

# **Saint Mark's New Member & Outreach Workplan**

Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Beaver Dam, WI

## **Encouraging Visitors**

Saint Mark's is a 162 year old family size parish in the city of Beaver Dam in South Central Wisconsin. Members and potential members come from Beaver Dam and a half dozen other communities within a 25 mile radius. The area has a somewhat stable economy with a number of industrial plants, a state prison, large regional warehouses, a technical school and academy.

Saint Mark's does experience persons coming to our services unsolicited, and that number has increased slightly with our outreach efforts implemented in 2011. Yet, a number of young families have moved away for various reasons and some older members are deceased or cannot actively participate.

The strategies undertaken in 2011 and since then have worked to attract persons to Saint Mark's, provide them with information and services as appropriate, and to incorporate them into the congregation when they show continued interest.

Beginning in 2017, with the leadership of Fr. Rozo, we are concentrating on coming out of the church facility and going out into the community to identify ways we can meet people where they are, to get to know them and their respective journeys.

## **Strategies to Inform Our Neighbors and Community**

We have undertaken strategies to inform the church neighborhood and wider community that Saint Mark's is an active, friendly and vital congregation to visit:

- Our parish is listed in the local Yellow Pages and worship services listed in the local newspaper.
- We maintain a comprehensive website with information about Saint Mark's, a service schedule, a list of parish ministries, the parish history, important links and a page that provides distance and directions from a specific inquirers home.
- We updated our colorful "Welcome to Saint Mark's" brochure in 2016 for mailing to newcomers and to hand out when visitors arrive at the church.
- Our priest and members provided the Sunday ecumenical service for Beaver Dam Lake Days celebration in recent years.
- We invited the Asbury Clowns (United Methodist) to our services on Good Shepherd Sunday each year for many years to use their ministry for kids and adults. Each event was advertised in the local newspaper inviting the public to attend and a reception with treats and balloons followed the services.
- At our rummage and bake sales we placed small printed crosses with contact information for Saint Mark's printed on the back in the bags of sold items.
- We celebrated an Earth Day Celebration Service with coverage in the local newspaper.
- We invited friends and neighbors to our celebration of the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Blessing of the Animals after the worship the past six years. We were successful in bringing several neighbors and their pets to this event.

- Saint Mark's continues a long tradition of a Christmas Cookie Walk each December with city-wide distribution of flyers, newspaper coverage and mailings to previous participants. This has become so popular that our huge cookie sale is sold out within an hour. In addition, two other churches in town have also taken up the tradition.
- We are avid participants in the Diocesan Haiti Project, with numerous child sponsors and givers through the Diocese and Episcopal Relief and Development. Jan Byrd, Project Coordinator until two years ago, gave regular reports during announcements at church services and has planned information sessions during parish coffee hour.
- For fifty years Saint Mark's has designed and sold decorative Christmas stockings, tailor made to the requests of the purchasers. Orders from within the community and throughout the country reach capacity early in the year. News coverage and colorful webpage displays help inform the public of our project. See our project at: [http://www.stmark-beaverdam.org/pages/christmas\\_stockings.html](http://www.stmark-beaverdam.org/pages/christmas_stockings.html)
- We have a strong presence on Facebook and Instagram. We are beginning to use social media to share our story and invite others to tell us theirs. We also use media to invite individuals to our Sunday and week service as well as to meet Rev. Oscar at the local coffee shop for prayer, theological discussions or pastoral visits.
- We regularly post videos of sermons and portions of our service on YouTube for those unable to attend in person, and the general public. Some of those postings have had over 100 "hits."

## Welcoming Visitors

We continue to look for ways to involve the members of our family-sized congregation in welcoming each other and visitors in a special way by:

- Posting one or more greeters at the front door to welcome persons to services, help with coats or directions, and to hand out the service bulletins.
- Our priest welcomes Sunday worshippers by greeting them on the outside sidewalk in all but the most inclement weather. She is also very good with making subsequent personal contacts with newcomers.
- We provide name tags for members, encourage members to wear them, and offer name tags to visitors and repeat visitors. A name tag rack is located on the wall of the narthex for storage between services.
- We attempt to involve everyone in inviting each other, newcomers and visitors to the weekly coffee hour following the service.
- Our ushers ask all visitors to sign our guest book and we offer them a welcoming pamphlet. We also have welcoming cards and pencils in each pew for visitors to complete with their name and contact information, if they wish.
- In the recent past our Porch Visitor Program was a means by which we welcomed visitors and guests to St. Mark's. In the past one or two lay people made a brief, friendly follow-up home contact, thanking the person for visiting and leaving a newsletter and small item, such as a loaf of bread or flowers. This was substituted with the "visitor gift bag" presented to any visitor following the service. The bag contains a brochure, Saint Mark's pen, Saint Mark's sticky notes, other information about Saint Mark's and a jar of preserves.
- In addition to the gift bag we are considering a "post card" given to each visitor whereby they can request additional information or a visit.
- Ushers offer a coloring book and crayons kit to families with small children and we have a cry room available with a rocking chair, toys and sound system if needed.

- We inform parents of the option to have children age 3 or older to attend Christian education classes during the first half of the Sunday service nearly all Sundays of the year. We have a nursery with a rocking chair and toys for parents with infants.
- We recently installed two large screen monitors in our church building through which we provide vital information to newcomers such as parish information, service schedules, Episcopal websites, videos from the Episcopal Church and testimonies of faith.

## **Our Physical Premises Must Be Inviting**

We routinely evaluate our physical premises, inside and out, and made a number of improvements to make Saint Mark's a more attractive and welcoming place to visit and worship.

- In 2016 we added a large lighted church sign board to the front parking lot. We are able to display messages to the community that change on a weekly basis, always emphasizing that the public is welcome.
- In the past ten years the front landscaping was redesigned, indoor and outdoor lighting updated, all rooms were painted and carpeted.
- Our rest rooms are conveniently located off the narthex. We provide stools for children at sinks and drinking fountains. We have a changing table in the women's room and a supply of baby needs. We also inform visitors of the location of rest rooms and the coffee hour in our Rite II booklet, inside cover.

## **Our Liturgy and Newcomers**

We believe that our liturgy needs to be welcoming and inclusive for visitors and members. Because newcomers may not be familiar with our liturgy we believe that we have to "go the extra mile" to explain what we are doing and why:

- We print a Sunday bulletin with lectionary texts to help newcomers follow the service.
- We published a Rite II pew booklet with the Sunday liturgy and service music and instructions and with a "Some Things to Know When You Worship With Us" introduction inside the front cover. It explains when we stand, sit or kneel as we are able during worship, who can receive communion and how, where to find prayers and hymns, and other information.
- We offer large print prayer books for persons who may need them.
- We strive to achieve musical excellence, with our hymn selections, our singing, and with a small choir on special Sundays. We have a fine, digitally updated pipe organ and an organist that plays well and encourages robust singing.
- We encourage parishioners to assist newcomers by finding pages in the prayer book and hymnal when needed.
- We supply each pew with a bookmark shaped welcome card and a pencil if they wish to leave their name or want to request a visit or more information from the church.
- We download sermons and parts of the service to our website and youtube with the hopes that people can access our ministry from wherever they are.

## **Incorporating New Members**

We see incorporation as an ongoing cycle. Incorporation is the involvement and attachment each person has to our community and ministries to each other and to the wider community,

and related to individual assessment and utilization of spiritual gifts. Sometimes newcomers self-identify interests they have – like a person with artistic talents that provided art work or those who do stitchery for our Christmas Stocking project. For others it requires discernment, study and prayer to find the match. Sometimes the “match” is a project entirely new to Saint Marks. And, finally, there are times that long-standing members become physically or spiritually frail, and now need the assistance offered by persons new to the community. When we are successful each of us will not only serve the Saint Mark’s community, but will go into the world to love and serve the Lord.

Some of the specific strategies we have tried and are likely to continue are:

- Offering Advent and Lenten “Soup and Bible Study” groups and make a point to invite newcomers.
- Taking meals or special treats to newcomers and families with special needs and offer transportation if needed.
- Spiritual gifts assessments and reminder lists of important ministries.
- Sending birthday greetings to every member of the congregation and on Sundays offering personal blessings to each member with a birthday, baptismal anniversary or wedding anniversary.
- Photographing our special events and posting photo displays and publishing group photos in our monthly newsletter, “Saint Mark’s Messenger,” Facebook and Instagram.
- Inviting newer members to participate in group activities such as our public “brat fry,” yard and garden work, the altar guild, and the Christmas stocking project.
- Our rector, although part time, attends most of our events to represent Saint Mark’s as pastor. He also meets individually with newcomers to answer questions and to learn their expectations and needs.

## **Evaluating and Re-Setting Our Workplan Strategies**

In the recent past we assessed the effectiveness of our newcomer ministries by inviting input from recent visitors and newcomers themselves. Generally we found that persons did learn about us from others in the community, from our social media and from invitation by our members. During the months of preparation for a new rector we assessed our status in the community in general, our relationship with ELCA Lutherans and our greater neighborhood. We are certain that **planning in the future should merge newcomer ministry with community outreach.**

- Recent ecumenical activities such as the Lutheran-Episcopal Hymn Sing held at Saint Mark's this year should be continued and expanded.
- Fr. Rozo's "Coffee with the Pastor" has been an effective way to bring the church out into the community and begin conversations with new persons.
- We need to meet regularly with local pastors and church leaders.
- Our participation in the annual Holiday Parade with a Saint Mark's float has been both a fun and effective community experience.
- Church in the Park should be continued and community invited in news and social media.
- "Drive-by-Ashes" on Ash Wednesday is a good means of bringing the church to the community and a reminder of the beginning of Lent.
- Our parking lot and front lawn is an asset to be used and shared with neighbors for events like Blessing of the Animals and Ice Cream & Root Beer Socials.

- Because our Fireside Room is not handicap accessible we need to find for ways to accommodate members, visitors and newcomers for events in that area, and to seek an ultimate solution in terms of a lift, ramp or elevator.

## **Expanding Community Outreach**

We recommend applying for a 2017 Diocesan Challenge grant to help fund purposeful outreach in the community.

With \$1,000 of funding we can do much more to invite others to experience Saint Mark's.

- Design/ publish/ purchase additional items to use for our community outreach activities such as information sheets, embossed pen/pencils, crosses with attached messages, advertising, etc.
- Hold additional Spring and Fall study series open to the public
- Plan an additional innovative visitor-friendly weekday service open to the public
- Make our successful "bring-a-friend-to-church" event and ice-cream social a biannual event
- Continue the "Meet Rev. Oscar" at the coffee shop sessions on Tuesdays, with more advertising
- Begin a "Praying on the Street" routine, with the goal of meeting people and engaging them in conversation, welcoming their prayers and intercessions.
- Train and implement a new Pastoral Care team in charge of going out to the community to provide communion to the shut-in and to meet families and caretakers in prayer and conversations.
- Hold Ecumenical services at the local hospital/nursing home
- Emphasize use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram and the church webpage
- Allow for implementation of an additional community ministry yet to be determined

We also want to cultivate new relationships in the community

- By engaging in ecumenical relationships and attending monthly gatherings with clergy in town
- Seeking ways to engage in conversations of common ministry with other denominations, church health services and other groups

In June, 2018 we plan to evaluate the results of our community outreach to date and either strengthen or discontinue existing ministries; and hopefully propose a broadened community ministry project, perhaps with other community partners, and with the possibility of making that happen by requesting a higher level challenge grant later in 2018.