

St. Augustine of Canterbury



St. Augustine of Canterbury (St. A's for short) is a Jesus-centered faith community, bonded together in love, firmly planted in the midst of our local and global community. Weekly we draw solace and strength from our communal worship and fellowship, and then return to the world outside the walls of our sanctuary, working to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Our common commitment to the Way of Love helps to foster acceptance and inclusion of all people in our liturgy and in our outreach.



In our Baptismal Covenant we are asked, and we affirm, that we will proclaim by word and example, the Good News of God in Christ. We are asked and affirm that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. And we are asked and affirm that we will strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. These are promises we make to God and



to one another and they form the core of how we try to live out the love of Jesus Christ.

St. A's began as a Mission in the early 1960s. Members of St. Stephen's in Benton Harbor, primarily a black congregation, joined with the members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church (primarily a white congregation) in St. Joseph who lived on the east side of the St. Joseph River to form a new congregation. Some in the neighborhood were initially

opposed to our new church, explicitly objecting on zoning grounds and implicitly to the idea of a racially integrated congregation. But we were founded on faith and over time built a thriving church in our architecturally distinctive sanctuary. By late 1980, we officially became a Parish. And in 2006, our parishioners, wanting to reverse the slow tide of decline from the previous decade, envisioned the potential of a revitalized presence in our neighborhood and elected to call the next rector. This began St. Augustine's mission to be more fully engaged in the needs of the greater community and to rebuild and renew the congregation. We have not looked back.





Our building may be simpler than many, and we don't often have a thurifer, but we are busy and engaged in the work of Jesus. The shelves of our Food Pantry are always visible in our parish hall, a reminder of the hundreds we are blessed to feed each month. Our involvement in the Immigrant Assistance and Tax Assistance programs and the Soup Kitchen often take place outside of church hours and outside of church walls but are



another way that we are bringing Christ and His church to the community. And our very first Tiny House, first dreamed of by our Children's Chapel members, was built through faith, hard

work, and a beautiful collaboration with Harbor Habitat for Humanity and many others. It stands as a fully formed mustard tree, moving the mountain of housing insecurity for one of our neighbors.

Within our parish family, we are formally affirming of our LGBTQI+





siblings in Christ. In 2012, we voted as a parish, without dissent, to become a Believe Out Loud parish in order to more fully live into the promises of

our baptism and proclaim the Good News to all. We include our children, not only as acolytes, but as readers, assistants to the Eucharistic Ministers, and contributing (if not voting) members of the parish during meetings. When children are present who wish to participate, they may help to celebrate the Eucharist or Morning Prayer on the first Sunday of the month. In 2014 we started the real work of a decades-long goal to become physically accessible. By financially investing in a truly accessible space that allows everyone to enter the sanctuary, the parish hall, and a restroom, we are seeking to more fully love others as we do ourselves.

Over the past few months, as we have begun our search process anew, we have been asked and have asked ourselves, 'who do we want to



EUCCHARIST
Sunday 10 a.m.

1753 Union
269-925-2670 
www.staugustinebh.com

Food Pantry
2nd & 4th Monday
4:30-6:30 p.m.



be as the Episcopal presence in Benton Harbor?' Each time we answer the question, it is the same. We want to be us and more. We are grateful for our history that has allowed us to begin and maintain our ministries in the community. We are proud of our Social Justice work. We are happy to be an open and welcoming parish. We want to continue to be those things. And we want to keep moving forward to become a church without walls, well known in our community for our love and outreach. We want to be a doing church; continuing to feed our hungry neighbors at our Food Pantry and finding

solutions for housing insecurity by building the next Tiny House. And, we want to be a church with eyes and hearts open in order to see what other ministries we may be called to do. We are both the settled church with our worship and service ministries well-established, and the missionary, seeking to go where we are led.

In our most recent parish survey, the words most often used to describe us were: community, family, and welcoming. It is clear





that the basis of who we are is loving connections, both to Jesus Christ and to one another. As we move forward, we are seeking a Rector who will help us strengthen those bonds and help us engage in our local and global community in ways that reflect the love of Jesus.

Where we are...

...in Michigan's great southwest. Berrien County sits in the southwestern most corner of the state, on the sandy shores of Lake Michigan. It is home to an increasingly important wine growing region, and is one of the top fruit producers of the country. The beauty and bounty of our "local ground" calls St. A's to embrace stewardship of the Earth in a very intimate way. Surrounded as we are by God's glory on earth, we are called to interact with His creation in a way that is fundamentally formed by a sacramental understanding of the world.



Benton Harbor occupies the east bank of the St. Joseph River, within a stone's throw of the shore of Lake Michigan. The world headquarters of Whirlpool are located in our beautiful corner of Michigan. But poverty is a major problem in Benton Harbor as



well. Almost half of the families within the city limits live below the poverty line, almost triple the Berrien County average. More than half of children in Benton Harbor live in poverty. Most homes are rented with only about 1/3 of residents owning

their homes. The median household income in Benton Harbor is just over \$30,000 a year, half that of St. Joseph, located just across the river, and of Michigan as a whole.

In contrast, is our sister city of St. Joseph, right on the shore of Lake Michigan. The median income there is double that of Benton Harbor. Less than 10% of the population lives in poverty and less than 5% go without health insurance. More than 60% of residents of St. Joseph live in a home they own. The St. Joseph Public High School is in the top 10% of high schools across the state.

St. Augustine of Canterbury was established as an integrated parish, drawing its members from both of the sister cities. In the early 1960s,



at a time when racial tensions were high, we were formed to be a bridge between two cities and two communities. A quick look through our membership directory demonstrates that over half of our regular members live outside of Benton Harbor but choose to worship here. Although the demographics differ markedly between where we live and where we worship, our mission is simple: to spread the love of Jesus.

Who we are...

...responding to human need. In 2007, we established our Neighborhood Food Pantry. Twice monthly, the Food Pantry is open to anyone in need. While many churches and other organizations operate food pantries in our



area, the Neighborhood Food Pantry is one of very few left that does not do extensive screening for “need”, nor do we attempt to manage which other pantries our clients can use

or when. While we appreciate the need for keeping data on community projects, the spirit of our pantry is that if someone comes and asks for food, they must be hungry. We try to 'bear one another's burdens' and to act upon the love of Christ by feeding those in need simply because they ask and we are able.



At the time the Food Pantry was established, before a lull in membership due to Covid-19 and other factors, we fed 50-75 families each time the Food Pantry took place. This was supported by a parish roughly twice as large as it is today. Now, we

routinely provide groceries to 110-120 families. Our community garden provides fresh produce when it is in season. And in 2020, we added feminine hygiene products to the items available to our Food Pantry friends. Although Covid-19 changed how we were able to greet our friends at Food Pantry, it only heightened both the need and our resolve to provide for as many people as we are able.

At St. A's we try to break down as many barriers as possible in order to include all of our siblings in Christ in the life of the parish. Our lovely little church was designed by Edward Dart, a well-known architect of the mid-century modern style, and is a distinctive feature in the neighborhood. Despite its unique design, we found it lacking in some key ways. For many years some of our parishioners and Food Pantry friends were not able to be fully included in activities and events as the only access to the parish hall was via stairs. The only bathroom was also located on the lower level and was not accessible via wheelchair or other



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time, like now, St. A's was without a Rector and we prayerfully considered waiting until our search was complete. Although we found ourselves without a shepherd, we chose to move forward in faith to continue the work of Jesus. The Vestry and the parishioners deemed this project too important to put off any longer and we felt the parish was strong enough to undertake such a project led by the Vestry and Building Committee members. The building plan, voted on by the parish, included an addition with an elevator, an ADA compliant restroom, and a meeting room. In 2015, we began the capital campaign. Through the faithful financial support of parish members and the award of several grants, we were able to meet our building goal without incurring debt. In 2018, Bishop Houghland came to bless our completed addition and celebrate its opening with us. We feel truly blessed to have taken this



step to more fully include all of God's children in our community. Just this year, we once again took a step in faith and undertook a capital project to repair our roof. This was also completed without debt and we are grateful to be the stewards of our little sanctuary until our next Rector is in place.



For many years, the mainstay of the Children's and Youth ministry at St. A's has been Children's Chapel and Kids' Mass. Traditionally Children's Chapel, our version of Sunday School took place most Sundays and Kid's Mass took place on the first Sunday of the month. During Kids' Mass children of all ages are invited to celebrate the Eucharist along with the priest, participating in all aspects of the celebration of the Eucharist. While some might find it risky to allow children to participate so fully, parishioners of all ages have been surprised and moved by how quickly the children pick up on what to do, and how they intuitively understand the sacred nature of the activities they are performing. Parishioners report that Kids' Mass and our other kids



programming are among the best things about St. A's. After all, Jesus rebuked His disciples for trying to keep children from coming freely to Him, "for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

In recent years, these activities have been curtailed because of Covid restrictions. But full inclusion of all, including our children, in parish life and ministries has been a core value at St. A's since its founding. After discussion with the children of St. A's and their parents, we are joyfully returning to these celebrations. Whether 1 child or many are able to attend on a Kid's Mass Sunday, there is a place for them.

Our young people have been inspirational and integral to another of our ministries. For a number of years our Children's Chapel has raised money all year for charitable giving. At the end of each year they would elect organizations for donations. Most often we donated small gifts of \$50-75 to a handful of worthy organizations. Heifer International, Big Cat Rescue, the Flint Water Project, and many others have been beneficiaries. In January of 2018, the kids asked to work towards a specific goal from the start. They had something pretty big in mind: building a tiny house for a neighbor in need.

We partnered with the Andrews University Graduate School of Architecture and Interior Design and Harbor Habitat for



Humanity to make this vision a reality. An initial fundraising goal of \$33,000 was set and the kids and the parish got to work. By May of 2019, we exceeded our goal and the total stood at more than \$35,500. Covid took us by surprise and pushed our building costs up substantially. In the

end, we were able to raise a total of more than \$75,000 and complete the build of a 1000 square foot home with the help of many local volunteers. In December of 2021, we held a House Blessing for our first Tiny House. The property, complete with a brand new, debt-free home, was then gifted to Harbor Habitat. The covenant agreement between St. A's and Harbor Habitat outlines that the property will be maintained as a very low cost rental for a Habitat client. After a set period of time, a portion of the rent paid to Habitat will be diverted to St. A's, to support another build. The Tiny House is now a home to one of our neighbors who previously was unable to find reliable and affordable housing.

Fundraising for our second Tiny



House is already underway. The property has been secured and plans are drawn.

As a faith community, St. A's seeks to learn and grow in ways to formally welcome and fully include all persons. Being a "Believe Out Loud" congregation is part of this journey. We are part of Interfaith Action (Southwest Michigan Peace and Justice Collaborative), a coalition of various faith communities who



understand that we are stronger when we act together. Currently, we are the only faith community in our area listed as both "Formally Affirming" of LGBTQI+ folks and "Anti-Racist" by Interfaith Action.

Recently, we received and are working to implement the action steps recommended by Interfaith Action to ensure that our LGBTQI+ siblings feel welcome, not just to come through the door, but to fully live their faith lives as a part of St. A's. Although we have taken steps to be fully inclusive of all people, we recognize that there is always room for improvement and embrace that work as the work of Jesus.

What we are looking for...

...preaching and teaching, pastoral care, and action. The core ethos of St. A's is loving connection, both to Jesus Christ and to the people around us. Our next Rector will be a person able to engage with us, and help us to engage more with Christ and one

another, both during and after the service. We value excellent preaching and we are seeking someone who shares our commitment to include all people, including our children, in ministry. And we are looking for a Rector ready, willing, and able to engage in the work of Social Justice. We want to welcome our next Rector into the ministries that we have already begun, and for them to help us discern what other work God has for us in this community.



We are an Easter people and parish, deep into our bones. We succeed and fail, and believe deeply in the promise of resurrection, so we try and try again. We

are so glad that you have taken the time to get to know us this much. We pray for your discernment and ours in this process. If you are called to be a part of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement here in Benton Harbor, we are here to

welcome you.