

**Rector's Address**  
**Annual Meeting – January 27, 2019**  
**St. Paul's Episcopal Church Cleveland Heights, Ohio**

In 1928, our parish moved from the corner of East 40th and Euclid Avenue to our present location here at Fairmount and Coventry. On April 8th of that year, St. Paul's parishioners celebrated the first worship service at this new location right here in Tucker Hall. On April 8th of this past year, we worshipped here in Tucker Hall, once again, in commemoration of 90 years in the Heights, and in gratitude for all who have shaped, sustained and nurtured this faith community over the years. Indeed, we continue to live in gratitude for the constant in our lives: God's love and mercy. We live in gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice and companionship, for the Holy Spirit's inspiration, for the gift of community. In our Annual Campaign this year, you told us that you are grateful for: uplifting liturgy and incredible music; pastoral care from clergy and one another; Christian education and formation for all ages; commitment to outreach; inclusivity; fellowship and friendships; shared gifts of time, talent and treasure. Indeed, your shared gifts of time, talent and treasure shined throughout the year. Let's take a look back.

In March, we hosted the Evangelism Matters Conference attended by more than 400 people from around the United States and beyond. The Episcopal News Service reported that it was the most web-accessible event hosted by the Episcopal Church to-date. Through panels, talks, workshops, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's keynote address and a soaring worship service, we learned how to tell our stories, how to share our faith with one another. We experienced viscerally the desire for **all to know** the saving gift of living in God's love, the joy and the peace. Bishop Desmond Tutu, as noted in his book, *The Book of Joy*, explains joy this way: "Discovering more joy does not save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily too. Perhaps we are just more alive. Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennoble rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreaks without being broken." The Evangelism Matters conference was inspiring. Like any good news, we want others to know this Good News. We want our family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers to know the joy and peace of living in God's love.

Preparing for this conference was no small undertaking. You remodeled the bathrooms and updated our signage. You helped with logistics planning, designed handouts, greeted conference attendees over four days, stood outside in the cold to direct attendees to parking and entrance doors, served numerous meals and snacks, gave directions, answered questions, ushered, prepared the altar, sang in the choir, played music, cleaned up messes, and, when it was all over, put away dozens of tables and hundreds of chairs. Every day of the conference, I couldn't walk five feet without someone stopping me to thank all of you for hosting this event. One priest said to me, "You know, the attendees of this conference will go back to their parishes across the U.S. and beyond and will remember all of you as role models for hospitality and

community.” For months following the event, I received thank you notes from around the country for your hospitality. My thanks to the Planning Committee led by Betsey Bell and Pam O’Halloran, the Staff, and the many, many volunteers – the conference was a formative event for St. Paul’s and for the Episcopal Church.

In addition to the many speakers here for Evangelism Matters, we heard from other inspiring speakers throughout the year. The Rt. Rev. Bishop Wright from the Diocese of Atlanta was here in early March as part of our Sunday morning Lenten Series. Going back another year, in the spring of 2017, a group of parishioners and staff members met for six sessions to engage in a facilitated dialogue based on Dr. Beverly Tatum’s book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* The participants in this dialogue were guided toward a heightened sense of awareness, excitement, collegiality, empowerment, humility and curiosity around differences. Though challenging, a continuing dialogue on race is critically important for our faith community and for all of us trying to live faithful lives in this world. On Sunday mornings in Lent this past year, participants from the 2017 dialogue spoke about their experiences with racism and about their experiences participating in the dialogue. In addition, they led us in a discussion of a series of articles entitled *Unlearning Racism* from the magazine *The Christian Century*. Bishop Rob Wright joined us on March 3. He shared his experiences with and perspectives on racism and told us about the work of the Commission for Dismantling Racism. The people of the Diocese of Atlanta are sharing their stories to facilitate healing, transformation and reconciliation “that will make it possible for us to truly see the face of God in all others.”

In April, Brian McLaren led a day-long retreat on his book *The Great Spiritual Migration* and joined us on Sunday morning to preach and lead the Adult Forum. McLaren is a noted author, speaker and activist who inspired us to be creative and courageous in living out our Christian faith. Andrew Collins and Jameel McGee joined us in September for the beginning of our new program year. They each told their story, leading up to the day when Andrew, a white police officer, framed Jameel, an innocent black man. Both men went to prison. After they were both released, they ran into each other, coincidentally, at a local park. Jameel talked about the heated emotion of coming face-to-face with the man who had framed him and sent him to jail. However, while Jameel and Andrew were in prison, they both grappled with their faith. And, their encounter that day in the park, led not to violence, but to forgiveness. Collins and McGee shared their real-life story which opened our hearts to the reality of racism and the gift of healing through reconciliation. At the end of September, Dr. Beverly Tatum, who wrote the book we discussed in the race dialogue back in the spring of 2017 - *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* - joined us for a Sunday afternoon question and answer session about the issues raised in her book. Dr. Tatum was the ninth president of Spelman College. She is the recipient of numerous honorary degrees, including from Mount Holyoke College where she spent 13 years serving in various roles: professor of psychology, department chair, dean of the College and acting president. Through her years of studying and experiencing racism, Dr. Tatum

offers, with grace and honesty, a path forward in dismantling racism. We are inspired to continue the conversation and effect change through transforming hearts.

Other highlights of the year include reinvigorating our relationship with Open Doors Academy, a national leader in out-of-school education which began right here at St. Paul's. In July, St. Paul's and Open Doors partnered on two 1-week Reading Day Camps held here at St. Paul's. The numbers grew significantly from the previous summer – we hosted between 32 and 42 third and fourth graders from Open Doors each week. Julie Micheletti, Director of the Day Reading Camps, wrote in Parish Notes: “Walking through the building one might have heard singing, laughter, loud cheering, an expressive recitation of a poem, exclamations of joy, quiet or bold reading, encouraging words or the spinning of an African story.” She continued, “By the end of the two weeks, I saw new relationships forged, attitudes transformed, growth in confidence and poise, curiosity encouraged, pride in work well done, reading ability bettered, increased interest in reading, and children who felt loved.” My thanks to the Reading Camp Committee and the 72 volunteers from St. Paul's and Open Doors who served as teachers, reading partners, bakers, food servers, chaperones for field trips, and more.

Just a note about Open Doors. During the school year, the Open Door's location that meets here at St. Paul's serves youth from Roxboro Middle School. For the past 18 months, all Roxboro students have been attending school on the Wiley Campus while the Roxboro building is under construction. Open Doors temporarily moved the St. Paul's after-school program to the Wiley Campus to accommodate the students. Good news...Open Doors will be returning to St. Paul's this summer for the start of the new school year. Pam O'Halloran and I met with Annemarie Grassi, CEO of Open Doors, a couple of weeks ago. Open Doors would like to move back into the space they were using previously – the setup of the classrooms along the South Wing works well for their students. Fortunately, with the move to Wiley, the Open Doors staff spent some time cleaning out the south classroom, which had become a storage space for a lot of stuff they were no longer using. Our toddlers now meet in that classroom on Sunday morning. We'll be able to keep that setup given Open Doors' reduced storage needs.

Our overnight Reading Camp was held this summer at Bellwether Farm, the Diocese of Ohio's new camp, retreat, and education center. The campers came from Roxboro School in Cleveland Heights, Boulevard School in Shaker Heights, Mound School in Cleveland, and Oxford School in Cleveland Heights. The Reading Camp Committee learned just ten days before the beginning of camp that Bellwether would not be able to house the campers overnight due to construction delays. Fortunately, the nearby Boy Scout Camp was available for sleeping. My thanks for Betsey Hockey, Director of the Overnight Reading Camp, and the Reading Camp Committee for their agility in managing the last-minute logistics and for another successful Reading Overnight Camp.

On the subject of Bellwether, there are nothing but rave reviews for the completed accommodations, the fabulous staff, the delicious farm-to-table meals, and the beautiful setting. The Women's Spirituality Retreat led by Elizabeth Moosbrugger and a Retreat for our Confirmands led by Leah Romanelli were both held there in October. And, of course, our first All-Parish Retreat was held there in August. Fifty-five parishioners, from three months to 70 years old, had a wonderful time exploring the farm, swimming, hiking, canoeing, painting, participating in the Iron Chef Team Cook-off, doing yoga, square dancing, and worshipping. My thanks to Meg von der Heydt and Leah Romanelli for developing and carry-out this new tradition. And, my thanks to our Intergenerational Ministry Team for carrying this tradition forward. I know there will be many opportunities this year to enjoy Bellwether Farm, including a Women's Fellowship Retreat that will take place there in April. Stay tuned!

Our Young Adult Ministry is growing and is now meeting monthly. Megan Findling, Allison Paetz, and Pegah Zardoost are leading this group, with oversight from the Rev. Jessie Dodson. New events this year included apple picking in October, cooking and serving the parish breakfast on the 5th Sunday of the month, and a FriendsGiving Dinner in November, complete with a deep-fried turkey made by the Petrey family.

Six of our youth, along with Anne Payne and Leah Romanelli, Director of Youth Ministries, went on a pilgrimage to Taize, France this summer. More than 5,000 youth from around the world visit Taize each summer, gathering with an ecumenical brotherhood of monks to live intentionally, learn from each other, and find God. One of our youth wrote a beautiful piece about the trip for the August Parish Notes. I want to share with you some of her thoughts. She describes the silence before worship and how "the whole room takes a collective breath when the first song starts. It starts with one voice, but then everyone's voices join in as one with many harmonies and tones so that your own voice isn't lost, but intertwined. You feel a part of something bigger than yourself. Whatever that magical feeling is—is to me—God." She talks about the simplicity of the meals – bread, cheese, tea – and people eating off their knees on benches, "and somehow it's perfect." She talks about "the beauty in the simplicity of a routine. Church three times a day before each meal, bible study, seminars, and a steady stream of chores, but also walks and card games and jokes and learning bits of other languages. There is so much freedom here." You were so generous in supporting these youth, in your prayers, and in the many fundraising events. So, in her words to you: "Thank you, thank you, thank you for all the help in getting us there and taking a chance on a trip St. Paul's has never done before. I will carry this experience with me for the rest of my life."

Our collaboration with EDWINS continues. We have learned a lot over the past two years, since this ministry began with a series of Adult Forum presentations by Brandon Chrostowski, founder and CEO of EDWINS, and members of the EDWINS community. We have learned the importance of listening to get to know the students and for the students to get to

know us, and we have learned that this takes time. We have determined that St. Paul's can play a role in helping the students in their transition between graduation and a new job. Brandon embraced this approach and explained to us how a chef is taken seriously when they bring their own set of knives into the kitchen. And, so, we give the graduates a monogrammed knife set to kick-off their new careers. We celebrate graduation with the students over lunch. But, our focus is building relationships with one another – our faith is all about relationships – and conversation over a graduation lunch isn't enough. Now, we are working with a few of the graduates on a one-to-one basis. Some of the graduates hope to open their own business, everything from a food truck to catering, and we can help by guiding them through the process of developing a business plan. We're learning. My thanks to the EDWINS Committee, led by David Hartt and with oversight from the Rev. Dale Grandfield – they give their hearts and time to this ministry. The Committee is grateful for the interest shown by you in this ministry and they will be reaching out so we can imagine together how we can continue to build this mutual ministry based on relationship.

We had three large projects going on this year to care for our beautiful building. First, the restoration of our leaded windows here in Tucker Hall...only minor repairs had been done on these windows since they were installed 90 years ago. The windows now have better seals and new locking arms to avoid the risk of damage when the windows are open and the wind is blowing. The broken panes were replaced and the frames were cleaned, scraped, rust-proofed and painted. The windows in the Brooks Room will be restored in the next phase of this project. Second, we re-directed the flue venting system for the church boilers through an unused chimney. We discovered that the flue stack that goes up the center of the tower was too wide for the more efficient boilers that were installed in 2010, thus preventing the destructive flue gasses from being drawn effectively up and out. The integrity of the flue stack as well as the carillon bells at the top were at risk. The unused chimney was a great find and the right size for efficient venting. In addition, we've made much progress in repairing various components of the heating system for better regulation and more even heat. Third, as mentioned previously, we remodeled two bathrooms: the first floor Men's Room off the Narthex and the second floor Women's Room, which included adding a unisex bathroom. Gentlemen, there is now a Men's Room on the 2nd floor! Please, thank Pam O'Halloran, Jim Ptacek, and the members of the House Committee for their dedication in preserving this beautiful building. And, my thanks to the Act II shop for providing the funding for the bathroom renovations.

Last Spring, I put together a task force to take a look at the West Wing, the part of the building that previously housed the nursery school, and to determine the best use for that space. The task force engaged JDS Consultants to do an assessment of the facility. They found that the concrete and masonry structure are in good physical shape. There is no settling of foundations, the mechanicals are in decent shape, as is the roof. The original windows remain functional, though not energy efficient. Given this report, the task force moved on to considering various uses for the space. Many ideas were considered, including several non-profit organizations.

Open Doors Academy was among the considerations, but, as mentioned, the space they were in before the temporary move works better for the students and aligns better with licensing needs. In December, the Task Force recommended to the Vestry to repurpose the space for the Act II shop. The Act II shop is not viable in its current space. Take a look downstairs, it is easy to see that every inch of the space is full, including the hallway, and the merchandise is spilling over into the Dining Room. The limited space for sorting hinders the recruitment of volunteers and the fellowship aspects of this ministry. The West Wing location should be inviting to volunteers and improve sales: more visibility, more space, and more attractive displays. Any necessary costs to improve the space can be self-funded. My thanks to the Task Force chaired by Chris Smythe. Other members included Bob Brown, Patrick Doherty, Mike Kechisen, Pam O'Halloran, April Siegel-Green, Judy Stuelpe, and Molly Urban.

It has been many years since we reviewed the Act II ministry – now is a good time. I am putting together a new task force to look at all aspects of this ministry: mission, board responsibilities, store management, volunteer recruitment, store layout, communications, distribution of proceeds, etc. My thanks to Kirsten Radivoyevitch for chairing this task force. They will begin their work in the coming weeks. Again, stay tuned!

I would like to say a word of thanks to our Stewardship Committee for a successful Annual Campaign: Tami Brown and Brian Murphy, Co-Chairs, Lael Carter, Mike Knoblauch, Anne Payne, Suzanne Stratton-Crooke, Andrea Turner, Paul Victor, Andy Wheaton, Dave Banyard, Brady Boccucci, Paul Melvey, Deb Mitchell, Paige Plumlee-Watson, and Jon Vitale, with much assistance from Pam O'Halloran and Kim Fry.

My thanks to all of you. We are in solid, financial shape, thriving in the present and preparing for the future. You'll hear more shortly in the budget presentation. But, just a couple of highlights...we had a 67% increase from last year in the number of households increasing their pledging and a 30% increase in the number of new pledges. Our theme of gratitude was, indeed, inspiring. Of course, if you haven't yet pledged, we welcome your pledge. My thanks for your generosity and my thanks to the many, many volunteers who wrote notes and made phone calls – I'm so grateful for your time and for your commitment to ensuring the funding that will allow us to grow the Kingdom of God.

Grateful for the gifts of time, talent and treasure over the past 90 years, we embarked this fall on a long-term financial planning project to assure the longevity of this thriving community. We are looking at engagement and giving trends in organized religion, and asking questions about the spiritual needs of our parishioners and the connections made between spiritual transformation and giving. We are in the midst of interviewing other parishes, Episcopal and other denominations, and planning small group discussions with our parishioners for the coming months, so we can imagine and create our future together.

Staffing changes in 2018 included the retirement of the Rev. Rich Israel. For more than 12 years, we were blessed by his deep faith, his passion for social justice, and his wise and empathetic pastoral care. Fortunately, the right candidate came our way to fill the position of Assistant Rector: Rev. Jessie Dodson joined us in June. We are blessed by her gifts in preaching, parishioner engagement, and pastoral care. This year, we increased the hours of our Pastoral Care Associate, Marge LoPresti, to assure that we are meeting the pastoral needs of our parishioners. Finally, we thanked Katy Ptacek for the many gifts she shared with St. Paul's as Director for Congregational Development. Katy has embarked on a new career as a Life Coach. We are grateful she is still a parishioner here at St. Paul's.

As always, it is hard for me to find the words to express my thanks to our extraordinary staff, all who give so much of their time, energy and heart to St. Paul's. They are skilled, collaborative, dedicated, and fun. It is an honor and pleasure for me to serve with them each and every day. So, to:

Our clergy, Dale, Jessie, Kirby and Denny

Our Pastoral Associate, Marge

Our Music staff, Karel, Rick, Steve, Lois, David and our current intern, Kelsey

Our Director of Children's Ministries, Meg

Our Director of Youth Ministries, Leah

Our Children's Ministries Assistant, Lauren

Our Director of Operations, Pam

Our Director of Communications, Kim

Our Admin team, Brenda, Gail, Amanda, and Anne

Our Sextons, Steve, Paul, Rich, Fred, Chia and Ethan, my sincere thanks.

All, please read through the Annual Report when it arrives in the mail over the next few weeks. Your gifts of time, talent and treasure shine throughout. I am so grateful to serve with you.