

Good morning. The Vestry would like you to know about five activities related to our church. Father Vang has allotted me just 90 seconds per subject, so I will be concise.

**First, Stewardship:** Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines stewardship as "the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care." As Christians, we are stewards of the Christian faith and are stewards of the churches, such as our beautiful, historic church, where we worship Jesus in furtherance of our faith.

While we are launching a stewardship campaign seeking a pledge from you for next year, we should reflect and pray on how we can be good stewards of our Christian faith and this Bethesda church. Stewardship is really a year-round responsibility. Your financial support is needed, for example, to keep the lights on and the services going. As previously stated when we kicked-off the Rector Search process in January, we need to increase our pledge and plate by \$50,000 annually to afford a new full-time Rector. Treasurer John Van der Veer and Assistant Treasurer Jami Piraino will be providing regular updates on plate income and our expenses in the bulletin.

Finally, stewardship is not just financial but also involves the giving of one's time and talents. There are many ways in which you can help, and be good stewards of Bethesda, through volunteering to serve on the Altar Guild, as an Usher, or on a church committee. If you're interested in volunteer opportunities, please speak with Father Vang, me or another Vestry member.

**Second, the Rector Search:** As you may recall, there are 21 steps in the Standard Parish Transition to a new Rector, which break down into four phases. Phase I is "The Information Phase," which we've already completed. We are in Phase II, "The Advertisement Phase." The Vestry has prepared the Parish Office of Transition Ministry (or "OTM") Portfolio for the OTM website, and the Diocese Transition Minister as posted OTM Portfolio on the OTM website. We have also advertised the Rector position in *The Living Church* and with the Episcopal Church News Service.

We are also moving into Phase III, "The Evaluation Phase." The Vestry is drafting interview questions for the applicants and their references. We have

received three applications which are being evaluated. Phone interviews with the applicants will be scheduled for dates in November.

We suspect the low number of applications may be a result of Bishop Love's position on same gender marriages, which is inconsistent with the National Episcopal Church and the vast majority of dioceses across the nation. We expect to receive Bishop Love's announcement on November 11, regarding the Albany Diocese's implementation of the recent National Church Resolution allowing same gender marriages.

Once qualified candidates have been identified, we will begin "The Selection Phase." Upon the Bishop's approval of the finalist, the Vestry will call a new Rector.

**Third, New Parish House and Mercy House of Saratoga:** As previously announced, Bethesda received non-binding letters of intent from five community-service organizations which want to partner with Bethesda to accommodate more than 40 guests in one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments in the second, third

and fourth floors of Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center. The five organizations partnering with Bethesda are:

1. Backstretch Employee Service Team, or BEST, which helps race-track workers who are either injured and recuperating, or have substance use disorders and are participating in recovery programs;
2. Wellspring, which helps victims of domestic violence including homeless families;
3. Veterans and Community Housing Coalition, which helps homeless military veterans;
4. Transitional Services Association, or TSA, which helps homeless individuals with mental illness or substance use disorders; and
5. In Our Name, which is part of Skidmore College's Restorative Justice project, which plans to offer an occasional café operation where people can pay according to their financial means.

By collaborating with these other charitable organizations, Bethesda is abiding by Jesus' commandment of loving thy neighbor by helping the homeless.

To further advance this religious mission of Bethesda, the Vestry has authorized the incorporation of Mercy House of Saratoga, Inc., a non-denominational, non-profit enterprise that will manage the supportive housing to be incorporated into the New Parish House. Initial incorporators will include members of the Vestry and Building Committee, and they will select the Mercy House Board of Directors. The board of Mercy House may include a few members of the community not otherwise affiliated with Bethesda, as a way of broadening Bethesda's outreach in the community. Anyone from the congregation interested in serving on the board of Mercy House please contact me.

**Fourth, a New Mission Committee:** We practice our Christian faith through charitable works, which we can do in collaboration with our five partner organizations. For example, with Veterans' Day next month, there is the Veteran's Ball on November 4<sup>th</sup>, from 5:00 pm until 9:00 pm, in the Hall of Springs, with proceeds supporting the Veterans and Community Housing Coalition. If you, like me, cannot attend, you can still donate to this worthy cause of helping those who have served and defended our great nation.

The Veterans and Community Housing Coalition also has needs for the upcoming holiday season. You can donate gift cards such as pre-paid Visa cards or Target gift cards, so that their veteran-clients can purchase gifts and food for their families. On Veterans' Day, Sunday, November 11, we will have a secure box in the rear of the church to collect donated gift cards for veterans. We will deliver the donated gift cards to the Veterans and Community Housing Coalition which will provide the gift cards to veterans to purchase Christmas presents for their families.

Another instance of how we, as a congregation, can help those in need is by donating a toy or other item during our Advent Lessons and Carols service on Sunday, December 2 at 3:00 pm. Those donations will then be provided to two other partner organizations – Wellspring and TSA - for distribution to local families to help make their Christmas holidays more joyful. Additional information on this giving opportunity will be in upcoming bulletins and next Bethesda newsletter.

These are two examples of how our new Mission Committee can help others. If you're interested in serving on the Mission Committee, please speak with Father Vang, me or another Vestry member.

**Finally, Church Restoration Projects:** As a result of your generosity at last year's summer party, one window is at Lamb Studios being restored. With this year's summer party contributions, we are proceeding with renovating the front main doors to the church. We expect work to begin within the coming weeks, changing the wooden doors to swing outwards, and installing an inner glass door as well. A contractor has been designated, and final estimates are forthcoming. Thank you for your financial support to repair and improve our church's main doors.

We are also undertaking a roof repair. A piece of wooden trim fell from the east transept on the Feast of the Dedication. Urgent roof repairs are called for to mitigate water incursion at that point in the building. A contractor, Duncan & Cahill, submitted an estimate of under \$10,000, based on a careful assessment that was done by our architect, along with Mark Griffin, Tom Remington and Gordon Boyd. Steve Rucker has also been instrumental in assessing the church

roof. Although the repair work is urgent to make things safe, we are hopeful that an outside grant will help us afford an entire new roof within the next two years.

In conclusion, these five subject matters are all important to our church and our community. None of these things happen without people working together, donating their time, talents and money. We are all blessed by God in one or more ways, and I think God delights in seeing His people come together, using their God-given gifts, and doing good works in the world. This is following Jesus' commandment of loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

We are doing just that – together, as a congregation, we are supporting Bethesda's ministry; maintaining and improving this wonderful church building; and helping the less fortunate in our community – in accordance with God's will. We are being good stewards for God.

Thank you for your attention this morning and continued support of Bethesda.

