

Wardens' Presentation for the 2022 Annual Meeting

January 29, 2023

Now that Nina has given you a glimpse of what we're proposing for 2023, along with the theological underpinnings of this work, Craig and I would like to share some more detail with you in the form of a question-and-answer dialog.

What is it we're looking to do?

The Wardens, Vestry, and Rector are proposing that St. Stephen's reach out to our neighbors in the community to find out more about what's happening in our neighborhood, in our city, and in our region.

Why reach out?

Parish leaders believe it's the ongoing work of the church to engage with our brothers and sisters in the community. As we just heard, the writer of Micah urges us to "walk humbly with our God." To us, this implies that God is on the move, and we're called to keep up. Episcopal priest and author Fleming Rutledge puts it this way: "The calling of the church is to place itself where God is already at work." So we're proposing we make a renewed effort in 2023 to search for where God is "already at work," here at St. Stephen's, and in Pittsfield and Berkshire county.

Why now?

One obvious reason is that the pandemic has reshaped so much of our economic, demographic, cultural, and even spiritual landscape. So, when we ask, "Who is God calling us to *be* in this place and at this time?" or "What is God calling us to *do* in this place and at this time?" it seems wise to ask those questions anew in 2023.

Our parish also seems to be at a pivotal moment in our history. For example, thanks to our capable Property Committee, several major projects are underway to address years of deferred maintenance. But how should the building serve parishioners – and the community - in the years ahead?

Also, along with most other mainline churches, St. Stephen's continues to face changes in attendance, demographics, giving patterns, and other headwinds. How could we – how should we - respond to these larger societal shifts?

Finally, it's been over 20 years since our last capital campaign. The time seems right for such an effort sometime in the foreseeable future. But a successful capital campaign is driven by a clear vision. A key way to discover that sense of vision is by exploring where God is already at work here at St. Stephen's and in the larger community.

Who are we going to talk with?

Parish leaders envision conversations with a wide variety of organizations, including government, civic, business, and religious groups. Some possibilities: City Hall, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., Berkshire Housing, Berkshire Health Systems, Service Net, Berkshire Arts Center, 1Bekshire, Berkshire Bank, Berkshire Theater Group, Mill Town Capital, Zion Lutheran, and others.

What questions are we going to ask?

The specific questions are still being formulated, but our key concerns are what groups are excited about in the year(s) ahead, what challenges they're facing, where they're already collaborating with other organizations, and more.

What is the timeframe for the effort?

The plan is to start soon. We hope to gather as much information as possible in the weeks ahead and reconvene this conversation early in the season after Pentecost, which this year is Sunday, May 28.

What are we going to do with the information/responses gathered?

We'll look for patterns and opportunities. The first objective will be to see as clearly as we can the shape of the landscape around us right now. Then we'll begin to consider how we're called to respond. Ultimately, we're trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide us throughout the process. But we'll be praying especially hard for help at this stage.

Who is going to do this? How can I help?

Parish leaders see a small, nimble group of parishioners heading up this effort, with help from others in the congregation. Broadly, we see three groups of participants:

- Group 1: A core group of no more than 10 people who will head up the effort. These will be our “advanced scouts.”
- Group 2: Other “assisting scouts” who may have a connection with or affinity for a specific community organization and would like to reach out to this group. (Note that we’ll always try to send at least two people out together on “scouting missions.” Jesus sent his disciples out two by two.)
- Group 3: Those who wouldn’t want to be directly involved but who would support the effort in other ways, especially and most importantly through prayer.

If you’re interested in any of these roles, please contact a warden, a vestry member, or the Rector.

Does this undertaking have a name?

Jesus beckoned to the first disciples, “*Come and see.*” Since we view this as St. Stephen’s responding to Jesus’ eternal invitation, we’re calling this, “***Go and See in 2023.***” And I think I hear our first scout approaching now...

Josie/Craig R: Hey Craig – thanks for being a scout!! Do you have your head lamp?

Craig S: Yep! I’ve got to see clearly!

Josie/Craig R: And your hiking poles?

Craig S: Got ‘em. Wouldn’t want to stumble.

Josie/Craig R: How about your hiking boots?

Craig S: You bet! Walking the path with God to “Go and see in 2023!”

Josie/Craig R: And all God’s people said...

AMEN!