

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

AT CAPITOL SQUARE, RICHMOND, VA



PROCLAIMING CHRIST IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

# SUCH GREAT HEIGHTS

The Spirit Stirs on  
Grace Street

&

God's Sky is Limitless



# Such Great Heights - Building a Stronger Parish Community

“Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Jesus’ love;  
The fellowship of Christian minds Is like to that above . . .  
Our fears our hopes our aims are one; Our comforts and our cares.  
We share our mutual woes, Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear.”

Hymn 495, The Hymnal (1940)

In a recent letter to the Diocese in the *Virginia Episcopalian*, Bishop Johnston wrote about “A Theology of Community.” Bishop Johnston’s message fits well with what we have heard during the Such Great Heights movement:

Much of my theology is founded on the premise that Christianity is a faith that is inherently and necessarily communal. . . . The meaning of the word that first described the church was “gathering.” Virtually every aspect of our worship acts out the communal nature of Christian faith and life. As our Lord Christ gathers us together to be His earthly body through baptism, we find ourselves to be people who are interrelated by our faith.

Just as was true for those original disciples, faith in Jesus is anchored in a group, a community committed to one another. In our tradition, to be wholly faithful each one of us must be committed to living our faith communally.

Bishop Johnston’s message, like the words of the old hymn above, echo the ideas, comments and feelings expressed throughout the Such Great Heights forums and meetings – that St. Paul’s should put its energy and resources towards building a stronger parish community. A place where people feel welcome and connected to the parish and to one another, and where they feel empowered in their ministry.

In answer to the question “Who is God calling us to be?” the parish has responded that we are to be a community of Christian believers that is:

- Inviting seekers into community
- Renewing the energy of our parishioners
- Engaging parishioners to go deeper into faith and into ministry together

How will we do this? For one, we should all attend worship on Sunday as regularly as we can. Jesus emphasized the importance of worshipping in community when he said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:20. And when you come to worship, wear your name tag and say hello to someone you haven’t seen in a while or someone you’ve never met. Finally, find a way to get involved at St. Paul’s. Whether it’s becoming a lay reader, singing in the choir, serving in an Outreach program or just enjoying fellowship with other parishioners at a Foyer Group or a Wonderful Wednesday dinner, find an opportunity to connect with your fellow parishioners. These simple acts will do much to build the parish community we seek.

Following this introduction are summaries of the reports of each of the six Such Great Heights teams with proposals for moving forward. Our areas of focus are:

- Welcoming and Incorporation –inviting and engaging newcomers and current parishioners in fellowship, ministries and service.
- Enhancing small group opportunities for fellowship, service and Christian formation.
- Worship that is enriching for current members and friendly to the newcomer and that provides a sense of community and freshness
- Christian Formation focused on Biblical education, what it means to be an Episcopalian and the intersection of the Bible and current events.

Most importantly, this report is a working document. This process began with the Vestry retreat at Skylark, where Wallace identified the six Such Great Heights areas. It was followed by our six-month effort to gather input and feedback through public meetings, the plogs and forums. We’ve gathered a lot of information, and all the suggestions and recommendations are being provided to our existing boards and committees so that they can put them into action. Also, over the next two months, the Such Great Heights Committee will integrate the six Such Great Heights

team reports into a final report with specific priorities and recommendations for action by the new Vestry elected in January, 2010.

We want your reaction to this report. Tell us what you like and don't like, tell us what we've left out and let us know what priorities we should set as we move forward.

Faithfully, The Such Great Heights Committee

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## **Christian Formation**

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Christian Formation is at the core of what we are called to do as part of St. Paul's mission of "proclaiming Christ in the heart of the city." Christian Formation is a lifelong process of learning about our faith and living into our baptismal covenant. We are called to provide developmentally appropriate and substantive opportunities for people to learn and grow in their relationship with Christ and one another.

Of the feedback we received in the area of Christian Formation for adults, there were some key themes. A number of comments revolved around the desire for substantive and intellectually challenging education programs. Another cluster of comments centered on the desire to see more biblically based programs.

Christian Formation is about more than educational programs. A number of people wanted to see more opportunities for small group experiences, which would bring provide a means for building stronger relationships.

### **Strengths**

- Strong youth programs which encourage reflection and strong group relationships.
- A children's program, Workshop Rotation Model, which honors the fact that not all children learn the same ways and that is developmentally appropriate.
- Lenten lunch program as Christian formation for members of St. Paul's as well as the wider community.

### **Challenges**

- Budget constraints. There seems to be a strong desire for speakers with name recognition at weekly forums.
- Volunteers to sustain the variety of course offerings that members of St. Paul's would like to see.

### **Goals**

- The development of small group opportunities, which would be offered at varying times and locations.
- Reevaluation of adult education program goals and establishing priorities.
- Examine ways to provide formation experiences for those who currently attend St. Paul's on Sunday and those who work downtown and see St. Paul's as their weekday church.

# Faith in Action

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## Introduction

The FIA Board has been in a discernment and strategic planning process for almost two years, and we have received input from both inside and outside the parish community.

**WHO DOES GOD CALL US TO BE?** With the re-christening of Outreach as Faith in Action, we continue to believe God is calling us to be a loving presence **within and without the walls of St. Paul's**.

**WHAT DOES GOD CALL US TO DO?** From our discussions, two broad themes emerged.

## Diversity

We feel it is important to explore what a diverse parish looks like and how a parish becomes diverse. To many, St. Paul's is more diverse now than it was 150 years ago; but, are we a uniquely 'diverse' parish? The issue of diversity is of vital importance. There is little doubt that all people are welcome at St. Paul's regardless of cultural heritage, race, gender, and various orientations. Because the country is moving in the direction of greater cultural diversity, however, we too must develop many cultural influences in our worship and faith programs.

## Downtown Identity

Our downtown identity is very important to us. It is important to understand that attracting downtown residents and workers means **creating a new model** and requires *'Boots on the ground.'* A passive approach will not be successful. We must go out into the bars and coffee shops and engage with people, hold Bible studies and provide education. People are hungry for spiritual engagement. With refinement, we have a place that offers such opportunities.

## Faith in Action- The Next Step

A celebrated St. Paul's story is the intentional, systemic evaluation and implementation of the Micah program. The success of Micah is a sign that we should take a similar approach to our FIA ministries. A next step, **in a Big Picture sort of way**, is to coordinate our FIA ministries with the other Episcopal churches in Richmond. We live in an odd time of greater centralization of organizations/government with a higher level of individual autonomy/choice. The trick is to find a way to take advantage of this centralization while maintaining our individuality as a parish and providing opportunities for people to live their faith through service on an individual level.

## Specific Challenges, Recommendations, and Considerations

- What is the next logical step for Micah?
- Where are we headed with global missions? Do we have a one-year plan, a five-year plan?
- The Emmaus program is a source of great pride in our parish. Not only is it a way to minister to those who are hungry, but it is also an opportunity to minister to those who are looking for ways to serve others. What more can we do – mental health, physical health?

## Generosity

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- The Spirit of Generosity is alive and well at St. Paul's and needs to be an on-going conversation throughout the year
- Generosity Sunday(s)  
Recognize and celebrate all gifts of time and talent  
Compilation of a "Time and Talent" inventory  
Volunteer Fair
- Stewardship Volunteer Coordinator on staff  
Maintains the Pulse of the Parish  
Help facilitate the gifts of time and talent by matching volunteers with opportunities  
Assist with annual giving campaign and planned giving
- New and Alternative Forms of Giving  
  
Offer various options recognizing every giver whether yearly, spontaneous or need-based
- Stewardship Statement  
Issue a statement acknowledging that Stewardship is about more than "financial support" and all gifts, however received, are equally valued

## Shaping Public Discourse

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### “Christianity Is Political Or It’s Not Christianity”

Bishop Desmond Tutu

St. Paul’s has a strategic location beside the state capitol in the heart of Richmond. Engaging in public discourse on the issues of the day has been a rich and integral part of the history of our parish. Members continue to participate actively in the political process and serve on boards of nonprofit organizations. Church activities such as ‘Eyes on Richmond’ stimulate conversation on issues important to the city. The Home Board Grants Committee, ECW, and other church funding sources have made monies available to organizations in the community whose goals are to improve the quality of life for the less fortunate.

Micah 6:8 asks ‘What does the Lord ask us to do?’ and it is answered, ‘He asks that we have mercy, seek justice and walk humbly with our God’. Through Christian discernment we pray that our role in seeking justice, for those who are powerless to do so for themselves, will become clear.

The newspaper columnist Leonard Pitts, speaking as a Christian, recently challenged all Christians to directly and visibly respond to the moral questions of the day such as racism, economic and social inequities, the Aids epidemic, and torture. The church needs to constantly be engaged in internal and external dialogue to identify important issues. It will be important as facilitators of healthy discussions that we help to provide objective educational opportunities and listening ears to diverse opinions. Shaping public discourse does not require polarization. Shaping public discourse facilitates dialogue and personal commitment. Fair compromises on social issues and creatively constructing paths toward answers will always come with Christian discernment.

The church shapes public discourse through collective parish activities, individual acts of parishioners, and choices by the clergy to invest their energy in public policy initiatives. Richmonders Involved In Strengthening Communities is an example of how St. Paul’s has worked with other churches in the community to effect systemic change. The Church’s advocacy for quality public education in the city through the Micah initiative is another example of the churches commitment to social justice. There are long lists of members who are active participants with nonprofit organizations in the city that are working for similar improvements. It will be important to involve these church members with the discussion of important social justice issues and the decisions on the churches course of action in addressing these issues.

It is time for St. Paul’s to develop a coordinated social justice effort. A **Social Justice Ministry** will be vital to identifying important moral issues of the day, facilitating healthy dialogue among groups of differing opinion, developing coordinated and timely responses to community problems, and seeking creative solutions through compromise and prayer.

## Welcoming

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- Maintain St. Paul's welcoming and inclusive reputation
- Establish systematic welcoming and incorporation procedures
- Invite new members into ministry and social opportunities
- Heightening the visibility of St. Paul's being "open for business" through marketing and physical appearance
- Provide additional parking for growth, special functions and weekday programs
- Establish "Parish Mission Team" led by a staff Community Missioner to survey needs and desires of our neighborhood
- Hire Membership/Parish Life Coordinator
- Encourage use of nametags
- Reintroduce clergy led exploring the faith classes
- Provide Official Greeters for major functions
- Open coffee shop with newspapers, books and homemade pastries

# Worship

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## Two-fold Goal:

- Enrich worship experience for current members of the congregation
- Provide a meaningful worship experience that attracts new members

## Challenges:

- We have collected a large number of specific suggestions regarding worship at St. Paul's. Suggestions and ideas were also collected during the search process. Ensuring that all these are considered and acted upon will require significant effort and discipline on the part of those implementing the plan.
- Honoring our liturgical and architectural heritage while offering worship that is fresh and enlivening and attracts new young members.
- Those who worship at St. Paul's are passionate about their worship and have a hugely diverse understanding of what makes worship work for them. We cannot fulfill all their desires. Finding a way to balance the diverse wishes and gaining acceptance that what we offer is right is a big challenge.

## Proposals:

- 1. Refresh and enrich the worship services held on Sunday mornings at 9:00 and 11:15**
  - Build upon what we have now while bringing a new awareness of God's presence in our midst
- 2. Develop a new service that can be used on designated Sundays when the two main services are combined.**
  - Designed from scratch, not a modified version of current services
- 3. Design and implement a weekend evening worship service to attract those living near St. Paul's**
  - Establish a team of St. Paul's and community people to design and implement
  - Start in intimate setting
  - Include time for socializing
  - Use a variety of music styles and formats
- 4. Recreate the 12:05 service using a series of specific themes – one each day of the week**
  - Improve the publicity
  - Make minor changes to chapel and entrance
- 5. Enhance the environment in which we worship**
  - Modify the furnishings in the chancel to open up the space, facilitate traffic flow and brighten appearance
  - Modify entrance area to make it more welcoming and open

- Improve lighting and sound systems.
- Evaluate new uses for the space currently occupied by the font
- Hire a liturgical/architectural consultant to evaluate and expand on the ideas we have to modify the worship space so that it suits the way we worship, while honoring our historic architecture.

**6. Encourage and facilitate worship at social and all other events.**

**7. Provide education about what we do in worship and why**

### **Themes**

- Worship must be welcoming to the stranger and worshipper friendly
- Eucharist and provocative sermons are two of the most critical components desired.
- A very wide variety of music styles have been suggested. People have expressed strong desires for high quality music in both participatory and non-participatory formats
- Worship that is excellent – of very high quality.
- High level of participation by the laity.
- Sense of community and freshness
- Worship that is “whole” – that is not a mix and match of various styles and language.