

## Church on the canal boasts nautical heritage

*St. Peter's Episcopal Church on the Canal was shipped by barge from Hull to Buzzards Bay in 1947. The church remains true to its nautical heritage with many artistic nods to the theme.*

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The parishioners of St. Peter's Episcopal Church on the Canal are proud of their church's unusual history, which originated with the building on the Cape Cod Canal. Once the canal was complete, all the churches in Bourne were located on the south side, so some forward-looking residents on the north side, in Buzzards Bay, decided to form a new Episcopal mission. They first met at Red Men's Hall in 1938.

The congregation continued to meet at the hall until 1947, when St. Peter's minister, the Rev. J. Samuel Stephenson, heard about an unused church building in the town of Hull. Finding it was too expensive to move the church by land to Buzzard's Bay, it was decided to load it onto a barge and float the building 60 miles across the Cape Cod Canal.

"When they brought it up onto the shore, they couldn't pull it across the street because it was a state highway, and it was against the law to transport it across the highway," explained parishioner Henri Masson, who is also the junior warden of the church vestry.

The priest was friends with the Bourne police chief and even through the chief couldn't give his friend the permit, he did tell him about a certain day when the entire police force would be at a meeting. The church was moved to its present location on Main Street that day and has been there ever since.

The influence of the building's early sea experience can be seen throughout the nautical-themed church. A wooden statue of St. Peter in a boat holding a net juts out over the front door. A similar image is echoed on the handcarved front panel on the altar which is framed on either side by handcarvings of fish – an early symbol of Christianity – rising out of the water. Above the altar, a wood canopy is decorated with five shell carvings and the front of the baptismal font features a scallop shell, a symbol of baptism.

The hammered bronze panel on the tabernacle where the sacraments of consecrated bread and wine are held is adorned with a compass rose. Above the tabernacle, a red glass lamp always burns next to a ship's wheel to symbolize that the church is a ship that carries people to heaven. The ends of the polished wooden pews have carvings of ships and anchors. And a beamed ceiling and jewel-toned stained-glass windows depicting the life of Jesus complete the effect.

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A beautiful building may bring parishioners in touch with the sacred, but it is the people who make a church, and the Rev. Sue Lederhouse, who has been the church's priest-in-charge since the summer of 2010, says the congregation is very special.

"This is a place that you can fall in love with," she said. "It is such a good group of people who are willing to put in time and effort to make this place work, and they have great ideas and are willing to find ways to make it happen."

When Lederhouse first arrived, after serving as interim priest at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Orleans, St. Peter's was having financial trouble, and there was some question about whether it would be able to remain open. Since she has been there, weekly attendance at the Sunday services has jumped from an average of 77 to 88 people, and the size of the church school has doubled to 15 children who attend every week.

"Under Sue's leadership, this church has blossomed in the last year and a half," said parishioner Linda Masson, who began attending the church with her husband Henri, a few years ago.

"We're going to have 14 new people joining. That's a big growth spurt for a small church, and that tells you something. People like being here and they are happy being here."

Parishioner Susan Hebb, who is also the vestry clerk and newsletter editor, began attending the church more than six years ago. She fell in love with the warmth of the congregation and the big hearts she found there.

"The thing that struck me when I started coming was the church was so small and yet the outreach was so impressive for the size of the congregation," Hebb said. "I thought it was amazing how much this church was doing and that was the thing that made me want to keep coming."

Outreach includes both mission work and community-oriented events. One of the missions of the church is involved with is the Friendly Kitchen, which has offered a warm meal and fellowship to 25 to 45 people in need of food or companionship every Monday for more than 20 years. They also have a food pantry every Monday and Friday, and the Marthas and Marys women's group collects different household items each month for the Village at Cataumet family shelter.

Community outreach includes a successful Family Fun Day in July and participation in the town's Fourth of July Parade in which the church's nautical themed float won third prize last year. They also have a small fair on the

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weekend of the Bourne Scallop Festival and are planning their first-ever Vacation Bible School in August.

St. Peter's has two Sunday services. Holy Eucharist Rite I, a contemplative traditional language service without music, is at 8 a.m. and Holy Eucharist Rite II, a contemporary language service with hymns and a choir, is at 10 a.m. Church school is immediately after the 10 a.m. service. Lederhouse began a monthly healing service in February that will take place at 9 a.m. the third Sunday of each month.

Also new at the church is the formation of a Green Team. "This team is committed to providing information and tips on how we can all make improvements in our church and homes to conserve energy and make us better stewards of our environment," said Linda Masson.

"It's a very quiet-looking church from the outside, but when you get here you realize how busy it is," she said. "There are so many activities. We have spaghetti suppers with a gam night. We have a men's breakfast once a month. We have a book club, and we have Bible study once a week. One of our goals is to be more visible in the community and to try to come up with more projects so that we bring folks in because it is a very warm church and we have a lot to offer."

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