

My husband Ray and I moved to Oak Island from Pennsylvania in late 2016, and joined St. Philip's in 2017. I was surprised at how lost and lonely I felt in those early days, following our move to this beautiful seaside town. While we enjoyed the beauty of the sea birds and the occasional dolphin sightings, where were the people? (our neighbors only visited occasionally). But the people of St. Philip's made us feel at home- at first in the choir, and then in other activities, such as the Parish Life committee and the Fall Sale. Soon, we felt like we were part of the St. Philip's family.

I am now in my first year on the Vestry, and have had the opportunity to get to know more members of St. Philip's. As Vestry Person of the Day, I was able to meet those who regularly attend the 8 o'clock service, with whom I was previously unacquainted. I also got to see all of the people who work hard to make just one service come together. I will admit that I previously did not fully appreciate all that they do. The verger, ushers, altar guild, flower guild and counters are bustling behind the scenes before and after the service. Add to that the clergy, readers, lay assistants, and the choir, who are participating in the liturgy, and you have at least 25 people. And that is just for worship services! Our many other ministries, close to 50 in all, that serve both the parish and the community, involve many more parishioners to make them possible.

As a member of the Vestry, I am on the Grow the Church Initiative committee. We are preparing a brochure to be placed in public places (such as the Chamber of Commerce and real estate offices) that will inform those new to the area of all that St. Philip's has to offer, as a way to attract potential new members. But I think that, although we hope that the brochure is successful in publicizing St. Philip's, that the best efforts at drawing new people to our church come from our members. If we have a friend who has mentioned looking for a church, or a new neighbor, we can invite them to a service or activity. If we are members of another group, such as a book club or a neighborhood social group, we can send them an email, or post it on Facebook.

While walking the Labyrinth at our recent event, and focusing on the paving stones in the path, I saw many familiar names, both those of the living (who had memorialized family members) and those who had passed. I realized that in the six years since those lonely first days after our move, that I knew or had known many of those whose names I was reading, and I felt a real sense of belonging and a spiritual connection to St. Philip's.

At St. Philip's, we strive to love God and love others in all we do. We can share that love with others by inviting them to join our church family.

Michele Barkalow