

## SCHENECTADY

# Drawn to serve the Lord

## Episcopalian priest shares his unique journey of faith

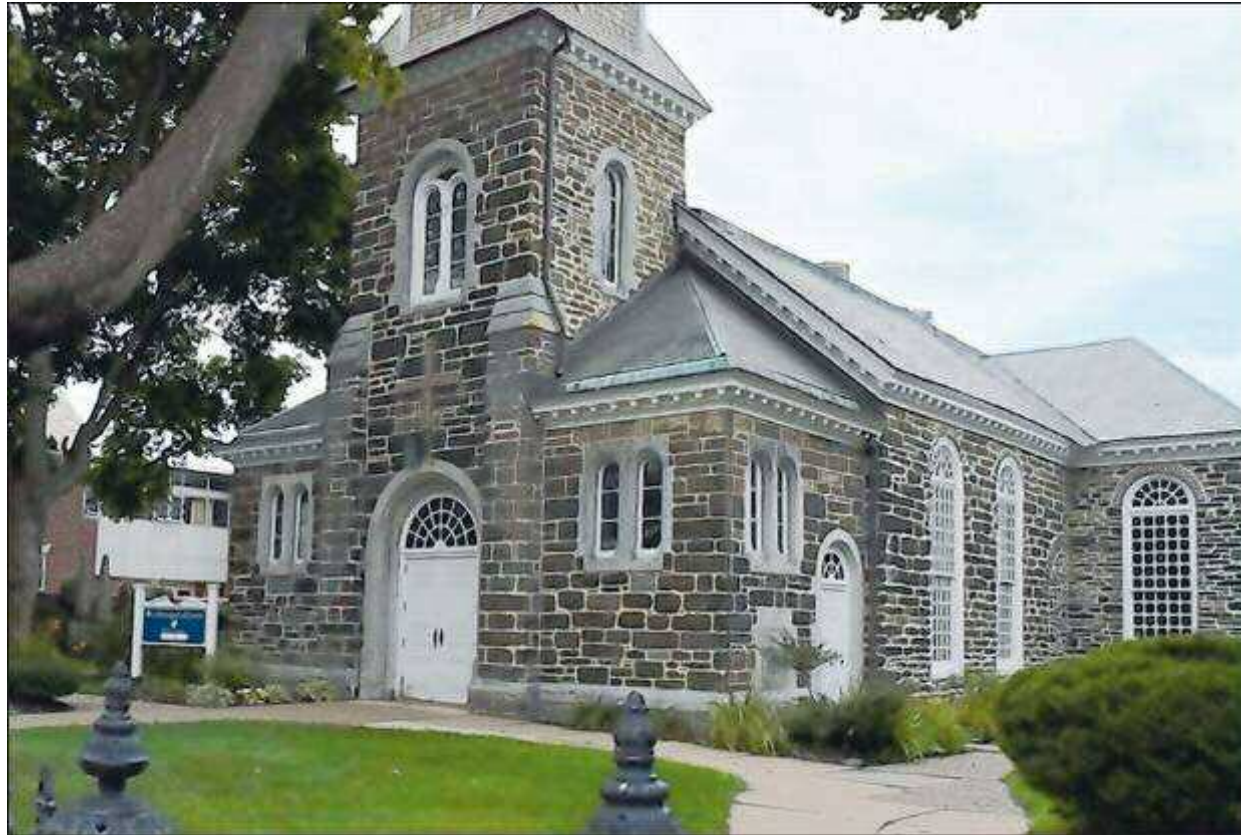
BY ANDREW PUGLIESE FOR THE DAILY GAZETTE

REACH GAZETTE INTERN ANDREW PUGLIESE AT 395-3191, [APUGLIESE@DAILYGAZETTE.NET](mailto:APUGLIESE@DAILYGAZETTE.NET) OR @BYPUGS ON TWITTER.



ANDREW PUGLIESE/FOR THE DAILY GAZETTE

The Rev. Matt Stromberg will deliver his first sermon as the 19th rector of St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady's Stockade neighborhood next Sunday.



**ANDREW PUGLIESE/FOR THE DAILY GAZETTE** The exterior of St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady.

The Rev. Matt Stromberg is a husband, a dad and a comic book lover, and as of today, the 19th rector of St. George's Episcopal Church in Schenectady's Stockade neighborhood. He did not always plan to be a priest and he has not always been Episcopalian. He holds a bachelor of fine arts degree from Temple University in drawing and painting. He has attended Methodist and Presbyterian churches, and even Quaker meetings for a time while an undergrad.

This was all before flooding near his Philadelphia apartment while he was in college stopped the trolley system from going to his Quaker meeting house, which led him on a walk that ended at a Lutheran Church.

When it came time for communion, he felt compelled to go forward with the rest of the congregation.

“I heard a voice saying ‘This is the way I feed my people,’ almost like somebody turned a radio on,” Stromberg said. “I was deeply impacted by that and thought, ‘Well, I’m going to need to find a way to make the Eucharist more a part of my life as a Christian.’”

It was not long afterward that he began attending service at a local Episcopal church, but the journey to that moment was not so direct.

Beyond his studies at Temple, he wanted to cut loose and look deeper into spirituality. This was, in part, precipitated by a search for answers when the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 occurred during his sophomore year.

“[It] just sort of had a profound effect on me,” Stromberg said. “What’s the way forward from this? How to make the world a better place? What really matters in life, and things like that.”

He was attending Quaker meetings at the time and began reading the writings of the early church fathers and medieval mystics as well as C.S. Lewis and N.T. Wright. It was an authentic conversion experience.

Despite not seeing priesthood on the horizon at the time, he started to be drawn back to a more organized church and the Eucharist. The Quaker tradition is quite different from the Episcopalian.

After a time, he began taking courses at a nearby theological seminary and exploring the call to be a pastor. He officially entered a seminary outside Pittsburgh following discernment at the church where he married his wife, April, in 2010.

“I knew I had an enthusiasm to share the faith,” Stromberg said. “I went through a lot of intellectual doubts about everything in the Christian faith and found that the Christian faith was really compelling, as far as what it claims as truth and the person of Jesus in particular.”

In December 2014, he was ordained into the Episcopal priesthood at Christ Episcopal Church in Cooperstown, where he came a curate, or assisting priest.

After about six months, the church's rector accepted a call to Virginia. Stromberg was left to take over preaching each Sunday and some administrative duties. The push prepared him for his first job as a rector.

Stromberg will take over for the Rev. Richard Lehman, who has been a supply priest for St. George's while the parish has searched for a new rector. Several supply priests have presided over Mass at the church since the Rev. Paul Blanch departed as rector in November 2014 to accept a call at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Redding, California.

Laurie Kearns, a warden at Christ Church in Cooperstown, helped Stromberg move his cats Lily and Sable last Thursday. She said they will miss Stromberg, and might miss his preaching on Sundays most of all.

Stromberg tries to avoid moralism in his sermons. He tries to make each sermon Christ-centered.

"It could be sort of discouraging because people know right from wrong. But, the fact is they find it difficult to do the right thing," Stromberg said. "They know the right thing but they find themselves doing the wrong thing. That's why we need Christ. We need more than just good advice. We need a savior."

He also believes in building bonds between members of the community — a potluck or movie night is just as important when building community as religious services.

Stromberg is not certain just yet what he will say during his first sermon Sunday. He has been a little busy moving and settling into his new home with his wife and their two young children, Helen and Isaac. But he will draw inspiration from the words of John the Baptist, "[The Lord] must increase, so I must

decrease.”

“Obviously, people are going to be curious about who I am and what I’m all about,” Stromberg said. “I feel the best way to let them know that is just to faithfully communicate what God has given me for that week.”

**‘It could be sort of discouraging because people know right from wrong. But, the fact is they find it difficult to do the right thing. They know the right thing but they find themselves doing the wrong thing. That’s why we need Christ. We need more than just good advice. We need a savior.’**

**REV. MATTHEW STROMBERG**

**Rector, St. George’s Episcopal Church, Schenectady**