

St. Matthias', East Aurora

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

Our mission at St. Matthias' Church is to "Share Christ's love in the world and with each other through worship, fellowship, and ministry." Along with many other parishes, we do our best to meet these challenging times, including COVID and its aftermath, and an aging congregation and building, with faith, hope, and love, and with the help of vibrant congregation, and, most importantly, with God's help.

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

St. Matthias' has had a presence in East Aurora for over 150 years. Our beautiful church building, designed by Robert North, an architect for many of the churches in Western New York, is fashioned after the country churches of southern England. Our church fits in with Elbert Hubbard's Art & Crafts Roycroft enterprise.

The recently restored stained glass window above the altar was designed by an original Roycroft artisan, and the Reredos and Stations of the Cross were hand tooled by current Roycroft Renaissance artisans. Our stunning building is surrounded by beautifully landscaped grounds and a large memorial garden complete with a meandering path, benches for rest and prayer, and a gazebo.

One especially unique activity here took root during the height of the COVID pandemic when we instituted a weekly Reading Group. We gather for an hour on Zoom and read books out loud, each taking turns to read a few pages. We typically read church related fiction and are still reading together after more than five years! Finally, our uniqueness is most apparent in our welcoming and beautiful Sunday worship featuring our small but mighty choir. Sunday service is offered in a hybrid fashion during which those on Zoom and Facebook are woven in via direct conversation (Zoom) and personal welcome (using the Facebook chat feature). Spiritual communion is offered together with our online guests as part of the post-communion prayers.

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

The congregation, vestry, and Rector are all committed to keeping our Outreach programs vibrant, and are grateful to our Mission Team and all of our volunteers for their dedication and drive. The twice monthly Pet Food Pantry was recognized by the Erie County Legislature in April of 2024 for over ten years of service, distributing cat and dog food to members of our community who dearly love and care for their pets but cannot provide for them fully on their own. We have sponsored a young girl at Our Little Roses home for girls in Honduras for fifteen years. Each year, we engage in the Angel Action Christmas gift program and an ongoing collection of food for FISH of



East Aurora. Other outreach programs have included donations of collected household items to Journey's End Refugee Services and Family Promise of WNY, and financial support to a variety of charitable organizations locally, nationally, and internationally. Most recently, we had a back-to-school backpack/water bottle drive spearheaded by the teenage daughter of a Vestry member. We are blessed by a devoted congregation, many of whom are willing to volunteer their unique talents to support our life and ministry. Outreach has been an especially great way to get all members of our congregation involved.

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?

The Holy Spirit turns up quite often here at Saint Matthias' Church, made known to us through a variety of synchronicities, generosity, laughter, and love. One way, in particular, that the Spirit comes to us is through prayer. Learning to pray together online during COVID helped us to create Spirit filled, prayerful community that is accessible in a new way. A faithful group of parishioners, along with our Rector, continues to pray the office of Compline together online twice a week, offering intercessions for the many people on our prayer list by name along with other prayers and thanksgivings as they arise.

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

One of the most poignant experiences with our local neighborhood has been the opening of our doors for ecumenical worship and activities. For the past two years, we hosted interactive Good Friday Stations of the Cross with clergy and members of other East Aurora churches. We gather at noon and walk the Stations together, sharing readings, and taking part in written, verbal, musical, or tactile responses.



Our journey ends in the sanctuary at a life-sized cross where we leave our prayers, written on post it notes, on the cross, leave our burdens, written on palm crosses, at the foot of the cross, and take away seed packets pointing us to resurrection and new life. Even though the day is a somber reminder of Christ's crucifixion, the Holy Spirit walks with us, bringing all of us together as one body.

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

Our main hope here at Saint Matthias' is to expand our visibility and grow our church by continuing to deepen our roots in our Episcopal tradition while extending our branches further into our community and beyond. We look to young families who are moving to East Aurora while fully embracing people of all ages who find their way to

us, and we hope they will make a spiritual home here with us. In an effort to boost youth presence, our Rector initiated a monthly Sunday Funday communion service for young children and their families to engage our littlest members in joyful worship. Additionally, a vestry member and our Rector, along with the Diocesan Youth Missioner and other clergy, developed a monthly program for older youth in other parishes with greatly diminished numbers of teens, creating a loving and caring community across our area.

In closing, we are well positioned here on the corner of Main and Maple streets to proclaim God's Love to the world and to welcome everyone to the Table.