

St. John's COVID-19 Response and Beyond

A White Paper from Lay Committee Leaders

- Informed by our parish's work and discernment around social justice over the past several years, we would like step up in the moment, lean in to our mission and greatly intensify our advocacy engagement. We do not intend to take any partisan positions or endorse any political candidates. Rather, we propose to speak up on social issues we already support. This is an exciting opportunity and natural next step for St. John's as a parish.
- St. John's already has a reputation in the diocese and in the community for being a church of action, for "voting with our feet." Bethesda Cares, Shepherd's Table and Interfaith Works consider us key partners. Our work with refugees has been reported in Bethesda Magazine. Community leaders recognize our commitment to action on gun violence prevention and interfaith cooperation.
- In the current crisis, St. John's has been quick to respond to the pandemic. Not only have we stepped up support for our traditional partners but we have innovated new ways to support others in our community. We are helping to fight COVID-related hunger and poverty by partnering with Bethesda Cares and Shepherd's Table, as well as with Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, ICCP, Manna, CASA, Wider Circle and more. We established the Helping the Helpers fund that has provided meals and N95 masks to the Suburban Hospital ER Department, meals to the Bethesda Chevy-Chase Rescue Squad, N95 masks to the Montgomery County Police Department and hand sanitizer to the Montgomery County Department of Transportation Ride-On Bus Drivers. We are providing food to needy families throughout the BCC High School Cluster and beyond through Here2Help, a local food access initiative. We have raised funds for the COVID crisis in Gaza and funded a full nurse's salary in the West Bank. This work has involved hundreds of St. John's parishioners and many St. John's ministries, including Faith in Action, the Holy Land Committee and the Men's Ministry.
- In addition, the pandemic has come at a time when a blue-ribbon panel of St. John's leaders has debated what a "new" St. John's campus might look like that would give us the ability to lean into our vision and mission, with an emphasis on connecting with our community and addressing issues of social justice.

- The ground is shifting fast under our feet. As Councilmember Jawando said in our forum last week — the pandemic is exposing who we are and what we value. Countless county residents are being left behind and will never recover from the consequences of the pandemic. What happens in the aftermath of this emergency will determine who is lifted out of poverty, who remains in poverty and who descends into poverty. It will define our community for decades.
- St. John's—as an organization—should talk about how we pivot to meet these new realities. Our parish is well positioned to take a major leadership role in our community in a number of ways. First, by facilitating our discipleship as community leaders and advocates. Second, by engaging robustly the Montgomery County government. Third, by actively coordinating the work of groups that we already work with to support a strong recovery effort and drive institutional changes that help our underserved communities. Fourth, by devising means to expedite our ability to respond to the needs in our community.
- To do this effectively, and put this in place quickly, we propose the following:
 - **Start Engaging with the County Council Immediately** — to support a strong recovery effort post-pandemic. In particular, we would support doing what it takes to ensure gaps in education, health, transportation, food and housing are met.
 - **Devise a Communications Strategy** — information has to reach more people more quickly and effectively. For example, we would like to set up an Action Alert that would go out to the parish as necessary during this crisis. This would include opportunities in real time for direct engagement in the community as well as on policy issues and help encourage, support, and train our parishioners to be active in our community.
 - **Develop an Advocacy Strategy** — Continue work in our Social Justice Advocacy Program with our advocacy consultant (retained through an NPF grant) to design a strategy for effective engagement with the County Council on COVID-19 response and recovery effort.
 - **Collaborate on Mechanisms for Rapid Response** — There will be times that we need to engage with the vestry quickly on issues, such as issuing time-sensitive letters to the County Council or approving much needed quick disbursements, that require their input and approval.

Signed,

Faith in Action: Penny Winder

Men's Ministry: John Ross

Interfaith Ministry: Rob Hartmann

Holy Land Committee: Kirk Campbell

Eco Action: Carolyn Pierce
Jane Houlihan
Tom Kerr

Forums: Peter Plocki
Jay Mallin

Sanctuary: Kirk Campbell
Denise Galbo

Outreach: Liz Everhart

Stephen Ministers: Toni Hartman