

## **What Does the Lord Require of Us?**

*Report of the St. Paul's Outreach Visioning Team to the Parish, Vestry, and Clergy*

Outreach matters at St. Paul's.

Through adult education programming, surveys, listening circles, and one-on-one conversations between parishioners and members of the visioning team, consistent in all forms of contact was the hope to see the parish engaged in the greater community.

The goal of the Visioning Team in surveying our parish as well as other faith communities was to provide St. Paul's with a deeper, broader, richer sense of how we might live out our call as Christians to extend our faith beyond the pew on Sundays and to work, in service, with those whom Jesus blessed and whom we are called to love as we love ourselves.

The information that has been collected over the course of five months falls into three broad categories: philosophical, financial, and structural.

### **Philosophical**

In terms of priorities and procedures, certain themes emerged. Parishioners were interested in work that is:

#### **Local, hands-on, and relational**

- Local does not exclude work beyond the Triangle or even beyond North Carolina, but there is considerable interest in affecting change in our community.
- Hands-on is a priority beyond the contribution of goods and products.
- Relational in terms of the individuals we would work beside as a way of improving lives but not limited to those receiving assistance. Interest extends to working with other churches and organizations beyond the walls of St. Paul's.

#### **Focused on hunger, housing, and "vulnerable populations"**

- Vulnerable populations would include children, the elderly, those with mental illness, veterans, farm workers, recent immigrants, etc.
- There is considerable cross-over between the three areas.
- Most of our existing outreach ministries focus on at least one of these areas.

#### **Communicated in a variety of ways**

- Information saturation is a problem. A periodic "outreach only" e-mail blast or bulletin insert might help bring focus to opportunities .
- Development of a resource for those who don't want or cannot participate in an on-going St. Paul's effort but would like information about options based on time and commitment level could also have value.
- A parish-wide focus every four months on one of these areas would allow for greater understanding of the biblical and practical implications of why people of faith care

about this issue. This would include homilies, adult ed, outreach opportunities, outside presentations, reading groups, etc. The area of work for that particular period would not be the only focus of parish life in those four months, but there would be consistent, strategic opportunities for parishioners to hear and learn in a variety of venues.

## **Financial**

In terms of funding, the difficulty in planning and maintaining outreach programs let alone expanding them without a consistent, reliable source of financial support is obvious. While there are opportunities that require minimal financial support, it is impossible to commit to those that do when parish funding is unreliable.

## **Fundraising**

- The parish has shown its commitment to outreach through internally generated fundraisers such as the Festival of the Arts and Lobster Fest. The parishioners who make these possible are to be commended and additional opportunities must seriously be considered.
- It should not fall solely to the Outreach Committee to raise its own money but to partner with others in parish-wide efforts to fund these ministries.
- The parish leadership must be willing to commit some level of funding to outreach consistently and might come to some budgetary understanding that parish fundraisers will supplement outreach funding, but those fundraisers cannot be the sole source.

## **Reliability**

- There should also be acknowledgement that new ministries will require new funding and should not be introduced at the expense of existing ministries.
- The parish leadership needs to rebuild trust in how it funds outreach and how it reports outreach budgeting. There is a perception of a lack of transparency, a lack of urgency, and/or a lack of commitment among some parishioners that directly impacts their confidence that outreach continues to be a priority within the leadership at St. Paul's.

## **Structural**

As it currently exists, the Outreach Committee of St. Paul's is made up largely of the leaders of individual outreach ministries. These are passionate, engaged individuals who care deeply about the work and have shown enormous grace in terms of what their ministry can and cannot do given financial uncertainty. In order to develop a long-term vision of outreach, however, an ongoing strategic vision is necessary.

## **Operational**

- The current Outreach Committee's work is invaluable and those ministries are a part of who we are as a parish. As a committee, those leaders might properly be asked to meet

twice a year to discuss budgetary matters, but their ministry work can otherwise be largely managed via other communications methods for matters of scheduling, etc.

### Strategic

- A strategic outreach committee with more frequent meetings could take responsibility for the overall vision of outreach at St. Paul's. Such a group would allow for long-term planning, consideration and development of new ministries with the intention that they align with parish priorities, larger issues of finance, etc. Representative to this committee, ideally made up of 9 to 12 people, might include:
  - The chair of the larger Outreach Committee
  - The incoming chair of the larger Outreach Committee
  - Representatives from the three priority areas of ministry from the larger Outreach Committee: Housing, Hunger, Vulnerable Populations
  - A vestry representative
  - A clergy representative
  - At-large representatives

### Conclusion

The New Testament is something of a training manual for living out a faith that is not confined to Sunday. At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, much good work has been done and more can be accomplished. This report is the next step in the conversation. Important decisions must still be made by the parish leadership and by the parishioners themselves about our next step forward.

Making outreach a deeper, broader, richer part of life at St. Paul's, as demonstrated by other churches that have recommitted themselves to this work, is a long-term process with financial implications that extend beyond adding another fundraiser to the church calendar.

It is our prayer that the information offered here will provide some direction to our parish and our fellow parishioners as we walk this path together.

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