

December 29, 2016

Dear St. Mary's Parishioners,

As the year 2016 comes to a close, we would like to take the opportunity to look back on the year passed as well as glance ahead to what lies in store for St. Mary's in 2017.

If you spend any time at St. Mary's you are likely aware that the **Beacon Committee delivered its final report** to the parish in June. The report provided us with an ambitious agenda consisting of a plethora of recommendations directed at shaping our future as a parish. We would like to share with you what's been happening in the past 6 months in response to the Beacon recommendations.

The Beacon Committee divided its recommendations into five categories: 1) Strengthening Parish Sustainability; 2) Enhancing Spiritual Growth and Formation; 3) Renewing our Outreach Strategy; 4) Fortifying Relationships with our Neighbors and; 5) Conducting a Formal Space Study of our Building and Long-term Options for All Properties.

The Vestry recently commissioned three new working groups to focus on the Beacon recommendations in the areas of Spiritual Growth and Formation, Outreach, and Neighbors. Each group has two-chairs and a vestry liaison and they have begun discussing ideas and calling parishioners as workgroup members to set agendas and begin acting to implement short and long term recommendations that are easily achievable. They expect to spend some time carefully planning and evaluating next steps for recommendations that will take more time or discernment before coming to fruition.

The group co-chairs (and vestry liaisons) are:

- **Outreach:** Paul Douthit and Nancy Brooks; (Elizabeth Keith)
- **Spiritual Growth/Formation:** Joan Turkus and Jay Liwanag; (Kate Muth and Lisa Leibel)
- **Neighbors:** Rosanna Esposito and Stacey Tevlin; (Tyler Suiters)

The clergy and staff have also been out in front in some of these areas, particularly with the topics covered in Sunday Forums – responding directly to Beacon recommendations with discussions focusing on mental health, stress, Christian citizenship, prayer, and individual discipline.

The Vestry has decided that the recommendations in the areas of Sustainability and Space Study/Long-Term Property options would best be addressed by the vestry itself. Much of the work in this area is well underway.

1. Staffing and Organization: The most pressing need is to make sure St. Mary's is properly staffed and organized to meet the needs of our vibrant parish. First and foremost, we are in the midst of **calling a full-time priest**. A search committee, headed by Carolyn Boswell, is interviewing potential candidates and hopes to have a new priest in place in the spring of 2017.

2. Professionalization of previously volunteer positions and functions: For decades, many key functions of our church were carried out by stalwart volunteers and our small and very over-stretched administrative staff. Father Merrow and the vestry have acted to increase the capacity of our paid staff to adequately support our growing needs. We have several new paid full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) positions:

- FT Finance Manager – Janet Tasker
- FT Minister of Communications – Diane Kopasz
- PT Spt. of Sunday School, Evelyn Hutton
- PT Outreach Coordinator, Ned Leonard
- PT Weekend Sexton, Santino Dut

In our preliminary budgeting for 2017 the Vestry is planning on **expanding the hours of the outreach coordinator** (though still part-time) and planning for bringing on a **full-time sexton** to support the work of Facilities Manager Jane Shafran, who has pretty much worked 24/7 for years – an incredible, but unsustainable example of service.

Finally, a **personnel committee** has been reinvigorated to provide guidance and counsel to the rector and staff to ensure that there are appropriate procedures and policies in place, including up-to-date job descriptions, a process for annual evaluation, and ensuring the adequacy of compensation and benefits.

3. Financial Health: Over the past two years an enormous amount of work has been done by our Finance Committee, which is populated by a group of highly qualified financial professionals from our parish, and chaired by our new treasurer, Deb Gandy. With the support of the new finance manager, the committee is in an excellent position to evaluate and plan for our long-term needs. For the first time, the vestry has received a draft of a long-term budget for anticipated capital expenses. When the results of the 2017 Stewardship Campaign are finalized, we are confident we will be able to allocate resources for those known expenses.

4. Stewardship is, of course, the main driver of our financial health and is a major focus of the Beacon Report. Our Stewardship Committee has built on its efforts to make giving and money something we talk about regularly and encouraged us to think about the spiritual aspects of giving. This year's Stewardship Campaign was more direct in identifying the financial needs of the parish and asking for corresponding increases in giving. Nearly 60 percent of our pledging parishioners responded to the call to increase their giving. We are so grateful for the generosity of everyone who has provided a pledge for 2017.

Another focus of stewardship has been to encourage those parishioners who do not pledge to make a financial commitment. If St. Mary's is important to you, please pledge so we can budget proactively. Remember: You can always update your pledge amount, and your pledge is only known by the Finance Manager, you and God. Please join your fellow parishioners who have already made a commitment.

5. Space Study and Long-Term Options for Properties: One of the principal findings of the Beacon Report was that the parish felt that no new structure should be built on the 26th Street property without first ensuring best use of existing space, clearly identifying needs, as well as the resources to sustain any new construction over the long-term. In response, Junior Warden Dave Fletcher has obtained a copy of a professional space study that was done in the last three years to help analyze the use of our existing space. The vestry, with the leadership of the junior warden, is beginning to discuss possible improvements to the 26th Street property that would enhance our ability to address key priorities, such as the provision of affordable housing beyond our current four houses, as well as potential housing for clergy and/or a sexton. The cost of living in Arlington is high and is a significant barrier to the calling of clergy. Dave Fletcher is working with a small group of real estate and development professionals within the parish to begin envisioning various development options and to analyze the cost of such projects. This work is in the earliest of stages and there will be wide consultation and communication before any next steps.

6. January Retreat for Staff, Vestry and Lay Leaders: On January 21, 2017, the clergy, staff, vestry and some key lay leaders will meet for a day at Virginia Theological Seminary reflecting and planning for 2017 and beyond. This should include an opportunity to discuss recommendations from the Beacon Report including broadening, enhancing, and strengthening lay leadership.

I hope this message provides a good update to anyone wondering about follow-up to the Beacon Report and gives everyone a sense of the actions underway to ensure a bright future for St. Mary's as a parish well-positioned to grow in faith and to serve Christ where we live and work.

In the year ahead, look forward to more updates from our new working groups and from the vestry about how St. Mary's is working to strengthen our life together, define our role in the community, and plan for our future.

Faithfully,

Jane Jacobsen, Sr. Warden