



St. Paul's Episcopal Church

The Rev. Carolyn H. Eklund, Rector

The Rev. Katie Holicky, Assistant Rector for Children and Youth

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are ever grateful for all of you keeping faith with us through extraordinary times, and giving generously of your time, talent and treasure in support of our Christian mission. No matter the circumstances, St. Paul's is alive with vibrant worship; with music and preaching that elevate, inspire and even challenge us; with deep fellowship and hospitality; and with faithful service to God and neighbor.

In the weeks ahead, you will be hearing more from the Rector; the Stewardship Team co-chaired by David Treadwell and Bob Jackson; and other fellow parishioners, as part of our stewardship campaign. The theme this year is "Faith-Filled Generosity". That theme captures the spirit alive at St. Paul's, and it speaks to this moment in our life together. This parish has been walking generously in faith especially in this time of crisis, reaching out to fellow parishioners, and giving generously to our parish to support our neighbors. And let it be said: among our many sacrifices, we have given up – just for the time being -- our physical worship space, and our face-to-face communal worship and singing. This is what God calls us to for now, living out our commandment to care for each other's well-being, even at a cost to ourselves. We know we will move forward into our Nave one day – we pray it will be soon -- forever changed and still the same, ever evolving as the Body of Christ.

We wrote you last year about financial challenges we saw ahead in 2020 and beyond: lack of income from the Barnes building and our concern that pledges were not adequately funding all the work we love. Your response awed us. We hoped for an increase in number of pledgers and in pledged amounts, and you answered our prayers. Last year, we saw number of pledgers increase from 138 to 150, and our median pledge increase from \$1600 to \$1770. By answering our call for increases, and committing to it for the longer term, you set a firm foundation for us to continue to fund what we love.

The Barnes building exploratory team provided terrific analysis of options for the building's future, and a grant from the Diocese allowed us to pay for architectural drawings and get bids to assess conversion into affordable housing apartments. That remains under study. We learned of an immediate housing need for a family of asylum-seeking new Mainers. Unsurprisingly, the parish responded with grace and hospitality, took up paint brushes, donated funds, and worked directly with the family and local officials. Thanks to our "angel" donors, and all who pitched in under Nancy Whitehouse's sure leadership, the Barnes building is home to a family of nine for the next two years. This not only meets a pressing need for our neighbors, it provides us a stream of income from the building, while we complete further study on its long-term future.

Last year, we did not know the challenges the pandemic would present. Nor did we know how much growth God had in store for us through these trials. Again, the response of this parish has been astounding.

We have new and vital digital worship serving our congregation and visitors from near and far. Our Sunday services are alive with spirited family worship, powerful preaching, lay readers, and of course our music we love so dearly. We offer two video Daily Offices Monday through Saturday at 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. And with help from Nancy Whitehouse, Paul Womer, Susan Tyler

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and others, we have upgraded the technology in the building to meet the audio, video and bandwidth needs for this new kind of worship. In all of this, we have learned how resilient we are, learning new technical skills, trying new things we never thought we could. And we have found new dimensions to our love for one another.

The Reverend Katie Holicky, who joined us during our lockdown, has eagerly answered her call here and connected with the family ministries in a world of creative ways – bike rides with families, Sundays in the garden with the youth, our new social-justice lending library, and a gush of new and creative ways to keep us in community.

Undaunted, our Christmas Fair planning team is creatively carrying on the Fair we love, to fund the outreach that is so important to our Christian mission.

Parishioners have kept up with their pledges and given generously to the Rector's Discretionary fund, allowing the Rector to meet immediate needs in our backyard for food, fuel and necessities. We not only are serving our neighbors' needs, we are connecting more deeply, learning more about our neighbors and ourselves in the process.

Our Lay Pastoral Care and Prayer Chain teams have been connecting regularly with those who are in nursing homes, homebound or alone – parishioners and non-parishioners alike. And Hugh Savage has been faithfully helping parishioners get groceries delivered or connect digitally in worship.

Our Sacred Ground dialogue groups are engaging in deep and challenging spiritual exploration of race in our society and culture and God's call that love express itself as justice.

Parishioners have opened their outdoor spaces to small group fellowship meetings, socially distanced, and overall, the pandemic has not put out the fire of hospitality and fellowship.

Of course, none of this is possible without the deep engagement, commitment and remarkable abilities of our parish office staff, and the leadership and skills of our blessed clergy. And none of it would be possible without you -- your commitment, your participation, and your ongoing financial support.

St. Paul's remains a healthy, vibrant parish. The economic difficulties brought on by the pandemic have largely spared the church itself. We have not cut any personnel or wages, and our endowment remains healthy, as investments have not suffered nearly as much in this economy as have many small businesses, working people and our most vulnerable neighbors. We hear Christ's call to do good with the good fortune we enjoy, and have been using our funds to help our friends and neighbors who so need it.

Finally, as we said last year, in all the discussion of our finances, we want you never to forget your very presence among us in worship and service is your greatest contribution. We are God's children, and it fills God with joy when we gather in God's Name– and when we discover in joy the beautiful variety in the ways God calls us to be the Body of Christ.

Yours in love,

Cliff Ruprecht and Johanna Wigg, Wardens