

Priest-in-Charge Report & Letter to the Congregation of St. John's Episcopal Church  
Warsaw, Virginia - Sunday, January 20, 2019

It's hard to believe that as February approaches I will be celebrating two years of serving as your Priest-in-charge. This past year was a turning point for me. First and foremost, I thank you from the whole of the heart space within me for your love and support when my husband Buff died in April. I felt embraced and held up by your prayers and presence in my life and remember with such gratitude how you had welcomed and gathered Buff in, along with me, when we arrived February 2017 and how you supported and assisted him as his health declined. How you seemed to take delight in what delighted him so specially in this place: his enthusiasm for "church," for the Sunday services, of course the music (especially when Ben made the organ so powerfully come alive) and sitting near the kids, enjoying their energy and participation in what was going on. He might not have remembered your names, but he enthusiastically loved what was going on and responded joyfully to this church "home" you as a congregation created and nurtured over the years before we came.

I am grateful for the leadership of St. John's. The 2018 vestry was superb: Barbara Jean LeFon as Senior Warden, Priscilla Wellford as Junior Warden, Anne Neuman as Treasurer, members Mercer O'Hara (who also serves as Altar Guild Chairman), Arlene Hinkson (who also shares her beautiful musical gifts and leadership with us) and Brother Mark (who also offers liturgical leadership to our Sunday services). I am also so grateful to St. John's staff for their dedicated, creative and caring spirits: Lucy Baker, parish secretary and co-editor of our weekly *E-pistle* Danni Jones, our youth programming director, and Florence Croxton, our sexton. Our congregational leadership also includes other leaders in specific areas of responsibility: Courtenay Altaffer as Register and as ECW President, David Gallagher, Receipts Treasurer and Ben Cox as Endowments Treasurer and our inspired and inspiring organist. What wonderful leadership graces this church! They have been so dedicated to the structure of the church – our spaces and what goes on in and around them and, also, to the structure of the Episcopal Church "way" of worship, liturgy, learning, caring, giving and sharing. What really makes St. John's St. John's, though, is a combination: the elected and appointed leadership, the staff, the quiet, without "title" leadership of so many of you within the congregation, but also (and this is essential) the dedication, commitment and activity of the "follow-ship/fellowship" of all of you participating and serving together as the body of this faith family here.

This Episcopal rhythm of life that is the bones of how we live in faith and community together in this tradition is a way of life that you as this congregation have embraced by your participation. Our job as the church, now and always, is to "put skin on the bones of it." To nourish the "body" of our church family and then turn and offer what we have been blessed by and with to nourish the community around us in which God has placed us.

As I look back over the past couple of years here, the words/phrase that emerges as I reflect on the "being and doing" here is "Caring and Sharing." My sense is that your living and working together as a congregation and how you go about this comes out of a deep caring that is an

essential element of your inner being. You seem to have an inner Light that you are letting shine through. This deep compassion as the ground of your being is the rich soil that has and will support your continued growth as a sharing people, both individually and as a faith family. After watching you over the past two years I believe that is God's call into which you are moving more and more, coming to know how deeply God cares for you, has blessed you and is drawing you into a future of serving as a channel of divine caring and blessing with each other and with those beyond these doors. This is the world God formed and is continuing to form and re-form out of a divine desire that all divinely created and loved are to be supported, sustained and experience themselves as beloved and blessed children of God. And God needs us all to be the hands and heart to accomplish this.

This report could have been a bullet point list of all that has happened here in 2018. What you/we/St. John's under the loving and watchful gaze of Christ have accomplished is important. I commit now to "producing" such a list, perhaps useful for posterity as I did for my 2017 Annual Report and I will make that available to you later.

However, as someone who loves Scripture, I am reminded that Paul did not communicate long lists of "doings" to the congregations he loved and served. Rather, his "reports" were instead in the form of Letters" to them. Instead he shared what he was "seeing" in how they were growing, how they were becoming in their being servants of Christ, how they were showing (putting "skin on") the Way of Christ as they lived, moved and had being. His communication was more about their "being-ness" as he observed the "fruits" of the Way of Love that Christ had offered as a Way of Life, the "Way of Love."

As we together look forward to the next year and the next years after that I encourage us to intentionally and prayerfully consider together how, with whom, and in what ways Christ is calling us to even more deeply explore and live into this "Way of Love"- then being it and doing it. By God's amazing grace, may this be so.

*Blessed to be journeying with you along the Way,  
Torrence*