

**Second Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Annual Meeting of St. Mary's Church**

January 18, 2026



**The Very Reverend Allison Burns-LaGreca, Rector**

**Mr. Curtis McKonly, Organist**

**Eucharistic Minister:** Lawrence Schmidt

**Reader:** Cathy Johnson

**Greeter:** Serena Smith

**St. Mary's Episcopal Church**  
9425 Third Ave., Stone Harbor, NJ 08247  
[www.stmarysstoneharbor.org](http://www.stmarysstoneharbor.org) 609-368-5922

# The Word of God

## Entrance Rite

### OPENING ACCLAMATION

*The people standing, the Celebrant says*

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*People*        **And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.**

### COLLECT FOR PURITY

*The Celebrant may say*

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The Celebrant*

Holy and faithful God,

you have called your people in every generation to walk by faith and not by sight.

When the way forward is clear, you lead us.

When the way forward is uncertain, you stay with us.

Today we come not with answers, but with open hearts.

*People*

**We come to listen.**

*The Celebrant*

We come carrying love, memory, hope, and fear.

*People*

**We come trusting your Spirit.**

*The Celebrant*

We come to place this community, its past, its present, and its future into your faithful hands.

*People*

**We come ready to discern.**

### OPENING ANTHEM OR SONG OF PRAISE

*The following is said, all standing*

**Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,**

**we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,**

**Lord God, Lamb of God,**

**you take away the sin of the world:**

**have mercy on us;**

**you are seated at the right hand of the Father:**

**receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

### **THE COLLECT OF THE DAY**

*Celebrant*        The Lord be with you.

*People*            **And also with you.**

*Celebrant*        Let us pray.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **The Lessons**

#### **FIRST READING: Isaiah 49:1-7**

*The people sit.*

A Reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

<sup>1</sup>Listen to me, O coastlands,  
pay attention, you peoples from far away!  
The LORD called me before I was born,  
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

<sup>2</sup>He made my mouth like a sharp sword,  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me a polished arrow,  
in his quiver he hid me away.

<sup>3</sup>And he said to me, "You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

<sup>4</sup>But I said, "I have labored in vain,  
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;  
yet surely my cause is with the LORD,  
and my reward with my God."

<sup>5</sup>And now the LORD says,  
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him,  
and that Israel might be gathered to him,  
for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,  
and my God has become my strength—

<sup>6</sup>he says,  
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

<sup>7</sup>Thus says the LORD,  
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,  
the slave of rulers,  
“Kings shall see and stand up,  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,  
because of the LORD, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

*Reader*            The Word of the Lord.  
*People*            **Thanks be to God.**

*Silence may follow.*

**PSALM: Psalm 40:1-12**

*Remain seated.*

<sup>1</sup>I waited patiently upon the LORD; \*  
he stooped to me and heard my cry.  
<sup>2</sup>He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; \*  
he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.  
<sup>3</sup>He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God; \*  
many shall see, and stand in awe,  
and put their trust in the LORD.  
<sup>4</sup>Happy are they who trust in the LORD! \*  
they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.  
<sup>5</sup>Great things are they that you have done, O LORD my God!  
how great your wonders and your plans for us! \*  
there is none who can be compared with you.  
<sup>6</sup>Oh, that I could make them known and tell them! \*  
but they are more than I can count.  
<sup>7</sup>In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure; \*  
(you have given me ears to hear you);  
<sup>8</sup>Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, \*  
and so I said, “Behold, I come.  
<sup>9</sup>In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: \*  
‘I love to do your will, O my God;  
your law is deep in my heart.’”  
<sup>10</sup>I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation; \*  
behold, I did not restrain my lips;  
and that, O LORD, you know.  
<sup>11</sup>Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart;  
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance; \*  
I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the great congregation.  
<sup>12</sup>You are the LORD;  
do not withhold your compassion from me; \*  
let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever.

## SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

*The people remain seated.*

A Reading from Paul's First letter to the Church in Corinth.

<sup>1</sup>Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

<sup>2</sup>To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—<sup>6</sup>just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—<sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Reader*            The Word of the Lord.

*People*            **Thanks be to God.**

*Silence may follow.*

## GOSPEL: John 1:29-42

*All stand.*

*Priest*            The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

*People*            **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

<sup>29</sup>[John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” <sup>32</sup>And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

<sup>35</sup>The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” <sup>39</sup>He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup>He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

*Priest*            The Gospel of the Lord.

*People*            **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

## THE SERMON

### Entering a Year of Discernment at St. Mary's Episcopal Church

There is a moment in today's Gospel that I cannot shake.

John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him and says,

"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

And then, almost as quickly, John steps back. He does not cling. He does not try to manage the future. He does not say, Stay with me. Build here. Preserve what we have started.

He points, and then he lets go.

That alone is a word for us today.

John had a following. He had disciples. He had momentum. He had a ministry that worked. People came out to the wilderness to hear him. They trusted him. They built their spiritual lives around his voice. And yet, when the moment came, John did not confuse his ministry with God's future. He pointed and said, Look. There. That is where life is going now. That kind of faith is rare. Because letting go is always harder than beginning. What strikes me next is what happens to the disciples. When they hear John's words, they do not immediately understand. They simply follow Jesus at a distance. And Jesus turns and asks them a question that sits at the heart of discernment.

"What are you looking for?"

Not, What do you believe? Not, What do you want to preserve? Not, What are you afraid of losing?

What are you looking for?

That is the question before us as we enter this year of discernment.

Not, How do we save St. Mary's. Not, How do we make things go back to how they were. But, What are we truly seeking now?

Belonging?

Faithfulness?

Purpose?

Control?

Certainty?

Jesus does not answer their question with a plan. He does not give them a strategy or a timeline.

He simply says, "Come and see."

Come and see where I am staying.

Come and see how I live.

Come and see what happens when you walk with me rather than ahead of me.

Discernment is not about rushing toward answers. It is about staying close enough to notice where Christ is dwelling now. And here is the holy discomfort of this text.

The first thing the disciples do after spending time with Jesus is not to build something. It is not to organize.

It is not to protect what they have found.

They go and tell the truth.

"We have found the Messiah."

And that truth pulls them forward into a future they do not yet understand.

Friends, St. Mary's is entering a year of discernment not because we lack faith, but because we have faith enough to stop pretending we already know the ending.

We are entering this year because we love this community, and love tells the truth.

We are entering this year because our world has changed, our context has changed, and pretending otherwise would not be faithful. It would be fearful.

John the Baptist teaches us something essential today.

Faithfulness does not always mean holding on. Sometimes faithfulness means pointing and trusting that God is already doing something beyond us.

And Jesus teaches us something just as important.

He does not say, Stay where you are and make it work.

He says, Come and see.

That invitation is gentle. It is spacious. It is honest. It does not promise that everything will remain the same.

It promises presence.

And presence is enough.

This year of discernment will ask something of us.

It will ask us to release nostalgia as a decision-making tool.

It will ask us to stop equating survival with faithfulness.

It will ask us to trust that God's love for the Church is larger than any one building, budget, or season.

That does not mean grief will not come. It will.

It does not mean fear will not surface. It will.

But fear does not get the final word.

The final word belongs to the One who says, Come and see.

Whether this year leads us toward revitalization, reconfiguration, or a faithful ending, the question will remain the same.

Are we willing to follow where Christ is already dwelling, even if it is not where we expected?

John points.

The disciples follow.

Jesus stays present.

That is the pattern.

So today, as we open this year of discernment, we do not stand at the edge of loss.

We stand at the threshold of truth.

And truth, in the life of faith, is always the doorway to resurrection.

May we have the courage to point honestly, the humility to follow faithfully, and the trust to believe that wherever Christ is leading us, God is already there.

Amen.

The Very Rev. Allison Burns-LaGreca

## **THE CREED**

*All stand.*

**We believe in one God,**

**the Father, the Almighty,**

**maker of heaven and earth,**

**of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,**

**the only Son of God,**

**eternally begotten of the Father,**

**God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
    he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
    he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
    and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
    he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
    in accordance with the Scriptures;  
    he ascended into heaven  
    and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
    and his kingdom will have no end.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
    who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
    and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

## **THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*All remain standing.*

Brothers and sisters, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I bid you to, "Come and see the great things God has done. *Behold, we come.*"

We pray for your Church. Give us as a light to the nations. Sanctify us in Christ Jesus, call us to be saints and strengthen us to follow Jesus to the end.

*Silence*

Come and see the great things God has done.

***Behold, we come.***

We pray for this nation and the world. May your salvation, O God, reach to the ends of the earth. May all the peoples know of your faithfulness and your deliverance.

*Silence*

Come and see the great things God has done.

***Behold, we come.***

We pray for all of creation. Give us a sense of awe as we consider all of the works of your hands.

*Invite the congregation to add their thanksgivings, followed by silence*

Come and see the great things God has done.

***Behold, we come.***

We pray for our local community. Make our footing sure. May our future be secured by your love and faithfulness.

*Silence*

Come and see the great things God has done.

***Behold, we come.***

We pray for all those in need of your healing and strength. Lift them out of the desolate pit. Put in their mouths a new song, a song of praise. May they know just how great for them are your wonders and your plans.

*Invite the congregation to add their petitions, followed by silence.*

Come and see the great things God has done.

***Behold, we come.***

We pray for those who have died. In your great faithfulness, keep them blameless for the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Honor them in your sight forever.

*Silence*

Come and see the great things God has done.

***Behold, we come.***

## CONFESSION OF SIN

*The Deacon or Celebrant says*

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Minister and People*

**Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

*The Priest stands and says*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

## THE PEACE

*All stand.*

*Celebrant* The peace of the Lord be always with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*Then the Ministers and the People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.*

# The Holy Communion

## OFFERTORY SENTENCE

*The Celebrant says*

Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God. *Ephesians 5:2*

## The Great Thanksgiving

### SURSUM CORDA

*The People stand.*

*Celebrant*        The Lord be with you.  
*People*            **And also with you.**  
*Celebrant*        Lift up your hearts.  
*People*            **We lift them to the Lord.**  
*Celebrant*        Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
*People*            **It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

### PROPER PREFACE

*Facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Because in the mystery of the Word made flesh, you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts, to give the knowledge of your glory in the face of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

### SANCTUS

*Celebrant and People*

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

### WORDS OF INSTITUTION

*The People stand or kneel.*

*The Celebrant continues*

We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.

On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me." Therefore, according to his command, O Father,

*Celebrant and People*

**We remember his death,  
We proclaim his resurrection,  
We await his coming in glory;**

**EPICLESIS**

*The Celebrant continues*

And we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to you, O Lord of all; presenting to you, from your creation, this bread and this wine.

We pray you, gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts that they may be the Sacrament of the Body of Christ and his Blood of the new Covenant. Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In the fullness of time, put all things in subjection under your Christ, and bring us to that heavenly country where, with St. Mary and all your saints, we may enter the everlasting heritage of your sons and daughters; through Jesus Christ our Lord, the firstborn of all creation, the head of the Church, and the author of our salvation.

By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. **AMEN.**

**THE LORD'S PRAYER**

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

*People and Celebrant*

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.**

**The Breaking of the Bread**

**FRACTION ANTHEM**

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;  
*Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.*

## **INVITATION**

*The Celebrant says*

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

*The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people.*

*The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words*

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life. [*Amen.*]

*All stand.*

## **POST-COMMUNION PRAYER**

*After Communion, the Celebrant says*

Let us pray.

*Celebrant and People*

**Faithful God,**

**we commit this year to you.**

**We commit our conversations,**

**our disagreements,**

**our questions,**

**and our decisions.**

**Teach us to listen more than we speak.**

**Teach us to love more than we fear.**

**Teach us to trust that whatever future unfolds,**

**you will be there ahead of us.**

**Bless those who lead.**

**Comfort those who grieve.**

**Strengthen those who are weary.**

**May all that we do be rooted in your love**

**and guided by your truth.**

**Amen.**

*(Those who wish to be dismissed before the “business Session” of our service, may do so at this time with God’s Blessing.)*

- 1) Submission of Minutes from the Annual Meeting 2024-2025**
- 2) Status of the Vestry and Election**
- 3) Financial Reports and Budget**
- 4) Rector’s Address and Year of Discernment**
  - a. Appendix A. Election/Vestry/Ministries**
  - b. Appendix B. Financials**

## **2026 Rector's Address**

### **Annual Meeting of St. Mary's Episcopal Church**

**January 2026**

Friends in Christ,

Thank you for being here today, and thank you for loving St. Mary's. Simply being present, especially in a season like this, is already an act of faith.

Today, I want to speak plainly, prayerfully, and without alarm. We are not here because something has gone wrong. We are here because we love this church enough to tell the truth, and because we trust God enough to ask what comes next.

At this Annual Meeting, St. Mary's enters a year of discernment.

Discernment is not crisis management. It is a spiritual practice. It is the work of listening deeply, together, for the movement of the Holy Spirit. It asks not, How do we hold on at all costs, but rather, What is God asking of us now?

This year will not be about rushing decisions, but it will also not be about avoiding them. Avoidance is not faith. Fear is not wisdom. We are choosing a different way.

You have before you today a discernment packet. It outlines the process we will follow, the questions we will ask, and the theological grounding that will guide us. I ask you to read it slowly. Pray with it. Return to it. Let it shape our conversations and soften our hearts.

I want to say something clearly and lovingly. The purpose of this year is not to save St. Mary's at all costs. The purpose of this year is to be faithful.

Faithfulness sometimes leads to renewal. Sometimes it leads to reimagining. And sometimes, faithfully, it leads to completion. Our Christian faith gives us language for all of these paths. We follow a God who brings life, not by denying death, but by transforming it.

If the Spirit leads us toward revitalization, we will pursue it with clarity and honesty. If the Spirit leads us toward partnership or reconfiguration, we will approach that work with courage and creativity. And if the Spirit leads us toward a faithful ending, we will name that not as defeat, but as resurrection trust.

Endings are not failures in the life of faith. Fear is.

St. Mary's story matters. The lives shaped here matter. The love offered here matters. None of that is erased by change. None of it is wasted. God wastes nothing.

This year will ask something of all of us. It will ask patience. It will ask honesty. It will ask gentleness with one another. It will ask us to listen more than we speak, and to trust more than we control.

I promise you this. You will not be left in the dark. You will not be talked at, instead listened to. And no decision will be made without prayer, transparency, and care for the people who love this place.

Above all, remember this. The Church is not a building. It is not a budget. It is not even a name. The Church is the people of God, gathered, blessed, and sent.



<b>Daily Office</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Total In-Person Attendance</b>	<b>2471</b>	<b>2823</b>	<b>1895</b>
<b>Average Sunday Attendance</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Pledging Units</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>

## **Demographic and Geographic Constraints on Long- and Short-Term Institutional Sustainability in Stone Harbor**

### **Executive Summary**

Stone Harbor’s demographics and geographic realities present profound structural challenges to the long-term and even short-term sustainability of community-based institutions, including churches, nonprofits, and service-oriented organizations. The borough’s extreme seasonality, very small year-round population, advanced median age, limited racial and economic diversity, and exceptionally high cost of living create conditions that constrain growth, leadership development, volunteer capacity, and generational continuity. These challenges are not the result of poor leadership or insufficient effort; they are systemic and largely outside local control.

What follows is a detailed analysis of how these factors function together to limit future viability.

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### **1. Population Size and Scale Limitations**

Stone Harbor’s year-round population of approximately 853 residents places an immediate ceiling on institutional sustainability.

- Even with strong participation rates, the absolute number of potential members, volunteers, and donors is extremely small.
- Institutions must compete for engagement within a limited pool of residents, many of whom already have long-standing affiliations, fixed routines, or seasonal residency elsewhere.
- Growth through local recruitment is structurally impossible at scale. Any strategy that assumes numerical growth from within the year-round population is not realistic.

Seasonal swelling to over 20,000 people does not offset this challenge.

- Summer residents and visitors are transient, inconsistent in attendance, and unlikely to assume leadership or long-term financial commitments.
- Seasonal engagement often increases workload without producing sustainable participation or revenue.

This mismatch creates burnout risk for year-round leaders and volunteers while offering little structural return.

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## 2. Advanced Median Age and Generational Imbalance

With a median age of approximately 65.5–66 years and more than 51% of residents aged 65 or older, Stone Harbor is one of the oldest communities in New Jersey.

### Short-Term Impacts

- High participation among older adults can initially mask decline, creating the appearance of stability.
- Leadership and financial giving may remain strong for a time, but are increasingly dependent on a shrinking cohort.

### Long-Term Impacts

- Natural attrition through aging, illness, and mortality will accelerate decline unless replaced by younger cohorts, which are largely absent.
- Children under 15 make up less than 4% of the population, meaning there is no meaningful pipeline for:
  - Future members
  - Volunteers
  - Lay leaders
  - Staff or clergy discernment
- Programming for families, youth, or young adults cannot reach critical mass and often fails despite quality or effort.

Institutions become custodial rather than generative, focused on maintaining legacy rather than forming future leadership.

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## 3. Wealth Concentration and High Cost of Living

Stone Harbor's exceptional affluence presents a paradox.

- Median household income exceeds \$128,000.
- **Average Household Income:** This figure is significantly higher than the median at **\$245,858**, indicating a concentration of very high-income households.
- Average individual income is over \$136,000.
- Median home value (2023) \$1.9 million.
- **Median Sale Price (Nov 2025):** Approximately **\$2,000,000**. Other reports from late 2025 place the median value even higher, around **\$4.5 million**.
- Homeownership exceeds 84%.

### Structural Consequences

- Staff recruitment is severely constrained. Teachers, clergy, nonprofit professionals, service workers, and younger adults cannot afford to live locally.
- Institutions must rely on long commutes, part-time staffing, or retirees, limiting innovation and continuity.
- Younger families, even with professional incomes, are priced out entirely.

## **Wealth concentration also creates volatility.**

- Giving capacity may be high, but donor bases are small and aging.
- A handful of households often carry disproportionate financial responsibility.
- Estate transitions, relocation, or economic downturns can produce sudden budget crises.

Affluence does not equal sustainability when it is not generationally renewed.

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## **4. Household Composition and Social Fragmentation**

With an average household size under 1.8 people and over 44% of households consisting of individuals living alone or with non-relatives, Stone Harbor lacks the density of relational life that sustains institutions.

- Fewer multi-generational households mean fewer built-in networks.
- Volunteer pools are thin, and leadership roles recycle among the same individuals.
- Social isolation increases pastoral and social service demands while reducing volunteer capacity.

Institutions often become primary points of connection for older adults, increasing emotional and caregiving expectations while shrinking the base of those able to respond.

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## **5. Racial, Cultural, and Experiential Homogeneity**

Stone Harbor's population is approximately 97.5% White, with minimal racial and ethnic diversity.

### **Implications**

- Institutions may struggle to reflect broader societal realities, limiting relevance to younger generations who value diversity and inclusion.
- Homogeneity can unintentionally reinforce insularity, making adaptation to cultural shifts slower and more contested.
- Outreach beyond the immediate community is often necessary for vitality, yet cultural distance can hinder connection.

This is not a moral failing of residents, but it is a structural limitation that affects long-term adaptability.

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## **6. Education Levels and Expectations**

Stone Harbor is highly educated, with nearly 70% of adults holding bachelor's degrees and over a quarter holding graduate degrees.

While this can support thoughtful engagement, it also brings challenges:

- High expectations for programming quality, leadership competency, and intellectual rigor.
- Increased likelihood of critique rather than participation.

- Resistance to institutional change that disrupts established norms or personal preferences.

Education without generational diversity can result in institutions that are intellectually rich but operationally fragile.

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## **7. Seasonality and Geographic Isolation**

As a barrier island community:

- Weather events, flooding, and climate-related risks increase operational costs and uncertainty.
- Geographic isolation limits regional integration and spontaneous participation.
- Seasonal rhythms disrupt continuity in programming, staffing, and community life.

Institutions must effectively run two parallel systems: one for summer and one for the rest of the year, often with insufficient resources for either.

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## **Conclusion: A Structural, Not Moral, Crisis**

The challenges facing Stone Harbor-based institutions are demographic, geographic, and economic in nature. They cannot be solved through enthusiasm, better marketing, or working harder.

### **Key realities must be acknowledged:**

- There is no local population growth coming.
- There is no youth pipeline to rebuild from within.
- There is no affordable housing solution that institutions can control.
- There is no realistic return to mid-20th-century models of growth or stability.

### **Long-term success will require:**

- Radical honesty about scale and future capacity
- Strategic collaboration beyond local boundaries
- Willingness to redefine success away from numerical growth
- Courage to consider consolidation, shared ministry, or legacy completion models

Naming these truths is not failure. It is faithful stewardship in a changing world.

### **Additional Challenge:**

Though there is no set date in place as of the writing of this report, the 96<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge will close for replacement sometime in 2027.

# **St. Mary's Episcopal Church**

## **2026 A Year of Discernment**

### **Why a Year of Discernment?**

At this Annual Meeting, St. Mary's enters a year of intentional discernment. This decision comes not from panic or failure, but from faithfulness. Discernment is a spiritual practice rooted in prayer, honesty, and trust in God's guidance.

We are choosing to ask courageous questions about who we are, who we are called to serve, and what form our ministry is meant to take in this season of our life together.

This is not a year to rush decisions. It is also not a year to avoid them.

The purpose of this discernment year is clarity, not preservation at all costs.

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### **Our Shared Commitment During This Year**

As a community, we commit to the following:

- To ground our discernment in prayer, scripture, and worship
  - To speak truthfully and listen respectfully
  - To resist fear-driven decision-making
  - To honor our history without allowing nostalgia to determine our future
  - To trust that God's faithfulness is not limited by any one building, model, or timeline
- 

### **The Core Questions Guiding the Year**

Throughout the year, these questions will guide our common life and conversation:

1. Who is God calling St. Mary's to serve now?
  2. What forms of ministry are truly sustainable and life-giving?
  3. How are we being asked to steward our people, property, and finances?
  4. Is our future best expressed through revitalization, reconfiguration, or faithful completion?
- 

### **The Discernment Process and Timeline**

#### **Phase One: Grounding and Listening**

##### **Months 1-3**

##### **Purpose**

To establish a shared spiritual foundation and name our current reality with honesty.

## **Activities**

- Vestry retreat focused on discernment and faithful endings
- Congregational listening circles
- Review of financial, demographic, and ministry data
- Teaching on discernment as a Christian practice

## **Key Question**

What is the truth of where we are, without judgment or fear?

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## **Phase Two: Holy Imagination**

### **Months 4–6**

#### **Purpose**

To explore realistic and faithful futures for St. Mary's.

#### **Activities**

- Study of three possible paths: revitalization, reconfiguration, faithful completion
- Engagement with diocesan partners and external resources
- Property and mission-use assessment
- Naming where energy, joy, and resistance arise

#### **Key Question**

Where do we sense life, and where are we only maintaining?

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## **Phase Three: Testing and Discernment**

### **Months 7–9**

#### **Purpose**

To evaluate options against our values and actual capacity.

#### **Activities**

- Vestry use of a decision matrix
- Financial modeling for each path
- Congregational reflection and prayer
- Continued pastoral care and transparent communication

#### **Key Question**

Which path aligns with our baptismal promises and our real resources?

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## **Phase Four: Decision and Blessing**

### **Months 10–12**

**Purpose**

To make a clear decision and bless the chosen path.

**Activities**

- Vestry vote
- Congregational communication
- Rituals of blessing, transition, or completion
- Implementation or closure planning

**Key Question**

How do we step forward faithfully, without fear?

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**A Theological Word****Faithful Endings and New Beginnings**

We believe that God is the author of life, not institutions.

Throughout scripture, God calls communities to release forms that once served them so that new life may emerge. Endings are not signs of failure. They are moments of surrender and trust.

The Church belongs to God. Buildings, programs, and structures are gifts for a season, not guarantees for all time.

Resurrection does not restore things exactly as they were. It brings transformation.

Our calling in this season is not to save what we love at all costs, but to love it enough to place it back into God's hands.

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**Naming the Possibility of Closure Faithfully**

If discernment leads us toward closure, we will name it honestly and pastorally.

St. Mary's would not be ending because it failed.

St. Mary's would be completing its ministry with integrity and trust.

Closure, when chosen faithfully, is not defeat. It is resurrection faith.

We would celebrate:

- Lives formed in faith
- Sacraments shared
- Justice pursued
- Love offered across generations

We would bless our legacy and release our resources for new life beyond ourselves.

Fear is the enemy of faith. Trust is its companion.

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## **Vestry Decision Matrix**

### **Guiding the Year of Discernment**

The vestry will evaluate each possible path using the following criteria, rating each area as **Strong, Moderate, or Weak**.

#### **Option A: Revitalization**

- Leadership capacity
- Financial sustainability
- Alignment with local demographics
- Energy and joy among leaders
- Clarity of mission
- Long-term viability

#### **Option B: Reconfiguration or Partnership**

- Willingness to change structures
- Financial stewardship
- Missional reach beyond the island
- Clergy and staff sustainability
- Use of property as mission asset
- Congregational readiness

#### **Option C: Faithful Completion**

- Pastoral care capacity
- Financial integrity
- Legacy impact
- Emotional health of leaders
- Ability to end well and generously
- Alignment with Christian theology

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### **Final Discernment Questions**

- Which option tells the truth most fully?
- Where do we see the fruits of the Spirit?
- What decision will we be proud to explain to future generations?
- Are we acting from fear, or from trust?

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### **A Closing Word**

This year is not about saving an institution.

It is about listening for God's voice, honoring one another, and choosing faithfulness over fear.

Whatever path lies ahead, we walk it together, trusting that God is already present in what comes next.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **A Year of Discernment at St. Mary's Episcopal Church**

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#### **1. Is St. Mary's closing?**

No decision has been made.

This year is a season of discernment, not an announcement of closure. We are intentionally creating space to listen, pray, and tell the truth together about our future before making any decisions.

Discernment means we are asking faithful questions, not assuming answers.

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#### **2. Why are we doing this now?**

Because timing matters in the life of faith.

Waiting until crisis forces decisions driven by fear. Entering discernment now allows us to be prayerful, thoughtful, and honest, while we still have choices, energy, and agency.

This is an act of responsible leadership and love for this community.

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#### **3. Does this mean leadership has failed?**

No.

The challenges we are facing are demographic, geographic, and structural. They are not the result of poor leadership, lack of faith, or insufficient effort.

Many faithful churches across the country are asking these same questions in a changing world. Naming reality is not failure. It is wisdom.

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#### **4. Are you giving up on St. Mary's?**

Absolutely not.

Discernment is not giving up. It is paying attention.

We are committing to walk together faithfully, whether that leads to revitalization, reconfiguration, or a faithful ending. Each of those paths requires courage and care.

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## **5. Why are we even talking about closure? That feels negative.**

Because Christian faith does not fear endings.

Our faith is rooted in death and resurrection. We believe God brings new life not by denying loss, but by transforming it.

Naming closure as one possible outcome does not cause it to happen. Refusing to name it does not prevent it. Honest discernment requires holding all faithful possibilities before God.

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## **6. What if I am angry, sad, or scared?**

That is normal.

Love always carries grief when change is possible. Your emotions are not a problem to fix. They are a sign that this place matters to you.

There will be space throughout the year for listening, prayer, and pastoral care. You do not have to carry this alone.

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## **7. Will parishioners have a voice, or is this already decided?**

You will have a voice.

This process includes listening circles, transparent communication, and opportunities for reflection and feedback. While not every decision can be made by consensus, no decision will be made without genuine listening and care.

Discernment is communal, not secretive.

---

## **8. What happens to our building during discernment?**

Nothing changes immediately.

Worship, ministry, and daily life continue as usual while discernment unfolds. Any future decisions regarding property would happen slowly, transparently, and with appropriate consultation and care.

There will be no sudden moves.

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## **9. Should I still give financially during this year?**

Yes, if you are able.

Financial support during discernment is an expression of trust and shared responsibility. It allows ministry to continue and gives the vestry clear, honest information about sustainability.

Giving during this season is not about propping something up. It is about stewarding faithfully whatever future unfolds.

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## **10. What if I strongly believe St. Mary's should continue exactly as it is?**

Your love for this church is honored.

At the same time, discernment asks all of us to hold our preferences lightly and listen for God's leading together. Faithfulness sometimes invites us to change what feels familiar.

Disagreement is allowed. Disrespect is not. We will walk this path with grace.

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## **11. What if I cannot imagine St. Mary's ending?**

That makes sense.

When something has shaped your faith, your family, or your life, imagining its end can feel unbearable. Discernment does not ask you to imagine everything at once.

It asks you to take the next faithful step, trusting that God will meet us there.

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## **12. What does success look like at the end of this year?**

Success is not measured by whether the church stays open.

Success is measured by whether we have listened deeply, told the truth kindly, cared for one another pastorally, and trusted God honestly.

Whatever decision is made, we will aim to reach it without fear, secrecy, or regret.

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## **13. What can I do during this year?**

Three things matter most:

- Pray for wisdom, courage, and gentleness
- Participate in listening opportunities when you can

- Speak honestly, and listen generously

You do not need to have answers. You only need to stay engaged.

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## A Closing Word

This year is not about loss. It is about love.

Love for the people who have built this community.

Love for the people who are here now.

Love for the future God is already imagining.

Whatever lies ahead, God will be faithful. And we will walk it together.

## BLESSING

*The Priest blesses the people, saying*

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. *Amen.*

## DISMISSAL

Let us go forth in the name of Christ.

*People*

**Thanks be to God.**

## Appendix A

### Nominating Report Annual Meeting January 18, 2025

#### Vestry of 2025

Warden: Lillian Armstrong, Class 2027

Junior Warden: Cheryl Lukens Oleferuk, Class 2026

#### **Vestry Class 2026**

Cathy Johnson

Dina Ziemba

#### **Vestry Class 2027**

#### **Vestry Class 2028**

**Treasurer:** Jack Olthuis

**The following candidates are placed in consideration for election of offices of this church:**

**Junior Warden (1 person – 2 year term)** 1.

**Vestry Person (2 persons – 2 year unexpired term)** 1.  
2.

**Vestry Person (2 persons – 3 year term)** 1.

### **Delegates to Diocesan Convention (3 persons – 1 year term)**

- (1) Jack Olthuis
- (2) Lawrence Schmidt
- (3) Lillian Armstrong

### **Alternate Delegate to Diocesan Convention (3 persons – 1 year term)**

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

### **Delegate to Atlantic Convocation (3 persons – 1 year term)**

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

### **Alternate Delegate to Atlantic Convocation (3 persons – 1 year term)**

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

## **The Blessings of Our Liturgy**

Every time we gather for worship, we are blessed to participate in the sacred rhythm of Episcopal liturgy—a rich tapestry of prayer, scripture, music, and sacrament. This beautiful expression of our faith doesn't happen in isolation. It is the fruit of many hearts and hands, each offering their unique gifts to glorify God and enrich our shared worship.

I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for everyone who makes our liturgy come alive. Each one of you plays an essential role in transforming our services into a holy and joyful encounter with God.

### **To Fr. Glenn Matis**

Thank you for for being my go to supply, your dedication to proclaiming the Gospel and presiding over the mysteries of our faith is a profound gift. Your guidance helps us draw closer to the heart of God, whether through preaching, prayer, or administering the sacraments. Your faithful service reminds us of Christ's enduring presence among us.

### **To the Lay Ministers**

Our lay ministers are a shining example of how God calls all of us to serve.

- **Lectors**, you bring the Word of God to life, sharing sacred stories that nourish our souls.
- **Eucharistic Ministers**, your hands extend Christ's presence in the bread and wine, reminding us of the grace that sustains us.
- **Intercessors**, your heartfelt prayers lift up the needs of the church, the world, and each one of us, creating a bridge between heaven and earth.

### **To the Acolytes and Altar Guild**

A special thank you to the **acolytes** who carry the cross, light candles, and assist in preparing the altar with reverence and care. You teach us, in your quiet service, that even the smallest actions in worship are acts of devotion. To the **altar guild**, your behind-the-scenes work ensures that every detail of our sacred space

reflects the beauty and order of God's love. **(Please take notice that many of our roles over-lap like the Acolyte and Eucharistic Ministers, and we ask you to consider joining our ministry if you feel so called)**

### **To Curtis, Tom and Arney and all our guest Musicians**

Your voices and instruments transform our prayers into song, lifting our spirits and connecting us to the divine. Whether leading a familiar hymn or sharing a sacred anthem, your music reminds us that worship engages the whole of our being—mind, body, and soul.

### **To all the Ushers and Greeters**

Your ministry of hospitality reflects the open arms of Christ. By welcoming each person at the door, guiding them to a seat, and assisting with the logistics of worship, you create an environment of warmth and belonging. You remind us that no one is a stranger in God's house.

### **To Jack and Yvonne Olthuis, Hilton Rodriguez, our Recovery community, and Seasonal family**

Thank you for making Saturdays at the beach and special services like Recovery Eucharist, Healing Services, and Blue Christmas extra special and successful. It's a joy to preside over these service and to witness the Holy Spirit at work.

### **To the Congregation**

To every worshiper, know that your presence matters. Your prayers, your voices, and your hearts joined in worship create a sacred unity that binds us as the Body of Christ. Together, we celebrate the divine mystery and encounter the living God in ways that transform us and the world around us.

### **A Shared Offering to God**

The Episcopal liturgy is not a performance—it is a communal offering. It is the work of the people, united in love and gratitude. Each of us, whether leading or participating, contributes to the sacred act of worship. Together, we bring our joys, our sorrows, and our hopes before God, trusting in the promise of renewal and grace.

Thank you, each and every one of you, for your faithfulness, your gifts, and your willingness to serve. As we continue to worship and grow together, may we be reminded that what we create in our liturgy is more than a service; it is a reflection of God's kingdom, here and now.

If you are not already taking part in one of these vital ministries to the church, please consider offering your time and talent.

With gratitude and love,  
Mo. Allison+  
Rector, St. Mary's Episcopal Church

## **Honoring Our Vestry Members**

Dear Beloved in Christ,

The vestry is one of the most vital and selfless ministries in the life of our parish. It is a calling that blends practical leadership with spiritual discernment, all in service to God's mission. Today, I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to all who have answered this sacred call—those who have served in the past, those currently serving, and those who will serve in the future.

### **To Our Vestry Members, Past and Present**

To those who have served in years gone by, thank you for laying the foundation upon which our parish

stands today. Your dedication to preserving and strengthening the life of this church has shaped who we are and how we serve our community. You gave generously of your time, wisdom, and prayers to ensure that our ministries could flourish and that our resources were stewarded wisely.

To those currently serving, I see your faith in action every time you gather to discern the needs of this parish and its mission. Whether you are wrestling with budgets, maintaining our physical spaces, or envisioning the future of our ministry, your commitment is nothing short of inspiring. You have taken on the sacred responsibility of shepherding this parish through challenges and opportunities, and your leadership reflects the love of Christ in action.

### **To Future Vestry Members**

To those who will one day serve on the vestry, I thank you in advance for your willingness to say “yes” to this call. The work of the vestry is not always glamorous, but it is always holy. It is through your leadership that this parish will continue to thrive, deepen its faith, and serve as a beacon of God’s love in the world.

### **A Ministry Rooted in Faith**

The ministry of the vestry is so much more than managing finances or overseeing property. It is a sacred trust to support the mission of the church and foster its growth in faith and service. Vestry members are called to prayerfully discern where God is leading us and to act boldly in response to that call. Through your efforts, this church has remained steadfast in its purpose, vibrant in its ministry, and hopeful in its future.

### **A Reflection of Christ’s Leadership**

In the Gospel, Jesus modeled servant leadership—leading with humility, compassion, and courage. As vestry members, you reflect that same spirit, putting the needs of others before your own and seeking always to serve the greater good. You remind us all that leadership in the church is not about power or prestige but about love and service.

### **A Heartfelt Thank You**

To each of you—past, present, and future vestry members—thank you for your dedication, your faithfulness, and your willingness to serve. Your work often happens behind the scenes, but its impact is felt every day in the life of this parish. Through your leadership, you help create a church that is welcoming, vibrant, and deeply rooted in God’s love.

May God bless you richly for the countless ways you give of yourselves to this sacred ministry. Please know that your work is appreciated, your sacrifices are honored, and your efforts are making a difference in the life of this parish and beyond.

With gratitude and love,  
Mo. Allison+  
Rector, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church

## **The Gift of Hospitality**

In the life of our church, there are moments when we encounter the grace of God in the simplest yet most profound ways. One of those moments is during **coffee hour**, a time of connection, fellowship, and nourishment for body and soul. This cherished gathering doesn’t happen by itself—it is made possible by the generosity and care of those who embody the ministry of hospitality.

Today, we extend our deepest gratitude to all of you who have given your time, talents, and hearts to make coffee hour a warm and welcoming space for our congregation. Your gifts, particularly your baking talents and the time you have dedicated to preparing and serving, are blessings that go far beyond the table.

### **The Ministry of Hospitality**

Hospitality is so much more than offering a cup of coffee or a sweet treat. It is an act of love that creates

space for fellowship and belonging. Through your kindness and effort, you extend the open arms of Christ to everyone who gathers, reminding us all that we are not just a congregation—we are a family.

In your willingness to bake, brew, and serve, you create a sacred space where friendships are nurtured, stories are shared, and burdens are lightened. Whether it's a delicious cookie or a simple cup of tea, these offerings are symbols of care that help us draw closer to one another and to God.

### **Ride-Share Ministry**

This past year, something quietly beautiful has taken root among us.

Members of St. Mary's saw a need, listened with compassion, and responded not with words alone, but with action. Out of love, care, and a deep sense of community, you created an extension of our hospitality ministry through a car share program, gathering together to offer rides so that those who no longer drive can continue to come to church, to worship, to belong.

This is the Gospel made visible.

Every pickup, every shared ride, every moment of waiting at a doorstep is a holy act. It is kindness with keys in hand. It is love that shows up on time. It is the Body of Christ refusing to leave anyone behind.

To those who organized the schedule, who adjusted routines, who opened car doors and hearts, thank you. You have made the journey to church possible for many, but even more than that, you have affirmed dignity, connection, and belonging. You have reminded us that church does not begin at the door of the building, it begins the moment we notice one another.

This ministry may look simple on the surface, but it carries profound meaning. It says, you matter. You are not alone. We will walk, and drive, this road together.

Thank you for embodying the love of Christ in such a tangible, generous, and faithful way. St. Mary's is richer, warmer, and more fully itself because of you.

### **Building Fellowship**

Coffee hour is often where the bonds of community are formed and strengthened. For newcomers, it's a chance to feel welcomed and to connect beyond the pews. For long-time members, it's a moment to catch up, laugh, and share life's joys and challenges. These moments may seem ordinary, but they are extraordinary in their power to unite us as the Body of Christ.

Your hospitality fosters this fellowship, creating an environment where people feel seen, heard, and valued. In this space, we are reminded that the church is not just a building or a service—it is the people gathered in love and support.

### **A Reflection of Christ's Love**

Through your service, you reflect the love and generosity of Christ Himself, who so often shared meals and moments of connection with His disciples and with strangers. In the simple act of offering food and drink, you help us all to see Christ in one another and to experience His presence in our midst.

Your ministry of hospitality is more than just a task—it is a reflection of the kingdom of God, where all are welcomed, nourished, and loved. It is an invitation to deeper relationships, not only with each other but also with Christ, who calls us to serve one another in love.

### **A Heartfelt Thank You**

To those who have spent hours baking treats, brewing coffee, setting up tables, and cleaning up afterward, please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed. You are ministers of grace, creating moments of joy and connection that enrich our shared life.

Thank you for your willingness to give of yourselves so generously. Your contributions make our time together not just enjoyable but meaningful. You remind us that hospitality is not simply about what we serve but about how we serve—with love, care, and a spirit of welcome.

May we continue to grow in fellowship and faith, and may the ministry of hospitality always be a reflection of the boundless love of God. Thank you for making coffee hour a place where we experience not just community, but communion with one another and with Christ.

Please consider becoming a part of this important ministry of St. Mary's.

## **The Heart of Outreach**

As we reflect on the life and mission of our parish, our hearts are filled with gratitude for the countless ways we have embraced the ministry of outreach this year. From Strawberry Fest to Thursday on the Lawn, from our first Cookie Stroll to Recovery Services and more, each initiative has been a vibrant expression of God's love in action. Today, I want to thank each and every one of you who contributed to these efforts, whether through your time, talents, resources, or prayers.

### **More Than Events and Fundraisers**

At first glance, outreach initiatives like these might seem like simple events or fundraisers, but they are so much more. Each gathering, each moment of service, is a sacred opportunity to connect with others, build relationships, and reflect the love of Christ in our community. Through these efforts, we have reached beyond our walls to touch lives, offering not just hospitality but also hope, joy, and a sense of belonging.

### **Strawberry Fest**

To those who helped plan, prepare, serve, and share in the joy of this beloved tradition, thank you. Strawberry Fest is not just a celebration of summer—it is a celebration of community. By welcoming neighbors and visitors alike, we have created a space where laughter, fellowship, and generosity thrive.

### **Thursday on the Lawn**

Thank you to Jack and Yvonne Olthuis and everyone who made our Thursday on the Lawn gatherings possible. These evenings of music, cookies, and fellowship have become a cherished tradition, drawing people together to relax, connect, and enjoy the beauty of our shared space. Your efforts have created a welcoming environment where strangers become friends and our parish shines as a beacon of warmth and hospitality.

### **Our First Cookie Stroll**

A special thank you to Kim at Salty Paws for her initiation and baking skills, and all the bakers both in our congregations and those further out in our community, organizers, and participants who brought the Cookie Stroll to life. This new initiative was about more than just delicious treats—it was about building bridges within our community. Through your creativity and hard work, you helped us engage with neighbors in a fun and meaningful way, spreading joy and connection.

### **St. Mary's Giving Basket**

An exciting new program for our church is St. Mary's Giving Basket Outreach, a monthly opportunity for our community to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need.

Each month, we choose an organization to focus on supporting a specific needs and/or causes.

### **Recovery Services**

To those who support our recovery ministries, your work is a testament to the transformative power of love and compassion. By walking alongside those seeking healing and hope, you are participating in the redemptive work of Christ. Thank you for being a source of light and encouragement to so many in need.

### **The Power of Relationships**

What makes these outreach initiatives truly impactful is the way they foster relationships. Whether it's sharing a meal, enjoying a concert, exchanging a smile, or simply being present, these moments create

connections that reflect God's kingdom. They remind us that outreach is not just about what we do but about how we love. Through these efforts, we are living out the Gospel by building a community where everyone is welcomed, valued, and loved.

### **A Community of Faith in Action**

None of this would be possible without you—the faithful people of this parish who continually say “yes” to God's call to serve. Your willingness to roll up your sleeves, share your gifts, and open your hearts has made these initiatives not only successful but transformative. Through your work, you are bringing hope, joy, and love to our community and beyond.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we look to the future, may we continue to embrace the ministry of outreach with the same enthusiasm and dedication. These efforts are more than events—they are opportunities to embody the love of Christ and to make a real difference in the lives of those we encounter. Together, we can continue to shine as a light in the world, building relationships that reflect the boundless grace of God.

## **Stewardship - a Year-Round Ministry**

Stewardship is one of the most profound expressions of our faith, inviting us to recognize, nurture, and share the many gifts God has entrusted to us. It is more than a season or a campaign—it is a way of life, a year-round ministry that calls us to live with gratitude, generosity, and faithfulness.

Today, we express our heartfelt thanks to **Larry Schmidt and Lillian Armstrong**, whose care, attention, and creativity have made our stewardship ministry this year vibrant and impactful. Through their thoughtful leadership, they have helped us see stewardship not as an obligation but as an opportunity to respond to God's abundant love.

Stewardship is not confined to a single season. It is a year-round ministry that touches every aspect of our lives and our parish. Stewardship invites us to:

- **Give of Our Time:** By prioritizing worship, service, and care for one another, we dedicate our days to God's purposes.
- **Offer Our Talents:** Each of us has unique gifts to share, and stewardship calls us to use those gifts to further the work of the church and bless our community.
- **Share Our Treasure:** Through financial giving, we sustain the mission of the church, enabling us to worship, serve, and extend Christ's love beyond our walls.
- **Care for Creation:** Stewardship extends to the world around us, calling us to honor God's creation and care for the environment.

When we embrace stewardship as a year-round ministry, it becomes a spiritual practice that transforms our lives and our community. It deepens our trust in God, strengthens our relationships with one another, and equips us to be faithful stewards of God's grace.

### **A Community of Stewards**

Stewardship is not always about numbers or programs—it is about people. It is about the countless ways we come together as a community to support, encourage, and serve one another. Stewardship is woven into the fabric of our daily lives, a reflection of our gratitude for all God has given us.

### **Moving Forward Together**

As we move forward let us continue to embrace stewardship as a year-round ministry. Let us give joyfully, serve faithfully, and trust in the abundance of God's provision. Together, we can ensure that our parish remains a beacon of hope, love, and generosity, living out the Gospel in all that we do.

With deep gratitude for Larry, Lillian and for each of you who contribute to this sacred ministry,

## **The Vital Role of a Treasurer in the Episcopal Church**

The role of a treasurer in the Episcopal Church is one of profound importance, blending financial stewardship with a deep commitment to the ministry and mission of the parish. The treasurer's work often happens behind the scenes, yet it serves as the foundation that allows the church to flourish and fulfill its calling.

The treasurer is entrusted with overseeing the financial health of the church, a responsibility that requires both skill and faithfulness. This includes tasks such as managing the budget, tracking income and expenses, ensuring transparency, and providing financial reports to the vestry and congregation. Beyond the numbers, the treasurer plays a critical role in fostering trust, accountability, and a sense of shared responsibility among the church community.

Today, I want to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude to **Jack Olthuis**, whose dedicated time, expertise, and leadership as our treasurer have been an incredible blessing to St. Mary's. Jack, your work has gone far beyond the routine tasks of accounting—you have approached this ministry with a heart for service and a vision for the church's future.

### **Your Leadership and Commitment**

Jack, your steadfast attention to detail, careful planning, and ability to navigate the complexities of church finances have provided a strong foundation for our parish. You have helped us to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us, ensuring that our ministries are supported, our bills are paid, and our financial decisions align with our mission and values.

Your leadership has extended beyond numbers—you have been a voice of wisdom and encouragement, guiding us through challenges and helping us seize opportunities to grow in faith and service. Your thoughtful presence has been a gift to the vestry and to the entire parish.

### **A Ministry of Stewardship and Trust**

The work of a treasurer is more than spreadsheets and balance sheets—it is a ministry of stewardship. Jack, your dedication has helped us honor our commitments to one another, to the wider church, and to our community. You have helped us build trust and transparency, reminding us that every dollar we receive and spend is part of God's work in the world.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we continue to grow and serve, the foundation you have laid will allow us to face the future with confidence and hope. Your tireless efforts have positioned us to expand our ministries, care for our facilities, and reach out to those in need, all while staying true to our mission as a church.

Jack, on behalf of the vestry, the parish, and all who benefit from the work of this church, thank you for your incredible commitment and leadership. Your ministry as treasurer has been a blessing to us all, and we are profoundly grateful for the gifts you have shared so generously.

May God bless you abundantly for your faithful service, and may we all continue to follow your example of dedication and stewardship as we move forward together.

With gratitude and love,

Mo. Allison+

Rector, St. Mary's Episcopal Church

## **A Heartfelt Thank You to Julie: The Heartbeat of Our Church's Ministry**

Behind every well-functioning church is someone whose tireless efforts ensure that everything runs smoothly, often unnoticed by many but deeply felt by all. At St. Mary's, that someone is **Julie**, our incredible administrator.

Julie, your dedication, hard work, and attention to detail are truly the backbone of our church's day-to-day life. From the smallest task to the most complex projects, you approach everything with care, efficiency, and a servant's heart. Today, we want to take a moment to express our profound gratitude for all you do to make the ministry of this parish not only possible but thriving.

### **Your Daily Dedication**

Your role touches every corner of our church's life. Whether it's ordering supplies, managing schedules, changing boards, printing bulletins, or keeping us organized, your work ensures that nothing falls through the cracks. Your dedication to even the smallest tasks reflects your love for this church and your commitment to its mission.

### **A Steward of Communication**

In today's world, communication is vital, and you excel at it. From social media posts to newsletters and countless emails, you ensure that everyone in our community stays informed, connected, and engaged. Through your work, you keep the heartbeat of St. Mary's alive, drawing us together in fellowship and shared purpose.

### **The Quiet, Essential Work**

Julie, you manage tasks that many of us may never see but always feel. From paying bills to organizing schedules, from updating records to coordinating countless moving pieces, your quiet, essential work makes the ministry of this parish not only possible but vibrant. Your care and attention to detail allow others to focus on worship, outreach, and community-building, knowing that the practical matters are in capable hands.

### **A Ministry of Faithfulness**

What you do is more than administration—it is ministry. Through your dedication, you embody the servant-leadership Christ calls us to live out. Your work creates the foundation that allows us to worship, serve, and grow as a community of faith. In everything you do, you reflect God's love and grace in action.

### **A Grateful Community**

Julie, please know how deeply appreciated you are by every single person at St. Mary's. Your efforts, your heart, and your unwavering commitment to this parish do not go unnoticed. We are blessed by your presence and your ministry, and we thank God for you every day.

On behalf of the entire parish, thank you for your hard work, your dedication, and the countless ways you support and sustain the life of this church. You are a blessing to us all, and we are grateful beyond words for all that you do.

With love and appreciation,  
Mo. Allison+  
Rector, St. Mary's Episcopal Church