

Community Ministry Portfolio

NARRATIVE:

Saint Patrick's was founded in 1953 as a mission church by The Falls Church. It was nicknamed "The Church of the Holy Cafeteria" because of its first meeting place - the Graham Road Elementary School cafeteria. In 1995, Saint Patrick's became an Anglo-Vietnamese church, a mission of the Diocese of Virginia. Over the years we have become more diverse - welcoming friends from Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, the Philippines, Laos and Japan to our fellowship. Our parishioners see St. Pat's as a "safe haven" for all who seek peace and those who need a quiet place to find rest. Whatever God's plan is for the next chapter of our story, we are excited about our evolving mission and are open to being renewed and transformed in the process. We celebrate being a multicultural parish where "all are welcome and each is valued" - and we look forward to continuing the journey with the Rector who is called to help us grow St. Patrick's.

Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry which you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

In early 2015, we recognized that crucial aspects of the physical infrastructure of the church building needed repair. We received partial funding from the Diocese of Virginia's Peter James Lee Small Church Revitalization Grant. Without hesitation, the congregation banded together to raise the matching funds. This project will install energy efficient windows and renovate the nursery, main office, and rector's office. Other critical repairs will increase sustainability and conserve resources. With the support of local businesses and the community at-large, we recently held a fund-raiser featuring a big band concert and dance, as well as a silent auction. These funds will be applied to other critical repairs, including the replacement of the church's HVAC system. We have learned that although we are a small parish with limited resources, the people of St. Patrick's have always rallied to meet the big challenges that come our way.

Describe your liturgical style & practice. If your community provides more than one type of worship service, please describe all.

St. Patrick's has one service at 10:30 a.m. each Sunday, with the liturgy alternating between Rites I and II. As a multicultural community, the Vietnamese language is incorporated into our liturgy, including the reading of the Gospel. The bilingual prayer book that was translated and produced by our former rector, Father Tinh Huynh, is still in regular use at St. Patrick's. We are open to modifying our service to include additional languages and cultural traditions. Additionally, we practice Open Table: all of our visitors and newcomers who would like to be closer to God are welcome to participate in the Eucharist. After the service, a coffee hour provides a venue for fellowship and conversation amongst parishioners and visitors. Our music director/organist has developed a rich musical program, including a bell choir and guest musicians, as well as a self-funding community concert series. However, St. Patrick's is in need of children and adult choirs and other assorted musicians to help grow our music ministry.

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How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

St. Patrick's is a church of volunteers. Our volunteers wear many different hats and are actively involved in multiple activities. While we thrive in many of our ministries and outreach programs, we feel we that we struggle in other important areas. This is due, in part, to the loss of membership following the retirement of the previous rector, as well as the aging of our parish. We have a desire to grow and would like to restart ministries to include an active team of greeters, adult and children's choirs, a youth group, an acolyte program, and various community events such as the Annual Pancake Supper, Art Show, Fall Harvest Dinner, Church Bazaar, and Game Nights.

As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

Although St. Patrick's is a small church, our spiritual needs are met in big ways through activities that bring us together to reach out to our members and the larger community: coffee hour, Eucharistic service at the Sunrise Bluemont retirement community, monthly healing service, English and Vietnamese Bible Studies, Quilting Group, and fundraising events. All of these activities have helped form us as a community that is close both personally and spiritually.

Another way that we reach out to those who can't always make it to our service is by continuing our Cookies for Coeds Ministry, a way of showing our St. Patrick's parishioners and extended community members who are away at college that we are praying and thinking of them during mid-terms and exams. Home visits to the elderly and hospital visits to the sick are a priority for us and we would like for our new Rector to lead and help us expand these efforts.

Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical region.

Although we are a small church, St. Patrick's embraces big ventures through its ministries. When natural disasters occur we hold relief concerts to help raise money. Recently, we held a concert to support efforts to eradicate the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. In the winter, we partner with the Bailey's Crossroads Homeless Shelter, opening our church to provide a warm place for those in need of refuge. In the spring, we partner with a team of medical professionals to run a Community Dental Clinic where those without insurance can get free dental service. Our parishioners are involved with the Westlawn Elementary School outreach program to provide clothes, food, and school supplies for children in need. Two years ago, we partnered with a local non-profit environmental organization, Lands and Waters, to establish a pollinator garden near our memorial walk. These activities are fueled by our keen desire to build a church that makes a difference in the local community and beyond.

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How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

Our ministries at St. Patrick's are based on love and compassion for our local communities and we welcome and minister to everyone we can reach. Our previous rector of over 22 years would often visit friends and family members of parishioners who were sick or just in need of spiritual guidance. He baptized adults and children, performed marriages for community members and friends of St. Patrick's, as well as those seeking to follow Christ regardless of denomination. For a number of years, we have partnered with St. George's Episcopal, Arlington to lead regular lay Eucharistic worship service at a local retirement community (Sunrise-Bluemont). We seek a rector who is open to lead and equip us for pastoral ministry beyond our immediate worship community.

Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

St. Patrick's is engaged in numerous outreach and community service activities which have been recognized by the Diocese, one of which was recently published in the Episcopalian newsletter. St. Patrick's provides a Community Dental Clinic Ministry where those without insurance can get free dental service from a team of medical professionals, led by our very own parishioner, Dr. Julie Tran.

Additionally, our parishioners are involved with the annual Westlawn Elementary School outreach program, which provides clothes, food, and school supplies for children in need. Our parishioner, Winnie Lebo, won the 2015 Fairfax County Volunteer Service Award Mason District Community Champion for her exemplary work with this ministry.

At the 220th Annual Council, The Harriet "Happy" Pullman Award was given to Liz Nguyen who leads the Feed The Homeless Ministry at St. Pat's. Liz assumed the leadership role in 2012, and leads a team of volunteers to serve a hot lunch monthly for Bailey's Crossroads Community Shelter's *Called to Care Mission*. This ministry also partners with the Bailey's Crossroads Hypothermia Program where we provide a warm place for the homeless to stay overnight for a week.

St. Patrick's is engaged in numerous outreach and community service activities and we would like to continue to grow our ministries. For more information regarding Music Ministries and the Odeon Concert Series, contact: Mariko Hiller, organist and music director; Westlawn Elementary School Ministry: Winnie Lebo, coordinator and liaison; Bailey's Crossroads Community Shelter Ministry: Liz Nguyen, coordinator and liaison; Falls Church Food Pantry Ministry: Catherine Dubas, coordinator and liaison; Community Dental Clinic Ministry: Julie Tran, resident dentist; Meals on Wheels Ministry: Victoria Kennedy, coordinator and liaison; Sunrise-Bluemont worship service; Michael Knowles, lay eucharistic minister; and for general information: Kathy Oliver, our Senior Warden.

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How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the future?

We are a small community of active and caring Christians who prayerfully work together for the future of the church in the changing world around us. During the past few decades, St. Patrick's has embraced profound social changes within American society (urbanization; immigration; the struggle for racial equality, evolving attitudes towards gender roles and sexual orientation) as opportunities to share Christ's love with others. During this period, our parish has transitioned from a more traditional suburban congregation to a diverse and innovative community of faith where all are welcomed and each is valued.

What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?

Our fundraising is more of a faith based approach by request for annual pledge letters and several stewardship sermons. The substantial commitment of time, talent and hard work are key elements of effective stewardship. Although we are a small congregation, our financial pledges and donations demonstrate sincere dedication to the ongoing work of the church. When there are extraordinary needs, our folks step forward to generously donate their time and money. This is what keeps our church going; this is the glue that holds us together. Looking to the future, we want to grow our congregation by inviting all persons and families to become an integral part of our St. Patrick's family and attracting those who would like to share in our vision. We want to expand our congregation, seek new ways to re-energize our congregation to serve one another other, and reach out to our neighbors in the wider local communities.

What is your worshipping community's experience of conflict? How have you addressed it?

St. Patrick's has experienced conflict throughout the years, as any active, caring community should expect. Some conflicts have been resolved through effective pastoral and lay leadership. Most folks have learned that the best way to deal with conflict is to honestly and prayerfully discuss ways to resolve their differences. They overcome conflict by practicing forgiveness and compassion towards one another. At other times, however, conflict has been avoided because folks were uncomfortable acknowledging and confronting the problem. Regrettably, this has resulted in people suppressing their dissatisfaction and harboring resentment. Rather than deal with conflict, some have simply left the church. Perhaps stress has been a factor - with too few people trying to cover too many bases. We have a lot going for our small community but we have much to learn about effective conflict resolution. We seek a Rector who understands conflict and is able to facilitate constructive dialogue and problem-solving. We find our current interim Rector very much exemplifies these qualities.

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What is your experience/leading change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? What did you learn?

St. Patrick's has experienced many changes since its inception. In 1993, when demographics showed a great increase in the Vietnamese population of Northern Virginia, our parish leaders discerned that St. Patrick's was called to become an Anglo-Vietnamese mission. This transition was not embraced by all members and some feared the church would fall apart. The change, however, was good for St. Patrick's and since then we have been transformed into a truly multi-cultural faith community. The church was revitalized, and by 2012 we were granted parish status by the Diocese. We have learned that our parishioners are open to change, and they are willing to embrace the challenges that are prevalent in contemporary American society - including controversy over sexual orientation and the social changes brought about by urbanization and the influx of immigrants from all over the world. We have become stronger and more resilient by addressing uncomfortable issues, seeking additional education, fostering communication within our congregation and sharing the lessons learned with experience with the larger community.

Please provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.

St. Patrick's seeks seek a Rector who will help us to develop and expand our current ministries and who will help us grow spiritually. We need an energetic, personable, and collaborative but firm (when necessary) leader who will provide solid pastoral care, embrace our multicultural parish, and help us build on our long history of inclusiveness and community service. Our new Rector must have strong administrative skills and be comfortable using social media. We value inspirational preaching: lectionary-based, topical sermons that address the current issues that challenge us in today's world. With this sort of leadership, we believe St. Patrick's can become a vibrant congregation that attracts and retains new members from all generations and walks of life.

Overall Gifts and Skills:

Congregational development including youth, embrace multi-cultural parish, energetic and collaborative leader, relevant Gospel-based preaching.

REFERENCES:

- **Bishop Name:** The Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston
- **Diocesan Transition Minister Name:** The Rev. Mary Brennan Thorpe and Mr. Edward Keithly
- **Current Warden/Board Chair Name:** Kathy Oliver
- **Search Chair Name:** Elisabeth Nguyen
- **Search Chair Contact Information:**
stpatsearch2014@gmail.com