E. Suzanne Wille
2026 All Saints Annual Meeting: For Good

Because I know you,
I have been changed for . . . Good.
We have been changed for good.

But what does that mean?

We have been **made** good?

We have been changed **forever**?

We have been changed in ways
We may not have been looking for,
Ways we may not have wanted or sought out
But see, later, is for the good?

Yes. Yes. All of those things.

In looking back at past
Rector's addresses,
I see all the ways
We've changed one another,
Changed our community,
Changed together . . .
For Good.

Two years ago,
I talked about what a church is for:
Connection.
Connection to God, to one another,
And to our larger community.
Aware of the dangers possibly facing us,
I invoked an image for All Saints:
Refugia, a term borrowed from biology
That describes places of shelter
where life endures in times of crisis,
such as a fire.

These *refugia* endure,
expand, and connect so that new life emerges.

Moss and fern are protected by fallen logs,
Boulders protect the holes and tunnels
Of small creatures.
These little pockets of safety
Allow life to endure,
Flourishing to spread outward,
beyond that place of safety.

We have nourished our *refugia*
Here at All Saints,
And our place of safety
Has thrived and grown.

All you have to do is
Read our annual report,
Listen to the reports given today,
Come to church on any given Sunday,
To see that growth:
Our nursery is bursting at the seams,
Our children are growing into themselves—
Moving into larger roles in the pageant,
Partaking in solemn communion,
Belting out musical numbers
In the midst of annual meeting,
growing in their own faith and fellowship
In youth group,
Becoming Eagle Scouts
Who give back to our parish,
Joining as youth delegates at convention,
And more.

And their ranks grow,
With four new babies born
And 13 children baptized this past year.

Adults flourish, too,
as we continued
So many great traditions,
Whether singing together
at Beer and Carols and Hymns in the courtyard
Or gathering in many ways:
Small Groups
Where we kept the faith

With God Sightings;
gatherings for fellowship and worship,
Including new offerings
Of Centering Prayer and monthly Taizé,
Serving and celebrating together
As we bake and raise money
For friends half a world away,
Giving gifts at Christmas
To families we'll never meet,
Give money to support Padre Bayron
Who serves churches we don't attend,
And so much more.

We've kept our *refugia* open,
Welcoming new people
Continuing to grow,
This year increasing
our average Sunday attendance by another 16%,
Not by accident,
But because we have intentional ways
To welcome newcomers,
And to connect them to one another
and more veteran members.

Our staff has grown and changed
As The Reverend Colin Collette
Transitioned from Music Director to Associate Rector,
Which means we're also welcoming Sam Shull
As a paid musician on our staff.
Courtney has become "Vicar,"
And we have priest affiliate
In Tyrone Fowlkes,
We are keeping our three nursery staff
And making our church school coordinators
"Staff official"!

We remain strong because
We gather together,
Not only for joy,
But even when we're struggling,
For, as we now often say,
At All Saints, we know
How to hold joy and sorrow in one hand.

And so we gathered folks
Affected by the chaos of DOGE and federal cuts;
We gathered people
To be trained in pastoral care;
We gathered in retreat
To focus on being fired in the crucible
And developing a spirituality of radical optimism
Even in the midst of chaos.

And we held one another in sorrow
As we we grieved and celebrated
those we love but see no longer:
David Brummer, beloved parishioner and spouse
Of Mary Fergus and father of Olivia.
Jeff Raleigh, baptized at the Easter Vigil
Just nine months ago,
And beloved partner of Jacob,
Long-time fierce and joyful beloved parishioner Lynda Hazen.
Long-time fierce and joyful beloved parishioner and priest Carol Reese.
May their souls,
And the souls of all the departed,
Through the mercy of God,
Rest in peace.

All those events,
All those people,
have changed us for good . . .

At last year's meeting,
when we knew
That we were going to need
This *refugia* more than ever
In a changing, frightening national landscape,
I quoted Bishop Marian Budde,
Who, at a service at the National Cathedral,
had graciously asked the President
To be merciful, to care for those who are afraid,
Who are vulnerable.
She was roundly criticized by some
For bringing politics into church,
Though, as I said last year,
You can't be mad because

You get served pizza in a Pizza Hut,
and you can't go to an Episcopal Church
And be shocked when you hear
The merciful message of Jesus.

Her words inspired me
To celebrate all the ways
We live that Good News out here at All Saints
And to share the wisdom from
parishioners who work
In democracy promotion
Who said that during this time
We must have as strong a community as possible,
Focus on one or two things to do in this time,
To be ready to act swiftly when the time came,
And, most importantly,
To be a community of HOPE.

And, friends, in the face of
All that has happened this year—
The shocking, the terrifying,
The morally repugnant—
We have maintained a fierce hope,
A fierce dedication to staying
Wholly human, wholly moral,
Wholly GOOD,
Which is surely what the world needs
From people of faith.

We have focused very clearly on one thing:
Protecting immigrant friends.
So, we protested
And got trained in rapid response.
We've acted as watchers
At our food pantry and local schools.
We've made whistle kits
And called our elected officials
And made friends with our neighbors.
Some of the things we've done are big and bold and brave.
Some of the things you've done are big and bold and brave.

But more than that,
The thing that makes me weep,

Is just, well, how darned good you are.

I mean, deep down good.

The kind of good
That takes time to talk to and care for
Not just your own children,
But others' children,
Helping them make sense of this world.

The kind of good
That leaves your own home
When you are hear trouble outside,
Going towards the danger,
Not away.

The kind of good
That makes meals for those ill or grieving
And then sits down
And makes time to listen.

The kind of good that makes space
In our overcrowded, imperfect church building
To host concerts for community members,
A winter farmer's market,
A neighborhood light up night
That brings in over a thousand people.

The kind of good
That cares for this place
Through the unsexy but oh-so-necessary work
Of meeting the plumber,
Painting the fences to spare our budget,
Serving in the nursery or the atrium,
Writing a grant
To help our old campus
Be more energy efficient,
Tending the financials and the pledge campaign,
And making sure that everything
Is ready for worship on Sunday mornings,
And then locking the place up
When we're done.
The kind of good that give generously

And barely blanches
When you hear that next year
We're going to have a capital campaign
To take care of this old building!

Those seemingly small things—
Volunteering at the food pantry,
Decorating for annual meeting,
Taking time to listen to another—
Matter very, very much.

We find ourselves, this year,
At this annual meeting,
In a yet another new reality.
The church is joyful and full and thriving,
But what a contrast it is
To the world outside our doors.

We've been hoping not to be here,
But we have been preparing for it.

Last year, I referenced one bishop.
This year, after the mayhem we experienced this fall in Chicago,
As that mayhem has now expanded
Into horrifying violence in Minneapolis,
I want to tell you about another Bishop.

Just a couple weeks ago,
While speaking at a vigil for Renee Good,
Bishop Rob Hirschfeld said this:
"I have told the clergy . . . to get their affairs in order, to make sure they have their wills written. Because it may be that now is no longer the time for statements, but for us — with our bodies — to stand between the powers of this world and the most vulnerable."

I gasped when I heard his words,
but I know he is right.

Rob is not urging people to martyrdom
But describing the landscape as it is.

We Christians must nurture our communities,
Keeping a place that is faithful and merciful,
Loving and kind,

So that those qualities survive.

We Christians must nurture and share hope
So that we and our larger communities
Do not fall into despair.

And we Christians must be brave.

For following Jesus
Means that we must
Always keep the possibility
Of the cross in front of us.

And that requires courage.

But it also requires community,
For us to continue to gather,
To befriend, to love, one another.

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas says,
”We have to stop doing church in such a way that people are deceived into thinking they can be Christians and remain strangers.”

I don’t think there is much danger of that here,
But if I have called every year
For each of us to connect to a small group at All Saints,
Then I double down on that call today.
We’re experimenting with longer groups now,
And we will offer a whole variety of groups again—
Long and short—in the fall.
And there are many kinds of groups meeting now—
Book groups, centering prayer, the choir,
Parents groups, a dad’s group, our new crafting group, and lots more.
Choose one.

We need soul friends,
People who know us,
Encourage us,
Console us,
Help us discern where God is calling us.

For, as Ann preached today,
The water is dangerous,

But we are not meant
To brave it alone.
No, Jesus sends us out at least in pairs.
And I think we need whole squads
To keep one another whole and safe
And, even, laughing and joyful.

There will be frightening things to do.
But we've got to stay faithful;
we've got to stay human.

This year our *refugia* must continue to thrive
And, also, to spill out,
More and more,
Into this troubled world,
Offering hope and joy,
Mercy and love,
To a world in desperate need of God's grace.

The good news is,
We've got God and we've got one another as shelter,
And we're in it for the long haul.
So keep coming to church every Sunday,
Connect deeply with a small group,
Say your prayers,
Hold onto hope even when you are afraid,
Fall into the grace and mercy of God.

I have been your rector for over four years now,
And I'm not going anywhere.
For I love this place;
I love YOU.
And you have changed me for good.

I am amazed by you,
Your sweet goodness,
And there is no group of people,
No Body of Christ,
I'd rather do hard things with.

I give thanks for you, All Saints,
In the Name of the God
Who created us, redeems us, and is loving us still. Amen.