

## **RECTOR'S REPORT**

### **The Rev. Phillip Parker**

As I was writing this report, I realized that I had been the Rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church for just over a month. I wondered just how long this report could be and what I would address. What have I done over these two weeks could justify being in a report?

The first thing that I would like to address is that I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as rector of All Saints'. The story that I tell is that after the closing Eucharist of the 2015 Annual Council, I was walking to the parking lot with Paul Stephens and jokingly said to him that in three years, after I finished seminary, it would be nice to serve as Curate at All Saints'. Paul just replied with something along the lines of, "We'll see." When I received word, that Paul had been called to the Diocesan office, I figured that any chance of serving at All Saints' was null and voided. However, here we are, and I can't be more overjoyed to now serve as your Rector. You have shown great love to me and my family. Thank you so much.

The second thing I would like to say is that I am thankful for the leadership at All Saints'. During the search and discernment process, I repeatedly heard that All Saints' was, "in a good place," and was a, "healthy parish." These comments came from Bishop Seage, Canon Paul Stephens, and the Rev. Peter Gray. To clarify, Peter Gray and I did not discuss the mediation process that Peter facilitated with All Saints'. However, after me telling him that a call had been made to serve as Rector of All Saints', Peter did state that All Saints' was in a "good place." This is due to the leadership of All Saints'. We need to thank our leadership for the hard work that they have done and continue to do for this church. I am confident that we will continue this level of leadership because of the love that the people of this church have for this church. I ask that we all continue to pray for the leadership of All Saints'.

It is not only the wonderful work of our Wardens and the Vestry, but also the hard work the staff of All Saints' does for the benefit of this church. Our Staff works long but rewarding hours to make sure that every aspect of our church lives' together runs smoothly. I don't believe that we could do what we do without the work that Nancy, Tommie, Michele, Taylor, Stacy, Rick and all the others who keep this church moving forward. We also need to say thank you for all the volunteer staff that blesses All Saints' with their gifts of time and talents. Thank you so much for what you do. I ask that we all continue to pray for our staff and when you get a chance, thank them for their work.

We also cannot forget about the work that Hannah and all the volunteers do in our outreach with Saints' Brew. This is truly a wonderful ministry that I am proud that All Saints' is involved with. It warms my heart to know that we are living out the Gospel message of caring for those in need with this ministry. This is not only true with Saints' Brew but also with the ability to give Hannah the space to work across Mississippi to address homelessness and poverty. Please pray for the work that they do and pray for those who are touched by their work.

One of the greatest gifts that All Saints' has been blessed to receive is the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Billy Walton. We need to thank him for his ministry here at All Saints' and for his ministry in his medical practice. We are reminded in the Book of Common Prayer that deacons are called to "interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world," and that at all times the deacon's "life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself." Rev. Walton lives out this calling everyday in his work here at church and in his practice. There have been many Sundays

when he has had to leave church between services because he was on call and was needed at the hospital. I am honored to serve at the Altar with Billy. Please continue to pray for the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Billy Walton.

Looking over this past month, I have had the honor of getting to know many of you. It has been a blessing to me to hear your stories. I hope that over the next few months, I may get to know more of you and hear your stories also. I have also had the honor to worship with you. We moved through the season of Advent together. We came together to worship on the holy night of Christmas Eve. We celebrated the light of the world coming into the world. We burned our Christmas greens and enjoyed king cakes. Time together is important. Time together in worship is important to our walk with Christ. Each time we are able to come together and share Eucharist together is a time when we get to enjoy a feast together. It warms my heart to look out from the behind the Altar and see you in the pews.

I can say we have done wonderfully this past month. Attendance in our worship services has been positive. We had 150 people present for our Advent Lessons and Carols and 256 people for our two Christmas Eve services. I know that church attendance is only a small part of what it means for our walk with Christ, but it does warm my heart to know that you have made time to attend church and to join us as we feast at the Altar. I encourage you to continue to make time in this busy world to attend church so that we can continue to share in this feast that God has given us. Pray for All Saints' and for those who are unable to join us for worship.

I am aware that with all the good that is going on at All Saints', there is also some hard decisions that we will have to make in the upcoming year. I am aware of the issue of church security and what this might look like. Before my arrival, All Saints' leadership made the hard decision to hire an off-duty officer to act as security on Sunday mornings. For some, this seemed like the best appropriate plan of action that the church could make for the welfare of those who worship on Sunday mornings. I am also aware that this did present a cause of concern for others. That by having an off-duty officer it may make it seem like we are not being as welcoming as we should be.

I will say that I can see both sides of this issue. My feelings concerning the issue of church security at this time is to metaphorically, "hit the reset button" and to start looking at this issue from a fresh point of view. We will be working over the next few months on developing a plan of action for security that, hopefully, shows that we are a welcoming and hospitable church, full of love and grace, that takes the safety of all of those who attend our church seriously. This is a high mark to make and will require everyone to work together as we develop our security plan. Please pray for our church as we move through this time.

Another issue that we need to continue to pray about is the fact that we are hosting Annual Council very soon. Much work has been done but there is still more work to do. But, let's not get lost in the work that needs to be done and forget that this is a great time for our church. We have the opportunity to share with our Diocese what we love about All Saints' and this wonderful city of Tupelo. I encourage everyone to attend the closing Eucharist on Sunday, February 9<sup>th</sup>. Annual Council is a wonderful way to meet old and new friends across our Diocese. Please support All Saints' as we welcome friends from across the Diocese to Annual Council on February 7<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup>.

As you may guess, coming in as a new Rector does present moments of fear and uncertainty. Both for myself and maybe for you as members of All Saints'. For you, the questions may be, "what is he going to do?", or "what is he going to change?". The best advice that I have received from other clergy who have experienced this transition was, "don't move a single chair or make the slightest change in your first six months to a year." This is advice that I am going to try to live into. While eventually there may be some changes to what we do or how we do something, we are going to take this slowly. The most important thing that we can do over the next few months is to build relationships with each other. I want to hear about you, I want to hear your stories. I want to get to know you because by getting to know you, I am getting to know All Saints'.

May Christ's peace be with you and please continue to pray that God will guide and comfort our church.