

Thank you, Al. I just have to emphasize how much I have to thank Al, the entire Vestry, and everyone who Al mentioned in his report for this absolutely amazing year, for the enthusiasm that has manifested itself, through so many things that we have done and things we have to look forward to. Without going through that whole list, I just want to say that I echo enthusiastically everything you just said as far as thanking the individuals who were named and, indeed, each and every one of you who are here today. Just by showing up and your energy and enthusiasm, this is a happy, wonderful place to be. It is a joy to work with each and every one of you and each and every one of you is so important to the ongoing ministry of St. Mary's Church.

I am simply honored to be your rector. I look forward to more incredible years like the ones we've just been through. I want to tell you that the guiding principles for me continue to be the theme of our discernment process – where is God calling St. Mary's – and the theme of our stewardship program, which is "Walk in Love". I think to me that these are ways of constantly reminding ourselves how do we do what we have discerned God is calling us to do. They go hand in hand in leading us to be Jesus' eyes, ears, hands, feet, and, especially, heart - whether we are on this beautiful campus, in Goochland, in metropolitan Richmond, or in the wider world which awaits greater engagement from all of us. This is a unique time in the life of this parish and in the life of the world. I think one of the things that those of us who were at the Convention were struck with was that what is going on in the world around us so calls us to reconsider who we are as Christians and what that means to live as Christians in the world today. And we look forward to continuing that conversation amongst ourselves and listening to all the many and diverse ideas about what that means and how we can support each other in doing that.

For myself, I am also guided - and hope the rest of us are – by our baptismal vows - specifically to proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving our neighbors as ourselves; to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. That is part and parcel of our baptismal vows and found in your Book of Common Prayer, so I commend it to each and every one of us as we move through this year.

Discerning how we are called to live into those vows as individuals and at St. Mary's is an integral part of everything we do in building our community as followers of Jesus. I will continue to look at such things as how our liturgy can strengthen us to go out into the world. And we've had some interesting conversations in the past year about what the meaning of our liturgy is. It's more than just gathering together on Sunday mornings, how our ministries, committees, and small groups equip as a community and as Christians, and, again, how we take that out into the world. We all have a role to play. I urge each of us to prayerfully consider what

we can do. The Vestry continues to be leaders in that accord. Later in February, we will have a Vestry retreat to explore more ways that they can help in the leadership of that. Most importantly, I want to remind us, Bob and I have already said this and continue to say it, that attendance at Sunday services is important, but it is not enough. It is not enough to meet the promises of our baptismal vows. I echo what one of our speakers at Annual Convention said that what we are really called to be is disciples, not members, to get out of that gated community of heaven and go out into the world. I challenge all of us to do that.

For me, individually and as the rector, I'm convinced that nothing strengthens us more than getting outside of our comfort zone - getting outside and seeking Christ in ourselves and in all persons, and there are so many opportunities to do that at St. Mary's. I'm especially excited about the work of our outreach committee. Outreach has been a passion for many of you at St. Mary's and there was a great deal of enthusiasm about it in our discernment process. One of the things we instituted in the past year is a grant application process, which not only asks for more information from our potential outreach partners, but gives us more of an opportunity to get to know them - whether it's an outreach committee member who makes a site visit and comes back and reports on what that partner does and why we should or should not consider their grant request. We've also actively started the discussion with our outreach partners on how we can get to know one another as volunteers or other ways we can help each other so that we're not just sitting around a table and making a decision about how much money someone gets but we are - some of us - putting our shoes on and going out and seeing how we can work with those potential partners.

Another way that we are going to explore supporting outreach in the coming year is to have some sort of outreach event. There are plenty of people who want to support outreach but might not know how to get connected to the outreach committee and the work that they do. Unfortunately, outreach is one of the things that is subject first to cutting in the budget. We've looked at how some of our sister churches in the area support outreach by having a special event, whether it is a Mardi Gras event, a bluegrass bash, or a golf tournament, and using that as a way to raise money for outreach. What we are proposing this year, because of the wealth of talent and experience here at St. Mary's, is that we explore having some sort of gala. We are thinking about, but would like input from you all, to have a dinner and auction. That lets people who per se are not interested in outreach but have gifts in putting on an event and bringing enthusiasm and the fun, frankly, of what it means to do that together as a group. So you'll be hearing more about that. If you're interested in it, please come see me. We hope that that will be the main funding for outreach going forward and we think it will result in huge increased amounts of money available to do that very important work within the community.

Annual Congregational Meeting

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

January 29, 2017

Rector's Report

Given by: The Rev. Louise Browner Blanchard

Some of our other outreach endeavors include increased mission work. I am excited to say that Matt has three different youth mission opportunities this summer: one to West Virginia, one to New York City, and one to the Lakota Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, and all are already enthusiastically subscribed. What a great way to have our youth involved and, frankly, leading the way in our mission trips! In just a couple of weeks, Ashley Cameron, whose responsibility includes outreach and mission, is going with parishioner Chris Ritrievi to Ecuador to see about possibilities of engagement for us there. This summer in June, I'm taking advantage of my relationship with my husband and going to Africa for two and half to three weeks: to Tanzania, to Congo, and perhaps to South Sudan if it's safe enough, to explore opportunities for us in those places as well. But I have to tell you, I would go no matter what because that part of my spiritual life is so important and is, frankly, something I've really missed since I've been at St. Mary's - the opportunity to get out into the world and see the joy that is manifested in our fellow Anglicans throughout the world. And I know from talking with many of you that you have a similar interest, and I look forward to exploring that.

Maybe outreach and mission is where your called and that's ok. Some of our other offerings have already been mentioned, from Bob's spiritual practice group to our increasing number of book and Bible studies – three of which are already being led or will be led by parishioners. That's an important part of our ministry here. You don't need me or Bob or any of our other leaders to do these. We are all equipped to lead in ways that we're called. And if you just want a little push, come see us. We are happy to do that.

Our pastoral care ministry continues to be a guiding light for greater engagement. I will lead a women's retreat to SSJE in March. We will have more information about that but if you are interested please see me. We are all committed to continuing on the path of discerning where God is calling St. Mary's and doing so by walking in love. So I close this by thanking each and every one of you for this incredible opportunity to serve side by side with you and I look forward to our future together with great enthusiasm. Thank you very much.