

FAQ

What does it mean to be “missional” and how is it different from models of church we might be used to?

Being a missional church is not about getting people to come to our church, but meeting people where they are, listening and discerning how the Spirit is already working and being witnesses to our love for God in Christ. It is about understanding ourselves not primarily as a *gathered community of members* but a *sent community of disciples*. Think early church disciples sharing the Good News and being led by the Spirit.

Is becoming more missional church a strategy to save the church?

No and Yes.

It is not about bringing more people to become members of St. Michael’s or about numerical growth (though this may happen as a by-product of this ministry).

It is a way of continuing to become the Body of Christ (the Church with a capital “C”) in a rapidly changing world. It’s about spiritual growth and an ever-deepening commitment to our faith. It’s about being open to the Spirit while being deeply grounded in our tradition and our heritage. We don’t know what this will look like. We make the road by walking it.

What does all this have to do with Mary’s sabbatical?

Not much. The Sabbatical Planning Team (Christy Fritz, Jeff Lewis and Leigh Marthe) started having conversations about our cultural context and about St. Michael’s past, present and future. We started to discern a direction and a shared excitement that St. Michael’s was being led to take the next step in our ministry together.

Out of this came the idea of the possibility of hiring a person in our midst who just happened to have excellent skills for discernment, discipleship and innovative ministry. This person also happened to feel called to live and work in Vermont part-time at a church. We thought it was a strange coincidence that we were compelled to share with the vestry and with the congregation.

Why would we hire someone when we have plenty of clergy already?

We really don't need any help with it comes to liturgy and preaching. We have plenty of excellent priests at St. Michael's! But this person would bring different gifts for a very specialized ministry.

So would this person do the discipleship and innovation for St. Michael's?

No, this person would train us to do this ministry with his support, encouragement, creativity and leadership.

Why is this happening so fast?

The candidate for this position will be ordained in the beginning of June and is looking at many different job opportunities. He will need to make a decision soon about his employment.

We may decide that this proposal is happening too fast *and that is okay*. We can decide not to move forward with the person, but continue to want to become a more missional church in other ways.

What does "3 year experiment" mean?

It means that we will have an agreement with the half-time person that he would stay at St. Michael's for three years. This is not a contract, but an agreement. Like other jobs, there would be annual reviews of his ministry.

What would we do at the end of the 3 year experiment?

At the end of three years, St. Michael's may decide that this experiment is over and go back to the current staff configuration, or St. Michael's may decide they want to continue this ministry as a staff position.

St. Michael's is doing well. Why rock the boat?

The nationwide church is declining rapidly. Many churches try to hold on to what they have, to "do church" better in the hope of attracting more people. While we expect St. Michael's will continue to survive and (hopefully) thrive as a congregation, St. Michael's has an opportunity, from a place of health and strength, to discern and create new forms of following Jesus that speak not only to those inside the walls of the church but to those who have never set foot in a church or other faith community.

Why wasn't there a search committee formed for this new position like when we hired Mary?

Hiring a Rector is a different process from hiring an assisting clergy person. Generally, the Rector interviews the possible assistant, then the vestry interviews them. It is up to the vestry, as representatives of the parish, and the rector to hire assisting clergy. It is not the practice of Episcopal churches to introduce the candidate to the whole parish before hiring them.

Why would we hire a new person when we still have to pay off our loan to the Diocese and we need a new roof ?

1. St. Michael's is fortunate to have generous parishioners as well as a healthy endowment. We "draw" from the interest of the endowment to help with our operating costs. We can draw up to 5-6 % of the interest without touching the principle. We now draw 3% from the endowment. We could draw 2% more (equaling about \$20,000) to help fund this position.

In 2017 alone, the endowment has increased over \$80,000.

2. While looking at "expenses," we may lump the money that goes to fix the roof or pay the loan from our building project in the same pile as money that goes to funding ministry and mission; but I would encourage you to see these monies as separate categories. The building exists because of the ministry of our church, not the other way around. We exist to follow Jesus, engage in ministry and share God's love with the world. If we fund building projects at the expense of ministry projects, we may end up like many churches of our time, with a beautiful building that has nobody in it.

We are already doing ministry in our community, why do we need someone to help us with this?

It's true, St. Michael's has wonderful ministry happening through the gifts of our parishioners! In addition, many of our parishioners are involved in serving our wider community in many ways.

We have wonderful programs of outreach (helping people with important needs like food, shelter, clothing, heat, etc.). We also have an amazing social justice ministry that helps us address root causes for poverty, prejudice and so many of our society's problems.

The particular "outreach" of this ministry has to do with spiritual nourishment and healing for people who do not have any background with a faith or a faith community. How do we discern where the Spirit is already working with our neighbors? How do we share what our faith means to us? What are the new forms of faith that God is calling us to explore at this time? How might we better equip ourselves to integrate our faith more closely into our daily lives? How might our fellow parishioners support us in this?

Why are we paying this person so much? So little?

We are proposing paying him the minimum under the Diocese of Vermont guidelines for compensation for a half-time clergy person who is newly ordained.

This process has been way too fast for me. I don't like surprises.

Yes, this process has been extremely fast, especially for the wider congregation. We know that the process has not been ideal, but it is the best we could do given the opportunity that is before us. But we hear you; we wish it were slower.

At the same time, we feel like there is a real and rare opportunity before us, one that we feel is being led by the Spirit.