

Rector's Report, The Rev. Tracy J. Wells Miller

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. John's,

In 2019, we celebrated the 130th anniversary of our parish's founding and the 10th anniversary of our move from Capitola to Aptos. In June, we finished a parish-wide discernment process that began in the fall of 2018, designed to help us hear what God is calling us to now, in our second decade in Aptos.

The parish-wide discernment process revealed several things:

1. St. John's has always had a commitment to service and justice work, and we feel called to continue that work in the future. Of all the goals defined in the visioning process for our next 3-5 years, the one with perhaps the most energy and enthusiasm behind it was that we hope to be known as a "Dynamic, Serving Presence in the Community." This congregational mandate informed the Vestry's decision to accept a proposal from the Outreach Committee to set aside 10% of all undesignated bequests to the parish for outreach purposes.
2. Most people in the parish realize that our current building does not meet our day-to-day needs for meeting and office space. While we are not overflowing the worship space on a regular basis on Sunday mornings, it is inadequate for larger gatherings, particularly memorial services, and the lack of separate worship and parish hall spaces is also becoming more apparent and limiting.
3. We would like to see more attention given to religious education and spiritual formation of adults, youth, and children. Christian formation for all ages is a priority.
4. We need to focus more on caring for one another inside the parish – Pastoral Care and Welcoming are essential to the health of the parish and its future growth and flourishing.
5. We need to address how we will ensure that we have the resources necessary to support the parish into the future – both in terms of finances and people power.

We ended the parish-wide discernment process with a goal-setting workshop led by Liz Lindsley in June, which was well-attended. Seven different small groups met and set goals for the next year. The Vestry is beginning its own process of goal setting for 2020 by looking at the goals set by the working groups from the discernment process.

One of the major visible outcomes from the discernment process was the organizing of a beach cleanup at Seacliff State Beach on September 3, the day after Labor Day. "Reaching Hearts, Giving Voice," a group that emerged from the discernment process, coordinated that event and commissioned the design of St. John's shirts for all to wear while cleaning the beach, making us visible as a "dynamic, serving presence" in our community. The "Hearts & Voices" group, as they are calling themselves, is focused on P.R., marketing, and visibility for St. John's and is being led by Robbie Kilpatrick.

The St. John's shirts featured a new St. John's logo, centered on the iconic bell tower that represents a visual common thread between the old church building in Capitola and the new church in Aptos. The logo was designed by parishioner Ann Henry, who was also St. John's Honored Woman in 2019.

2019 also saw major staffing changes: the hiring of our new Director of Music Ministries, who began in February, and the hiring of Lisa Freeman to direct our new Community Youth Program.

Also in June, Matt McCabe joined the staff as our volunteer sexton. Having an on-site sexton dedicated to caring for the buildings and grounds has made a huge difference in our common life together, most noticeably in Matt and his wife Patricia's setting up and cleaning up for events and our weekly Sunday coffee hour. We began holding weekly staff meetings in February, a practice that has continued throughout the year and has been a positive way to increase communication and camaraderie among the staff.

The Stewardship Committee was revived under Karen Greenleaf's leadership in late spring, and in March I created a Pastoral Care Committee, chaired by Win Fernald, to organize and oversee the parish's caring ministries, including welcoming and incorporating newcomers.

This fall, I began holding "open office hours" once a week at The Farm, a local bakery and café on Soquel Drive near Cabrillo College. This no-appointment-necessary time frame when I am publicly available to meet with anyone – whether about practical or functional matters or to discuss more personal pastoral needs – has been a positive way to connect with parishioners and make myself more accessible, both to the parish and the community at large.

As we begin 2020, I am aware that we are at a key point in our parish's history. There are exciting things on the rise and there is new energy around our call to serve God in our community. At the same time, as we are aware of rising costs and declining resources, we realize we must seriously consider how we will sustain ourselves financially into the future. The decisions we make in this next year will set the stage for what kind of parish we will become in the next 130 years. I pray that God would give us the wisdom to know God's will and the courage to follow it.

With gratitude and hope,

Tracy Wells Miller+
Rector