

RECTOR
Rev. Phillip Parker

Grace to you and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

By just about any measure, All Saints' had a great year in 2023. We had visitors with us just about every Sunday. We had several individuals who may have found All Saints' as their new church community. We explored new ministries that took us out into the community. We offered new ways for us to come together as a community. New formation classes were offered that took place at times other than Sunday mornings. Saints' Brew was able to move back inside so our guests could sit and eat a hot breakfast together as a community. Church really started to feel like church again.

In my report from last year, I stated that "Worship is the most important aspect of our church life." Worship continues to be the most important aspect of our lives together. The Holy Eucharist is what shapes us and grounds us in our life with Christ. The Holy Eucharist is what feeds us so that we can go out into this world and feed God's people. I always find it special to be with you on Sunday mornings and participate with you in this divine liturgy.

This past year we were delighted that Susanna Huwe, Michael Carson, Roya Walker, and Tanner Bryson were all baptized into Christ's church. We kept Bishop Seage busy with confirmations during his last annual visit with All Saints'. Emma Skates, Cori Smith, Andra Plunkett, Brian Plunkett, and Jimmy Holland were all confirmed by Bishop Seage into the Episcopal Church. All Saints' was excited to celebrate with Cindy Ring and Hud Hudnall as they exchanged vows and said, "I do." There were times in 2023 that with joy and grief, we said goodbye to some. May God's light perpetual shine upon Catherine High Stegall, Loree LaRue Sharon, Arnie Jones, and Jim Goodwin.

We often say that All Saints' is a church that welcomes everyone. And so, the Vestry of All Saints' decided to be intentional about welcoming everyone, both those who were here for the first time and those who grew up in this parish. It was one of the vestry's expectations for each vestry member to reach out to the people of All Saints' so that they may get to know each other a little better. We want everyone, no matter who they are, to feel welcomed, accepted, and affirmed here at All Saints'.

We also wanted to find new ways of reaching out to the community. What better way than with a tailgate. All Saints' cooked around 70 cheeseburgers and about that many hotdogs before heading off to a community tailgate at a Tupelo High School football game. We shared our food and love with those who were tailgating with us before the game. All Saints' went to the Robins Street Art stroll to spend the afternoon with our friends and neighbors and to let them know we care about this neighborhood. We served hot chocolate during the Christmas parade. All Saints' returned to Tupelo Pride fest to show our love and support. It was humbling having individuals come to our tent to tell us their stories. Often, they would be crying as they told us that they have never felt accepted by the church. These were just some of the ways All Saints' went out into the community to share love. We are looking forward to finding new ways of getting out into the community. If you would like to help, just let us know.

Christian formation does not always have to be on Sunday mornings. Les Alvis and Caleb Bedillion led "Experiencing the Scriptures" in the south breakout room of the Parish Hall one evening every other month. People enjoyed pizza while exploring and discussing different stories from Scripture. David and

Goliath, the Psalms, and translating the Holy Bible were some of the topics explored during this time. One November evening, we did something that I don't remember any other church doing. With only candles lighting the Nave, we heard the Book of Revelation read aloud from the beginning to the end. This was a unique experience that gave a new perspective to that often misunderstood book. This was then followed with a discussion of Revelation that took place once a week for several weeks.

One day last February, I was having lunch with our then out-going Senior Warden, Dinetia Newman. I asked the question, "do you think All Saints' could host a concert series?" My thought was that All Saints' would offer space for people to share their musical talents with anyone who would like to come and hear them. The Episcopal Church of the Resurrection in Austin, Texas offered something like this. The next thing I know, we are having a string quartet perform in the bell tower garden on a beautiful Sunday afternoon with around 80 people in attendance. This was only the beginning. Throughout the rest of 2023 we hosted a block party with a band in our Parish Hall, an Organ recital in the Nave, and Lessons and Carols. At each event we had guests from across our community come to All Saints' on a Sunday afternoon to hear great music and spend time together. This is the only event like this in Tupelo on a Sunday afternoon. I would like to thank Dinetia Newman, Dr. Debra Atkinson, Tracy Proctor and Dr. Taylor Sparks for all the work they have done to get this concert series off to a great start.

I would like to thank All Saints' for allowing me the time to do work in the larger church. Not only was I able to spend a week at Camp Bratton-Green for the Special Session II camp, but I was also able to go with several youth from our diocese to Baltimore for the Episcopal Youth Event. For a week this past July, 1500 Episcopal youth gathered at the University of Maryland for worship, formation, and fun. Thank you for letting me be a part of it. This event takes place every three years. Maybe next time some of our youth could get a chance to attend EYE.

As great of a year that All Saints' had in 2023, there are still some areas where we need to pay attention to and grow stronger in. One ministry that we need to work to make it stronger is our Children and Youth Ministry. Tommie Moore and our great Sunday School teachers do a fantastic job providing formation opportunities for our children on Sunday mornings. Our Sunday School teachers are committed to providing a good foundation for our children. However, as more children and youth come into the church, we need to make sure we are welcoming them into the church and seeing them as members of the church. They are not the future church; they are the church now. We need to be mindful of this and include them in our ministries and programs. We need to make sure we are offering what they need as they grow in the Body of Christ. One need that we do have is that of a youth minister. What I would love to see is that we could hire someone who not only works with our youth, but also our children. Someone who is involved with those who are just now starting Sunday School and all the way up to those in EYC. This would give our children the opportunity to build a relationship with someone during this important time in their lives. This relationship would continue all the way through high school. This would also allow this person to gain a sense of the needs of our children and youth.

How about after high school? We want to continue that relationship. We don't just forget about our youth when they graduate from High School and move on to the next chapter of their lives. Currently we have a ministry that throughout the fall and spring, we send little goodies and gift cards to our young adults who are away at college. We want them to know that we love them, support them, and are here for them. We want our young adults to know All Saints' will always be a home for them. So, can we ask

the question, could we do more? What would that look like? This is something we may want to think about.

One of the main areas we need to focus on, outside of worship, for this year is our capital debt. I know we are tired of hearing about the debt. The good news is that we are so close to having it paid off so we can burn this mortgage note. We need to stay focused just a little while longer and we will have it paid off. If you have pledged before, I ask that you continue your pledge. If you are new to All Saints' and are not aware of the debt, yes, we have some. This debt is from building the Programing building, the building with the Parish Hall. You may not know of the many ways this building is being used. It is not open just on Sundays. Most days of the week we have something happening here. Saints' Brew, Boy Scout Pack and Troop 85 meetings, Mississippi United to End Homelessness (MUTEH) offices, Pathway Montessori School, potlucks, yoga, and a variety of events to connect people to resources in the community are some of the events that take place here at All Saints' in the Program Building. We should be proud of how we use our space for the benefit of everyone in Tupelo. We are using what we have to do God's work. This spring, we will have a capital campaign pledge drive. Please pledge so we can burn this note.

I do want to thank everyone for their ministry at All Saints'. I often say that for a church our size, we do way more than we should be able to do. That is because of you. Thank you.

2023 was a good year for All Saints'. We can make, with God's help, 2024 even better. Let's continue to love and serve.