

## **Rector's Report, the Rev. Gaelyn Lei Evangreene**

Jesus said, in last week's gospel: "What are you looking for?" And this is the challenge before us today: what are we looking for, who are we listening to, what are we valuing most in our common life together? These are demanding concepts, for they compel us to consider our spiritual priorities. We must discern and decide what is important to us — what will we be looking for, what are we going to listen to, what will we value most in our common life together?

These are questions that require and charge us to consider our past. And these are questions that lead us to a full, honest, and accurate assessment of our current situation. But mostly, these are questions that inspire us to look to our future. This is the task of a Parish Annual Meeting just as we give thanks to those who have served in this past year and are rotating off their various roles with the vestry, Betsy, Doug, and Kelley, we also immediately look forward to see what is next in our common life and to welcome into leadership Nancie and Phil for vestry, and many others as we strive to seek and serve Christ in all persons here in Jackson County.

2022 has been a year of losses and of growth. We have been blessed by new members who not only attend worship on Sunday mornings but have joyfully jumped in to serve in multiple ways including being secret Advent Elves beautifully decorating our doors and Cinderfella who seems amazingly happy washing dishes and loading the dishwasher as greeting people at the door.

In August, we held the largest service since 2018 when we celebrated the life of Barbara Hardie. In September, after a long illness Dottie Burnette died and was mourned by many who struggled to accept that she was not being buried from the church. In November, Jere Annis, a strong example of faith and testimony to the goodness of God died, leaving a gap that cannot be replaced in many people's lives.

And there have been losses other than deaths. Ongoing health challenges have kept faithful parishioners worshipping online and via home communion visits, changing the makeup of our Sunday morning worship. And of course a loss we are all feeling of Muff moving to Gray Stone, SC just a few weeks ago.

Growth, loss, change, and celebration. These are all parts of the life of a community. We bear with one another and hold each other up through meals, calls, prayers, and visits. We are good at caring for one another; this is a definite strength of St. David's.

You have heard me say repeatedly that there is a world outside of this church that also needs the love of Christ that we share here that needs to be brought to them. I believe we have been given the opportunity to share the gospel in a new way, a way that highlights Jesus' love and care for everyone.

Both Nancie and Phil in their bios they submitted for their nominations mentioned the need to grow, the need to attract new people to St. David's "somehow" as Phil said and "as a beacon of hope" as Nancie said. The church is changing and changing in ways we cannot completely see at this time. Change can be exciting and Spirit-filled.

When Jesus asks us, "what are you looking for?" Let's boldly respond that we are looking for Jesus and seeking him in serving others. To better equip our vestry to lead in this new "post-Covid" era the vestry will be participating in the diocesan Vestry Academy for small parishes. During this weekend we hope to learn how to adapt to our current situation and how to lead in what many of us see as uncertain times.

Uncertainty times was what we experienced when we began reviewing the budget this year and the finance committee realized that we did not have enough money in pledges to cover our current commitments. But the committee was not in doubt of the commitment of the people of St. David's to the work we have to do and

came forward to meet our budget. Keeping in place all areas of our budget including areas for Christian formation.

This year I will be using a portion of my Professional Development budget for Core Training in Godly Play in aid of future Christian Formation at St. David's. I have shared with some of you in the past that since coming to St. David's I have seen an after school time of formation with children in our Children's Room. While I cannot foresee all that God is calling us to, I can respond by preparing and discerning in community how to take our next steps. I ask for your prayers throughout the year as I learn and we listen to where God is calling us.

So what are we looking for? We are looking for Jesus and looking for how to best follow him and bring his love to those around us. I am excited about where God is leading us and am ready to trust in God's presence with us as we move forward.