

A Message from the Rector

Hope you all are doing well! At the annual meeting the vestry class of 2020 was elected: David Blevins, Julie Daughtrey, David Sandbach, and Matthew Wilkin. Thanks to all the candidates for their willingness to serve on vestry. FYI, below is the report I shared at annual meeting yesterday. It remains a privilege to serve at Christ Church!

Thanks for being here today! I am not here to “kill time” while the votes are tallied, but to share my heart with you. I am SO grateful for the privilege of serving as your rector. Christ Church is an amazing church where my family and I have experienced the grace of God in many ways, and I love you all.

Now that I have been here for three and a half years, I want to share my perspective on things here at Christ Church. When I arrived here I did not come to impose any agenda on you. I came to preach the gospel of God’s grace, to administer the sacraments, and to love and serve you—that’s it. Every day I spend time in scripture reading and prayer that includes the Daily Office, both Morning and Evening Prayer—which I have done for several years—and every year I read the entire Bible cover to cover—which I have been doing for nearly 30 years, the King James Version because, as you now know it is the version Jesus used ☺. And throughout each day I pray that God would lead me by the Holy Spirit. This is the backbone of my ministry, and the longer I serve in parish ministry—and counting my youth ministry years this week I am beginning my 27th year—the more aware I am that I am utterly dependent on God’s grace for everything, because I am a flawed human being who “gets it wrong” sometimes, and occasionally more than sometimes.

If you add up the number of people represented by our pledge giving, non-pledge giving, and others attending or whom we visit because they are no longer physically able to attend, we have approximately 400 people active to one degree or another here at Christ Church, which means there are approximately 400 different opinions about how I am doing or what I need to be doing as rector.

Let me begin by saying that I pray regularly for Christ Church, and I pray regularly for you—that God would remind you more and more of his presence with you and love for you—that God would build Christ Church, because, as scripture tells us, “Unless the Lord builds the house, their labor is in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1), or as Jesus told Peter and his disciples, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). I bid you to please pray with me that God would continue to build Christ Church.

Christ Church is centered on the grace of God in Jesus Christ, because the gospel and the sacraments are both centered on the grace of God—as the Apostle Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). This grace of God, this unconditional love of God has been historically and definitively demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We receive God’s grace in Word and Sacrament, and we share this grace with one another and the world in many different ways.

As your rector, my priorities are presiding at services, preaching the gospel, pastoral care, teaching, and supporting our staff. I do not cut corners, I do not take shortcuts. Each and every one of you serve and give here in many ways here—all of us working together as the Body of Christ—and I am thankful to serve with you.

I am also really proud of and grateful for our staff. At our staff Christmas lunch at the rectory a few weeks ago I told them when you work hard and put your heart into something, it doesn’t guarantee good results, but it definitely increases the odds—and I appreciate their work hard and how they put their heart into it. As far as hiring another clergy assistant goes, that is on hold for now. We are blessed to have the Rev. Peter Ingeman, Deacons Stella Clark and Patricia Marks, and when he’s not serving elsewhere in the diocese, the Rev. Walter Hobgood, all here at Christ Church—an embarrassment of riches—and they will spell me as needed.

Sunday attendance has gradually increased over the past few years. While I am not a fan of using numbers to measure what God is doing in a church (because there is no way to measure that—and if you read the Bible you will quickly learn the folly of putting your trust in numbers). Nevertheless I will share a few numbers with you today. Since my arrival here we have had 22 funerals for Christ Church

members—this does not include additional funerals I have done. We have had 23 baptisms and 32 confirmations—with plenty more in store for 2018. As you know our weekly attendance fluctuates, but overall we are on an upward trajectory. It is important to remember that the number one reason, hands down, that people visit a new church is because someone has personally invited them. In fact, 5 of the 10 baptisms last year were for newcomers personally invited by members of your vestry. I ask you to consider inviting others to worship with us as you are led by the Holy Spirit.

Your vestry and I work together to oversee the temporal wellbeing of Christ Church, particularly finances and property. Along those lines, 2014 pledges totaled \$431,000—and 2018 pledges total \$518,000, which reflects your amazing generosity—and again indicates your love for God and Christ Church—thank you! The Friday email this week will include a link to a summary of our vestry-approved 2018 budget.

In the past three years your generous stewardship, combined with very generous bequests from the Gabards and others, has enabled Christ to retire the mortgage for the Gabard building, renovate the sanctuary, add a rear parking lot and redo the front parking lot, renovate Louttit Hall, renovate the memorial garden, and complete many other needed property improvements and repairs. Christ Church is financially debt free. Your vestry has done a great job bringing these things about, because as you know, there are plenty of churches with ample resources who bicker and quibble instead of putting those resources to use. I am thankful that is not the case at Christ Church. In addition, a group of very generous parishioners formed “Friends of Christ Church, LLC” and purchased the adjacent townhouse property—this will be a huge blessing for Christ Church down the road.

There are three attributes your vestry and I emphasize: gentleness, listening, and servanthood. We seek to be gentle because Jesus said, “Learn from me, for I am gentle” (Matthew 11:29); we seek to be good listeners because scripture exhorts us to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19); and we seek to serve because Jesus taught that leadership is not about being a heavy-handed ruler, but a humble servant (Mark 10:42-45). As we all move forward in areas we are

doing well, and address areas we could do better, I encourage all of us to be gentle listening servants with one another.

We open every vestry meeting with the Lord's Prayer because as we seek to discern God's will for Christ Church, we discover that God's will may or may not be congruent with what our individual wills for Christ Church might be—and it is God's will that matters most, not ours. We conclude each vestry meeting with a prayer for mission with which we will close this annual meeting. Highlights of our vestry meetings are regularly posted with a link on our weekly Friday emails.

Kathy Armstrong, Angela Duncan, and our choir continue to do an outstanding job with the music ministry here. Elise Sandbach and her crew continue to do an outstanding job with the preschool. One of the highlights for me each week is sitting in the chancel with about 30 preschoolers singing songs about God's love. Emily Young does an outstanding job with our growing Parents Morning Out program. We also remain richly blessed to have Kim Dudley as our Administrator, Amy Creasy as our Bookkeeper, and Laura Paine leading our amazing Altar Guild.

Millie Johnson is doing an outstanding job with the children's ministry, evidenced by over 50 kids at Vacation Bible School last summer and a packed chancel during our Christmas pageant three weeks ago, as well as building our middle school ministry and overseeing our social media. Molly Stevenson is doing a great job reaching out to our high school students, as well as other high school students not yet connected to Christ Church.

Under the leadership of Steph Johnson our college ministry has taken off. Our Thursday dinners will resume next week in the renovated lower level of Louttit Hall, which is now Grace Cafe—where the slogan is “It's not cheap, it's free”—because that reflects God's grace for all of us. We will also be adding Holy Communion to our Thursday dinners. This semester we will have three interns living upstairs in Louttit Hall: Antonio Scantlebury, Alex Jones, and Wil Brown, who will be helping run Grace Café and assisting the youth and college ministries. You will see them at our 10:00 service and I bid you to welcome them warmly.

One of the things Christ Church is increasingly known for is being welcoming—and hospitality is a huge part of that. Sallie Honeycutt and many others have done so much with coffee hour, Happy Episcopal Parties, Foyer Groups, and the like—and my wife Steph has done the heavy lifting with the over 300 *different* people who have been to the rectory for a Christmas Open House or a 20's/30's dinner or a college dinner, or a Ladies' Night Out, or other gatherings—thanks, Steph! Scripture emphasizes the need for the church to be “given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13) and “lovers of hospitality” (Titus 1:8). Indeed, on the last night of his earthly life, our Savior washed his disciples' feet, served them dinner, and instituted Holy Communion. Hospitality is a vital way of sharing God's grace. Lunch Bunch and Jamming for Jesus continue to thrive under the leadership of Sandy Sandbach, George Mellors, Stella Clark, and Marge McCartney. The DR Mission trip remains a huge blessing to all involved due to the leadership of Julia and Julius Ariail. Thanks to Nancy Lutsko for organizing our Sunday and Wednesday servers, Pat Bezona for leading the Daughters of the King, to Jane Kinney and her crew for Oktoberfest, and to Dave Clark and the Men in Blue for the awesome feasts they prepare for us. And thanks to our LEM ministers who take God's grace to our shut-ins. If I have forgotten to thank anyone specifically, please forgive me—and a hearty “blanket” thanks to “all y'all”☺.

As we move forward in 2018, here are few of the events coming up the first half of this year...

- February 2-4 weekend with the Very Rev. Dr. Paul Zahl
- February 14: Ash Wednesday (before or after your Valentine's date...)
- February 21 through March 21: Wednesday evening Lenten dinner series
- March 10-11: Women's Retreat
- April 1: Easter (no fooling☺)
- April 15: Bishop Benhase's visit/Confirmation
- May 25-27: Parish Retreat at Honey Creek (hope you join us—kids are free)
- June 4-7: Vacation Bible School
- June 17-23: Youth Ministry Summer Mission trip
- June 23-30: DR Mission Trip

In closing I ask you to consider two questions for 2018: 1) How is God calling *you* to share God's grace *in new ways* with others here at Christ Church—and 2) how is

God calling *you* to share God's grace *in new ways* with the world? God is a renewing God who is always at work "making things new" (Revelation 21:5). I believe God has some wonderful things in store for Christ Church in 2018, and every single one of you has a vital role to play.

Let's all remember to pray for one another as we move forward receiving and sharing God's grace. I love you and continue to pray God's richest blessings for you!

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen (The Book of Common Prayer, 101).*

Peace,

Dave