

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
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Ayer, Massachusetts 01432  
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## Parish Profile



### A Prayer for the Rector Search

*(written by the teens and tweens of the parish)*

O Gracious and Loving God, please guide us through this unpredictable time of transition. We are thankful for our church community, the effort and hard work of our search committee and vestry, and their dedication for our church.

Please help us find a rector who understands that we all have different perspectives and are beautiful and unique in our own ways.

May we all be open with our thoughts and find a rector who will look upon us like a shepherd, who loves children, and loves our church as much as we do. Amen.

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#### Our Mission

We seek to grow in faith as individuals and as a community, to glorify God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and to nurture those around us. We reach out to share God's word, (resources) and love with all people, especially those in need.

## Welcome to St. Andrew's Ayer

St. Andrew's Ayer is looking for a Priest with an optimistic and collaborative leadership style who shares our loving understanding and compassion for the world and has a fervent desire to bring the love we know out into the world. Our new Priest will match thoughtful spiritual worship with clear intrinsic musical elements.

St. Andrew's offers a congregation that is a positive and loving community of deep faith with shared core values of acceptance and welcoming to all. We have an effective lay leadership that maintains our core and is ready to take a stronger position in our community.

### Our Vision

At St. Andrew's we wish to continue as an independent parish with a more visible presence in our local communities of Ayer, Shirley, Harvard, Groton, Littleton, Lunenburg, Townsend, and beyond. The parishioners of St. Andrew's are positive and optimistic about the future and wish to welcome others to the community of God's love that is at the heart of the parish. We have a desire to make progress on social justice and to help those in need in more demonstrable and practical ways.



While our budget currently supports a 2/3-time priest, the Vestry and parishioners of St. Andrew's believe that we are on a journey where we can employ a full-time priest in time, and we continue to make positive steps towards advancing that vision.

### Our New Rector

The qualities we hope to find in our new Rector include:

- a collaborative leadership style;
- a deep faith and prayer life;
- thought-provoking sermons that include contextual references that engage the congregation and encourage learning and spiritual growth;
- a background in outreach/organization and eagerness to engage with our growing racially diverse community;
- a level of comfort engaging with the greater community of Ayer and surrounding towns, as well as the St. Andrew's parish;
- the ability to establish and sustain collaborative relationships within the parish and the community leaders to help us expand our footprint in the town of Ayer;
- experience with driving volunteerism and finding a balance between internal and community-focused volunteering.

### St. Andrew's offers:

- an active, engaged congregation, ready to embrace transformation and change;
- an intimate parish where it's easier to know all the parishioners;
- strong hospitality focused on creating opportunities for parishioners to meet and socialize outside of the worship service;

- a self-aware congregation, aware that our outreach efforts need to grow beyond check writing to active community engagement;
- a positive and optimistic congregation that has maintained energy and momentum throughout a pandemic and our priest retiring.

## Our Worship



St. Andrew's is a liturgically traditional but culturally progressive congregation. Its liturgical style is broad church. St. Andrew's considers the liturgy a living experience, and we are not just "going through the motions." We are open to changes in sequence and other changes in the worship service.

Our parish profile survey shows that we love intergenerational services, and we also love having babies and children in the church during the service. Newcomers have remarked on the kindness we show to children and families in the service, meeting those children where they are and not where we may want them to be.

Our parish profile survey also shows how much we love the music in the service, and our choir and music director provide

moments of real transcendence during the service. One comment from a parishioner described the church as "a spiritual oasis, a sacred place for centering".



## Life of the Parish

St. Andrew's has well-established worship patterns, traditional events throughout the year, enduring behaviors, and always a mix of long-standing parishioners and newer parishioners. Parishioners rated our patterns of worship very highly in our recent parish survey, as was the music during the service. Worship is focused on the liturgy and follows the traditional order of service. In the worship space, the parish makes room for young children and their families to participate and engage fully in the service. Spirituality does not begin and end with worship but permeates throughout activities such as regular adult forums, a weekly Zoom bible study group, an email bible study group, and an annual labyrinth.



Our traditional events include Apple Pie Day (a fundraiser where the parishioners make close to a hundred of apple pies in one day), a well-attended coffee hour after service on Sundays, adult forums, a children's Easter egg hunt on Easter Sunday, a Fall Holiday Fair fundraiser, a Spring and Fall parish picnic,



a Spring and Fall cleanup/workday, and a mix of other Parish Life events that engage parishioners outside of Sunday Service.

Our enduring behaviors are the way we love, care, and support the Church, and each other inside and outside of Sunday services. The parish has always had a vibrant Parish Life and Hospitality mission, providing regular events and opportunities to get to know new and old parishioners. Newcomers comment on the way that they feel welcomed without feeling overwhelmed, and that they can tell the community is sincere.

The parish has always had a mix of long-term parishioners (whole lifetimes to twenty or more years) and newer parishioners. As people leave for a variety of reasons, it always seems that some new people join the parish, giving us a constancy in the size and tenure of parishioners.

The strength of the laity, with the support of the diocese, our welcoming bridge priest, and our interim priest, have all allowed St. Andrew's to thrive. The recent Parish Survey showed St. Andrew's as a High-Engagement and High-Satisfaction parish.

## Our Children and Youth Ministries

As a parish, we are committed to the spiritual development of the next generation. In collaboration with our neighbors, the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, we offer Children's Sunday School, ages 3 to 10, using the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd curriculum. This Montessori-based program gives children the tools and opportunities to explore mysteries of faith, grow engaged in the liturgy, and foster love and a relationship with Jesus as their Good Shepherd.

Similarly, our teens experience a collaborative approach to deepening their Christian faith with the youth from the United Church of Christ in Groton, MA as well as the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd. This group engages in scripture study, field trips to learn more about Christianity and other faiths, service projects, and social events. This hands-on approach to learning and living the Christian faith was highlighted by the teens participating in CityReach in 2023, where they organized a clothing drive, and traveled to Boston to spend a weekend understanding the reality of being unhoused.



## Our Collaboration Efforts

The parish has hosted an annual Advent event in our Parish Hall, "In A Manger." The focus of this event is a display of over four hundred Nativity scenes from around the world. In 2022 we collaborated with Trinity Episcopal Church in Shrewsbury and both Massachusetts Dioceses to move the event to Shrewsbury in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts. In the

two days the exhibit was open in Shrewsbury, over three hundred people visited the display.

Sharing “In A Manger” with the broader Massachusetts community is a great example of collaboration between churches and between Dioceses. St. Andrew’s received recognition and an opportunity for continued outreach, in a way that is welcoming and leaves a lasting impression of that welcoming spirit without being overwhelming.

## Caring for Each Other

St. Andrew’s has a true culture of kindness and consideration for our parish which we extend to our neighbors and newcomers. A large number of parishioners go out of their way to help so that it is not down to just one family or one person. Examples include parishioners who shop for those who are housebound; those who provide meals for families with newborns, and those who organize and provide support for new immigrants in the town.

Lessons from the pandemic have helped shape our pastoral care to a full parish responsibility, and we have kept that care constant after the pandemic. We have drawn closer as a parish community, and we can rely on others to step in wherever there is a need.



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## Our Outreach

St. Andrew’s has a dedicated Outreach Commission funded through annual pledging and strong parishioner support. The Outreach Commission financially supports the Society of St. Margaret, Esperanza Academy, Loaves and Fishes (a local food pantry originally started in the basement of St. Andrew’s in the 1970s, and has since passed into secular management), Stone Soup Kitchen (a local food pantry and social justice ministry). Parishioners directly support both food pantries with time and treasure. St. Andrew’s also supports refugee ministries, school backpack ministries, and advent gifts for those in need. The youth of the parish also assist in organizing activities for local outreach.



Outreach ministry is an area that St. Andrew’s feels very strongly about wishing to grow. In the recent parish survey, our three highest priorities where the parish felt we were called to do more are related to outreach, social justice, and helping those in need. Responses noted were: “Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society;” “Work as an advocate for social and institutional change so that society might better reflect the values of the kingdom of God;” and “Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people in times of need.” We are looking for a rector who will help us continue to grow in this direction.

## New Ministries

St. Andrew's was selected as one of six partner parishes across the United States and Canada to participate in a year-long project, "Worship and Mission in the Face of the Climate Crisis." The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission (APLM) sponsor the project. The project kicked off in July 2023 with a weeklong conference in Minnesota. Two parishioners attended the conference and are charged with working within St. Andrew's to shape worship and liturgical practice to respond more visibly to the climate crisis.

St. Andrew's has long pushed for climate crisis engagement through supporting changes to the church facilities (new efficient windows, new efficient heating systems, new insulation) as well as information sharing with the parish on effective ways to contribute to solutions. The parish supported a nearby "Pocket Park," and our latest project is to transform parish land into a native pollinator garden with the help of all parishioners.



## Our Stewardship

St. Andrew's conducts an annual Stewardship drive in the Fall which is active and participatory. Over recent years approaches to the annual stewardship drive have differed without radical change. The annual operating budget is supported by rental income from the Rectory and by investment reserve income.



The parish continues to invest in its buildings and grounds, keeping up with regular maintenance and capital investment when needed. We have been very successful at grant writing for some of the capital investment and there is no deferred maintenance for the buildings.

St. Andrew's recently completed a capital campaign for larger improvement needs (new roof, trim, and clerestory windows for the Church building, for example). There have been two other capital campaigns in the last 20 years; one for Organ repairs and refurbishment, and one for the installation of a complete set of stained-glass windows in the church.

## Our History

St. Andrew's was first organized in October 1889 when the Rev. Dr. Endicott Peabody, headmaster of nearby Groton School, began the work of founding an Episcopal mission in Ayer. That work resulted in the present attractive stone church being completed in December 1892. St. Andrew's continues to maintain a close relationship with the Groton School.

## What is a significant event that stands out in our history?

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the parish to adapt practices to ensure the continuation of worship and our sense of community. The parish was able to quickly adapt to create a model for online worship services broadcast by video streaming. Many individuals contributed to the success through their time, talent, and other support, including the ongoing financial support of the parish.

During the pandemic we showed love to our parish through shopping for each other, phone call check-ins with the whole parish, Weddings and Baptisms continuing, Sunday School (Atrium) and Teens and Tweens groups meeting outdoors, and other acts of community.

As the pandemic ended, fresh challenges grew around how to welcome parishioners back to worship in-person and to make them feel safe, especially when and how to manage the lingering risks related to the pandemic. As a parish, the clergy and laity showed great strength and character in navigating the end of the pandemic.



## Changes Over the Years

### Parish changes

St. Andrew's has changed significantly in the living memory of the church, always moving towards a more loving and accepting communion. Some of these changes were in response to major challenges in the nation, the national church, and within our own community. In responding to these challenges, the parish has continued to nourish and proclaim a truly welcoming identity that is at the heart of parish life and worship.



Those major challenges have included the ordination of an LGBTQ Bishop in a nearby diocese (2003), working with a Rector who was not a good fit for the parish (2005), and most recently COVID-19 (2019). In the journey through these challenges, the parish response has been to strengthen our core values of love and acceptance and to provide the opportunity to show our care and concern for each other.

Other changes in the parish over the same period of time include; a move from two services on Sundays (Rite I and Rite II) to one service (Rite II and a variety of other materials); the move of coffee hour from a small room in the church to our nearby and larger Parish Hall; focusing on our Sunday school program and being more family-friendly; constantly investing in our building and grounds (especially related to accessibility and energy efficiency); and most recently the live video broadcast of our Sunday worship with a feature to view later.

## Community changes

The Town of Ayer has also undergone significant change at the same time as the Parish. Ayer is a former “base town”. The neighboring Fort Devens Army Base closed in 1994. Ayer has since recovered from economic hardship to become a notably thriving and growing town today.



The commuter rail station in town is attractive to new families and professionals providing public transportation access to Boston. New amenities were completed, including a new High School (built in 2015) and new Sports fields (added in 2022). New houses in the area are being built at the fastest pace in Massachusetts. The main street of town has old and new restaurants in addition to other businesses.

## Challenges

As the Pandemic was ending, our beloved Rector, the Reverend Joyce Scherer-Hoock announced her retirement after 13 years with the parish. This retirement announcement so soon after the pandemic increased the challenges the Parish faced.



Our Parish laity reacted quickly and followed the protocol of saying goodbye to Rev. Joyce while at the same time establishing continuity of worship first with a bridge priest and then with a longer-term interim priest. As a parish, we have grown our congregation and increased our programs, continued our financial stability, and continued to worship together as a loving community, as we search for our new Rector.

In the recent Parish survey completed as part of this new Rector search, we were delighted to observe the fulfillment that the parish receives from the St. Andrew’s community across programs and worship.

## How is conflict resolved?

As the national discourse has driven a sharp polarization, St. Andrew’s continues to transparently and definitively side with love and acceptance. Unfortunately, a small number of parishioners chose to leave the parish as a result. Those who remain are aligned with our core values, and this diminishes the occurrence of conflict.

There is still a diversity of personalities as is natural with any group. These small conflicts are generally managed through one or both parties choosing to make space for the difference, and the parish does not take “sides” which reduces escalations. Our current interim priest, The Reverend Stephanie Chase Bradbury has commented that St. Andrew’s is a tolerant parish and not a parish of conflict.



Life within St. Andrew's Ayer has brought us blessings and we have overcome challenges over the years to become a thriving faith community within Central Massachusetts. We are excited to embark on our next chapter together and anticipate what lies ahead with a new rector. Please direct all inquiries and applications to [mhubbard@diomass.org](mailto:mhubbard@diomass.org)

**Search Committee**

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**Vestry**

Patricia White, warden  
Jenny Outman, warden  
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