

Rector's Annual Report 2019
St. James Episcopal Church
January 27, 2019

I just can't imagine a better reading for our annual meeting than this morning's Epistle from the First Letter to the Corinthians. All of us are members of the Body of Christ and yet we all have our own individual gifts and roles that help make the body function effectively. Imagine our physical body, if all we had were ears! We might listen well but without eyes we would constantly be bumping into each other. No one member of the body can say to another, "I don't need you". So, keeping this scripture passage in mind, I present to you my annual report to the parish.

Our new vestry began their year together setting Mutual Ministry Goals. In our diocese, the rector and the vestry work together to set what we hope to accomplish in the coming year. We had two big goals: one dealing with having a Christian Education working group to look at our education programs, especially focusing on the 10-14-year old's. This group focused on including more "Episcopalian" elements: aiming to form not just Christians in general but recognizing that we wanted to form our children in the Episcopal Tradition as well. Our second Goal was to have a Welcoming Committee that would look at how we get people who come to visit us to come back. The work of the Welcoming Committee is talked about in the Senior Warden Report.

The education working group focused on liturgy as the basis of incorporating more Episcopalian elements in our education program. Cheryl Starkey, our Christian Education coordinator, and I worked to develop a children's chapel format. It can best be described by something I heard one of our children say to describe it to her grandmother, "It is just like what you do in church but we do it at a kid's level." On the 2nd and 4th Sundays, the children have a Liturgy of the Word that includes what we do but in children's language, they have the same readings (usually 1 or 2 instead of three) and have a short sermon by the adult leader that often explains some part of the liturgy they have just experienced, or other factors about liturgy like the colors of the seasons, the focus of a liturgical season, etc. the children help set up the liturgy and clean up as well. Then they join us around the sign of peace or a bit later at the time of communion.

A related improvement that was introduced this year involved starting an intergenerational eucharist on the 5th Sunday of the month (which happens 4 times a year.) This happens on the Pet Blessing Sunday, St. James Day, Christmas Eve Family Eucharist and sometime during Lent. The first part of the Eucharist is similar to what the children do in Children's Chapel and then we add the Liturgy of the Table—what most people know as communion. This helps tie together what they do in Children's Chapel with what the adults do in church by bringing us together for liturgy. A side benefit of this is that it helps teach adults, who are not familiar with a liturgical tradition, what we are doing each Sunday. I hope you have been to one of these Eucharists to see for yourself.

I want to especially give a note of thanks to Cheryl for all her work on this, with me, to design something new that works for us as a relatively small church. I also want to thank the members of the Education working group: Travis Ridout, Beth Benton-Burns, Maureen Edgecomb, and Beth Hatter.

Along with starting this new Education program, we hired a babysitter to work with Cheryl. We decided that it was not feasible to hire someone with a Christian Education background (those folks are few and far between around here) and to go with someone who could take care of those children who needed extra attention during church school. Baylee Harding, a junior at WSU was hired in September and has been doing a great job helping with the children. I would also like to thank our Church School volunteers and teen workers including Gia Gordon (who filled in during Cheryl's extended sick leave) Declan Edgecomb, Eowyn Gordon, Dawn Kraft and probably others who I don't know about.

During this year we have opened our doors to some new organizations in our community. The Palouse Choral Society now uses our building every Monday evening for their rehearsal space. They bring beautiful music to our space every week—and fill the parking lot as well! We have also welcomed a newly formed group known as the Kenyan Fellowship on Sunday afternoons. This group, started by The Rev. Robert Gichuru from the Anglican Church in Kenya, ministers to people from many African countries and faiths who come together to share time together along with foods from their home countries. Our Bishop has given Rev. Robert her blessing to continue this ministry and we look forward to continuing our partnership with them in the future.

Another innovation we implemented this year, at the urging of our insurance company, is instituting an emergency plan for the Sanctuary. This occurred in November when we put the Emergency Pew cards in each pew (you can straighten them out now if they aren't already) and an emergency drill on the Sunday we introduced them. Thank you for your participation in this and yes, we hope and pray we never need to use it.

Very early in 2018 I set up a Paypal Donate button on our website. I want to mention this to point out that it can be used for your recurring donations, for special donations (as in remembrance of someone), for the Backpack program or for any other outreach donation as well. Our financial report is in the packet you received by email on Friday and also will get in paper form in the parish hall. I want to say a special thanks to Doug Adams who is retiring as our treasurer, David Hutton, our assistant treasurer who makes the deposits each week (and also, I might add, is our on-call handyman for small repairs and installations around the church.) We have a transition plan in place for incorporating Kaylee Hammerich as our new treasurer but first she must be voted on later in our meeting.

Our reading this morning from the first letter to the Corinthians reminds us that all members of our physical body are important and uses the analogy that the Body of Christ, which is the Christian community, needs each one of us in order to be whole. So often it is those members of the body that are not seen that perform the most important functions—just think what our body would be like if our heart was not functioning! In that vein, no pun intended, I would like to thank some people who do so much for our church and yet are usually not seen in their work. My first thanks go to the altar guild, led by Linda Adams, (please stand if you are a member of the altar guild). They get our worship space ready each week, clean linens and decorate for seasons and special occasions. Most of it done when no one else is around. Thank you!

Next there are those who participate in all the ministries that occur at or around worship. So first of all, let us recognize the choir and our music director, Elena Panchenko. What most of you don't see is that the choir regularly comes to practice at 9:30 am virtually every Sunday during the school year. They also come in the evenings when it gets closer to Christmas and Easter.

Then of course there are the Eucharistic Ministers and those who distribute the chalice, the readers, the ushers, the Eucharistic Visitors who take communion and Fellowship to our shut-ins, and of course our two Deacons, Ted Nitz and Dianne Lowe, who have stepped in whenever I call upon them to preach and teach and lend their creative worship planning skills as a part of our liturgy committee. Added to our Deacons as a teacher is Dean Ritchie, who faithfully leads the Lectionary Study (with my meddling!) and the Adult Forum/Book Study along with the clergy already mentioned and myself. Dean is our only trained worship leader, at least as far as I know, and he has faithfully led Morning Prayer during our diocesan convention when all the clergy must be present at liturgy with the bishop. (So would all of these people please stand.)

Thanks also go to those who coordinate, cook for and clean up after all of our many fellowship events. Please stand as I mention the event, if you helped to make that event happen this past year—Coffee hour after either the 8 or 10:30 Eucharist; Twelfth night and variety show; Annual meeting; Shrove Tuesday pancake supper; Easter egg hunt; St James Day picnic; summer in the Rectory Garden; kickoff Sunday; the Dent Davidson music and liturgy workshop; reception for the Bishop's visitation; and Advent Fridays.

And then there is the folks who help make this place beautiful, both inside and out. So if you helped with our spring clean-up day please stand. How about those that helped green the church for Christmas—please stand. Those who continue to work in the gardens like taking care of the memorial garden, the raspberry garden or even (gasp!) the junipers—please stand.

Our vestry this year, and every year, is the leadership body of the church. Together we meet monthly to pray and share our journeys, to oversee the temporal holdings of St. James, and to set vision and goals for the year and beyond. Please stand if you served on the vestry this year. A special note that two of these folks, namely Jan and Doug, stepped in to finish the terms of two members who moved out of the area. I especially thank them for being willing to step in half way through the year and continue to serve as if they had been there all along.

All of these folks, and I am not just talking about the vestry, all of the people who I have acknowledged, and I apologize if I missed someone, all of us make up the one body of Christ here at St. James. And all of you are important parts of this body. And I thank you for your service to each other and to Jesus.

I have one concern I want to raise for us in the midst of all this joy. This has to do with our Justice and Compassion Committee or JCC. This group has done wonderful work in starting a backpack program to feed children from the childcare center who need food on the weekends. This program is thriving through the efforts of Jane Sielken and Liz Siler plus others from St James and the Childcare Center. You will also hear later about a proposed new ministry partnership with an Episcopal church in California to do ministry in Haiti. But we have no one to lead the Justice and Compassion committee—meaning someone to coordinate communication and call together the group to do its work. Now it may be that the individual ministries of Backpacks and if we decide to go with it, Haiti, can exist on their own. If there is a coordinator for each of these ministries I will go for it. But it brings up a deeper question—why do we have such a hard time getting people to fill leadership positions? I don't know the answer to that question but I want to put it out there as something that we as a congregation need to ponder. Do we need to train people? Do we need to come up with succession plans for those who are doing a ministry—again meaning training those who will come after us? To put it another way, though our own physical Body has one head, and the Body of Christ has one head who is Jesus, our body here at St. James needs several people willing to join as leaders (or leaders in training) to carry on the legacy of what we hold dear. Is God calling you to the ministry of leadership? Pray about it. We still have positions to fill on the vestry and as convention delegates and nominations from the floor are permitted.

In conclusion, I come before you today grateful for all of you and the many gifts you bring to this Body. I continue to be grateful to God for this wonderful Community of St. James in Pullman and this amazing region of the Palouse. I am open to hearing from any of you concerning what I have addressed today. Just let me know when you would like to talk and I will make it happen. God bless you all.

The Rev. Linda M. Young+