

St. Mary's Episcopal Church
Annual Parish Meeting & Vestry Election
February 2nd, 2020
Senior Warden's Report
Karen Huennekens

I stand here today not really sure how I got here other than to say that I had a phone call from Tracey Ragsdale followed by a lunch with David May. Who can say no to either one of them at any given time other than Duane Ragsdale and Emmy May?

Seriously, I have been humbled and honored to serve as Senior Warden. It has been an experience that has brought me closer to St. Mary's, more conscious of my personal faith in God, and I have developed some wonderful relationships along the way.

The Vestry is an important body of the Church. We have grown together, discussed complicated issues amongst each other and supported one another's views and opinions. It has been a wonderful experience and I am truly thankful for the dedicated Vestry members who give of their time making St. Mary's a better place for all of us to worship and enjoy. This is also a time to thank the multitude of volunteers, and co-chair of ministries that make St. Mary's what it is today and to our dedicated staff that manage these responsibilities. There is no place I would rather worship than here with you.

I want to thank two particular people for their support and friendship along this journey- Junior Warden, Scott Stephens and Treasurer Joe Cheely. They have always been giving of their time, their expertise and are the real deal. We are in a better place because of their commitment.

I'd like to highlight a few of the things that we have accomplished this year and conclude with thoughts on the future of St. Mary's.

In September, St. Mary's had the honor of hosting the Diocesan of Virginia Ordination to the Priesthood service and welcomed over 500 guests including priests, candidates, and family and friends from all over the state of Virginia. It was a huge undertaking and our Church benefitted by show-casing what is so special and unique about St. Mary's. This couldn't have been accomplished without our professional staff and the many volunteers at the service.

We experienced great strides with our stewardship campaign over the past two years, finally reaching the million-dollar mark with pledged gifts in 2019 and 2020. As Stewardship Co-Chair, I thank all of you who have stepped up to participate. Our current 2020 effort has been the most successful to date and we are making great progress. As I have stated before, a thriving Church

needs a strong stewardship culture. Stabilization of the stewardship campaign, seeing an increase in giving levels, and planning for the sustainability of St. Mary's future is extremely important to all of us. With the development of a planned giving program to launch soon, we are looking to the future and preparing for a new generation of worship participants. All vitally important to the legacy of St. Mary's.

With the leadership of Vestry member Patsy Simril and volunteer Barbara Tavenner, we added the Welcomers' Committee ministry this year to cultivate our newest members and provide a support system to those individuals and families visiting St. Mary's. This committee is the first face of our church and instrumental in providing a good first experience that will hopefully lead to a more engaged member.

Our services are reaching record attendance levels in both Little St. Mary's and New St. Mary's. We have continued to see a swell in attendance at our adult forums and education opportunities and bible studies. Our Lunch and Learns have been popular and we look forward to our first series of speaker workshops and retreats. Our staff continues to do an excellent job of answering the needs of spiritual development and fulfillment and offering unique ways for us to participate.

We were happy to revitalize Children's Chapel for our youngest St. Mary's participants and have high hopes that this opportunity will expand and continue to reach the need of our young families.

Our Fellowship committee was instrumental in identifying the needs for the renovation of our kitchen and the replacement of appliances to better serve our Fellowship team and church members. We thank our buildings and grounds committee for their expertise and their time in managing these maintenance and renovation projects and keeping a pulse on the projects to come. They have dealt with rotten wood, new awnings, fences, and painting, to thousands of honeybees in the bell tower and everything in between. Most recently, we are thankful for the ingenuity in building posts to aid in our worship services as congregants participate in communion in New St. Mary's. We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to the hours spent on keeping our facilities safe and operable.

Along those lines, with the support of Elizabeth Starling and Vestry member Kim O'Shea, we undertook the daunting task of cataloging the churchyard cemetery and establishing guidelines to preserve the aesthetics of our sacred grounds. This was long overdue and feel great appreciation for the research and work performed by both Elizabeth and Kim.

Our outreach ministry has benefitted from two successful Date with the Daffodil galas and we thank the hardworking committee and Ashley Cameron for their work. The money raised from these galas benefit our community outreach grant recipients and adult and youth mission trips. We have raised over \$142,000 in the past 2 years allowing us to give more to our community and build funds for future outreach initiatives. Mark your calendars for our newest version of Date with the Daffodils as we take the party outside on Sunday, September 27 from 4-8 p.m. for a BBQ and oyster roast with fire pits and entertainment from Whiskey Rebellion. You will hear more from our co-chairs, Claire Laing and Katie Howlett in the coming months.

Most recently, we honored John Miller as Rector Emeritus for the leadership that he provided to St. Mary's for so many years and said our good-byes to Bob Hetherington who was a stabling force during our transition some 4 years ago.

What lies in store for St. Mary's in the future?

- We are actively searching for a new full-time Associate Priest that we hope will come aboard this Summer.
- We are researching new technology for our sound system in NSM to provide a greater worship experience;
- We are launching a planned giving program to help provide the needed resources to continue St. Mary's living legacy for future generations to come and will aid in the expense of maintaining our buildings and grounds.
- We will continue to educate and inform our parishioners about the stewardship process hoping to achieve higher participation percentages from our members. We are currently at 55% participation of the 592 households that consider St. Mary's their church Home and feel confident this number can move higher. To meet our needs, it must move higher. We also hope to decrease the number of unpaid pledges that have a direct impact on our working budget.
- We are strategically looking ahead and always evaluating our buildings and grounds projects while prioritizing immediate needs for the future. We will begin hearing more about roof replacement as our next large project.

- Finally, We promise to communicate the needs of this Church keeping you informed of our plans for a sustainable and healthy future. Please continue to lean in, show up, be present. We need you.

In closing, when I began my Vestry term 3 years ago we were facing a very different future. We were launched into the unknown with the departure and disruption of a mid-year loss of our Rector. We had a lot of work to do and wondered how we were going to do it.

Looking back, God was maybe trying to tell us something, testing us. Putting the right people in place. Just maybe - God was saying that we needed to get to work, lean in, show up. And maybe this was God's plan for St. Mary's after all. We have certainly grown from it and have become stronger for it.

I think about God's calling as I look back over how I got here realizing now that he was speaking to me. It is easy to resist his voice, convenient to make excuses of being too busy, spread too thin, working too much. But it hit me- Sitting across from me was DAVID, he and Emmy left their Church, their Home, their community, and took a giant leap of faith because he heard God calling him to come HERE. I realized at that point whatever excuse I was trying to come up with wasn't going to fly with God or even with myself. I was out of excuses. I had to come out of the shadows and fly above the radar. God was in my ear, in my head, and in my heart. I needed to listen.

I am incredibly blessed to have had the opportunity to work with David in his first full year at St. Mary's. His energy, love for his congregation, kind heart, and desire to reach all of us-wherever we are in our faith, is a real gift to St. Mary's. What an impact he has already made in such a short time. I'm thankful for this experience as a Vestry member, and Warden and hope that when God calls you, you are listening and will feel the comfort of his guiding hand and the confidence to answer his call. It will change your relationship with your Church and anchor your Faith in God. Thank you.