

## The Full Story

St. James is one of the newer parishes in the Diocese of Vermont. The first services were held in the Fall of 1951 in the village of Essex Junction at the Masonic Temple and later over the fire station in the Essex Junction Town Hall. St. James was formally accepted as a mission of the diocese in 1952. Assistants from St. Paul's Church in Burlington served this new mission until 1958. These assistants included the Reverends H. Adams; R. Dew. Mallary; A.J. Smith; C. Walsh; J. Higgins; R. S. Beattie; D.A. Webster; and J.B. Deforest. In 1958, Giles Willey gave us land adjacent to the Champlain Valley Fair Grounds for a church home. A "pre-fab" building was purchased from Creative Buildings and erected with the help of dedicated parishioners. The first resident priest, Father Allen Sither, was called. At that time, the rectory was a house on Mansfield Avenue.

The new church building was dedicated in September, 1959. For the sanctuary, a font was acquired from All Saints Church in Shoreham, Vermont, an altar from Rock Point, and chancel furniture from the former Trinity Episcopal Church on Pratt Street in Winooski. The church school wing was built in 1964. The wing is dedicated to Bishop Veddar Van Dyck, bishop of Vermont when St. James became a mission.

In October 1964, the Rev. Alexander Smith was welcomed along with his wife Janet and their four children. They led St. James for over a quarter of a century with their witness, their devotion to St. James, and their loving concern for the parish.

St. James was formally accepted as a parish in 1964. In 1968, the new rectory was built on adjoining church land. In 1969, the bell tower was given for a memorial and erected with Richard G. Bilyard's cross design. An historic bell, originally from the Congregational Church in Highgate Center, was acquired. It has been traced through its manufacturer, the Maneely Bell Company of Troy, New York, to pre-Civil War days. Warren E. Austin, first United States ambassador to the United Nations, and his brother, Chauncy Austin, carved their initials into the old wooden wheel when they were children. Soon after the bell tower was in place, the women of St. James designed a garden around it and planted shrubbery around the church.

The memorial Garden behind the church was created in 1974 in memory of Geoffrey Hamlin, a beloved member of St. James. St. James has been blessed over the years with members who have given generously of their time and talent in caring for the church as well as for the grounds. These gifts are too numerous to list here but are recorded in the memorial Gift Book.

The church building was enlarged in 1977 to provide much needed space in the sanctuary. Twenty feet were added in the Undercroft to enlarge the kitchen for a more adequate Meals on Wheels facility as well as for benefit dinners, craft fairs, rummage sales, and community use.

Robert Anderson completed a design for two stained glass windows to replace the sanctuary windows in January 1982, and the windows were installed.

The entrance to St. James was enlarged in 1985 to provide more balcony space and to create a foyer by removing a wall.

At the 1989 Annual Meeting, Carol Reichard, Organist and Choir Director, reported that the organ was in need of replacement. The parish quickly raised the funds for the magnificent Gallanti Praeludium III which now fills the church with beautiful music.

Father Al Smith retired in 1990 after serving St. James for 26 years. A common room adjacent to Van Dyck Hall is dedicated to him. The Rev. Graham Pierce came as Interim Rector to help with the work of transition and served until January 1991.

The Rev. John Edson was called to St. James in early 1991. While Father Edson was Rector, plans were finalized to make St. James handicap accessible. A new elevator and enclosed ramp as well as new office space were dedicated in the Fall of 1993.

Once again, The Rev. Graham Pierce came as Interim Rector, this time from January 1993 until January 1994.

The Rev. Henry M. McLeod III (Mac) was called to St. James in early 1994 and retired on September 1 of 2000. St. James continued to grow under his leadership and plans began for additional classrooms and a larger commons room.

The Rev. Molly S. Comeau was called as Priest-in-Charge at St. James and began her work on November 12, 2000. Under Molly's leadership the church embarked on a Capital Campaign for Building for the future. The Campaign was titled "Witness, Nurture and Welcome". A third service was added in the Fall of 2002. In March 2003, ground was broken for a new multipurpose room, kitchen and nursery. The new addition was completed at the beginning of August with a dedication in September 2003.

The Rev. Susan W. deGavre came as Interim Rector in the early summer of 2004 to help with the work of transition. Under Kipper's leadership, plans were completed for a granite replacement cross for the Memorial Garden. The cross was erected in the fall of 2005. She also was instrumental in revitalizing the nursery program. In the fall of 2005 a discernment committee was formed to continue the important work of transition.

St. James welcomed The Rev. Kenneth R. Hitch and his family on March 4, 2007. Father Ken immediately became involved with the youth in our parish by working with Rock Point Summer Camp, our diocesan camp in Burlington. He also shared with us his compassion for the homeless. While Father Ken was here, he helped to bring the clergy of Essex Junction together for joint outreach projects, Gospel study and occasional ecumenical services. The project closest to his heart was the forming of Essex Eats Out with other churches in the Village. Essex Eats Out provided a free meal every Friday to which everyone was invited. St. James provided meals every 3rd Friday

of the month through early 2020, after which the ministry was disbanded due to the national pandemic.

We also did some major work in the church chancel; brightening up the walls, refurbishing the floors and moving the altar forward so that those on the altar would be closer to those in the pews. The St. James Players were formed during Father Ken's time with us. Father Ken started Dinner Church, an informal worship service where the Eucharist was served as part of dinner and stories shared based on the Gospel or other readings of the day. Father Ken was called to parish in Michigan in the spring of 2015.

For the first seven months of our transition period, we were blessed to have The Rev. Bob Stuhlman as our supply priest. During this time, the Ministry Discernment Committee was chosen and the Vestry began the process of choosing a half-time Interim Rector.

On Palm Sunday of 2016, The Rev. Kim Hardy began her ministry among us as our Interim Priest. In April of the same year, the Vestry and Amma Kim met to review changes that would be required with a half-time priest. This marked the beginning of a significant restructuring of the ministries of St. James. While doing this very important work, the people of St. James felt that God was calling Amma Kim to become our permanent priest. With great joy, we welcomed her as Priest-in-Partnership at a celebration on July 26, 2017 and in 2020 she became Rector of St. James.

Like churches across the country, St. James services and activities moved online in March 2020 because of the pandemic. During this time, lay leadership roles were identified to fill the gaps created by moving from full-time to half-time clergy; many members of the congregation stepped forward into them. In the following 5 years, the St. James lay leadership ministry has expanded and matured.

In 2024, St. James and Calvary, Underhill, joined together in a Constellation under the Diocese. This new model of sharing resources while remaining distinctly different congregations is evolving and yielding unplanned benefits for all parties!

Amma Kim retired in December 2025 and St. James began the search process for a new rector.