

What Happens during our “Interim” Year Together (continued)

I will be providing updates to the congregation throughout this process. Not only that, the lay leaders and I will need everyone’s help to carry out this work, our ministry together, for the coming year.

Ministry Development: Three Goals

Our call as baptized persons as expressed in the baptismal covenant, commits us all to serving in Christ’s name—to growing in faith and sharing the love of God in Christ with our neighbors. This is the heart of what it means to be the Church, sharing in God’s mission in the world. Toward this purpose we use all our resources—our money, our buildings, our time, and our talents. That is why we are starting first with ministry development, and we are starting right now.

As the Vestry discussed this over the past two meetings, three areas of ministry need to be developed this next year at St. Paul’s: *christian formation, pastoral care, and outreach to our neighbors*. Let me address each in turn.

Christian Formation

In the CAT survey that St. Paul’s took, one theme came through clearly. St. Paul’s wants to have a Sunday School again. I couldn’t agree more. First of all, we already have children at St. Paul’s, each one is sufficient reason for us to do this work. We do not need to wait for more kids to come. Indeed, why would families come to us at all if we do not offer anything for their children? In addition, learning and growing in faith together is not an optional activity for a congregation. It is something the church must always do. *Finally, faith formation is not just for kids. Learning and growing are for all.* Therefore, we are beginning right away with this initiative. We will have faith formation for all ages, not just children. We have already begun classes for adults after church. We are using the curriculum developed at the request of our presiding Bishop, *The Way of Love*.

For kids, Michelle Garcia is already hard at work recruiting teachers and talking with families with kids. She began recruiting weeks ago! Several people have already committed to teaching. Michelle will be meeting with potential teachers this month. Contact her if you are interested. Furthermore, we are asking you to help—for parents to bring their kids, for uncles and aunts to bring nieces and nephews, for grandparents to bring grandkids, and for everyone to invite your neighbors. We will be starting in early September. We will have more details soon for you to help us get the word out.

Many have shared with me their memories of an active Sunday School in the past at St. Paul’s. I share that vision of St. Paul’s, vibrant with the energy that children and youth bring. But let me add a note of counsel. God’s work is always new. As we begin our Sunday School again, what God will do among us will be new and fresh. I encourage us to be open to the new way we see God in the children God sends us.

Pastoral Care

A loving community cares for one another. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, when one suffers, we all suffer; when one rejoices we all rejoice. Part of being the body of Christ together

is this kind of mutual care and celebration. The Vestry voiced a desire for deepening this care in our congregation. This is clearly a value that St. Paul's has for its new rector; however, I was heartened to hear the recognition that this is not just about the priest providing pastoral care. A priest should care pastorally, but a leader will also help a congregation care for each other pastorally.

Again we need your help. Is there someone with whom St. Paul's has lost touch? In particular, I am concerned if there might be someone who can no longer make it to St. Paul's but who wants to be connected and part of our congregation. The Vestry wants to be sure this happens as a first priority pastorally. In addition, is there someone who would like an invitation to return to St. Paul's? An interim is a time when those who have drifted away from our life, for whatever reason, can return, with grace and with welcome.

I will be working with lay leaders to ask parish groups, or form new ones, to reach out and care for our congregation. We need people to be trained to take the sacrament to those who cannot make it to church. We need people to reach out regularly to shut ins. I will share in this work, but it means so much more if not only the priest does this, but when it is a community effort.

Outreach to our Neighbors

There was a day, when to be the church, we simply offered programs to those looking for churches. In my two decades of ordination, this has changed dramatically. Fewer and fewer people are even looking for churches. Many people think of churches in a negative light, viewing them as exclusive and judgmental. More and more people were never raised in church. They have no experience of church at all. We can be a strong congregation, with a hearty welcome and vibrant programs, but if we stay in our walls no one will know.

Today, congregations are learning to leave the walls of our building and serve in mission to our neighbors. We should have always been doing this, but today, it is no longer an option. If we want people to know the love of God in Christ, we have to go to them. In the Gospels, Jesus didn't tell his disciples to invite people in. He told them to go out and share. It is what the apostles did after the day of Pentecost. It is what the church has always done when it has thrived most.

I hope to engage St. Paul's in discernment of how God is calling us to serve Key West. There is much need here. But God is already present, healing, forgiving, reconciling. This is simply what God does, always and everywhere. Our job is not to bring God to our neighbors but to cooperate with what God is already doing. I look forward to helping us listen, learn, and share in God's mission to our neighbors. After all, we do not do this only for others. We do this because we need to as faithful Christians. It is energizing for any congregation. It stretches us as we reach out to strangers; then, we find that we see Christ in others, and they see Christ in us. I hope we can launch one new outreach ministry in my time with you.

This is all good and ambitious work. I look forward to working and learning with you. I am confident we will grow in our faith as we share it with others. We do not do this by ourselves. God's grace is sufficient—without which we can do nothing. However, we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us.