

## Vicar's Report – 2018 Annual Meeting

*In God is my safety and my honor; \*  
God is my strong rock and my refuge.  
Put your trust in him always, O people, \*  
pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.  
(Psalm 62: 8-9)*

We have much to be thankful for as we look at the gifts we received from God and each other in the past year. There have been several things which I am very proud of this year:

- The first is the recommendation by our parish for **Jamie Smith to pursue ordination to the Diaconate**. It is a long road, with many obstacles, but we have forwarded her completed application to the Diocese and expect that interviews for acceptance will begin soon. A committee, led by Sarah Wisniewski, met with Jamie over a course of months to discern her call. Jamie and the committee prayed, reflected and completed voluminous paperwork. Jamie's call to ordained ministry is a sign that God is working here. Please pray for Jamie as she moves ahead to follow God's call. [We are also proud of **Louise Wagner** who celebrated her graduation from a four-year Christian Education program called, Education for Ministry last summer. She has become a fundamental part of Holy Spirit's life and work.] The commitments made by Jamie and Louise are signs of God's Spirit moving among us.
- Our delicious and varied **Community Dinners** continue to serve 60-70 neighbors each month. Our guests love the Ocean Library give-away table and the gracious service of food. We pause this year to give thanks to God and to **Ernie Tews (and Anna)** for his long administration of this program. Month after month, Ernie has lined up volunteers to cook and serve large quantities of delicious meals. Often, these meals are seasonal celebrations with coordinated decorations and themes. These dinners require that we maintain supplies and inventory of many items. Ernie has faithfully shopped and stored these supplies for over a decade. He and Anna have been the backups for all those times the scheduled volunteers just couldn't make it. We owe Ernie a debt of gratitude for this ministry and all his other work with us. For 2018, **Jim**

**Wack, Pat Johnson and Jim Heller** will take over this ministry. They are looking for volunteers for cooking, serving AND cleanup – a ministry few seemed called to do.

- Our **Fire Safety Upgrades**, made possible by a grant from the Diocese were completed at the direction of **Bill Stephenson**, the Junior Warden. This project required coordination of many people, several contractors, the State Fire Marshall and the Tuckerton Construction officials. We are now in full compliance.
- The **Hospitality Room** renovation, led by **Chris Bobinski**, has enhanced our weekly coffee hours and made the space more attractive for rental use. We thank the many people who gave financial gifts, who gave items to furnish the room and the people who gave physical labor to make this project possible.
- A complete list of our ministries would be too long to list here, but we remember especially:
  - Our Holiday gift ministries to the local school children, Catholic Charities, St. Teresa's, the nursing homes and our own homebound.
  - The work of your Wardens and vestry, the Clerk of the Vestry and the Treasurer. **Arlene Bixby retires as Clerk after today. Eileen Minett and Kathie LaRocca are retiring from the Vestry.**
  - Our redesigned website; kept up to date each week.
  - Our year-round ministry at Family Promise
  - Our work at the Tuckerton Food Pantry
  - Our ongoing Eucharistic visits to Seacrest and other homes
  - The movie and craft outreach to local families (now ended)
  - Our Newcomer Dinner
  - Participation by many in the workshops, discussions and readings about churches as “sanctuary” and the “sanctuary movement”. We held many civil discussions about this current topic.
  - Our hospitality to Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, AA, NA, Yoga, Tuckerton Elementary School, etc.

In 2018, we are moving forward to major changes which will require all of us to adapt to what God has planned for us ahead. My ministry with the people of Holy Spirit – Tuckerton will come to an end this summer. It has been my joy and pleasure to serve you since 2009, but I will retire from full-time employment with

this church. With the Bishop's approval, I will complete my service here in July. I am deeply grateful for the care that has gone into this decision by Jim Wack, your senior warden, Bill Stephenson and the vestry, and especially by **Kathie LaRocca, Eileen Minett, Grace O'Connor and Bill Meyer** who formed the budget committee. Our bishop and his staff stand ready to help this congregation and me personally with this transition.

We have served God well together. However, the financial realities of our parish and my lifetime "bucket list" have converged to make this a necessary reality. However, we believe there will be time for you to plan the shape of your ministry beyond my tenure; and time for me to plan the next steps of my life; and time for all of us to say graceful goodbyes and celebrate God's goodness in bringing us together.

There are issues which need to be addressed as Church of the Holy Spirit moves forward. Whatever path you take, there must be commitment and participation to make a CHURCH:

- **Parish Participation** - Our average Sunday attendance stayed at 70 for many years, but has dropped to 63. In the low seasons, when weather is bad AND when the weather is good, and people travel, it drops much lower. This is not a recent change, but one that has been true since mid-2016. The number of people who have moved away or become homebound or are unable to attend regularly is significant. While we have welcomed many new members, almost all pledging to support our church; that has not replaced the losses over the past few years. I want to be clear that it was not the change to one service that caused the drop. Careful analysis of the numbers shows a slow and steady drain of attendance. The change to one service was a response and recognition of that existing truth.

Beyond worship attendance, your participation in the ongoing life of the parish will be increasingly important. It takes many hands for worship services, to keep the building and grounds properly maintained and cared for, and to minister to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. When God calls us to service, he calls ALL to serve.

- **Stewardship** – Financial issues are a sign and symbol of other issues. The 2018 budget reflects a lack of committed people contributing regularly to our income.. Our expenses have been stable over the past years. For this year, the number and amount of pledges has dropped significantly. Our average pledge here is above the average for our diocese. However, the pressures of fundraising have grown as the number of active people has declined. Over the past year, I saw significant stress and damage to relationships among us as we tried to maintain a high level of fundraising. Look instead to study together and learn about God and serve where your heart leads. A wide network of relationships builds a strong church and brings a high level of personal and financial commitment to one another and to God.

Over the next few months, my mission will be to continue connect us more deeply with God and to connect you with each other. The Gospel is where we will focus first. Our Lenten discipline will involve reading the Gospel of Luke and meeting to discuss the impact of the Gospel on our own life and work. In Eastertide, we will read the Book of Acts. The early churches were small churches, based on families and small gatherings of people learning and teaching about Jesus. Through the Good Book Club, we will follow their example. Forward Day by Day and other resources will be available.

The work of our parish is the work of God. Your participation is a great calling and is appreciated in ways that will be made known now and in days to come. Know that you are loved and that you are prayed for regularly. In turn, please pray for each other, pray for Jim and me; and support with all your hearts and minds and strength the work of God in this Church.

With a grateful heart,

The Rev. Martha McKee+, Vicar