St. John's Mission Statement

To cultivate a life of faith as we follow Jesus in the Way of life-giving, liberating love, and inspire others to do the same.

A word from Rev. Stephanie

There is a banner by the entrance to our worship space that reads, "Love your neighbor: who doesn't look like you, think like you, love like you, speak like you, pray like you, vote like you. Love your neighbor. No exceptions."

Many of you are part of this community precisely because of that message. You've told me so. Over the years, you have been able to disagree while still treating each other with the dignity and respect called for in our baptismal covenant. That willingness to walk together even when you disagree must continue if St. John's is to remain a vital faith community.

We recognize that there are members of this congregation who agree with the vestry's recent decision and others who strongly disagree. Loving your neighbor does not mean remaining silent or withholding your opinion. However, it does mean that when you voice your opinion, you do so without anger, shunning, or demeaning others. It means avoiding deliberate attempts to divide the congregation and instead being willing to listen to all sides with an open heart.

Your Vestry has compiled a list of responses to questions from the congregation that they have been hearing most frequently. You are encouraged to attend the parish meeting to be held on Monday, June 22, at 6:30 pm, here at St. John's. Please come prepared to work together for the mission of Jesus Christ.

Faithfully,

Stephanie +

A Message From Vestry – Frequently Asked Questions From Our Congregation

Why We Made This Decision

- This decision was made after many months of discussion, analysis, and prayerful discernment.
- St. John's has operated with deficit budgets for multiple years. We cannot continue spending more than we receive indefinitely.
- While one-time financial gifts are helpful and appreciated and we have received multiple gifts in 2026, they do not resolve annual budget deficits.

- Personnel expenses, including salaries and benefits, have consumed nearly 80% of our annual operating budget in recent years.
- Healthy churches typically devote significant resources not only to staff, but also to facilities, mission, outreach, Christian formation, worship, and future ministry opportunities.
- Our current financial structure leaves very little capacity to invest in the broader mission of the church.
- We are in a building that is 40 years old and needs investment – there are no funds to allocate to capital projects.

Why the urgency in making the decision?

- The decision was not made in urgency nor was it taken lightly. The vestry has been prayerfully discerning how to address the long-term health of St. John's for more than a year.
- The vestry felt that we should address this challenge before a new rector arrives rather than asking them to inherit deficit budgets and staffing models that are unsustainable that we have known about for several years.
- Delaying this difficult decision would likely lead to larger and more painful decisions later such as taking on debt when the roof needs to be repaired unexpectedly.
- We wanted to avoid a short-term "band-aid" solution (changing the health care allocation) that would provide temporary relief while not solving the problem of unsustainable budgets.
- We need to invest our parishioners' stewardship offerings into the mission work of the church – the members are asking for financial investment in youth, children, adults, and our community and there is no money to pay for those resources.

Why was the Treasurer not consulted?

The Vestry and Treasurer have monthly discussions:

- The Treasurer submits monthly financial reports including balance sheet and budget
- The Treasurer attends monthly Vestry meeting for review
- The Vestry asks questions of the Treasurer and approves the report
- The Vestry has a liaison who attends the monthly Finance Committee meetings, along with the Senior Warden

Why didn't we know our financial status?

Where we stood at the beginning of this Vestry Term.

- At the start of the Vestry term, the Parish faced a financial crisis. For 3 years the diocese has supported St. John's through the Reimagining Curacies program with a full time Curate and then financially supporting the Associate Rector position. The period of support came to its conclusion in 2025.
- The Parish Treasurer presented the Vestry with (6) staffing scenarios to balance the budget (forecasted deficit of $70,005). The included scenarios included options such as reducing the Associate Rector position to part time, termination, and small reductions to some programs to assist in balancing the budget (ie., music fund).
- The Vestry selected the option to terminate the associate rector position. This allowed for a projected (time context) surplus of $4,459, or 0.8% of the annual operating budget. This would become a continuing factor in the Vestry's discernment process.

Where we Stand Today.

- The situation has not much improved. The May 2026 Treasurer's report identified the annual operating budget as $555,916 (YTD $321,079.87). At the time, this suggests that 58% (approx.) of the operating budget has been realized. In part, this is supported by estimated YTD gifts amounting to $256.076.55 of the annual expectation of $466,566, or 55% (approx.). Summer attendance is expected to influence these numbers in a manner that validates the YTD figures as normal.
- Total annual operating expenses were forecast at $546,467. This represents 98% (approx.) of the annual operating budget. To date, the Parish has spent $225,779.69, or 41% (approx.) of expected annual expenses. Total expected annual personnel costs are $375,904, or 69% (approx.) of annual expenses, and 68% (approx.) of the forecasted operating budget. A surplus of $9,449.00 is the current expectation, or 1.69% of the annual budget.

Where we want to Be.

During the annual meeting, the Parish was informed of the Vestry's decision regarding the associate rector positions. Parishioners identified several areas for emphasis/improvement. These included:

- An associate rector "who has the same interest in younger people/families."
- A youth director/minister

- Sunday school/youth programs,
- Advances in community involvement.

Over the years, giving has increased. Unfortunately, expense increases have more than kept pace. This Vestry has considered the hopes expressed in the annual meeting and during recent listening sessions and assessed the Parish's ability to bring those hopes to fruition with less than 2% of the budget available for new programs. Therefore, the Vestry's discernment process has been focused on long-term sustainability where the full-spectrum needs of the Parish may be met more responsibly through some of these lenses:

- The Annual Parochial Report to date does not currently reflect the church growing or reflect the broader Wake Forest Community from a demographic standpoint which is an opportunity for the Parish to invite more people to St. John's
- Salary and benefits will continue to be a growing expense for St. John's as we have seen from our rector search salary change and the need for additional ministry support communicated by Parish and vision for St. John's set forth in the Ministry Architect's plan
- Due to the large majority of the budget being allocated to staffing, when looking to balance budget needs and avoid deficit budgets, all non-staffing related expense changes or adjustments don't materially move the needle
- Stewardship has become a year-round activity at most churches, and we are moving in that direction for St. John's. Stewardship Committee will also consider capital campaigns for important long-term needs of the church like website enhancements, new roof, and community outreach projects not materially allocated from the operating budget

How are other parishes our size with similar budget staffed?

Organizations such as TENS (The Episcopal Network for Stewardship) and Diocesan financial leaders often suggest that healthy parish budgets generally include:

- **40–60% for staff expenses** including clergy and lay salaries, pensions, and health insurance
- **20–40% for facilities and buildings** including utilities, maintenance, insurance, and debt service
- **10–30% for mission and outreach** supporting ministries both inside and outside the church walls

- **20–40% for church ministry and administration** including formation programs, music, communications, youth ministry, worship, and parish operations

While every congregation is different, these guidelines remind us that church budgets are not simply financial documents - they are spiritual documents that reflect our values, priorities, and mission.

In Listening sessions, the parish said, "No Changes". Why did you then make this decision?

- The Vestry has been entrusted by the congregation to make decisions necessary for the health and mission of the parish.
- While Vestry members seek the wisdom and perspectives of parishioners whenever possible, there are occasions - particularly those involving personnel matters, compensation, legal concerns, confidentiality, or sensitive pastoral issues - when they must deliberate privately. In those moments, the vestry's responsibility is not to reflect individual preferences, but to prayerfully discern what is in the best interest of the parish and its ministry.

How much money do we need to budget to keep Barb and Karole's full-time positions and benefits?

The average cost per full-time employee is $100,000 for salary plus benefits.

Why don't we fundraise to keep Barb and Karole's full time positions and benefits?

- A fundraising campaign is typically a one-time process of soliciting and gathering voluntary contributions from individuals to support a specific charitable need, nonprofit mission, or personal emergency.
- A campaign is typically tied to capital projects and long-term needs reflecting growth (buildings, new construction, endowments, etc.) and should not be relied on to make up an operating budget shortfall.
- The spiritual practice of tithing and stewardship has become a year-round activity at most churches and nonprofits, and we will be moving that direction for St. John's in 2026. Stewardship Committee is already putting together an initial planned giving education session (July 12th) and looking at the long-term needs of St. John's.
- A one-time fundraising campaign for an annual operating budget expense item is not sustainable in the long run, especially as the cost of salaries and benefits continue to grow.

What We Are Trying to Accomplish

- Create a sustainable financial model for St. John's.
- Ensure that future budgets are balanced and meet multiple needs of the parish.
- Preserve resources needed to maintain our buildings, grounds, and columbarium.
- Strengthen our ability to support mission and outreach ministries.
- Position St. John's for healthy growth under new clergy leadership.
- Practice faithful stewardship of the gifts entrusted to us.

The Role of Vestry Leadership

- Vestry members are elected by the parish to exercise leadership and fiduciary oversight on behalf of the congregation.
- During our listening sessions, some parishioners expressed a desire that no significant changes be made during this transition period.
- While we understand that sentiment, the vestry cannot simply pause leadership responsibilities while awaiting a new rector.
- Our responsibility is to address known challenges, not defer difficult decisions indefinitely.
- Good stewardship requires us to act when action is needed, even when those decisions are difficult. This was the case with Father Mawethu’s position earlier this year.
- We believe this decision fulfills our responsibility to leave the parish stronger and healthier for the next rector and future generations of St. John's members.

How do we move forward when we are uncertain about the future?

- Many of us are feeling a sense of uncertainty as our parish moves through this period of transition. The absence of a rector and the recent decision to move our full-time staff positions to part-time beginning in 2027 have understandably raised questions and concerns about the future of our church.
- First, it is important to acknowledge that these feelings are real and valid. Change can be difficult, particularly when it involves the ministries, people, and traditions that are so important to our parish family. We understand that some may feel anxious about what lies ahead.
- At the same time, we want to assure you that our church remains strong, faithful, and committed to its mission. While we are navigating challenges, we are doing so

thoughtfully and prayerfully. The Vestry and church leadership are actively working to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of our parish.

- It is also important to remember that the strength of St. John's has never rested solely on one rector, one staff member, or one group of leaders. The strength of our parish is found in our shared faith, our commitment to one another, and our dedication to serving Christ in this community. Throughout our history, this church has weathered seasons of change and emerged stronger because of the faithfulness of its people.
- As we continue through this transition, we ask for your prayers, your patience, and your participation. Open communication, mutual support, and a shared commitment to our mission will help us move forward together.
- While we may not have every answer today, we are confident that God is guiding us through this season and preparing us for the next chapter in the life of our parish. Our future is not defined by uncertainty but by faith, hope, and the enduring presence of Christ among us.
- Thank you for your continued support, your prayers, and your commitment to our church family.