

St. James Episcopal Church

Florence, Italy

Parish Profile

St. James Episcopal Church of Florence, Italy is currently seeking a new priest. The priest we seek will invite us all, new and long-standing members alike, to deepen our commitment to our shared community. We begin this search knowing that the church as a community needs to be rebuilt. This task will not be easy, and will require an energetic, active rector who is not just a spiritual leader but also a person who can help promote and organize the church as a whole. The vestry needs to be involved and given much deeper responsibility in this process.

Our parish has been praying this prayer to support us in our search.

*Faithful and loving God,
You trace our journeys and our resting places,
and are a companion on the Way.
Sustain St. James Church with your grace:
Bless us with Joy, Beauty and Wonder.
Bind us together in fellowship and love.
Let us be a refuge for the weary,
and a companion for the pilgrim;
Raise up a Pastor who will care for your people,
equip us for our ministries,
and shine a light on your path.
Grant that we may walk with you in the Way of Love,
and reflect your goodness and light always.
This we pray in the power of the Holy Spirit and hope of your Son,
our savior Jesus Christ.*

Introduction

St. James Episcopal Church is a small but global parish, with members from more than ten countries (including Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Japan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, and the U.S.) and 11 Anglican provinces (TEC, Canada, England, Scotland, Nigeria, Kenya, West Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, Philippines, and Japan - as well as the extraprovincial Ceylon [Sri Lanka]). We value the many cultures and languages represented at St. James. We rejoice in our diversity and

welcoming spirit. We seek to deepen our commitment to our community, and to draw everyone closer to this vision.

We seek a priest-in-charge who will come here for us and for the church, and not for the pleasure of being in Florence and Tuscany. The church as a community needs to be rebuilt. This task will not be easy, and will require an energetic, active rector who is not just a spiritual leader but also a person who can help promote and organize the church as a whole. The vestry needs to be recognized as having a deep responsibility in this process.

In many ways, and for different reasons, the past decade has not been an easy one for St. James. Our purpose seems to have changed, and the past year has ushered in a process of much-needed discernment. Populations are shifting, and the parish is aging. Resident expats seem fewer, yet we know they must be out there, in the community, if only we knew how to reach them. We seek a priest who will partner with us, love us for what and who we are, without wishing we were someone else, some other way. Our reality often feels messy and complicated. We believe that faithful prayer and discernment will provide a way through if properly nourished and encouraged.

Topics

[Overview of St. James](#)

[Our Congregation](#)

[Parish Membership](#)

[Our Worship](#)

[Sacred Music](#)

[Parish Staff](#)

[Ministries and Volunteers](#)

[Parish Finances](#)

[Parish Property](#)

[Rectory](#)

[Parish Challenges](#)

[Parishioner Feedback](#)

[Qualities We Seek in a Rector or Priest-in-Charge](#)

[Parish Opportunities](#)

[Church History](#)

[Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe](#)

Overview of St. James

St. James Episcopal Church is a diverse community of faithful Christians with a rich history and on the cusp of a great opportunity for growth and change as we search for a new priest in charge. There is a significant missionary aspect to St. James with respect to language, people, and cultures. We host many worshippers from near and far, as well as a handful of permanent residents. We are not a typical “downtown” parish.

In this profile we offer an honest look at our parish - in the context of the opportunities it will offer its members, the larger Florence community, and the Church at large during the coming years. We seek to deepen our commitment to the community and to the church, drawing together everyone in our parish to embrace a new vision for spiritual life.

Our Congregation

Many come to St. James in order to place Jesus and spirituality at the center of their lives and to be refreshed by the Spirit. Listen to the voices of our parishioners as they explain in their own words what St. James means to them:

Nicoletta: "It's hard to single out a specific event... what keeps recurring in my mind, though, is the memory of the day I was received by the bishop during Passion Week last year. But every single time I am in the Chapel (or in the garden during the summer) turns out to be a special moment."

Joan: "As an Irish Catholic raised in Dublin, I felt indecisive about taking Holy Communion. At the feast of St. Francis, Father Andrew gave a heartfelt welcome to the table to take the Eucharist, whether we had been often or not for a long time, whether we felt full of faith or full of doubt. It gave me the freedom to receive."

Shannon: "St. James is a spiritual buoy in our community. A place where visitors and residents can tie up and feel safe."

Elisabeth: "For me St. James is a place of welcome and inclusion. People are happy to be welcomed warmly and feel a part of the community it has created."

Ermanno: "To me St. James means a place where I feel always welcome, no matter my denominational affiliation."

Clelia: "I am Catholic but my father was Waldesian. The Protestant world is not new to me. I am active as a volunteer of the library and help at thrift sales. I like to think I, too, am a very, very small part of St. James and am very happy and proud to be able to say that!"

Parish Membership

Parishioners cite many reasons for becoming and/or remaining members of St. James. Motivations include:

1. Our diverse, inclusive community.
2. The music.
3. That the service is given in English.
4. Our warm welcome.
5. The physical grace of our worship space.

6. Previous experience either growing up in the Episcopal Church, or because of the openness and tolerance that we have grown to love in our tradition and may have not found in our denominations of origin.
7. Marriages with partners coming from different denominations are able to find a home in the Episcopal tradition.
8. Being far from home, St. James is a steadying and grounding influence in an unfamiliar culture and environment for many.
9. Services in English, and English being spoken widely are a big plus.
10. Finding community was also mentioned several times and is reflected in many of our experiences. Our community's friendly welcome, tolerance, and openness were repeatedly cited. The spacious quality of these traits have given many people the freedom to find a spiritual home here.
11. Attracted by the chance to sing in the choir, as well as general opportunities for lay involvement in worship services (lay eucharistic ministers, ushers, readers, prayer group leaders, Sunday school teachers and acolytes).
12. Extra-liturgical activities, such as the Thrift Shop, St. James Food Bank, and Sunday school. Good midweek activities exist for volunteers of St. James Food Bank, the Thrift Shop and related activities, and our relatively high volunteer numbers reflect that.

Historically, St. James drew much of its membership from the American overseas resident community in Florence and Tuscany. As that community has diminished in recent years, membership has grown very diverse denominationally and ethnically. While St. James continues to have a significant number of American members, our members are drawn from such African nations as Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa, other English-speaking cultures such as England, Scotland, and Canada, as well as Asia - including Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Members come from many different provinces of the [Anglican communion](#) - The Episcopal Church; The Church of Nigeria; The Church of the Province of West Africa (Cameroon); the Church of the Province of Central Africa (Malawi); The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (South Africa); The Church of England; the Episcopal Church of Scotland; the Anglican Church of Canada; The Church of Ceylon; the Anglican Church in Japan (Nippon Sei Ko Kai) and the Episcopal Church in the Philippines. Our parish therefore comprises at least 11 of the provinces of the Anglican Communion. Italians comprise a very small fraction of our community.

Only a small number of our parishioners grew up in Episcopal churches; many people have come to the church from across the spectrum of mainline Protestant as well as free evangelical denominations, as well as Roman Catholics, which contributes to varied opinions on worship and worship style. Our parish needs a priest who can help teach us who we are as Episcopalians - as they learn themselves about our parish.

St. James, therefore, is now becoming less the "American" church in Florence (as it has been known traditionally) and increasingly a church of pilgrims, in every sense of the word, from far and near.

The composition of our congregation changes frequently. Long-term, year-round residents are few. Half of our twelve-member vestry is frequently away or unavailable, and often the remaining vestry members shoulder the lion's share of the work within the parish. Locating parishioners for discussion and consensus often presents difficult challenges.

St. James has been experiencing a relative decline in membership in recent years, although a slight uptick has occurred this year. During the 2018 calendar year, average Sunday attendance was 60; during the 2019 calendar year it has averaged 63. Easter service attendance in 2018 was approximately 180, while Easter attendance in 2019 increased to 247. A challenge for our next priest will be to inspire further revitalization efforts.

Parish Youth

Our parish youth activity was once robust and active. In the last ten years, it has lessened to the point that now we no longer have childcare service at the Sunday service, nor do we have a functioning Sunday school. Both of these ministries were active until 2018. The vestry leadership is currently exploring ways in which we might rejuvenate our support and offerings for youth of all ages. Part of the issue at present is the average age of our engaged faithful. There are simply very few young children in the parish, not to mention teenagers or young adults.

As a parent (of a still-young son), who now rarely attends, commented, "My son grew up at St. James with Sunday school. It was the brick and mortar to our attendance, and led to other involvement because there was a world for children and young people among the adults. This no longer exists. The experience for children now at St. James is to be a child in an adult world, and it's a hard sell."

A short-term exchange student came regularly to St. James on Sundays this fall to sing in our chancel choir; she was motivated to come after the choir director and vestry clerk attended the new student orientation for Syracuse University in Florence to talk about music opportunities at St. James. We asked her for her insight. She affirmed that we were welcoming and friendly, and that choir was her main draw (she is a vocal performance major). For many students, she said, St. James is a bit off the beaten path and out of the way. Her recommendations to engage college-age youth are:

1. Create a St. James Instagram account. Hashtag as many relevant search keywords as possible, particularly events, and post on a weekly basis if not more frequently.
2. Initiate an ecumenical Bible study in English in an easy-to-reach venue.
3. Consider creative student outreach in bars and other student gathering places.
4. Brainstorm and pilot a new program for student dinners to engage youth with the local community - perhaps in the homes of parishioners, or hosted potlucks or takeaway dinners in the rectory.



Parishioners enjoy fellowship during the Volunteer Gratitude Breakfast, September 29, 2019.

Our Worship

St. James celebrates the Sunday eucharist throughout the year in a spoken service at 9:00 a.m. and a service with music at 11:00 a.m. The 11:00 a.m. service includes intercessory prayer offered in the chapel concurrent with the eucharist. Contemplative prayer is hosted once a week in the chapel. Sunday services follow Rite II of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. The Gospel is proclaimed in English and Italian, the service leaflets are bilingual, as is The 1979 Prayer Book.



Fr. Andrew Cooley blesses a parishioner's pooch at the Feast of St. Francis, October 2019.

Sacred Music

Our sacred music is provided by a small chancel choir with a part-time director, accompanied by our resident organist/pianist, Maestro Riccardo Foti. Occasionally, visiting choirs from all corners of the world provide sacred music; we actively seek and encourage these types of offerings. A local Italian gospel choir, Lucrezia's One Voice, whose founder was a parishioner, routinely provides music. In 2008, our pipe organ was installed by the well-known Liverpool, U.K.-based Willis Organ Company, replacing the previous organ that was badly damaged in the flood of 1966.



The St. James Chancel Choir, ca. 2015.

Parish Staff

In addition to a priest and sacristan, our parish staff includes a secretary, business manager, bookkeeper, organist, and choir director. In the past, we have also had volunteer Sunday School teachers and a child minder for Sunday morning services.

The Parish Profile committee asked our Senior Warden to meet with parish staff to solicit their input.

Our sacristan emphasized the importance of prayer and Bible study to support our vestry leadership, saying “What has been in my heart for years is happening now. A Bible study before the vestry meeting is an answered prayer.” He added, “Our search committee ... concentrated mainly in technical aspects of a good rector. What I believe is especially needed in this case is [taking] time in prayer [so that] God speaks. We need His wisdom for us to make the right decision.”

Our choir director observed, “Father Andrew has been wonderful and paramount in supporting the musical life here and I would strongly suggest someone of similar opinions and methods to take us forward. I hope that the search for the new rector can prioritise someone [who is] attentive to detail, open-minded, available at all times, with a passion for music, and a desire to develop this aspect of the church.”

The parish secretary position is currently halftime, four hours per day, Monday through Friday. She works closely with the Rector and other staff, and is the face of St. James. She shared that “the most important thing is to be willing to ask for help when it is needed. If [new priest] has never lived abroad or has never lived in a Mediterranean country (or similar), they will be overwhelmed with all the cultural adjustments. This does not make them incompetent; it makes them normal. The person who steps into this role should be willing to admit that they don’t know how something works and that they need help with it. They should also keep a very open mind, and remember that St. James represents a lot to the secular community in Florence. By nurturing those bonds, we will attract more people to the religious activities at St. James.”

The business manager provided a great deal of in-depth commentary that has been incorporated throughout this document.



Fr. Andrew Cooley blesses the participants and nourishment at the Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast, September 29, 2019.

Ministries and Volunteers

In past years St. James has been at the center of a vibrant ecosystem of affiliated ministries, in particular Al Anon, the Children's Lending Library, the St. James Food Bank, and the Thrift Shop.

Over time, these ministries have spun off into an autonomy characterized by little to no interaction with the liturgical life of the church. As our parish membership has decreased, it became harder to channel new volunteers into ministries. As a result, our volunteer numbers right now are very low, and almost exclusively limited to vestry members and about a dozen regular liturgical ministers beyond that. We do not presently have a youth coordinator, nor a volunteer coordinator. Simple measures to welcome visitors have floundered due to a lack of communication and follow-up.

We would like to raise up our ministries and see them attracting new volunteers to do God's work in a pluralistic, diverse community that needs them. Florence is not a beautiful dream for everyone. There are those who struggle, immigrants and refugees, the elderly, the poor, youth at loose ends, students whose reality is not meeting their expectations. We would like to identify and nourish ministry leaders, a volunteer coordinator, a youth minister. These are all goals. There is work to be done. Our community needs us.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. There are no dues or fees.

The AA group at St. James has been growing since 1974, when St. James was the only church in Florence which agreed to host this pioneering Twelve-Step group. It is the first AA group in Tuscany. They meet every day on a regular schedule, six days a week. There is no Sunday meeting. A meeting on the last Saturday of the month is an open meeting for anyone wishing to know more about alcoholism or AA.

The core AA group consists of about 20 locals. Others travel for two hours or more to Florence to attend meetings. The group is growing and provides a service for those that live nearby and also for tourists and travellers. With variation, and according to the season, about 100 homeless people attend during any given week. Many of the people who attend this group are vulnerable; in the past the group has lost members to suicide as well as to relapse. They expressed gratitude to St. James for hosting the group all these years and contributing to the work of the twelfth step ("Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we try to cry the message and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.")

Al-Anon

Al-Anon is a mutual support program for people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. By sharing common experiences and applying the Al-Anon

principles, families and friends of alcoholics can bring positive changes to their individual situations, whether or not the alcoholic admits the existence of a drinking problem or seeks help. This group (one to four people) has been meeting in Italian for the past 3 years and replaces another, more long-standing group. English-speaking visitors occasionally come, and at least one person in the core Italian group speaks English. They make a small donation to the church for use of the room. They are very happy with the kindness and friendliness of the welcome they receive at St. James, specifically mentioned that they like being in the “American Church” because Al-Anon originated in the U.S.

Children’s Lending Library

The CLL was founded 40 years ago by a group of local mothers and is currently managed by a group of 25 volunteers, including 5 Italian volunteers and one Romanian. The library has a large collection of books and films for children. Membership costs an annual donation of €15 and is currently about 200 people, mostly local. What was begun as a largely anglophone enterprise has grown increasingly Italian to the point that the newsletter goes out quarterly in both English and Italian. The CLL also actively hosts community events for children for a small fee - Easter, Halloween, and Christmas. The CLL is currently on an uptick and is enjoying robust growth and community interest.

The undercroft also has a small lending library of fiction and nonfiction for adult readers that has been managed in the past along similar lines to the Children’s Lending Library. While the books and comfortable seating remain inviting, the enterprise has been relatively inactive in recent months.

St. James Food Bank

The St. James Food Bank was begun 25 years ago and at its peak was giving donated and purchased food to about 140 people per week. The community needs seem to be changing, and the food activity of the food bank seems to be winding down as weekly recipients shrank to 10 to 12 per week. The food bank is now in a time of transition, open weekly for clothing distribution only.

The Thrift Shop

The Thrift Shop volunteers provide a monthly thrift shop of donated goods (clothing, small housewares, and toys) on Wednesday from 9:30 to 11:30 whose proceeds are donated to charity. They would like a priest who listens to them, appreciates their work, and who will respond to their needs.



Parish Secretary Patricia Estrada announces "Breakfast is served!"
September 29, 2019 - Volunteer Appreciation breakfast.

Parish Finances

The annual budget is about €450,000, increasing more than 10% since 2015. Our operating expenses for 2018 were €443,914. Our annual assessment to the Convocation is 9%.

St. James is fortunate to have an endowment in our name, which is managed by our board: the Endowment for Ministry and the St. James Main Fund. We seek a rector who can cultivate a culture of giving and pledging, considering that our pledges have declined significantly in recent years (from 18 pledges for 2018 to 8 pledges for 2019). Therefore, our annual revenue derives mainly from a handful of generous private donors, the annual interest provided by our endowments, and revenue from the Thanksgiving Ceremonies, which are offered to tourists who wish to commemorate their union in a picturesque, memorable location. In recent years, most of the participants have been Japanese nationals, whose ceremony is presided over by lay ministers, as per convocation policy. The revenue (which we characterize as appreciation gifts) from the townhouse also provides a portion of our annual budget.

The parish buildings are all at or beyond the century mark, and are in constant need of repair and renovation. The parish has spent large amounts of money in recent years on its structures; a new boiler has been installed in the Rectory, and minor repairs are underway in the townhouse. This pull on financial resources is likely to continue. We are hopeful that increasing our membership will lead to the re-formation of a Financial Committee and/or Property Committee.

Note that the last capital campaign at St. James took place around 2008 for our organ. In lieu of capital campaigns, we have been fortunate in that a small number of generous private donors have given significantly and frequently.

The next priest must be well-informed about the financial aspects of running an Episcopal parish, and possess experience and patience for lay treasurers who lack extensive financial expertise. In particular, we need to transform our relationship to money in a way that inspires generous giving and empowers our vision and expectations for a dynamic, outward-looking spiritual community. Our priest will need to be skilled at working with, and operating within, a unique blend of overlapping systems of governance—the Vestry, the Board of Saint James, and the Convocation.

Parish Property

The sanctuary of St. James with its beautiful stained glass windows dates to 1908 and is privileged to be under the protection of the *belle arti* through the national Ministero dei Beni Culturali. The grounds today include a rectory with gardens, a large apartment, a back garden with a stone altar for outdoor worship, a sexton's residence, and a carriage house. The undercroft below the sanctuary is used for social gatherings, ministries, and parish offices. St. James is located within the city walls of the UNESCO World heritage site of Florence.

In addition to being blessed with its central location in Florence, St. James has several other advantages. The geographical location makes it much easier to reach (and return from) by bus, train or tramvia. There is some limited parking available on the church grounds, and the church is located outside the Zona Traffico Limitato (ZTL), which limits access by drivers to city streets within the old wall's boundaries. The undercroft is a good functional space for exhibitions and events. The parish hosts secular and sacred feasts throughout the year, for Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas.

The property presents challenges. The locked front gates pose a problem for the church, both in preventing easy access to the church on weekdays, and more broadly in symbolizing the separation of our church from the surrounding community. We need the courage to open our gates. How do we grow a church with a locked gate?

The central location of St. James can be both an advantage and disadvantage. St. James is not a typical, parochial neighborhood parish where most parishioners live in proximity of the church or in the vicinity. People come from every part of the city, as well as peripheral towns, often travelling an hour or more to get to church. Special events, some of which are scheduled for Sunday mornings, close the city center to traffic, and St. James is not readily accessible. Although there is some parking space on the church grounds, it is limited, and street parking is nearly non-existent. This affects both church attendance and event planning.

The space is well-used during the week by many external groups and ministries, including [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) (AA); [Al Anon](#) (in Italian); [Il Club del Punto in Croce](#) (crochet group); the Thrift Shop (open monthly); [Jesus Loves You](#) (Filipino worship group); the [Quirky Quilters](#); Vivere in Forma (Italian Weight Watchers); the [Children's Lending Library](#); our internal, informal Adult Lending Library; and labs with [My Tata Inglese](#) (in formation). In addition, the church provides a venue for a small number of concerts by outside musical organizations, including *Florence Voice*, an American summer opera program out of Westminster Choir College of Rider University in New Jersey).

While community organizations routinely use or rent our space, we do not currently have a complete list of those that have used our space in recent years. We are working on compiling this list.

We have not had a set policy for price lists for space rental or for visiting choirs who invite themselves to sing in our space, which we love, but whom we have not proactively invited. We are working on this, creating a price and rental policy for the parish.

Rectory

St. James is blessed to have a spacious rectory onsite that serves as a home for our priest. The rectory is contemporaneous with the church, built in the early twentieth century, and includes a large kitchen, formal dining room, spacious parlor, and a WC on the ground floor. The second floor contains three bedrooms and two bathrooms, along with a large living area. A terrace that can be used for dining in temperate months gives onto a gated formal garden with a pond. The rectory has been put to use, to various degrees in different phases of our history, for parish activities and social events, depending on the availability and comfort level of the priest.

Parish Challenges

St. James is not a typical parish. This is very important to note, as parishioners come from near and far for Sunday service, and logistics quickly become a challenge. Parish membership has been in decline for some time. The need for vestry development and lay leadership development and training is critical. The vestry should be supported and encouraged to exercise real leadership. The next rector should work in a collaborative, supportive, and transparent manner with the vestry. St. James possesses many beautiful treasures, but the most important treasure is found in the dedication of our lay leaders. Art historians need not apply *if they are not priests first*.

Our Parish Profile committee has identified the following challenges; broadly, it may be said that the top concerns are:

1. Growing the parish
2. Addressing the needs in our community
3. Supporting families

The following challenges have also been recognized:

4. **Communication:** We must clearly and honestly describe church programs, both internally and externally.
5. **Communication:** We need to improve communication about parish activities and prayer opportunities. For example, a prayer group meets during the week (Tuesdays at noon) but this is not well-publicized.
6. **Communication:** We must improve social media presence by the parish on our website and social media.
7. **Communication:** We have not been doing a great job welcoming visitors with follow-up communication. Due to the silo culture of our ministries, it is difficult to know how to direct new and prospective members into appropriate volunteering committees.
8. **Funding:** Pledges have dropped off in the past few years just to a fraction of the annual need.
9. **Funding:** The Japanese Thanksgiving Ceremonies create advantages and disadvantages. Our lovely property generates much needed revenue for the parish budget - as is the case with our sister churches in Rome and Paris. Note that two members of the parish are currently presiding over these ceremonies, in accordance with Convocation policy that requires lay presidency over such ceremonies.
10. **Funding:** Capital improvements are on our radar as significant future expenditures.
11. **Pastoral care:** There is a need to deepen the pastoral care offered by both clergy and parishioners, which has been growing during the past year. A more integral approach may help every member feel welcome and appreciated given our diverse denominational and cultural backgrounds.
12. **Volunteers:** It has been difficult to recruit additional liturgical ministers out of our small, regular congregation. Almost all our active parishioners already serve as readers, ushers, and LEMs. Training is sporadic if nonexistent. The burden of serving that has been placed on this small group has become, at times, taxing.
13. **Volunteers:** Our ministries have, over the years, spun off into silos of activity managed by members of the community who are no longer as active in the liturgical life of our parish (the Children's Lending Library, the Thrift Shop, and St. James Food Bank).
14. **Welcoming:** We do not offer a welcome packet for visitors and newcomers. People tend to dash off after Sunday services, so more attention is needed to welcoming visitors - at the conclusion of the service, and in the days after.
15. **Christian education:** We need to emphasize Christian education for youth, since so few young people are now active (either children or youth/students).
16. **Youth:** We used to host student dinners at the rectory, which attracted many students but also taxed the clergy and individual parishioners to a point of exhaustion.
17. **Youth:** The parish once had a dedicated staff member for student outreach.
18. **Youth:** Opportunities for children and youth have dwindled in recent years; there is little in the way of a Sunday School currently and no specific program for youth.
19. **Youth:** Revitalize outreach to study abroad students; previous efforts with fellowship over weekly meals tapered off in 2018.

Parishioner Feedback

Our junior warden, Nevin Brown, chaired the Profile Committee, which worked to solicit parishioner feedback on the parish in general and the rector search in particular. The committee facilitated a series of thoughtful meetings, which took place on four Sundays in late September and October, either before or after service for an hour in the undercroft. This phase of the rector search brought with it some trepidation as it was not certain who in our parish might even appear to provide feedback. To our relief, approximately 40 parishioners came to talk and listen and to share their hopes and concerns for the parish.

In addition, we circulated a parishioner survey to our Constant Contact distribution list of 527 recipients, which is also our channel for sending out a weekly parish newsletter. Survey responses are incorporated into this document.



A parishioner feedback meeting held in the undercroft by the Parish Profile Committee, fall 2019.

Prior to the listening meetings, general questions for reflection were circulated among parishioners:

1. What treasures does St. James possess that we can celebrate?
2. What are our dreams and hopes as we imagine the future at St. James that we are called to embrace?
3. What do we see at St. James that needs our attention and care to restore to vitality and health?
4. What losses do we lament as we consider the life of St. James?
5. What first drew you into the life of St. James?

The Qualities We Seek in a Rector or Priest-in-Charge

St. James has become less “The American Church” and increasingly a community of people from various international backgrounds, cultures, and different denominations. Our search welcomes all qualified candidates, fluent in English, with transnational experience and understanding and who can acculturate quickly to Florence, Italy, and Europe. Through our own experiences we note that the adjustment period may overwhelm an individual who lacks the necessary skills and experience with respect to culture and language.



Fr. Andrew Cooley preaches at the Feast of All Saints, November 3, 2019.

The following qualities were cited as desirable in a new rector or priest in charge.

- Good with all ages
- Pastoral and people experience
- Spirit-centered, with an active prayer life
- Pastoral caregiver
- Inspirational preacher
- Leader both of the vestry and parish
- Bilingual in Italian, or able to learn
- A great sense of humour
- Teacher and teachable
- Charismatic, dynamic personality
- Culturally adaptable
- Attentive to detail and a good listener
- Able to spot talent in the congregation
- Outreach experience
- Oriented toward the development of new programs

- Open-minded
- Able to seek help when needed
- Interested in growth
- Not afraid of change
- Respect for the liturgy
- Awareness of more evangelical leanings within the parish
- Visionary

The church would benefit from a rector who lives fully in the city and region, and who looks for opportunities for the church; for instance, the 66 American study abroad programs that are active in Florence, international families living in Florence and Tuscany, the thousands of English-speaking residents, and so on. Years ago St. James was *viva* and vibrant - some parishioners used to complain that there were too many activities! That tone was often set by an energetic rector.

As in any parish, parishioner expectations are informed by personal preference, yet at St. James we must also be responsive to the many cultures worshipping under one roof. For example, we have spent a significant amount of time in past years planning gala dinners, festive meals, and the like, yet a clear comment from a longtime Nigerian parishioner was that “many people are more interested in the preaching and sermons of the preacher than the lunch and dinner of the church.”

An Italian parishioner who was confirmed in St. James in 2018 commented, “Allow me to use the archetype of the “wounded healer” to describe [the qualities in a rector] that I’m thinking of. A person whose awareness of his/her own vulnerability becomes a source of strength and good sense; a person who is able to open up to others with attention, empathy and flexibility; eagerly willing to explore their worlds respectfully, to be known by them, and to find the best way to be there for them.”

Again, St. James needs a pastor, a partner, and a leader who will come here first and foremost for the church, and less for the pleasure of being in Florence and Tuscany. The church as a community needs to be rebuilt. This task will not be easy, and will require an energetic, active rector who is not just a spiritual leader but also a person who can help promote and organize the church as a whole. The vestry needs to be involved and given much deeper responsibility in this process.

Parish Opportunities

There is an overall sense that St. James is a place of genuine opportunity. Much can be built here on firm foundations. As Haswell Beni, our senior warden, has made a point of repeating to all parishioners: *You don’t have to be here, but we want you here.* What can the parish do to attract new people?

1. Offer regular Sunday school. Our program ended, for various reasons, in 2019.
2. Offer regular childcare. Our service ended in 2019.

3. Emphasize our bilingual and international community composed of others learning and attending school in both Italian and English.
4. Make a proactive welcome to families and children.
5. Cultivate a caring and interactive community.
6. Offer adult Christian and Religious Education. Until recently we had adult forums on Sundays.
7. Support a Bible study group - perhaps with a general group and possible subgroups organized by age range.
8. Visit parishioners who have not been seen at church and who are missed, either due to illness, busy schedule, travel, etc. (Lay Eucharistic Visitors)
9. Train ushers - they are particularly important as they greet all comers at the door.
10. Emphasize and nurture thrift shop, food bank, Sunday school - they are pathways to Christian community.
11. Offer a prayer group during the week. Consider a praise service.
12. Offer and support Bible Study and Adult Religious Education.
13. Reinstitute Spring/Fall fundraising social events as have been held in the past.
14. Assess, appreciate, and support a transitioning Food Bank.
15. Reconsider how we might offer dinner, fellowship and/or other opportunities for American university students.
16. Schedule church events to coincide with sporting events on TV for non-sports fans.
17. Schedule and support TED Talk dinners.
18. Plan trips for parishioners and friends - e.g., Via Francigena, mini-pilgrimages, volunteer work, etc.
19. Institute and support a monthly evensong service to which we would invite students specifically, both to sing and to attend. Note that evensong services at English cathedrals are now drawing many young people, and present a more accessible model to the less churched, as they do not include a eucharist.
20. Opportunity to turn what was once called the American church into one that serves many nationalities - a truly International Church

Church History

[St. James Episcopal Church](#) was first formed around 1850 by expatriate Americans, and was officially recognized in 1867. Its corporate structure differs from parishes in the United States in that the church is owned by a Board of Directors in New York City through a non-profit corporation, the Board of Trustees of St. James American Protestant Episcopal Church, Florence, Italy. The purpose of this structuring was to preserve the title to the real property of St. James and its endowments. The well-researched *St. James Church: A History of the American Church in Florence* (2008), written by parishioner Horace Gibson and a former priest Rev. Clement Welsh, is recommended for further reading in our history.

Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe

St. James Episcopal Church in Florence, Italy, is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion and a member parish of the [Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe](#). It comes under the direct jurisdiction of our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. Our Convocation is led by an elected bishop, The Right Rev. Mark D.W. Edington, based at the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity in Paris, France.

The Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe is a collection of churches, mission congregations, and specialized ministries, spread geographically over six countries in continental Europe. The convocation includes nine established parishes along with fifteen missions and specialized ministries in Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and (most recently) the Republic of Georgia. Other Episcopal entities in Italy include a parish in Rome (St. Paul's within the Walls), a latent Italian-language mission in Milan, and a spiritual retreat center near Florence. Our bishop, who took office in April of 2019, often speaks of the Convocation as the "research and development arm of the Episcopal Church," because our congregations are learning how to be the church under conditions of radical secularization, deepening multiethnic and multilingual populations, and the inescapability of intentionally interfaith engagement—all qualities that will come to characterize the American home of the Episcopal church in the coming decades.



The St. James delegation at Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Paris, on the occasion of the consecration of our new bishop, the Right Rev. Mark D.W. Edington, April 2019. L to R: Mac Hruska, Fr. Mark Dunnam, Gail Cocke, Nevin Brown, Monica Sharp, Susan Bendlin, Greg Bendlin, Fr. Andrew Cooley, Margi Hammer.

In addition, the convocation serves as a key resource for St. James. It provides support and guidance, as well as opportunities to engage on a broader level with Episcopalians in Europe.

St. James hosted the Convocation's Convention in 2013 and various youth and child programs for members across the convocation. St. James vestry members have participated in offsite, overnight retreats with the Academy for Parish Leadership. Members of the parish have been active representatives with groups within the convocation, such as the [Council of Advice](#), the [Commission on the Ministry of Baptized](#), and the Presiding Bishop's [delegation](#) for the [UN Commission on the Status of Women](#).

Finally, the Convocation plays a key role in providing supply priests when our resident priest is called away from Florence for business reasons or time off.



Members of the St. James vestry on retreat in June 2019: Sylvia Behrman, Monica Sharp, Erica Kopczynski, Haswell Beni, Liz Chard, Vicky Magazzù. With Bishop Mark D. W. Edington, Bishop in Charge (back row, L.), and Fr. Andrew Cooley, interim rector (back row, R.).

Conclusion

St. James offers great potential for the church of the future, a diverse community of faithful Christians with a rich history and on the cusp of a great opportunity for growth and change as we search for a new priest. We seek a priest who can support us, love us, and grow with us into a new future that continues to celebrate our diversity and community. We seek a priest for whom teaching is as important as learning, whose wisdom is equal to faith, whose personal warmth informs an expanded perspective.

There is a significant missionary aspect to St. James with respect to language, people, and cultures. We host many worshippers from near and far, pilgrims as well as local residents. We are not a typical “downtown” parish. We need to deepen our commitment to the community and to the church, and we need to draw everyone in our parish to embrace a new vision for our life together.

In many ways, the process of drafting a parish profile, engaging with diverse parish constituencies, and preparing the parish for new leadership has been an instructive experience in dealing with real change. Openness and honesty have been our allies in this work, even when it has led to difficult conversations. Successful completion of our search for a priest will allow us to learn what went well, what might have been improved, and thus a clearer sense of the lessons learned. In this and everything we do we ask that God grant us the grace to proclaim with dignity that He not "give tasks equal to our power but give us a power to equal our tasks."

If, after reading and prayerfully considering this parish profile, you feel moved to present yourself as a candidate for the search, please submit the following materials in support of your application for candidacy:

- A copy of your current curriculum vitae
- A copy of your profile with the Office of Transitional Ministry
- A cover letter, in which you clearly address the following questions:
 - Describe specific instances of your work in revitalizing ministries in a parish setting.
 - Describe specific initiatives you've undertaken to connect parish ministries to the wider community served by the church.
 - Leadership in the context of St. James requires working successfully with a number of overlapping groups—particularly the Vestry, leaders in the American and other expatriate communities in Florence, the Board of St. James, and the Convocation, but also others. Describe in detail your experience of working with varied stakeholders who do not necessarily have shared, or even harmonious, goals.
 - How does your prayer life shape your understanding and exercise of leadership in the church?

We thank everyone who has taken the time to read our parish profile. Please pray for us in our search for a new priest, that we may joyfully welcome the priest whom God has already selected for us.

In Christ our Lord, Amen.



Front facade, St. James Episcopal Church.