

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

St. Mary's Episcopal Church is nestled in the historic district of Milton, Florida - a mill town established in 1844, along the Blackwater River in the panhandle of northwest Florida. Milton is a small town; the 2020 U.S. Census records indicate that 10,000 people call Milton home. Population in the area is growing, especially in the neighboring community of Pace and along Escambia Bay and Escambia River. Just across the bay is the City of Pensacola, first settled by the Spanish in 1559, and recognized in recent years as the oldest European Colonial settlement in Florida. To the east, new industry and land development, and plans for new schools, are likely to assure a further increase in population for our area.

We are proud of the beauty of our Emerald Coast, its rich historical legacy, its important lumbering and naval stores industries, and our active and vital military installations. Opportunities for excellent education exist from pre-school through graduate school, which has attracted industries, both large and small, to Milton and Santa Rosa County.



St. Mary's Episcopal Church has served generations of parishioners since it was established in 1867. Each Sunday, an average of 70 people from Milton and nearby areas gather to worship with the friendly, welcoming community of believers at St. Mary's Episcopal Church. Every week, the warmth of the congregation is evident in the smiles of the greeters and the devotion of all those who participate in the church service—either by preparing the altar, serving during worship, singing in the choir, or sitting in the pews. Worship at St. Mary's centers on the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (Rite II) and the 1982 hymnal, with occasional prayers and songs of praise from other accepted sources. All present are invited to receive, and to participate fully in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Worship



St. Mary's Episcopal Church
"To Build Up One Another in Christ"

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*Episcopal Diocese of the Central
Gulf Coast*

*The Right Reverend J. Russell
Kendrick, Bishop*

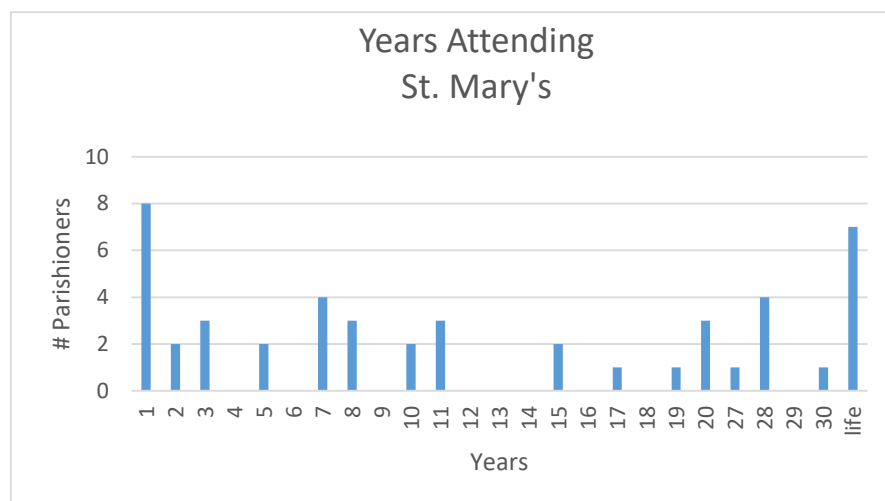
"St. Mary's is a beautiful historic church with a close knit congregation."

On Sunday mornings, we currently offer two services: one at 9:00 a.m. (attended by 63% of the congregation) and one at 11:00 a.m. (attended by 37%). Our recent survey indicated that respondents were split (43%) in their preference for one or two services, and 14% were supportive of either one or two services. However, a review of our "Book of Services" revealed that two services yielded 1/3 more participants. Our counters verified a financial advantage in having two services. In addition to Sunday services, Morning Prayer or Holy Eucharist is offered each Wednesday at noon.

Of the 90 contributing church members who received the Church Assessment Survey, 50 responded (a 55% response rate). Survey results were overwhelmingly positive about St. Mary's making a difference in their spiritual life--particularly their sense of belonging, feeling valued, and loved. A time of fellowship and friendly conversation, enhanced and enlivened by Men's Group Breakfasts or Women's Group Coffee Hours, is scheduled each Sunday in the parish hall between the two worship services.

Who We Are

Parishioners at St. Mary's are predominately female (60%), married (62%), college educated (88%), retired (77%) and over 50 (98%). Our profile does not match the demographics of the area, revealing only 15% of the population over 65, 47% female, and 87% having a High School level education. Although several travel as far as 30 miles to attend church, most live in Milton (68%) or nearby Pace (16%). In the past year, church attendance has increased (41%) or stayed the same (32%). Members have been worshipping at St. Mary's from under a year to a lifetime. Military couples and families from Whiting Field also occasionally attend.



“St. Mary’s is a very welcoming church. In the short time I have been back at the church, I have come to think of it as my extended family”

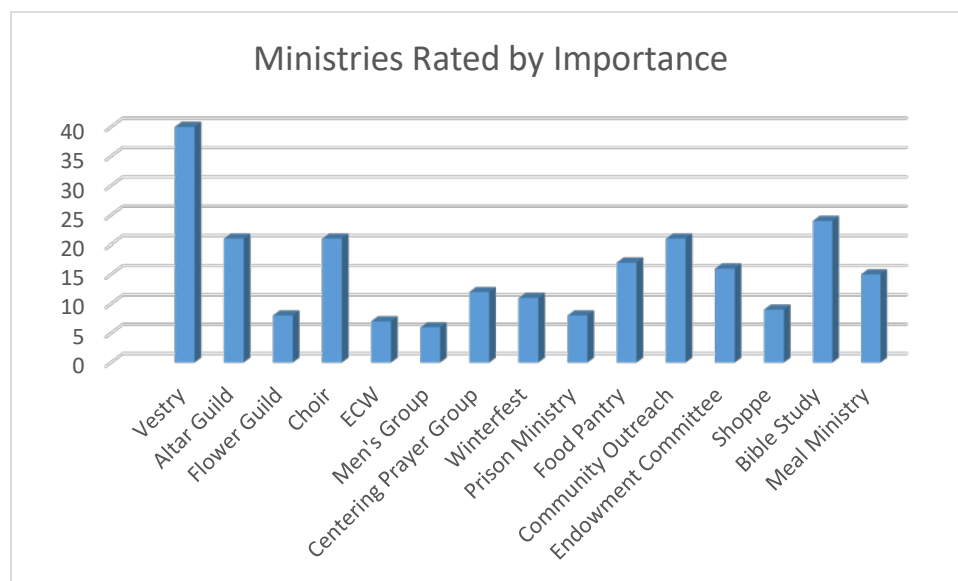
Lay Ministries

An active core of parishioners at St. Mary’s serve as Lay Eucharistic Ministers during Sunday services and other religious occasions. Others choose to serve on the Vestry, Altar Guild, Flower Guild, sing in the choir, or share duties as acolytes, lectors, ushers, and greeters.

For over 70% of parishioners who completed the Assessment Survey, the activities listed below, together with Bible Study, a well-maintained food pantry and other forms of community outreach, are considered essential or important to the overall life and ministry of the church.

Although most respondents believe there are a number of active, successful ministries at St. Mary’s, they do not see a strong plan for growth and development of lay leaders, nor a priority to train and encourage those who may express an interest in learning to be an effective leader. A few respondents also voiced the opinion that once a leader is in place, little effort is made to plan for an eventual “changing of the guard”—a plan to infuse new talents and new ideas into that ministry.

“Teach, support, create leaders within the church to lead small groups”



“The church does a great deal with a small group of active members”

“Children and youth ministries are so important but we currently have no youth nor do we offer Sunday School. We also need a young adult ministry to build faith”

“Combine ECW and the Men’s Group to form a service group to meet church needs”

Music

At St. Mary’s, our Music and Choir Director uses the 1982 hymnal and the *Cursillo* songbook to plan and coordinate appropriate music for each service. The music reflects the liturgical season and the gospel message. Voices of our choir members are accompanied by organ or piano, and occasionally by an acoustic guitar.



Christian Formation

A majority of the members of St. Mary’s who responded to the Self-Assessment Survey indicated that they consider education and training to be an important and essential part of Christian life.

In years past, the church offered age-level Christian education in well-attended traditional Sunday School classes, from Nursery to High school. Now, the few children we see at St. Mary’s are generally those visiting family or friends who are members of this church. We are largely a congregation of older adults.

To serve the needs of our members, there are two Bible Studies offered each week: one on a weekday morning, in person; and one on a lively ZOOM meeting held on a weekday in the late afternoon. Both sessions are appreciated and are well-attended by many parishioners and occasional guests.

In 2016, Contemplative Outreach of Pensacola offered an introduction to Centering Prayer, a contemplative form of worship. The workshop inspired a devoted group of centering prayer practitioners to meet weekly in the church to read from a contemplative text and devote twenty minutes to silent meditation. This group is growing in number of participants and

another workshop is scheduled in the fall of 2023 for those interested in resting in God in silence. Our survey also indicated the importance of small group settings for encouraging discipleship.

Most parishioners feel that St. Mary's is doing well in providing opportunities for personal growth and spiritual formation. They feel that the church engages people in their spiritual life and welcomes them wherever they are in that important journey. On the other hand, in both personal and written communications, St. Mary's parishioners clearly *do not want political agendas* to be addressed or supported from the pulpit.

"We live during a polarized time in our country. The congregation needs spiritual guidance devoid of politics. We need a priest who will be a spiritual leader and leave his/her politics at home"

The church teaches and encourages spiritual practices; discipline and prayer is instituted within the Church. An Inquirers Class is offered annually, before the scheduled visit of our Bishop. However, about half of our responding congregants do *not* think that St. Mary's helps its members develop language for *talking about God and the importance of His presence in their own lives*.

Financial Stewardship

Results of our survey indicate that the congregation as a whole is aware of the importance of adequate finances to the church, especially as we search for a priest and maintain aging buildings. The majority of church members acknowledge the importance of supporting the concept of tithing to enable the financial well-being of a church. But the concept is a difficult "sell" to both young families (of which we have very few) and aging retired persons on fixed incomes. Some members agree that St. Mary's needs to be more open about its finances, which should be discussed openly and regularly, including its obligations, its savings, and all ongoing needs.

An active Endowment Committee monitors the investment of large gifts of money or property bequeathed to St. Mary's. That committee has campaign to promote the importance, to the entire congregation, of including the church as a beneficiary in one's estate planning. Periodic major building maintenance expenses such as a new roof or

exterior painting are made possible through fundraising efforts like dramas, special meals and receptions, and an annual Arts & Crafts event.

“Offer weekly social activities for the congregation”

Outreach

The Priest and Deacon regularly visit parishioners in hospital, in nursing homes, and in their homes or assisted-living facilities.

“Provide more visitation of past and lost members. Follow up on visits”

Devoted Eucharistic Visitors administer the sacrament to parishioners who are not able to attend church. Answers to survey questions indicate that the congregation not only perceives these visits as important, but values increasing our efforts in this ministry to support our aging congregation.

Overall, the majority of the congregation believes that our church is quite involved in the local community, and that St. Mary’s is identified as a caring, giving church by the local population—especially considering our moderate size.



The Shoppe located in the Allen House across the street from St. Mary’s Parish Hall, has offered “gently used” donations of clothing, furniture, books, toys, and assorted household items for sale since opening in 2013. Proceeds support several community endeavors, such as the homeless in Santa Rosa County’s Tent City and homeless students at our local Milton High School who receive gift cards, personal items, and other tangible support. The Shoppe also supports Malawi and Guatemala missions.



Food Pantry - The Deacon, with the support of parishioners and outside donations, initiated a pantry in 2022 to answer the ever-increasing need for providing food to the hungry. Currently, our pantry gives 25 bags of groceries to members of the community each week.



Prison Ministry - The Deacon visits prisoners at local correctional institutions each week, and delivers the message of God's love for them and hope for their future. The Deacon is the *sole provider of this ministry in our Diocese.*



Winterfest - An annual, much-anticipated **Arts and Crafts** show is held on the first Friday and Saturday of December. Local vendors and artisans display their wares in booths inside St. Mary's Parish Hall, or outside in the yard. Last year (2022), proceeds from this event contributed to the cost of painting the church.



Members of St. Mary's attend and support the overseas mission in Guatemala to build clean, safe homes for residents in need. The **Guatemala Mission** is funded through spaghetti sauce sales, "noisy coin" drives, and special meals.



Malawi Relief - Support and assistance for **Fr. John Ng'oma's** Anglican Church in Malawi is continuously provided by the generosity of our parishioners. Fr. John visits his "second home" at St. Mary's during breaks between classes at Sewanee, where he is working toward his Ph.D. In Malawi, he has helped provide computers for schools and goats for widows who have no other income.



A Hope Bowl Filler - (And Blessing of the Animals) St. Mary's supports efforts by the local Council on Aging to help senior citizens keep, feed, and care for their beloved pets, who are often their only companions.

“St. Mary’s has a prime location to help the community and to help the homeless with in house meals, showers, etc. We have a fully functioning kitchen in the Parish Hall where we could make meals for the homeless”

Physical Campus

St. Mary’s Episcopal Church has four buildings which occupy its city block on Oak Street. The church is Gothic Revival in style, and was constructed from virgin timber in 1878. The beautiful stained-glass windows were installed in the mid-1900s. Children of the parish funded the altar window of Saint Mary’s, which was imported from Czechoslovakia.

The rectory, directly across the street from the church, was built by Doctor Charles Edward MacDougall, a physician, in the early 1870s. MacDougall was an ordained Episcopal Deacon, and served as St. Mary’s priest from 1876 until 1916. After his death, the house was willed to St. Mary’s to use as a rectory. Currently, the rectory is used as a church office, and since 2022, it houses students in the School of Ministry for the Diocese.

In 1987, Pensacola architect Carter Quina designed the parish hall to complement the Gothic Revival style of the church next door. That same year, the church purchased the Allen House across Oak street, which is now the home of The Shoppe. The parish hall is used for events and meetings, including AA and NA.

The garth behind the church is a lovely garden area, with a repository for the ashes of deceased parishioners.

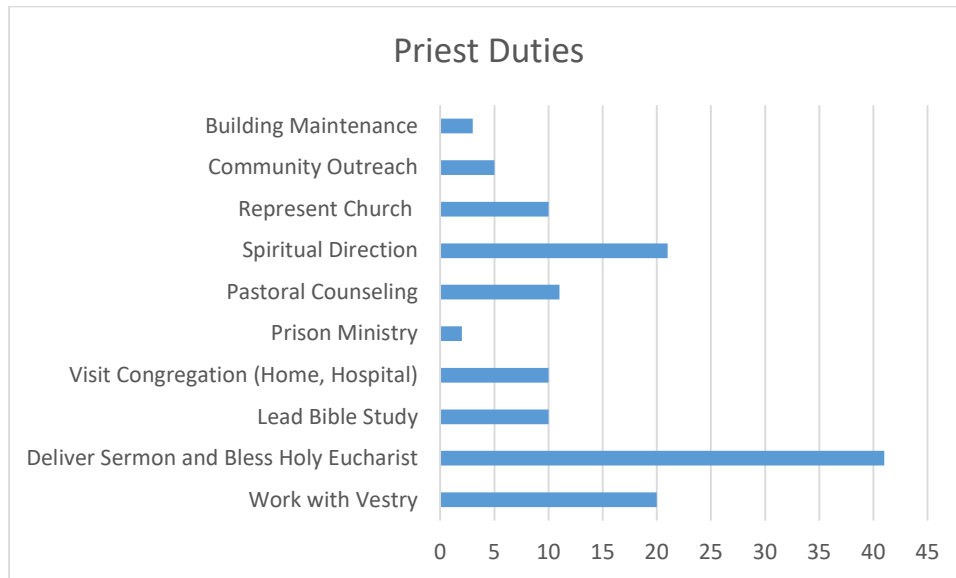


Staff

The staff at St. Mary's Church includes a Deacon, a part-time Office Administrator, a part-time Sexton, and a Musician/Choir Director. The Treasurer is a volunteer.

A New Rector

St. Mary's is seeking a priest who will help us face the challenges ahead in our church and in the Diocese. Our recent survey results rate the following priestly duties:



Spiritual direction, spiritual growth and formation, and pastoral counseling rank high in importance in addition to the more traditional duties of delivering sermons, blessing Holy Eucharist, and working with the Vestry.

Finally, we prefer a priest who is open to change and growth, as well as someone who can move fluidly in our community of faith, hope and love.

"We need a priest who is a good listener and who is generous and kind"