

St. John's, Youngstown

What are some significant moments in the history of your church that have shaped its identity today?

Situated just outside the entrance to Fort Niagara, our church was built in 1878 on land donated by Ordnance Sgt. Lewis Leffman and his wife, Elizabeth. Sgt. Leffman was the longest serving enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army (55 years), stationed at Fort Niagara for 37 years. His obituary was on the front page of the NY Times. Many of the original members were part of the Fort's garrison and assisted with the construction of the church. St. John's is the only building in the Village of Youngstown to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Our Parish Hall (originally located across the street) was the chapel of the Villa St. Vincent, moved to its present location in the 1950's.



What makes your church unique in the region and the diocese?

Our beautiful, historic church looks like the iconic church on a Hallmark Christmas card! But well beyond the physical plant, the people of St. John's form a wonderfully strong, loving, centered, peaceful Christian community. "The Mission of St. John's Parish is to glorify God by growing in Christ's love and sharing that love with others." By the grace of God, that is what we do.

What are the most vibrant ministries or strengths of your parish today?

There are 19 ministries listed on our Welcome brochure. Of those, the strongest year-round ministry is support of the local Care and Share Food Pantry. St. John's is the biggest contributor and in addition to supplying food goods, we participate in hands on work at the Pantry and have members who serve on the Board. That said, we are probably most well known for our annual Strawberry Festival. This year we served over 500 people free strawberry shortcake. Free-will donations each year go to varying local causes and organizations. This year, we supported Buffalo-Niagara Honor Flight and the Friends of Youngstown.

Describe a moment in your community's life when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among you. What made that moment possible?

In 2014, planning for our annual June Strawberry Festival was upon us, and we were once again stressing about not having enough help to pull off a two-day, labor intensive community event. With guidance from the Holy Spirit, we decided that the strawberry shortcake would be a gift to the community, given away in gratitude to God for God's blessings. The Boy Scouts were recruited to help set up tents, tables, and chairs. The Youngstown Lions took over the grill. This allowed the congregation to be present to the community during the festival. Thanks to generous donations from

parishioners and others, we were also able to hire a local band and distribute \$2,000 to \$3,000 each year to various community organizations. Now our festival is truly a community event!

How does your church engage with the local neighborhood, the civic life of your community, or diocesan and/or Episcopal Church-wide initiatives?

Most of our congregation comes from within the Village, many within walking distance of the church. Our newest member comes from just down the street. We are active with the Lewiston-Porter Family Assistance Program, Youngstown/Porter Christmas Baskets, Pinnacle Community Services, Youngstown Free Library, Community Missions of Niagara, Youngstown Volunteer Fire Co., Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (NACC), Niagara County Sheriff's Safe Children Program, Old Fort Niagara, Wear 'n Share Clothing Closet, Feed More WNY, and Youngstown Lions. In the Diocese and Episcopal Church: Threads of Hope Linen Pantry, ERD, UTO, and Our Little Roses.

What are the hopes and dreams of your congregation for its next chapter?

As with many mainline churches in our region, our congregation consists primarily of adults. We wonder who will be coming along to 'catch the ball' when we have to pass it forward. We are striving to faithfully love and serve God in our time and praying that the Holy Spirit will breathe continued life into our church in the years to come. In three years, we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the consecration of St John's. What will the next 150 years be like? God knows, and we pray: "We put all our trust in you, O God; all our hope is in your mercy."

