

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

of Newburyport, MA



Dear St. Paul's Church Family,

Moving to Newburyport in the middle of a pandemic to become your new priest has been trying, to say the least. I have met very few of you face to face and I know it has been difficult for the community as a whole not to be able to gather together, worship with one another, and celebrate our faith and friendship. It has, however, been a surprisingly busy time—it's shocking how much there is to do when the church is closed and there is seemingly nothing to do! We have been planning for the future, learning to cope with the effects of the pandemic and what it means to be the Church in the midst of it, developing new ways of spiritual formation as a parish (more on this soon!), and working to establish sustainable and long-term technological solutions that are an essential and necessary part of our future life and ministry as a parish.

Our dedicated technology team has worked tirelessly to keep us connected, help engage us in corporate worship, and continually improve the quality of our online ministry. The number of people watching and participating in our online worship is more than double that of the average service attendance before the pandemic, and we have even gained a few new members whose first engagement with the parish was the online service. We are broadcasting on three local television stations and are making new connections in the surrounding community. People who are homebound and have not been able to attend worship at St. Paul's for some time have expressed profound gratitude at being able once again to participate on some level in communal worship. At a time when many churches have been struggling to stay connected, grow, and maintain relationships, St. Paul's has shown itself to be vigilant and wise in its use of resources and in moving forward toward our future "new normal." I for one am immensely proud of the initiative of the parish, particularly as this began in a time of transition without permanent priestly leadership in place.

We long for the day when we can gather together again to learn, connect, grow, and particularly come to the altar to receive communion. Online worship alone is certainly not the fullness of our worshiping, communal life. Nevertheless, we have come to realize that our online ministry, which began out of necessity in a time of crisis, is now a permanent aspect of the life of our parish moving forward into the future. This requires us to install permanent equipment in the church. As things stand, due to hand-held equipment being used in the aisles and pews, when we regather as a community for worship we would have to cease our broadcast, excluding those who are homebound, those who are vulnerable and isolating, and others who are finding their way to faith but not yet ready to attend church in person. We would lose access to what has become a life-giving and life-sustaining ministry to so many of us, and we would forfeit many of the broader connections we are making in our community and the great potential we have for furthering these relationships.

Beyond our online services, this project will enable us to become a creative community hub. Countless people will be able to experience concerts and events using our building as a video venue and connect with loved ones through weddings and funerals even when they cannot attend in person. It will transform our building into a central point of connection far beyond our congregation, carrying our mission forward in new and exciting ways. This has already begun even with our current setup, including the live streaming of the Newburyport Chamber Music Festival benefit concert earlier this month. Moving forward into our new normal, in which we will continue to engage our world through multiple media, this project will bring life to our building and parish in collaborative and creative ways, build relationships, and re-envision what it looks like for St. Paul's to carry out its mission to live and proclaim the love of Christ in our changing and complex world.

Our technology team has consulted with vendors, other houses of worship, and engaged in research with expert sources to devise a plan to leverage our previous investment in our current

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equipment but move it to the balcony of the church and out of the way of the congregation, all the while improving our online broadcast capability. The plan has been discussed and approved by the Vestry. This letter and an accompanying video sent through email are first and foremost a way to share with the entire congregation where we are headed with this exciting new project. Second, it is to invite those who feel called to participate in this ministry to do so by giving toward our financial goal of \$18,500 to make this project a reality.

We know that some might be struggling financially during this time, and if that is the case, while we hope that St. Paul's video ministry has been a source of sustenance and peace for you, we ask only for your prayers and continued fellowship. Some of you we hope will be both able and willing to financially support this project that has become a significant aspect of our parish life and ministry.

Being a follower of Jesus involves sharing in God's radical generosity and knowing that living generously is a joy and privilege. And I've learned already that this parish gets that. I am so encouraged as I discover the history of your generosity and see how even in this difficult and uncertain time you have continued to give faithfully of your tithes and offerings. Thank you. Truly, thank you. And whether or not you can give to this ministry above your regular pledge giving, know that the gracious gifts of your resources, time, talents, and most of all your life of prayer and service will continue to bear fruits for Christ's kingdom and the blessing of the world.

Take a moment to pray with us as we seek to follow God's direction during this season that is reshaping our world and how we as the Church relate to it, watch the video sent by email, and consider whether you might be called to contribute to the future of St. Paul's ministry by supporting this project.

In all things my prayer for you is that of the Letter to the Ephesians:

I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you (Eph. 1:16–18).

Yours faithfully in Christ,

Fr. Jarred

Bronson de Stadler, Senior Warden

Ed Winslow, Junior Warden

Clare Keller, Clerk

Stu Tuthill, Treasurer