

**Rector's Letter to the Parish
Annual Meeting 2017
St. John's Episcopal Church, Bangor**

Dear Friends in Christ,

This, I believe, is our time. We've reached a moment of stability: several ministries are bearing fruits that are visible to us and to those around us. Our spending has been cut and our pledge support has increased so that our ministries are more sustainable than they have been in years. After a year of staff turnover and changes in positions, our staffing is strong, and our systems are improving. We've been incredibly well served by our Vestry and Officers. They've provided leadership in their thoughtful and prayerful consideration, in their rolling up of sleeves to get jobs done, and in their proactive looking to the future while also attending to the details of today.

In this moment of stability, it is also clear that much is changing within our community and in the world around us. Changes within our community are most striking when long time members move away or die, and, beyond the sadness of our loss, we are left with a shift in generations and leadership. Thankfully, people have also joined our community in recent years. Changes are clear when we look around us and realize how many people there are that we do not know well. Our Vestry has addressed this, and will continue to do so, by sponsoring dinners to bring people together to get to know each other beyond Sunday morning. We will need to strengthen our changing community to engage a changing world together.

The world around us is clearly changing. Generations are clearly changing. Young adults now often have no religious culture. They do not know the stories, traditions, or habits of Christians. Socially we are fragmented and divided. Churches are often seen as divisive and negative in their influence. And yet we know it can be a matter of life and death that people know how much God loves them and has set them free for love. How are we to bring the Good News of Christ to our world and time? It will surely be different from the recent past and may require new things from us.

The Vestry, considering the time, has engaged and committed to several processes of discernment. The first two have been sponsored and encouraged by the Diocese. To help us consider God's call to go deeper in our life together, we engaged as a parish in the Renewal Works process by first taking the Spiritual Life Inventory that it provides. The results gave information to our Discernment Team to help us consider Spiritual Growth in our own parish and what initiatives might respond to hungers in our parish and God's ongoing call to growth. An initial Report is included in our Annual Report, and a final Report is still forthcoming. Similarly, we have also accepted the Diocese's invitation to participate in the Living Local initiative that is just beginning. Our team is forming now, and more information for our parish will be presented February 5th by Cn. Michael Ambler. The Living Local Team will also engage in discernment, but from a very different direction: looking at our community from the perspective of our neighbors and considering how we might begin relationships with them. A Discernment Report will be given to the Vestry in May, and it will also be the start of Living Local initiatives and reflection for learning in the year that follows. The Discernment Report, along with that of the Renewal Works team, will contribute greatly to the larger discernment work of our parish in the year ahead.

Our third and largest discernment work is soon to begin. This February will begin our 100th year of worship in our current church building. It is a glorious and beautiful space. To ensure the future of our worship space, to prepare it for its second century of ministry, we will need to renew and restore it, particularly its beautiful windows. Now is the time to consider not only our building's needs, but also its purposes and how God's mission will be accomplished through it and through us. The Vestry has engaged the Episcopal Church Foundation to lead us in the Discernment Phase of a Capital Campaign. The Discernment Phase will include the work of the other discernment teams and then bring together people from across the entire parish to give input to where we sense God calling us, our greatest gifts and challenges in responding, and what we

need to answer this call, including what kind of worship and program space. Please join in this work by attending one of the ten to twelve gatherings, or “cottage meetings,” that will be held in Lent. From these cottage meetings, our consultant, Leslie Pendleton, will work with us to create a vision of our life and ministry going forward, and to identify a scope of project for renewing our worship spaces and facilities to support that vision.

The Discernment Phase does not commit us to a Campaign. Only if we wish as a parish to continue, will we then engage for Phase Two, the Feasibility Study, that helps us to test support for our vision and based on feedback refine the scope and purpose of a possible Campaign, so that it will be attainable and successful. Phase Three would be then the separate and final phase of an actual Capital Campaign.

The time is now. Let us give thanks for all that we have received, and the love we have known, that we may look to God’s future with confidence and hope, and with thanksgiving that he has promised us a part in it.

As we prepare to leave this moment of stability by pausing, breathing deeply, and giving thanks, I continue to be humbled and grateful to walk with you as your rector on this wondrous journey of faith.

I am yours in Christ,

Mo. Rita+

Mo. Rita+