

I think it is safe to call 2017 the year of the St. Paul's miracles. We have been blessed by so much and so many in this past year that it is only fitting to offer our heartfelt thanks for the grace that God has bestowed upon us. Now do I think that God has suddenly looked down on our little church and said "St. Paul's you stand out among so many churches for the work of your mission and ministry?" That would be hubris indeed. But it has been a good and productive year and therefore the prayers of thanksgiving are more than appropriate.

To begin with the vestry has been a dream team, a group of dedicated volunteers that have been instrumental in all the work that we have done: maintenance of our buildings and grounds, participation in our fundraisers from the Spring and Christmas Fairs, the Fashion Show, the Spaghetti and Pancake Suppers, Tag Sales, and the Thrift Shop, year-round support for stewardship, liturgical ministry, our Lenten Program, Christian Formation, oversight of our financial affairs, outreach through the Food Pantry, donating to outside organizations like providing supplies for the victims of this fall's hurricanes, supporting our adopted Christmas Families, connecting with and contributing to the Eastern Farmworkers, maintaining our presence in the local newspapers, on or Facebook page and to our parishioners. I am sure there is more but you get the idea. This has been a particularly active and connected vestry. I offer special thanks to two outgoing members, Dee Laffin and Conni Still who have played prominent roles in so many of the activities mentioned above. I am profoundly grateful for the leadership of our Wardens, Robin Sconzo who has lent her considerable talents and labors to so much these past two years and to Cathie Pliszak for stepping into leadership roles in several key fundraising activities.

Leadership in the parish is not just restricted to those on the vestry. We have a vibrant community life that relies on the work of many people. Administration, communication, fellowship, formation, fundraising, ministry, maintenance, stewardship, vision, worship. Please read through the other reports from the Altar Guild to the Thrift Shop to understand all the wonderful work that goes on in our parish, work that shows the dedication and commitment of all of our volunteers.

Nevertheless being busy is not necessarily the same thing as accomplishing and it is our accomplishments of the past year that we can say that we have achieved some significant traction in managing and overseeing the overall health of the parish.

Given the size of our plant, a large, two-storied parish hall, the church itself, and the rectory, all of which date back more than a hundred years you can appreciate that ongoing maintenance is a concern. We are pleased to report that several key projects were finished. The hole in the steeple was repaired, the leak on the south side of the roof of the St. Nicholas wing was addressed by replacing the roof, a massive job that involved removing and reinstalling the solar panels. Thus far we have remained watertight. In addition we completed installation of hardwired CO2 and fire alarms in much of the parish hall and the church. I can only imagine what those who raised these buildings in the first place would think of all of the odd fixtures and

blinking lights that are now a part of our worship and public space. The best part of these improvements to our facilities is that we actually received almost \$28,000 in grants from the diocese to do some of the work. These grants have freed us up to plan for more improvements in 2018. Furthermore, that serendipitous grace that has blessed St. Paul's from time to time turned up again in the form of Tony Pitti from Goldbrush painters. Tony was the contractor who painted our kitchen and parish hall for no charge in 2009. Tony turned up again in December to repaint the kitchen and a bedroom in the rectory. You will understand then that we have decided that Tony will be our first choice for repainting the outside of the parish hall which will be a major project.

Other gifts included funding remove the bushes in front of the parish hall. These bushes were so overgrown and had become a repository for all manner of trash. Having them removed allowed the beauty of the building to be revealed. In addition we also received a gift from the estate of Mother Paulette that enabled us to create an attractive and flexible sign for the front of the parish hall. This is in addition to gifts that we received to reduce our loan to the diocese for earlier repairs to the parish hall and a gift to clean the heating ducts in the church. These signs of abundance are just some of the examples of those miracles of St. Paul's, small miracles to be sure, but powerful testimony to our need to trust in God's grace – although a little sweat equity doesn't hurt either!

We have witnessed a wedding, a funeral, and four baptisms, which together with all of the weekly and feast day Eucharists that we have shared are all outward and visible signs of our sacramental life as a people of God. Our spiritual lives have been enriched by the relationships we have cultivated with St. James, Brookhaven, Christ Church, Bellport, and the Lutheran Church of Our Savior. During our Lenten program we studied the book *Just Mercy* and expanded our understanding of the challenges of racism in our society. We rejoiced in our joint celebration of Epiphany and integrated some of our services during Holy Week, a practice we will continue in 2018.

St. Paul's plays a vital role in the Village of Patchogue. We participated in the Fourth of July Parade, the COAD (Community Organization Active in Disaster), and the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. We assist our neighbors in need through the Food Pantry, the Soup Kitchen, and the Thrift Shop, by hosting 6 12-Step meetings, and sponsoring Cub Scout Pack 177. These activities help us to develop more effective working relationships with our neighbors. It is gratifying to realize that many of these activities are staffed by people who are not even members of the parish and that is healthy because it means we are outwardly focused and people know it and are drawn to us because of it. All you have to do is to look at the page in the back of the Annual Report that lists the donors who have supported us. This list reflects the impact that we have in the community and our connections that are all out of proportion to the size of our membership.

Nowhere has this been more evident than in the work that has continued to address the ongoing challenge of the Lakeview Cemetery. Thanks to the tireless leadership of Ralph Wright, chairman of the Greater Patchogue Foundation, the Cemetery Task Force has gathered a group of dedicated volunteers who are raising money and obtaining grants to maintain and improve the cemetery. The bishop has expressed support for our need to turn over ownership of the cemetery and our Canon Lawyer, Robert Fardella has reviewed the material on the results of the title search. Attorneys Egan and Golden are handling the paperwork for filing with the state since changing from a religious cemetery to a non-religious cemetery is work that will involve several legislative bodies including the state supreme court. St. Paul's has provided some additional financial support and participated in several clean up days. This is a huge improvement over the days when the rector of St. Paul's was summoned to court for not maintaining the cemetery!

It is wonderful and fearsome to have been called as a priest since the responsibility to God and to the community is at once humbling and exhilarating. I continue to be thankful for my life among you and thankful for the faith, generosity, and energy of the people of St. Paul's.

Elisabeth E. Tunney

Rector, St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
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