

Welcome to the 2017 Annual Meeting of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. It is really wonderful to be gathered together as a community this morning to worship God, to celebrate the blessings of our common life, to elect a new slate of leaders to serve on the vestry, and to vote on an exciting proposal before us as a congregation (more on that to come!). Here's how this morning is going to go. We'll begin with some remarks from Kay, your senior warden, Steve Salter, your treasurer, and me. Chuck Baur, your Junior Warden, has put together a written report for you, which is included in the back of your bulletin with the Treasurer's report. Following these reports, we'll offer the Prayers of the People, pass the Peace, hear some voting instructions, and then conduct the vestry election and voting. We'll then conclude our time very appropriately gathered around two tables – The Eucharistic Table and the tables of First Sunday Fellowship.

### **Rector's Opening Remarks**

This time two years ago, I announced a rather audacious strategic planning process that would be focused on improving our financial health on the one hand and marketing and evangelism on the other. Our financial priorities were to pay off our mortgage and eliminate our operating deficit by developing new income streams and increasing our pledge income by 25% over a three year period. Our mission and evangelism priorities were to shake off our identity as one of the "best kept church secrets" in Richmond by sharing our stories of why God matters in our lives and inviting others to do the same, joining God's mission in the community around the church, increasing our involvement in and partnerships with the neighborhood, and using our buildings and grounds as an instrument of mission. As we reflect back today, I am amazed by all we've accomplished by the grace of God, the highlights of which you'll hear in the reports to come. With that, I'll hand it over to our Senior Warden, Kay McCall:

### **Senior Warden's Report (Kay McCall)**

Good morning. How wonderful to have our annual meeting coincide with the first day of the new liturgical year. It's the perfect time to reflect with gratitude on what has been, and to look forward with hope and expectation. It's the perfect time to ask the

question I've often heard Abbott ask: "What is God up to at St. Andrew's?" This question has been the hub around which our activity has circled this year.

We are starting this year with a new logo and a new way of telling the world who we are at St. Andrew's: we are approachable, accepting, inclusive, and certainly not into perfectionism (witness the new logo). We have the conviction that everyone is a child of God, everyone has God-given gifts to be encouraged and appreciated, and everyone is on this God-journey – no matter who you are, you *belong*. With this self-knowledge focused and articulated, what a good time to be asking afresh: What is God up to at St. Andrew's?

The assumption behind this question is that God is not interested in the status quo. We need to be *doing* God's reconciling work in the world. We need to be a part of the Jesus Movement, as Bishop Curry calls it, and spread the news of the "loving, liberating, life-giving" way of Jesus.

We start with Christian formation, making sure we ground ourselves in meaningful, relevant, and enlivening worship. This past year, Abbott helped us step out of our comfort zone in worship by leading us in "cardboard testimonials." (Remember that? Back in January, we wrote stories of our struggles and God's transformative help on pieces of paper and spoke them here in church. We heard powerful stories of what God had been up to in our lives.) Through brilliant sermons, Abbott, Barbara and others brought the events of our world into the context of worship. Remember, for example, Abbott's sermon on her experiences in Charlottesville, and Barbara's recent sermon on the opioid epidemic.

Continuing in the vein of formation, our Adult Forum, Catechesis, and GOTH programs are foundational. Although we miss the two who stepped back from Grace on the Hill at the last minute, we have three amazing new GOTH interns this year who are true gifts in our community. We are privileged to uphold Kristin Wickersham in her seminary training again this year. We enjoyed a special book study on African American theology, and we offered "Salt and Light" gatherings for Young Adults. The Education for Ministry program at St. Andrew's is now four years old. We graduated the first two who went through all four years at our church. And the Crossroads group is diving deep into the question of what God is up to, both in the building and through those who want to be St. Andrew's in the world.

Formation is fundamental for figuring out what God is up to, but ministry and outreach are where we move from that hub, that central question “What is God up to at St. Andrew’s,” out into the world. This year we opened the chapel for prayer on the third Thursday of every month, used the Blessing Fence for prayers and warm clothing, did hundreds of loads of laundry, and went outside the walls for the Blessing of the Animals and the All Saints Labyrinth Walk. If you weren’t at the Labyrinth Walk this year, do come next year to see the growing number of Oregon Hill neighbors who become fascinated and drawn in to this ancient spiritual practice. And speaking of our neighbors, this fall we finally brought to fruition the long-dreamed-of art show, a collaborative venture with St. Andrew’s artists and artists from Oregon Hill. I’m told we had people come see the exhibit who had lived in the neighborhood 25 years but had never before darkened our doors. What is God up to at St. Andrew’s? We are leaning into that question with these projects.

Undergirding our worship, ministry, and outreach is our stewardship of the buildings and resources entrusted to us. You will hear and read more about our finances and buildings from Steve, Chuck and Abbott – I won’t steal their thunder – but I will say from the perspective of a stewardship committee member, we had an extraordinary pledge campaign last fall. After years of flat pledges, we – together – increased our pledges by an amazing \$23,000, and we have real hopes of keeping that gain this fall. We have been consistently positioning ourselves to respond with more agility to what God has in mind for us as St. Andrew’s.

Certainly, there have been challenges this year. Our organ flat out demanded attention (pardon the pun – I couldn’t resist), and we are still in search of a long-term organist. What *is* God up to?

Certainly, there has been sadness this year. We said good-bye to our beloved and one of God’s most faithful disciples. Russell’s delight in watching for God’s work at St. Andrew’s was an example for all of us.

But there have also been big steps forward and many celebrations this year. We are moving rapidly toward new income streams. Our rector now sits on the national Episcopal Service Corps Board of Directors. Grace on the Hill, our Episcopal Service Corps program, is now five years old and has 20 alumni. They are now doing such varied things as

seminary, law school, teaching, writing, and social work. We are very proud of them. Yet again, a St. Andrean represented the diocese at the national Episcopal Youth Event. More than 60 came to the art show's opening reception; 20 more at Halloween. And, in an historical moment, we have our first female trustee. Clearly, God is up to something at St. Andrew's.

In the Epistle today, Paul gives thanks to God for the church in Corinth, for they had been "enriched" by Christ. We, too, give thanks for God's enriching work among us. We are grateful for our spiritual home; grateful for our approachable, accepting, and inclusive community; grateful to *belong*. We are working to be agile and innovative, and to lean into the question of what God is up to in and through St. Andrew's.

I'd like to close with a simple prayer from the great Swedish diplomat and author Dag Hammarskjold: "For all that has been, thanks; for all that will be, yes." Amen.

### **Treasurer's Report (Steve Salter)**

#### **Conclusion**

Really what more is there to be said?! Well, you know me, so I do have a few words to add and I want to tie up a very few loose ends in the reports you just heard.

First of all, Kay mentioned the Crossroads Learning Community. You may remember the sermon I preached last March about God calling us at St. Andrew's to take some risks and move beyond the crossroads of what is safe and comfortable toward God's promises. I issued an invitation to join me as part of a learning community, and in response a group of folks have been meeting about twice/month doing bible study, story listening and storytelling, exploring what it means to be Episcopal evangelists in the way of the Jesus Movement, and looking at demographics and analytics while committing to practice "holy habits" designed to be deeply immersive in our immediate neighborhoods that surround the church and our homes. As we've gone about this work, we have continually reminded ourselves that this is not about selling anyone anything, including even getting people into church. Rather we are about the work of translating the Gospel, participating in God's mission and establishing relationships on our neighbors, not on our terms but on their

terms and God's terms. As we wrap up our first six months, we are now turning our attention to how we might invite you all into the conversation and these practices over the next six months. You'll be hearing more about that this winter.

Secondly, you heard about the challenges with our music program. First of all, we are still in search for a permanent music director. The search committee worked hard over the summer and fall, and we simply have not found a suitable match for us. We have been truly blessed to have both Jeannine and Donald filling in for us this fall, and we are exploring options for the coming months, while still searching and praying with the question, as Kay said, "What is God up to here." Please hold this search and our choir in prayer during this time. They have been in transition for nearly 15 months now, and their commitment through changes in leadership has been remarkable. We owe them incredible thanks for their ongoing ministry.

In addition, Kay and Steve both mentioned the organ conundrum. As you know, we have been soliciting proposals, and what we have learned is that things are a bit more complicated than we might have hoped or been originally led to believe. Given this, we are using this as an opportunity to take a look at all of our outstanding capital needs and any deferred maintenance issues so we can have whole picture in mind as we move forward with our decision making. We are in information gathering mode and will share more when we have enough for us to be ready to make some decisions. As I mentioned in the Saltire article a few months ago, we are very fortunate to have had a substantial bequest designated for just this eventuality with the organ, so we have an organ reserve fund that is about \$50,000 – obviously this is not quite all we will need as we had originally hoped, but it is a good chunk, so we're in good position moving forward. So, stay tuned!

Finally, Steve mentioned that we are in negotiations with T-Mobile to lease space in our bell tower for cellular equipment and antennae. This is in addition to our current lease agreement with Sprint. According to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Virginia, we have to have a congregational vote to approve entering into this lease, so this item has been added to the ballot this year. I will share a few more details when we get to that portion of the annual meeting and open it up for questions. For now,

just know that this is an unexpected opportunity for us and could be truly beneficial for years to come.

Last year at this time I suggested that all this work that we had been doing and that we would continue to do in 2017 was something akin to cleaning house and getting things in order. I also suggested that this was something of what Advent is about. Not cleaning house and getting things in order in a penitential way, but cleaning house and getting things in order in a making room sort of way. All that we have done and continue to do renders us ever more energetically available to participate in God's redemptive in-breaking in the world around us every single day – an in-breaking that we celebrate most profoundly with the coming of Christ in Christmas and that we prepare for during Advent. All of this frees us to be more intimately entangled with God's mission and increasingly susceptible to the sending of the Spirit – something that we are seeing more and more among us, and it is a beautiful sight to behold.

As the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." I do give thanks to God for you, from the depths of my heart, I give thanks. And as we round out another year, I especially give thanks for the vestry and officers of St. Andrew's. We are blessed year after year by incredible leadership, and this year is no different. You've been a blessing to me, to St. Andrew's, and to God's work in and through this place. Thank you.