

Rector's Report – 2023

The Rev. Paul J. Kane
7th Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Delray Beach, Florida

I want to take this opportunity to tell you how grateful I am to be serving as the seventh Rector of St. Paul's. It is an incredible joy and privilege for Irene and me to be a part of this loving, welcoming, and active parish family. 2023 was my eighth full year serving as your rector. As we continue to live in the "new normal" post-pandemic, we celebrate new, renewed, and sustained life-giving ministries, and we deal with various challenges, all through God's grace.

This report highlights some of the many wonderful events, initiatives, and programs of 2023. It also includes reflections on stewardship in 2023, an update on clergy and staff, and a few thoughts as we look ahead to 2024 and beyond.

I. **Growth in Membership:** Contrary to the narrative that "organized religion" has become a thing of the past, we at St. Paul's continue to see signs of growth and new life in many aspects of our common life. Last Sunday we celebrated the second of our new Family Prayer and Praise worship services. This new service, specifically designed for children and young families who are searching for spiritual nourishment and community, has gotten off to a great start. We are so grateful to Fr. Bernie, Liz Ryan, and their team who worked for many months to craft and mold this service into something that is a unique combination of worship and Christian education. We believe that there is no other service quite like it in our diocese!

Through our new social media and marketing initiative, led by Ellen Kentner, we have raised the online profile of St. Paul's in our Delray Beach community and beyond. Through this focused initiative in which we are inviting people to join in upcoming programs and events, as well as highlighting major happenings at St. Paul's, we have seen new people, young and not so young, come to our church family. Engagement in our online social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube has risen over 50% from October, meaning more people are finding St. Paul's and participating in our common life.

In spite of the lingering challenges brought on by the pandemic, we had 19 children and one adult baptized in 2023, up from 16 children in 2022! In 2023, we had two people confirmed, two people received into the Episcopal Church, and two people Reaffirm their Baptismal Vows! In 2023, we celebrated six weddings, up from the four we celebrated in 2022! These increases in participation in the sacramental life of our parish give us great hope as we live into our "new normal."

In 2023, we had two Newcomers Lunches that filled the parish hall with people new to our parish or engaging in the life of the parish in a deeper way.

As we continue to invite new members into our parish family, let us remember that personal invitation is still, by far, the most effective way to attract new members. I encourage you to share the joy of St. Paul's with your family, friends, and neighbors. For those seeking a worshipping community, invite them to join you at St. Paul's!

2) Enhancing Our Spiritual Vitality: In 2023, we continued to live stream our 10 am Sunday service, while discontinuing the live stream for the 8 am Sunday service. Through this weekly live stream, our sick and homebound members and friends are able to worship with us in a virtual way. In 2023, we continued to broadcast via our Facebook page daily Morning and Evening Prayer, as well as Compline. Additionally, we continue to offer Lectio Divina online via Zoom. We also offer a number of our Christian Education programs as hybrid with both in-person participants and others joining via Zoom.

In addition to our in-person and online worship and prayer groups, our healing ministry continues to grow and bring spiritual vitality to our parish. We welcomed and commissioned new Lay Eucharistic Visitors who bring Holy Communion and comfort to our homebound members. Our prayer request ministry also includes on-going intercessory prayer offered by six of our prayer ministries, namely: the Daughters of the King, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the Lay Healing Ministers, the Lay Eucharistic Visitors, the Prayer Shawl Knitters, and Cursillo.

3) Increasing Opportunities for Fellowship: Fellowship continues to grow at St. Paul's! In 2023, our Women's Dinner Ministry reemerged after a two year hiatus due to the pandemic. This fellowship ministry is once again thriving, filling the parish hall with good cheer on the first Monday evening of each month.

Another ministry that reemerged at the end of 2023 was our Sip, Dip, and Chat groups. This ministry provides many of our church members with the opportunity to gather in small groups at restaurants and in homes, cultivating and deepening friendships.

Both our Daughters of the King and our Brotherhood of St. Andrew continue to grow and add new members. These two fellowship ministries meet simultaneously on the second Saturday morning of each month. They are ministries that pray for our church members and serve our church and community in many other ways.

In 2023 we reestablished the rotation of ministries to sponsor the 10 am coffee hour. Once again, through sponsoring the 10 am coffee hour, our ministries are able to promote their good work, invite others to join them, and share upcoming events or initiatives.

Through our fellowship ministries, we at St. Paul's continue to offer vitally important Christian caring and opportunities to socialize. In a culture that too often cultivates isolation, the fellowship we offer at St. Paul's is so comforting and reassuring!

4) Outreach to Those Broken by Life Circumstances: Thanks to our vibrant outreach ministries, St. Paul's continues to meet the needs of so many people adversely impacted by the economic challenges so many in our community face. Our partnerships with CROS Ministries, the Delray Beach Interfaith Social Services Committee, Family Promise, and Jewish Family Services of South Palm Beach County enabled us to provide food, clothing, rent and utilities assistance, hot showers, hygiene kits, and many other social services to poor, hungry and homeless families in our community.

In response to the on-going humanitarian crisis in Haiti, St. Paul's continues to be a source of hope to children and families at Bon Samaritan Episcopal Church and School, our partner parish in Bondeau. In 2023, St. Paul's contributed a total of \$20,100 (\$14,100 more than our annual budgeted amount) to the South Florida Haiti Project (SFHP). 2023 saw many positive developments for the SFHP. Work began on the reconstruction of the guest house, which not only houses people visiting on mission, but also regularly houses staff members and

families of the school. In March of 2023, St. Paul's had 23 people attend the food packing event at which over 75,000 meals were packed for the school children and adults in Bondeau.

In addition to our support of the SFHP in 2023, St. Paul's continued our incredible tradition of generosity to those broken by life circumstances. In 2023, St. Paul's gave \$13,500 to CROS Ministries (\$4,500 more than our annual budgeted amount), \$3,000 to the Interfaith Committee for Social Services, and we collected \$2,310 in gift cards to assist hungry and homeless persons in our community. In total, St. Paul's domestic and overseas outreach assistance was a remarkable \$38,910 in 2023! God is good!

In 2023, our Paul's Place Afterschool ministry continued to help the many Haitian-American children and families it serves, providing the children in our care with nutritious meals; tutoring; art, music, and recreational enrichment; scholarships; a computer lab; and weekly field trips. We are so grateful to the many volunteers who help this program flourish!

With our ever-deepening involvement in the Delray Beach Interfaith Social Services Committee (which is chaired by two members of St. Paul's, Judy Fenney and Kathleen Megan), the renewal of partnerships with organizations like the Delray Beach Police Department, Delray Beach Fire Rescue, the United Way of Palm Beach County, the Delray Beach Public Library, PEACE (People Engaged in Active Community Efforts) and Jewish Family Services of South Palm Beach County, we were able to more effectively respond to various needs of our community.

In 2023, we helped to establish the Anti-Bias Coalition of Delray Beach with our neighbors at Temple Sinai and the Islamic Center of Boca Raton. We also served as the temporary host of a young adult 12-step fellowship that meets on Friday evenings. We remained active with many of our partnerships of grace such as the South County Recovery Residence Association, Habitat 4 Humanity South Palm Beach, CROS Ministries, Family Promise of South Palm Beach County, Episcopal Charities of Southeast Florida, the Delray Beach Children's Garden, the Delray Beach Historical Society, and others. In doing so, St. Paul's maintains a high profile in the wider community.

5) Strengthening Our Christian Education and Spiritual Formation:

In 2023, we celebrated the Confirmation of two people, the Reception of two people into the Episcopal Church, and two people reaffirmed their Baptismal Vows during Bishop Eaton's visit on April 22, 2023.

In 2023, our commitment to the "Becoming Beloved Community" initiative of the Episcopal Church continued to grow. We were a leading congregation in the establishment of the Anti-Bias Coalition of Delray Beach. At a Community Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, we launched the Coalition to the wider community. At this event, the Coalition received a Proclamation from the City Commission and the full support of the Delray Beach Police Department.

On campus, our Sacred Space Book Club continues to meet monthly, engaging in caring conversations on books that both challenge and inspire the reader. In June of 2023 we started a monthly movie matinee series. The debut film was "All Saints," an inspiring true story about a small but mighty Episcopal congregation in rural Tennessee. This film series features, with one exception in December, movies that are based on true stories. Like the Sacred Space Book Club books, the movies in this series create caring conversations on a variety of topics.

Our clergy-led Christian education programs for 2023 included a Sunday forum featuring "The Chosen," a television series about the life of Jesus.

In 2023, St. Paul's was a big part of the renewal of the Cursillo retreat experience in our Diocese of Southeast Florida. We had five women and two men make the retreat as "pilgrims." Additionally, Liz Ryan served as Rectora, or team leader, for the Women's Cursillo, her husband Joe Ryan, Fr. Bernie, and several other "Cursillistas" from St. Paul's served on both the Women's and Men's Cursillos as either team members or volunteers-at-large.

In the Fall of 2023, we had six people participate in our Foundations of Faith journey, which prepared them to either be confirmed, received into the Episcopal Church, or reaffirm their baptismal vows.

Finally, perhaps the most inspiring Christian Education and Spiritual Formation initiative of 2023 was the formation of a team led by Fr. Bernie and Liz Ryan that helped to reimagine our Church School program and, in the process, create our new Family Prayer and Praise worship service. This service, as far as we know, is the only one of its kind in our diocese and it will be a wonderful gateway through which many young families will get to know Christ through our common life at St. Paul's.

2023 Financial Stewardship

In 2023, the number of our pledging households increased by over 8% from 2022, going from 135 pledges in 2022 to 146 pledges in 2023. In spite of us having more actual pledges in 2023 than we had in 2022, we actually had less total dollars pledged, going from \$438,882 in 2022 to \$435,480 in 2023. This presented a significant challenge in terms of financially resourcing our ministries. The Vestry approved a very ambitious budget increase for pledges. Unfortunately, we were not able to meet that ambitious pledge goal. As a result, we had a special "Bridging the Gap" appeal in the Fall. That appeal, together with some very generous non-pledged gifts in the late part of 2023, allowed us to close the anticipated budget gap significantly. We drew about \$103,000 from a reserve fund to balance the budget. Our Capital Improvement Reserve Fund now has \$223,013 to meet the many on-going facilities challenges of our historic, but aging, church campus.

Our St. Paul's Endowment Fund is a tremendous blessing as a financial resource to help sustain flourishing ministries and fund new ministries. Thanks to our generous donors and the good stewardship and oversight provided by our Endowment Fund Board, in 2023 our Endowment Fund grew by more than 10%, going from \$2,842,421 to \$3,131,799. Our St. Paul's Endowment Fund Board continues to recognize and thank those who have donated to the Endowment Fund and those who have pledged an estate gift, and it continues to cultivate new donors to help expand and sustain the good work of St. Paul's for generations to come.

As we look ahead, we will need many things to sustain us financially, namely: continued strong pledge commitments, new pledge commitments, special gifts, and we will need to generate more income from our substantial real estate holdings in order to do the work God has given us to do and to have sufficient resources for our parish missions and ministries in 2024.

Clergy and Staff

In 2023, one of the most significant staffing issues was the change in employment status of our talented and beloved choir master and organist Dr. David Macfarlane. Over the summer, Dr. Macfarlane retired from full-time ministry, and is now with us part-time. He continues to be

available to play music for weddings, funerals, and other sacramental services. We hired Missy McArdle-Rovinelli as the interim-Director of our Music at St. Paul's concert series.

Sadly, at the end of 2023, we changed Fr. Bernie's status from full-time to part-time. We are blessed to have Fr. Bernie continuing to minister to us, and he will continue with many of the ministry involvements he has had for the past two years, including leading worship and preaching regularly; overseeing our new Family Prayer and Praise Service; serving as chaplain to our St. Catherine of Sienna Chapter of the Daughters of the King; helping to coordinate our Veterans Ministry; advising our Cursillo ministry and; leading Sunday forums throughout the year. Going forward, Fr. Bernie will be our part-time assisting priest while he begins to draw his retirement pension.

Once again in 2023, our dedicated staff members were truly heroic in their service to our parish family. Caren Kilpatrick, our Parish Administrator, and Roscoe Campbell, our Sexton, worked tirelessly to improve and maintain our historic campus and to keep our facilities welcoming and beautiful. Liz Ryan (Day School Director and Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation), together with Fr. Bernie and a dedicated team of volunteers, helped to craft our new Family Prayer and Praise Service, a unique fusion of Church School and Sunday worship. This incredible new worship service has been described as "Vacation Bible School every Sunday!" We cannot thank Liz enough for her leadership and selfless dedication to the children and families of our parish. In addition to her very full ministry with our Day School and Children's Faith Formation, Liz also served as Rectora for the 2023 Diocesan Women's Cursillo. We also thank our dedicated team of Day School teachers that Liz leads: Kathy Yates, Kendra Voet, Cary Tobias and Janet Thompson.

In 2023, our Paul's Place senior staff Kathy Fazio (Paul's Place Executive Director), Tim Kilpatrick (Paul's Place Director), and Miliene Dellagrando (Paul's Place Assistant Director) went above and beyond the call of duty to serve the children and families of our Paul's Place Afterschool program.

Ryan Kane, our part-time Coordinator of Parish Communications, worked diligently to help keep us connected via email and other online communications, while skillfully managing our live streamed worship services and publishing our weekly bulletins. Speaking of communications, in November we welcomed Ellen Kentner as our social media and marketing consultant. Ellen has done outstanding work so far, increasing our social media engagement by over 50% already, updating our parish database, and encouraging church members to "like and subscribe" to our St. Paul's Facebook page! Before ending her six month consulting agreement, Ellen will help us to update and improve our website, a much needed project!

The greatest asset of any parish, of course, is its human resources, and at St. Paul's we are blessed with outstanding staff members and dedicated volunteers who serve our parish and community with distinction.

Looking Ahead

As we begin 2024, we find ourselves living evermore deeply into a "new normal" brought on by the pandemic. As a parish family that embraces the motto "where tradition meets today," we are embracing the opportunities that come with the challenges of a rapidly changing social, political, economic, and religious landscape.

The uncertainty that comes with venturing into a "new normal" requires us to walk evermore in faith. Our faith is in a God who promises to walk with us, no matter what

circumstances life presents. St. Paul's has a long, proud tradition of serving as a beacon of faith to our community of Delray Beach and beyond. The grace of God continues to be our strength. That grace has been shared abundantly through the ministries and missions of St. Paul's. Trusting in God, I know that St. Paul's will continue to be an instrument of God's love and goodness. Now, perhaps more than any moment in recent memory, our community, our nation, and our world longs for that which only God can provide. While social, economic, political, and religious challenges can reveal our vulnerability as human beings, they also can reveal the incredible power for good that lives in each of our hearts. That power is the Holy Spirit!

My prayer for our parish family is that we will continue to live into being the Beloved Community that God calls us to be.

In Christ, for whom our hearts are on fire,

Paul+

The Rev. Paul J. Kane
7th Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church