

# **RECTOR'S REPORT**

## **The Rev. Paul J. Stephens**

### **A DIFFERENT LENS**

Early each year Episcopal churches across the United States complete the Parochial Report and submit it to their respective diocesan offices and to the Episcopal Church Center in New York. This report requests various financial, membership and other numerical data. The Church Center and diocesan offices study this data looking for trends: e.g., how many people were baptized during the year; what was the average Sunday attendance in each parish, mission and across dioceses. This data is useful in numerous ways, but does not tell the whole story of the Church at work.

In the remainder of this annual report I will offer a different but equally important view of All Saints' and its work. Before I do so, I encourage you to spend time reading and studying the other reports contained herein; they tell the story of various committees and commissions planning and working in numerous ways. These committees and commissions do the heavy lifting at All Saints'. I am thankful for the engagement by individuals and groups in countless ways. Your work is the backbone of our common effort to be disciples of Christ at this time and in this place. Thank you!

During 2013, on any given Sunday we averaged 163 in church. While I wish that average was higher (and it easily could have been!), throughout the year I felt that our worship services not only brought people together to hear God's word and to celebrate the sacraments but that a deeper and richer spiritual relationship with God was realized by many. A visitor recently shared with me thoughts about his worship experience at All Saints'. "The service fit together so nicely," he said. "All components – music, readings, sermon and prayers – complimented one another and built on each other. It was obvious that much thought and work had gone into making the liturgy rich and meaningful." That was music to my ears! Our commitment to excellent liturgy reflects our search for a deeper relationship with God in a community grounded in sacramental reality. I hope that as a community gathered to worship and praise God we will continue to strive for excellence in our liturgical offerings and continue to develop and nurture our relationship with God.

An Episcopal priest who publishes a daily blog often writes about the often-overlooked ways a parish connects with its members and the broader community. In 2013 we spent some time looking at the various and numerous ways that All Saints' connects with its members and neighbors. These "points of contact" or "points of mission" provided a different lens through which we can view the work that takes place within the four walls of our church and beyond. I

want to share information about four areas where a focus on “points of mission” paints a different picture of our common life:

- Because of your generosity, in 2013 Stanford and I spent \$27,207.05 from funds in our discretionary accounts. These funds were used for various charitable purposes, including providing various forms of assistance to individuals, families and organizations (both within our parish and beyond). Items supplied included medicines, food, clothing, housing, emergency lodging, utility assistance, payments to physicians and physical therapists, transportation expenses and the like. We were also able to provide scholarships to youth so they could attend summer camp sessions at Bratton-Green, Happenings, Winter Solstice and DOY. Additionally, in special situations I was able to provide funding for other “pious” projects and purposes within our parish.
- During 2013, we gathered to worship 280 times. These services included Eucharists (Sundays, on weekdays and in homes/hospital/nursing homes/hospices), Daily Offices, Weddings, Burials and other special services such as Advent and Christmas Lessons & Carols. These services were attended by 9,280 people. As you know we have added a 5:30 Sunday evening worship service. While it is open to all, it is an offering available to those who may have been traveling over the weekend, missed Sunday morning services and upon returning home Sunday evening wish to worship in our community. No matter the service you normally attend, I hope in 2014 you’ll ask yourself “Am I truly faithful in my worship attendance?” “If not, how might I increase my attendance and participation in the liturgies offered by All Saints’?”
- We are constantly looking to develop and offer relevant Christian Formation opportunities Sunday mornings and throughout the week. Responding to requests among the new adult Sundays morning offerings were the theology and the movies class (thank you Sally Gray and David Sparks) and a lectionary class taught by Stanford. Six hundred four adults made their way to one of the various adult Sunday morning offerings during 2013. An additional 611 youth and children were involved in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the Youth Sunday School class. While both the attendance and level of participation in the lectionary class and in the youth Sunday School class reflect genuine enthusiasm, *overall Sunday School attendance numbers are too low. I interpret these low numbers as reflecting either a lackadaisical approach by many to Christian Formation in general or an unwillingness to devote the time and energy to attend these learning opportunities.* We value your opinions and input on topics or offerings that you find relevant and which would engage you and your children. **I challenge our parish to**

**double the number of children, youth and adults attending Sunday School in 2014.**

Adults, please make your way to one of these classes every Sunday morning and make sure your children are also present. Christian formation is vitally important to the future of the Church. Adult and youth confirmation classes will be offered beginning in February. If you are not confirmed please join us. If you are, join us for a refresher class.

- We had 21,042 guests eat a hot breakfast at Saints' Brew during 2013 (in 2009 we averaged approximately 40 guests per day; in 2013 we averaged about 85 per day). Many people prepared and served these meals, contributing almost 1,500 volunteer mornings to this endeavor. The entire out-of-pocket cost of these meals (about \$1.00 per meal served) was paid through contributions to that important ministry. Saints' Brew receives no direct funding from our operating budget; all food is purchased through contributions made to the outreach effort. Fortunately we also receive a substantial amount of food (coffee, sugar, creamer, cereal and the like) donated by individuals, churches and other organizations. These contributions significantly assist in keeping our per meal cost low.

Please accept my sincere and heartfelt thanks to all who contributed time, effort, prayers and financial resources during 2013. Your engagement in the life of All Saints' is valued and greatly appreciated. Thanks to our wardens and vestry for taking an active role in leading our parish in countless ways and for being willing to devote the time and energy to focus and vision about the challenges that the future no doubt will present. And to our church staff – the best in all of Christendom and a dedicated and energetic group who always rises to the occasion – Thank You! Y'all make my job so much easier. I add a special thank you to Martha, my wife, for supporting me in this work and the demands it sometimes presents.

I close with a personal addendum. I felt your prayers last fall when I shared the news that I had prostate cancer. I felt embraced by this community as Martha and I made decisions about treatment and as I recovered from surgery. Thank you for your warm embrace and for lifting us up in prayer. It meant so very much to the both of us.

Peace, Paul+