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9-2021

### Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church in Providence, Rhode Island

Katayoun Alidadi

*Bryant University*, [kalidadi@bryant.edu](mailto:kalidadi@bryant.edu)

Jennifer Horan

*Bryant University*, [jhoran@bryant.edu](mailto:jhoran@bryant.edu)

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#### Recommended Citation

Alidadi, Katayoun and Horan, Jennifer, "Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church in Providence, Rhode Island" (2021). *Exhibits*. Paper 2.

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# FOCUS ON COVID & SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL



Communion at St. Stephen's during the pandemic.

# CHURCH IN PROVIDENCE



Rev. Benjamin Straley delivers his sermons, which is live-streamed.



Drawings by Nicolas Marty

**J**ennifer Horan, who is a Humanities Professor at Bryant University, has been an active member of Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church in Providence since 2013. Jennifer grew up Catholic and attended Mass consistently with her family in Cape Cod. She studied at Boston College, a Jesuit College, and while there attended Masses on most Sunday nights. During her graduate school years in New York, that changed and she no longer went to Mass consistently. Pursuing her passion for French literature, she travelled and lived in France for six years.

**Dr. Katayoun Alidadi**

September 2021

*Jennifer says that* // while in France, I would attend the Catholic services in the St. Sulpice and in the 6<sup>e</sup> arrondissement around which I lived. Not the full service, sometimes I would come back in the end and listen to the organ. But it was there in my ambient world //

*Upon her return to Rhode Island, she once again started attending Mass consistently. It was a small Church, Trinity Church in Newport.*

// fell in love with the choir, it was the music that drew me in. It's definitely the music with the Episcopalians that is the game changer. Music is a huge part of it, the Church cannot function without the choir director, the organist for it to truly be episcopal //

*She contrasts the Episcopal Mass experience with the one in which she was raised.* // The Anglican, Protestant is so text-based. For me it's the words that I'm so captured by. It's different in the Catholic tradition, the priest is key in the service. This is what you read, how you interpret it, how it makes you think. It's all interpretation and I connect with things I'm reading in class //

## WHAT IS WORSHIP ABOUT FOR YOU?

// Well, it is the community, it is being together with other members of the congregation, that is the game changer. And giving your time. We all help run the Church in one way or the other, from singing in the choir, becoming part of the vestry, helping collect the money. The work is very much shared so it doesn't feel like a hierarchy. And the singing, which makes you feel alive and energizes you. It can put you in a good direction for the week. I love how everything is shared in the episcopal religion. This helps maintain the personal faith that you have //

*Jennifer remembers that when the pandemic hit in March 2020, the Church* // went to Facebook quite quickly. I think there was not a week amiss, they immediately reconfigured. We came and then all of a sudden were told we can't come because of Health Department rules //

## CHOIR

*Masses were scaled down in the beginning* // Reverend Straley was preaching, and some members of the choir singing. Even the choir was not there for quite some time //

*Communion is a part of weekly Mass at St. Stephen's*

// On Facebook that completely is gone, breaking the bread, sharing the bread. However, the text part that led up to that, the blessing the body, blessing the spirit, that we continued reading //

## MULTITASKING AND YOGA

*Jennifer attended the online services regularly before St. Stephen started to hold Masses in-person.*

// Not always, because I get busy with teaching in our compressed semester. But the days I did attend sometimes I would be attentive and sit on my couch and listen. I would not have the

pamphlet with the prayers in front of me, unlike when you go to Church physically, they hand you the paper and you have the text in front of you. So I tended to be quiet. Just like our students; there was a lot that was taken away from them, so they were less active. And the same thing was happening in Church, you're just not as active, you're not reading along unless you have the text memorized. I would not sit at my desk and read the text on the screen, I could have. It was not as active. I loved the sermons, a different reverend was filling in. But I was doing yoga or making breakfast at the same time, multitasking away, and you don't do that when you are in the shared sacred space. In that space you are more devoted to the operation, you are just more present. I was not as present with the online Mass, just as our students were not //

*As a lector, Jennifer came to the services before it was opened to all the members recently in May 2021.*

// The lectors would come to the service. I would read with my mask on. The only people who could be in the actual physical space were the people part of the service. Part of the vestry, in sanctuary space. As a reader, I'd come with my mask, I'd come to the podium take my mask off and read the texts. Then mask back on and go sit down. Nobody else was around. Just me and the others who were part for the service. That did not change until very recently //

## COMEBACK

*How does it feel to be back?*

// I feel great. It's great to go back and just to see people face to face again. I don't feel worried being vaccinated. I do think the mask remains necessary so that people are not worried //

// I miss the coffee hour. We're now talking about bringing it back. The choir joins and you get to know other parishioners. In the winter-time, the room would be packed. I now forget their names since I haven't talked to them for a while //

**We hope you enjoyed learning about religious worship in Rhode Island during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feel free to reach out to Professor Alidadi, principal investigator, at [kalidadi@bryant.edu](mailto:kalidadi@bryant.edu)**



Jennifer Horan attends Sunday Mass in July 2021.

