

For Parish Council

2023

Celebrating and Connecting Community

In the fall of 2022, Bishop Anna met with the community and recommended when I returned that I would meet with the Wardens and offer some clear focus for the year ahead (and beyond). This meeting took place on January 18th and from that creative and inspiring discussion I have put together some things which respond to needs we have felt in our church community, and some things which I bring from my own recent experience. These are not goals, as such, but different things we wish to pay attention to – there may come particular aims from the different parts, and I hope, in partnership with the Parish Council, we will explore these together.

The overall theme for our year ahead I have chosen is **“Celebrating and Connecting Community.”** We have much to celebrate at St John’s, and much we have achieved in these past years. A review of our ‘Quo Vadis’ report, our “Why?” process and Strategic Planning shows just how much we have managed to do since 2013, though we recognize that in the dynamic and ever-changing community that is St John the Divine, there is always more to pay attention to. We have struggled through pandemic and adapted to massive changes which have impacted our lives and our common life tremendously. Many of us have felt isolation, separation, and a sense of fragmentation, deeply and often painfully – through this we have endeavoured to keep in touch with one another and reach out to each other with compassion and support as best we can. We have made changes to our meeting, learning, and worship to make use of electronic methods of communication that we really hadn’t imagined doing even five years ago. We continue to work to allow all to connect with our worship and our shared life in as many ways as possible and will continue to do so.

There are other concerns and other issues beyond this focus that we will continue to pay attention to – our stewardship of our finances and careful management of the funds we have available, our desire to grow our base of volunteers, and our ongoing response to Transforming Futures, some of which is found within these focus areas and some of which is proceeding in its own right.

We will be paying particular attention to the items which come from our Special Vestry meeting, and prioritizing the order in which we can work on the renewal of our Lower Hall, our review of our main worship space (the Nave) with the possibility of reordering the space, and a review of the usability of the Parish House and our need for office, meeting, ministry, and storage space.

With this in mind here are the particular areas of focus I would like us to consider for this year ahead alongside our ongoing concerns. I am committed, as I hope you feel able to be, to making these things happen in the year ahead and to being a part of them as we gather together.

Offer the opportunity for **more gatherings which complement our worship gatherings and rebuild our sense of being community** – ie Social, and Fundraising Events. We would hope to have **at least a monthly social gathering** such as quiz nights, meals together, games nights. Some of these may be fundraising events also, and our aim would be to give 10% of any monies raised to one of our outreach projects. We would have these gatherings either online or in-person, or as technology allows, a hybrid version.

We will have a **‘Welcome Event’** for all those who have joined our community in the past few years.

Opening our Doors – we would like to offer the Church space as a place of rest, prayer, reflection – with the main space open a few afternoons each week, beginning in Lent. We would need at least two volunteers for each one-to-



two hour session. I will be opening the doors on Mondays from 1-3pm for Lent starting February 27th and will looking for volunteers to open the space in a safe, careful, way for a couple of hours, a few days each week.

Learning together – Lenten Studies, online and in-person, hopefully with soup lunch for the in-person gathering. Ongoing series of learning with speakers/discussions throughout the year. Quiet Days on Saturdays through the year. Also, to promote our ongoing Book Study on Mondays, and Sermon Circle on Wednesdays, alongside consideration of Sunday Reflections and whether a hybrid model might be possible after our Sunday gatherings. I will be considering just what I am able to offer and facilitate in these groups as time permits.

Liturgical explorations and education – we will be looking at ways in which we can embrace a variety of liturgical styles beyond our Sunday 10am service and doing some intentional learning, with teaching from myself and others, about what is and is not possible in our public worship gatherings. I will seek to explain choices which have been made about liturgical shape through the past years along with sharing some contemporary liturgical best practise and informing us what is authorized by our Bishop and canons.

World connections – explore the building of relationships with our siblings in the Anglican Church of Kenya and Church of South India which I had privilege to connect with during sabbatical. There will be an evening presentation on a Wednesday evening in the coming weeks where I will offer some reflections of time on sabbatical and share some of the experiences and adventures we had in our time away in England and Kenya.

Pastoral Care – though much work continues to go into pastoral care, particularly by Stephanie, our pastoral care lead, and the existing pastoral care team, there is a need to recruit to that team and to offer training for those who offer to be a part of it. All this in partnership with the visiting and care that Stephanie and I offer on an ongoing basis.

Reinvigorating our **Community Safety and Well-being Group** - we realize the work of adjusting and improving our grounds is beyond the scope of our current Property Group, and has no-one to take on the role of project manager. I will reconvene the group to consider implementation strategies and how we might work with PC, Finance, and the wider community to make our grounds welcoming, inviting, and safe using the guidelines given us by Rethink Urban and VicPD.

Continued attention to **Communications** – a small working group is being convened of which I will be a part, to consider the many avenues of communication St John's uses and how we might make best use of these, encouraging parishioners to engage with these multiple avenues and make sure there are forums in which conversations might occur regarding the life of our community.

These items will periodically appear on the Parish Council Agenda and will be reviewed by the wardens and clergy group every three months or so. We will need volunteers to help advance these items, and if you would like to participate in working with any of these goals please do contact myself or the Wardens, for whose dedication and hard work I am very grateful.

With thanks, as always, for our partnership in the Gospel,

Alastair