

## **State of the Parish Report**

This part of our Annual Meeting is labeled the State of the Parish Report, but I think that's something of a misnomer. We derive our understanding of the state of the parish in all of the materials prepared for this annual meeting.

We will learn about the state of the parish in the Treasurer's report, learning that we are in a strong financial position to continue the work that we are doing together in this place

The report on this year's Stewardship Campaign, and the exciting possibility that we might reach 100 pledges this year, our best year since the pandemic, speaks to our commitment to this community and to our neighbors.

We will learn about the funds for ministry being generated through our investments in the Jesse Crane Endowment for Outreach, and the John Peterson Endowment for Worship Learning and Fellowship. The foresight of the folks who helped to establish and fund these endowments, and the endowment's ongoing value to the community, speak to the state of the parish.

We will learn about the state of the parish in the report on our Outreach Giving over the last twelve months, confirming what we already know to be true; that St. Andrew's will rise to the occasion and live out our baptismal covenant by seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The sum total of these reports tell us that the state of the parish... in these difficult and turbulent times, is very good indeed!

So I prefer to think of this report from the Rector, required by our bylaws, is an addendum to the body of work described by these reports, something that, along with all that we will hear and learn today, might give us an opportunity to sum up and reflect together on what all of these reports say about our values, our priorities, and our vision for our future.

So let me add to the treasures we will receive today, by telling you why I am so excited about the state of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. In the past year:

### *Newcomers Committee*

Our Senior Warden, Casey Reiser, in her final months as our Senior Warden, is working to develop a Newcomers Committee to better respond to folks who come through our doors for the

first time, extending our hospitality beyond that first encounter, and helping people to find their way into the life of our community.

#### *Young Adult Group*

This year saw the beginning of a new Young Adult Group, led by folks who are relatively new to St. Andrew's, who expressed a need for community, and have been supported in their work to build that community, by the Vestry and the people of this parish.

#### *Outreach Committee*

This year three members of our parish have come together to re-establish an Outreach Committee. This group is exploring ways that we can meet the immediate needs of people in our community who are struggling. You might think about this as the group of folks helping all of us to pull drowning people out of the river.

An immediate result of the work of this committee is our newly formalized partnership with West High School through the Madison School Foundation's Adopt a School Program. This partnership means that we have a direct line to the staff at West to learn about needs that aren't being met; moments and places where we can provide financial, material, and in-person support to students and families at the school three blocks west of St. Andrew's on Regent Street.

And if you will allow me a quick plug for this group, they will be hosting a gathering after the 10:30 service on December 8th so that we can join them in identifying ways that we can best serve our community. This will be an opportunity to add your voice to the conversation, and hopefully, to join them in their work.

#### *Social Justice Committee*

If the Outreach Committee is responding to immediate needs, pulling people out of the river, the newly formed Social Justice Committee is working to gather teams from all of the Madison Episcopal Churches to head upstream and stop people falling into the river in the first place; looking for ways that we can effect change at a systems level that will have an impact on the lives of people in need in our community, and beyond.

I am also excited about our ongoing programming.

#### *Reinvigorated Church School program and Film and Theology*

Long time parishioner Janet Hyde, who now lives in the St. Louis area, has renewed her generous gift to St. Andrew's, funding another year of our Children, Youth, and Family Ministries Coordinator position. It's obvious by the flood of happy and excited kids who come

into the nave at the peace on the Sundays when Church School meets, that that Program is thriving. And the family Film and Theology programming on Saturday evenings, attended by families, singles adults, and couples without kids, has become a regular part of our life together. Adults who attend these functions tell me they are constantly blown away by the kids questions. We have taken that successful model and extended it to include Film and Theology for Adults on Sunday mornings after church, having watched *The Philadelphia 11* and *Luther with Schindler's List* scheduled for January 26th

#### *Other ongoing groups*

I am excited about the other successful ongoing groups/communities at St. Andrew's, like the Flower Guild, Beverages and Bites, the Men's Group, the Benedictine Cell Group, Tuesday Morning Women's Bible Study, the Wednesday Dawn Patrol Bible Study, the Altar Guild, and the choir, all of which both celebrate and expand our common life in this community.

These ongoing groups, and the groups that we have formed this past year, all point to our commitment to meet the needs of the community here at St. Andrew's, and the needs of the community around us. They point to our willingness to adjust what we are doing to meet the changing needs of the people who come through our doors, and to the changing needs of the community and world around us.

As exciting as that is, I have to tell you that I am most excited about something in the Junior Warden's Report to the Annual Meeting. That's because I believe that our decision to sell the Newell House is the clearest indicator of the health and vitality of this parish. The decision to sell the property adjacent to St. Andrew's was not an easy one. Lots of people have put in a lot of work, over many years, to maintain the house and the grounds as a resource to our community. There was a lot of nostalgic attachment to a building where our Youth Group once met, and where, back in the 60s when we bought it, church school and confirmation classes met.

We, as a parish, went through a two year discernment process trying to understand how we might retain and use the Newell House property, but stymied by the city's refusal to let us take the house down to create an outdoor gathering space; by the daunting cost of repair, both immediate and long term; and serious questions as to whether maintaining the property aligned with our mission, the Vestry voted this past summer to sell the property. It's that last bit of the story that shines a spotlight on the health, the vitality... the state of this parish.

The willingness to let go of something that had been part of us for almost fifty years, something we had worked and labored to maintain, something that represented a nostalgic view of our past and present; all for the sake of mission, is a powerful statement about our desire to live out our baptismal vows, and to pursue the work that God has called us to do, in this place, at this time.

The Newell House no longer supported that work and that mission; and no matter how hard we tried we couldn't find a way to justify holding onto it saddled with the cost of ongoing repairs, as we work to follow God's call. So we turned the high maintenance, high cost, liability next door into a resource for ministry.

The vestry has had quite a few conversations about the proceeds from the eventual sale of the Newell House. We have talked about adding an accessible entrance to the church along the east side of the building; a sidewalk ramp that would lead from the Education Wing door, down a gradual slope to a new door, opening into the side room of the nursery that is now being used for storage. That entrance would give people easy access to the elevator and thus to the rest of the building, finally making our church an accessible, welcoming place to people for whom stairs are a barrier.

We have talked about placing some of the proceeds of the sale into an endowment like investment, and using the proceeds to help underwrite our operating expenses, giving us yet another way to give and support the long term health, the work and ministry of the parish.

The proceeds of the sale of the Newell House represent an opportunity to expand what we are currently doing, reaching more people with the Good News we proclaim in this place, as we work together to reconcile and heal a broken and hurting world.

None of this would have been possible without the courage and resolve of this parish to choose vocation over nostalgia, mission over comfort; and without the courage to change to meet the needs of our ever changing community and world.

So if you ask me, and you, or at least our bylaws did ask... I would say that the state of the parish, a community of forward looking, generous, committed and courageous people, is very good indeed.