

Rector's Report – 2024

The Rev. Paul J. Kane
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 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. 2024 was my ninth full year serving as your rector. 2024 was a year to celebrate growth in our congregation, as new ministries continued to blossom and long-time ministries grew in wonderful ways, all through God's grace.

This report highlights some of the many wonderful events, initiatives, and programs of 2024, as well as some of the challenges we faced as a congregation. It also includes reflections on stewardship in 2024, staffing updates, and a few thoughts as we look ahead to 2025 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.

Through our social media and marketing initiatives, led by Ellen Kentner, we continue to raise the online profile of St. Paul's in our Delray Beach community and beyond. The most significant initiative in 2024 was the redesign of our parish website. If you haven't done so already, I encourage you to check it out: www.stpaulsdelray.org. Engagement in our online social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube continues to grow, as we deepen our efforts to proclaim the Gospel in the digital world.

In 2024, we had 23 children and three adults baptized, up from 19 baptisms in 2023! We had five people confirmed, and four people received into the Episcopal Church. We celebrated seven weddings, one more than we had in 2023. These increases in participation in the sacramental life of our parish give us great hope as we live into our motto “where tradition meets today.”

In 2024, our two Newcomers Lunches filled Bush 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:** The most significant enhancement of our spiritual vitality was the fact that our Family Prayers and Praise worship service, started in the second half of 2023, continued to grow in 2024. This service, specifically designed for children and young families who are searching for spiritual nourishment and community (but also enjoyed by older adults), has seen many new families become a part of our parish life. We are so grateful to Fr. Bernie, Liz Ryan, and the Family Prayers and Praise team who have done so much to make this the welcoming and life-giving service it has become. In fact, the service has become a model for reimagining faith formation among children, youth, and families in the Episcopal Church. Liz

Ryan was asked to make a presentation on this worship service at the National Association of Episcopal Schools 2024 conference this past October!

In 2024, we continued to live stream our 10 am Sunday service. Through this weekly live stream, our sick and homebound members and friends, and those church members travelling away from south Florida are able to worship with us in a virtual way. In 2024, we continued to broadcast via our Facebook page daily Morning Prayer at 8 am and Compline at 8 pm. 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. Our Lay Eucharistic Visitors bring Holy Communion and comfort to our homebound members. Our Lay Healing Ministers offer the healing rites and intercessory prayer at all services on the third weekend of the month. 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 2024, our Women's Dinner Ministry continued to flourish under the leadership of Ann Caldwell and Lola Reed. This fellowship ministry fills the parish hall with good cheer on the first Monday evening of each month.

Another ministry that continues to reemerge stronger than ever is 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. Our Brotherhood of St. Andrew added five new members in 2024 and in December of 2024 we installed three new Daughters of the King in our St. Catherine of Siena chapter. 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.

Through our fellowship ministries, we at St. Paul's continue to offer vitally important Christian caring and opportunities to strengthen existing friendships and make new friends. 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 respond to the needs of so many people adversely impacted by the economic challenges so many in our community face. Our partnerships with CROS Ministries, the Interfaith Social Services Committee, Family Promise, and the Veterans Administration of 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 and individuals in our community.

In response to the on-going humanitarian crisis in Haiti, St. Paul's continues to be a source of hope to the children and families at Bon Samaritan Episcopal Church and School, our partner parish in Bondeau. In 2024, St. Paul's contributed a total of \$23,245 (\$21,245 more than our annual budgeted amount) to the South Florida Haiti Project (SFHP). 2024 saw many

positive developments for the SFHP. Reconstruction of the guest house continued. The guest house not only houses people visiting on mission, but also regularly houses staff members and families of the school. In March of 2024, St. Paul's had 26 people attend a food packing for Bondeau event at which over 75,000 meals were packed for the school children and adults.

In addition to our support of the SFHP in 2024, St. Paul's continued our incredible tradition of generosity to those broken by life circumstances in our local community. In 2024, St. Paul's gave \$7,900 to CROS Ministries (\$5,900 more than our annual budgeted amount), \$5,128 to the Interfaith Committee for Social Services, and \$6,850 to Family Promise. Additionally, we collected over \$1,000 in gift cards to assist hungry and homeless persons in our community. We donated \$3,200 to Episcopal Relief and Development for assistance to victims of Hurricanes Milton and Helene. In total, St. Paul's domestic and overseas outreach assistance was a remarkable \$46,323 in 2024! God is good!

In 2024, 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!

The Interfaith Social Services Committee enhanced their services significantly by adding a laundry truck to compliment the shower truck. By offering the poor and unhoused in our community the opportunity to launder clothing and take a warm shower, we put into practice our Baptismal Covenant promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself."

In 2024, we deepened our involvement with the Anti-Bias Coalition of Delray Beach. In addition to St. Paul's, coalition congregations include Temple Sinai and the Islamic Center of Boca Raton. In November of 2024, St. Paul's hosted a very moving and joyful annual Interfaith Community Thanksgiving service.

In 2024, St. Paul's began hosting the monthly meetings of the Drug Task Force of Palm Beach County.

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, the Grass River Garden Club, 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 2024, we celebrated the Confirmation of five people and the Reception of four people into the Episcopal Church during Bishop Eaton's visit on March 10, 2024.

Our Sacred Spaces Book Club continues to meet monthly, engaging in caring conversations on books that both challenge and inspire the reader.

Our clergy-led Christian education programs for 2024 included a Sunday forum featuring "The Chosen," a television series about the life of Jesus.

In 2024, St. Paul's remained a big part of the renewal of the Cursillo retreat experience in our Diocese of Southeast Florida. One couple from our parish attended the co-ed retreat as "pilgrims." Joe Ryan, Fr. Bernie, and several other "Cursillistas" from St. Paul's continue to serve on both the Women's and Men's Cursillos as either team members or volunteers-at-large.

In the Winter of 2024, we had ten 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.

2024 Financial Stewardship

In 2024, the number of our pledging households was 134, down slightly from 2023. In spite of us having fewer actual pledges in 2024 than we had in 2023, we actually had more total dollars pledged, going from \$446,321 in 2023 to \$468,053 in 2024. Thanks to significant increases in our non-pledged and holiday income, we ended 2024 with a little more than \$48,000 more in contributions than we did in 2023. Having reduced staffing in 2024, we ended the year with an operating budget surplus of \$29,579. The Vestry designated this surplus to our Capital Improvement Fund, a fund that we draw from to pay for significant maintenance and capital expenses.

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 2024 our Endowment Fund grew by almost 10%, going from \$3,131,799 to \$3,433,414. 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 2025.

Clergy and Staff

In 2024, we saw significant changes in our church office staff. The most significant change was the retirement of Caren and Tim Kilpatrick. Both Caren and Tim were not only long-time faithful members of St. Paul's, but they both served our church family with distinction as staff members. Caren served eight years as our parish administrator and Tim served the past three years as the director of Paul's Place and prior to that he served as our Youth Group coordinator. With Caren's retirement, we restructured our church office team. Caren's responsibilities were primarily in two areas, operations management and bookkeeping. When Caren retired in May, we hired Elaine Wotton as our part-time Parish Operations Manager. Also in May, we outsourced our bookkeeping to SSERS Financial Group, a firm that specializes in non-profit financial management. Also in May, Ryan Kane, who served very effectively for five years as our part-time communications coordinator, left our staff to pursue restaurant management full-time. We hired Ellen Kentner, who had served for six months as our communications consultant in redesigning our parish website, to serve as our part-time Parish Communications Coordinator. Both Elaine and Ellen have been wonderful additions to our church office team!

In addition to the office staffing changes, we also changed our church office hours. The church office is now open Monday through Friday from 9 am to 1 pm.

We continue to be blessed with a wonderful team of "office angels" who volunteer Monday through Friday at the front desk of the church office. Our office angels include Barbara

Clifford, Barbara Filipowski, Sally Kauser, Sherry Fleming, Margherita Downey, and Gail Napolitano.

The Rev. Bernard Pecaro continues to serve as our part-time Assisting Priest, helping to lead worship and serving as clergy liaison for our Veterans and Active-Duty Ministry and as chaplain to our St. Catherine of Siena Chapter of the Daughters of the King. Roscoe Campbell continues to serve our church family faithfully as our full-time Sexton. Our music ministry continues to be led by Dr. David Macfarlane, our part-time organist and choir master. We are very blessed to have these three wonderful and talented people on our church staff.

Liz Ryan continues to serve with distinction as both our Day School Director and Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation. Working closely with our clergy and a dedicated team of volunteers, Liz helps to lead our wonderful Family Prayer and Praise Service, a unique fusion of Church School and Sunday worship. This incredible 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. We also thank our dedicated team of Day School teachers that Liz leads: Kathy Yates (PK-4), Karen Sciara (PK-4), and Cary Tobias (PK-3), as well as vital Day School support staff members Janet Thompson and Brianna Keller.

With the retirement of Tim Kilpatrick in May, our Paul's Place senior staff saw significant changes in 2024. While Kathy Fazio continues to serve with distinction as Paul's Place Executive Director, Miliene Dellagrando, a member of our Paul's Place staff for the past 10 years, was promoted to Paul's Place Director. Miliene's promotion was well deserved and we are blessed to have her incredible leadership guiding the day-to-day operations of Paul's Place. This past summer Joe Ryan joined the Paul's Place staff team. Joe had been a dedicated volunteer and we are thrilled that he is now part of the Paul's Place staff. We are blessed with a wonderful team who always go above and beyond the call of duty to serve the children and families of our Paul's Place Afterschool program.

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.

Church Governance

In 2024, the Vestry revised our church bylaws. This important and significant initiative produced the first revision of our church bylaws since 2004. Serving on the Ad Hoc Bylaws Committee were: Robert Helander (Chancellor), Kristen Murtaugh, Patricia Kollander, and myself. One of the most significant revisions was the creation of four Vestry Standing Committees (Budget & Finance, Stewardship, Leadership & Governance, and Buildings & Grounds). The other was a change in how we elect church members to serve on the Vestry. Our newly structured Vestry committees will allow us to more effectively oversee our facilities and provide better support to staff members and ministry volunteers.

Looking Ahead

As we begin 2025, we find ourselves living ever more deeply into the opportunities and challenges brought about by a culture that continues to be less religiously observant. 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, cultural and religious landscape.

The uncertainty that comes with venturing into our cultural landscape requires us to walk ever more 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 walk in love and become all that God calls us to be.

In Christ, who walks with us in love,

Paul+

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Rector