

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Goochland, Virginia



Discerning God's Calling for St. Mary's Episcopal Church

A Prayer for the Future of St. Mary's Church

Dear God, we give thanks for the ways you have blessed the ministry of St. Mary's Church in the past. Be with us now as we look toward the future. Show us the way forward. Help us plan a ministry which will reflect your glory, a ministry which will serve the needs of your people and which will be an important witness of your love for the world. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This prayer served as the foundation of our Discernment process. We read the prayer to open and close most every meeting and incorporated it into worship services as well.

Discernment Background and Objectives

As a vital part of St. Mary's Episcopal Church's transition from the blessed leadership of Rector John Miller to our future together, we have entered a period of prayerful discernment, where we have sought to answer "What is God's calling for St. Mary's?" Through reflection, intense listening and healthy discussion, we sought clarity and consensus on what God sees for us and our future.

We believe and hope that Discernment provides the vision needed for the Vestry to re-establish the mission, vision and short-term needs of the church. Additionally, the results of Discernment provide insights into the expectations and requisite qualifications of our permanent rector, and should help to finalize the selection and confirmation process.

Our Approach to Discernment

The Discernment process was designed to promote broad congregational participation and to identify consensus around our future. We established five "areas of focus" subcommittees that generally align with our existing church structure, and we sought 1-2 lay leaders for each subcommittee. The subcommittee leaders recruited committee members (8-10) representing a cross section of church membership, with a special emphasis on involvement of the younger family demographic, as their participation is especially vital to the long-term health of any church. At least one Vestry member and one member of the clergy or staff participated on each subcommittee. Subcommittee Chairs and members are named in Attachment 1.

Our five committees were:

- **Worship** – how and when we prepare for, gather and organize liturgy, including music, (e.g. alter guilds, ushers, lay participation)

- **Education and Spiritual Formation** – for youth through adults, with a specific emphasis on opportunities for the post-confirmation to pre-college ages (excluding St. Mary’s Episcopal School directly, but we sought input indirectly)
- **Fellowship** – how we gather and celebrate socially and casually, how we support each other in times of need, how we welcome prospective members
- **Outreach** – how we reach out and serve the community of need around us
- **Stewardship** – how we grow and manage our resources, including financial resources, contribute our time and talents, and support our ministry and mission

The subcommittees reviewed the status of current work and sought input from church members on how we might fulfill our potential. Specifically, the committees worked to identify strengths, aspects we could improve upon, opportunities for growth and improvement, and threats to our future. The leaders of each subcommittee formed an ad hoc Discernment Steering Committee to review, streamline and develop a comprehensive summary of the results. At the request of the Vestry, parishioner Tim O’Shea chaired the Steering Committee and facilitated the Discernment process. Each Committee prepared a final report, and the Steering Committee identified common themes and drafted this consolidated summary, which we believe represents the consensus of our parishioners.

Importantly, we asked the Reverend Canon Robert G. Hetherington for ongoing support of the steering committee with his prayerful insight, guidance and perspective throughout the Discernment period. Bob graciously served as the Chaplain of Discernment, ensuring that our focus was on listening for God’s guidance through the words of our parishioners and friends.

Over a 75 day period in the spring of 2016, at least 25 committee meetings were held, as well as 3 steering committee meetings. The committees collected feedback from the congregation, employing numerous strategies, including but not limited to:

- Leading the Sunday Adult Forums in April and into May on various Discernment topics
- Attendance at numerous church activities and events, often in special speaking and/or listening roles, like Seniors’ Luncheons, Monthly Suppers, church breakfasts, social meetings of the “Dovers”, etc.
- Interviews with key lay leadership and staff
- Informal conversations with parishioners and a few former parishioners
- Establishment of a successful Discernment email suggestion box
- Weekly bulletin “Reflections” from Discernment leaders, participants and stakeholders (included as Attachment 3)

The Discernment Steering Committee leader, in consultation with the Chaplain, specifically advised against a comprehensive parishioner survey (at this time) in favor of conversation and discussion. We believe that the fifty-five or so committee members not only form a valid representation of church members, but their efforts to discuss Discernment with members, past members and potential members were fruitful. We believe targeted surveys may follow this process as the Vestry seeks input on specific aspects of church life.

Our Vision for St. Mary's Church

We have untapped opportunity as we look to the future. We were so blessed in recent decades with the steady hands-on leadership of Reverends Holt Souder and John Miller, true shepherds who carefully guided their flock. They led and we followed. They cared for us in times of grief and times of joy. And through their leadership St. Mary's has grown from a small, rural church into a robust congregation, filled with talents and resources. We are also blessed with a serene church yard and grounds that provide a refuge from the complications of nearby suburbia and the surrounding metropolitan area.

Our Discernment work helped us to recognize that the future of St. Mary's lies within us, the members. We have the opportunity now to take what God and others have provided, to nurture it, make it grow, and to sustain and thrive in the face of societal trends and pressures. We seek leadership from our to-be-named permanent rector, clergy and staff, **yet we acknowledge we can do more for ourselves. This acknowledgement and subsequent action is a vital aspect of God's calling for us.**

An important outcome of Discernment is a summary of our expectations, hopes and plans for the church, **enabling our members (and prospective members) to fully embrace church life.** Our Steering Committee reflected upon the myriad comments and input received, looking for common themes that summarize the vision for our future church.

Our **consensus vision** for St. Mary's Church:

- St. Mary's appreciates and will build upon the **traditions** of our past and the blessings we have received. We want a **welcoming, comfortable** church that serves all ages and is a place where God's presence is felt, in worship and all aspects of church life.
- We hope for **multiple paths for spiritual fulfillment**, through participation in services, expanded and targeted education, and caring for ourselves and the communities around us.
- St. Mary's will strive to be a destination for **families to grow together** in God's way. We will provide age-appropriate learning and fellowship, while supporting families in worship and outreach.
- Going forward, St. Mary's needs its **parishioners to consistently feel and be responsible** for what we do and how we do it - mostly through active and vibrant participation and leadership, but also in building and nurturing our resources (time, talent, treasure) to support a healthy church.
- We can do much more **to educate, inform and encourage one another about opportunities for participation, fulfillment, growth and service.** Further improvement in how we communicate will provide additional momentum towards creating an engaged and involved congregation.
- Our **administrative resources need to be strengthened** to support our calling, from data gathering, management reporting and technology infrastructure, to appropriate levels of staff support and access to targeted expertise (in areas like communications or planned giving).

The themes of participation, engagement, fulfillment, communication and accountability resonated through our committee and congregational discussions. The detailed committee

findings that follow in this report tend to focus on church “programs,” what we do and how we do it. But it is important to emphasize that while programs are important, our belief (supported by current thinking and literature) is that focusing on programs may not yield as much benefit as focusing on what gets people feeling like they are owners of our parish rather than consumers of church as a product. It is vital that in implementation we remain committed to engagement of our parishioners, not just programming for them.

The recently implemented **pastoral care team approach provides a strong example of how we might create an organic, enduring model of member involvement** across numerous aspects of church life (e.g. Hospitality, Fellowship, Ushering, Outreach). The team approach, when integrated into the culture and structure of St. Mary’s, will enable us to align responsibilities and foster satisfaction that comes from success, especially when achieved through teamwork. Please see Attachment 4 for more information about the Pastoral Care teams.

Next Steps

Condensed summaries of our committee work are offered below as a reflection of the status quo, paired with proposed actions that will enable St. Mary’s Church to achieve our vision over the next 3-5 years. We have not attempted to set top priorities or a sequencing of actions, leaving that responsibility to the Vestry and Rector. We emphasize that St. Mary’s should not attempt to flip a switch and make too much change at once, rather that we should recognize that the **change process is eternal and any steps taken in the right direction will strengthen our church. Discernment is viewed by the Steering Committee not as an end point, but as a guidepost in our evolution as a church.**

The possibilities of change initiated by the Discernment process, combined with the leadership transition, create significant opportunities to strengthen our approach to communication and information sharing. **The rationale for change should be effectively and purposefully communicated to members as it unfolds.**

Summaries of our committee work are offered in the following outlines, organized by committee. The outlines identify who we are today, our strengths to build upon, and opportunities for betterment through understanding God’s calling, strategies to better serve young families, communication improvements, engagement / participation ideas, and ultimately a vision for each topic.

The Steering Committee individually and collectively feels blessed to have been a part of the Discernment process. We are incredibly encouraged by the positive feedback from our members, their hopes and emerging consensus for our future. We are encouraged and believe that our Interim Rector and clergy team are in synch with the vision. We see a strong foundation for moving ahead.

Worship

Who we are

Traditional, welcoming, comfortable (which gives us strength), with the presence of the Holy Spirit

Pillars of strength

- A strong balance between traditional approaches to worship with a comfortable, welcoming environment.
- Two beautiful and unique church buildings and peaceful grounds, with settings that enhance worship.
- Clergy with unique individual skills and experience, excellent and different styles as preachers, and comforting in pastoral care.
- A caring core of lay ministry – ushers, altar guild, musical leaders, readers, oblation bearers, pastoral care, etc. (But we need more of them.)
- Musical resources and talents that grace our services.

God's calling for us in worship

- We can maintain our sense of tradition and simplicity while also providing variety that is appealing and engaging, and keeps us coming back for more. There is potential for **positive disrupters** such as:
 - Variety in musical offerings, from hymns that are generally familiar, to spirituals and other sacred music, occasional variety in instrumentation (piano, guitar, flute, violin), patriotic themes, etc.
 - Guest homilists speaking on pertinent topics, including hearing from outreach partners
 - Broader lay and youth participation, in all aspects, e.g. ushering, music, reading, acolyte role. (Adopt the pastoral care team model where appropriate.)
- We can be more proactive in our approach to hospitality in many ways, from usher responsibilities to name tags to how we greet, and plan before/after service social time.
- To keep our sermons and other spiritual fulfillment relatable to today's society and issues, while remaining grounded in scripture.
- To make our services attractive for families to worship together while preserving the solemnity of church, and to consider a consistent or predictable worship approach for specific services. (E.g. one service traditional, one service more experimental with use of variety).
- Continued evaluation of timing of services in attempt to meet the needs of the congregation, reflecting societal trends and pressures (e.g. sports activities/responsibilities).

Serving young families

- To include more opportunities for family participation in services, such as ushering, oblation bearing, music, etc. Integrate youth talents for music, reading and organizing their own Acolyte and ushering teams. Involve more young people in the Altar Guild, especially in decorating the church for Easter and Christmas.
- To offer parents of young families guidance and support in teaching children to respect and revere the solemnity of church. Ultimately consider if a separate young children's sermon breakout is needed.

Informing and communicating

- Reminders of key church events and upcoming opportunities can be provided via social media; this will provide a buzz and momentum for events.
- Name tags and welcoming should be more a part of our culture.
- We need more cross-pollination across working committees and staff/clergy to heighten awareness.

Engagement and participation

Our culture over the years has evolved and survived with few “doers” who participate a lot, and with somewhat passive participation from many. We need to make involving people more intentional. Seek out the talents of our members and ask them to share them with the church. This may be best accomplished through teams (e.g. pastoral care as a model) and pushing responsibility to them. Also more training for our ushers and other participants so that they are more comfortable performing the role, whether for Holy Eucharist or Morning Prayer.

Worship vision

St. Mary’s is packed with engaged and active members who find traditional worship and other spiritual fulfilling opportunities to be a priority of family life. Our schedule of services is adapting to meet the needs of families who increasingly feel time pressure from numerous activities and responsibilities (e.g. youth sports and academic requirements), while remaining responsive to members who have depended on the traditional service in the little church or chapel.

Our services will also mix in occasional variety to keep it fresh. Music is important, especially when we sing our favorite hymns together. For example we could return to singing the 4th verse of “America” after the Doxology, as we need it more than ever. Occasional variety of music and speakers will keep our traditional services appealing, especially when younger members are encouraged to contribute their talents. Outside speakers and guests will expand our horizons and encourage new perspectives.

New friendships are emerging as a result of increased activity and opportunity for Ushers, Greeters, Acolytes, Lay readers, and Pastoral Care and Altar Guild teams which generate more youth and young adult interaction and participation both on and off the church campus. The traditional, simple and comfortable character of St. Mary’s is maintained as we treasure the peace which draws us to the grounds, sanctuaries and the friendly community.

Most importantly, we are supportive of our new Rector and a ministry which serves the needs of the people of St. Mary’s, the community and the world.

Stewardship (Time, Treasure and Talents)

Who we are

- Our financial resources and processes have not kept pace with church growth, infrastructure needs and technology trends.
- Generally inconsistent or lacking in communication with parishioners of the church's financing needs, leaves some parishioners uninspired to give, impacting both church operations and outreach. (Many registered parishioners do not pledge).
- Timing and operation of annual pledge process leaves church entering a new year with budget uncertainty.
- Need to establish a clear vision and mission for giving, including outreach and funding of all church priorities.
- Lack of a consistent Stewardship committee with a year round focus on Stewardship planning, execution and communication. Clergy involvement and messaging needs to be more visible.
- Lack of a planned or legacy giving program to support endowment or other long-term needs.
- Underutilization of IT system capabilities, lead to missing or misleading information, and lack of routine financial reporting.
- We have a wealth of talent, expertise and involvement with causes among members and attendees, but we do not have documentation of our members' experiences, contributions, interests and potential.
- Major donor base is aging.

Pillars of strength

- Our financial software is considered state of the art for churches, although we may need to expand our knowledge and how we use the system.
- Approximately 2/3 of our parishioners make an annual pledge.
- An experienced, talented and resourceful congregation.
- Giving has continued to increase since 2008, yet we have huge upside potential with untapped interest from active parishioners.

God's calling for us in stewardship

- We want to build the foundation for a future to leave to our children, all the while respecting the past. Building a foundation takes a clear vision that leads to a 3 year plan, emphasizing continuity and improvement through measureable objectives. "Build a healthy future on a foundation of our rich past."
- Better communications to parishioners overall; annually create a "narrative budget" with transparency to clergy, vestry and parishioners.
- Consider a consultant to help us plan and re-establish our Stewardship approach.
- Being good stewards of our gifts and talents – more parishioners involved ("people respond to people"), established metrics to monitor progress.
- To utilize and coalesce our member interests, experiences and skills. Diversify major donor base over time.

Serving young families

- More education about finances and the operation of the church.

- Bonding opportunities for families within the church.
- Providing for outreach activities and experiences that increase frequency of family interactions with St. Mary's.
- Activities that young families can be involved in that tie back to Stewardship.
- Active participation in Stewardship committee and processes.

Informing and communicating

- Narrative budget at least once per year to the Parish.
- Clear mission/vision for St. Mary's with direct links on how Stewardship supports our goals.
- Monthly/quarterly financial statements to Clergy/Vestry with all information available to Parishioners.
- Annual calendar for Stewardship.
- Brochure on the many ways to give pledge, gift, "Bell Tower" society (or some other name), planned giving, E-Giving, mobile app giving, special events (e.g. linked to outreach).

Engaging and participation

- Education and awareness of the topic of Stewardship and the many ways to get involved.
- One on one personal call for pledges and participation in the Stewardship committee.
- Increase size and diversity of the Stewardship committee, inclusive of all demographic segments of our Parish.
- Establish emotional bonds between St. Mary's and the donor, emphasizing that giving cannot be solely based on "the ask" and will be used to change people's lives

Stewardship vision

Our Vision is for a Stewardship Process that "celebrates our abundance of time, talent and treasure while engaging parishioners through clear communication and expectations."

St. Mary's has created a culture of Stewardship through leadership and giving that reflects God's will for us. Clergy is enthusiastically involved in delivering the Stewardship message both during sermons and in person-to-person contact. Our members have a higher understanding of Stewardship needs and opportunities through a clear vision and education. Our efforts are supported by a broad-based Stewardship Committee leading to greater participation and more treasure. Dedicated Parishioners attend church regularly, support financially, are leaders in the community, are eagerly solicited and feel called and honored to chair or serve on the Stewardship Committee. Our major donor base is diverse and well-established. We have seen an overall increase in average pledges and participation. We better utilize our current and new technology and train our staff to improve our records so that we can assimilate better information about our Parish.

Spiritual Formation and Education

Who we are

- Infectious joy overall
- Children and youth education – dynamic (evolving under new leadership / resources), growing, inviting
- Adult education - traditional, interesting yet intimidating to many, geared towards A student, lacking structure, limited in program scope and availability.
- Relatively small group of active participants and volunteers

Pillars of strength

- Peaceful setting that supports learning and spiritual growth.
- A desire to stay true to our history and traditions while being flexible enough to change with the needs of today.
- Great staff with great ideas, energy and leadership.
- Children's / youth structure with directors and independent committees established and moving forward.
- Wednesday Bible Study with Frank Eakin.
- Seniors Monthly Meeting.

God's calling for us in Spiritual Formation and Education

- Communication – we can better connect our curriculum across ages, from children through adults.
- More structure and definition of accountabilities will help us to grow and flourish.
- Development of an Adult Education organization, with a functioning committee and supporting clergy, will enable us to match content and curriculum to parishioner interests.
- We need program content enticing to adults who want to casually and socially learn, while perhaps finding support for life's everyday challenges. (No, or little homework!)
- There is high potential to match our talent and leadership needs with a Parishioner Talent Database.
- Utilize existing leadership from EFM, DOCC, Outreach, etc. to lead/teach/facilitate education initiatives.
- Activities, trips and music that involve, and are familiar to, families, and span generations.
- St. Mary's Church and Preschool can each benefit from a closer working relationship, beyond sharing a facility. Ideas include cross marketing, cosponsored events (e.g. children's carnivals), curriculum coordination, and clerical presence.

Serving young families

- Consistent routine communication is important for young families. Quick messages, reminders, encouraging words and flexibility are keys for families to navigate and coordinate activities and responsibilities.
- Our messaging and greetings can be more inviting, welcoming, and inclusive, especially to new or prospective members, or newcomers to adult education. We have numerous students of the Bible, well-educated and read, who can be intimidating to newcomers.

- Varying times of programs during the week and time of day to be more sensitive interests of working adults.
- Providing a mix of education and fellowship for parents during 10-11am hour.
- Child care during worship for restless children.

Informing and communicating

- Overall, provide transparency in all we do.
- Establish more structure within our programs to allow rotation of participants that expands involvement from a few to many. (Perhaps the team approach to Pastoral care is a model.)
- Establish a stronger greeter / host function (part of or separate from ushers) for Sunday morning services
- Bulletin boards directing to activities will be helpful, along with email or other burst communications as reminders.
- Provide a central area to post all committees and members, including an electronic sign up system that would enable parishioners to see who they are joining in a program.

Engaging and participation

- Electronic sign up capabilities (e.g. shared calendars or invitations) that enable viewers to “see who’s joining” to build program momentum. Use Facebook or other social media to inform and build momentum.
- Make the program structure and timing/scheduling attractive to young and working parents.
- Involve others by reaching out, personally asking for their involvement.
- We see high potential for smaller, targeted group education series vs. larger forums.
- Build a website area dedicated to educational resources that we can build over time (e.g. to post parenting tips, class notes from series, other educational links).

Spiritual Formation and Education vision

Education and spiritual formation opportunities are coordinated with the church year calendar and worship planning, maximizing opportunities for cross-pollination. We have developed and implemented a structured approach to adult education, where clergy and staff plan educational content with committee input. Our goals and a curriculum are established for children and youth education that ensures a comprehensive education leading to confirmation. Sunday School and St. Mary’s preschool programs are communicated and coordinated to the extent feasible, Educational opportunities are geared to family education and fulfillment (e.g. Mission trip with adults and Youth). As a change of pace, occasional opportunities for spiritual fulfillment are offered, such as Bible study lead by high schoolers, concerts and Speaker Series during Adult Forum. These changes lead to growth of children’s Sunday School participation, enabling tighter age bands of classes, so that same age students are together in a manageable class size.

Outreach

Who we are

- We have an active, engaged and giving core of parishioners.
- People want to see the St. Mary's congregation actively involved with grant recipients.
- Communication of opportunities for involvement, the grant process and return on our investment of initiatives has been lacking.
- We do not have metrics or ability to measure impact on organizations or initiatives we support.
- Sending money to organizations is too easy (little time & talent involved), real meaning comes with involvement.
- Examples of what is working: Goochland Free Clinic; Habitat; Caritas; St. Andrew's.

Pillars of strength

- Deep affection for St. Mary's, with a beautiful setting.
- Energetic participants but with a small but committed core of "doers."
- A congregation that is compassionate, and willing to sacrifice and be generous with resources.
- Active "multigenerational" congregation, with deep involvement in the Richmond community.
- A solid tradition in funding organizations - giving about \$55,000 to 8-9 programs annually.
- Momentum with new programs (e.g. St. Andrews) enables us to take our energy and "extrovert it" – i.e., we are emerging and positioned to take advantage of the use of our campus and children & youth programs.
- Energetic and visionary new interim leadership.

God's calling for us in outreach

- We have ability to "reset" Outreach.
 - Develop a clear "mission" for St Mary's outreach effort: "Plug in and then reach out."
 - Bring structure and accountability to the grant process.
 - Better discern the wishes of the broader congregation as to potential recipients. Serve as a facilitator in connecting parishioners with Outreach partners.
 - Balance between "one & done" and "long-term" commitments. Focus on a few opportunities, but execute well.
 - Use Caritas and Pastoral Care as a model – provide structure for work to be done (cross-generational, on campus therefore easy to be involved, "one and done", part of a supported program).
- Survey congregation to determine who is involved in what organizations to determine if there are relationships to leverage – create data base of people and organizations.
- Find/Hire a coordinator to assist Clergy in helping to "plug into" organizations and communicate to congregation.
- Clergy and Staff leadership: reallocation of job responsibilities; part of each responsibility to champion Outreach.
- Invite organizations to speak to parishioners.
- Improve communications throughout - on what is being done, what dollars spent, grant process – create means to measure and evaluate.

Serving young families

- Consider efforts in three areas: on campus, in the region/State, internationally, and allocate resources according to priorities.
- Make participation easy, fun and rewarding:
 - Create easy way to “plug in” and get information, e.g. common calendar and sign ups.
 - Create a “hub” or even a St. Mary’s App
 - Engage young families, providing opportunities to meet their desire to volunteer (or need to satisfy a service requirement), yet be mindful of time commitments.
 - Attract young adults to be active in Outreach by first engaging their children.
 - Create tie in with children and youth programs and Outreach opportunities
 - Create clear explanations of opportunities with “what it looks like”; “this program is good for...families, adults...etc.”; “this program requires...”
 - Work with Dover Parish Group to create outreach project for young families
 - Partner with Fellowship (i.e.: have a “manpower-volunteer” BBQ)
- Conduct annual “Outreach Fair” with families invited to celebrate our partnerships with grant recipients.
- Large permanent Outreach Board in hallway listing Outreach Partners and volunteer options with sign-up instructions.
- Discern what young families are looking for and how St. Mary’s can facilitate those opportunities; consider occasional surveys to identify congregation’s interests.

Informing and communicating

- Outreach Committee / Grant Recipient presentations at church dinners, Sunday services, 10:00 Adult Forums, etc.
- Sermons – example: Bob’s 4/3/16 sermon, “Take our energy and extrovert it” – essence of what Jesus did; “All have things that worry us, but if we lean in and help others, amazing how it gives our lives meaning.” God’s purpose in our hearts and lives, and in others.
- Detailed, written, periodic (6 months?) Outreach financial report relating gifts and their use/impacts. Transparent reporting which highlights financial support, engagement and impact.
- Written testimonials and articles in newsletter from parishioners.
- General “shift” in what we highlight in all communication to an Outreach foundation > Jesus’ life is our example >disciple.
- Hire/find Outreach Coordinator to assist in communications and maintaining information.
- Anonymous (or not) parishioner suggestion box.

Engaging and participation

- Create “outreach” calendar.
- Create accessible outreach database which includes: opportunities, “congregational relationships”, relevant contacts, descriptions of activities to include who might participate (e.g. “good for families”, “good use of a weekend” , “frustrated craftsmen welcomed”, etc.)
- Create inventory of congregational “talents” to document congregation’s interests, active involvement and ongoing participation.

- Hire Outreach Coordinator – Maintain database, coordinates activities/volunteers, is the communication “HUB”, and employs multimedia to communicate with congregation.
- Chart each opportunity to evaluate dollars versus time and talent needed for the activity.
- Partner with Fellowship to celebrate and muster volunteers.
- Create signup sheets/Outreach Communication “board” to build momentum.

Outreach vision

Outreach at St. Mary’s is celebrated as a manifestation of God’s work, extending beyond Sunday at church into the greater Goochland/Richmond community. We have established a clear grant process to identify recipients, accounts for use of funds, tracks results and connect St. Mary’s parishioners with meaningful volunteer opportunities. We have become a more philanthropic culture through our clear communication and program success. Our efforts maximize the talents and resources of our members, crossing all age groups in the parish. Our success drives support for more programs to help people “get on their feet” and children in our community. Mission trips spread our impact regionally, perhaps nationally and internationally.

Fellowship

Who we are

- Welcoming, friendly, warm, comfortable, home.
- Common threads for members of all ages are the love for St. Mary's as a congregation as well as a love for the physical setting. It is a place of comfort and a place to recharge.
- Many value the "small church" feel and want to preserve that as the church continues to grow and strengthen.

Pillars of strength to build from

- Fellowship - There are many opportunities for fellowship at St. Mary's and members want to see these continue: Parish Suppers, Parish Breakfasts, coffee between services, "Dovers" socials and picnics, Senior's lunch and speaker series, supper clubs. We are blessed to have beautiful and functional facilities to host onsite fellowship activities.
- Pastoral Care - Pastoral care teams (4 teams of 10 members each) have been in place since early 2015. These teams are making a difference to the membership and those who are participating are thoroughly enjoying the experience.
- St. Mary's clergy also make a positive impact on the membership through direct pastoral care as well as maintaining the prayer list.

God's calling for us in fellowship

- Communication - It is very important that all fellowship opportunities and activities are widely publicized and open to all. Many members are unaware of fellowship opportunities and how to become involved in committees and volunteer opportunities. St. Mary's is already off to a great start with the most recent improvements to the email communication and website.
- Engagement and Inclusion - It is key to ensure that all activities are open to everyone. Different groups may find a common thread in their interests and schedules, which is natural, but St. Mary's needs to make sure members do not feel excluded from any fellowship opportunities. Some committees have run their course with very loyal committee members over long periods of time. It is important to recruit new committee members who are active and engaged to ensure the great meals, services, and events continue to be supported.
- New members/visitors - While many members choose St. Mary's for its warm and welcoming environment, this is an area that needs a more structured process in place to identify and welcome visitors to the church, as well as re-energizing the new members dinner, possibly quarterly. A new member mentor program is recommended.

Serving young families

- Offer childcare consistently at events and programs, and ensure that child care availability is well-communicated.
- Overlapping events - offering fellowship opportunities for children and youth at the same time and location as opportunities for adults.
- Continue to strengthen the relationship with St. Mary's preschool and the church. Encourage young families to be more engaged – e.g. MOPS (mothers of preschoolers) - similar to a Christian based support group and gatherings can be held at St. Mary's.

- Members, including younger members, take ownership in the planning and execution of fellowship activities. We see this happening with the Dover Parish Community Group.
- Increase opportunities for children's fellowship opportunities outside of Sunday School, as well as continue to strengthen the middle and high school youth programs.

Informing and communicating

- Utilizing social media is a great way to connect with the younger families and members. Conventional methods of emailing and direct mail are still necessary to reach across the membership to ensure that information is distributed to all in a consistent manner.
- A central calendar is a good way to ensure that all events/opportunities are able to found in a central location.

Engaging and participation

- Often, members just need to be asked to participate. Making members aware of activities and opportunities is the first step.
- A personal touch, call, or request can often be the catalyst to get members to show up for fellowship events and/or participate on a committee.
- Offering childcare has been a common request from members with young children.
- It was suggested to have a **"St. Mary's 101"** forum possibly quarterly to educate the membership on the behind the scenes of St. Mary's and the committee and volunteer opportunities available.
- Continue to offer a variety of opportunities both onsite and offsite to increase participation across the membership.

Fellowship vision

Opportunities for fellowship within our community help to strengthen personal relationships with each other, our church, and ultimately, our relationship with God. The vision for the fellowship subcommittee is to continue to develop more of a community within the parish and build upon the warm and inviting environment at St. Mary's. It is a goal to be welcoming and inclusive to visitors and new members as well as maintain consistent engagement from current and long term members.

Conclusion

The Steering Committee's views on **Next Steps** are outlined on page 4 of this report. While we have included many pages of specific ideas for what we do and how we do it, it is important to reinforce that the people of St. Mary's Church should reflect mostly on the vital themes of God's calling for us - **participation, engagement, fulfillment, communication and accountability**. If we master these themes, then the Steering Committee is confident that the direction we take with worship, spiritual fulfillment and education, outreach, stewardship and fellowship will follow God's will for us.

Attachment 1 - Subcommittee Member List

- **Worship** – how and when we gather and prepare for liturgy, including music, (e.g. alter guilds, ushers, lay participation, service schedule, music, content)

1. **Peggy Talman, Chair**
2. Sue Thompson
3. Ben Lewis
4. Susie Patton
5. Russell Wyatt
6. Kemper Wharton
7. Martha Rhodes
8. Rebecca Johnson
9. Robin Lind
10. Burke McCormick
11. **Vestry – Betsy Rawles**
12. **Clergy/staff – Weezie Blanchard**

- **Spiritual Formation** - for our youth through adults, with a specific emphasis on opportunities for the post-confirmation to pre-college ages (excluding St. Mary's Episcopal School). The committee will reflect on unique program needs of different age demographics, e.g. pre-school to grade 6, grade 7 through high school, young adults, parents, middle age, and retirees.

1. **Mary Lou Bean, Co-Chair**
2. **Owen Conway, Co-Chair**
3. Chris Cotropia
4. Doug Monroe
5. Sydna Street
6. Betty Johannessen
7. Cabell Jones
8. Marilyn Ware
9. Dan Williams
10. Angelique Wilhelm
11. **Vestry – Brantley Holmes**
12. **Clergy/staff – Matt Rawls**
13. **Clergy/staff – Amelia McDaniel**

- **Fellowship** – how we support various ministries through organizing gatherings and celebrations, and how we welcome prospective members, planning for special events

1. **Kristie Inge, Chair**
2. Caroline Moomaw
3. Duane Ragsdale
4. Margaret Lundvall
5. Martha Bowden
6. Frances White

7. Carrie Schaeffer
8. Andy Howlett
9. **Vestry – Bruin Richardson**
10. **Clergy/staff - Emily Brown**

- **Outreach** – how we reach out and serve the community, our own members in times of need, and the community around us.

1. **Marshall Bowden, Chair**
2. Margaret Mickel
3. Liz Rider
4. Richard Lundvall
5. Wallace Inge
6. Jen Wilkins
7. **Vestry – Charmaine Trice, Tracey Ragsdale**
8. **Clergy – Bob Hetherington**

- **Stewardship** – How we gather and manage the church’s resources, including annual giving, other giving initiatives, budget and plan, approve new initiatives, etc. We expect this groups’ work to extend beyond the discernment period given the need to reestablish many aspects of stewardship at St. Mary’s and the Vestry’s responsibility for oversight. Thus, we have included Vestry members as leaders and committee participants.

1. **Jane duFrane – Vestry and Co-chair**
2. **Wally Stettinius – Co-chair**
3. Tracey Ragsdale
4. Wallace Inge
5. Mercer Ferguson
6. Eddie Goode
7. Jane Spilman
8. Ben Weimer
9. **Fay Lohr – Vestry**
10. **Clergy/staff – Weezie Blanchard**

Attachment 2- Idea Inventory (not vetted)

Over the course of Discernment, our conversations and committee work unearthed numerous ideas and suggestions. Most were used to form the themes, aspirations and strategies outlined in this report. We wanted to document the specific ideas for future consideration; these ideas are presented as Attachment 2. Some of these ideas were discussed, but they should be collectively considered as not-vetted and not acted upon by the steering committee.

Worship ideas:

1. Many old timers as well as Dovers expressed desire for more Morning Prayer and less Communion.
2. Many people expressed desire for hymns that are more familiar instead of brand new ones which are hard to sing.
3. Some think a two hour expectation of youth and children is too much while others appreciate the choice of opportunities.
4. More training for acolytes and ushers is needed so that they will feel comfortable on communion Sundays.
5. "Acolytes, unconfirmed members of our church, are administering communion. In my opinion communion is a sacred and personal thing that should be administered by those who have been trained and know what they are doing."
6. We need to take advantage of our two different church spaces to offer the more traditional service at 9:00 and experiment with music, visiting choir members, exchange of preachers, etc. at 11:00.
7. Many people would like to see the family service and Sunday School at an earlier time. Specifically, someone suggested that the Communion and MP-LSM at 8:00, the Family Service at 9:30 with children leaving for Sunday School before the sermon as before, and if demand, an Adult Forum or Bible Study at 11:00. If both services grow substantially, another service could be offered at 11:00. The earlier service for families would accommodate this new era of sports and other activities which now occur on Sundays.
8. There is some discomfort among some members who think St Mary's is moving toward high church practices too quickly and are fearful that we will lose our low church character to which many of us were attracted in the first place. There needs to be some forum where these things can be explained and discussed.
9. Should St. Mary's consider supporting the military by partnering with, for instance, McGuire Veterans' Hospital or perhaps other military-related groups in the Richmond area, thereby addressing the needs of military families affected by suffering and loss?
10. Given the considerable blessing of living in America and given the abundant challenges our nation faces, would it be appropriate to restore to weekly services the singing of the fourth verse of "America" following the doxology? (*Our fathers' God, to thee, author of liberty, to thee we sing; long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light; protect us by thy might, great God our King.* No. 717 in the Hymnal.) We routinely sang it for a number of years at the urging of the late Bob Patterson, but now we sing it hardly at all when seemingly we need it even more. Here's a tradition we feel strongly merits restoration.

Attachment 2 (continued) - Idea Inventory (not vetted)

11. To set a contemplative mood for being in God's house to worship in an intimate and prayerful way, perhaps there could be organ (or organ/choir) music beginning 15/20 minutes before at least the main service. How wonderfully soothing this could be.
12. In view of the generational variations within the congregation, could the hymn selections include a stronger representation of traditional, familiar songs — many of which assisted us on our way into the church?
13. On word usage: Do we want to continue with "Little St. Mary's" and "New St. Mary's"? "New" St. Mary's is hardly new anymore. Possibly we could move up to "St. Mary's" or "The Church" and "The Chapel." Or: "St. Mary's Church" and "St. Mary's Chapel."
14. On the main church: (1) Ever since we began attending St. Mary's in 1966, there has been discussion about rugs. Maybe the issue needs to be re-visited yet again. We recognize that the sounds emanating from our spectacular music program are enhanced by the current acoustics. Yet a rug runner in at least the center aisle would (a) cut jarring, mood-disrupting shoe clatter and (b) absorb (and thereby reduce) echo.
15. Is it possible to improve and increase the schedule for cleaning the window behind the altar cross? Too much of the time film, smudges, and smears obscure and diminish the glorious view into God's creation.

Stewardship ideas:

1. Clear Financial Statements, use of our data base and systems and analysis of whether we need additional training and/or different hardware and software
2. Monthly Sermons on topic of Stewardship.
3. Monthly complete financial statement to Vestry which will be available to all Parishioners
4. Added administrative Staff to handle increased reporting and communication across the board
5. 3 year Vision for St. Mary's to include church goals that can be aligned with Stewardship goals
6. 2 year commitment for a Stewardship Committee with members from every demographic who meet year long and work off a central calendar
7. "Work, Wealth, Wisdom"
8. More investigation at the Diocese level about programs we could emulate – look at what works for other churches
9. More messaging about Stewardship throughout the Parish with both visual and verbal queues
10. Sunday School lessons throughout the year for children and youth on tithing
11. Join the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes
12. An established tag line for St. Mary's that engages Parishioners to do more than just make a pledge to maintain the annual budget, but also establishes a life line and feeling of responsibility to the greater good of St. Mary's future
13. Recruiting Stewardship Leadership and committee members

Attachment 2 (continued) - Idea Inventory (not vetted)

Spiritual Formation and Education ideas:

1. Sunday 10:00 am casual fellowship area in new sofa area
2. Children in church is good experience for children but offer to leave during sermon- less disruption
3. Wants/needs of youth group - "real mission trip", more retreats and pilgrimage
4. Young children's wants/needs -build a helpful parenting tips website
5. Provide less intimidating classes for the "B/C" student
6. Return to morning prayer options, consider an 8:00 am Sunday service
7. A shorter alternative class to EFM
8. More involvement by EFM graduates teaching and leading
9. Staying true to STM beginnings and uniqueness
10. Establish time frames, quarter type systems
11. Ongoing series
12. Transportation for retirement communities
13. Big buddy program for the children/youth and HS/MS

Outreach ideas:

1. Parishioners' testimonials, articles in newsletter and announcements explaining their outreach projects. Invite Outreach recipients to share their stories with congregation.
2. Outreach audit: What are our parishioners currently involved in outside of St. Mary's and how do our proposed efforts align or compliment? Do we have "blind spots" in our plan?
3. Prepare a detailed "brief" for the St. Mary's brand of outreach that be circulated to the parish.
4. Create database/clearinghouse listing opportunities and participants who are involved.
5. Establish a clear Outreach mission "plug in an then reach out".
6. Create App.

Fellowship ideas:

1. St. Mary's "Ambassadors" – assigned to identify new members and visitors and welcome them to the church - this would be in addition to the scheduled ushers and greeters.
2. Match new members with a sponsor family for a period of six months.
3. "Coupling events" to encourage participation (have a parish supper with a speaker series for adults and childcare/youth activities)
4. Re-name events such as the Seniors lunch series to Speaker series sponsored by the Seniors, or social outing "sponsored" by the Dovers, etc. to encourage attendance across age groups.
5. Offer more off-site opportunities for fellowship.
6. Redirect members to Parish Hall after church services for cookies and coffee instead of everyone heading straight for their cars and home.
7. Strengthen supper club participation - "Cottage Dinners"- members are intentionally matched up.

Attachment 2 (continued) - Idea Inventory (not vetted)

8. Not always have an official Adult Forum on the mornings of Parish Breakfast, just allow for people to take their time with breakfast and fellowship before or after attending the church service.
9. Revisit pastoral care training and open it up to members maybe once or twice a year.
10. Family hand on volunteering opportunities to do as a group, all ages.
11. Continue to make St. Mary's more "Hang out" friendly - this is happening with the revised lounge area - and could be further enhanced with some outside seating.
12. Annual or biannual "St. Mary's 101" event- opportunity to educate the congregation on the way things are set up at church, inform them about opportunities for involvement, could include an element of the history of the church.

Attachment 3
Weekly “Reflections” published in The Annunciation

3-27-16

A Weekly Reflection

Where do you find God at St. Mary’s? Throughout Lent and Holy Week, we received the answer to that question from various members of our St. Mary’s family. Each reflection touched me deeply and made me ever more attuned to God’s presence at St. Mary’s. This Holy Week, I marveled at God’s presence in our Palm Sunday service, from the procession of the St. Mary’s Choir to the dramatic rendition of the Passion by excellent readers of all ages to the silent procession out of the church. I was awed by God’s presence in the institution of Holy Communion in Jesus’ last supper, which we commemorated in the Maundy Thursday liturgy. I witnessed the steadiness of God’s presence in the behind-the-scenes work of our loyal, hard-working and amazingly cheerful staff, Altar Guild and other parishioners who are devoted to St. Mary’s as an outpost of God’s kingdom.

But I have rarely been so moved by God’s presence at St. Mary’s as I was Thursday afternoon during the children’s presentation of the Stations of the Cross. Inspired by the lifelong effect of her participation as a 10 year-old in a similar offering, parishioner Kerri White was the driving force behind this strikingly simple shadow play production. For six weeks, over 20 children ages five to 14 diligently rehearsed their speaking, acting, and singing roles, and their commitment resulted in a remarkable reminder of what Jesus endured on our behalf during the last days of his life on earth. Nearly 60 people—parents, grandparents, friends of all ages, and plenty of parishioners who simply showed up—received their gift. Everyone was deeply moved by the power of the story and deeply touched by the beauty of the children’s presentation. Afterwards, old friends mingled with new, and we gathered for a simple soup supper on the terrace overlooking the churchyard. All of us were amazed at what we had just experienced together. As the children gravitated to the playground, the spring breeze and warm sun blessed us all, and I had no doubt—God is in this place.

We are so glad that you are celebrating the resurrection with us this Easter. May you find God at St. Mary’s today and always.

The Rev. Louise Browner Blanchard
Interim Rector

4-3-2016

A Weekly Reflection

And we are off! May the Spirit flow.

Last night (Thursday), the leaders of our five Discernment Committees (the “Steering Committee”) held an organizational “kick off” meeting led by Tim O’Shea to begin the process of listening, probing, asking and deciphering the question “What is God’s calling for St. Mary’s?” We are at a historical moment in the life of our Parish. After a tenure of almost four decades of dedicated service and spiritual leadership of our former Rector John Miller, we have this fresh opportunity to

seek and reflect on our mission and various goals. To quote Tim, we will seek to answer “Who are we as a church?” and “How can we do things better that enable us to fulfill our mission?”

Our committee leaders are close to populating the various discernment groups: Worship, Spiritual Formation, Fellowship, Outreach and Stewardship. Over 50 members of our Parish community have graciously agreed to actively participate in one of the groups. The entire list will be published soon along with an initial calendar of meetings. Various forums will be available to provide opportunities for Parish wide input. We will also utilize the structure of normal church activities. We expect to provide continuing updates. Any parishioner should feel comfortable seeking out a committee member for discussion. The number one priority of our process is to assure that no interested voice goes unheard.

Over the next two months, each committee will undertake its work. Following which, the Steering Committee will meet to develop a report for the Vestry, to include a clarified set of priorities for the immediate future and to provide a basis for calling our permanent rector. We would expect certain topics will be suggested for continued reflection. The report will hopefully be typified as the “essence of the consensus.” Our goal is for this process is to be both contemplative and enthusiastic. We ask your continued prayers for the spiritual and intellectual curiosity to pursue our answer to “What is God’s calling for St. Mary’s”.

Al Rider, Senior Warden

4-10-16

A Weekly Reflection

Tips for Planning the Future of St. Mary’s Church

- Stay with the Questions: What does God want for the future of St. Mary’s Church?
- Pray the prayer for the future of the Ministry:
- Dear God, we give thanks for the ways you have blessed the ministry of St. Mary’s Church in the past. Be with us now as we look toward the future. Show us the way forward. Help us plan a ministry which will reflect your glory, a ministry which will serve the needs of your people and which will be an important witness of your love for the world. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.
- Get answers to important questions:
- How can St. Mary’s serve the larger community?
- What do I need to become a better Christian?
- How can we build faith for our children and grandchildren?
- Stay close to the history of St. Mary’s church. What is unique about this parish church?
- Cast the net broadly for input.
- Listen carefully and prayerfully to each other.
- Stay close to your passionate interest in this ministry. (Don’t plan programs for other people who are not here.)
- Remember the future is open-ended. You do not have to have a complete plan for the next ten years.

- Think outside the box. Dream big dreams for future ministry.
- Have fun!

Robert G. Hetherington, Priest Associate

4-17-16

A Weekly Reflection

As we journey forward as a community in our attempt to discern “What is God’s calling for St Mary’s?” I have had the privilege to meet with a wonderful group of individuals, some familiar and some new to me, on the Spiritual Formation and Education Committee. The group spans generations of involvement at St Mary’s, which is a joy when discussing development and enlightenment for all ages, the young through the mature.

As we share our growth journeys, pausing with quiet reflection and appreciation, there is a gratitude for St. Mary’s that is tangible. The simple beauty, the engaging clergy and staff, and the love we share resonates. So too do humorous stories of past days with no Sunday School curriculum and very active students, the profound impact of EFM (Education for Ministries) in participants’ lives, thought provoking speakers, the reflection from Contemplative Prayer and other memories from our own years of spiritual formation.

The weaving of all ages’ formation and growth, the interaction and support between generations has been a repeating theme. Bible study, outreach, giving, retreats, community building, fellowship are ageless endeavors.

We will continue to listen and question, non -judgingly, to help discern God’s calling for our Spiritual Formation and Education. Please let us know your thoughts.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Rom.12: 2

Mary Lou Bean and Owen Conway
Spiritual Formation and Education Co Chairs
trmlb@verizon.net

4-24-16

A Weekly Reflection

About two months ago I was asked to attend a meeting to start the planning of our Discernment Process and found myself wondering what in the world I was doing in a room with the leaders of the church. As I am sure many of you do, I often see myself as just one of God’s sheep following the crowd to the safety of a Sunday service led by the clergy or attending an event coordinated by other people from the church. It’s difficult for me to look at myself in the mirror and realize that I too am called to step up and take on bigger things in our Parish Community.

Life is full of commitments –the family and work life balancing act we all do each week—while church often falls to the background of our minds. St. Mary’s is something that I feel is always going to be there for me when I need it and not something I feel personally responsible for taking care of. This Discernment Process has opened my eyes to the fact that we all must come together to make sure this parish community is taken care of so that our future will be what we hope and pray for it to be.

Stewardship is so much more than just money—however, we often don’t worry about that aspect and assume the church will keep running along and providing the services and experiences we all enjoy. We volunteer our time in the activities of the church and we spread our talents around the parish and we feel that our support has been given. For this period of discernment we are looking inside of our hearts at our faith in God and asking him to guide us to what we will do for the years to come to take care of our parish so that it not only survives but THRIVES!

Please ask yourself: What can I do to make a difference for the future of St. Mary’s? What can we all do to be more involved in the emergence of our new identity? What calls us to come to this place and give of ourselves and of our fortune? As I think about my calendar and how I spend my time, I also think about my abundance and what I feel is important to share with this church. St. Mary’s has given so much to me and my children and my family. I am emotionally tied to this place, and I hope that my family will grow up and old within these walls. If you feel the same way, then I know you will take this time to pray on how stewardship can be more of a focus in your life so that we can become what God intends our parish to become.

Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine. Proverbs 3:9-10

Jane M. duFrane
Discernment Stewardship Chair
janedufrane@verizon.net

5-1-16

A Weekly Reflection

As Chair of the Fellowship subcommittee for the St. Mary’s discernment process, I took a step back recently to truly wrap my mind around the concept of “Fellowship” and what it means. I, of course, started with Google to seek out the literal meaning of the word, and I discovered that it is derived from the Greek prefix koinos, meaning “to hold something in common.” What do the people of St. Mary’s hold in common? First and foremost, is our love for Christ. Out of this love for Christ I have developed a love and respect for the physical sanctuary, as well as for the people who make up the St. Mary’s community. Opportunities for fellowship within our community help to strengthen personal relationships with each other, our church, and ultimately, our relationship with God.

These fellowship opportunities exist in various ways, from attending Bible study to enjoying a cup of coffee together. I experienced the positive strength of St. Mary’s fellowship recently as my

husband Wallace and I attended a gathering sponsored by the Dover Parish Community Group at Licking Hole Creek Brewery. We were greeted by the smiles and laughter of fellow St. Mary's members, and I felt the stress of the day melt away. Wallace and I truly enjoyed every moment and conversation that evening and felt blessed to have had the opportunity to strengthen existing relationships and form new ones. It was just one example of the many opportunities for fellowship at St. Mary's and one more reason for St. Mary's to feel like a home for us.

Kristie Inge
Fellowship Discernment Focus Group Chair
Kristie.Inge@gmail.com

5-8-16

A Weekly Reflection

Bishop Shannon will be with us at the 9 and 11 a.m. services on May 22. Below is a brief excerpt from his Pastoral Address at this year's 221st Diocesan Annual Council:

...I've said many times before that in our Anglican Tradition, our commitment is to each other in Christ, not to each other's opinions. More than that, I say that disagreement can actually be a fruitful dynamic in Christian fellowship and governance; it can be a crucial part of how faithful discernment and the deepest community happen.

To me, the acceptance – the celebration – of this quality may be the very specific gift – the Godly charism – that our Anglicanism has for this world that is so deeply and variably divided, indeed polarized. Knowing how to disagree and still be totally committed to one another and to the greater good of all is the proverbial "balm in Gilead."

Our Anglicanism, at its best and most authentic – focused on the Gospel of Jesus – has so much to teach our politics and relationships. This is something that is so desperately and achingly longed-for in every culture and society. I believe that by virtue of being Episcopalians – people of the both/and – we are called, indeed expected, by God to be reconcilers. Or, to put it another way, we are called to witness to how all people can become and remain "connected in the Kingdom..."

Reprinted from The Diocese of Virginia website

The Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston
Bishop of the Diocese of Virginia
sjohnston@thediocese.net

5-15-16

A Weekly Reflection

Becoming a Sunday school teacher has been one of the best things I have ever done. I was asked probably eight years ago to teach middle and high school kids at our old church. I had no experience, but I knew I wanted to do something good and felt honored to be asked. I fell in love with it and have been teaching since. This year was my second year teaching the 3rd- 5th grade Sunday school class at St. Mary's, and I will teach next year and the year after. It is absolutely one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. My family and I have gained so much more than I have given.

Teaching Sunday school helps reinforce my commitment to church. We all have things that we are committed to: our families, our friends, our work our children's activities, our volunteer service. And all of those are so important. But one of the of the most important things I feel we can do for ourselves and for our children is to be committed to church. In this day and time when there are so many outside forces trying to pull us away from God, being at church most Sundays, if not every Sunday, keeps us and our children closer to God, which is where I want to be.

Being a Sunday school teacher requires me to be at church at 10:00 every Sunday. This is not always easy. And there are Sundays where I have to "talk it up", not just to our children but to myself as well. But I do it because it is good, and fulfilling and warming. Getting to know the children of St. Mary's; showing them that I value them and feeling them value me, teaching and learning about God's love together is a blessing. And I am not alone. Most of the Sunday school teachers at St. Mary's came back to teach again this year. They have felt the blessing too!

It makes me so thankful to be a part of such a wonderful Parish.

Brantley Holmes
Chair, Children's Ministries Committee
Vestry Member
3rd – 5th Grade Sunday School Teacher

Attachment 4 Pastoral Care teams at St. Mary's

- The pastoral care teams were **organically organized** by Eleanor Wellford by reaching out to those who she thought may be a good fit.
- There was a **one day training** held for all team members, and depending on what meeting day worked best for each member, the larger group was broken into smaller teams. The teams meet once a week on Mondays (each team meets once a month, with a different team meeting each Monday).
- During those meetings, they mostly write cards - birthday, new baby, sympathy, thinking of you, and miss you cards. The team members were **asked which tasks they felt most comfortable with** - for example, going to the hospital, nursing homes, visiting new babies, just writing cards, etc. Initially, they divided up the card writing and did it at home, then started writing them all together and all signing them during meetings.
- Some team members do go out to visit members in need. They are supposed to identify themselves as a St. Mary's pastoral care team member representing St. Mary's. They then report back to the clergy to let them know when there is a need for the real clergy to visit (they don't rely on the teams entirely for that though)
- There is no starting or end point to the teams regarding recruitment and length of term, and no rotation procedure or new member opportunity at this point.
- There is a need for the general membership to be educated more on the pastoral care teams as well as plans put in place to offer the opportunity to additional members that may be interested in participating on a team (general info and training is necessary).