

Good morning, and happy new year. There are several topics the Vestry would you to be updated on.

**1. New Parish House and Mercy House of Saratoga:** Bethesda is collaborating with five community-service organizations - Wellspring, Veterans and Community Housing Coalition, Transitional Services Association (TSA), and Backstretch Employee Service Team (BEST) - to accommodate in the upper three floors of Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center more than 40 people, including children, who would otherwise be homeless. To facilitate this religious mission of Bethesda, the Vestry authorized the creation of Mercy House of Saratoga, Inc., a non-denominational, non-profit corporation to manage this supportive housing initiative. The Mercy House Board of Director approved by the Vestry are Gordon Boyd, Laura Bradigan, Mark Claverie, Mark Griffin, Doug Huston, Howard Nelson, Mary Sanders Shartle and Mary Withington. An application will be filed this week with the IRS, seeking 501-c-3 tax exempt status for Mercy House of Saratoga.

Since BEST will use the fourth floor from April through October, we are exploring options for the fourth floor to serve those in need during the winter months. We have had several meetings with representatives of Shelters of Saratoga regarding whether the fourth floor could accommodate the Code Blue program and house homeless individuals overnight when it is freezing cold outside. Those discussions are on-going, and we are optimistic that Bethesda and Mercy House can help provide a long-term solution for housing the Code Blue program. By helping and housing the homeless, Bethesda is abiding by Jesus' great commandment of loving thy neighbor.

**2. Bethesda's Mission Committee Work:** Thank you for your donations to help those in need in our community during the holiday season. Your generosity resulted in well over \$1,000 in gift cards for homeless military veterans and victims of domestic violence, as well as other homeless individuals and families. We also collected children's toys, crafting materials and other items. These charitable works, which will continue in 2019, are a means of practicing our Christian faith. If you're interested in serving on the Mission Committee to help

organize future mission-related activities, please speak with me, Father Vang, or a Vestry member.

**3. Church Restoration Projects:** Contractors have examined the front main doors to the church and have tested the hinges. The plan is to restore the historic wooden doors and reverse the doors' swing outwards towards the street. Additionally, new inner glass doors will be installed. These improvements will enable us to use the main entrance to the church and open the wood doors at times so people can see into the church, while maintaining security and energy efficiency. General contractor Duncan and Cahill is working with several sub-contractors to prepare an estimate, which we anticipate receiving in the next week or two. Your financial support of this project is greatly appreciated.

The roof over the east transept was recently repaired to prevent leaks and water damage. A parishioner made a generous donation to off-set the expense of this repair. In the future, we will apply for a state grant to cover much of the cost for a new roof.

**4. The Rector Search:** The Vestry has received four applications from priests seeking to be Bethesda's next permanent Rector. We had planned to conduct telephone interviews with the applicants in November. However, uncertainty surrounding the impact of Bishop Love's proclamation prohibiting same gender marriages in the Albany Diocese, along with a busy holiday season, caused delay in conducting these initial interviews. We continue to advertise the position and will schedule the phone interviews in the coming weeks. There will be more news on the Rector search at the Annual Meeting on January 29.

**5. Bishop William Love:** National Episcopal Church Resolution B012 went into effect in December, and Bishop Love continues to refuse to allow same gender marriage ceremonies in the Albany Diocese. While there are rumors of activities and possible action by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and the House of Bishops in response to Bishop Love's conduct, there is no reliable information to report. Consequently, the Vestry has held-off hosting a meeting until there is an indication of what may transpire regarding Bishop Love and same-gender marriage in our diocese. As you know, we at Bethesda are undertaking a lot of

important work and any speculation as to what may or may not happen only disrupts our focus.

Bishop Love is aware most of the Bethesda congregation does not agree with him on same-gender marriage. Bishop Love will visit Bethesda on Sunday, January 27, to lead services at 8 am and 10 am, and to confirm and receive individuals into the Episcopal Church. By attending a service on January 27, it will demonstrate that we at Bethesda practice our Christian faith by loving and respecting others, even those with whom we may disagree. We can show Bishop Love that despite our differences, we follow Christ's teachings about turning the other cheek and loving everyone, without exception or qualification. We also should turn out in great numbers to support our fellow Christians being confirmed or received into the church.

Lastly, on a personal note, I will be away from Saratoga, Bethesda, and most importantly, my family over the next ten weeks. I have the honor and privilege of attending the FBI National Academy in Virginia, starting tomorrow. It is a professional course of academic study and fitness tests for select U.S. and

international law enforcement managers. The ten-week program - which provides coursework in intelligence theory, counter-terrorism, management science, law enforcement communication, and so forth - serves to improve the administration of justice in law enforcement agencies and to raise law enforcement standards, knowledge, and cooperation worldwide. I plan to come home some weekends and will keep current on Bethesda's projects and activities through email. While I'm there your support and prayers are most welcome for me and my family. Thank you, and may God bless you.