



Church of St Mary Magdalene

PARISH PROFILE



November 2025



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ST MARY MAGDALENE'S – A COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION

The Church of St Mary Magdalene holds a special place in the Anglican Church — not just in Canada, but throughout the Anglican Communion. Its commitment to liturgical and musical excellence has given SMM a well-deserved reputation. We are a community that values both our sense of tradition and our liturgical and musical innovation and freshness. We celebrate and embrace our relationship with God and his son Jesus Christ, and we do so joyously in our music, in our worship, and in our Christian fellowship.

SMM is a unique place. Deeply imbued in the musical traditions of Healey Willan, our Organist and Choirmaster for 47 years, and proud of the Anglo-Catholic foundations laid by Father Hiscocks in the 1920s, St Mary Magdalene's is a church which also quickly embraced the liturgical reforms of the 1960s and helped to pave the way for the development of the Book of Alternative Services, while still making use of the Book of Common Prayer. SMM was one of the first parishes in the Diocese of Toronto to reorder its sanctuary in the 1960s and to welcome children and infants baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity to receive communion.

Since 2020, SMM has faced numerous challenges. The combination of Covid and the resignation of Fr. David Harrison in 2020 created significant issues for the parish's membership and finances. While the parish has come a long way towards rebuilding since then, more work needs to be done to bring people to the parish and ensure our financial stability. We owe much of the progress we have made to the dedicated efforts of Fr. Eric Beresford, who came to SMM as priest-in-charge in the Spring of 2022. His sudden death at the end of 2024 came as a shock to the parish and to many parishioners. We are seeking an Incumbent who will continue the task that Fr. Eric began, working to restore SMM as a vibrant centre of Anglo-Catholic spirituality in our diverse urban Toronto community.

This parish profile is an update from a profile originally produced in 2021 as part of the Incumbent Search that led to the appointment of Fr. Eric.

MUSICAL LIFE

SMM and music are synonymous. Even before the arrival of Healey Willan in 1921, SMM had gained a strong musical reputation. It is with Willan's arrival that the musical



reputation of SMM began to build and then soar. As Organist and Director of Music, he worked collaboratively with Father Hiscocks in the development of the Anglo-Catholic tradition at SMM, modelling the musical side of the Solemn Mass on Westminster Cathedral, London. Willan replaced the traditional men and boys choir with the Ritual Choir – a male voice choir singing the propers and, until the formation of the Gallery Choir, the ordinary of the mass to Gregorian Chant.

With the introduction of the Gallery Choir in the mid-1920s, Willan was able to give musical voice to his growing body of compositions for the liturgy – chiefly his masses and motets. There can be little doubt that Willan and the Gallery Choir established a level of excellence in liturgical music in this small working-class parish that was unparalleled in Canada at the time. This tradition of singing Willan's music, as well as renaissance polyphony became the hallmark of SMM for decades, continuing through successive Directors of Music. The Gallery Choir's repertoire continues to evolve and expand. All members of the Gallery Choir are unpaid volunteers and always have been, which has always been a point of pride for our musicians. While the Gallery Choir saw significant attrition during Covid, efforts are actively underway to attract new members.



The goal of the music at the 9:30 service is to provide accompaniment for the mass within a contemporary idiom. The SMM Singers, a group of 9:30 parishioners that led the music of the 9:30 service for many years, ceased to exist as a separate entity after



Covid. However, the 9:30 service continues to enjoy a strong congregational music tradition.

The Healey Willan Memorial Organ figures prominently in the musical life of SMM. The console was installed in the sanctuary in 1906 and was moved into the Gallery in 1931. Last rebuilt between 1971 and 1980, the console was rebuilt in 2017 with new keyboards, and a new memory level system was added. The electrical relay, which had become sluggish and unreliable with age, was replaced with a new solid-state system, refining the playing capabilities of the instrument immensely. This work was the first in a multi-stage schedule of restoration; the remaining stages still require completion.

LITURGICAL LIFE

The various liturgies at SMM are central to the life of our parish. Almost three quarters of parishioners continue at SMM because of our liturgies. Community worship is the cornerstone of the SMM experience.

Three Masses are celebrated each Sunday: at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00. The parish uses the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), and Feast days are celebrated on the day with the exception of the Solemnities of Dedication, Patronal Festival and Corpus Christi which are transferred to Sunday. The Book of Alternative Services (BAS) is used in the contemporary language Service, while the liturgy of the traditional service is a combination of prayers and rites from different sources. A sermon is preached at each Sunday Mass.



The 9:30 Sung Mass is celebrated according to the BAS contemporary language rite.



At the 11:00 Solemn Mass, a number of additions from the catholic tradition, such as the Asperges (Vidi aquam during Eastertide) and festal processions are part of this liturgy.

In the Advent-Christmas cycle, Christmas Eve is celebrated with an all ages Mass at 4.30, and a Solemn Midnight Mass. Christmas Day is celebrated with a contemporary Mass. Epiphany is celebrated on January 6. Two Said Masses and a Solemn Mass mark the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday. In Holy Week, there are solemn liturgies principally from the BAS on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The office of Tenebrae is sung on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evening according to an adaptation from the 1662 BCP and pre-Vatican II offices. Ascension has Solemn Mass on Thursday. Corpus Christi includes an outdoor procession of the Blessed Sacrament.



Mass is celebrated daily at varying times. The order of the Sunday 8:00 Mass is used. On Thursdays, two Masses are celebrated – one in English and one in Italian. The daily Masses are often linked with other activities such as meditation, bible study and breakfast. Solemn Mass is celebrated on approximately eight principal weekday feasts such as All Souls and Candlemas. The Mass on Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary includes an outdoor procession as part of the May Festival of Our Lady.

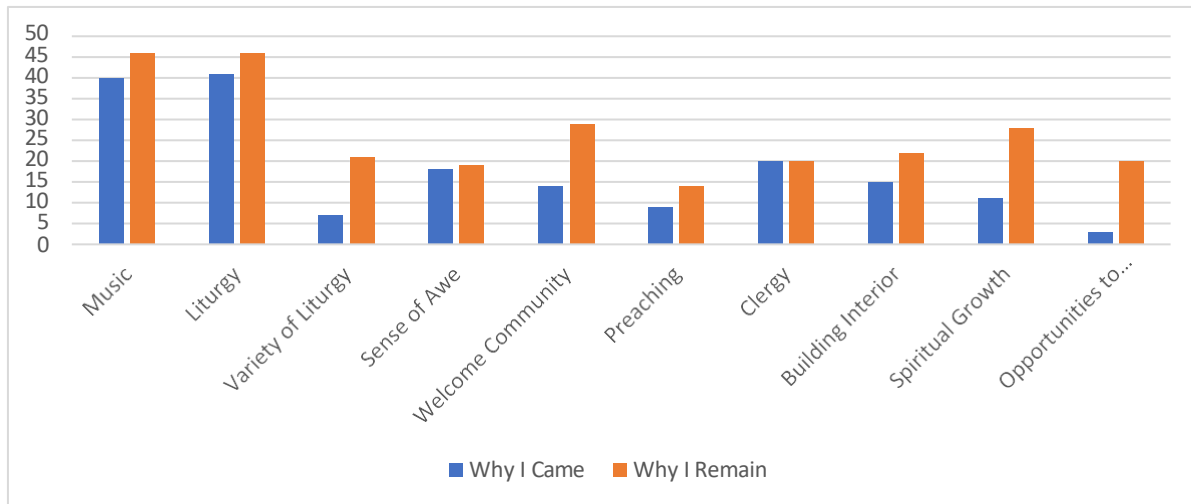
All who are baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity are welcome to receive communion, including children and infants.

It is worth noting that the forms of all the liturgies at St Mary Magdalene's, including the traditional Masses, have not been static over the past 40 years but have been evolving creatively within the Anglo-Catholic tradition. Nor is there a simple BCP vs. BAS ethos. Both liturgical styles have deepened a catholic witness which goes beyond those two books and has influenced models of liturgy for the wider church. The new incumbent is invited to join and lead this important movement in parish worship. One liturgy: many expressions.



WHY PEOPLE CAME, AND WHY THEY REMAIN

In a survey administered in 2021, parishioners were asked the reasons they originally came to SMM and what it is that keeps them here. The results were revealing, as the graph below illustrates. By far, the greatest number of people (65%) first arrive at SMM because of the music & liturgy, but there are many reasons why people stay. Overall, we see that in all categories the longer-term satisfaction with the factors that attracted people to the parish in the first place, exceeds their initial expectations. On average, there is a 49% experiential improvement in all categories examined. Four areas saw the most significant growth – variety of liturgy, a welcoming community, spiritual growth, and opportunities to contribute. Music and liturgy are the bedrock of what attracts people to SMM and what keeps them here.



OUR PERSONNEL

Currently, SMM has an interim Priest-in-Charge supported by a part-time Parish Administrator, a part-time Sexton, and a part-time Director of Music.

OUR FINANCIAL LIFE

At the time of our last hiring process in 2021, SMM was in a dire financial situation owing to the combined effect of Covid and the departure of Fr. Harrison. Our financial situation has improved since then, but we continue to run significant deficits. This will continue to be one of the challenges faced by the parish in the near term.

Deficits have been funded by borrowing from the Memorial Fund, which has been fortunate to receive several large bequests in the last 15 years. However, funding large deficits from the Memorial Fund is not sustainable in the long run.

OUR PHYSICAL RESOURCES

The Parish

St Mary Magdalene's is a parish in the Diocese of Toronto in the Anglican Church of Canada. The official boundaries of the parish are:



West: Ossington Avenue

East: Bathurst Street

South: College Street

North: Bloor Street

Toronto and The Neighbourhood

Toronto is Canada's largest city and one of the world's most multicultural cities. It has been transformed over the past 50 years and now a majority of residents are from our vibrant immigrant communities. Toronto is a city that is proud of its distinct and diverse neighbourhoods. SMM is located in the heart of one of these fascinating and lively communities located in the downtown area. It is a charming area replete with wonderful Victorian and Edwardian homes. The Church is within walking distance of Bloor Street and Little Korea, as well as College Street and Little Italy. Ours has always been a neighbourhood in transition. For years it was an immigrant settlement area, but increasingly urban professionals have been making the area their home. There have also been significant condominium developments in and near the parish boundaries. There are a host of local services and amenities: as of 2021 no fewer than three secondary schools and four elementary schools (two of which offer French immersion); public libraries; public transit including street cars, buses, and the subway; and innumerable shops and restaurants. Major post-secondary institutions are close at hand in downtown Toronto including University of Toronto, George Brown College, and Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), with York University readily accessible by public transit to the north.



The Church



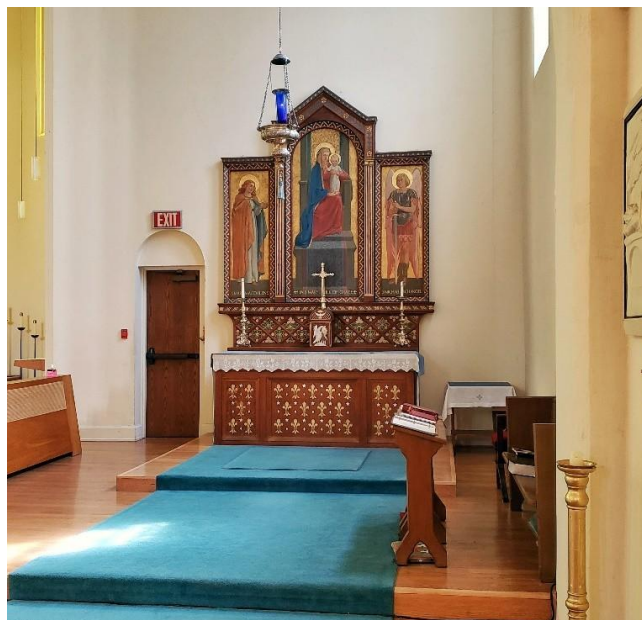
Construction of SMM started in 1888 and took 20 years to complete. The Church is built in a Romanesque style, the exterior being reminiscent of a brick Victorian “factory”. In the 1920s three huge windows in the gallery over the west entrance and five large windows in the sanctuary were boarded up, dramatically impacting the exterior aesthetic of the building. In 2008, a \$585,000 renovation was completed– funded entirely through parish resources. That project included adding new exterior doors with glass panels and interior plate glass doors; removing the wood from four windows in the sanctuary and the three windows in the gallery and replacing it with translucent glass; installing a new oak floor throughout the nave and sanctuary; procuring a new sound system; and a complete repainting of the interior.



From the exterior, while the building is unprepossessing, its scale and mass fit comfortably amid the Victorian row houses that surround it. Indeed, until the recent additions of the glass paneled doors and exterior lawn sign, a passerby might be forgiven for not noticing a church situated at the corner of Ulster and Manning. However, upon entering the nave, you are immediately struck by the expansive space that unfolds before you. It is this well proportioned volume that gives SMM its enviable acoustic properties.



The nave and adjacent side chapels seat 400. It is a space well suited to SMM's liturgy and is used regularly for concerts and recitals.





A basement renovation in the 1990s provided two choir rooms, two rooms for the children's program, reception/gathering area (Hiscocks Hall and the Long Room), two sets of washrooms, a spacious and functional kitchen, and the Director of Music's office. The main floor includes: the administrative, Warden's and Rector's offices. As well, there is a lounge, sacristy, vestry, elevator, and an accessible washroom.

The Rectory

Built in the 1950s, the Rectory is a two story brick house next to the Church, with a yard which is shared with the church for occasional garden parties. It is a simple building, well laid out, and includes:

First floor:

Living – dining room

Study

Kitchen with 3 appliances

2 Piece bath

Second floor:

4 Bedrooms

3 Piece bath

Other:

Finished basement

Central Air Conditioning

Front porch requiring minor remediation

Covered parking pad

Laundry with washer and dryer



SMM PARISH LIFE

While a small community, SMM is a very active community. Its activity groups are the life of the parish, the groups that keep the parish active and engaged in a wide range of activities that support the liturgies, the music, spiritual growth, the children, the homeless, refugees, and the elderly.



Almost all these groups are feeling the pressure of reduced membership. While COVID has had a real impact, these challenges have been developing for several years: fewer people doing the same work, if not more.

Our small activity groups include:

Gallery Choir	Wed. Discussion Group	Community Dinners
Ritual Choir	Parish Life	Hospitality
Children / Youth Formation	Advisory Board	Outreach & Social Justice
Servers Guild	Adult Christian Formation	Altar Guild



SMM FOCUS GROUPS – OUR STRENGTHS, OUR WEAKNESSES...

Facilitated focus groups were held amongst SMM parishioners in 2021, as part of the last incumbent selection process. The focus of each group discussion was a SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats) analysis. The following reproduces and updates some observations that still seem relevant four years later.

Strengths

The first strength that was immediately noted in each group was SMM's strong tradition of music. Healey Willan's compositions and the rich choral tradition he established remain strong identifiers for the parish. This high standard is achieved by unpaid amateur musicians. Singing and music, however, are not reserved for the choirs, but the parish as a whole is musical and congregational singing brings unity. Music has helped to earn SMM an international reputation for excellence.

Linked closely with the musical tradition is SMM's strong Anglo-Catholic foundation for its liturgy – liturgy which takes different forms, ranging from the simplicity of the 8am to the family-orientation of the 9.30 to the solemnity of the 11.00am service. Sunday services are augmented by monthly feast days and great emphasis is placed on the importance of Holy Week at SMM and the wide variety of liturgical offerings throughout that week, especially Tenebrae. It is through our liturgies that community is formed and built, how people connect in the deeply shared act of worship.

Our parishioners and volunteers are dedicated, have many talents and skills, are thoughtful and knowledgeable, and come from diverse walks of life. Indeed, the congregational skill set is considerably greater than most parishes. There are many opportunities for parishioners to become engaged. As of 2025, the parish continues to enjoy and rely on a very active and engaged body of volunteers in all aspects of its ministry.

The building itself, while simple on the exterior, establishes a deep sense of a sacred space and is a wonderful place to worship. Its glorious acoustic is perfect for renaissance polyphony, chant, and the works of Willan, and is now regularly being used for concerts. The basement facilities allow a wide range of activities. The building also helps connect the parish with the community by making space available for local activities. Improvements to the gardens, including the addition of a public bench and bike racks have helped connect to



the neighbourhood. Since 2021, our physical resources have been used more effectively to help generate revenue (rentals, recordings, concerts) and to help connect to the wider community.

In the tradition of Anglo-Catholic social justice, SMM has a strong history of social action and outreach. Our longstanding commitment to the Community Dinner draws many clients and is supported by an impressive group of volunteers.



The 9:30 service has attracted many families to the parish. We have an active children and youth program which has continued to grow since Covid. Recently, it has expanded to include a youth group focused on the 11-to-16 (Grades 6-10) age group.



Weaknesses

While our volunteers are seen as a tremendous strength, there is too much reliance on too few people, which may be historical. There has been a long-term decline in attendance particularly at the 11:00 Mass. This drop in attendance impacts our finances and reputation and puts increasing pressure on fewer volunteers.

Parish finances remain a serious concern. Young families, seen as a natural growth area, have limited financial discretions to support the finances of the parish.

The building is aging and needs attention, although significant issues have been addressed in the last four years. Elements of the original design and construction may be contributing to these problems. The slate roof is reaching the end of its expected 100-year lifespan.

Opportunities

Engaging with the wider community is key, and has been a priority for the Stewardship Working Group (2024-2025). Since parishioners have a deep sense of spirituality, but are not particularly evangelical, the use of programs to attract newcomers could deepen the connections with the neighbourhood. The parish maintains an active video livestream which is used both for regular services and other events.

Threats / Challenges

Observations from the 2021 process focused heavily on issues relevant at the time, including Covid and the departure of the former incumbent. Updating to 2025, the following challenges seem important to mention:

The parish's financial situation remains challenging. This creates a need for continued stewardship efforts within the parish and engagement with the wider community. As noted, this engagement has been a priority for the Stewardship Working Group.

We have been fortunate in the last few years to have additional clergy supported by grants from the Diocese, including a grant supporting regional ministry. These grants will likely not continue past the end of 2025, with consequences for our clergy staffing. This may require setting priorities and managing expectations.

The 11:00 Mass is rightly treasured by many at SMM but attendance remains an issue. It is important to build our 11:00 attendance while continuing to preserve the aspects of this Mass that so many parishioners value.



INCUMBENT'S PROFILE (reproduced unchanged from 2021)

Our new Incumbent should be a person...

Who loves and is nurtured by the catholic liturgy of the Anglican church,
knows its history and faithfully conducts it with care and preparation,
embraces a creative vision of the catholic tradition that has many expressions,
looks to intentional, prayerful liturgy as our principal means of evangelism and outreach.

Who rejoices in the musical spirit of our parish,
encourages and supports the musical volunteers in their work,
sees strength in a diversity of musical expression,
has an expansive vision of music in the parish,
sings the liturgy confidently and wants to join with us in song.

Who is passionate about the Anglo-Catholic tradition of outreach and service to the
neighbourhood and inner city,
strengthens and develops existing parish programs,
fosters new initiatives in the community,
empowers lay participation in the outreach of the parish.

Who deepens Christian formation and teaching with parishioners of all ages,
preaches well with conviction and discerning sensitivity,
supports a wide spectrum of educational events and programs
encourages the teaching gifts of parishioners.

Who brings loving pastoral care to the parish,
Strives to bring harmony and enables a ministry of reconciliation and healing,
attends to the spiritual well-being of individuals,
draws parishioners into the pastoral work of the parish,
engages respectfully with children and youth.



Who offers creativity and stability to the leadership of the parish,
delegates responsibilities with mature judgment,
works comfortably in a collaborative environment with lay persons.

Who brings joy to the life of the parish,
builds up the community,
sends us out to be Christ in the world.

