

From St. Paul's Annual Meeting on January 24, 2021.

The following comments and slides were presented by Matt Stehle, co-chair of St. Paul's Community Engagement Steering Committee:

My name is Matt Stehle, I am the co-chair of the Community Engagement Steering Committee. I going to take a few minutes to look back 2020, share some reflections on what we accomplished, and talk about the strategy and planning we are doing to evolve Community Engagement at St. Paul's.

Community Engagement at St. Paul's

Community Engagement Steering Committee:

- Lynn Williams (staff lead)
- Rev. Gwynn Crichton (clergy)
- Matt Stehle and Barbara Holley (cochairs and vestry liaisons)
- Michelle Walker
- Susan Brooks
- Christopher West
- Matthew Cole

History and Reconciliation Initiative Steering Committee:

- Lynn Williams (staff lead)
- Rev. Gwynn Crichton (clergy)
- Matt Stehle and Barbara Holley (cochairs and vestry liaisons)
- Michelle Walker
- Lynn Blankman
- Sue Bland
- Rev. Ben Campbell
- Christopher Graham
- Dr. Christopher Reynolds



Leading this steering committee with me are Gwynn our clergy representative, Barbara Holley, my co-chair and our vestry liaison, Lynn Williams, our staff lead, along with team members: Michelle Walker, Susan Brooks, Chris West, and Matthew Cole

As our History and Reconciliation Initiative closes out their initial charter, I want to take a moment to thank them again for their faithful service and the many gifts they have given St. Paul's since 2015!

We are gradually folding HRI into Community Engagement at St. Paul's to continue our racial justice work and embed their learnings, passion, and research throughout our programs.

The History and Reconciliation Initiative steering committee includes: Michelle Walker, Sue Bland, Lynn Blankman, Chris Graham, Dr. Chris Reynolds, and Rev. Ben Campbell as well as Barbara, Lynn, Gwynn, and myself.

Throughout the spring and into fall of 2020, the Community Engagement Steering Committee has worked with Chris Bennet, from The Spark Mill to help us assess our current programs, listen to parishioners, talk to community partners outside St. Paul's, and guide our discernment on the future of our community engagement programming.

Needless to say, 2020 has been a tough year!

The pandemic took away our ability to meet in person, making collaboration very difficult.

In fact, our steering committee has yet to meet as a group in person!

Throughout this time, our steering committee members continued to persevere.

I want to take this moment to thank our team – particularly our staff lead, Lynn Williams, who has done so much this year and kept our programs going throughout the pandemic! THANK YOU, LYNN!

For all of you, the collective trauma we all face in isolation and watching the events unfold in our city and country over the year, has been exhausting.

2020, Year in Review

- COVID 19 Relief Fund
- Emmaus feeding program kept going!
- Gifts cards for Woodville Elementary School families this Christmas.
- Blind Spots Book Study
- Reconciliation Sunday
- Removal of Plaques, Reclaiming Windows
- Allyship and Social Justice with Dr. Keith E. Edwards



And yet, we have done so much and have so much to be proud of!

You should be so proud as you read the report of what we have been able to accomplish this year.

- *The COVID 19 Relief Fund was created with \$150,000 from St. Paul's budget and \$50,000 from donations! We were able to distribute those funds to over 30 non-profit organizations to address a wide range of needs arising from the pandemic.*
- *We continued our Emmaus feeding program, feeding 160 guests per week at St. Paul's on Thursdays. Huge hand to Lynn, Jason, Michael, Uli, and the rest of the staff and clergy who kept this program going while volunteers were not allowed to be at the building.*
- *You donated more than \$4,000 worth of gift cards to Woodville Elementary School families this Christmas.*
- *We distributed 275 copies of the book "Blind Spots" to you to read. Blind Spots chronicles St. Paul's history with race from before the first cornerstone was laid in 1843 through the inception of the History and Reconciliation Initiative in 2015. It traces how our spiritual ancestors evolved their understanding of race and identity as a justice seekers over that time.*
- *After reading the books, over 75 of you participated in discussion groups in October to dig in, reflect on the learnings of the past, and talk about how we go forward with more understanding.*

- *We held our first Reconciliation Sunday service which included A Litany of Repentance, a rededication of stained-glass windows, and guest preacher, former St. Paul's associate rector Rev. Melanie Mullen, who is the current Director of Reconciliation, Justice and Creation Care for the Episcopal Church.*
- *As a reckoning came to racist symbols throughout the city this year, St. Paul's took action. As a vestry member, I was so thankful for the HRI team's work preparing reports over the years to give us the background, meaning, and history of the plaques and windows in our sanctuary. These reports provided important context for the Vestry to confidentially act in June 2020 to remove seven Lost Cause era plaques and rededicate windows on Reconciliation Sunday.*
- *We hosted Dr. Keith E. Edwards for a virtual event series on Social Justice and made it available to anyone. We had over 50 people attend his opening keynote on Allyship on January 12th and will continue with a series of workshops to be held on Tuesdays in February.*

We also conducted focus groups, surveyed the congregation, spoke to be people outside the church, and reflected all that was going on to gain insights on the interests and opportunities in evolving Community Engagement at St. Paul's.

On behalf of the Committee Members and Staff, I want to thank all of you for your participation, input, and support!

Since October, the Community Engagement Steering Committee has been focused on distilling those insights into a vision, goals, strategies, ministry structure, tactics, and timelines.

Community Engagement Discernment

We learned in the surveys and focus groups that

- You come to St. Paul's for inclusion, justice-seeking, and hope.
- You are engaged in community work outside of St. Paul's
- You want continued focus on Racial Justice.
- You have a diversity of talents, passions, and interests



We learned in the surveys and focus groups that:

- *You come to St. Paul's for inclusion, justice-seeking, hope.*
- *You are engaged in community work through St. Paul's and outside of St. Paul's through other organizations.*
- *You care about Racial Justice and want to see St. Paul's maintain a focus on this.*

- *You have a diversity of talents, passions, interests, careers, networks, ages, associations and seek to find ways to apply them in action in the pursuit of justice.*

Community Engagement Discernment

What we learned from the COVID Fund:

- Requests came from organizations big and small
- Range of issues and organizations doing great work
- Connections to St. Paul's
- Power of partnering with organizations
- Importance of process, communications, and stewardship



When we were doing things, we were learning too. As an example, from the COVID Fund we learned:

- *Despite several other funds available, the requests still came in from organizations big and small.*
- *We were amazed at the range of issues and organizations the doing great work in our community.*
- *One of the questions we had on the grant application asked about the grantee's connection to St. Paul's:*
 - *Nearly every organization that sent an application had a connection to a person at St. Paul's.*
 - *This shows the array of interests and involvement across the congregation.*
 - *You are involved as board members, advisors, volunteers, advocates, friends, etc. of so many amazing organizations. It was really inspiring!*
- *We also realized the significant impact we can have by partnering with organizations, supporting the good people that are at work already in the community – which includes so many of you!!*
- *and the importance of consistent process, communications, and budget in achieving our full potential.*

As we head into 2021, the Community Engagement Steering Committee is clarifying its role and function to provide the Goals, Strategy, and Empowerment for programs at St. Paul's:

Goals

- **Formation.** Inspiring and equipping congregants to seek truth and live into their baptismal covenants as well as providing opportunities to act.
- **Exploration.** Engaging with others to examine history, explore systemic problems, and to foster beloved community.
- **Reconciliation.** Empowering people, initiatives, and organizations working for racial justice and repair.



Our Goals for Community Engagement at St. Paul's

- **FORMATION:** *Inspiring and equipping congregants to seek truth and live into their baptismal covenants as well as providing opportunities to act.*
- **EXPLORATION:** *Engaging with others to examine history, explore systemic problems, and to foster beloved community.*
- **RECONCILIATION:** *Empowering people, initiatives, and organizations working for racial justice and repair.*

Strategies

- **Collaborative.** So many are doing great work in our communities already.
- **Transparent.** Communication and process are important to fostering engagement and inclusivity.
- **Flexible.** Support of the diversity of experience, interest, passions, and talents of the congregation.
- **Spirit-led.** "Inner work" is important to achieving justice.



As a Steering Committee, we are focused on strategies to support the congregation:

Collaboration with others. So many are doing great work. We want to first seek to join in that work, support it, and amplify it. We will find work in the interests, passions, and talents of our own congregation as well as from outside.

Transparency. Communication and process are important to fostering engagement and inclusivity.

- We want to create awareness. People need to know what is happening and what is available. They want to share ideas, resources, collaborate, and grow together.
- We want to create process. We want you to know how to connect the gifts of St. Paul's (people, programs, building, location, budget) to your passions, interests, groups you are involved in.

Flexibility. We want Community Engagement at St. Paul's to be representative of our diversity of experience and interest.

- We want you to be involved and feel empowered to promote your interests and opportunities you are aware of, to pursue your passions and share knowledge.
- We want to be able to support activity across many levels of issues and opportunities – education, inspiration, needs and symptoms, policies, and systems.

Spirit-led. "Inner work" is important.

- We feel this is important because achieving Justice is about more than charity. Systemic change comes from being a better neighbor, co-worker, teammate, citizen, friend, family member, parent, etc. It is about how we show in daily life as much as anything.
- We will continue conversations about anti-racism, allyship, justice seeking, and being better neighbors.

We will tie this back to our faith, we will invite others to join with us, and we will continue to push to embed inclusion, equity, and justice throughout St. Paul's programs and operations.

What's Next

Town Hall on Community Engagement in early March

Thank you! Peace be with you!



The Steering Committee's vision is to support a dynamic, engaged, and empowered congregation living out their baptismal identities at St. Paul's and doing great work in the world by providing communication, coordinating budget, and partnering with the vestry on behalf of those engaged.

There will be more to come in a town hall in early March. Look for that invitation soon.

In so many ways, 2020 has been an unbearably tough year. But we have hope and you have given us so much to be proud of and look forward to! Thank you! Peace be with you!