

Parish Profile UPDATE

Grace – St. Paul's Episcopal Church

MERCERVILLE, NJ

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Introduction

The Grace – St. Paul’s Vestry has chosen to build this brief “UPDATE” to our Parish Profile in light of what we have learned about ourselves in the two plus years since the creation of our initial Profile.

No, our rich history has not changed; however we have found additional strengths, successes, and challenges that we have chosen to share openly.

Our Mission Statement and Our Mission Goals

The Mission of Grace–St. Paul's Episcopal Church is to be the Living Body of Christ, Acting as Faithful Stewards in our Hearts, our Community, and the World. To that end, the Vestry has learned that the need exists for a reevaluation of our short and long term goals, Our Mission Goals. A guiding hand is needed to partner with us as we revise our goal statements to take on the ministries and challenges that truly make us the Living Body of Christ.

Life of Our Parish

The spirituality of Grace – St. Paul’s has grown!

In September of 2011 Grace–St. Paul’s covenanted a two–year ministry adventure with the National Church and a number of other Episcopal churches across the country.

Missio:Engage is “a community of practice that shares a passion for revitalizing communities of faith. We are learning the art and craft of midwifing God’s longings in our midst, as we practice together.” It is specifically focused on the systematic redevelopment of parish ministries, like Grace–St. Paul’s, that have struggled with decline. The goal of Missio:Engage is to assist communities of faith in the process of re–rooting their ministries in the communities they are called to serve, while

developing enough critical mass to engage in sustainable missional ministries while avoiding “burnout.”

Grace–St. Paul’s Missio team/core group is made up of five lay leaders who entered into covenant with one another, with the Grace–St. Paul’s Vestry, and with its previous rector to learn together, to practice what we learn, and to share our learning and discoveries with our church at large via testimonials, forums, written electronic witnesses, etc. In the course of two years, the Missio team will—with God’s help—learn how to offer radical welcome to newcomers in our community, move visitors from being newcomers to fully–formed leaders, reconnect with the realities emerging in our local community we have been called by God to serve, and offer relevant outreach that offers God’s grace in ways meaningful to our community. By the end of the two year period, each of the members of the Grace–St. Paul’s Missio team will have identified, trained and nurtured their replacement.

The Christian Education program now includes Adult Forum between the Sunday services on most weeks, beginning at 9:00 am. This occurs simultaneously with Church School instruction. Also provided is a professionally staffed Nursery during both Sunday morning worship services.

As a congregation, Grace – St. Paul’s has found itself at a spiritual crossroads—many of our parishioners support growth and change within the church, while some remain committed to retaining the status quo. Our spiritual leader will be challenged while mentoring us to become the Living Body of Christ that we want to be.

Demographics and Money Matters

The Church. Like any older structure, upkeep and refurbishment are paramount. The Church School repainting mentioned in the Profile was expanded to include new lighting, floor refurbishment, and the installation of new exit/emergency lighting. Rain gutters and downspouts are soon to be replaced on the exterior with the hope of alleviating some of the drainage related issues we have found in the past. The pipe organ has undergone an electrical system refurbishment, providing a fully functional and electrically safe musical instrument to enhance worship. Stained glass window refurbishment has also been undertaken at a gradual pace.

The Rectory. The interior of this structure received a complete tear out down to the studs. Renovation/refurbishment of this four (4) bedroom home has included new bathrooms, new appliances, sanding and refinishing of the hardwood floors, and the installation of replacement windows.

Parishioners. For the calendar year 2011, we had 135 families listed “on the books”, including approximately 300 individuals. Of these, our average weekly attendance at worship services was 99 for the year 2011. For that same year, our Church School listed an enrollment of 32 students with 25 – 30 in attendance each week.

Pledges. For 2012, the Stewardship ministry has received commitments from sixty-six (66) pledging units for a total of \$121,421.00.

Budget. In 2011, Grace–St. Paul’s had a budget deficit, even after cutting many needed essentials. Our leadership and vestry decided that now’s not the time to cut out the very things that would lead the congregation to new growth. Instead, they created a budget strategy through June 2013 to provide the crucial foundations for a healthy, functioning parish:

- new funding for property maintenance
- proper support for the existing staff
- and beginning to fund the programs for newcomers and longtime members.

The strategy? Where we fall short in stewardship, we will draw from the endowment – our savings – to support those basic needs. We already had to draw down the endowment principle to fund the necessary repair on the rectory. **Future growth and supported stewardship of our parish is critical.**

But along with that short-term plan, leadership is planning to replenish those endowment funds. Partnering with the Episcopal Church Foundation, the office of the national Episcopal Church that specializes in capital campaigns and supporting vestry and lay leadership, we will move through three phases of the campaign to involve the whole congregation. The three phases are: 1) communication, discussion, and discernment of mission; 2) a feasibility study that comprises parishioner feedback in both written and interview formats; 3) the solicitation phase, when we come together

with whatever we can offer, no matter how large or small, to give back to the endowment the gifts that those benefactors gave to us.

Ministries of Grace–St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

Ministries. Additional ministry “Groups” now include WAM (Women’s Auxiliary Mission) and EV (Eucharistic Visitors). WAM is an action-oriented group that supports immediate needs within the community at large, based upon the mission of Grace – St. Paul’s. Eucharistic Visitors are lay people authorized and trained to take communion directly from the church to members of the congregation who are unable to be present at the service.

Outreach. The Vestry has discussed if it is best to “narrow” our outreach to T.A.S.K. (Trenton Area Soup Kitchen) and Crisis Ministry, with other smaller initiatives/focuses as need presents (such as the recent “Nets for Life” campaign).

Qualities Sought in a New Rector

While all items listed under “Qualities Sought in a New Rector” in the Profile are of great significance to us, “key” qualities for our present congregation are: physical presence/involvement with the congregation at coffee hours and activities; “hands-on” pastoral care; inspirational sermons that are very clear to the populace; and an open communication between clergy and parish that builds bonds of faith and trust in one another.

Hopes and Dreams

While all items listed under “Hopes and Dreams” in the Profile are of great significance to us, “key” items are:

- Parish growth and well attended church services and parish activities.
- The parish continues to deepen the spiritual growth that has begun, both as a community and as individuals. These “new” experiences are noticeably changing lives through growth in the holy spirit.