship Committee was immediately organized, as was a "tech team" to support them. From February 7 until the present time, they have been providing virtual, and recently, live, meaningful and inspirational worship for our parish.

2. Describe your liturgical style & practice. If your community provides more than one type of worship, describe all.

The liturgical style at St. Bartholomew's is a blend of traditional and creative. We are relaxed and somewhat informal in worship. The building itself reflects our informality and flexibility. For example, the sanctuary houses not only our worship but can be reorganized to hold fundraising events such as our juried art show or Christmas Fair.

Our practice has been to hold two services; an eight am Eucharist without music and a ten am Eucharist inclusive of music with children joining from their Christian education program. All are welcome at our table. We faithfully follow church seasons and lectionary. Liturgically we draw on sources such as the Scottish Episcopal Church, the New Zealand Church and the Church of England to complement and enrich the services of the Book of Common Prayer. The rector has held primary responsibility for delivery of the services; lectors and chalice bearers participate. Returning to in person worship, the first Sunday of the month will be a non-clerical Healing Service of the Word led by the Pastoral Care Committee. Creating our worship together has led to enhanced inclusivity and sense of community.

3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

St. Bartholomew's church has a long-standing tradition of engaging our entire membership in a collaborative expression of our values and ministry. In this time of transition, a Parish Responsibility Grid was developed to clarify the roles of our lay members and clergy, formalizing the broad community engagement we have already enjoyed for years. It is intentional that our church members do not simply attend services but are invited and encouraged to actively participate in a variety of roles before, during, and after services. From serving in the altar guild, to educating our youngest members, to weeding the gardens, and many tasks in between, there is a role for everyone in our parish. The entire community benefits from everyone's unique gifts and we are also able to minister to each other as we work side by side.

4. As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being?

As a worshipping community, St. Barts cares for our spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being by fostering community between members and encouraging meaningful participation in the community by members. Our long-standing investment in pastoral care by lay members of the church is echoed in the commitment of members to many other lay services. We prioritize transparency and accessible communication even in challenging situations, ensuring that our community remains connected to each other and engaged in the Church. We appreciate the way that the community itself embodies the Church. We participate in caring for the different aspects of the community through the ways that members lend their time and energy to meeting those needs.

5. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographic region.

St. Bartholomew's participates in the local community's worship in a handful of ways. Our youth engage routinely in a joint Confirmation class with First Parish Congregational Church in Yarmouth. This collaboration allows us to appreciate our rich similarities and discern our differences. We have engaged in an anti-racism discussion surrounding the Sacred Ground film with several Faith communities in the Yarmouth community. Many of our outreach efforts are also joint efforts with Diocesan and our local faith communities.

6. How do you engage in pastoral care beyond your worshipping community?

We support several programs that provide essential services to underserved communities such as those in recovery, the financially needy, and new Mainers. Key partners are Friendship House, a residential community for men in recovery, and St. Elizabeth's Essentials Pantry, a Jubilee Center sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. We are also a founding partner in the Yarmouth Compassionate Housing Initiative, helping to find housing for immigrants (see more below). A new committee has been organized which calls itself "Reimagining Outreach" and is focused on finding other ways that our parish can be active in the greater community.

7. Tell about a ministry your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

In 2015, St. Bart's initiated the Yarmouth Compassionate Housing Initiative (YCHI) in collaboration with two other churches. The project prioritizes temporarily housing homeless families in member's homes when they are unable to find housing in shelters. The project also turned a church building into a property that can house 4 adults; this property remains full three years after its inception. The project not only hosts families, but members also help families move into their own homes from the family shelter and encourage and mentor them as they seek employment. The group is offering English language learning classes to the community of new arrivals living in Yarmouth, many of whom are refugees and immigrants from Iraq, Congo, China, Spain, India, Japan, and Burundi. Members provide support to help families become self-sufficient, such as food vouchers, education, and transportation. The project has hosted, connected, befriended, and provided material support to over 50 families

to date, and members continue to stay close to the families even after they move on from direct involvement with YCHI. Contact: Carla Hunt at 206-251-8694.

8. How are you preparing yourself for the Church of the future?

Our former Rector created a liturgy for our church that we intend to use with other liturgies going forward. It's modern, and new, and speaks to a wide range of listeners.

We firmly believe that our parish community IS our church, and the movement to a less than full time pastor reflects our desire to equip our community to carry God's word into the world in meaningful ways, while relying upon our spiritual leader to inspire and nourish us. We are confident that by modeling God's love in the world we can counter the movement toward even more dwindling numbers predicted for the Church of the future. We are making this transition, not out of financial necessity, but because we think this will help our community thrive with continued enthusiastic parishioner responsibility and involvement.

9. What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshiping community?

We have a Stewardship Committee who recognizes its role in encouraging our parishioners to give time, talent, and treasure to our church. The development of multiple strong committees to see to the work of the church, especially over the last 18 months, has resulted in the committee's focus being primarily on the "treasure" aspect of these "three t's." An organized, focused pledge campaign is undertaken in the fall. Materials provided to the parishioners include a realistic draft of the next year's budget and current financial statements for transparency. Testimonials from current pledging parishioners at 5-6 worship services share the importance and joy of giving. All this is followed by personal phone calls or visits with each household in the parish by vestry, committee members, and other volunteers to answer questions and address any issues that might exist about the church. The commitment of time and talent is evident in our community every day.

10. What is your worshiping community's experience of conflict? And how have you addressed it?

Seven years ago, we determined that our experienced volunteer Sunday school coordinators were burnt out and that there were no more volunteers willing to coordinate our children's program. The alternative to hire part-time staff was a daunting budget option for the Vestry given that our pledging membership had shrunk somewhat in recent years. The Vestry and the membership responded to this situation with an important parish wide conversation about how to continue to provide a creative and engaging children's program – and to continue to attract families with young children to St. Bart's. The conversation led the Vestry to create a part-time paid coordinator position to restore and strengthen the program. We have been blessed with successful and creative programming by three individuals spread over the seven years. Families continue to join and participate in the congregation. Initially, we funded the position with the help of small fundraisers (carwashes for example) and now more significantly, it is funded through the Hannaford grocery store chain's gift card program (we raised \$8,000 in 2020). Forty parishioners buy their groceries using the gift cards.

11. What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? And what did you learn?

One example of contemplated change that didn't go as planned was when there was a steady buzz about making a change in our worship services arrangement. Should we consolidate to one service? Should we have a “music” service and have a separate “family” service? The pros and cons were batted around for a little over a month. Eventually it was left in the hands of the Vestry to either make a change or not. After much deliberation, the Vestry was of one mind that the situation was not so dire as was presented, and the potential consequences of disrupting our current arrangement posed a greater risk than not making a sizable change. In the end, our service model did not change, and there was not in fact a precipitous decline in attendance, giving, or any other metric of involvement. The Vestry at the time learned the wisdom of not making rash decisions based on emotional responses but rather taking a circumspect assessment of the perceived problem and working through divergent ideas. In the end, *not* making a change was the best change we could make.

12. In no more than four descriptors of one or two words each: Provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshiping community.

- Effective preacher
- Compassionately engaged
- Warm and welcoming
- Sense of humor