



ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
2017 ANNUAL REPORT

100 Chapel St.
Portsmouth, NH 03801
603-436-8283
www.stjohnsnh.org

CLERK'S REPORT ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES -

January 22, 2017

Call to Order - 9:06

Introduction of Vestry

Opening Prayer - Lacey Bangs

Motion to Approve 2016 Minutes - John Rice (unanimous)

Motion to Approve slate of Vestry Members: Joe Wier, Maggie Skafidas, Bob Nalewajk - John Rice (unanimous)

Sr. Warden Report: John Tabor

- St. John's is in a good place and expanding; fiscally healthy, continue to attract new members; Vestry is asking how can we do more to build community
- Retreat goals:
 - support Rob's desire to bring in a curate (hard at work for that for 2017)
 - Accessibility
 - John read comments from an email query to the congregation
 - Initial study done in 2015 but now we want input: cottage meetings
 - Want to launch a capital campaign to address the issues that come up

Fun Numbers: Chris Sieve

Teen Service Sundays: Lizzie Bristow

- Teens are going out into the community and "being the Church"
- Partnerships with housing authority, adopt a block, crossroads, food pantry
- Compiled Thanksgiving baskets for over 300 families
- Gift giveaway
- Served coffee and muffins/neighborhood cleanup at PHA
- Half marathon to benefit food pantry
- 1st Weds of each month - cook for crossroads
- 40+ participate - help teens understand what it's like to practice their faith in the community

Choir School: Chris Sieve

- 2nd year
- Expanded numbers by changing structure of the program - 2 days/week better meets needs of kids and has increased participation and decreased attrition
- Serving 17 (2 more than designed) with a waiting list

- Kathy Hardy drives the van - essential
- Kids get snacks, homework help, have piano and voice lessons
- 2 fundraisers
- 3/10 - March 10th (Fire & Ice)
- 6/17 - Ballroom Dance & Big Band event
- Program is self-funded through donations and does not come out of the operating budget of St. John's (same as Common Table)

Treasurer's Report: Kelly Boston

- Pledge level has grown from \$399,999 to 520,000 in 2017 - no longer operating from a place of scarcity all the time

Stewardship: Meg Moran & Carol Gruen

- Large team - so grateful for all
- Successful campaign - celebrated ways St. John's flourishing (invited people to speak at services to talk about that)
- Close to goal - anticipating 300 pledging families; exceeded last year and anticipating that this year, as well so that we can continue to support our programs.

Hardscape Project Review: Doug Greene

- 6-8 month survey and study resulted in significant renovation which achieved three goals:
 - Remedies safety/accessibility issues in lot and entrances
 - Rectifies apparent physical decay and neglect
 - Lays foundation for current and future renovations
- Many thanks to Doug Greene and Gerry Simpkins

Jr. Warden Report: Gerry Simpkins

- 2016 Projects:
 - Parking Lot
 - Philbrick Room/Kitchen - thanks for Lara Ludes & Sarah Hammill
 - Economy shop has new outlets to eliminate extension cords
 - New floor and lighting in tunnel
 - Outlets and new fridge in kitchen
 - New outlets on stage for freezer
 - Motion sensors in bathroom for lights
- 2017 Upcoming:
 - Drainage issue in upper lot
 - Boiler issues - radiators and valves (flushing it this summer)
 - Wheelchair seats in the church

- Upper lot becoming a paid lot in off hours when church is not using it - revenue breakdown is 60/40 (SJC/Parking company): will fund work on lower lot and repay loan

Capital Campaign: Leslie Pendleton

- Discernment (where we are in Jan 2017)
 - 1st step toward a capital campaign - “Cottage Meetings” (sign up to meet in a small group setting)
 - Why are we doing this? What are our goals and what do we reflect to the larger community as we do God’s work?
 - See where the energy of the parish is
- Feasibility study
 - Results of discernment examined
 - Identify how to get to our goals
 - Can we do it?

Questions:

John Rice - What is the status of wiring in church?

- Electrical work safe
- Some concerns in back - aware of it (breakers need to be updated)
- Existing systems taken into account in scope of work going forward

John: Thanks to Vestry and all who volunteer

Rob:

- Thanks to Chris Kozak - amplification improvements
- Thanks to Vestry
 - Especially those rotating off - Lacey Bangs, Lee Baxter, Jean Lincoln (in absentia)
- Curate explanation
 - What is it?
 - Beginner priest (a la Jeff Thornberg)
 - Why are we doing this?
 - We need one for our teens to support volunteers & make all ministries richer and more full
 - Bishop sought out St. John's as a place to train new priests - formation will be with all of us and not just Rob & Anne
 - When?
 - By July 1, we hope
- Gerry Simpkins Unsung Hero Award - Inaugural Year

Motion to adjourn 10:12 - John Rice

Respectfully Submitted, Marian Ellis, Clerk

SENIOR WARDEN'S REPORT

As I finish my second year as Senior Warden, I think, “look at how far we’ve come!” mingled with the greatest respect and thanks to my colleagues on the vestry and so many others who keep St. John’s vital.

Financially, it appears we will finish the year with a 1-3% deficit after four years of surpluses. Our pledge income has held steady, but we faced unexpected “bad guys” in repairs to leaking radiators and front steps, audit costs over budget and an unanticipated tax hit. Net of these one-time, unusual expenses, we would have been in the black. In prior years, we have always offset surprise costs by having open positions on the staff, but this year we were fully staffed. We covered cash flow shortfalls with an equal amount of reserves and fundraising.

As a non-profit, both sides of the income statement sustain good works. But we like it to balance.

We had several big programs of work for the year: we wanted to support Rob and Anne’s desire to hire a curate. We wanted to finish the parking lot repairs with attractive landscaping. And we wanted to move forward on a 5-7 year plan to improve our buildings. Rob recruited Nathan Bourne fresh from Yale Divinity School. He is bringing new vitality to our teen program. And with leadership from Ann Tarlton, Gerry Simpkins, Doug Green, Jean Lincoln, Peter Rice and others, we have added beautiful plantings to the parking lot, all funded with donations.

In February, we held a series of 10 “cottage meetings” to discuss the long term needs of the church. We found solid support for our goal of accessibility – for young, old, able or not, as well as replacement of the old roof, electrical and plumbing elements of the buildings, and creation of much brighter and more attractive space in Thaxter. All of you agree it’s time our buildings match our spirit. Moreover the chance for us as vestry to meet all of you and talk at length was wonderful. Thanks to all who hosted and participated.

A building team of Joe Weir, Laura Ludes, Gerry Simpkins and Bob Nalewajk developed a \$3mm long-term building program using that input. Tracy Kozak of JSA Architects developed drawings and accurate costs. Our plan was to install an elevator from the lower parking lot inside Thaxter, enabling someone in a wheelchair to enter the church through a connector between Thaxter and the sanctuary. The connector gave us an added benefit of a bright foyer and meeting space, as well as a way into the church where people of all abilities could enter together. Then in September, our fundraising consultant, Leslie Pendleton helped us do a feasibility that concluded we can realistically raise \$1.4mm for the program. Faced with this feasibility estimate, the building team is considering postponing the elevator for a second phase and using a ramp for handicapped access into Thaxter and the connector. The appearance of the connector has been the subject of much discussion. We keep modifying it to get to something we can all support – a blend of the old and new that we all will feel good about. Because we did not feel we had consensus on this in the fall, we did not start a capital campaign.

In the meantime, annual fundraising must maintain its pace and Carol Gruen, Meg Moran and Lee Baxter led this fall’s stewardship. They’ve dedicated many hours to reaching out to all of you; please thank them because this work sustains the staff and all that happens at St. John’s. A special thank you, also, to Bob and Susie Nalewajk for hosting our all-parish dinner in November which 120 people attended as part of stewardship.

Once again I want to shout praises for Gerry Simpkins, our Junior Warden. Gerry negotiated a deal to meter our parking spaces on the upper lot which generated more than \$35,000 new net income. This was a vital source of financing we did not budget, and covered the cost of our loan with the diocese to renovate the parking lots last year.

In 2018, we must bring our community together around a building plan we all will support, move forward with our capital campaign, retire the parking lot debt and begin the needed renovations. We need to expand our revenue sources and continue to support the many programs of the church: Sunday School, youth ministry, small-group worship, pastoral care, and all the ways we love and learn together. And for the long term, we believe renovation of Thaxter Hall can open opportunities to be a vital part of Portsmouth in ways we haven't even dreamed of yet.

John Tabor, Senior Warden

TREASURER'S KEY MESSAGES

2017 continued to be a good year for St. John's fiscal health. We officially changed our financial system to QuickBooks from an older antiquated system. The change in the system has had many benefits but specifically, quicker and efficient month end closes for Michelle, our Bookkeeper, and an ease of use/review for both me and our external auditors. During 2017, we had a successful external audit of the 2016 financials by our auditors Plodzik & Sanderson Professional Association from Concord, NH. Although we have had compilation engagements over the past few years, it has been many years since we had a full audit engagement.

2017 Operating Revenue & Expenses

We had unanticipated revenue but slightly higher more unanticipated expenses resulting in an operating deficit this year of \$21.6K. If past patterns hold, we will recoup an additional \$5-10K this month after our annual notification of incomplete pledges. A detailed "line" item report of 2017 revenue & expenses is posted on the St. John's website, www.stjohnsnh.org, in the Archives section.

Revenue Summary:

2017 revenue totaled \$831K, about \$31K more than budget. About 70% of our income was from offerings: Pledge, Plate and other gifts. This is down from prior years. The pledge commitment was \$514K, of which, \$502K has been received prior to end of year, a shortfall of \$12K. It is not too late to get your 2017 pledges in as it will help decrease our deficit.

Metered parking for the Upper Lot is new in 2017 and has proven to be successful. We have been receiving income since April, this income accounts for 5.9% or \$48.9K of total operating income. This income has offsetting expenses such as income and property tax leaving a net impact of approximately \$35K. Thank you, Gerry Simpkins, for all the great work as it relates to the Upper Lot!!

This year, we have also received contributions of \$13.4K for our Landscaping Project – this completely offsets the total costs of the Landscape project which has beautified our property.

In the table below, you will find the operating revenue, by category, for 2017 compared to our 2017 budget including a comment explaining the variance:

Revenue Category	Actual 2017	% of Total	Budget 2017	% of Total	Act vs Bud Variance		Comments on Variances
					\$	%	
Pledge Offerings	\$ 501,603	60.3%	\$ 525,000	65.6%	\$ (23,397)	-4.5%	\$514K Pledge Commitment, \$525K Budget assumption
Endowment	\$ 68,000	8.2%	\$ 68,900	8.6%	\$ (900)	-1.3%	
Parking Donations / Passes	\$ 58,249	7.0%	\$ 55,990	7.0%	\$ 2,259	4.0%	Includes PPI adjustment & catch up
Plate Offerings	\$ 57,434	6.9%	\$ 67,800	8.5%	\$ (10,366)	-15.3%	budget assumption too aggressive
Metered Parking	\$ 48,926	5.9%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ 48,926		first year started in April, not budgeted
Program & Outreach Reimbursement	\$ 35,542	4.3%	\$ 34,690	4.3%	\$ 852	2.5%	
Grants	\$ 19,916	2.4%	\$ 29,894	3.7%	\$ (9,978)	-33.4%	budget error for St. Andrews contribution for Curate (only recognize 1/2 in 17)
Ground & Organ Fund	\$ 17,110	2.1%	\$ 3,000	0.4%	\$ 14,110	470.3%	includes \$13.4K for Landscaping Project
Facility Usage	\$ 9,031	1.1%	\$ 7,000	0.9%	\$ 2,031	29.0%	increase usage of rented facility
Economy Shop & Other	\$ 4,972	0.6%	\$ 4,200	0.5%	\$ 772	18.4%	
Prior Year Pledges	\$ 7,351	0.9%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ 7,351		2016 pledges received in 2017
Investment Income	\$ 3,620	0.4%	\$ 3,924	0.5%	\$ (304)	-7.7%	
Total Operating Revenue	\$ 831,754	100%	\$ 800,398	100.0%	\$ 31,356	3.9%	

Expense Summary:

2017 expenses totaled \$853K, about \$53K more than budget. Our largest category of expense is people: Clergy and Lay staff. With our new “Seacoast Youth” curate, Nathan, we are finally fully staffed. Our curate position is partly funded by St. Andrews and the Diocese. I know personally as a mother of a young son, I am super excited that Nathan has joined our community. My son brings up Nathan in our conversations outside of church, so I know he already looks up to him.

This is the first time in several years we have been fully staffed to support our programs, care and outreach. The excitement and mission of this church shows not only within but “off the hill” as well.

In the table below, you will find the operating expenses, by category, for 2017 compared to our 2017 budget including a comment explaining the variance:

Expense Category	Actual 2017	% of Total	Budget 2017	% of Total	Act vs Bud Variance		Comments on Variances
					\$	%	
Personnel	\$ 506,852	59.4%	\$ 505,544	63.2%	\$ (1,308)	-0.3%	
Diocesan Pledge	\$ 109,998	12.9%	\$ 110,000	13.7%	\$ 2	0.0%	
Building & Grounds	\$ 115,261	13.5%	\$ 91,856	11.5%	\$ (23,405)	-25.5%	includes \$13K for Landscaping project & unplanned Masonry, Radiator & Gas Leak repairs
Administrative Offices	\$ 45,037	5.3%	\$ 38,315	4.8%	\$ (6,722)	-17.5%	include \$5.6K in additional audit expense
Music	\$ 24,991	2.9%	\$ 21,191	2.6%	\$ (3,800)	-17.9%	higher guest musician expense
Property Taxes	\$ 3,797	0.4%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ (3,797)		new due to upper lot metered parking income
Income Taxes	\$ 6,442	0.8%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ (6,442)		new due to upper lot metered parking income
Insurance	\$ 17,094	2.0%	\$ 16,023	2.0%	\$ (1,071)	-6.7%	includes 2016 Worker's Comp Audit true up
Adult/Children/Youth Programs	\$ 8,245	1.0%	\$ 9,269	1.2%	\$ 1,024	11.0%	
Outreach	\$ 11,142	1.3%	\$ 6,700	0.8%	\$ (4,442)	-66.3%	includes \$5K prior years commitment for African Burial Ground
Worship	\$ 2,038	0.2%	\$ 1,500	0.2%	\$ (538)	-35.9%	
All Other	\$ 2,432	0.3%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ (2,432)		IRS Penalty for 2014 1099 late filing
Total Operating Expenses	\$ 853,329	100.0%	\$ 800,398	100%	\$ (52,931)	-6.6%	

As mentioned in the revenue section, we have offsetting expenses for income and property taxes, approximately \$10K for the year. We are now responsible for property taxes for the upper lot and we have a provision for income tax expense as it related to the metered lot income.

Essentially we managed within our budget however there were unforeseen one-time expenses which are included in the summary above but explained a bit more below:

- Landscaping Project \$13K (this is offset in revenue)
- Additional \$5.6K of audit expenses (due to the original estimate/scope of audit)
- Outreach \$5K for our prior commitment to the Portsmouth African Burial Ground
- Additional maintenance & repairs of \$10K which include unplanned repairs for gas leaks, radiator, and masonry.
- IRS penalty of \$2.4K for the 2014 1099 late filing

Endowment (Long-Term Investment Funds)

Our endowment balance as of December 31st is \$1,493,929. We took one authorized withdrawal for operations during 2017. Below is a summary of our endowment over the past 5 years:

Endowment Values Last 5 Years					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Starting Balance	\$1,312,586	\$1,623,651	\$ 1, 576,149	\$1,387,368	\$1,439,025
Growth	\$159,158	\$78,888	(\$41,076)	\$105,657	\$120,404
Withdrawals: Operating	(\$51,250)	(\$62,390)	\$ (60,000)*	(\$64,000)	(\$68,000)
Withdrawals: Tebbetts	\$ -	(\$65,000)	(\$121,000)	\$0	\$0
Gifts	\$17,000	\$1,000	\$20,000	\$10,000	\$2,500
Tebbetts Gift	\$186,157	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-
Ending Balance	\$ 1,623, 651	\$1,576,149	\$1,387,368	\$1,439,025	\$1,493,929

2013 includes the bequest from Margaret Tebbetts which was then used in 2014 and 2015 to fund capital improvements to our property at 100 Chapel Street, now called the “Tebbetts House”. We would like to recognize that the work of our Investment Committee: John Hebert, Sandra Pagel and Gerry Simpkins is highly valued and appreciated.

2018 Operating Budget

The Vestry is pleased to announce that we have approved a balanced 2018 Operating Budget of \$877K. Our pledge goal of \$540K is our assumption for the budget. We have made great progress with pledges from 244 families totaling \$500K. I am happy to share that the average pledge has increased from \$1,900 to \$2,100 this year, nearly 11%. We have 71 families who have answered our request to increase their pledge year over year and we have 28 new families who have pledge.

Thank you very much for your continued generosity!! Of course it is never too late to pledge for those who have not yet committed. Please help us in any way to meet or exceed our goal of \$540K.

In the table below, you will find the operating revenue, by category, for our 2018 Budget comparing to 2017 Actuals including a comment to explain the variance:

Revenue Category	Actual 2017 % of Total		Budget 2018 % of Total		Act vs Bud Variance		Comments on Variances
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	
Pledge Offerings	\$ 501,603	60.3%	\$ 540,000	61.5%	\$ 38,397	7.1%	
Endowment	\$ 68,000	8.2%	\$ 65,000	7.4%	\$ (3,000)	-4.6%	4.5% of rolling 3 yr average
Parking Donations / Passes	\$ 58,249	7.0%	\$ 64,919	7.4%	\$ 6,670	10.3%	includes increase - most cash received already
Plate Offerings	\$ 57,434	6.9%	\$ 57,000	6.5%	\$ (434)	-0.8%	
Metered Parking	\$ 48,926	5.9%	\$ 65,000	7.4%	\$ 16,074		increased to \$65K for balanced budget
Program & Outreach Reimbursement	\$ 35,542	4.3%	\$ 33,767	3.8%	\$ (1,775)	-5.3%	
Grants	\$ 19,916	2.4%	\$ 35,000	4.0%	\$ 15,084	43.1%	includes FY of St. A \$20K & \$15K from Diocese
Ground & Organ Fund	\$ 17,110	2.1%	\$ 3,000	0.3%	\$ (14,110)	-470.3%	2017 included \$13.4K for landscaping project
Facility Usage	\$ 9,031	1.1%	\$ 6,000	0.7%	\$ (3,031)	-50.5%	
Economy Shop & Other	\$ 4,972	0.6%	\$ 4,238	0.5%	\$ (734)	-17.3%	
Prior Year Pledges	\$ 7,351	0.9%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ (7,351)		
Investment Income	\$ 3,620	0.4%	\$ 3,512	0.4%	\$ (108)	-3.1%	
Total Operating Revenue	\$ 831,754	100%	\$ 877,436	100.0%	\$ 45,682	5.2%	

Notable budget assumptions for revenue include:

- Pledges of \$540K against a commitment of \$500K as of Jan 16, 2018.
- Funding from both St. Andrews (\$20K) and the Diocese (\$15K) partially offsetting the curate expense
- 4.5% endowment draw (of the rolling 3-year average balance) for operations per policy
- An increase for parking donations/passes of which may have been received already.

In the table below, you will find the operating expenses, by category, for our 2018 Budget comparing to 2017 Actuals including a comment to explain the variance:

Expense Category	Actual 2017 % of Total		Budget 2018 % of Total		Act vs Bud Variance		Comments on Variances
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	
Personnel	\$ 506,852	59.4%	\$ 557,309	63.5%	\$ 50,457	9.1%	include FY Curate, health insurance increases and proposed increase of approx 3%
Diocesan Pledge	\$ 109,998	12.9%	\$ 112,812	12.9%	\$ 2,814	2.5%	
Building & Grounds	\$ 115,261	13.5%	\$ 90,428	10.3%	\$ (24,833)	-27.5%	2017 included landscaping project & unforeseen repairs (radiator, gas leaks & masonry)
Administrative Offices	\$ 45,037	5.3%	\$ 36,391	4.1%	\$ (8,646)	-23.8%	2017 included full scope audit, 2018 includes review only
Music	\$ 24,991	2.9%	\$ 23,161	2.6%	\$ (1,830)		
Property Taxes	\$ 3,797	0.4%	\$ 7,594	0.9%	\$ 3,797	50.0%	new for upper lot due to metered parking revenue, full year impact
Income Taxes	\$ 6,442	0.8%	\$ 16,407	1.9%	\$ 9,965	60.7%	based on increase in parking revenue
Insurance	\$ 17,094	2.0%	\$ 16,023	1.8%	\$ (1,071)	-6.7%	2017 includes prior year worker's comp
Adult/Children/Youth Programs	\$ 8,245	1.0%	\$ 8,300	0.9%	\$ 55	0.7%	
Outreach	\$ 11,142	1.3%	\$ 6,500	0.7%	\$ (4,642)	-71.4%	2017 included \$5K for African Burial Ground
Worship	\$ 2,038	0.2%	\$ 2,511	0.3%	\$ 473		
All Other	\$ 2,432	0.3%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ (2,432)		2017 includes IRS penalty for 2014 1099 late filing
Total Operating Expenses	\$ 853,329	100.0%	\$ 877,436	100%	\$ 24,107	2.7%	

Notable budget assumptions for expenses include:

- Full staff to support programs, care and outreach, and a modest adjustment for clergy and staff to keep compensation competitive and recognize merit.
- Full year impact of our Seacoast Curate (Nathan joined us in July 2017)
- Includes our contribution to the work of the Episcopal Church in NH
- Maintains funding, at 2017 budget rates, for our facility upkeep and repairs to address urgent needs.
- Income & Property taxes related to our newer revenue source "Metered Parking"

We budget to "breakeven" as a non-profit organization and manage our budget as close to that as possible. As a reminder, we have other important programs not part of the operating budget but the mission of St. John's includes Common Table and Choir school. These programs are self-funding.

In Summary, 2017 was another good year despite the shortfall in meeting our pledges and our one-time unusual expenses. We have operated with prudence for the past several years and 2018 will be no different. I am extremely excited about this coming year as we have a reasonable budget and a full staff that supports our mission. I look forward to getting to know more of you personally as we come together in future cottage meetings, church dinners and family events.

If you have any questions and/or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

As always, with gratitude for being part of the St. John's Community,

Kelly Boston, Treasurer

JR. WARDEN REPORT

Building and Grounds

- Repointed the steps to Church and crack in sidewalk to stop leaks under Church and in classrooms. Replaced 2 radiators in the Church.
- Had an energy audit completed for the Church and hall: Recommendations
 - windows be re-glazed and caulked
 - add weather stripping to windows and doors
 - Provide better heating for bathrooms
 - Add insulation to attics
 - Some of these should be addressed during the Capital Campaign

Building Committee Efforts

The Cottage Meetings held in early 2017 provided the congregation with a voice to highlight the positive impact of our church community, and to identify opportunities for improvements at St. John's. One common theme arising from the series of meetings was the desire to make St. John's safer and more accessible for all members of the congregation.

In response to this shared vision, the Building Committee initiated a study to not only ensure the preservation of our historic structure (e.g., roof replacement, electrical upgrades and fire suppression), but to also propose structural changes in the form of a "Connector" to facilitate access to the church from Thaxter Hall and the lower parking lot.

In the context of the upcoming capital campaign, a cost analysis was performed to understand the financial impact of such an undertaking. Furthermore, with the assistance of a local architect, the Connector started to take shape, with an emphasis being placed upon concept and functionality, rather than on final design and appearance. Throughout this endeavor, costs, safety measures and historical preservation were just a few of the considerations made.

After several iterations, input was sought from the congregation through a series of "show-and-tells." While the overall concept was well received, there was much uncertainty with respect to the all-glass exterior façade of the Connector, and how that would alter the appearance of our historic church.

In response to these concerns, further consideration is being given to a design which will allow the Connector to blend more readily into the existing structures. In the coming weeks, the Building Committee plans to facilitate additional opportunities for members of the congregation to provide their feedback with respect to the Connector with the hope of finding a general consensus in the design concept.

ASSOCIATE RECTOR'S REPORT

St. John's Pastoral Care

Pastoral Care is at the heart of a loving community, and there are many folks at St. John's who give sacrificially of their time to this ministry. A big thank you to Jane Holway, Linda McVay, Clark McCurdy, Charlie Nichols, Aubrey Sanderson, Mary Turner and Conni White for their contributions as Eucharistic Visitors, and I am grateful to all who have organized and provided support for both parishioners and members of the community in times of challenge and crisis.

The provision of Pastoral Care at St. John's continues to evolve. In 2014, an expanded pastoral care program, NeighborCare, was launched. NeighborCare is working in and through the St. John's Community at this time. The Portsmouth Ministerium (the association of Seacoast faith leaders) continues to look at the provision of support to those seeking to 'age in place' on a community-wide basis.

We have a number of people signed up on the NeighborCare data base, although fewer than 20 at the moment, as both givers and receivers of NeighborCare but many people have provided NeighborCare or received NeighborCare this past year! Thank you to all who have provided lifts to and from church, doctors' appointments, physical therapy and the grocery store, helped with gardening and shoveling snow, visited the housebound, residents of nursing homes and patients in the hospital and rehab, and cooked and delivered meals to numerous parishioners and other members of our community this past year. Each such action is evidence of the love of Christ and I am so grateful for the generosity of spirit and the gift of time given to those in our community who have a temporary or long-term need of support. Let us know if you wish to give or receive NeighborCare!.

Adult Formation

Adult formation at St. John's takes a number of forms. On Wednesday mornings we meet for Reading between the Lines (Wednesday mornings from 10:30-12:00) and St. John's Night (Wednesday Evenings 7-8:15) continued through the spring of 2017, focusing on different approaches to prayer, including lectio divina, body prayer, centering prayer, the labyrinth and prayer in art and poetry. Adult Forum (Sunday mornings 9-9:45) met during Lent 2017 for a series on Being Mortal – Living Well, Dying Well, and again in October and November. Thank you to our speakers John Bolduc and Jim Zuckerman for sharing their insight and expertise.

Enormous thanks to all who shared the leadership of St. John's Night in the first half of the year, Reading Between the Lines and Living Faithfully, Dying well, especially Nathan Bourne, Charlie Nichols and Dick Seiner, and to all those who provided supper on Wednesday evenings. We said farewell to Charlie Nichols and Christine Niles in September 2017 and they are much missed in the provision of Adult Formation offerings!

In addition to the regular formation offerings, there were a variety of other formation opportunities. In March, The 2017 Trinity Institute program 'WaterJustice', organized by Trinity Episcopal Church Wall Street, was live-streamed into the Philbrick Room. In May, we welcomed former parishioner Dr. Eden Wales Freeman to facilitate a discussion on issues of race and justice through a reading of Jodi Piccoult's book 'Small Great Things'. A new series of Sunday lunchtime events 'Outside the Box' introduced members of the St. John's Community to the work of Chikumbuso, a charity improving the lives of women and children in Zambia, The Angola School Project in Onjiva, and the legal work of Vestry member Meg Moran with refugees and asylum seekers. The title of the series comes from Bishop Rob Hirschfeld's Easter 2017 sermon at St. John's – God's love cannot be kept in a box. Many thanks to Sandie Dika, Carol Gruen, Susan Lassen, and Sallie Mackie for the organization and lovely soup lunches. There were two Labyrinth Prayer Walk offerings, in October and December, with thanks to Kim Salanthe for facilitating those events. The Women's Book Groups and the Men's Book Group report separately, but a big thank you to Ann & Peter Tarlton and Conni White for their dedicated leadership of those groups.

Safe Church

The Diocese of New Hampshire introduced a new Safe Church policy and an updated Safe Church Training program in 2013. The training covers three years and the first wave of those trained under the new system have been re-certified. A copy of the policy, and Bishop Hirschfeld's accompanying letter, is posted on the bulletin board outside the church office and in the Narthex. On the value of Safe Church training, Bishop Hirschfeld writes: Safe Church Training, therefore, is not merely an exercise required by the institutional bureaucracy, mandated by our insurance providers. Much more than that, I urge you to enter into these sessions with a contemplative attitude of openness by which we learn again how to be holy in our interactions with each other and with those, both young and old, who come seeking and expecting holiness in our congregations.

In 2016, Joanne Ferguson took on the role of Safe Church Administrator at St. John's. Many thanks to Charlie Nichols for his work in that role in 2015 and 2016. Joanne is now the one organizing and monitoring training and background checks. Training and background checks are required for some: Wardens, Treasurer, Kids Church, Choir School and Youth Group Volunteers, Pastoral Team, EfM mentors and staff but is open to ALL. There are two elements to the new training, an online training component and attendance at a half day training session. We are working to offer Safe Church training on-site at SJC and had an on-site training in September 2016.

Progress has been made but there is more to do - as our Bishop has said, having a Safe Church is a benefit to all; St. John's as a Safe Church may be the only place someone, either an adult or a child, feels safe enough to tell someone else their story...that is why it is so important.

Millennium Development Goals 2015 allocation – reports from Angola and Cuba

Angola – Susan Lassen

Albertina School 'Under the Tree' The support from St. John's Church makes the difference in Ombanja, Cunene Angola. Report Dr Gertrude Wafula and Susan Lassen Jan 17th 2017
The thirst for knowledge by children from Omwandi village in Ombanja Cunene continues to blossom, thanks to the support received from St John's Church Portsmouth NH. the Anglican Church.

In May 2016, after visiting the school in June, the number of children had doubled from 50 to 116 pupils. They had not just grown in numbers but were happy to show the skills in writing poetry, maths and language (Oshikwanambo, English and some Portuguese). Albertina then had a second teacher (volunteer helping) who has since left to look for a paid role.

From the Support given by the St. Johns church, we have been able to have Albertina, the teacher travel to Onjiva for personal development and teacher training for two months from December to January. The funds helped pay for mentoring and coaching in Portuguese, accommodation for two months, living expenses for Albertina, and travel to Onjiva and back to her village. Learning Portuguese will help Albertina transfer the skills to all children who currently speak Oshiwambo and English. This will prepare them for transition in the Angolan education system.

The teacher is also being trained to understand other aspects of teaching such as lesson plans and delivering teaching materials to learners. She is also being introduced to the teaching syllabus offered by the ministry of education in Angola. It is expected these skills will help her develop as a teacher and help her do a better and a professional job when back in Ombanja in February.

An assessment of her progress on the training and her future aspirations will be reviewed with her before end of January 2017 and further plans arranged for her continuous development.

During the flood in April last year the community attempted to respond to the needs of the children. The classroom the community built out of tree twigs was a real gesture of commitment and was needed to support the school even with very limited resources. They had plans to raise funds to buy 3 iron sheets targeted by end of the year with each villager contributing 5 Namibian dollars. The last trip in October to the village we met with the teacher, the chief/headman in company of Fr Mbala of Onjiva and a team to measure the construction of a shelter (4 rooms, 40 children each and storage/staffroom). The budget estimates have been done for future building and now depends on resources. Building a permanent structure entitles the school to get support from the government. The expected visit of Bishop Rob Hirschfield hoped for in 2017 will be great.

A special thanks to St John for the support and the difference being made to so many children.

Cuba – Charlie Nichols

Relationships and Clean Water Flow in Cuba

by Charlie Nichols, St John's, Portsmouth

April, 2016

New and renewed relationships and clean drinking water were the order of the day for fourteen NH Episcopalians on pilgrimage to Cuba from April 2-9, 2016. Led by The Rev Mark

Pendleton, Rector of Christ Church, Exeter, the group made its base in Cardenas at the parish of St Francis of Assisi, with whom Exeter shares a companion relationship.

From Cardenas, the group made day visits to churches and parishioner's homes in Limonar, Bolondron, and Coliseo. Highlights of the pilgrimage are always the opportunity to break into smaller groups for walking visits to parishioner's homes. Led by a lay woman from the parish – or in Limonar, the parish deacon – we gather for conversation and deep listening to the stories of life in Cuba's villages, and hear how Jesus is alive and moving in their midst. During our 2015 visit, we delivered a water filtration system to St John the Evangelist, the parish church in Coliseo. The system could not be installed at the time due to plumbing requirements at the church and the situation was further complicated by a neighbor who controlled the water supply to the church. On this trip, we learned St John's recently received a \$10,000 gift - enough to purchase the neighboring house. This means St John's will now have a rectory, and control of the property's water supply to enable installation of the filtration system.

One significant component to the installation of a filtration system includes a faucet in a public location. During our time in Cardenas, we observed many villagers waiting in line to fill their containers with clean water.

In addition to Exeter, other parishioners travelled from St. John's, Portsmouth; Good Shepherd, Nashua; and Transfiguration, Derry. Everyone involved looks forward to deepening relationships with the loving and Spirit-filled people of the Episcopal Church in Cuba.

Celtic Evening

In September 2016, we began offering a monthly Celtic Evening Service. These candlelight services of Celtic music, poetry and reflection are offered at 5:30pm on the third Sunday of the month. The themes for 2016 were Care and Concern for Creation, Justice and Peace, Welcome and Hospitality and Blue Christmas. Many thanks to the Celtic Evening planning team of Holly Gagnon, Charlie Nichols, Christine Niles, Courtney Patrick and Anne Webber for their vision and commitment, and to Anne Rehner, Olin Johannessen and Sue Nalewajk for their support.

CURATE'S REPORT

This year has been one of transition and growth for me. In 2017 I graduated seminary, was called by St. John's to serve as Curate, moved to Portsmouth, got engaged, got ordained as a priest, and got to know the St. John's community. I've been so blessed to be a part of this place, to work with the staff, and to have all of you as a part of my life. I've felt strongly embraced by this community, and I'm regularly awed by your graciousness and hospitality. Thank you for welcoming me and for supporting me through my ordination and my adjustment to my new home.

There are a few things I'd like to highlight from the past year. I've gotten involved in a number of areas of the life of our community—the youth program, pastoral care, preaching and presiding over Sunday morning and Thursday morning services, and sharing responsibilities facilitating Reading Between the Lines, the Bible Study group that meets on Wednesday mornings.

What stands out about the past year more than anything is the relationships I've formed—relationships with so many of you. I'm grateful for the year that's past, and looking forward to more years to come.

It's challenging to come into a new place, a new position, and a new community. Every church has its own rhythms, its own ways of doing things. St. John's is no exception. I've learned a lot this past year, and there's much I'm still figuring out. A big part of my role as Curate is working with the youth program. Early in my time here, I realized that what makes the program at St. John's work are the volunteers who offer their time and talents. I would especially like to thank Denise Croteau, Doug Greene, and Neely and Rick Barnhardt for their work with the Middle School Youth Group; Lizzie Bristow for her support during my transition into this role and for organizing and leading Service Sundays; and Sharon Orr for helping to get acolytes trained and robed on Sunday mornings.

I'd like to highlight what the past year has held for the youth program:

YOUTH PROGRAM

A year of service

When I think about the past year of youth programming, one of the things that stands out is how much our middle and high schoolers have done to serve the wider community. Once a month they've shown up on Sunday mornings to go out into the community, to learn more about challenges facing families and individuals in our area, and to give their time and talent to the service of others. We've sorted toys for Operation Blessing's Christmas give-away, cleaned out Operation Blessing's attic, assembled "Welcome Home Kits" for families in transition through the Cross Roads Shelter, and cleaned up a local beach. Each of these special Sundays have brought together as many as thirty middle and high schoolers. The "Welcome Home Kits" also engaged the wider congregation. People donated more than \$1500 worth of basic home goods to help eight families make the transition out of homelessness and into their own apartments. It was beautiful to see such a collaborative effort. Thank you to everyone who donated.

One of the highlights of the 2017-2018 program year has been the Family Service Sunday at Jenness Beach. More than fifty people showed up to help clean the beach. The beach had been well-combed and there wasn't as much trash as we anticipated, but the morning offered us the opportunity to be outside on a beautiful morning and for families to spend time together. Our morning ended with a beachfront Eucharist that may have been my favorite service that I was a part of last year.

Our Middle Schoolers and High Schoolers have also helped with our "Cooking for Crossroads" program. Once a month a group of teens (and some younger folks) offer their Wednesday afternoon to help feed the residents of the Cross Roads shelter. Lizzie Bristow and Conni White have provided the vision and know-how to create delicious meals for the folks at Cross Roads.

Sunday mornings

On the other Sundays of each month, Denise Croteau, Doug Greene, and Neely and Rick Barnhardt meet with the middle schoolers in the Philbrick Room. It's a time for community building, faith formation, and for young folks to come together and wrestle with important questions. "Our style is to tell, not read, the story" Rick says of their method, "and to ask the

class how they feel about what is going on in the story. It's meant to be interactive." Sunday morning is a time to connect the stories at the heart of our faith to the lives of Middle Schoolers. More notable than the numbers who attend is their ability to consume 50 Dnkin' Donuts munchkins each week, whether there are five kids or fifteen.

We've struggled to find the right format to engage high schoolers with a regular formation time. Service Sundays are popular, and a way that our teens can embody the faith, but in the year to come I hope we can build in more opportunities for education, discussion, and familiarity with the words of scripture and our liturgy.

Involvement in Parish Life

Something Ashley and I have talked a lot about these past few months is getting our Middle and High Schoolers more involved in church, offering them ways to feel like they are a part of—not separate from—what we all share in on Sunday mornings. We've started gradually—we've had middle and high schoolers serve as lectors, some have been trained as acolytes, and our middle schoolers who are involved with the youth and children's music program have taken on more leadership roles in putting on the Christmas pageant and occasions when the youth sing in church. There's still more to do in this area, but I think it's important to get kids involved in church and to celebrate the intergenerational nature of our community.

Other ways that our teens have engaged with Parish life at St. John's include volunteering with the Choir School and serving at the parish dinner in November. I hope we can find more opportunities for this kind of integration in the year to come.

Time together

Outside of Sunday morning and times of service, the youth of St. John's have taken time to enjoy being with each other. We began the year with a cookout at the New Castle Common—about thirty middle and high schoolers attended. Later in the fall, six middle schoolers were able to go to Camp Merrowvista for a weekend. It was a fun trip and an opportunity to grow closer. Our High School group went on retreat to Church of the Woods, an alternative worshipping community in Canterbury, New Hampshire. We spent in the woods, reflecting on all of creation as our neighbor, and helped with a few work projects on the site. Jeff and Denise Croteau hosted a Christmas Party which brought together thirteen middle schoolers. I wasn't able to be there, but I got to enjoy the eclectically and expertly crafted gingerbread house they produced.

It's been a great first year with the youth program at St. John's in 2018, I'm looking forward to Confirmation classes this spring, finding ways to get outdoors with the group, a youth Sunday in May, the expansion of the acolyte program, and the opportunity to build stronger relationships with all of the youth of our community.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev. Nathaniel F. Bourne
Curate

MUSIC MINISTRY

Sunday Morning Liturgy

St. John's is a community where diversity is embraced in many ways. One of these is in our weekly liturgy. The opportunity to embrace a great variety of music is one of the wonderful aspects of life at St. John's. Both our musical ensembles and the congregation embrace this tradition with laudable enthusiasm. In the program year beginning in 2017, we began using Anglican Chant for our Psalm singing. The congregation seems to be adapting well to the change.

Parish Choir

The members of the Parish Choir at St. John's have proven themselves to be tremendously hard working and dedicated to providing beautiful, life-giving music. It is a joy to work with this ensemble. One of my favorite parts of my job is planning each next musical adventure we will take in coming seasons!

This ensemble has achieved several tremendous musical feats in the past year. Their complete performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Requiem for All Souls Day was quite an accomplishment. We made a switch to performing the Requiem in the context of a full Requiem Mass instead of a Vespers service. This is the most technically challenging Requiem the choir has performed to date. The Lessons and Carols service in December was, as usual, a huge success, drawing an audience from across the state. The Christmas Eve musical offerings represent another musical milestone. These services are a gift not only to our immediate family, but also to the larger community of Portsmouth and greater New Hampshire.

A final significant accomplishment of 2017 for the choir was being invited to perform as part of the massed choir for the Portsmouth Symphony Orchestra's performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. St. John's Parish Choir was the only church choir invited to sing, which is a great honor. Our singers represented St. John's well.

The choir has grown significantly in the past year, drawing in new members to the community. We have plans for new choral offerings in coming years. This summer, we will begin celebrating Choral Evensong in June and August. Celebrating Choral Evensong at St. John's will begin to prepare us for a special upcoming project. The Parish Choir has been invited for a Cathedral Residency in Bristol, England in 2020, in which they will sing Choral Evensong every night for a week. This is an exciting goal to work toward!

I am proud of the great work accomplished by our Parish Choir. In addition to their tremendous collective musical skill, the choir is a community filled with love. This is evident in the sound they create when they sing together, but it is also evident in how they treat one another. I look forward to more music-making with this ensemble.

The Choir School at St. John's

2017-2018 is the third year of the Choir School at St. John's, an after-school tuition-free music program for kids in grades 2-8. This has been a massive undertaking, and has been well-supported by the parish. Volunteers help to supervise the students during snack and homework time on weekdays, help shepherd them on Sundays in weeks when they sing, and in the van on the way to and from the Choir School. Ashley Wade, Kathi Hardy, and I are very much enjoying the process of shaping this program. It's a great way to open the doors of St. John's to our wider community.

We have seen great progress in our students already. Each child has shown progress socially and musically, and a strong community is beginning to form between students, volunteers, and teachers. We have been at maximum capacity from our second year onward, with a booming wait list. In 2017, we added a summer program for the first time. The central focus of our summer session was two performances. The first was at St. Andrew's by the Sea, which has been a significant supporter of the program. The second was our first collaboration. The Choir School students were invited to give the world premiere of a newly composed piece at the prestigious Newburyport Chamber Music Festival in combination with two other choirs and a professional string quartet.

The energy that our kids have for music and each other is palpable, and we have begun discussions about how to responsibly expand our program. We are excited to see the ways the choir school is changing lives in our city!

Instrumental Music

In the summer of 2017, we welcomed St. John's parishioners to add their instrumental talents to our summer worship services. This was a welcome addition to the musical landscape of summers at St. John's, and I look forward to expanding this program in coming years.

Concerts on the Hill

Concerts on the Hill enjoyed great success in its 2017 season. COTH has honed its focus on educating audiences in Portsmouth at the same time it brings them top-notch performers. Visiting artists are encouraged to speak with the audience about the music they play, to make concerts educational as well as enjoyable. All children are admitted to concerts at no cost to encourage parents to bring their children to hear great music. In 2017, we hosted 5 concerts, ranging from a nationally acclaimed Early Music vocal duo to Bob Stibler's retirement recital, which finished with more than 30 of his former students playing a moving rendition of Somewhere Over the Rainbow.

Most importantly, 2017 continued our annual field trip to St. John's from Portsmouth Middle School's 6th grade class. Students trekked over to the church and heard a high school string quartet and a middle school string quartet. They learned about musical instruments, composition techniques, and heard great music. They even got to try the instruments afterward! This annual event is a great way to open the church's doors to our wider community and provide a service that is not otherwise available to our youth. This event is paid for by the profits of the concert season – there is no charge to the school or to students to participate.

Concerts on the Hill will be re-shaped for the coming season, and will take place during St. John's program year rather than the summer. Stay tuned for more information about the coming season!

The Young Organist Collaborative

The Young Organist Collaborative is still moving ahead full-throttle. This year, the program has 18 students enrolled, from first year through eighth year of study. In April, Adam Peithmann and Kevin Birch gave masterclasses for current students at Christ Church, Exeter. In a July competition, one of our advanced students was awarded a large scholarship for lessons in the 2017-2018 program year. In November, we took the students on a field trip to see several large organs around Worcester, Massachusetts.

YOC's alumni continue to achieve great things. This program is a gift to churches across the entire country that will one day benefit from musicians who received their initial training right here in Portsmouth, NH.

I look forward to 2018 and all the adventures it will bring. St. John's is brimming with musical energy and ideas. I am excited for the possibilities that await us all.

Respectfully submitted,



Margaret Harper
Director of Music and Liturgy

CHILDREN'S MUSIC AND MINISTRIES

As we hope the members of our parish body have personally witnessed, 2017 was a fantastic and very full year in the life of the youth program at St. John's. Here's a glimpse at the year by the numbers:

- 150 youth and their families were enrolled in our various programs including Sunday morning "Kids' Church," youth groups, youth choirs, and one-time events.
- 20 dedicated volunteers run the Kids Church and Youth Group programs
- 25 youth were involved in our annual Christmas Pageant
- Over 30 young actors, singers, and stage technicians were a part of The Wizard of Oz, our annual musical
- 9 youth went through the Rite 13 ceremony in the spring
- We witnessed almost 20 high school seniors from our community graduate in the spring
- Youth engaged in Cooking for Crossroads and Service Sundays monthly
- A new blog was created to more effectively organize and track all the offerings for our children, youth, and families. <http://sjcfamily.blog>
- We have begun two new initiatives for families: Family Nights and Family Service Mornings.

This year, the youth programs continued to serve the community, "being the church" outside our walls. Once a month youth are engaged through Cooking for Crossroads and Service Sundays, both of which have been well attended, exceeding expectations. In the fall of 2017, we began a new initiative, adding a family service morning – one in the fall and one in the spring. These mornings are an opportunity for children of all ages and their parents to work together to support the community outside the walls of St. John's. In September, this was a beach cleanup including a beach Eucharist celebrated together.

Kids Church (preK through 5th grade) continues to evolve. This fall we shifted to a new curriculum called Living the Good News. This is a lectionary-based curriculum. We also

moved the classrooms around to accommodate the new grade levels and give the nursery a better space. In addition to their classroom activities, children are participating in monthly Children's Chapels in the sanctuary, led by one of our clergy. Here we make space for kids to participate in a mini-service and get connected to the message in a different way. Children also benefit from learning and performing music, often led by middle school leaders. We are very encouraged to witness a greater level of connection to one another as we explore what it really means to be a community.

As we experience the benefits of being in community together, Nathan and I have etched out some good expectations for the 2017/18 program year, that we are working hard to live up to! One of these expectations we are committed to is working to 'develop disciples' through more exposure to the ministries in church. Acolytes have been offered three separate training dates throughout the fall, and other children will learn about other ministries that keep our services running, such as ushering and altar guild. There has been a concerted effort to get more young people involved in the service through readings and prayers, and in the spring of 2018 we are planning a youth-led worship service.

We (staff and volunteers) continue to focus on drawing out the inherent good within each of the young students. The flexibility of everyone working within the Kids Church program is an incredible gift. Our hope is to provide a safe and loving environment for every child who comes through our doors. We have made a concerted effort to get all volunteers equipped with the complete Safe Church training.

Creating space for youth leadership has been a guiding force in the children's music program this year. In the spring, Victor Tracey (one of the wonderful seniors we recently graduated) led kids in a musical call to worship each Sunday. Also in the spring of 2017, Kendall Mood co-directed *The Wizard of Oz*, and she with Sam Ellis (both now graduated) collected props and costumes for the cast, designed our set and worked with the younger students during rehearsals. We have learned a lot from these experiences that have led us to reimagine the youth music program for the 2017/18 year. Beginning in the fall of 2017, we re-named 'Junior Choir' to the 'Junior Choir & Theater Workshop.' Students of this group have made it their mission to mentor and teach the younger children in the Cherub Choir on Wednesdays and Sundays. Not only do they teach and rehearse with the younger kids, they also perform with them. The older students feel passionate about bringing up the next generation of singers and performers! In addition to these increased responsibilities, we adopted a 'theater workshop' model during the second half of our rehearsals; including blocking scenes and playing improv games.

Our 2017 youth musical *The Wizard of Oz* was unbelievably fun to put together, and we worked hard to include the most students to participate in our musical before. Meg Harper was our orchestra, and with her help we were able to perform the most challenging musical to date!

The Pageant and Christmas Eve Family Service were my favorite of all my time here. (I said this last year, but 2017 has topped the charts again!) I am so proud of the leadership, poise, sense of humor, and creativity offered by our young performers. This year, the pageant was truly student directed for the first time. Thanks to the amazing talents of Olin Johannessen, parent volunteers, and the night sky brigade, this year's pageant goes down in history!

As we look to the future, we hope to cultivate more opportunities for children and youth to deepen their connection with the St. John's community. One way we can do this is simply spending more time together. A new Family Night idea began in the fall and has been a wonderful experience for young families to get to know each other a little better, eat a meal, and relax while kids play. As a staff, we are committed to working together to recognize opportunities like this and to adapt our programs so they will better reflect the character and strength of our children, youth, and families, providing a safe, engaging, and meaningful spiritual experience.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley

Ashley Wade,
Director of Children's Music and Ministries

COMMITTEES AND MINISTRIES

ALTAR GUILD

Twenty six dedicated women and men comprise St. John's Altar Guild. Our duties include care of the altar for all Sunday services as well as special services-baptisms, weddings and funerals.

We also oversee a flower chart in the narthex for those wishing to contribute flowers for a Sunday service. Flowers may be donated in memorial, celebration or for thankfulness. Members serve on teams and serve one month at a time.

We also have a Funeral Coordinator and a Wedding Consultant to help families with these important events.

Thank you to all who have so generously contributed to the Altar Guild, especially for flowers for Sundays, Easter and Christmas.

New members, both men and women are always welcomed-simply speak to any Altar Guild member or contact Bertha Rocray, Altar Guild Directress.

Bertha Rocray, Directress
Virginia Edwards, Secretary/Treasurer

CENTERING PRAYER

When we were children we learned that prayer is talking to God. Prayer is also listening to God; not listening for messages, but simply being in God's presence. It is deeper than talking to God. It is being present to the presence of God. This simple wordless, trusting, opening of self to divine presence is Centering Prayer. It is the simplest form of prayer yet it can be life changing.

Thomas Keating in his book, “Intimacy with God, an Introduction to Centering Prayer” offers these guidelines for the practice of this form of prayer:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When you become aware of thought, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

A much more complete understanding of this prayer can be found in Keating’s book.

Centering Prayer has a long history. It can be traced back to Jesus saying in Matthew 6:5, “When you pray...go to your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen.” It was a practice of the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the third through sixth centuries and was found in the Benedictine tradition of praying the scriptures. The Christian mystics used this form of prayer. Thomas Keating reintroduced Centering Prayer to the Christian Church in the 1960’s.

St. John’s has a Centering Prayer Group which meets every Thursday from 10:30 – 11:30am following the 9:30am Eucharist. It is open to anyone interested in this prayer form. We invite you to join us as you continue to seek growth in your spiritual journey through this earthly life. All are welcome.

COMMON TABLE

Although the most visible part of Common Table is the warm, sit-down meal served by volunteers, there have been various off-shoots.

We have long wanted to expand the mission of feeding the hungry, contacting other churches in the area to see if they might provide lunch on another day of the week. The Middle Street Baptist Church is now preparing to take a turn on Wednesdays and hopes to begin in February. Volunteers from St. John’s will be on hand to provide some initial help.

Over the years chefs from local restaurants have provided most of our help planning and overseeing meal preparation, but now we have more local talent within our St. John’s community. They include Conni White and Sue Nalewajk and long time volunteer, Dawn Carswell. Also, thanks to parishioners Neely and Rick Barnhardt, a chef from High Liner Foods comes once a month to oversee the meal. High Liner also donates all the food for that meal.

Another off-shoot occurred at Christmas Dinner when one of the guests asked about a place to stay and the need for a warm sleeping bag. That led one of the Christmas volunteers to do some quick fund-raising and approach Kittery Trading Post for discounted sleeping bags. Thank you Peter and Ann Tarleton.

So Common Table continues strong. New volunteers appear every year. New guests come to enjoy the meal; old ones return. St John's parishioners are always welcome to stop in, take a seat and talk with your neighbors, ones you might otherwise pass by.

As I write this year's Common Table report, it is overshadowed by the loss of Lew Roberts on January 12, 2018. Lew, with his beloved wife Judy, were the moving force behind Common Table, which served the first lunch on October 20, 2001.

Submitted by Margaret Sofio on behalf of Judy Roberts, Suzanne Raeside, Team Leaders, and the more than fifty volunteers who keep Common Table going week after week.

COOKING FOR CROSSROADS HOUSE

See Youth Program for information.

THE COMMON CENTS ECONOMY SHOP

Tucked in the basement of St. John's Church, The Common Cents Economy Shop continues to provide household goods and clothing to parishioners and members of the community at extremely reasonable prices. The shop is open on Wednesday and Thursday during the school year and on Thursday throughout the summer.

This past year we have met customers from as far away as Texas and California. We have had the pleasure of donating yarn for baby blankets in Guatemala, men's ties for high school proms in northern Maine, and toys for VFW holiday gifts. We continue to fill requests for winter clothing, sleeping bags, and backpacks for those in need.

The thrift shop staff would like to thank everyone for the generous donations that help to make all this possible. Donations may be dropped in the red box at the bottom of the stairs in Thaxter Hall.

Our mission is to remain accessible and affordable to all.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Musselman and Brenda Johnson

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Our group really outdid itself this year. The usual mailings and phone coverage went as planned, but when Joanne was ill, we needed to rally and pull in additional volunteers. We were able to provide office coverage and help with the Capital Campaign effort, making phone calls, scheduling interviews, and compiling the packets of information for the initial surveys. Many hands pitched in and though it was a challenge, given our sketchy phone skills and technology gaps, it was a labor of love. Many thanks for all who made that time work well. We are so glad to have Joanne back!

Lacey Bangs for all the office helpers

PRAYER CHAIN

Recently, Judy Roberts, a member of the Prayer Chain, began calling us “The Sisterhood.” At about the same time, a St. John’s friend was blessed by a visit to the Order of the Sisters of Mercy in Vermont. The double signal brought to mind songs from the 60s and 70s, whose inspired lyrics converge with the ministry of the Prayer Chain, as in Leonard Cohen’s Sisters of Mercy :

Oh the Sisters of Mercy, they are not departed or gone;
They were waiting for me when I thought that I just can’t go on;
And they brought me their comfort, and later they brought me this song;
And I hope you run into them, you who’ve been traveling so long.

They lay down beside me; I made my confession to them.
They touched both my eyes, and I touched the dew of their hem.
If your life is a leaf that the seasons tear off and condemn,
They will bind you with love that is graceful and green as a stem.

That led to the Beatles’ Let It Be :

When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me,
Speaking words of wisdom: Let it be...There will be an answer,
Let it be. Let it be. Whisper words of wisdom: Let it be.

And from there to Bob Dylan’s prayer of blessing, Forever Young :

May God bless and keep you always, May your wishes all come true...
May you always know the Truth and see the Light surrounding you.

Binding with God’s love--ever “graceful and green as a stem”--is an apt image of our prayers. God listens. There will be an answer. Let it be. Letting it be is the hardest--and the best--part of this ministry. We keep learning that God does indeed bring good out of the afflictions of His troubled ones, as He has promised. We hold them before Him, asking the Holy Spirit to give them grace to know the Truth and see the Light surrounding them. Let it be.

All are welcome to ask for prayer for themselves or someone else. Contact Susan Mennel at 603-430-2830 or susanmennel@gmail.com .

Thank you to Prayer Chain members Helen Gettelman, Kathi Hardy, Myrtle Moore, Karen Parrott, Judy Roberts, Sarah Todd, and Barbara Widen.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Mennel

RECEPTIONS COMMITTEE

We had an unusually light year for funeral receptions in 2017, and that is a good thing. However, along with our three funerals for Steve Barsanti, Armie Dennett, and Ian Blenkinsop, we had three joyous receptions in the fall: Nathan Bourne's Ordination, Charlie Nichols' Ordination, and a retirement for Robert Stibler.

We were grateful that after her husband's reception, Carol Blenkinsop joined our core group of volunteers. She has been a tireless worker and a joy to get to know. New church member, Beverly Martell also joined our group.

Our mission is to help grieving families through an emotional time by taking away the worry of feeding friends and family. It was fun this year to plan receptions for three wonderful and happy occasions.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzi Raeside and Gladys Butterworth, co-chairs

SALVATION ARMY

St. John's volunteers serve every second Friday of each month at the Portsmouth Salvation Army Soup Kitchen. Nancy Fessenden arrives before 3:30pm to deliver the \$125 food donation purchased through St. John's outreach. Our volunteers prepare, service and clean up the dining room and kitchen from 3:30 to 6:30pm. Our diners number from 30 to 60 for dinner that consists of mashed potatoes, meat, vegetables, fruit, bread and butter, dessert and drinks.

Submitted by: Nancy Fessenden, Chair

ST. JOHN'S VAN

Did you know that St. John's owns a 15-person van? In 2017 it was driven 2,461 miles for the choir school; to Concord for Charlie's ordination; brought musicians to perform in nursing homes and hospitals; to retreats, concerts, and plays; to Service Sunday locations. My goal this year it to find other ministries that can use the van from May to August because the van sits mostly idle during this time and non-use can cause as much damage as normal wear-and-tear. Because the entrance to the van is rather high off the ground people less nimble than a fifth grader may find it difficult to get in/out of the van. If we added a step bar, then I think we could serve more people. In order to justify the expense, I need to know that there is an interest in this. Would you be able to participate in more church activities if the van was more

accessible? Can you think of a ministry at St. John's that could use the van? Are you interested in driving the van for those ministries? If so, please contact Joanne at the office or me via stjvan01@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathi Hardy

WOMEN'S BOOK GROUP

Book group There are two Woman's Spiritual Book Groups at St. John's. The one I run meets every Friday at 10:30. We are a hardy group of ladies who have enjoyed wandering through a variety of spiritual topics such as Richard Rohr's *The Divine Dance* and *The Immortal Diamond*, Henri Nouwen's, *The Prodigal Son*, Rabbi Abraham Heschel's, *The Sabbath*, and Reza Aslan's, *The Zealot*. Our present book is Parker Palmer's, *Hidden Wholeness*. Best of all, are the rich conversations generated by the varied topics of these books. We all learn so much about ourselves as well as from each other. We share our tears, our laughter, our doubts, our questions and our joy. And this fall we even shared a three day retreat at SSJE's guest house in Newbury, MA. Anyone interested in joining, just call Ann Tarlton 603-319-8660 or email Annhtarlton@gmail.com. All are welcome! Ann Tarlton