

Annual Church Meeting, February 9, 2025

An Annual review from the Rector.

Before I begin, I want to thank the vestry, the Altar Guild, the Building and Grounds team, music ministry, hospitality, volunteers and everyone who serves in our many capacities at St. Michael's. May God bless you for your dedication and faithful service.

I have been asked by seminarian friends what the difference is between writing a sermon to your own congregation and one as a visiting priest. The two come from opposite viewpoints yet all start by asking the Holy Spirit to give us the message that the audience needs to hear. When writing to my own congregation, I have a better sense of knowing their needs.

It has been an honor being your Rector since March 2024. I have gotten to know some of you better, and I have seen how we are all growing spiritually. At St. Michael's, my ministry of teaching opportunities range from the 3 year old child at a Wednesday Children's chapel to the 93 year old I visit every month. In a church, life and times constantly change, and so does the need for the word of God to be relevant to our unique St. Michael's lives.

This is an exciting and challenging time to be serving at St. Michael's. As Rector, it's a time to see and apply change, but not just any change. Change has to be understandable and we must all be ready. Change can take time, and always require a foundation of grace, forgiveness and open heartedness. Change needs to be centered on a united goal, and that goal is the mission of St. Michael's. Our mission has always been and remains to, "Grow in love, working in God's spirit."

I like this mission statement because it's clear yet challenges our faith. My goal in these next few years is to strengthen the core of our congregation. We grow in love towards each other, to people we know well, but also to expand that love to others to join our circle. It's a circle with

many entrances, not a clique, but a place of full welcome. Working in Spirit requires us to expand our theological knowledge through teachings, both from the pulpit, and also from our own opportunities to learn. That is why, it is important for us to utilize opportunities with other neighboring Episcopal churches when they offer learning opportunities, and when the greater Episcopal church offers zoom learning experiences. This is the most practical and effective way we can learn with the resources we have.

This year, we offered a Christian education series about Creation care by Deaconess Paula Walker and one from St. Cross. We also encouraged personal daily devotion from Forward Movement and other Diocese resources. As we are able in this coming year, we can look forward to Bible Studies and guest speakers on such topics as “Old Testament 101,” “What is Compassion,” and “Centering Prayer.” I encourage you to join us.

Our vehicles of information also come from our monthly newsletter, “The Guardian,” in which I write the section called, “Rector’s Thoughts.” It is a place to learn about our identity as Episcopalians, why we worship, how we worship and what we believe.

This past year, learning also took place for those preparing and dedicating their lives to God in baptism, confirmation, reaffirmation and reception in the Episcopal Church. We held two catechism courses, each taking 3 Sundays to learn about our faith from the Book of Common Prayer. These classes equipped 9 people for their dedication. These courses are required in order to be baptized, confirmed or received in our church. We witnessed the baptism of Judith, Mieko and Victoria on All Saint’s Sunday in November. Confirmation, Reaffirmation and Reception in the Church is performed by the Bishop in May. Please support our parishioners that day by attending the service at St. John’s Cathedral.

Working in the Spirit also means having an outward view of ministry. St. Michael’s believes in preparing for a growing church and in the work of evangelism. In our modern era, the church continues to grow, and don’t let others convince you otherwise. It’s growing in a different way,

and it will continue to grow if we are relevant to the messages people need to hear—that God is love, and all are welcomed at the Table of God. We believe that St. Michael’s can reach more people by improving our access to the world through technology. This past fall, after a few months of completely re-hauling our website, we launched one that is capable of reaching a broader spectrum of our community. On the website, we are able to share who we are and how we can be found. In it, we have a portal that encapsulates all our calendar events, sermons, newsletters and Sunday service videos. We are now expanding our reach through our YouTube channel allowing us to share our worship services with the world. Along with YouTube, we will continue to maintain our Facebook community and re-direct people to our YouTube platform. We believe, as we have learned from every church, increasing amounts of people use the internet to worship and to find their church. At this time, I want to thank all who help every week with filming, uploading and handling IT issues.

Our church has always served our community both with outreach and in-reach ministries. Outreach wise, we see every third Sunday of the month the generosity our community shares in donating food to CASE, and on special times of the year, our contribution to Family Promise, Re-sale thrift store, and to the needs of our veterans. In the future, we hope to expand to new ministries that give us a hands-on opportunity to serve. In-reach ministry includes ministry such as fellowship hour after the 10 am service, providing an important opportunity to build and share community. In-reach ministry also includes supporting our Children’s Center. My weekly Rector’s Notes is not only received by our congregants but reaches the parents of the Children Center, on whom we include as important people to welcome. Many parents share with me how energetic their child is when Wednesday Chapel occurs. We see how many of the busy parents are interested in finding God with their enthusiastic response to our Christmas Eve 4:00 pm family service. Among the 97 people in attendance, approximately seven families were from the Center. It was wonderful to see their children singing in the choir. Our church needs to care for these parents, providing them practical options to spend time with God.

Every Wednesday, the 27 children march in to the sanctuary, one holding the cross, while the rest follow, waving their LED candles and singing, “This little Light of Mine.” Another volunteer helps me light the candle to begin the service, and another holds the offering plate where they deposit their offering, not money, but a fresh flower. It is during this precious time that they learn about the love of God, and returning that love to God. It is there, that they sing from the top of their voices, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” It is there that they build their spiritual foundation for the rest of their lives. This is also there that the Holy Spirit speaks to their parents. In the coming year, we are planning to offer a once a month family service at our 10 am service for the parents of the children.

We are grateful for our music ministry. Thank you Adam and the choir for leading us in heartfelt musical worship each week. We are grateful for our choir members new and old who share their gifts with us. This is another indication that St. Michael’s has momentum to grow. In the new year, we look forward to more new people that can participate and share their gifts in music.

2024 has been a rewarding and challenging year for me, as I newly navigate through our church calendar year blending old traditions with new ones. It has been my unimaginable joy to share in your lives. From a burial, to baptism, to offering Holy Communion at home visits, to be the chaplain of the children, to encouraging your spiritual participation and growth through our stewardship campaign, vestry meetings, sermons and too many other ways to count. But out of all these rituals, the most meaningful of all is serving you in Holy Communion.

As you can see, we have exciting hopes and plans. God will continue to direct us in this growth, but we need your support in time, talent and treasure in order to “expand the light.” We need to say as Simon did to Jesus, “Yet if you say so, I will do it.” Just as the Magi went on a new road home, let us venture into the blessing God has planned for St. Michael’s. One thing I have clearly learned as your Rector is that harmony and unity are needed to steer God’s church from distractions into productivity. We have that unity at St. Michael’s. The steadfastness of everyone of you and your dedication to this church are evident. Now, please join me in the next chapter—

deepening that spiritual fervor to allow the Holy Spirit to say in your personal life, and together as a church, “Here am I, send me.” Amen.