



SAINT JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
CHARLESTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

# Parish Profile



February 2020 | 27 Devens Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts 02129 | 617-242-1272 | [www.stjohns02129.org](http://www.stjohns02129.org)

## Who We Are

St. John's is the community Episcopal church in the historic yet evolving Charlestown neighborhood of Boston. We are a parish of cherished traditions: an all-volunteer choir accompanied by traditional organ music, a beloved early morning Eucharist around our garden altar, a well-established Godly Play program for children of the many young families of Charlestown, a treasured 180-year traditional annual Harvest Fair, a community gathering Lessons and Carols service, and even our own baptismal prayer prayed at the baptism of generations of St. John's children. At the same time, we are a parish situated in a dynamic, growing, and economically diverse urban community. We attract a steady stream of young families new to the neighborhood, while serving older parishioners who have lived in the neighborhood for almost a century. We are newcomers and long time members, young families and retirees, single, divorced, married, widowed, and members of the LGBTQ community. We come from different walks of life and socioeconomic backgrounds, and arrive from Charlestown and neighboring communities.

Fundamentally, we are a community of love. Individually, we are a group of often eccentric, ideologically diverse, and sometimes brilliant/sometimes broken parts. But we take care of each other. And we take seriously the imperative of our mission to **Hear the Spirit, See God's Beauty, and Act in Love**. We are called to love and serve Christ in each other, to see God's beauty in our neighbors, and to do everything we can—as a small community parish—to live as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ.

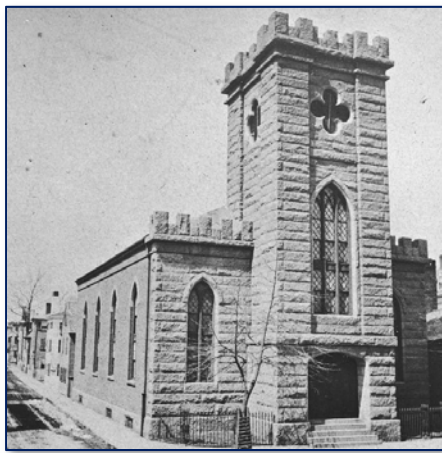


## Charlestown, Massachusetts

Charlestown is the oldest neighborhood in Boston, famous as the location of the Battle of Bunker Hill and the historic Charlestown Navy Yard (where the *U.S.S. Constitution* resides). It is home to Bunker Hill Community College, two marinas, the Spaulding Rehabilitation Center, and a campus of Massachusetts General Hospital. But though it sits right next to downtown Boston, Charlestown has a residential neighborhood feel. Today, the neighborhood is perhaps more socioeconomically diverse than any other one-square-mile in Massachusetts—home to a growing number of young professionals with families, a strong longstanding working-class population, and the residents of multiple affordable housing developments.

### Our History

St. John's was founded in 1840, during a population boom in Charlestown. In less than two years, the congregation—led by the then Chaplain of the Navy Yard—raised funds and completed construction of our church building at 27 Devens Street. Over the next 175 years, older and newer churches in Charlestown came and went. But St. John's persisted: sometimes with a robust congregation filling the pews, and other times with a skeleton crew of dedicated parishioners. Today, St. John's is one of four churches in Charlestown (two Roman Catholic, two Protestant).



### Charlestown by the Numbers:

- Population: 19,312 (according to BPDA)
- Highest percentage of zero- to five-year-olds of any neighborhood in Boston
- Race/Ethnicity: 72.0% white, 8.4% Hispanic, 10.5% black; 7.5% Asian
- Median income: \$94,600

### St. John's Today

Today, St. John's has 115 formal members (with 37 pledging units, and an average pledge of \$2,746) and average Sunday attendance of 58. Our membership has slowly but steadily grown over the past eight years, while our average attendance has generally fluctuated somewhere between 60 and 80. In addition to the Rector, the Parish employs a Director of Music, a Parish Administrator, and a Sexton. We have had (but do not presently have) volunteer Priest Associates and/or a diocesan-provided Deacon, and a paid *Godly Play* teacher.



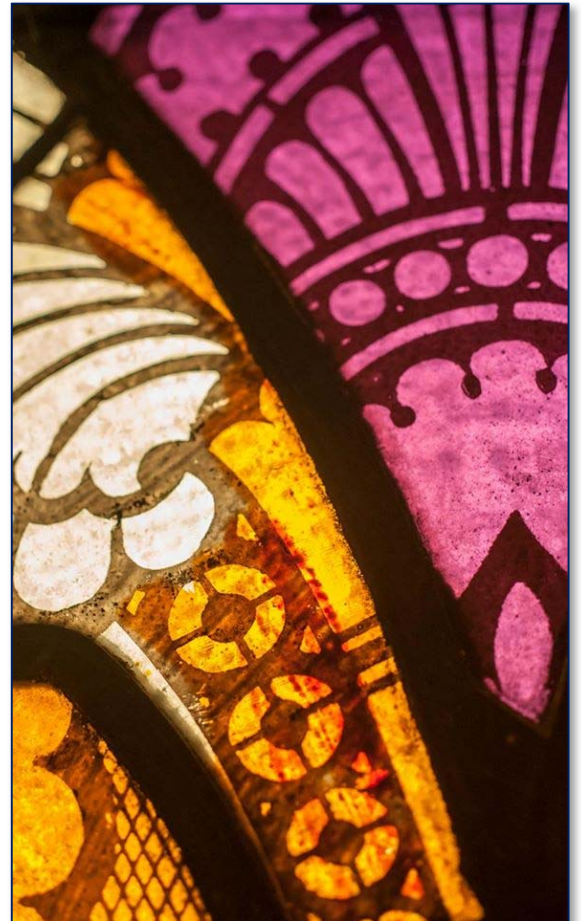


In addition to Sunday morning programming, we have an active Episcopal Church Women (ECW) group that engages in fellowship, educational enrichment, and fundraising programs to support the Church's ministries. Our dedicated Garden Group meets weekly during the spring and summer to lovingly tend for our (award-winning) garden. And as if all of that weren't enough, we have the best coffee hour around!

It is, however, impossible to talk about St. John's today without explaining our recent history—which has, candidly, been a real challenge. Our prior, well-loved Rector took a much-deserved sabbatical in mid-2018 then, shortly after his return, was seriously injured and away for many months. Shortly after his recovery, he left service at St. John's when his spouse was elected as Bishop of Maine. As a result, we have been without consistent clergy leadership for well over a year. (Our Interim Priest has been with us since this past summer.) This leadership vacuum and fluctuation has taken a toll on the lay leadership and the parish as a whole, and we are badly in need of both a reliable long-term spiritual leader, and some loving care. That said, the leadership vacuum has also united the parish and helped us understand better who we are and what we value, which will—ultimately—make us stronger.

## St. John's Today (continued)

We have traditionally offered two Eucharists each Sunday—a Rite I Eucharist at 8:00 a.m., and a Rite II Eucharist at 10:00. During the summer, weather permitting, the 8:00 Eucharist takes place around the handcrafted altar in our historic Cutler Memorial Garden. And during the school year, our 10:00 Eucharist includes music from our choir, as well as occasional offerings from our junior choir. In addition, we offer monthly sung Evensong, and children's Christian formation classes on Sunday mornings—*Godly Play* for younger children (traditionally taught by a paid staff member, though currently being overseen by parent volunteers) and *Living the Good News* for our tweens and teens (or, as its participants call it, PLCC—"Peace, Love, and Comfy Chairs").







## Our Ministry and Mission

A critical—if not the critical—aspect of the ministry of St. John’s is to provide a meaningful Sunday morning Eucharist for the community. As part of our extensive self-study process, we conducted a parish-wide survey (in electronic and paper form), followed by group and individual meetings with parishioners, staff members, and children. The single theme that emerged most clearly is this: we are a parish that believes in and values the power of the liturgy, and we need to, as several parishioners put it, “**get Sundays right**”—with consistently inspiring and engaging sermons, a carefully prepared traditional liturgy, and beautiful music. Our extraordinary music program and our Sunday morning liturgy are among our greatest strengths, and they provide a critical opportunity for reflection and renewal for our community.

Our longtime parishioners and new members also agree that a fundamental aspect of our ministry is serving our children. Charlestown is a neighborhood that attracts families with (or planning to have) young children, and baptisms and our *Godly Play* program are what have traditionally been the main entry points at St. John’s.



We also see ourselves as something of an incubator for the future of the church. Over the past nine years, we have sponsored four candidates for ordination (three to the priesthood, and one to the diaconate)—a remarkable number given our size! We have also hosted a robust Education for Ministry (EfM) program. And though many of our young families eventually migrate from the city to the suburbs, we often see their names turn up on lists of vestry members of larger suburban parishes and on diocesan committees. Finally, a critical part of our mission is providing spiritual renewal and care for our many parishioners who are engaged individually in broader city-wide, nation-wide, and international mission work.



## Our Future

St. John's is a little church with a lot of potential. It is hard to build a high quality music program with an all-volunteer choir, to establish a robust children's formation program, and to educate a congregation and community to expect and value carefully prepared traditional liturgy. We have all three. And we are ideally located: we have a gorgeous, in as-good-as-any shape church building located in a neighborhood that attracts young families looking for church homes. As the former Bishop once said, if there were not already a church there, Charlestown would be exactly the kind of neighborhood where the Diocese would have set up a mission.

Our immediate future will, necessarily, be a period of healing and trust building. We have suffered leadership whiplash with the departure of our rector, the departure of three volunteer priest associates, and a string of temporary priests. The first and most important things for our new rector to do will be to listen, to help us heal, and to earn our trust as someone who will grow with us and guide us long term.



- Top responses to Rector Self-Study Questionnaire Question 1a, "Please identify in priority order, what you think are St. John's strengths": **welcoming, community, music, liturgy, and children.**
- Top responses to Rector Self-Study Questionnaire Question 2a, "Describe your vision for the future of St. John's, focusing out roughly 5 years from now. What would be the same?": **music, liturgy, children, and choir.**

We see our long-term future as building on our strengths. We hope that our liturgy will remain musical, traditional, and beautiful, and that we will find ways to grow our all-volunteer choir. We hope preaching on Sunday mornings will inspire, challenge, and move us. We do not anticipate becoming more "contemporary"—rather, we prefer traditional liturgy, chanted psalms, beautiful organ music, and an elegant altar setting. Our sense is that there is a craving for that kind of beautiful worship, certainly among our existing congregation, but also in the broader community. At the same time, we hope that our classrooms and sanctuary will be places that awe and inspire each new generation. We hope to expand our offerings for children, including introducing a youth group—and we would hope that our next Rector would lead that effort and develop individual relationships with our tweens and teens.

Finally, we hope for growth. We recognize that the church nationwide is in an era of declining attendance and declining financial commitment. But we are a fertile space for growth, given our urban, family-friendly location and the strength of our foundations. There is a desire for outreach—including social, community, and justice activities—particularly to the Charlestown community. Though we have no aspirations to be a mega-church, we hope to grow to a place of financial security to ensure—as one longtime parishioner put it—that the doors of St. John's remain open for all who need us.





### Or, in Our Children's Words

Our *Godly Play* children had this to say when asked what kind of new Rector they would like (and we couldn't agree more!):

- "Good listener"
- "Good teacher"
- "Not mad at someone who makes mistakes in real life"
- "Fun"
- "Kind"
- "Respectful"
- "Honest"
- "Brings stuff to build with"
- "Funny"
- "Doesn't take people's things without asking"

### Gifts We Are Looking For

- We are looking for an **inspirational** Rector who will "get Sundays right"—a strong preacher and a confident liturgist who can form a beautiful, consistent, and coherent Eucharist.
- We are looking for a **teaching** Rector who will lead and guide faith formation, with an emphasis on children, and particularly with the interest in and talent for developing a program for teens.
- We are looking for an **empowering** Rector who will inspire our mission and outreach work, and committed to being visible in the Charlestown community and raising the profile of St. John's.
- We are looking for an **organized** Rector able to exercise strong oversight over Parish administration and finances.
- We are looking for a **loving** Rector with a talent for pastoral care, and an ability to manage conflict, see our individual imperfections, and love us anyway.



Are you the one we are looking for? Please provide a letter of interest, your resume, your OTM profile, and a link to two or three sermons to our Rector Search Committee Chairs, Evie Scoville ([evie@scovillesolutions.com](mailto:evie@scovillesolutions.com)) and Louis Tompros ([ltompros@gmail.com](mailto:ltompros@gmail.com)). We are also happy to answer any questions you have!

