



St. Peter's Episcopal Church

351 Elm Street

Dartmouth, MA 02748

website: stpetersdartmouth.org

email: stpetersdartmouth@gmail.com

774.510.5661

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF ST. PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

October 3, 2022

Dear Parishioners and Friends:

It is with a sense of great **urgency, honesty and transparency** that I write to you today regarding the current state of our parish, St. Peter's Episcopal Church. We face a very difficult **"crossroads"** and I am hoping you can help make a difference. I humbly ask you to please take the time to read this most important communication in these **"make" or "break"** times.

People often tell me how important St. Peter's is to them. Children have been baptized here. Loved ones have been buried here. People have found deeper faith here and have been spiritually restored here. This community means so much to so many people. We can't lose it.

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

As you are aware, the pandemic (since March 2020) has had a negative impact on churches of all denominations across the country. Many churches have merged, consolidated or closed. Here at St. Peter's, the pandemic has had a **devastating impact** on our sense of **"community."** Before the pandemic, we worked tirelessly for many years to build this incredibly welcoming, hospitable family of faith. We did so much good work together. We grew as a family of faith. We developed a mission and vision that has been deeply shattered and now we need you to help rebuild with God's help!

OUR CURRENT SITUATION & CHALLENGE

In terms of what we like to call our **"Sunday Morning Experience,"** before the pandemic, our church was full. It took many years to get it to that point. When I arrived in 2013, attendance was very low and I took on the role to become the priest here because I believed the parish could be "saved." Together, with our hands joined, and with great openness to the Holy Spirit, a new parish was born. New people gathered and a new church came into being. By late 2019, St. Peter's was "on fire" with the Holy Spirit and the "Sunday Morning Experience" was the unifying force and changed many lives.

During the pandemic, we did our best to hold the parish together via live stream. The live stream was a temporary measure to hold the “core” community together. The live stream cannot replace “real” community. The celebration of Sunday Eucharist is “incarnational.” It is meant to be experienced in the real time. Receiving the Eucharist, the blessed bread and wine, the very presence of Christ, is central to what we believe as Episcopalians. If the “Eucharist” is central to our worship in the Episcopal Church, the need to gather in-person is central to the mission of the church.

During the pandemic, many folks got used to “watching” our service on live stream. Almost three years into the pandemic, now many people have remained on live stream because it is more “convenient” for them. Meanwhile, our parish community and sense of family are suffering greatly, and it is having a detrimental effect on our parish.

THE CURRENT PURPOSE OF LIVE STREAM

Now that the pandemic is over (President Biden highlighted that last week) the purpose of our live stream is primarily for two groups of people:

- A. The elderly, sick and homebound who because of illness cannot attend church in-person**
- B. NEW Christians who are seeking to be part of a church and are “shopping around.”**

Now that the pandemic is over, we realize that Covid will always be part of our lives and we need to take the necessary precautions. Many people regularly attend family events, social events, the supermarket, etc. No one has ever, to our knowledge, contracted Covid in our church and we continue to promote a clean, safe environment. We can’t avoid attending church for the next 10 years.

IT’S ALL ABOUT THE EUCHARIST

Our Sunday Gathering is central to our life of faith. Eucharist is our “strength for the journey.” Our Sunday Gathering is the central reason for existing. As God Church, all that we are “flows” from the Eucharist. All that we are points to the Eucharist. As our liturgy documents tells us: **“The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.”** At God’s Table, our human hungers are fed and our thirst is quenched. Our soul is nourished. How important is that in your life? In life, we always make time for what is most important. We each need to ask: Where is God on our priority list?

CURRENT AVERAGE ATTENDANCE

Numbers are important. Numbers create energy. Numbers create synergy. Numbers build community. Most parishes in our area have experienced a return to at least 70% of their pre-Covid numbers. That means 30% of their folks are not currently engaged. St. Peter’s is hovering around 50% of pre-Covid numbers. **Our average Sunday attendance is basically HALF of what it used to be before Covid and if this trend continues, our parish will not be sustainable for much longer.** This is a huge stress for me as your Rector and for your leadership team.

ANOTHER AREA OF IMPACT (OUTREACH)

Our ministries here in the parish have also suffered. Our outreach to the poor and needy, our Thanksgiving Drive, our Back-to-School Drive and other important outreach ministries have suffered greatly due to a lack of participation in parish life. Ultimately, the people we are called to serve are also being impacted.

CLERGY BURNOUT AND CLERGY LEAVING MINISTRY

Due to the current situation, many clergy and pastors throughout the country have experienced extreme burnout and many have even left ministry in record numbers because of the incredible pressure of feeling that they have to hold this all together. While I have been presented with many challenges, I am in a good place in this regard because of the joy I experience in ministry. But, I will wanted to raise the issue because I am not sure if most people know how challenging and stressful this time has been for clergy.

FACING THE FUTURE

God does the growth. “We cultivate, plant and water” as we are open to God’s Spirit among us. We are people of hope and we have accomplished so much together, especially our new Youth Ministry program. We all want to move forward in faith, hope and love. We need to be renewed in our support from each other. When thinking about St. Peter’s, I always think about **Redwood Trees**. Their roots are entwined and they support each other and always grow together, never separately.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU???

We just need YOU. That’s it! We need you to show up at worship every Sunday or at least most Sundays. The gift of “YOU” is so important to us. We grow in faith by being rooted in community. We can’t build community if we don’t get to see one another and share life with one another. In addition to building community (and even more importantly) we grow in faith by being grounded in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ his Son. That needs continual nurturing on a regular basis. The weekly celebration of Eucharist has a deep transformative impact on our soul. Our devotion to God will then help us to share our love of God with others. **So, we need you and all parishioners, first and foremost, to be fully engaged in the life of our parish – especially in the worship/spiritual life of our parish.** Remember, Redwood trees are entwined and they support each other and always grow together, never separately.

TWO IMPORTANT EVENTS

There are two important events coming up that will help to renew the life of our parish. These events will be useless unless the gathered community is present. We hope you will join us and will experience renewal and joy.

STRATEGIC & PASTORAL PLANNING: On **Sunday, October 9, 2022**, we are beginning a very important process of Strategic and Pastoral Planning here at St. Peter’s. We will begin this process at our 10:00AM Mass. We need everyone who has ever been part of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church to join us. The service will take the normal amount of time and everything will happen during the service. This will be an important indication of our future by how many people show up.

A lot of work and energy has been put into this process. This process is being done for YOU. Everything we do here is done for you, the People of God. We just need you to show up.

VISITATION OF OUR BISHOP: The visitation of our bishop is a big day for any parish. It is a day of celebration for who we are as a family of faith. Our Bishop will visit our parish on **Sunday, October 16, 2022**. This is a very big event in the life of our parish. **Since this is such a big event, we ask everyone to arrive a bit earlier than usual around 9:50AM.** Following the liturgy, there will be a **FREE LUNCH** in the Community Room. Bring someone with you!

A SPECIAL INVITATION TO FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN & TEENS

We heard over the years from many young families who said they would participate in the life of the parish more regularly if we had an active children's program. We listened to you and now have an active Faith Formation program for children and teens (pre-school to high school) as well as an active Youth Ministry. Despite a lot of advertising and "reaching out," we are not seeing a lot of our registered young families participating in Faith Formation and Youth Ministry. At the baptism of a child, the parents make the promise to raise their children in the faith of Jesus Christ. We invite you to give your child the most important gift you can give – the gift of faith. We all want the best for our children! Help them build a strong foundation for their lives by learning about Jesus and allowing them to develop a relationship with God. The next Youth Sunday is **October 23 at 10:00AM**. Please join us and bring your children!

Friends, the "spirit" of this letter is one of care and concern. It is also one of deep love for our parish. If we are not able to renew the incredible spirit of St. Peter's and the participation of our parishioners in the regular worship life of our parish, I am afraid of what this could all look like in another three months. Consistency in attendance is so important. Churches close very easily these days and churches normally close for two reasons 1) lack of participation and 2) they stop reaching out to the wider community.

This is really "MAKE" or "BREAK" time for us as a parish. Please consider joining us in the **RENEWAL** of our parish. Help us to be bigger, better and stronger.

And, let's all remember that Redwood trees are **entwined** and they **support** each other and always grow together, never separately. Together, led by God's Spirit, we can do great things!

Peace,



(Rev.) Scott A. Ciosek
Rector

In collaboration with our Leadership Team:

Susan Susan, Warden

Michelle Woodacre, Warden

Martin Costa, Vestry Member