

April 2024

NEWTON HIGHLANDS MA

Episcopal Parish of Saint Paul



Episcopal Parish of Saint Paul
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 **Parish Profile**

Welcome to the Parish of Saint Paul!



Some of our group gathered in 2023 to send Mandi Rice off to postulancy.

The Parish of Saint Paul (POSP) in Newton, Massachusetts has been a small, hearty, and unpretentious Episcopal parish since 1883.

The co-wardens and Vestry of POSP welcome the chance to introduce you to our enthusiastic, 'small but mighty' congregation.

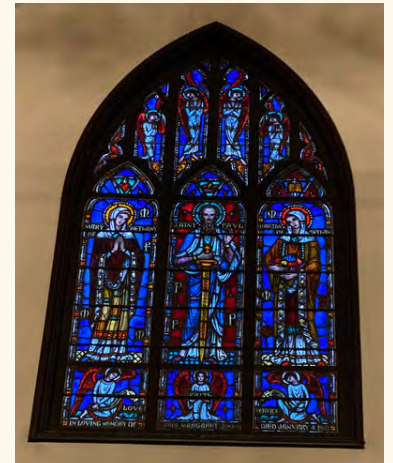
MISSION



Our village church has a traditional wooden structure. It has been hosting worship for 140 years.



At times in the past, we have had enough young folks to have an active children's service.



At a Vestry retreat in June, 2022, the leadership of the parish drafted a new parish mission statement. Although we have stalled on completing the rollout of this new mission statement to the larger membership, we trust it may give you a sense of what we are all about and remain open to further discussion and ratification of the mission with our new rector.

PURPOSE:

We are learning how to create a new kind of spiritual community in today's world, hearing and responding to the questions that God is still asking.

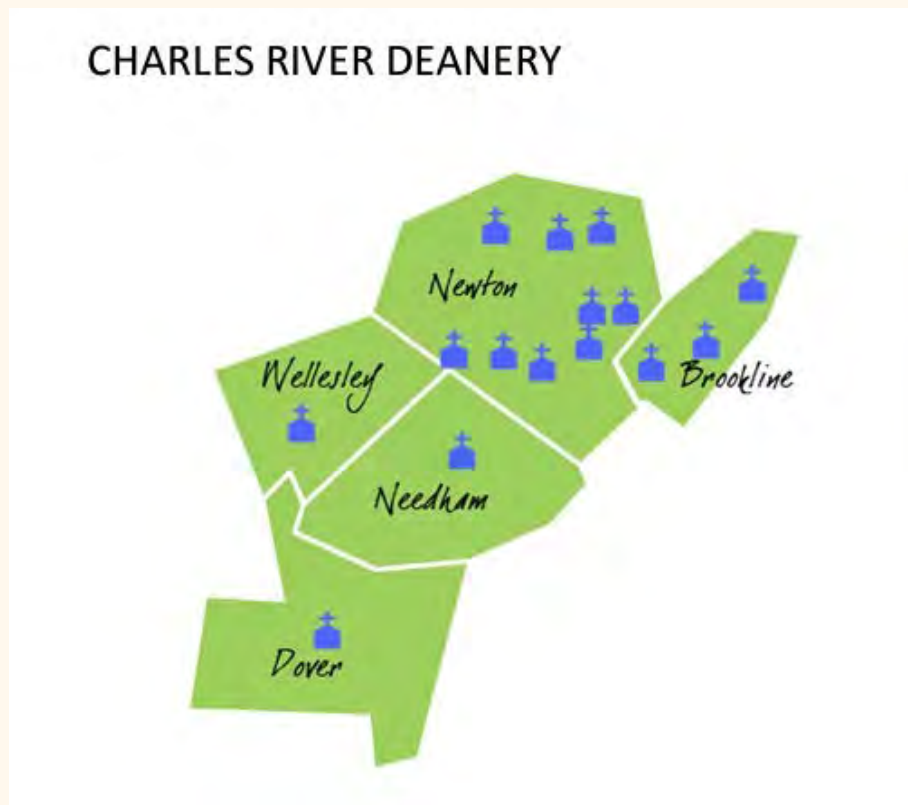
WHAT WE DO:

- We seek to understand and enact equity justice —so that we all may be equal in Christ.
- We welcome the messiness and the pain of life, in communion with The Being we call God.

HOW WE DO IT:

- We treasure our beloved community, creating beauty together through music, worship, celebration, and service.
- We practice radical inclusivity, actively inviting and including people who may not have found a church home elsewhere. We are learning how to love in a complex world.

WHERE WE ARE



Newton, an 80K-strong suburb of Boston, is divided into 13 villages. These villages have played host to as many as 8 (and now 7) Episcopal parishes, each having evolved from the days of the “neighborhood church” with their own concerns, personality, and take on worship and theology. POSP is located within the village of Newton Highlands. It is also one of 14 Episcopal parishes that comprise the Charles River Deanery, an administrative subregion within the Diocese of Massachusetts, which offers opportunities of collaboration and synergy with our neighboring parishes both within and beyond Newton.

Newton is located in the Metro West section of Boston.

At the time of POSP’s founding, it was situated comfortably within a majority Protestant burgeoning bedroom suburb of Boston with the current MBTA Green Line and CommuterRail driving the area’s development. Access to public transportation is an attractive resource for residents and continues to have great potential for church revitalization: we are mere steps from the Newton Highlands stop on the MBTA Green “D” subway line which connects us to downtown Boston. Newton’s comparatively multicultural and international population and its innovative and highly-ranked school system are additional strengths of our location. Currently, religious observance in the Newton area is more evenly divided between Protestant, Catholic and Jewish traditions — with many in each of these groups migrating increasingly to the “none” religion. There is a growing population of other world religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, including a large number of Chinese families. As a congregation of seekers and highly-motivated lifelong learners, we seek out opportunities to learn from our neighbors’ faiths and ally with them in service.

WHO WE ARE



Maeve Ward (center, in lavender sweater) was a very early and active crusader for climate justice and her influence is felt today in St. Paul's.



Despite fewer Episcopalians in the local mix, the need for spiritual community is crying out to be addressed here: youth mental health stress, desire to build a sustainable future for the Earth, recent immigrant families building a new life away from their support networks of origin, those who would value a judgment-free, no application required, multi-generational spiritual community where individuals are known and loved while participating actively in good works, worship, and spiritual growth. POSP has been home to many interfaith families over the years — and **openness to the full spectrum of human spiritual expression has been a strength of the parish.**

Over the last 10 years, POSP has evolved from a multi-generational congregation of around 100 people to a cohort of more like 30-40 mostly late-middle-aged and elderly congregants. Many of the members of this small, loyal core wear many hats — i.e. musicians, altar guild, Vestry, hospitality, communication, pastoral care — that allow the basic functions of the parish to continue — but with little to no reserve “bench” of volunteers waiting in the wings when a key volunteer needs to step away — and at a level of stress and involvement for several volunteers that often turns church into “work” in a way that leads to burnout and lack of spiritual sustenance.

POSP has been notable for generations for its ease and willingness to take on new, interesting, important ways of being before they were mainstream. We were **diocese-leaders in centering environmental awareness and sustainability** — from minimizing our use of paper and plastic to undertaking a capital campaign to update to an energy efficient heating system in our old building. In the 2020s, we seek to identify more ways we can make a difference in the world through **environmental stewardship and environmental justice for people near and far.**



During the pandemic, when we couldn't gather indoors, we created wonderful community gatherings on our church grounds.

We were also **among the first in the Diocese to hire a woman ordained to the priesthood as our rector, and likely among the first to have a woman as Senior Warden. For more than two decades, we have embraced a Co-Warden model of lay leadership which we have found to be empowering, supportive and collaborative in nature.**

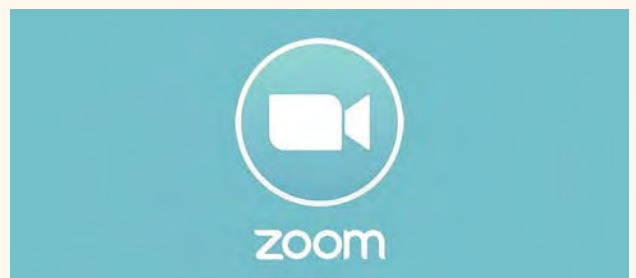
For generations, we have been blessed with beloved, dynamic **lay and clergy leaders and parishioners who were members of the LGBTQ community.** Long before the marriage laws caught up in 2015, POSP blessed the unions of LGBTQ members. In recent years, we committed to flying the rainbow flag as an external sign of God's welcome that echoes our long-term atmosphere of joy and openness, of feelings of comfort, safety, and deep respect for each individual and their story.

We have similarly long enjoyed the lack of stereotypical Episcopalian stuffiness — people come dressed as they are, families come in all shapes and sizes — with many individual seekers comfortable worshipping here on their own. **Several of us, and/or our children, identify as neurodivergent.** Offering a welcoming worship space for all kinds of minds may be another of our charisms, and one that we could further build upon. Children are more than welcome: there's plenty of pew space for everyone -- as well as a cozy area in which to toddle, stretch out, nurse, or color with crayons.



Some people call us 'quirky'... and our inflatable unicorn tells people that they should expect the unexpected from St. Paul's.

As a congregation we are now smaller but also in some ways more diverse than the surrounding neighborhood was when POSP was founded. However, we are no longer a “neighborhood parish” as when most parishioners lived nearby. Through the years we have attracted weekly congregants coming from near as well as from quite far. Currently about half or fewer of the regular attendees live within walking distance. Most of the rest live in contiguous cities / towns. Although we see the value of serving those who are closest by, we recognize that **via online worship and other means we may find more compatible members and partners by looking further afield, even by seeking partners in service, education, and community-building from other denominations, other faiths, or those holding no official faith.**



BUILDING AND GROUNDS



Our grounds include a meditation garden with a stone altar, and a stone walking labyrinth.

POSP is a sweet, small village church. The sanctuary, which **seats approximately 80** people, features dramatic arching wooden beams in the classic timber frame style. Our Parish Hall has space for meetings and dinners, as well as a **full performance stage** which is used by youth groups and by our tenants, including an evangelical congregation, NewCity Church. On the ground floor, the priest's office, the parish administration office, a choir room and sacristy, a small kitchen, and an accessible bathroom round out the facilities. Our undercroft features a large **multi-purpose room** which is currently rented to another religious organization, a large kitchen, a Christian Education office, and two more bathrooms.

In 2016, the parish took up the issue of **environmental stewardship** in the context of our own building. We applied and received the go-ahead to replace the oil burning furnace that we had prayed over for years. Working with diocesan environmental experts (Tom Nutt Powell, etc) , HVAC engineers and a parish "green team," our loan application was a big financial undertaking, but one we all felt was critical to our mission to be good stewards. We now have a zoned system that is cleaner and more efficient.

Our grounds include a **meditation garden complete with a stone altar**, where we occasionally hold sunrise and other services. We also have a **stone walking labyrinth** which was built as an Eagle Scout project by one of our parishioners.

Behind the church is our **rectory**, which is currently rented. We also have another rental property, a small house in another part of Newton.



WORSHIP



For All Saints Day, we create an annual altar of the saints among us.

Currently, we offer **one weekly Eucharist service on Sundays at 10:30am, complete with homemade communion bread.** Our worship, typically based on the BCP's Rite II, is perhaps most marked by its **inclusive language, lack of formality, and a variety of sources, including the New Zealand prayer book and the following Statement of Faith adapted from the Iona Community:**

We believe in God, whose love is the source of all life and the desire of our lives, Whose love was given a human face in Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was crucified by the evil that waits to enslave us all, and whose love, defeating even death, is our glorious promise of freedom. Therefore, though we are sometimes fearful and full of doubt, we put our trust in God; and in the name of Jesus Christ we commit ourselves, in the service of others, to seek justice, and to live in peace; to care for the earth, and to share the commonwealth of God's goodness; to live in the freedom of forgiveness, and the power of the Spirit of love. And in the company of the faithful we will be the church, a community of flawed and forgiving disciples, for the glory of God alone. Amen.

Statement of Faith adapted from the Iona Abbey Worship Book, © 2001 The Iona Community

In a recent parish survey, respondents mentioned the importance of inclusive language as an aspect of our inclusive welcome and as a means of their re-imagining God with a different face or in a more expansive way. We consistently introduce our worship services with a fully inclusive welcome: "From wherever you come, with whatever you bring, you are welcome here."

We are a congregation of seekers and teachers. Many of us have long identified as Episcopalian. Several of us were raised as Roman Catholics, others as mainline Protestant, or evangelical / evangelical-adjacent, and we have a number of people whose spouses follow different religious traditions. No matter where we have come from, **many identify POSP as a sanctuary from pain or rejection caused in other religious settings earlier in our lives.** One young person raised at POSP described us as a congregation full of people recovering from religious trauma. If this is the case, perhaps welcoming others from similar experiences could be one of our more formal charisms.

In the course of re-inhabiting our sanctuary for live services post-Covid, we committed to offering **full hybrid connectivity**—meaning that remote participants can be lectors and otherwise participate actively in services, as opposed to being passive recipients of a livestream. We employ technical AV helpers every Sunday to make this possible, with an array of mics, cameras, and speakers.

Our commitment to full hybrid worship continues to this day, making it possible for retired, traveling, or housebound parishioners to participate across the miles. We also continue to broadcast a video feed via Facebook, which we hope can serve as an outreach opportunity.

MUSIC



Our all-volunteer choir rises to the occasion for Christmas and other holidays.

While our numbers are down, those of us who are left are doing as much music with as much joy as possible. There are regularly a **keyboardist and four singers**, supplemented on holidays with other members of the congregation who can't make the year-long commitment to singing. **In addition to piano and/or pipe organ, we usually have a cello and often also a fiddle** played by members of the parish. For many, music is an essential element of POSP's worship, and runs the gamut of formal anthems composed recently, tried and true favorites from Bach, plainchant, familiar hymns from the 1982 Hymnal, LEVAS, and Wonder Love and Praise.

Our choir is composed (pun) of lifelong volunteer church musicians. We've been singing together as a choir for decades (literally). We love the traditional and the modern, from medieval church music to contemporary hymns, to contemporary classical and jazz composed by professional musicians who are friends of the parish.

In recent years, choir members augmented by others have enjoyed presenting **special music services** (including Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar, Beatles Sunday, Gershwin Sunday, Bacharach Sunday, and our own "JazzBlest" liturgy). Our singers have also enjoyed working with a professional organist in the Advent season, making our eternal balancing peace between our imperfections and our joy and appreciation for the opportunity to worship God through music in different ways.

FORMATION



We welcome children of all ages, although today our members are mostly older adults. In the back of the sanctuary, we host a 'Prayground' so kids can stay with parents in the service if desired.



CHILDREN AND YOUTH

While we have had a robust youth program in the past, **our current membership does not include school-age children.** We see this as a reflection of changing priorities among today's young families, but would be open to rebuilding the program if and as we can attract participants.

ADULT FORMATION

In recent years, adult education has primarily been **lay-led.** We have been blessed with the participation of several talented and enthusiastic leaders who have facilitated study series on Climate Change, the poetry of Advent, and more.



PASTORAL CARE



We love celebrating the joyous occasions as well as comforting the afflicted.

POSP **maintains an active pastoral care committee** whose members participate in helping parishioners in need, keeping tabs on those who are housebound, and reaching out to those we have not seen recently. The committee also sees its mission as continuing to weave the fabric of the community, through active listening and simple acts of kindness, whether providing rides to church or taking people to medical appointments.

We look forward to the renewed presence of a priest among us to oversee and head this vital component of our parish life. We see the **priest as having the primary and central pastoral care role in our congregation**, providing personal spiritual support and direction as needed to all members of the parish who seek it, and supervising others in such ministry when applicable.

OUTREACH



We are especially proud of our ongoing work with the Global Village Childrens Project in Uganda.

As well as welcoming people in, outreach is also important to us as a tangible expression of God's love in the world. Prior to Covid closures we participated in **many direct outreach programs** such as serving quarterly at a meal program run by the United Way, taking sandwiches to Common Cathedral (a program for unhoused people sponsored by the Cathedral), and assembling backpacks full of school supplies for Boston's Epiphany School. We also teamed with other Newton Episcopal parishes to plan and prepare breakfast and lunch for the B-SAFE summer fun and learning program for neighborhood children.

We helped to found, guide, and staff ministries that continue to thrive, such as the **Centre Street Food Pantry** in Newton. One parishioner writes, "The founding of the Centre Street Food Pantry (with two other parishes in town) in 2012 stands out. The pantry has become a wonderful resource to many citizens from Newton and surrounding towns." The Pantry is still located at Trinity in Newton Centre; POSP folk continue to serve in leadership positions and volunteer there. Now that Covid limitations are lifted, we are gearing up to resume holding frequent food drives for them. Need is great; post Covid it continues to increase. Currently the CSFP serves over 200 families per week.

As we have for years, we continue to provide **higher education and a sustainable and safe home for children in Uganda who have been orphaned by AIDS** through our support of the Global Village Children's Project (<http://gvcporphans.org>). We recently held a fundraiser concert and information session to spread the word more widely about the work there, and POSP parishioners have been instrumental in providing housing for and otherwise helping the GVCP founder on her trips to the US for fundraising and medical care. A powerhouse of a parishioner has written grants that have brought substantial additional funds to GVCP from the Dioceses of Massachusetts and other granting agencies.



For many years, confirmation candidates and other members of the parish have contributed bottles and cans to raise money for a hot lunch program run by Project Plenty in Belize.

Currently, St Paul's parishioners continue to collect return for deposit bottles and cans in order to financially support -- via our partnering with the NGO "Plenty" -- rural solar energy development in southern Belize, as well as to help finance Plenty's organic school garden projects in that region, which in turn provide produce for public school hot lunch programs.

We have put parishioners forward for ordination: currently **a former member is a postulant for ordination in Diocese of Mass;** at least 7 other former parishioners or interns have gone on to ordination in the last 25 years.

Individuals sponsor parishioners' causes. Parishioners invite each other to sponsor fundraising for their particular passions: through them we learn about and participate in the Walk for Hunger, the Crop Walk, walk vs. cancer, and the Winter Walk.

COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIPS



It's a joy to share our space with the NewCity Church, an evangelical church plant.

POSP is committed to using our resources in service to our faith. **This includes partnering with various community organizations. Right now, we rent our Parish Hall (on Sunday mornings) and our undercroft to an evangelical church plant called NewCity Church.** We have been delighted to work with NewCity to find ways to have both churches' services complement each other. The founding pastor of NewCity is co-chair of the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association and is deeply connected in Newton and other local clergy groups. NewCity attracts a younger and more racially / economically diverse congregation than ours currently is, and does quite a lot of direct service locally, especially to those with food insecurity. We are excited to continue exploring shared service and outreach opportunities.

This collaboration happened because we learned that a new congregation had come into the neighborhood; our then-clergy reached out to get to know them; we invited them to the annual interfaith Village Day worship (it was our year to host). Shortly afterwards, zoning issues at the space they had rented and partially renovated for worship and service caused them to have to move out, despite having invested hundreds of money and volunteer hours renovating. They asked to borrow our Parish Hall for an annual Thanksgiving Dinner, and later we realized that a more permanent space-sharing agreement would work for both entities.



As part of the Sanctuary project, we advocated for change in the name of social justice.

Another example of our commitment to putting our assets where our beliefs are, is the Sanctuary project. After the 2016 election, parishioners with connections to the immigrant community learned of opportunities for us to offer our space to someone whose ability to stay in the US was tenuous, but who had a legal path to citizenship. After a deliberative process involving the diocese, our own vestry, and several congregational meetings, **POSP offered our building as a Level One Sanctuary to a woman whose immigration status made her vulnerable to deportation.**

This was an enormous and complex undertaking. During the time of our guest and her family's residence at POSP, at least two volunteer Companions were on site at all times in case of emergency. The choir robing room / music library became one of two companion sitting / sleeping rooms; the small Christian ed office downstairs became the other. Additional volunteers (2 at a time, in accordance with Safe Church protocols) escorted her children to school, did weekly laundry, served as interpreters, liaised with city and school officials, trained new volunteers, and more. Each week dozens, if not hundreds, of volunteers from many faith communities, and from no faith community at all, each week came through the doors at POSP

Throughout the 18 months of our guest's residence, POSP parishioners continued to serve in leadership roles on the board as well as volunteers in a variety of regular roles.

The Newton Sanctuary and Solidarity Collaborative was founded as a separate organization, and POSP parishioners served on the board along with others from congregations who had voted to be Level Two Sanctuary participants (providing funding, leadership, and volunteers). Congregational partners included several Jewish congregations and chavurot (smaller, independent / egalitarian Jewish congregations, self-governed and often without formal rabbinic leadership) as well as several students from the nearby (now closed) Hebrew College. The Workman's Circle (a secular Jewish service and cultural organization) also provided volunteers and funding, as did some UCC and UU congregations. Volunteers without formal affiliation with a Level Two congregational partner were also welcomed after a vetting process.





Our collaborators in the Sanctuary Project included many Jewish faith communities. We built a sukkot with them, and jointly celebrated seder.

The Sanctuary program had a built-in re-evaluation period two years in, and the POSP congregation held another series of meetings where the congregation voted to continue hosting for another two years. Shortly thereafter, however, in June 2019, our guest chose to move elsewhere. We rejoice to hear that she and her family are doing well. Her children (American citizens) continue to grow up with their mother by their side.

We had not found another sanctuary candidate before the onset of Covid in March of 2020, at which point the physical church building was closed and the Sanctuary project ended.

The Sanctuary project was a time of both success and struggle within the church, given the enormity and stress of the project. Some parishioners strongly supported taking this action, while others were concerned about diversion of parish energy.

Both the collaboration with New City and the Sanctuary project of 2016-2019 demonstrate that POSP, although small in size, has a core of parishioners and lay leaders who believe that **we should use our assets to live out our faith in the world.**

FINANCES

St. Paul's is in sound financial condition, well able to meet all of its commitments, and with resources to initiate and support properly conceived future additional activities. Two individuals with long professional experience fill the roles of Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer.

Full financial details with some history are presented starting on page 19 of our Annual Meeting Report dated January 28th, 2024. In summary, our budget for the current year projects break-even at approximately \$200,000 income and disbursements, proportioned as follows:

Pledges & Donations	41%	Payroll	55%
Rental Income	47%	Facilities	33%
Reserve Draw	10%	Diocese Assessment	6%
Other	2%	Programs & Outreach	6%

The primary assumptions in our expense budget are a half-time priest for the full 12 months, and, having spent considerable sums in recent years on our buildings, they are in reasonably sound shape, and we anticipate minimal need for repairs and renovations. On the income side our pledge receipts have fallen by 40% over the last 6 years, though pledging units have stayed almost constant in 2023 and 2024. However, our rental income has more than doubled recently, which has more than replaced our reduced income from pledges and donations.

Our outreach activities have traditionally been substantially funded by various means outside our main budget.

Our assets, none of which are mortgaged or restricted in any way beyond the vestry's wishes and the usual requirements of the diocese, are informally designated as follows (as of December 2023).

Liquid Assets:		Fixed Assets: (approx.)	
Cash at Bank	104,297	Sanctuary and Parish Hall	2,000,000
Operating Cash Reserve	60,056	Rectory	1,500,000
Long-Term Endowment*	506,062	Rental Property	600,000
(80% stocks, 20% cash)*		Furnishings and Equipment	<u>50,000</u>
Total	\$670,415	Total	\$4,150,000

VISION



We love the Blessing of the Animals on St Francis Day.

Recognizing and appreciating that collaboration is the new framework in which we are all working, we seek to map out our congregational path ahead, guided by inspired clergy and a shared enthusiasm to build Beloved Community wherever we find ourselves. We embrace the idea of collaboration, while acknowledging it is not clearly defined. **Our fervent desire is to partner with a priest who is inspired by both the potential and the challenges of collaboration and will help us, our region, and the Diocese build this model together.**

We seek four main vital components to building the future of our parish:

- **Worship and Formation:** engaging the congregation with scripture-based, Christ-inspired, topical, heart-felt, and provoking preaching with humor and informality much appreciated; encouraging, appreciating, and supporting a vibrant, ambitious, and spirit-filled music program; and developing a program of activities throughout the liturgical year that offer a deeper dive into spiritual matters.
- **Pastoral care:** seeking to forge personal pastoral relationships directly between priest and all parish members (by listening, thinking, and speaking with care, thought, and concern for each individual), encouraging and reinforcing deep, healthy relationships among parish members, and emboldening us to strengthen our commitment to our shared ministries.
- **Community Outreach:** continuing to find ways to take our faith beyond the walls of our church and to demonstrate our active commitment to love, equity, and justice in demonstrable ways. It is our fervent hope that our new priest will spearhead and structure our community outreach efforts so that they will not only serve worthy charitable purposes but also educate and influence our ever-evolving concept of the community we live in and our responsibility to support it.
- **Parish administration:** making sure that our small organization runs well and that all involved are empowered to accomplish the needed tasks of church business; seeking effective collaborative leadership shared with the laity (with areas of respective responsibilities to be agreed upon); supervising and directing our multi-talented parish administrator.

OUR NEW LEADER

Gifts we offer

- Demonstrated passion for **living out our faith in the world**, inspired by Christ's example
- A committed (although small) group of parishioners who want to see St. Paul's **change and transform** in a way that we can thrive
- An openness to **new and imaginative collaboration** with other organizations or parishes
- **Financial resources** to enable a 'runway' for that change to occur
- Willingness to compromise and be creative to make a **half-time priest position** realistic

Gifts we hope that you will offer

- Readiness to **help us grow** via baptizing, marrying, burying anyone seeking sacraments—we are open to all
- The passion to help us grow and **collaborate with other ECUSA entities** (parishes, chaplaincies, vicarages, church plants)
- The imagination to see how we can grow and **collaborate with neighborhood partners outside the ECUSA** -- the borders of our hearts are permeable
- The energy and vision to **do something new** -- with our physical and financial resources, our passionate people, our accessible location
- The skill to **preach deeply and passionately** on Sundays—we are a group who appreciates challenging preaching.



We are waiting to meet you, and share the deep well of community at St. Paul's!