

Senior Warden's Report – 2023

By Meghan Foley, Senior Warden

St. Paul's spent an aspirational year in 2023 emerging into the "new normal" of the post-pandemic world. It was a year characterized by the desire to be with one another more and to serve God and our community more while grappling with a post-pandemic financial picture without planned large gifts and without government support. And St. Paul's handled the challenge with grace.

We continue to add a robust list of new and returning ministries for our congregation to put their spiritual gifts into action. The Veteran's Ministry successfully fundraised over \$3000 in order to sponsor a volunteer event for our parish with a new partner, Forgotten Soldiers. St. Paul's packed and shipped 100 care boxes filled with over 60 items each to service members overseas who usually receive no mail during their deployments.

The Women's Dinner was resurrected and is a joyful success! The women of St. Paul's fill the Parish Hall to capacity each month to meet over good food, good fellowship, and good conversation. Speakers such as Winnie Edwards and Yvonne Odom shared important stories about the history of Delray Beach and the important role of St. Paul's in the community's development and Ruth Mageria spoke to how St. Paul's serves the community through our partnership with CROS ministries.

The Racial Healing Ministry continues to host opportunities to learn about different perspectives and to decrease bias in our community. The Sacred Spaces Book Club meets monthly to discuss works by authors of color. Through our special and historical relationship with Temple Sinai, the Anti-Bias Coalition of Delray Beach (ABC) was formed. An initial movie screening event open to both congregations led to the creation of an executive committee with representatives from multiple houses of worship in south Palm Beach County. The Interfaith Thanksgiving Service was reborn. Over 200 people attended, a proclamation from the city of Delray Beach was read declaring the founding of ABC, and attendees were encouraged to sign an anti-bias pledge. Plans are ongoing to engage the broader community in training and committee work.

A Community Offertory is now a staple of the second weekend each month. The Shower Truck and the Veterans Ministry sponsor the offertory and distribute food and clothing to those in need. It is a beautiful testament to the generosity of our parish and to living out our covenant with God to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

In addition to engaging ministries, there was significant focus on St. Paul's future. For example, to address the spiritual needs of young families, a planning committee emerged to create a Children and Families Prayer Service to debut in early 2024. Efforts were renewed to expand the Columbarium, which is at capacity. After much research, the vestry decided the best way forward is to create a memorial garden. Such a space is more financially responsible, allows for greater capacity, and supports more environmentally friendly landscaping practices, which is

in line with the Church's teachings. The design of this new space will also provide a welcoming, serene, and reflective place for parishioners to visit loved ones. And through a generous donation, this project is expected to reach completion in 2024.

Focus on the future is important as St. Paul's entered 2023 with an aspirational budget. The vestry chose to keep funding levels equal to those sustained through the pandemic, knowing that more pledges would be needed as other large donations were not repeated. However, pledges did not increase enough to meet this need. There was a special end-of-year appeal to bridge the anticipated budget gap of \$250,000. Through the generosity of the parish, \$150,000 was raised. Fortunately, there are reserves available to provide the additional \$100,000 needed. The vestry enters 2024 having to make difficult decisions on how to support our vibrant and thriving parish with less financial resources.

Many seeds were planted in 2023 for potentially increasing income from assets. We are in negotiations with a company to lease our parking lot for paid parking, which could substantially increase the funds we receive compared to the current valet parking contract. And there are plans to renew the conversation about viable options for the development of the western properties. While 2023 feels like it ended with a test from God, we his faithful Chosen have every reason to rise to the occasion and hope for the future of this great parish.