

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

PARISH PROFILE

This profile gives an account of our history, our present and our hopes for the future. We have been careful not to minimize our challenges or overstate our strengths and positive strides over the past decade. As the parishioners who preceded us, we are committed to St. John's Church, and, after a period of introspection and self-study, we are ready to move forward. The people of St. John's are looking for an optimistic, energetic rector to help us grow to a "pastoral size" parish by building on our strengths, meeting our challenges and continually supporting our church family and our community in spiritual growth.

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THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, LOWER MERION

“God is calling the people of St. John’s Church to be a community seeking a knowledge of Christ, following His teachings, and serving God and His people.”

A PARISH HISTORY

The first 125 years

The Church of St. John was originally established by members of the Church of the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr. A wood-frame church, parish hall and rectory were constructed. The first service was held on August 6, 1863, the day designated by President Abraham Lincoln as “the National Day of Thanksgiving for the Civil War Victory at Gettysburg”.

In 1878, John Marston, a parishioner, vestryman and Sunday School superintendent, instituted the Sunday School Lenten Mite Box offering for missions. Since that time, countless Episcopal churches have followed St. John’s example. A bronze plaque on the tower wall of the church commemorates the first 25 years of the Lenten “Mite Box” Offering and attests to the concern and creative spirit that continues to exist in the parish today.

A general plan for a new church, rectory and parish house was approved by the vestry in 1897. Ground was broken in 1900, and the Lady Chapel was consecrated in December, 1906. The nave, the final portion of the group of buildings, was completed in 1926.

1963, the Centennial Year, was celebrated joyously with an array of activities, Festal services, and plans for the Centennial Tower of the parish hall which, through the generosity of many St. John’s parishioners, became a reality. In the late 1960’s, a rift with the rector resulted in a substantial number of members leaving St. John’s. In addition to causing friction in the parish community, this resulted in a decline in pledges and depletion of many of the church’s financial assets.

On Christmas Eve, 1968, St. Andrew’s Mission in neighboring Belmont Hills held its last service. St. John’s rector and vestry invited St. Andrew’s communicants to join with St. John’s. Those who accepted this invitation brought with them to St. John’s the carved wooden free-standing altar, the brass cross in the triptych, and a carved wooden statue of St. Andrew. They also brought their strong faith and willingness to serve, attributes which they continue to share with the St. John’s family.

In its 139-year history, St. John's has had eleven rectors. When the church closed for a year (1894-95) due to declining attendance, a concerned parishioner petitioned Bishop Whitaker to "re-open my church." Responding to this plea, the bishop appointed the Reverend Henry A.F. Hoyt, D.D. as temporary priest. The vestry appointed him permanent rector the following year beginning the longest tenure of any rector of St. Johns – 30 years!

The past decade – a period of growth followed by a period of uncertainty

In 1990, the Reverend Bruce Jacobson was called as rector. Fr. Jacobson's tenure was characterized by a focus on the liturgy and on helping parishioners to recognize and use their spiritual gifts. He was adept in encouraging people to develop their spiritual lives and drew additional people into service as chalice bearers, lay readers and acolytes. Under his gently prodding leadership, the church grew in numbers, in spirit and in unity. In the summer of 1998, Reverend Jacobson stepped down as rector to take a position as interim rector at a church in New England – a bit closer to "home". While the parish was saddened by his departure, there was a strong sense of optimism about the future of St. John's.

In the fall of 1998, the Reverend Stephen Harrop was called from a position in Taiwan as "priest in charge" on the recommendation of Bishop Bennison. Fr. Harrop was a controversial figure at St. John's with strong sentiments on both sides. In large part because of this, the 1998 Discernment Committee was unanimous in its decision not to consider Fr. Harrop for the permanent position.

The Reverend Mary Jo Melberger was installed as Rector in January, 2000. A former elementary school teacher, the Rev. Melberger had served as assistant priest in several parishes, most recently at a large parish in suburban Memphis, TN. Although she lacked experience as a rector, she was the unanimous choice of the Discernment Committee on the basis of her pastoral skills, her ability to "connect" with the different types of people in the parish and the community, and a perceived ability to facilitate a spiritual healing process for the congregation. During her brief tenure, Reverend Melberger was instrumental in experimenting with new programs (such as the ALPHA program and an Adult Forum series with speakers from inside and outside the parish) and in re-connecting the parish with the broader church and the community. It came as a shock to most parishioners when Reverend Melberger announced her decision to accept a position as Lower School Chaplain at

Episcopal Academy in the summer of 2001. Because of her short tenure, many in the congregation expressed feelings of disappointment, betrayal and anger.

Understanding our past and planning for the future

The Reverend John Martin has been serving as Interim Rector, on a part-time basis, since Reverend Melberger's departure. Fr. Martin has been guiding the Vestry and the congregation through a period of introspection, helping us to understand the parts we have played in past events and assisting us in defining our vision for the future. The Vestry and Discernment Committee have approached the Discernment Process with prayer, patience, and dedication.

DISCERNMENT AND PARISH SELF-STUDY

Vestry Commitment

With the Interim Rector, the twelve members of the Vestry participated in two half-day retreats for the purpose of re-defining the mission of St. John's Church and determining its path for the future. Once frustrations and fears about the future were discussed, anxiety gave way to a spirit of determination and a resurgence of "creativity" which has long characterized St. John's. **As a group, the Vestry committed to church growth (from a "plateau zone" to a "pastoral size" church), primarily through stewardship and evangelism.** Six members attended the sessions on pastoral churches at the Diocesan conference, "Under One Roof" and, shortly thereafter, a Covenant Group of Vestry and other parishioners was formed. The Covenant Group has been meeting on a weekly basis, focusing on two types of evangelism: "inviting" and "program".

Parish Survey

The Discernment Committee conducted a survey to help in developing an honest and accurate description of who we are as a congregation – and what we as a Christian community are seeking in a rector. The response to the survey was gratifying – 51 individuals responded of the 152 "communicants in good standing". Respondents ranged in age from their 20's to their 80's, with a majority falling in the 50-70 range. A majority of respondents (80%) have been members of St. John's for more than 6 years. Only half of the respondents were raised in the Episcopal Church.

While 20% reported a decrease in their involvement over the past few years, 50% said there had been no change in the level of their involvement and 30% percent reported an increase in their involvement. This is significant in light of the turnover in pastoral leadership. Those whose involvement increased attributed this to an increase in church-related responsibilities.

Worship: Historically, the style of worship at St. John's has been traditional, with Rite I or Rite II spoken at 8AM and Rite II with music at 10AM. Forty percent of respondents indicated that they would prefer no change in the style of worship, and a majority indicated that they are comfortable with either rite. No respondents indicated a desire for less formality, but 40% were equally split between desiring more formality and more contemporary services. Approximately one-third expressed a desire for more inclusiveness of children and youth in worship services. The respondents were receptive to all aspects of the Book of Common Prayer and desire a respectful, well-run service. Of those who attend the 10 AM Sunday service, music was reported to be very important. Most of the additional comments (20% of respondents) on survey forms related to feelings about and preferences for music. Forty percent indicated that they would attend Evening Prayer or Evensong services if offered.

Christian Education: While there are few adults with young children, most children attend Sunday School. Eighty percent of adult respondents indicated that they feel it is important to discuss, at the parish level, some of the issues facing the Episcopal Church today. The survey results showed a desire for a pastor with a strong theological base to give us a greater understanding of how God works in our lives and how the Bible relates to present times.

Outreach: Most respondents participate in some form of outreach - volunteering time (~40%), donating food, clothing and other materials (~85%) and/or responding to financial appeals (~60%). In ranking the importance of parish outreach programs, respondents ranked small-scale, direct aid programs such as St. Barnabas' Mission for Women and Children and St. Andrew's and St. Monica's after School Program (both in West Philadelphia) highest.

Participation: The reported levels of participation were highest in the more "social" aspects of the parish – Ushers/Greeters(~30%), Coffee Hour Host/Hostess (~45%), Foyers Groups (~30%), and Fundraisers (~35%).

What we seek in a new rector: The questionnaire listed eighteen attributes of a rector, and respondents were asked to rate each attribute on its importance. Respondents were then asked to choose the three most important attributes. The results were dramatic, with the following four attributes receiving the highest ratings:

- **A strong presence and support in times of personal crisis**
- **The ability to relate comfortably with a broad range of people – and a sense of humor**
- **A catalyst for growth and development, with an emphasis on evangelism and stewardship**
- **A spiritual advisor**

Focus Groups

The Discernment Committee conducted a focus group session with the objective to better understand what people felt about St. Johns Church. About 50 members of the parish participated in one of four discussion groups. The following three questions were discussed:

1. What is the one most important thing that keeps you "connected" with St. John's?
2. What is the one most important thing that keeps you from feeling "connected" with St. John's?
 1. What would you like your relationship with a new rector to be?

Some of the significant factors to the congregation in making them feel connected are as the beauty of the church, the music, tradition and just plain habit. However, one other factor was brought up over and over again -- the people of St John's. There are bonds of family and personal relationships that tie us together, connecting us to this church in a worshiping community.

The decreasing size of the parish and the fact that we have had five rectors in the last five years are the main barriers for people. Although the level of involvement remains high, parishioners are concerned about bringing in more members to keep everything running.

The responses to what members want their relationship with the new rector to be ties right in with what makes them feel connected. They want the rector to be a good friend and confidant - someone who can connect with them, both from the pulpit and in person.

OUR PRESENT STRENGTHS

An appealing environment

St. John's Church, in Lower Merion Township, sits in an upper middle class, economically stable neighborhood just outside the city of Philadelphia, a major historic, cultural and entertainment center. Bala Cynwyd, the area in which the parish is located, is at the easternmost part of an area known as Philadelphia's "Main Line". It is characterized by large, stone, single family houses, tree-lined streets and small-scale commercial districts.

Lower Merion Township is noted for its highly ranked public and private schools including Lower Merion and Harriton High Schools, Episcopal Academy, the Haverford School, Baldwin and Shipley Schools, and Friends Central School. The area is also home to several prestigious colleges and universities such as Bryn Mawr, Haverford and St. Joseph's. Not surprisingly, the township has long attracted residents with strong academic backgrounds and affiliations.

Religious institutions are also prominent on the township landscape – Roman Catholic (including the magnificent St. Charles of Boremo Seminary), Jewish (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform sects), and the traditional Protestant denominations, including Korean congregations. The Episcopal Church has an unusually strong presence in the area. St. John's is one of seven Episcopal Churches in the township – a challenging environment for growth. It should be noted that two of the seven churches are members of the Episcopal Synod.

Exceptional church buildings

Built in 1901, the gray stone English Gothic-style church is considered by parishioners and non-parishioners alike to be one of the most beautiful in the region. The church is dominated by a "tower" at the center of the nave and includes a Lady Chapel with flying buttresses and Te Deum stained glass windows. An intricately carved rood screen from Germany, exquisite stained glass from English and American studios, and magnificent brass chandeliers add to the quiet beauty of the sanctuary. The nave and Lady Chapel have a combined seating capacity of approximately 300 people.

The parish hall is connected to the church by an archway and houses offices, class rooms, a fully

equipped kitchen, four bathrooms and parish hall. At present, these spaces are shared with the Children's School. A three-story, stone residence with a kitchen/ pantry, powder room and number of multipurpose rooms on the first floor, and six rooms/ 3.5 bathrooms on the second and third floors, is connected to the parish hall on the first floor. Currently, the rectory is rented to the vicar of All Souls Church for the Deaf in Philadelphia through an arrangement with the Diocese. To the rear of the residence is a stone, two-car garage and a large, paved parking lot for the church. The church and parish buildings are rimmed by privet hedges and shaded by stately sycamore, beech and evergreen trees.

Enhancements: Notable among the many memorials given to St. John's over the years are the impressive oil painting above the organ console and the altar kneelers. Created by Bo Bartlett, a local artist who has gained national recognition, the painting is a tribute to the Reverend Robert Keel and his family—especially their son, Rob, who died as a young man. The altar kneelers were designed by Bartlett and the needlepoint was done by parishioners. In recent years, approximately 15 parishioners completed the task of needlepointing 98 new kneelers for the nave and the Lady Chapel.

Many generous St. John's parishioners continue to donate time and money for restoration projects—most recently for purchasing additional kneelers, choir robes for children, carpeting and painting for the sacristy and vesting areas, and refinishing the wood flooring in the sanctuary.

Our Congregation and Vestry

Most of St. John's parishioners live within a five-mile radius of the church. St. John's' congregation is distinctive among its neighboring Episcopal parishes in that it is a heterogeneous mix of people drawn from a variety of socioeconomic, racial, occupational, educational and lifestyle backgrounds. Perhaps because of this diversity, the people of St. Johns' are supportive of one another and welcoming to visitors and newcomers. The current membership is 152, a slight decrease from the 1990's during which time there was stability in pastoral leadership. A significant portion of the members attend services and activities on a regular basis. Participation in activities has remained constant among members, but, as in most small parishes, the few leaders tend to suffer "burnout" after years of chairing guilds and committees.

Our congregation tends to respond positively to a rector who makes personal connections with

members by providing enrichment through pastoral counseling and prayer, by opening our eyes to leadership opportunities, and by accepting us where we are in our spiritual journeys.

In terms of financial stewardship, very few parishioners have succeeded in meeting the goal of tithing, but many try to approach the financial goal of a pledged tithe incrementally over the years. There is an understanding among parishioners that each one will make a unique contribution to the life and health of the parish. When called upon for specific projects, parishioners typically give generously of their time, talent and treasure.

This year, for the first time in a number of years, there were several more candidates than positions to be filled at the January, 2002, Vestry elections. The Vestry of St. John's is representative of the broader congregation on many levels. Its current twelve members span age groups (from 30's to 70's), occupations, and interests. As described previously, they are committed to church growth through evangelism and stewardship.

Music at St. John's

St. John's is very fortunate in having a magnificent instrument - the Tily Memorial Organ. Built in 1938 by the renowned M.R. Moller, the organ has nearly 3000 pipes in five divisions located in the chancel, the tower ceiling and the west gallery. St. John's has also been fortunate in the fine musicians who have held the position of Organist/Music Director. Peter Olds-Clarke, Organist/Choirmaster and dedicated parishioner for 20years, retired to the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 2000. After a six-month period with an excellent interim organist (David Deery), Dr. John Dangerfield Cooper was hired on the recommendation of the Musician Search Committee. In addition to being an excellent keyboardist, Dr. Cooper is a prolific composer of sacred music. In his first 6 months, he has met several of the objectives set forth in the parish's music program, such as incorporating music from the LEVAS Hymnal. Most significantly, he has begun a children's choir – a musical activity which has been lacking at St. John's for decades. He is also making contact with other Episcopal churches in the area to generate interest in holding joint evensongs and concerts.

Partnership with St. Joseph's University - The Children's School at St. John's

In 1996, St. John's forged a unique relationship with St. Joseph's University. A Jesuit (Roman

Catholic) University came together with an Episcopal Church to create The Children's School at St. John's. The school, which took the place of a smaller nursery school with dwindling enrollment, offers a year-round all-day program for children from 6 months through 5 years of age. With support from the university, the school took on extensive renovations of the parish hall (air conditioning, carpeting, additional bathrooms, and a security system). Over the years, St. John's and St. Joseph's University have worked effectively as a team to develop a safe, secure, healthy environment in which the children can learn and grow. The school is an asset to both the community and the church. Rental revenues from the school have substantially reduced St. John's operating budget deficits, and, with the constant movement of families in and out of the school there is potential for new members at St. John's.

The school operates Monday through Friday, from 7:00AM until 6:00 PM, throughout the year. The school is one of only a few in the area to be certified by NAEYC. It has an enrollment of approximately 75 children, and an extensive waiting list!

OUR CHALLENGES

Increasing the size of our congregation from plateau to pastoral size

As described previously, we recognize the vital importance of growing The Church here at St. John's. We are already taking positive steps toward the goal of growth. We believe that, with a new rector to provide the leadership and the pastoral stability we've lacked, the goal is achievable.

Preserving our Buildings

The maintenance of large, stone buildings such as those at St. John's presents a substantial challenge for a small congregation – particularly one without a large endowment. In the late 1980's-early 1990's, parishioners contributed approximately \$155,000 to a capital campaign, enabling extensive repairs and restoration. Before her departure, Rev. Melberger was instrumental in obtaining an \$18,000 grant from the Diocese for a comprehensive architectural assessment of the buildings, the necessary repairs, staging, etc. The architectural assessment, now nearing completion, will help the Vestry to prioritize necessary work and will serve as the foundation for a proposed capital campaign.

Restoring the Organ and Building the Music Program

The observant reader will recall that music was noted as a strength. While this is true in the respects noted, music is also a challenge. The organ, long maintained with love and “bandaids” by the former organist, is in need of repair. Over a dozen pipes are unplayable. A recent assessment of the huge instrument estimated the total cost of these repairs and general restoration to be in excess of \$150,000. The work can be accomplished in stages – one division of the instrument at a time, for example – but the prospect of raising such funds presents a significant challenge.

With the decrease in the size of the congregation, there was also a decrease in the size of the adult choir. This has created significant challenges for the music program, but efforts are underway as described previously.

PARISH RESOURCES

Parish Life – Sacred and Secular

Worship Services: Sunday services are at 8:00AM (spoken service – alternating Rite I and Rite II) and 10:00AM (choral service – Rite II). Approximately 8-10 people attend the earlier service, and 40-60 attend the later service. On the first Sunday of each month, a healing service is offered in addition to the Eucharist. Special services are held on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Eve (Easter Vigil), and Thanksgiving Day. In the recent past, mid-week services have been held either early in the morning (7:00AM) or in the early evening (6:30PM) for a small segment of the congregation. With a growing number of semi-retired and retired people, there is interest in re-instituting this mid-week service.

Altar Guild: The guild works in teams of two on a rotating basis. The two volunteer coordinators are responsible for scheduling and supplies ordering respectively.

Choirs: The **adult choir** is an all-volunteer group of 8-10 parishioners, including a few with professional voices. The choir rehearses on Thursday evenings and on Sunday mornings before the 10:00AM service. New members, and “holiday drop-ins” are always welcome. The newly formed **children’s choir** (ages 5-12) rehearses on Saturday mornings and sings once a month at the

10:00AM service. In February-March, 2002, parishioners contributed over \$400 for the purchase of vestments for the children.

Liturgical assistants: A number of adults and young people participate in the worship service as acolytes, lay readers, chalice bearers, crucifers and torch bearers. A volunteer provides training and maintains schedules.

Christian Education: A small but dedicated group of parishioner-teachers rotates (in half-year “semesters”) in teaching Sunday School classes for the seven to ten children who attend on most Sundays. There is a nursery for children from infancy to age 3. The children are encouraged to join their parents for the Eucharist following their classes. A Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper has been planned and staffed by parents and children in recent years, and the proceeds are used to purchase supplies for classes. Young people are encouraged to become involved as lay readers, torchbearers and/or acolytes.

Currently, Adult Bible Study is led by the interim rector after the 10:00AM Sunday worship service. Additional programs are held on Wednesday evenings during Lent. These “Lenten Soup Supper” programs generally draw 10-15 parishioners and non-parishioners. In recent years, periodic Sunday Forum programs with outside speakers have been well attended, and mid-week and Sunday Bible Study groups have consistently drawn 5-6 people.

Coffee Hour: The coffee hour following the 10:00 AM service is an important part of parish fellowship and presents an excellent opportunity for welcoming visitors and newcomers on a personal basis. Beginning in 2002, the coffee hour was relocated from the remote parish hall to the rear of the church in an effort to make it more accessible to visitors and to elderly and/or disabled parishioners.

Flower Guild: This group works in teams of two on a rotating basis to create flower arrangements for the altars throughout the year. They also lead the parish in decorating the church for Christmas and Easter. In recent years, the guild has sponsored two unique garden tours, generating funds for a variety of uses - from purchasing a new church oil burner to providing flower arrangements for Ronald MacDonald House in Philadelphia.

Foyers: The Foyers Groups at St. John’s offer an opportunity for newcomers and “old-timers” to get to know one another better. Foyers groups of 8-12 people are formed each September and meet for dinner one Sunday evening a month at participants’ homes. Group composition changes every year – and conversation is limited to “non-church” topics. There are 3 Foyers groups of 8-10 participants in the 2001-02 season, and each group is free to invite others to their monthly dinners.

Outreach Activities: The Outreach Committee is one of the most active groups in the parish. It gathers information on needs and opportunities, communicates these to the Vestry and parish, and implements programs for ministry. Under the leadership of the Outreach Committee, the parish supports the following: St. Andrew’s & St. Monica’s After School Program (West Philadelphia), St. Barnabas’ Mission for Women and Children (West Philadelphia), Program in Counseling Christmas gift program for children (Norristown), Episcopal Community Services, and Habitat for Humanity among others. Many parishioners actively support other religious and community organizations as a part of their personal outreach.

Parish Life – “FUN”d Raising: The Vestry has challenged itself to raise additional funds for operations and outreach with three well-coordinated events, evenly spaced throughout the year. The events are intended to draw from both the parish and the community. In previous years, events such as Christmas bazaars, spring fairs and an “Old North State Barbecue” (with roasted pig supper and live bluegrass music) have been successful.

In the 2000-2001 year, our fundraising reached new “highs”. Two entertainment offerings - “Double Bill” (Father-Son Relationships in Music), the Intermezzo Choir (African-American gospel group) – and a Monte Carlo and Auction event attracted large audiences and raised spirits while raising \$9,200. **In recent years, 10% of all fund-raising events has been allocated to outreach programs.**

Stewardship: As Christians we are called to be God’s stewards in all aspects of our lives – not only in the Church, but also in the world. The Stewardship Committee at St. John’s has worked to expand the congregation’s notion of stewardship - from the amount of money we pledge to a broader view which encompasses the ways in which we lead our lives. In previous years the Stewardship Committee implemented a number of creative approaches including a St. John’s “job fair”, a “gifts of

stewardship Sunday” (which was subsequently chosen for a Diocese-wide workshop on stewardship in 1998).

Ushers and Greeters: A group of approximately 14 people serve as ushers and/or greeters at worship services on a rotating basis. They welcome people at the door(s), hand out service leaflets, present elements at Eucharist, take up collection, guide or help parishioners needing assistance to the communion, and assure that the church is neat and secure before leaving. They take special care to identify newcomers and visitors, encouraging them to sign the guest book, offering assistance as appropriate and making follow-up visits.

Buildings and Grounds: Several dedicated parishioners serve on a Buildings and Grounds Committee which oversees maintenance and repairs and organizes seasonal workdays for interior and exterior upkeep. In the generous spirit so typical of the parish, several retired members formed a “One-Sixtieth Club”, volunteering one-half of one day a month to painting, carpentry and other minor maintenance projects.

Paid Staff

The **Parish Administrator** is a 30 hour-a-week position filled by Lorrie Halpin for the past several years. The Parish Administrator performs all administrative and clerical functions and, in the absence of a full-time rector, Lorrie has accepted additional responsibilities.

Music Director/Organist is a quarter-time position currently filled by Dr. John Dangerfield Cooper. He is responsible for planning and/or performing all service music, rehearsing the choirs and for overseeing necessary repairs and maintenance of the organ.

Parish Communications

- The New Life:** A monthly newsletter is produced and mailed to all parishioners.
- Website:** www.stjohnlm.org
- Phone Chain:** A telephone tree is put into action to communicate important information in a timely manner.

Financial Resources

In the past several years, St. John's has operated at a slight deficit. Fund balances total approximately \$80,000, most of which is unrestricted. Operating expenses are covered by parishioner pledges, rental income (primarily from the Children's School at St. John's), bequests and investment income. The 2001 Financial Statement is attached.

Rental of property: As described previously, St. John's receives rental income from the Children's School at St. John's for the use of the classrooms and office space in the parish hall. The Vestry is currently considering a proposal to convert the adjoining residence/rectory into a dual purpose facility with additional rental space for the school on the second floor and dedicated space for parish offices and small meeting rooms on the first floor.

From 2001-2002, St. John's was the "home" of the Main Line Philomusica, a group of professional and volunteer musicians and singers. The group conducted its rehearsals in the nave and presented some of its concerts in the church as well. The group paid a rental fee for use of the church and provided tickets to its concerts at reduced rates for parishioners. The group also made its piano available for church choir rehearsals.

For many years, the parish house has served as a meeting place for a weekly AA meeting. St. John's does not charge its members for use of the facility, but members make a free-will contribution to the church. In a similar vein, the parish has recently begun to allow community residents, particularly apartment dwellers, to use a portion of the spacious grounds for gardens. The gardeners allow the church to use plant materials for altar arrangements in return.