



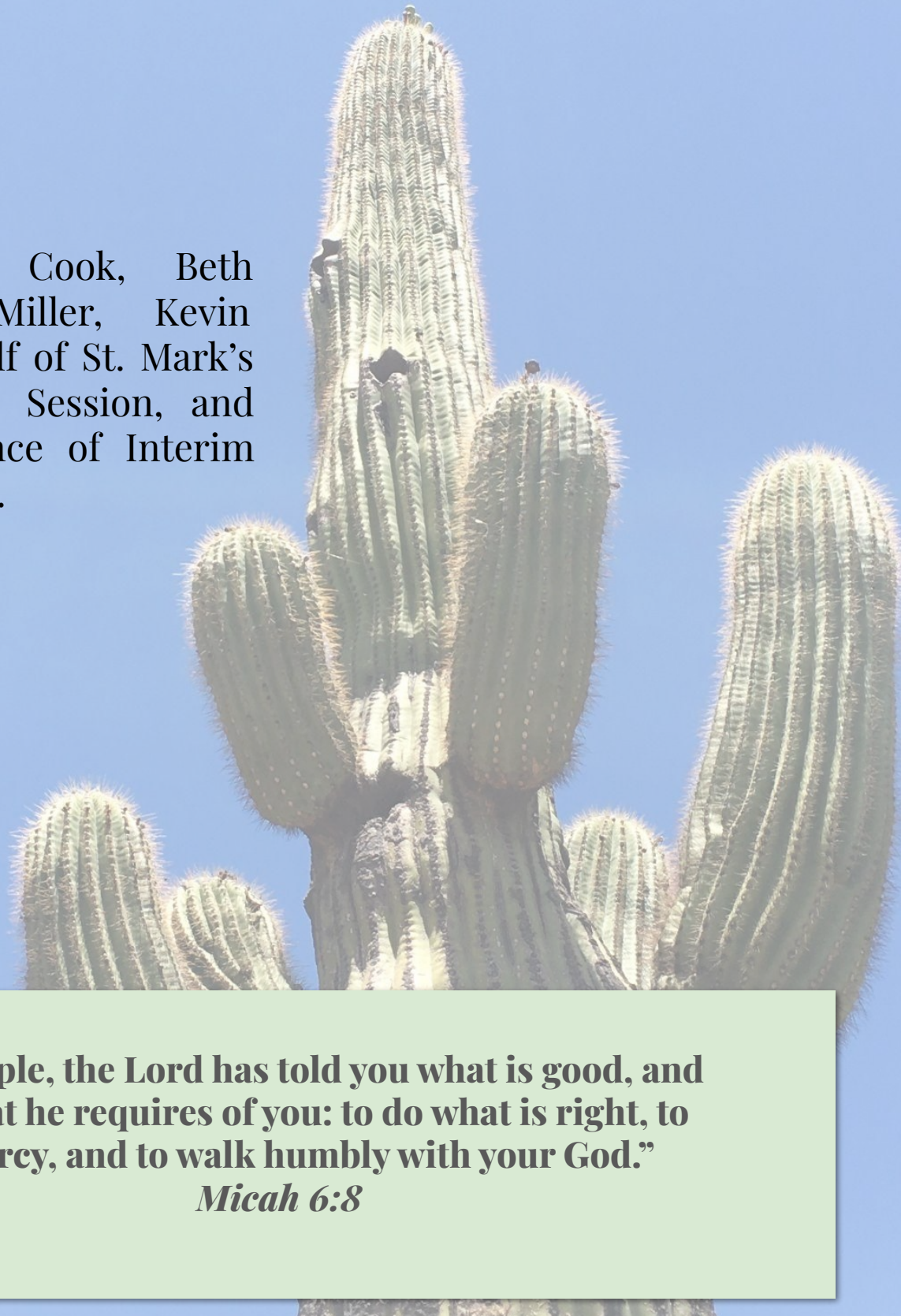
**St.
Mark's**
Presbyterian Church

2025 Mission Study

Mission Study

**St. Mark's Presbyterian Church
Tucson Arizona, January 2025**

Authors: Becky Cook, Beth Carroll, Tom Miller, Kevin Hainline, on behalf of St. Mark's congregation and Session, and under the guidance of Interim Pastor Tracy Daub.

A large Saguaro cactus with several arms, set against a clear blue sky. The cactus is the central focus of the image, with its arms reaching upwards and outwards. The background is a solid, bright blue sky.

“No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

Mission Statement

Jesus Christ calls us to be a joyful community that celebrates God's love, transforms lives, and is a force for justice in the world. St. Mark's Presbyterian Church is a place of welcome and hospitality, where all persons and gifts are honored.

Worship challenges and sustains us. We are led by powerful, prophetic preaching, and we are renewed and inspired by our music programs. Musicians reflect a diversity of genres, styles and culture and an effort is made to use gender inclusive language in the service. Our community also comes together in our art team, which uses imagination and creativity to bring stars to the sanctuary in Advent and doves in Pentecost. Our children and youth participate in the life of the church as liturgists, livestream technicians, and musical or visual artists.

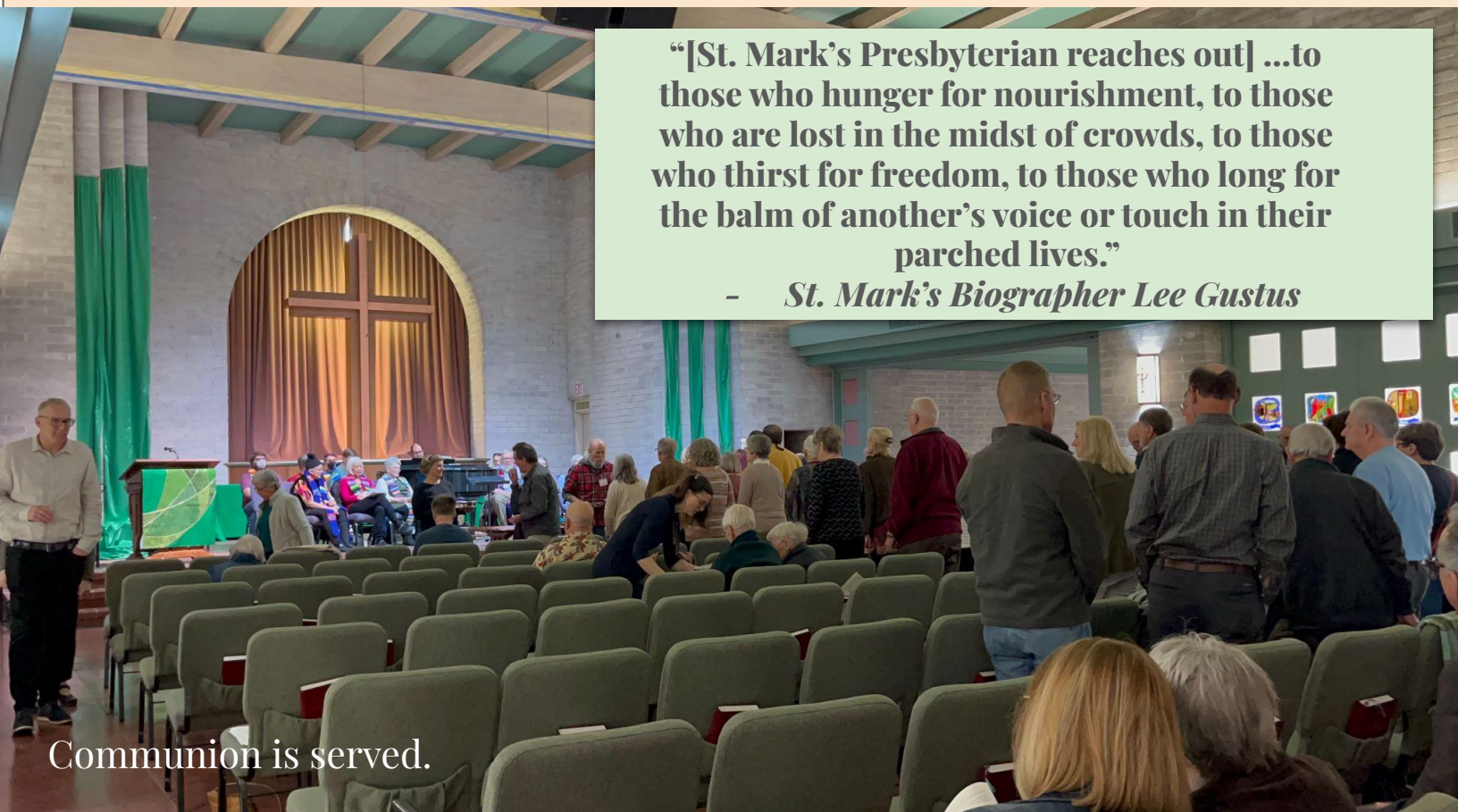


Members of the St. Mark's congregation meet outside the Sanctuary

Mission Statement (continued)

We encourage fellowship and connection beyond worship by hosting “Big Coffee” Sundays, and Second Sunday Suppers that bring neighborhood and congregation together. Midweek Manna, a weekly Bible study, sparks discussion, reflection and prayer. Faith formation and education programs enrich our lives and inform our witness to a hurting world.

Our commitment to social justice lives deep in our bones. Grounded in our long history of justice work, we seek to be agents of reconciliation and peace. We respond to God’s call to serve and grow with those who have been ignored and mistreated. We open our doors to asylum seekers and prioritize actions on racial justice. We walk in solidarity with public school educators and call for common-sense gun control. We stand with our LGBTQIA+ siblings in challenging discriminatory policies and laws.



“[St. Mark’s Presbyterian reaches out] ...to those who hunger for nourishment, to those who are lost in the midst of crowds, to those who thirst for freedom, to those who long for the balm of another’s voice or touch in their parched lives.”

- *St. Mark’s Biographer Lee Gustus*

Communion is served.

Who We Are

Our History

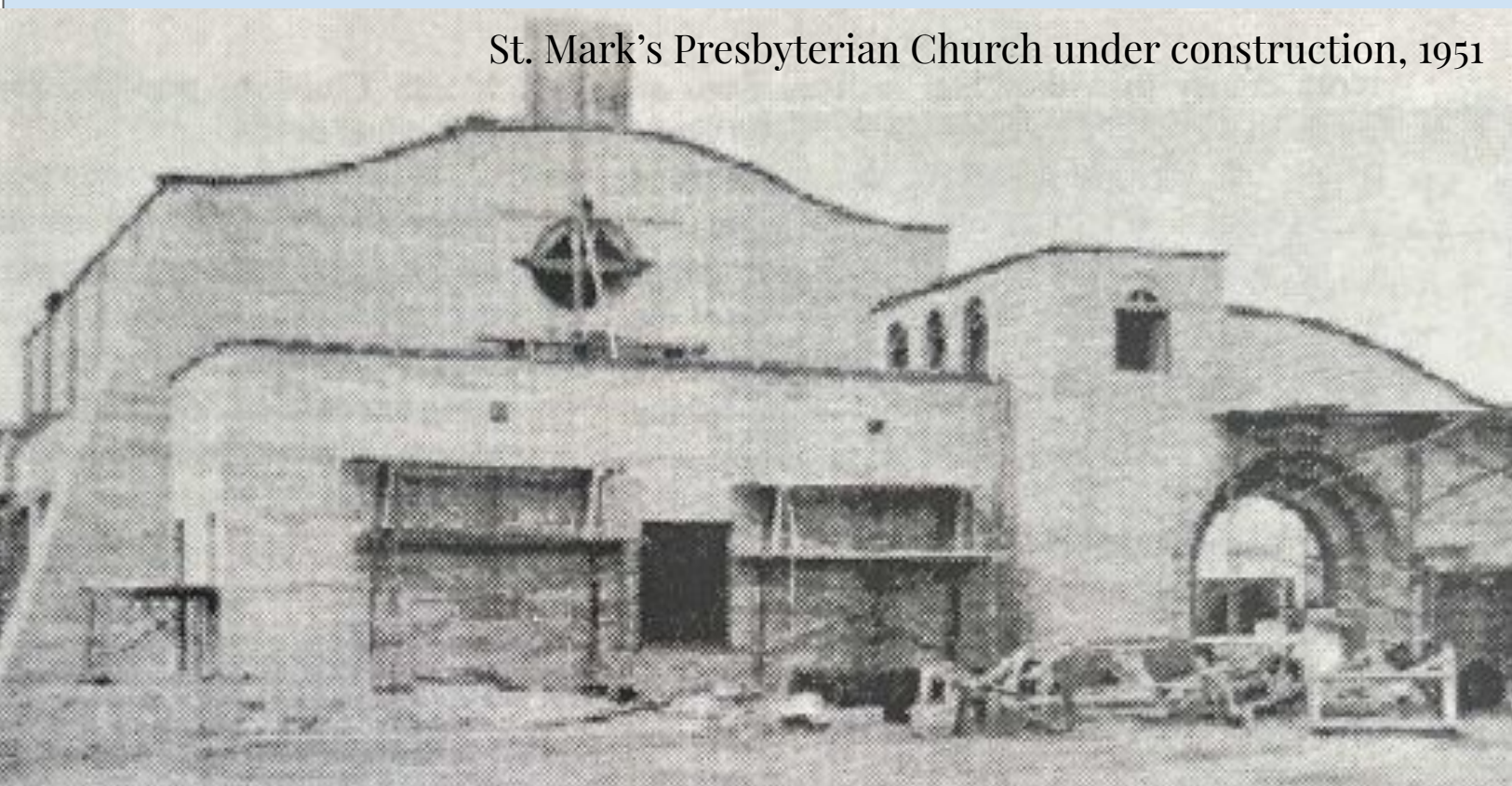
Founded in 1948 when Tucson had only 45,500 occupants, Mountain View Presbyterian, (the church that would eventually be renamed St. Mark's), began its history of bold action confronting intolerance and injustice. Under the leadership of our founding pastor, Rev. David Sholin, our congregation has looked to Isaiah 40 as a call to action on behalf of social justice.

In the early days, this meant curbing the rise of youth crime, working with Native Americans seeking education and employment opportunities, and pushing to desegregate housing, schools, and public facilities across Tucson.

**In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.**

Isaiah 40:3

St. Mark's Presbyterian Church under construction, 1951



Who We Are

The congregation of St. Marks has always been guided by its social justice commitments, even when those commitments carried real costs. While the church's early advocacy for civil rights became a model that later church leaders often cited, there was a worry that each "fiery civil rights sermon" drove donors away and resulted in further delays to needed church repairs. Regardless, social justice work formed the cornerstone of the church in its early decades. The church at that time had over a thousand members and three pastors.



Meals served on the patio.

Civil rights were a major issue in the 1960s, but even then St. Marks recognized it faced special obligations as a borderlands church and took an early and active role in assisting migrants. The Migrant Ministry mission worked through the 1950s and 1960s to assist immigrants by providing donations, education and training to the growing population. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the church took the lead in institutionalizing the US Sanctuary Movement in housing and protecting refugees, working closely with Southside Presbyterian, the first church to officially declare itself a sanctuary for Central American refugees in March 1982.

Who We Are




Later, in the 1990s and 2000s, as part of efforts to end the deaths of migrants crossing the southern border, St Mark's collaborated with other community and faith groups in Tucson in 2004 to start "No More Deaths" (No Mas Muertes). For many years, No More Deaths met at St. Mark's to plan trips to provide supplies and water, locate missing persons, and recover personal effects. The church expanded youth education, working with local Latinx and Native American communities, and adopted a "Commitment to Inclusiveness" to welcome all regardless of "age, gender, race, country of origin, ethnic heritage, sexual orientation, variety of abilities, education, marital status, economic, cultural or religious background, or any other human condition." To that end, St. Mark's also joined the More Light Presbyterian network, which accepts, centers and supports LGBTQIA+ members of faith.

Who We Are

Music has always been core to our worship services and a window through which we enter into the mystery of the Divine. The variety of musical forms at services reflects the diversity of our world and the varied gifts and talents in our community. The church has been home to multiple youth and adult choirs, along with a handbell ensemble. We've hosted artists from around the world as guest performers and singers to enhance worship and demonstrate the many ways that we can worship God through music, sharing their talents, styles and perspectives to help us broaden our appreciation for the beauty and wonder of God's creation.

Easter choir and brass ensemble



“We try to capture the complex love of God through words, but words are incomplete -- song helps us open ourselves to experiencing love and grace in a way nothing else can.”

- *Choir Member Kevin Hainline*

Who We Are

Our Neighborhood

Today, our congregation has 162 members and 64 friends. Only 15% are under 40, 12% are between 40 and 56, and 72% are over 56. Weekly church attendance varies depending on the season, but we often have 100 congregants at a service, though attendance declines during the summer when the temperature climbs and some members leave town for cooler climates.



The Miramonte neighborhood around St. Mark's hosts a diverse community. The church, along with the Benedictine Monastery, were the first two large developed lots in the neighborhood in the late 1940s. At one-half square mile and almost 4,000 people, the Miramonte neighborhood is predominantly white (57%) and hispanic (26%), with a proportion of black (9%), asian and pacific islander (4%), and indigenous (3%) residents. This data cannot reflect the number of unsheltered people in the neighborhood - there are estimates of around 2100 unhoused in Pima County. In the neighborhood, the over-65 population (9.9%) is lower than Tucson as a whole (11%). Miramonte is largely residential, and features the Third Street Bike Boulevard, which crosses just south of the church lot. In addition, the neighborhood features a significant number of transitional housing units within a few blocks of the church campus.

Who We Are



“We love St Marks...we feel that our church community here cares about us as a family [and the] joyful chaos of [our] church life that is welcomed and understood.”
-Nicole Person-Rennell

Preparations for More Light Sunday

We are excited about our shared future and the ways our congregation will continue its contributions to both our local community and to southern Arizona. As Tucson changed over the past 75 years, so did the congregation of St Mark's, but throughout we remain steadfast in our mission to do God's work in the world.

Our Activities

St. Mark's Presbyterian Church has always been an active community. We worship, we discuss, and we take action. Central to the lives of our congregation and members are our weekly services on Sunday mornings which include choir anthems, monthly handbell performances, stirring sermons, and an open call for prayers, concerns, and joys from our congregation. Many members of our church community have found that communion is a powerful touchstone for them in their life of faith. Sensitive to the importance of this sacrament in many people's lives, we have recently returned to a practice of weekly communion, emphasizing the inclusiveness of Jesus's invitation to the table. Recognizing that everyone may not be able to attend in person, services are live-streamed and recorded, and we have viewers from around the world.

Beyond weekly services, there are regular weekly rehearsals for the choir and handbells and monthly meetings of the individual ministry teams to help further the work of the church. Midweek Manna, a Bible study and prayer group led by the pastor that gathers on Wednesdays, is a highlight for its regular attendees.



Laying on of hands.

Our Activities

Beyond our Third Street campus, St. Mark's owns a cabin on Mt. Lemmon north of Tucson which is rented to members and other faith groups for retreats. We strengthen our community with monthly Big Coffees that include informal after-service brunches, annual celebrations of our LGBTQIA+ members, and frequent post-worship adult education programs.



Maundy Thursday Supper

“When we needed a place to move our meal distribution (during COVID) to a more central location, we called St. Mark’s. Thankfully, your clergy and leadership said, ‘Yes’, as St. Mark’s always does.”

-Scott Blades (TĪHAN)

St. Mark's faith is also expressed in its commitment to the broader Tucson community. We work to address the needs of those facing food insecurity through our Food Pantry, which offers non-perishable food items and is maintained and staffed by church volunteers four days a week. Our Second Sunday Supper is a neighborhood potluck where church members and neighborhood residents sit around tables together to enjoy good food and conversation.

Our Activities

Beyond the activities of the church itself and its partners, we enact our commitment as followers of Jesus' message through our engagements with border issues, LGBTQIA+ concerns, and food insecurity, including those living in our immediate neighborhood and those who are currently unhoused.

Continuing our history of involvement in border and immigration issues, we have supported the work of multiple non-profits which provide shelter, food and logistical assistance to legally processed migrants seeking asylum in the US. In the past, we have offered rooms for clothing donations to be dropped off, sorted and stored prior to delivery to community shelters. In the years since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have strengthened our partnerships with immigrant network Iskashitaa to better support their efforts to provide clothing for immigrant and refugee communities.



A sample of donations.

Our Activities

In addition, St. Mark's Presbyterian supports many other organizations:

No More Deaths and the **Tucson Samaritans** are both dedicated to reducing death and suffering of migrants crossing the desert by providing water, food and medical aid. St. Mark's is a clothing donation site for No More Deaths.

Keep Tucson Together and **Pima County Justice for All** are both focused on helping local residents navigate immigration laws and providing legal representation.

Frontera de Cristo and **Cafe Justo** (Just Coffee), our denominational partners, are border ministries in Douglas, AZ and Agua Prieta, MX. Each Sunday we sell coffee from their grower cooperative in Salvador Urbina, Chiapas Mexico in 1 lb. bags (beans, ground, regular, and decaf). Cafe Justo is a pure, organic coffee grown, harvested, roasted, and marketed in the spirit of justice.

Eloy Visitation and Accompaniment (EVA –formerly Casa Mariposa) is an organization that supports people in immigration detention. EVA offers opportunities for volunteers to visit, write letters, and find other ways to support those in detention and at their release into the community. We donate office space for their use.

The Iskashitaa Refugee Network, which has an office and a large garden on St. Mark's campus, is a group dedicated to assisting United Nations refugees and asylum seekers who have been resettled in Tucson. They work to assist the refugees, who represent over 35 ethnic groups, with self-sufficiency and education, and the group locates, harvests, and re-distributes local Tucson produce.

Our Activities

Borderland Young Adult Volunteers (YAVs) - This PC(USA) program involves young adults ages 18-30 who make a year long commitment to community service and faith exploration.

Casa Maria is a Catholic Working community that seeks to aid the impoverished and unhoused by providing affordable housing. They primarily work with those in South Tucson, where 35% of people(according to the 2020 census) live below the poverty line.

The Tucson Interfaith HIV/AIDS Network (TIHAN) provides compassionate and non-judgmental service to those living with HIV/AIDS. The Poz Café, which met for months during the pandemic at St. Mark's, offers those living with HIV an opportunity to take a break with positive people and enjoy a healthy meal.

Palestine Lunch Discussion



“God is love, Jesus is love, and love is political”

**-St. Mark's Member
(anonymous)**

Our Activities

Members of Iskashitaa



St. Mark's pursues collective action on behalf of, prayer for, and solidarity with the marginalized, vulnerable and suffering peoples of the world. It is not unusual for the congregation to gather after worship to pack travel snack bags for migrants passing through our community or host an event featuring groups or individuals working on the U.S.-Mexico border or for peace in the Middle East.

Importantly, St. Mark's outreach to the Tucson community is rooted in acceptance and love. While many of our members have been a part of the church throughout their lives, we are happy to find that our new members have come from diverse faith backgrounds. We work to be an authentic voice of healing and acceptance to Christians who may have been harmed by other traditions or who have limited or negative experiences with Christianity. St. Mark's seeks to be a safe place of generous acceptance for people who may not have a place like that in their lives. At St. Mark's, we aim to put into practice Christ's teaching of radical love for all.

Our Future

Good Futures

The decline of St. Mark's membership over the years has left the congregation with a large campus with many buildings to manage. St. Mark's has approached this challenge from the perspective that our underutilized property is a blessing and an opportunity. To explore how the church might put parts of our campus toward a "social good" to meet a community need while also reflecting our Christian commitment to care for our neighbor, the Session formed a team of members called "The Good Futures Team."

The Good Futures Team, following the *RootedGood* process recommended by the PC(USA), spent the better part of 2024 reflecting on our congregation's vision for the future and reaching out to community non-profit organizations to explore possible partnerships. The focus of our explorations has centered on one church building in particular (Hudler Hall) and its potential in serving as transitional housing for a portion of Tucson's sizeable unhoused population.



Our Future

Good Friday in the Chapel



The partnership St. Mark's envisions for this project would involve more than simply offering use of our property to a community organization. Rather, St. Mark's hopes that such a partnership would involve the congregation in active ways in offering support for the future residents.

Even as this potential collaboration unfolds, The Good Futures Team imagines this endeavor as only Phase 1 of what could be additional projects for transforming the blessings of our property into benefit for others.



Second Sunday Supper

Our Future

Small Groups

There is strong interest among St. Mark's members in the formation of small groups within the congregation. Years ago, similar small groups met in members' homes to discuss topics of faith or to have conversation around a book. These gatherings were not only important in faith formation but also in fostering strong relational ties among members.

Our current Midweek Manna Bible conversation is an example of an existing small group within the church which is flourishing and attracts a loyal following of members. The Midweek Manna gathering serves as a model for what we hope to achieve with the formation of other small groups within the congregation.



“I love to study scripture — especially with others who love to study scripture.”

**- *Midweek Manna Participant*
*Nancy Martignetti***

Our Future

St. Mark's has had a rich history of service and faith-based outreach, and with our current membership, it is important for us to make sure that we focus our time and talents where they are most appropriate. What are the missions, organizations, and projects that we should focus on in the coming years? Over a decade ago, former pastor Gusti Newquist wrote that **"St. Mark's will need to discern what it means to be a church "on the margins" rather than a church at the center, advocating for the margin."** We, like many churches in America in the 2020s, are grappling with the complexity of our present crises, and what our role is to aid, spread Christ's message of peace, and support our membership.



Our Future



The Narthex Rose Window

Our congregational discernment gatherings revealed a wellspring of enthusiasm and optimism for the future of St. Mark's. We are excited to begin writing the next chapter in our story, one that testifies to the strength of the ties that bind us, the depth of our faith, and the courage of our witness for justice and peace. We may not know with certainty exactly where we are headed, but the movement of the Spirit in our community is palpable, and we trust in its inspiration and where it will lead us.



And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25