

Sunday, Dec. 1, 2019

The new Advent Season is challenging us!!

Today was a beautiful start to our Advent season at St. Peter's, but I feel as though we are entering more than just the start of a new liturgical year!

Leah and I will be celebrating our 40th year at St. Peter's next year. Returning to Salisbury in 1978 left us conflicted between my roots at St. Francis and Leah's roots in the Episcopal Church. It wasn't a difficult choice; we knew the beautiful sanctuary and magnificent liturgical worship of St. Peter's were calling us home. As the new century began, I felt called to serve on the Vestry, as Warden, and for many years as Treasurer. During this tenure, I longed for St. Peter's to reach its full potential as a Christian church in downtown Salisbury. Something was missing and the church drifted both financially and in community. In 2009, with the retirement of Fr. David Tontonoz, I felt excited about the new chapter beginning. However, the past decade has been a very dark time in the financial and congregational life of the parish. Many families departed. In 2013 Fr. David Michaud was called by the Bishop to stabilize St. Peter's and seek to re-build the once vibrant congregation. He accepted the challenge and we have been blessed for that leadership.

Fast forward to this past spring at our annual meeting; there were calls for the Vestry to cease the practice of supporting church operations by borrowing from the endowment as had been done during the decade of challenge. The Vestry heard this message loud and clear and has tried to honor the parish guidance in preparing a budget for 2020. This fall, our annual pledge drive has fallen short of the financial needs to fully support operations of the parish, and the Vestry has been deeply praying how to handle the 2020 budget gap.

When I heard about the dilemma, and possible drastic options, I had to respond with what I see as a new, hopeful chapter in the life of St. Peter's. Two wonderful stars arrived earlier this year and began to shine light on the future life of the parish; Rev. Adele and Daniel. Never in our 40-years as parishioners had we witnessed all the pieces of the parish leadership puzzle to be in place at one time as now, bringing a glorious new future on the horizon for St. Peter's. But the budget challenge is still before us!

The letter sent by the Vestry this week is a wonderful outreach from our leadership. How will we respond? We can retreat into financial safety which I fear would forever squash hopes for the revival of St. Peter's and leave a most uncertain future for the parish. But I am passionate about the possibility before us and implore you to consider how you might join in this challenge. Additional pledge income is immediately needed as outlined in the parish letter. Be proactive about welcoming guests and visitors who enter our doors, they are the future!! Write, call, text, email the Vestry with your support for their prayerful choice to welcome this chapter with faith. Attend the presentations this Sunday after each service. To do nothing is to take a decision of retreat!!

This may be the most memorable Advent season in the past 100 years for St. Peter's!! Pray!!!!

-Dick Van Gelder