

Rector's Report 2024

My annual report is always an opportunity, in part, for us to look back at the previous year in ministry together. We can celebrate victories, as well as think about how we can do better in the future. Yes, reminiscence can be a good thing. I have personally been doing a lot of it recently. There's nothing like a milestone birthday with friends and family assembled to cause one to look back through the mists of time in great detail.

The human memory has a funny way of erasing a lot of the bad stuff, or at least overemphasizing the good. We can take shelter in memories of a cozy, playful, and carefree childhood as a way of insulating ourselves from the realities and responsibilities of now.

In the process of researching and shopping for my birthday party, I tripped the Star Wars algorithm, and boy, you would not believe the merchandise on offer—everything from homegoods to fine jewelry. What interested me, though, was a bit more nostalgic: a Facebook page dedicated exclusively to collecting vintage-only action figures and toys. (One of the rules one must abide by for membership is “No stormtrooper bleaching.” Really. Apparently they yellow over time—don't we all) It's fun to look at posts featuring others' often extensive (I mean whole rooms full) of a shared childhood. I have no such plans for the rectory, but it is important to keep a sense of fun and imagination throughout life, and to play every once in a while.

I suppose that it is impossible to be completely objective with your own memories. So while it is fun and even comforting to reminisce, living in the past is no way to live. There were problems then, too. In the Church and here at St. Mary's, one of the ideals we are striving to live into is appreciating the now. Of course, we cherish and learn from our past, but we do not idealize (or idolize) it. God is with us, and he is working in and through the people who are here right now—as St. John puts it: a peculiar people, zealous for good works.

With that framework in mind, let's take a look at our journey together in 2023 and dream of what blessings this year will bring.

The year started off quietly with a new addition to the rectory who needs no introduction. Adele, or “Della,” one of the unexpected offspring of Strawberry and that scoundrel Rocky, came into our lives. She is full of boundless energy and loves everyone and everything, especially coming to the church office during the week, and coffee hour on Sunday. She is a great friend of the members of our growing Sunday school class. It has been such a blessing to see more and more children running around the church, a trend which I hope continues this year.

In the spring, for the second year in a row, I attended the Episcopal Parish Network annual meeting, this time in Jacksonville, Florida. Pete accompanied me this time, and as usual it was replete with fantastic speakers and workshops, as well as lots of opportunities to network with other bishops, rectors, and lay leaders from across the church.

April brought another moving Holy Week and glorious Easter. Easter Day is always such a magnificent and uplifting experience, but Holy Week plays a vital part as well. If you haven’t attended the services of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday before, I highly commend them to you.

In early May, I attended The Gathering 2023, a triennial gathering of Gen-X clergy to which I have been invited since 2013. May was also the month of the consecration of our Bishop coadjutor, Matthew Heyd. The weekend included clergy time with the Presiding Bishop in Mamaroneck (we continue to hold Bp. Curry in our prayers), a diocesan dignitaries dinner at St. Bartholomew’s in Manhattan, and finally the main event, the consecration at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The procession alone took 45 minutes! St Mary’s was represented by our convention delegates, B and Pete, by our banner-bearer, Schuy, and of course, the rector. We closed out the month with our second “Camp Cocktails” party, this time on the great lawn of the church, at which we raised money to send children to the town-run summer camp whose parents could not otherwise afford it. I was also honored to serve on the cathedral’s Pride committee, and was invited to offer an original prayer at the opening service of evensong.

In the beginning of June, we were treated to a visit from St Mary's friend and former curate, the Rev Canon Dana Corsello, who was here to perform a baptism. I told her that we have so much fun when she comes; we can't wait for another baptism! That same weekend, St Mary's also provided the sound system for a mayoral candidate forum which was held at Chastellux. Many thanks to Pete for schlepping, setting up, breaking down, and returning the equipment to the church. That month, we also had glorious air conditioning installed in French House, which was sorely needed. I am sincerely grateful to those who donated for that project. June is also the month for graduations, and once again I represented St Mary's at both TPS and GFB high school. I distributed two St Mary's scholarships to college-bound students, and new this year, Rector's Awards to three graduates pursuing trades. We also brought back the popular and "no-fuss" covid-era outdoor cocktail fundraiser at the Tuxedo Club, which is always a great time. The month closed with the College for Congregational Development, which I attended along with JoAnn at the Graymoor Retreat Center in Garrison. It was an amazing time of connecting with others from across our diocese from extremely varied circumstances.

Several major projects also got underway around that time. The main stairway project, which had stalled out for about a year, finally came back to life when we found a trustworthy contractor thanks to a tip from Kimberly. The project grew in scope to include the repointing of the entire western facade and chimney, restoration of the chapel doors, and once winter is over, the final replacement of broken stone treads.

Thanks to a generous gift from Jane, and the incredible carpentry skills of Hristos, seven of the original double-hung windows in the rectory were removed and stripped to bare wood. The frames had extensive rot and were repaired, and even the pulleys, locks, and lifts were stripped. The end result is that they look and function like new. The next set of windows with extensive rot are on the other side of the house, where years of rainwater bouncing back off a rubber roof has caused considerable damage.

In July, Pete and I took our "grande vacance" in Italy, where among many other things, we enjoyed the hospitality of one of my dear friends from New Orleans days, who is now the rector of St. James Episcopal Church in

Florence, a parish with a number of historical ties to Tuxedo Park, including being the final resting place of a local resident's dog. In Florence, I found several treasures, which made an arduous journey home, where they will further ornament God's sanctuary for many years to come.

In August, the clergy of our deanery were finally allowed to resume our ministry to the Valley View nursing facility in Goshen for the first time since 2020.

In September we kicked off the program year with the return of our wonderful Schola and Sunday school. I also went into the city for a one-on-one lunch with our new bishop, which was time very well spent. The 23rd was a big day, as I met the Archbishop of Canterbury in the morning, and we had our very successful benefit dinner that night. A big thank you to Lili and Jane for all their efforts, Pete, the auctioneer, and to all those who donated items and attended. It was the most successful dinner we have ever held.

We began October with our always-popular St Francis Sunday pet blessing. The following week, St Mary's participated in the Tuxedo Stewardship Forum by once again providing the audio equipment for the event—thank you, Pete. That same week, we were blessed to attend the opening of an art exhibition at the Cathedral of St John the Divine entitled "Divine Pathways," by artist Anne Paterson which is made from fifteen miles of ribbons, each one with a prayer inscribed on it. The reveal was accompanied by the seldom-heard piece, *Spem in alium* c. 1570 by Thomas Tallis—seldom heard because it was composed for eight choirs of five voices each, for a total of forty different parts! It was truly breathtaking. Thank you, Jock, for the invitation. On the 15th, we celebrated St Mary's 135th year of consecration in grand style, including a magnificent *te deum* offered by our schola.

In November, the annual meeting of the Tuxedo Park Garden Club was held, and my time as its president came to an end. As a gesture of thanks for my tenure, I was given a beautiful weeping redbud (native!) that will grace the grounds of the rectory for many years to come. Each November also brings our annual diocesan convention, this year held at the Cathedral

of St John the Divine, with B and Pete as our delegates. We also wrapped up our stewardship appeal on Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday—many thanks to our outgoing chair, Inger for your years of dedication and leadership. To quote her, “this is not a deadline.” If you haven’t already, please do make your pledge to St Mary’s for 2024. We have plenty of pledge cards on hand.

The Daisies kicked off the holiday season in Tuxedo with their caroling concert at St Mary’s—it was truly adorable, and we are so happy to be the home of our local troop of Brownies and Girl Scouts, who are all growing up so quickly! The greening of the church was held on the 19th—many thanks to Wendy, Frank, and the extended Favia family, as well as the Clarkes, Cecily, B, Roy, Jane, and Pete. We also held the ever-popular rectory Christmas open house that weekend, and the only broken ornament was the fault of my wild-child, Della. A good time was had by all. Our Christmas celebrations were glorious, as always, with the highest attendance in many years. Many thanks to everyone who volunteered in so many ways.

By the numbers: sacraments in 2023

Eucharist 151

Baptisms 5

Burials 4

There were no marriages

We are scheduled for an episcopal visitation this October; this will be the opportunity for any confirmations or receptions.

Talk about membership slide.

As you can see, we pack a lot into a year at St. Mary’s. Our life together takes a great deal of dedication and commitment, and we must never lose sight of the reason we do all of this in the first place: we exist to glorify God, to preach and live the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to go forth into the world in the power of the Spirit to heal the sick, minister to the poor, and bind up the broken hearted. I know that there is no way I could do my work without all of you. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you, with special thanks to:

Our Music Ministry—Sheldon, Aileen, Anthony, Will, and Johanna Rose.

Music is an absolutely vital part of Christian worship, and especially in the Anglican tradition, we are fortunate to hear some of the most glorious music as we sing God's praises, and I am so very fortunate to work alongside a group of such talented and dedicated men and women. Sheldon and our *Schola Cantorum* have the support of their rector as they continue their important work of ever-refining the musical praises we offer unto God.

Altar guild—Wendy Favia, who dutifully sets up the altar for divine worship, but also the Seiberts, Serene, Sally, and the other members of the Favia family, who get called into service when extra muscle is needed. As you heard recently, Wendy is leading several altar guild training sessions, and we can really use some new volunteers.

Lay servers – all who serve as acolytes, lectors, eucharistic ministers, ushers, videographers. We are always in need of volunteers for all of these ministries as well.

Sunday school –Thank you to Kimberly, who along with Sally brought our Sunday school program back to life. As of today, Kimberly is no longer coordinating the program, and I am very excited to welcome Jennifer into that role. I am also grateful to Ava and Marley, who keep the peace and help with the lessons.

Hospitality – all those who host coffee hour throughout the year, especially Dennis, Aoife, Jennifer, and those who step in when we have no volunteers.

Special events team—Lili, Jane, Serene, and all others who create fabulous and memorable events for our community that are not only a lot of fun and “must-do’s” but also integral parts of our yearly budget.

Outreach—Sue and the Outreach Committee who do so much for our community and our world. I always think of Sue when I hear that line in the Christmas carol, “Good King Wenceslas:” “Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.”

Finance crew—JoAnn our treasurer, Natalia our bookkeeper, Charlie our investment expert, and Pete, who work throughout the year continuously to update our accounting processes to be clearer and more coherent.

Vestry—I am blessed to work with such a group of multi-talented people, and look forward to welcoming new and returning members. My sincere gratitude goes out to Allen Fowlkes, who would have been rotating off today, but who resigned ahead of the meeting due to plans for a move out of state.

Wardens—Lili & Jane: The wardens have a special direct working relationship with the rector. The senior warden is traditionally the “right hand,” while the junior warden traditionally oversees the fabric of the church—that is, the buildings, grounds, and all that entails. Both of you are truly a blessing to me, and I thank you for your faithfulness in this ministry.

There are so many others: The Emporium, the Stewardship committee, the Pastoral Care committee, the Buildings & Grounds committee, the cleaners, Pete with Communications, and of course our Rector Emeritus, Fr. Cromey.

We were blessed with some very generous donations this year for various purposes. I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all of our donors.

Special recognition—Jennifer. Welcome and re-introduce.

Vision for 2024—I am grateful for our most recent journey together. There is a feeling of collaboration, good will, and a desire to grow—not just numerically or financially, but spiritually and corporately. Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Like all fishermen, we must never grow weary of casting out our nets.

We were delighted this year to welcome several new families to St. Mary’s who have jumped in with both feet. Others who had drifted away have returned, and our Sunday attendance has been on an upward trajectory throughout 2023—let’s keep that going! People remain generous, and we

exceeded our stewardship goal for the year by more than \$10,000—let's also keep that up!

Most importantly, let's make 2024 a year in which we reminisce fondly about the past, embrace the present, and resolve (with God's help) to move forward in faith, growing intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually closer to our God and one another.