

Application for 3-year Urban Resident
The Lowell Episcopal Partnership of Saint Anne's and Saint John's

Names and Addresses of the Congregations:

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1. Congregations' and clergy present demonstrated commitment to Urban Ministry:

Our outreach to the community has been through direct and indirect programs. We support the Greater Lowell Food bank through direct donations from parishioners and by providing a team of volunteers to pick up food at the Lowell Food Bank and to prepare it for distribution. We also support the Lowell Open Food Pantry. In the last 3 years, we have responded very generously to the needs caused by Katrina; supported 3 mission trips - to New Orleans, to Washington DC and to the Dominican Republic; provided space for Merrimack Valley Project; supported a potable water project in Africa; sponsored a Scout Troop and a Cub Scout Pack; trained 30 high school students in computers skills; stood up against Hate Crimes in our city by conducting a citywide candlelight vigil in front of St Anne's; provided space where Gay, Lesbians and Transgendered persons can feel safe and accepted; provided mentoring, tutoring and lunch to thousands of youth over the last 3 Summers in partnership with Community Team Work; responded to the clothing needs of the Lowell Transitional Center; host the Merrimack Valley Chapter of the Nigerian Association and have offered our facilities to support City of Lowell events: City of Lights, Winterfest, the ArtVentures and the annual Lowell Folk Festival.

In the area of youth ministry, some members of both congregations (including the rector) belong to a citywide anti-gang task force, actively support UTEC (United Teen Equality Center), financially and in-kind and have begun a partnership with the Youth Group at Elliot Presbyterian Church. Saint Anne's also has an excellent working relationship with Middlesex Community College which on a number of occasions has used the sanctuary for College-sponsored events. Saint Anne's also sponsors a group of young Cambodians/Latinos who meet twice a week to learn more about their music and dance and who perform locally. In fact, they were part of the entertainment at our 2008 Annual Parish Meeting on Shrove Tuesday.

In the area of evangelism, Saint Anne's has a number of volunteers who visit the surrounding housing projects and restored mills and provide information about the church's liturgical services and community programs. The fastest growing segment of the congregation is among the Latinos from Lowell and the surrounding areas who have found at Saint Anne's (and hopefully will at Saint John's) a place where they are welcomed and invited to fully participate in the life of the church. We provide all visitors with a "Welcome Package" that includes information about the Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Massachusetts and our congregations. We also give them a video that outlines the history of Saint Anne's, provides a tour of the church and details its present-day ministries. The two local television stations feature the same DVD on a regular basis. We have a great relationship with the Faith/Religion Editor of the city paper, The Lowell Sun and are often asked to contribute articles. The Rector serves as a volunteer chaplain to the Lowell Police Department.

The present vestry of Saint Anne's reflects the racial, ethnic, socio-economic and gender preference of the membership of the congregation. As the congregation of Saint John's experiences more diversity, it will also reflect it in the vestry membership.

The congregation of Saint John's has already begun to show signs that they want to reach out to the community at large. On Sunday, January 13, Father Ramon's first Sunday there as celebrant, there were 62 people in the congregation – double the number they usually have. That in and of itself showed a willingness on the part of Saint John's to move beyond their comfort zone. I believe that Saint John's leadership is ready to continue to explore ways of reaching to those in the immediate vicinity of the church, a predominantly Portuguese/Brazilian neighborhood. To Saint John's credit, they have for

the last 3 years sponsored an ESL Program which they hope to continue to support. They are also very actively involved in MVP, particularly in the areas of Fair Affordable Housing and Immigration Issues. For the past 9 years they have held their “No Room at the Inn” crèche display event at the beginning of Advent with proceeds going to various Lowell area charities including the Open Pantry and St. Paul’s Soup Kitchen.

Saint John’s is located next to the District Court and up the street from the Juvenile Court. Presently, there is a need for a center in Lowell that could address some of the issues that our Latino brothers and sisters are facing. I think Saint John’s is in an ideal location for such a Latino Assistance Center.

2. Five year plan for congregational mission. Goals, programs and relationships.

First of all, we hope that the pastoral relationship that Saint Anne’s and Saint John’s have begun as of January 1, 2008 will continue to develop, grow and flourish. As we move forward we plan to intentionally share resources instead of duplicating ministries. Saint John’s has an active ECW; Saint Anne’s does not. Saint Anne’s has a Director of Christian Formation; Saint John’s does not; Saint John’s has more comfortable meeting space than Saint Anne’s; Saint Anne’s has a strong and active Youth Group; Saint John’s does not. So, whenever possible we hope to combine our efforts and have more strength in numbers.

It is the intention of the rector to share the pastoral responsibility of both parishes in a reasonable and proportionate manner. Saint John’s has not had a permanent pastoral presence since 2005 and needs some immediate pastoral attention, particularly in the areas of visitation to the shut-ins and lapsed. As we move forward in this relationship, the rector hopes to train members at both parishes who can serve the needs of both congregations as Lay Eucharistic Visitors. We will be working with Bishop Cederholm on a joint Parish Leadership Retreat to discern our call as Spiritual Leaders in our communities.

3. Areas of strength? Growing edges?

Strengths: Diversity; variety; an open and inviting atmosphere; a nucleus of faithful, supportive longtime members who are willing to move in new directions; minimal resistance to change; willingness to take risks. Growing edges: Greater sense of commitment to community life; development of Spiritual Leadership; training and empowering of non-white membership for leadership roles and responsibilities; more intentional evangelism to the residents of the area, especially the seniors in the large complex across from St. John’s; greater outreach to the multi-cultural young population of the churches’ neighborhoods.

4. How Urban Resident can help:

In addition to sharing with the rector the liturgical responsibilities of both parishes, the Urban Resident’s responsibilities would lie in the areas of Congregational Development and Youth/Young Adult Ministry. Lowell has experienced a boom in the housing market with many now using it as a bedroom community for Boston. Additionally, both churches are near centers of youth concentration: Saint Anne’s is in front of the only public high school in the city; Saint John’s is close to the Juvenile Court, UTEC and the Rogers Middle School. The leadership of Middlesex Community College has on several occasions spoken about a pastoral presence at their main facility in Lowell, and with consultation with the Diocesan Leadership on Campus Ministry, perhaps some form of outreach to college students can be explored in Lowell. (In fact, Saint John’s rector serves as a member of the Protestant Campus Ministry Board of UMass-Lowell.)

Mission Statement for Saint Anne's/Saint John's Partnership
(From the Diocesan Convention Resolution on Holy Partnerships.)

We believe that God trusts us and we will regularly act in that trust by engaging in transparent conversations, listening to each other and to God through our committees, and parishes to address, in an open and thoughtful process, the issues that challenge us. Further we will journey together trusting Jesus is before us, around us and working through us in all things. We, though many, are one body in holy partnership.

St. Anne's is situated in the heart of Lowell--the fourth largest city in the Commonwealth and the second largest in the Diocese of Massachusetts. Lowell has been a city of immigrants through its history--from young women from the New England countryside working in the 19th century textile mills, then Irish, French Canadian, and Greeks, and today's arrivals from Latin America, Africa, southeast and southern Asia. St. Anne's welcomes new arrivals and native New Englanders alike. We welcome black, white, and brown; gay and straight. Our worship integrates our many traditions.

In a book written in 1885 about Saint Anne's, the author wrote: "The gathering here, in the first quarter of the present Century, was of large numbers of persons representing many nations; of all ages, but mostly young; of various religious beliefs, or none at all; with one purpose only, common to all – that of getting a living."

We feel that our mission and purpose have not changed. Demographics have but, nonetheless, we still are as inviting as our founders were in 1824.

In 1861, a group of St. Anne's parishioners got enough money to begin St. John's. While both churches are separated by no more than 1 ½ miles, they are in very different and unique neighborhoods and have offered vital ministry over their history. St. John's is in an area now predominantly populated by Portuguese and Brazilians. In fact, a Brazilian congregation rents space from the church. There is no doubt that St John's cannot continue to live in the kind of isolation that it has for the last several decades; most of the membership is keenly aware of that and is willing to explore options that will take the church in the direction of new ventures in congregational development and outreach. We believe that the partnership that is now in its trial stage would be further empowered by the addition of an Urban Resident who can work with Father Ramon to further move us in the direction of more intentional "Inviting, Forming, Sending and Serving."

MISSIONS AND GOALS

Inviting

Our inclusiveness at St. Anne's has its challenges since, 2000 years later, we're still trying to heed Paul's message that in Christ there is neither slave nor free, Greek or Jew. But we remain steadfast in our commitment to invite all creation to share in God's just kingdom. We invite by keeping St. Anne's visible in the community and sharing the wonderful resources God has given us: beautiful grounds and church, a parish hall and office space. We offer a summer lunch program for children and teens. We open our doors to 2,000 visitors during the July weekend of the annual Lowell Folk Festival. We publicize unique worship opportunities such as the recent Blue Grass Mass, which was very well attended. We widen our circle of outreach by inviting downtown businesses and residents to participate in activities such as a recent blanket drive for a local homeless shelter. We celebrate the Cub Scout pack and Boy Scout troop that we sponsor and invite their participation in events like the Folk Festival. We spent much of last summer bringing our Sunday School space to life with cleaning, painting, new furniture and

safety improvements. We sponsor an Integrity Circle to assure the gay and lesbian community that St. Anne's is a safe and supportive environment.

As individuals and as a congregation, we participate actively in the life of our city: the Open Pantry, Lowell Transitional Living Center, Merrimack Valley Project, Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership, Acre Family Day Care. We stand against hate and open our hearts and property to expressions against hate. In response to a gay hate crime in our city last year, we invited the city to a candlelight vigil that drew several hundred participants from all walks of life. St Anne's also served as host for the Prayer Vigil for Affordable Housing in the City of Lowell.

St. John's recently celebrated a "Jazz Eucharist" that was well publicized and attended. "No Room In The Inn" brings in approximately 500 people during Advent who have often never been inside St. John's. We use that opportunity to invite them to worship with us. By opening our doors to the "Four Square Church" we have found a way to tell the Brazilians in our neighborhood that they are welcome. Finally, during the "Lowell Clean-Up Days" St. John's has shown its hospitality and gratefulness by offering refreshment to those in the neighborhood involved in the work.

Forming

St Anne's has begun offering a Children's Formation curriculum that we hope will lead us to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. We have a very active Christian Formation Multi-Generational and Multi-Cultural Forum once a month (3rd Saturday). We have begun to explore ways to bring education and Christian Formation into a Sunday setting since we already have a captive audience and could capitalize on that. St Anne's new Minister of Music is also doing her part in this area by familiarizing the congregation with new music expressions and taking the opportunity to do some teaching not only around music but also around the abundance of theology that comes with good musical variety. She and the Music Minister at St. John's have begun to develop a working relationship by sharing new ideas and resources.

Both congregations are presently in the midst of a 6 Week Lenten Formation Program around the theme of Mission. The Program was the idea of Father Ramon and Deacon Gay Cox. It is rotating around the 5 Churches of Greater Lowell and Saint James, Groveland. Father Ramon also facilitates a weekly Bible Study for members of St Anne's and St John's and held at St. John's. In the present study (Acts) the participants are looking at the early Church from the perspective of Inviting, Forming, Sending and Serving with the intention of gleaning from the scriptures applications for our present settings. St Anne's is presently seeking 3 young adults who will oversee our computer training program. They will be paid by the Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board and Career Center and will use the computers that St Anne's received through a Congregational Development Grant.

At St. John's, several members have been very intentional in sharing information about affordable housing, the situation with Temp Workers at Gillette and Immigration Issues. Because of the relationship St. John's has had with UMass-Lowell, we have been invited to participate in a "Spirituality Forum" meant to inform the student body and faculty about what Episcopalians believe in and how they express it. The times of Sunday services and the website have also been posted throughout the University.

Sending

St Anne's parishioners participate in local and global activities. We support the Open Pantry, local shelters, and Katrina Relief. We gave financial, spiritual and materiel support to our sister parish (Saint James, Groveland) in preparation for its mission trip to the Dominican Republic. A number of us have participated in Mission Trips to New Orleans, El Salvador and Washington, D.C. We also support mission work in Haiti through Food for the Poor. A number of us have expressed an interest in a mission trip to Africa while others have voiced bewilderment and frustration with our concern for work outside the USA when there is so much work to be done right outside our own doors. We feel this dialogue is expressive, if nothing else, of a willingness to do much with what we have been given. Our parish youth group was well represented at the 2005 EYE and they are presently planning to participate in Faith in 3D, a joint Youth Venture of ECUSA with several other mainline denominations.

St. John's Sunday School has supported programs like the Heifer Project and bought gift cards which were sent to parishes in Gulf Coast designated for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Every year we support the Lowell General Hospital Cancer Walk and the AIDS Walk. We have also been active in supplying food and volunteers to serve at the St. Paul's Soup Kitchen. We have also sponsored AA and NA.

Serving

At St Anne's we start close to home by helping parishioners in need with food and shelter, recently initiating a program to provide fuel assistance. Then we enlarge our circle by action in our community and finally to the world (Hurricane Katrina work, support for Dominican Republic mission and a work partnership of youth to youth in DC). As a retired military chaplain, Father Ramon is often called upon to make presentations at annual events such as Veterans' Day and Memorial Day. He is also a frequent visitor at the Bedford Veterans Hospital where he is available for counseling. A number of parishioners from both congregations serve on boards including Merrimack Valley Project, Merrimack River Valley House, the Lowell Transitional Living Center, the Children's Home Board, The Friends of Merrimack River Valley House, and Saint Paul's Soup Kitchen.

Additionally, St. John's is active in the work of the Open Pantry, MVP, and Lowell General Hospital. A number of St. John's parishioners reach out regularly to the elderly and shut-ins taking them shopping, on errands or to doctor's appointments. St. John's has also been very active in the "Back-Central Neighborhood Association.

CONGREGATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

St Anne's is a pastoral church moving to a program church. We now have more paid staff: director of Christian Formation and assisting clergy. Our Vestry comprises 11 members, plus the clerk and the treasurer. We need to rebuild a system of committees and ministries that has not been in place for a while. Currently we have active property, finance and stewardship committees and are identifying other priorities ministries. While St. John's infrastructure might be slightly different, it is our intention to share resources whenever possible and thus minimize the duplication of structures that are not necessary in a partnership like the one we envision.

Both vestries, however, need to encourage the development of other lay leaders through committees and ministries so that these leaders can carry on the non-sacramental work of the Urban Resident after his/her departure.

BROAD-BASED EXPOSURE

Father Ramon and the Urban Resident will share equally in the liturgical and pastoral duties of both congregations including rotating at all Sunday Services (provided the Urban Resident is bilingual), preaching, weddings, funerals, baptisms, visitation of the sick and shut-ins and counseling. Since we anticipate that at the end of the 3 year period the Urban Resident will be called to a position as a rector of a parish, we want to partner him/her with our treasurers, finance committees, other relevant committees and support staff who can offer him/her a broad spectrum of experiences and knowledge.

CONGREGATIONAL SUPERVISION

Both congregations will team the Urban Resident with several parishioners who are willing to meet regularly, set priorities, and evaluate progress. The parishioners engaged in this work with the Urban Resident might change over time as needs change. By engaging a team of parishioners to work with the Urban Resident, we hope to ensure continuity of ministry beyond the Resident's three year commitment. We envision mutual learning and development.

ACCOUNTABILITY

At St. Anne's we have already begun to hold one another accountable using the 5-year-plan that we adopted in preparation for Bishop Shaw's visit in December 2006. We have and will continue to have regular reports and discussions at Vestry meetings about progress or lack of, so we can assess next steps. We will include the work of the Urban Resident in this system of planning and review.

We need to have quarterly discussions with the parish about this 5-year plan. Without this visibility and transparency, the 5-year-plan will simply sit on the shelf.

While St. John's recognizes the importance of a 5-year plan and in fact had one in place until Father White's retirement, the congregation will begin to develop a new one with the hope of working with St. Anne's on some mutually shared goals.

Both parishes are willing to commit to a yearly Mutual Ministry Review. Each parish will offer to the other a member who can facilitate the process, thereby assuring accountability while being somewhat familiar with the principles and practices involved.

Finally, we expect the Urban Resident to attend the monthly vestry meetings of both congregations and to present regular reports on his/her ministry and progress.

We lift this narrative and all the ministry past, present and future up to Almighty God and in an act of offering have placed this application on the altars of both congregations asking God to guide our steps as we continue this wonderful Holy Partnership, not only with one another but with Christ, in whose name we offer what we do. Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent
February 24, 2008
Lowell, Massachusetts