



ST PAUL'S MEMORIAL CHURCH

at the UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Mutual Ministry Review 2018

The overwhelming themes of our Mutual Ministry Review are *gratitude, optimism, abundance and momentum*. Even where improvements were offered the general tenor was positive, hopeful. Several mentioned a renewed sense of community and energy in the parish. People are grateful for Will's leadership, the close tie between the rector and the congregation, and many noted progress on several areas of church life and programming. Nearly everyone stressed the increase in church attendance, particularly by young families, and the sense that all aspects of our parish are growing in positive directions.

Process

There were two questions posed: [What are some of our best successes since Will accepted our call over a year and a half ago?](#) And, [what are areas for growth and/or places where St. Paul's can sharpen our focus?](#)

These questions were posed not just to the Vestry and Will but also to the staff and the congregation. We received thoughtful input from more than 20 parishioners. Themes in the responses are catalogued under each question.

➤ [What are some of our best successes since Will accepted our call over a year and a half ago?](#)

[General](#)

There is consensus that St. Paul's has a bright future. Several reference a sense of mutual accountability and a collegial tie between the rector and congregation. Respondents point to a clear vision with a leader capable of steering us to successful implementation.

"By far the greatest success is that Will rekindled a sense of optimism and hope at St. Paul's, restored the staff's pride in working at St. Paul's, and brought renewed energy to all that we do."

Worship and Attendance

Most respondents pointed to some aspect of parish growth, most notably the increase in Sunday attendance and the subsequent increase in pledges (both dollars and number). Many pointed to engagement, enthusiasm and satisfaction, particularly with families with young children as well as the younger congregants (20s and 30s), and the return of former church families.

"I'm so pleased to see familiar faces in the pews (folks who'd gone 'away' but are giving St. Paul's another try). As well as the growing number of newcomers. This is such a welcome sign. I appreciate the fuller involvement of Canterbury students."

There were many comments about the service itself:

"Will has improved the quality of our worship services. Subtle changes to the form of the worship and to the stagecraft involved have greatly enhanced the worship experience."

"A worship service that flows better... more cohesive and more intentional and more liturgically sound and overall more holy"

"Will's preaching has been inspiring — and the children's sermons are as important to me as I imagine they are to the kids. I love seeing them gather around Will or Heather at the altar."

"I really appreciate the primacy of the liturgy that Will espouses for example by moving announcements to a period before worship starts as well as eulogies in funerals. It is clearly a heartfelt value and not simply good style for him and I think that value is transmitted to the congregation."

Programming and Ministry

People are excited and grateful for the emphasis on the growth and strengthening of so many essential aspects of the church. The most enthusiastic comments were about the choir and music ministry and there was positive regard for the emphasis on children and youth programming and praise for the dramatic expansion of the Canterbury ministry.

"I think Will has done a masterful job in determining the areas of ministry in most need of help and in strengthening those areas considerably - Children and youth ministry, music ministry, university ministry. He has involved those most touched by these ministries, listened well, and taken steps, in concert with members of the parish who have a stake in these areas of ministry."

"The enthusiasm for, and actualization of, development of programs and activities for our children and youth under the guidance of the Ministry Architects "

"Will formulated and executed a plan for building a world-class music program to grow our church. He hired Deke. Working with Deke, they have restarted the Junior Choir and they have brought several younger members into the Parish Choir."

"The development of a full time, benefited Music Director is significant, made more so by Deke Polifka's particular knowledge, skill and spiritual vision. Music has always had a

high ranking in parish surveys, search preparation, etc. and this is a logical and important development.”

People also noted several program/ministry enhancements:

- More thoughtful and caring and intentional pastoral care
- Moving the Wednesday night service into the chapel
- Opportunities to get to know others in small groups like the Foyer dinners and last Spring’s wisdom group
- Increase in spiritual worship opportunities including compline and Tuesday Eucharist
- Some sprucing up of the tired physical plant
- We loved Shrinemont this year!
- Use of St. Paul’s for the in gathering on August 11
- Overall, the church itself seems to be better kept, cleaner, well-organized

There was also appreciation for what we are doing with outreach ministries:

“As a supporter of the work of ADP, I appreciate that St. Paul’s has formally recognized and claimed it as its own. I hope we the congregation can build close ties with our projects in Africa.”

“One of our best successes during the past year and a half, in my opinion, is our church’s involvement in IMPACT, a truly impressive ecumenical effort to address critical human service needs in the Charlottesville-Albemarle community.”

“On a smaller scale - but noteworthy - was St. Paul’s drive to collect school supplies for the refugee students of our elementary schools - a vital reminder to all of the needs of those new residents to our community from other parts of the world.”

There was also a positive theme about outside communication and branding related to church life:

“Will has improved the quality of our printed materials. The look and quality of the content of the Constant Contact newsletter, yellow sheets, bulletins, and the Fall brochure have all improved. The focus on rebranding has been quietly effective.”

Leadership

There is high praise throughout the comments for Will’s leadership. People report that he is approachable, relatable, a visionary, a role model and a hard worker.

“I am so thankful Will is leading our congregation. He has brought energy, faith, a sense of humor and a growing congregation to us.”

“I feel like I can relate to Rector”

“Clear in calling us to identify as Christian”

“Getting to know you: Knows his parishioners, works collaboratively and is very approachable.”

“Greater vision, a big picture view of where we want to be going and what we're capable of as a parish.”

“Will has sustained a long period of time since Elaine left. I think he has done exceedingly well with good humor and a great deal of energy.”

“Will has begun to re-direct our parish in a more positively Christian perspective in stressing more the need to identify with Jesus Christ.”

One area of strength identified was patient and outstanding recruitment and hiring, as well as working effectively with existing staff team to build morale and excitement about the future of St. Paul's.

“Will has focused on building a high-quality staff. He has articulated and demonstrated a desire to provide employees with good salaries and benefits.”

Responses point to monumental and momentous accomplishments in the relatively short time Will has been here.

“Will has quietly but effectively addressed several long-standing contentious issues. He has demonstrated firmness, resolve, patience, and kindness.”

“We have undergone a discernment/overhaul of our children's education programs, made significant additions in the music program (including staffing and a new choir for children), re-envisioned many of worship services (namely the 5:30 Sunday evening service), started building a new website, and laid out plans for further staffing/growth. Will has been able to steer the ship on these projects in a logical and steady way, as an outgrowth of his confidence in the vision of what St. Paul's can be. Will's effective leadership style stems from his own comfort with who he is and where he wants to go. It is exciting to see where this will lead, especially when we are fully staffed and able to see the results of the many positive changes being made.”

“A shout out for moving forward with Booker House.”

“Will has taken steps to greatly improve the financial footing of St. Paul's. His year-round commitment to Stewardship has been effective. Attendance is up. The number of pledgers is up. He has pushed through the creation of a Finance Committee. He has worked to clarify the components of our pooled investment funds and to properly designate portions as restricted endowments and unrestricted investment funds. He has committed energy and focus to the Booker House lease negotiations.”

“Will has tackled important issues in the office, in web page development, changing of physical layout with improved workspace and in personnel development”

“He has created a vision of prosperity as opposed to scarcity.”

➤ **What are areas for growth and/or places where St. Paul's can sharpen our focus?**

Physical plant

There were emphatic and recurring comments were about our physical plant and the need to make significant investments to upgrade, modernize, and maintain our church. People hope to see a capital campaign so that we can have the kind of renovation and restoration that is necessary. Specific things that were mentioned were: the Skinner organ, church school wing, parish offices and parking.

"We need to develop a plan for creating and executing a capital campaign. (There is zero parish culture around capital campaigns). The ground work in front of a capital campaign is work we need to be doing. We have years of deferred maintenance on our building and related to our organ that will hinder our growth unless addressed."

"Dare to be great and take risks once [now that] Booker House lease is renegotiated."

Inclusivity

People want us to be sure we don't alienate or forget about any of the parishioners. Specific mention was made of politically conservative and elder parishioners and continuing to find ways to involve and support them. There was also mention of the importance of being a truly welcoming community, noting that there are not many gay, disabled or other diverse group members.

Adult formation

While people are pleased with the focus on children, youth and young adult formation many would like to see equal attention to adult formation. There is acknowledgement that this means different things depending on many things including age, faith journey and family obligations.

"Adult forum. It isn't consistent enough to get into a pattern (sometimes social, sometimes teaching, sometime information gathering, etc.), there isn't enough connection from week to week to make you feel compelled to come to multiple weeks in a row, etc."

"Coffee hour could be a more active way to greet and engage new members. It feels like it has been too often used for formal programs or is slap dash with boxed snacks. This social time helps to create social "glue."

"I hope that equal attention will be given as soon as resources and bandwidth increase to the needs of our older parishioners in terms of educational programmatic and spiritual exploration and formation."

"Need for more adult programs and learning opportunities...especially in small groups."

"I feel the lack of a group, either short or long term, that explores interesting issues, theological, spiritual, the intersection of the two, or as applied to the world we live in

today. I also feel the lack of a group experience that strengthens my connection with a smaller group of St. Paul's members."

"I think that the next step in strengthening the community that is St. Paul's church is giving us more opportunities to develop deeper and more spiritual relationships with each other."

"I hope we will have opportunities to stretch both spiritually and theologically."

People also want to be sure the offerings are communicated earlier and often:

"Events — Adult Forums, music offerings, etc. — or often not "advertised" well-enough in advance (a month seems reasonable) for some of us to make plans around."

"Adult Forums that involve substantive "conversations" or 'processes' with Will (him communicating plans, us communicating our input about various issues) should somehow be communicated widely. Not everyone can come to every adult forum. A paragraph in the subsequent weekly bulletin with "for more information, contact ... (or see ...) could be a simple way of handling this."

"Let's hear from all the various groups - it would be great to hear from all the different groups — Who Dunnit? Men's Bible Study; Stephen Ministers; etc. from time to time. A short blurb in the weekly newsletter with a first person 'testimonial' would be interesting and engaging and help bring the groups' activities more to the center of our parish life."

Outreach

There are differences of opinion about what outreach should look like. People would like to see an emphasis on outreach/service/missions and the responses reflect that this is often a place where personal passions and interests exist. It will be important for St. Paul's to create a plan for what outreach means to us.

"We need to reimagine our Mission and Services work as a parish. We need to resolve how grants and legacy projects (ADP, Crop Walk) fit in."

Communications

There was a theme around better internal and external communication. People would like to see more timely communication and responses to correspondence. Additionally, it would be helpful to have a clear and shared understanding of the best channels of communication for certain matters. In addition to improving how we relate and relay information to one another there is also a sense that we need to think beyond our church walls to how we are communicating and relating to the community at large.

"We need better corporate and personal communications."

"As we grow in our ministry and mission, we will absolutely need to think about larger communication strategies - how to get people in the larger community involved in the great things we will be doing."

“Volunteers need to feel empowered and view themselves as the experts in particular areas. Parishioners need to learn the proper people to go to for answers.”

“We all need to work on this together.”

“I wish there were some way to make them (sermons) available either in audio or transcribed version so that people who can't be in church and be more connected.”

There were some other themes around planning, triaging tasks, celebrating successes and appreciating people's contributions.

“We need to be better at celebrating successes and thanking people.”

“More focused appreciation of and affirmation of others... parish leaders, volunteers, staff, etc.”

“More proactive, less reactive”

“Need to more clearly empower and delegate authority and responsibility to lay leadership and volunteers. It would be nice to see and hear more from the vestry, for example.”

Summary

There is broad recognition that St. Paul's Memorial Church is on a fine path: from our soon to be augmented clergy, to efficient and talented staff, to expansion of student participation, to careful stewardship and new expansions of our funds, to intense focus on a better and larger children's program, an ever-improved music program with a superb organist and a restored organ, to a careful and thoughtful vestry, and increasing attendance. On all of that, we have reason to celebrate a place already making notable strides and working towards an enviable future. That future needs to look forward to proceed on a course of more of the same initiative it is bent upon: further concentration on expansion of participation by children and students, increased memberships, ever more comprehensive efforts to communicate fully with parishioners and seeking more hands on participation in church matters, intense restoration, and more focused concentration on how best to shape and expand our outreach endeavors.