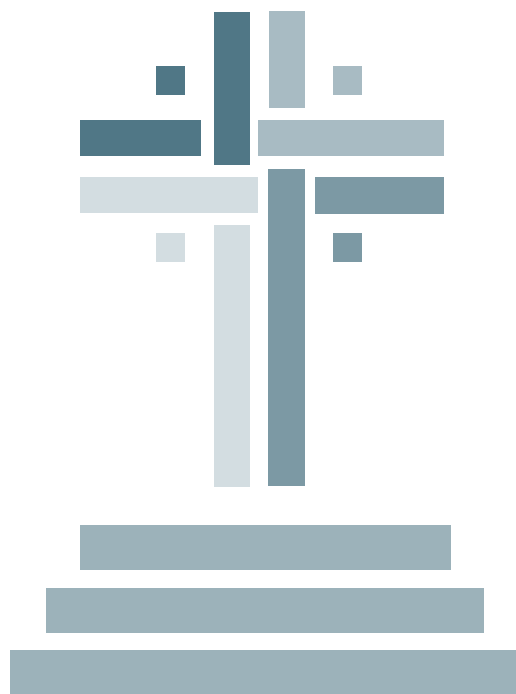


# St. Michael's Episcopal

## *A Parish History*







## St. Michael's 75th Anniversary 1948–2023

### **About the author**

Evelyn Bence, a longtime St. Michael's parishioner, has spent much of her editorial career in inspirational publishing. Among other books, she has written one biblical novel, *Mary's Journal*, and most recently *Room at My Table: Preparing Heart & Home for Christian Hospitality*. Her personal essays have appeared in publications such as *Christianity Today*, *US Catholic*, *Washington Post*, and *Washingtonian*.

### **Acknowledgments**

Design and layout by Katrina Moore, Parish Administrator, and Cindy Matlack, Co-Chair of the 75th Anniversary Celebration Committee.

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**NEEDED**  
TO AFFILIATE AT ONCE WITH  
*THE NEW*  
**St. Michael's Episcopal Church**

Arlington, Virginia

**WE NEED YOU . . .**

To Worship With Us At Our Temporary Location At

**WALTER REED SCHOOL**

NORTH MCKINLEY ROAD AND WASHINGTON BOULEVARD

EVERY SUNDAY MORNING AT 11 O'CLOCK

A Church School For Your Children At The Same Hour

To Help Us Build The New

**ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH**

AT OUR PERMANENT SITE ON NORTH ELEVENTH ROAD

BETWEEN JEFFERSON AND IVANHOE STREETS

(WE PLAN TO START THE FIRST UNIT IN 1948)

To Share In Making

**Your Community A Truly  
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

*We Urge You To Join With Us In Meeting*  
**THIS CHALLENGE**

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**St. Michael's Episcopal Church**

REV. GEORGE C. WEISER, *Rector*

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

TELEPHONE OWENS 3307



# THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH



Ground-breaking ceremony for the new church.

On Sunday evening, September 23, 1945, 17 laypeople gathered with a diocesan missionary, the Rev. Alfred St. John Matthews, at a house at 5511 Washington Blvd., owned by Trinity Presbyterian Church. The topic at hand? Organizing a new Episcopal Church between St. George's just east of Ballston and The Falls Church. Arlington County was exponentially expanding. In the 1920s, Arlington had consisted of hamlets grouped around crossroads and railroad stations. Twenty years later, the War effort beckoned civilian and military personnel to the Washington area. From a population of 16,000 in 1920 to 120,000 in 1944 Arlington County was racing toward urbanization.<sup>1</sup>

In 1945, north Arlington was served by three Episcopal churches: St. Mary's founded in 1926, St. George's in 1908, and St. John's,

just across Route 50, dating from 1895. Considering the burgeoning need, in 1943 the Rev. Dr. Robert Gibson Jr., a board member of the Diocesan Missionary Society (and later bishop of Virginia), recommended that the Diocese purchase the parcel of land that now grounds St. Michael's Episcopal Church.

Discussion at that initial organizational meeting established the church's name. Participant George Creswell later recalled Mr. Matthews suggesting the group choose an uncommon name. George himself suggested St. James the Less, which, he admitted, "didn't generate any enthusiasm." Someone opened a *Book of Common Prayer*, looking to determine the liturgical holy day closest to September 23. That discovery of the Feast of St. Michael (the archangel) and All Angels on September 27 set the trajectory of the church's history.

The next year and a half, the small, committed nucleus set out to organize and expand the membership of a new congregation. At first, Sunday services held at the Washington Blvd. house averaged only ten. Two women volunteered as teachers of a fledgling Church School. The pace of growth picked up, aided by word-of-mouth and the neighborhood circulation of flyers. By August 1946, the original membership of 23 had swollen to 100 families.

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<sup>1</sup> A more complete account of the church's first 50 years can be found in the church files and in the Virginia Room archives of Arlington County Central Library: *A History of St. Michael's Episcopal Church*, Arlington, Virginia (December 1998).

By Easter 1947, with the pending Presbyterian sale of the Washington Blvd. house, St. Michael's held its services in the Walter Reed School library in Westover. But increased membership required action, and the Board voted to embark on a building program.

The Rev. Matthews procured a preliminary design and then additional drawings by Charles Frohman, architect of the Washington National Cathedral. But ultimately the design, engineering, and construction contract went to Sharpe and Hamaker; estimated cost, \$49,920. The Board minutes indicate

surprise at the architect's high invoice—\$84. The plan: Phase 1 of the project would serve as a temporary sanctuary, seating 200, and its undercroft. Later additions would comprise an education wing and a new sanctuary, the original building serving as a parish hall.

Because church people generally recall a congregation's history not by the relevant decade but by the era of pastoral leadership, the following overview is organized by the tenures of St. Michael's rectors—seven men and women in 75 years.



St. Michael's 1948.



# RECTOR GEORGE WEISER

(1947-1956)



**Fr. George Weiser congratulating kindergartner Bob Moore, who now serves on the St. Michael's vestry.**

**A**s the congregation garnered pledges and diocesan funding, in late 1947 it hired its first permanent rector, a Midwesterner (and dentist!), the Rev. George C. Weiser. In the critical founding year, 1948, the construction proceeded rapidly. On May 19, the Diocese of Virginia admitted St. Michael's as a Mission Church in Arlington Parish. On June 14, a ground-breaking ceremony preceded the big dig, with a cornerstone laid on August 14. In the late-year rush to completion, men of the parish built the altar and helped install the pews. According to church folklore, the altar candlesticks were fashioned from bowling pins. The Women's Auxiliary raised funds to purchase an electronic organ. On

Christmas Eve, the doors opened to celebrate the first Eucharist (then called Holy Communion) at the corner of N. Ivanhoe St. & N. 11th Rd. From the church's founding, it valued its volunteer choir, which opened the service with "Silent Night." The congregation then sang the beckoning processional "O Come All Ye Faithful." On January 25, 1949, Bishop Frederick Goodwin presided at the building's dedication.

The post-War baby boom and the Eisenhower-era Christian ethos stretched the new church building to the limit. Under the long-tenured supervision of John Pate, MD, by 1953, the Church School enrolled 246 students. By 1956, classes were tucked into every nook and cranny, including the kitchen and under the foyer stairwell. Eventually some classes met in nearby homes.



**Teen Sunday school class meeting under the foyer stairwell.**

From its earliest days and much of its history, St. Michael's has maintained ties with Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, relying on and training seminarians who earn clinical pastoral credits for serving two years in a church setting. For example, in the mid-1950s, seminarians and parishioners led Church School and Sunday evening programs for teens—the first round of baby boomers.

The first decades of the church's history reflected the ethos of the times in terms of gender-based service and social groups. The St. Michael's Women's Auxiliary first met in May 1947 and quickly organized into committees (programs, hospitality, altar, missions), even drawing up bylaws. In the 1950s, the Auxiliary more formally became the Women of St. Michael's (WOSM), with activities including hosting special receptions for funerals and weddings; undertaking fund-raising projects, e.g., fashion shows and a published cookbook (1957; reprise 1987). Thanks to WOSM, in 1953, St. Michael's was among the first Arlington churches to equip pediatric beds (2) at Arlington Hospital.

St. Michael's Men's Club, organized as the church opened its doors, maintained the buildings and grounds, helped to man the fall bazaar/festival, and greened the church for Christmas. The group organized social

events, such as father-son/daughter banquets and special speakers. Eventually called the Church Men, into the 1990s adults and teens met monthly for breakfast, community service, and prayer. And post-pandemic, in 2022 the men of St. Michael's have again gathered for breakfasts and weekend get-aways.



**In his retirement, Fr. Weiser, deemed rector emeritus, needlepointed St. Michael's first processional banner, displayed near the altar until 2015. Fr. Weiser's handiwork is now framed on the south wall of the main Ivanhoe entrance. It's notable that grown sons of our first two rectors—Tom Weiser and Tim Matlack—returned to northern Virginia, establishing St. Michael's as their church home.**



# RECTOR DAVID MATLACK

(1956-1964)



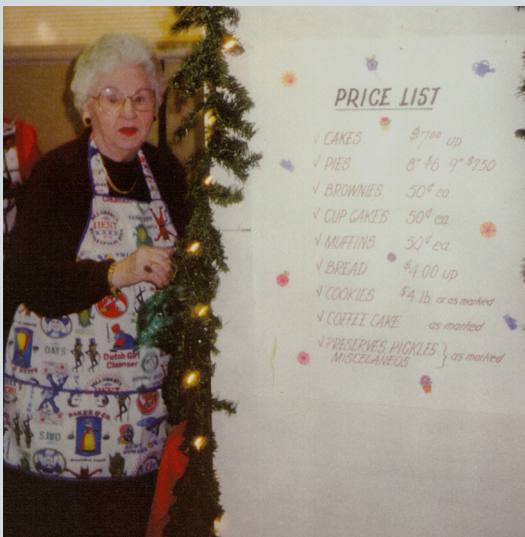
Fr. David Matlack

In 1956, the Rev. Weiser resigned, and the church called the Rev. David Matlack as its second rector. By July 1957, as church facilities strained under the pressure of 815 members and 275 enrolled Church School students, the vestry voted to build an education wing, dedicated on September 7, 1958. The

new facility added 15 rooms, including classrooms, a choir room, and a new rector's study, replacing the office in the current choir loft. Discovering a large problematic limestone deposit at the west wall of the sanctuary, contractors devised a work-around—an open, landscaped patio on the ground floor, eventually enclosed as the current church office. With immediate space problems solved, by 1960, St. Michael's membership grew rapidly.



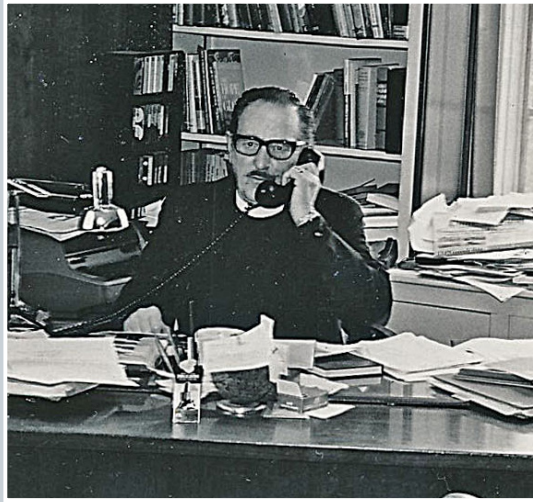
Fathers and daughters dressed in their best for a 1957 banquet.



Henry Slye, a local lumberman (d. 1968), and especially his wife/widow, Margaret, had key roles in the church and community. From 1961 to 1974, Margaret owned and managed the Old Dominion Esso station in Cherrydale. She served the County as an assistant registrar. A long-tenured leader of WOSM, she was a force to be reckoned with. A 1989 Arlington Public Library Oral History Project interviewer asked about being a woman in a man's world. Margaret said, "I even notice it in church. We needed security lights and repairs—I had hammered for a couple of years for the Fall Festival money to be used for this purpose, and this man, God bless him, his attitude was, 'Down girl, down girl, I'll take care of it.' Well, he didn't take care of it. So I became insistent, and the minister said, 'Margaret, how about you being the chairman?' I said, 'I thought you'd never ask.' We got lights. You better believe we got lights, and I brought it in about \$1,000 below budget."

# RECTOR GEORGE PRATT

(1964-1984)



Fr. George Pratt in the church office.

In 1964, St. Michael's bought the current rectory, at 1421 N. Jefferson St., as the family home of its third rector, the Rev. George Pratt. Fr. Pratt moved to Arlington from Germany, where he had served as resident pastor of Heidelberg University's Ecumenical Institute and more recently as administrative assistant to the chief of chaplains, US Army-Europe. His international and military connections broadened St. Michael's purview. Over the next 20 years, a succession of distinguished foreign churchmen visited. This was the Cold War era. St. Michael's proximity to the Pentagon, the commanding influence of Fr. Pratt, and kindly relations with the Fort Myer chaplain's office drew military officers to the congregation. Many held church-leadership roles into their retirement years.

On Saturday, February 1, 2003, CAPT David M. Brown, USN (b. 1956), died tragically as the flight surgeon on the Space Shuttle Columbia. Sunday morning, a reporter came to St. Michael's looking for a scoop. Yes, retired Air Force officer Alan Wilber remembered David as an acolyte and Sunday school student who loved talking about airplanes.

This was also the era of restless turmoil among the nation's youth. St. Michael's had an active ministry supporting youth of church families: softball teams, an active Boy Scout Troop, diocesan-sponsored youth camps at Shrine Mont in the Shenandoah valley. In 1969, the diocese recommended that St. Michael's involve itself more in the wider community. The vestry considered the suggestion made by youth leader Barbara Kuehn, to establish a telephone hotline, originally targeted to teens. Though the start-up appeared insurmountable, persistence drew community and eventually government funds. On December 1, 1969, the lines opened to the Arlington Hotline, precursor to the Northern Virginia CrisisLink.

On the other end of the age-spectrum, St. Michael's outreach ministry was on the ground level of Arlington Meals on Wheels, which rolled out in 1971. And for parish seniors, Fr. Pratt encouraged the 1968 founding of XYZ (Extra Years of Zest) monthly social gatherings for retirees. The potluck lunches



were followed by programs, often home-spun song and dance reviews or vacation travelogues. The church's longest-running program, a version of this senior potluck program, now called Prime Time, remains active to this day.

Another first: In 1964, a weekly, then biweekly or monthly newsletter, the *Guardian*—referencing the patron archangel—replaced earlier parish-information publications. Over time, a volunteer and dedicated Chat and Fold (and nosh) Society witnessed the change from low-tech, snail-mailed mimeographs to electronic production and distribution to parishioners and church friends.

## Church Expansion

On the home front, church expansion again surfaced in vestry conversations. Two options were considered in 1965: building a new sanctuary facing 11th Rd. or increasing the capacity of the current sanctuary. Costs gave pause to the extensive projects. What's more, new (1964) county regulations stymied the plans, requiring off-street parking to compensate for building expansion. For good or ill, this turning point has influenced St. Michael's to this day, as it identifies as a neighborhood church, serving as a worship center for a mid-sized community of faithful Christians and seekers. That core congregation in turn reaches out in ministry to Arlington and beyond.



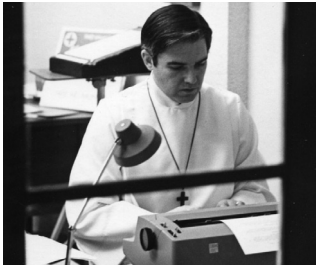
In the original church plan, the choir sat in the chancel area.

Plans veered to renovation. In 1974 the open patio in the center of the building complex was roofed and converted into the present church office. The Willet Stained Glass Studio in Philadelphia designed and installed nine stained-glass windows (1975–1977). Early in the next decade, new chancel furniture was installed, including the impressive reredos on the western wall. The rear sanctuary balcony was repurposed as a choir loft. An electronic Schulmerich carillon, graced (some would say) the surrounding neighborhood with noontime hymns. Till the end of their time—the late nineties—the oversight of “chimes control” lay in the hands of Alan Wilber.



A wintery gathering ready to help with food distribution.

## Additional Clergy Staff



**Fr. Jess Stribling**

Under Fr. Pratt's tenure, the parish enlisted the services of two associate rectors, long honored for their contributions to the congregation's ethos. Fr. Jess Stribling (1974–1985), a part-time associate rector (and full-time lawyer), challenged the congregation spiritually and coordinated fellowship gatherings, including a popular group for young couples and then singles also, prompting a name that combined the two nouns—Cousins. With the introduction of the new 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, he introduced new Holy Week liturgies, culminating in a Saturday evening Easter Vigil.

Under Fr. Pratt's tenure, the parish enlisted the services of two associate rectors, long honored for their contributions to the congregation's



**Fr. Robert Craighill**

Craighill (1976–1999) chose ministry to seniors as his chosen field. He made St. Michael's his home. As part-time assistant rector, he stepped into and expanded a vital, long-standing ministry by which volunteers led Sunday services and weekday prayers and Bible studies in several area nursing homes, principally one in Crystal City known by various names as ownership changed. A rotating team of volunteers—leaders and musicians—remained faithful to the weekly Sunday morning service in Crystal City until confronted with the Covid-19 quarantines in 2020.

After retiring from the Navy as a rear admiral and graduating from Virginia Theological Seminary, Fr. Robert Craighill (1976–1999)



Jack and Jackie Hightower had deep roots in the St. Michael's community, dating to the 1950s. Alongside many volunteer roles, Jackie served as parish secretary (1972–1988). Jack stepped up as church treasurer, vestryman, Lay Eucharistic Minister, choir member, and more. Their son Rick continues in his parents' faithful service.



# RECTOR CHARLES E. B. GILL

(1986-1994)



Fr. Charles Gill, working the phones.

**F**r. Pratt retired in 1984, and the congregation welcomed the Rev. Charles Gill at Easter-time 1986. Fr. Gill's tenure was notable for a deepened commitment to community outreach. The 1992 budget allocated 60 percent of its mission & outreach budget to local needs. The church kitchen was abuzz with activity. For example, volunteers, principally men, prepared twice-monthly Community Suppers offered free to up to 100 immigrants referred by the Virginia Extension agency. Youth served up the meals. Parishioners provided transportation. A clothes closet exemplified the "be warm and filled" commission of James 2:16. Della (Mrs. Charles) Gill directed the ministry, vital until 1994. As a Christian witness to this potentially unchurched community, the large cross crafted from Honduran mahogany that predated the altar reredos was reclaimed from storage and hung on the east wall of the parish hall. The congregation also supported a jail ministry and embraced the annual Christmas in

April (rebranded as Rebuilding Together) project of refurbishing a stranger's home. Salvation Army Christmas gift-giving programs gained traction.



A "stone soup" supper—an example of a St. Michael's time-honored tradition that featured men in the kitchen, cooking and serving the fare.

Fr. Gill's personal dedication to renewal attracted many young families. A new generation of children revitalized the Church School—a program for children during the first part of the worship service. A daytime one-week summer Vacation Bible School filled the education wing. A new and long-lived Caring Friends ministry led by Ardis Sneddon focused on "in-reach," providing soup and solace to church members in distress. A 1993-1994 capital campaign resulted in a significant kitchen upgrade and a north-side sidewalk ramp allowing circuitous handicap access to the parish hall. For years the annual meeting had been held in the parish hall, even though the room would not accommodate the full membership roll. To improve potential participation, the meeting, including a meal, was moved to a Ballston hotel.



In a 2014 farewell tribute, parish administrator and parishioner Ginny McLaughlin said, "Tom and Eleanor Foley have been the backbone of St. Michael's for years," Tom serving as warden, treasurer, search committee member, acolyte director, scout master, chef, Lay Eucharistic Minister, and more. In the words of parishioner Anne Jacoby, "Their characters—faithful, strong, compassionate, affectionate, gentle, witty, practical, optimistic, loyal—provide us with extraordinary role models."

The WOSM "club" remained strong. Three guilds—Margaret, Elizabeth, Rebecca, each informally drawing a progressively younger age group—were joined in 1990 by the Lydia Guild, with evening meetings intended for working women. It's hard to overstate the long-term extent of the fund-raising efforts of the St. Michael's women. Labor-intensive spring and fall Outgrown Sales—for which all secondhand items were individually priced—overran the parish hall and drew goodly crowds until 2004.



**Lydia Guild, 1997.**

In 1994, after Fr. Gill accepted a call to a North Carolina congregation, the Rev. Jane Heenan, formerly assistant to the rector, stepped in as interim rector. Under her leadership, a stone triptych symbolizing Christ and the Eucharist was installed over the front

entrance, envisioned and painted by longtime parishioner John Bryans. A cadre of congregants took the Education for Ministry (EFM) course produced by the University of the South (Sewanee). An Early Christians lay-led group met before the 9 a.m. service to discuss the lectionary readings. In 1995, at the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, veterans displayed their military memorabilia in the parish hall—the congregation paying special respects.



**Triptych installation with artist John Bryans reaching down from the upper window.**



# RECTOR HOWARD HUMPHREY

(1996-2001)



**Fr. Howard Humphrey with young acolytes vested for service.**

**I**n January 1996, the week of what was called the Great Blizzard, St. Michael's warmly welcomed its fifth rector, the Rev. Howard Humphrey, from an Oklahoma City parish that had been shaken by the tragic federal court house bombing. St. Michael's appreciated Fr. Humphrey's pastoral care coupled with his experience as an Air Force pilot, especially in his last weeks in Arlington, when the daughter of a vestry member lost a Navy husband in the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Fr. Humphrey, known as a teacher, emphasized adult education, including the Crossways and Alpha curricula, the EFM track, and Cursillo weekends engendering personal renewal. During his tenure, a busy liturgical church calendar included a weekly weekday Eucharist at the Pentagon, daily noon prayers—weather permitting in the newly expanded columbarium—a mid-

weekday or evening Eucharist. Services were held on weekday holy days such as Epiphany and Ascension. Festival celebrations included memorable highlights: Parishioners fluent in foreign languages read a key sentence of the Pentecost lection. Teens read the Passion on Palm Sunday. Parishioners signed up for slots on an all-night Maundy Thursday vigil. Children and adults flowered a wire cross on Easter.



**A Palm Sunday service at the outdoor altar and columbarium**

Under the guidance of Fr. Gill, the vestry had articulated a mission statement that was amended ca. 1999, with a Trinitarian emphasis that stands to this day, though not without seasons of debate: To provide a nurturing spiritual community in Christ Jesus as the foundation from which we strive to go forth and serve God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Concern for the church's long-term vitality prompted the creation of the St. Michael's Endowment Fund and the appointment of the first Fund Board members in 1999.



## Music at St. Michael's

Participatory music has always played a critical role in the life of the congregation. Multiple choirs—at first ranked by age, junior and senior, and later also a second adult choir delineated by preference for the early (9-ish) family-friendly service or the later (11-ish) more formal service—enhanced the worship experience. A handbell choir, swinging the St. Clair (Mrs. Robert) Craighill Memorial English handbells, musically augmented feast days. Mr. David Donaldson served as the organist and choir master from 1979 until his retirement in 2017, when he was named music director emeritus. Over his tenure as a traditionalist, he composed and led the congregation in singing choral antiphons for the full cycle(s) of lectionary psalms. A prodigious collector, he bequeathed a significant cache of antiquarian prayer books to the Virginia Theological Seminary library.



**David Donaldson prepares for St. Michael's Sunday, his last Sunday before retiring in 2017.**

Mr. Donaldson oversaw the design and February 2000 installation of a new Schantz organ—890 pipes squeezed into and above the modest choir loft. David composed a sung Mass to honor the long-awaited event. That October, guest organist Bruce Neswick, director of music at the National Cathedral schools, gave a dedicatory evening recital. The vintage Rodgers electronic organ found a home in a North Carolina church devastated by the 1999 Hurricane Floyd.



**St. Michael's 1993 adult and children's choirs also with handbell ringers illustrate the joy the intergenerational music ministry provided across decades.**

## Community Life

As the calendar turned on a new century, the congregation's community life and outreach remained strong, grounded in coffee hours after both main services. A monthly Movie Mixer group attended and discussed a matinee feature; other gatherings included Lenten soup suppers, even a Thanksgiving Day potluck, and annual not-to-be-missed Christmas Eve midnight parties.

*“Eating was such a central part of the church life.”*

—Charley Roberts



Lunch is served at the 1998 Fall Festival Archangel Cafe.

One of the most continuous projects from the earliest day of St. Michael's was the annual Fall Festival, its first incarnation seen in a 1948 fund-raising bazaar. Reflecting the effect of the baby boom, the first festivals, in addition to sales booths and meals, featured outdoor games and pony rides. Local merchants supported the event through in-kind donations. From the mid-1960s onward, the festivals financed the purchase of church furnishings as well as outreach efforts and Shrine Mont scholarships. Until 2002, a Friday evening candlelight dinner (two seatings) provided truly festal delight. In 2003, the Festival Committee scaled back the all-hands-on-deck event.

*“My neighbor Betty Weber invited Lisa and me to St. Michael's. She was not a person to give up easily. When our daughter was born, we finally became regulars. I never imagined the wonderful experiences that would lead to.”*

—Wil Harkins

In 1999, the vestry returned to the earlier mode of holding the annual meeting on the church grounds, in the sanctuary after a Sunday Eucharist and before a parish-hall reception. This new pattern remains to this day. Church picnics, previously held in county parks, similarly “came home” to the church yard as the church celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1998.



The Rev. Dr. Bill Weiler, associate rector (1998–2001), is fondly remembered as a biblical scholar as well as for his down-to-earth wisdom and personal presence, here, for example, giving rides in his “sweet chariot” at annual church picnics.

## Mission & Outreach

For decades, much of St. Michael's mission & outreach funding was collected in specially designated green (later yellow) envelopes found alongside the pew hymnal racks. Parishioners understood a uniquely parochial lingo: “The green envelope offering this month/week goes to . . .”—a specified local nonprofit, an overseas mission project, or the rector's discretionary fund. Similarly, in-kind donations, tagged “basket collections,” were designated month-by-month,



the requests often seasonal (e.g., school supplies, winter socks or gloves). A Mission & Outreach committee comprising parishioner advocates connected to various nonprofits chose and distributed funds and goods to recipients. Monetary amounts were bolstered by vestry-allocated funds. Long-supported ministries included Christian Children's Fund, Metropolitan Police Send-a-Kid-to-Camp program, and Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD), Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC), and Doorways. From 1997 to 2018, a sandwich-making team gathered once a month to provide brown-bag meals distributed by ASPAN (Arlington Street People's Assistance) on specified Arlington intersections. Volunteers also helped serve dinners and facilitate check-in at the Emergency Winter Shelter.



**Assembling sandwiches to be distributed by ASPAN.**

## Care of Creation



**Fr. David Cox teaching at Shrine Mont.**

When Fr. Humphrey resigned in fall 2001, the Rev. Dr. David Cox served for a year as interim rector. When he arrived, Fr. Cox

articulated what he saw—volunteer burnout. A worker-bee generation of WW II veterans was fading away. Baby boomers stepped up to a point, but more and more women held jobs outside the home. On any number of fronts, the times, “they were a changin’.”

Consider the congregation's growing awareness of their responsibility as stewards of the earth. In 2002, Fr. Cox led a springtime celebration of Rogation Sunday. A seed took root. Four years later, a newly formed Care of Creation committee organized ten Sunday-morning forums culminating on Rogation Day 2007. In subsequent years, the congregation has slowly achieved goals: (1) improving energy efficiency, including installation of new thermal windows, lighting, air conditioning, and appliances, (2) replacing invasive species with native plants, and, most recently in 2023, (3) reducing, even eliminating, the parish-hall use of single-use plastics.



**The 2016 landscape renovation featuring native plants.**



# RECTOR LESLIE HAGUE

(2002-2016)



Mtr. Leslie Hague

**A**t a 2002 Thanksgiving Day Eucharist, St. Michael's welcomed the Rev. Leslie Hague—its sixth rector, representing a sea change in leadership. In its first 25 years, the church's official governance roster listed male names. The first female warden, Mary Webbere, served in 1975, a year after the Episcopal Church ordained its first female priests. A quarter-century later, Mtr. Leslie, as she was called, accepted the challenge of leading the parish, as rector, into new cultural territory. As the national church wrestled with the issue of homosexuality in the church, Mtr. Leslie brought the issue to the fore in a 2010 month-long segment in a periodic Wednesday Nights at St. Mike's educational series. Her personal journey became part of the congregation's history when, in 2012, she married her partner, Katie Casteel, at a civil ceremony in Washington, D.C., a year later blessed litur-

gically by Bishop Shannon Johnston. This was significant, being the first same-sex union blessing for a priest in the Diocese of Virginia.

Mtr. Leslie initiated two major administrative changes: (1) consolidating separate financial accounts of various groups (e.g., the women's guilds, the Fall Festival) into the broader church budget with vestry oversight, reducing the risk of misuse of funds and (2) integrating financial records into a broader parish database, eventually facilitating ease of electronic giving and pledge statements. Also the church hired a professional bookkeeper, taking the responsibility off the hands of volunteers.



In September 2003, Peter Fetridge, the church's unofficial "gate keeper" (1994-2007), discovered the overnight uprooting of a large tree that had hit but not broken the apex cross, which in turn had spared the roof. Mtr. Leslie saw this as a "visceral image of how the cross saves us." Peter never realized his dream—to write a book titled *The Care & Keeping of Our Father's House*.

## Youth Ministry



**Processing to the third-floor Children's Chapel.**

The new century was marked by a full calendar of youth activities: theological discussions tagged Popcorn Theology at the Rectory; summer mission trips to coastal North Carolina, southwestern West Virginia, and the rustbelt in

Pennsylvania;

fund-raisers, such as

Shrove Tuesday pancake suppers and the Fannie Mae mini-walk for the homeless; service projects, including making care kits for individuals experiencing homelessness, and providing hands-on help to the Salvation Army during Advent. Sunday school, held between the two morning services and eventually after the second service, reached students from toddlers to teens. In 2003, the weeklong daytime Vacation Bible School program moved to an evening track, with volunteers providing child-friendly meals. From 2000 to 2004, the *Guardian* included a monthly *Youthink* newsletter written by Jane Cook—information and inspiration for the younger set. The church continued its tradition of granting scholarships (in 2003, 15) to students attending summer camps at Shrine Mont.



**Teens whipping up pancakes for Shrove Tuesday supper, 2009.**



**Vacation Bible School 2009 drew smiles from volunteers, both teens and adults.**



**Reading the Creed or Lord's Prayer in a Children's Chapel service. Participants then joined the adults for Eucharist.**





For some 20 years, Jane Cook led two vital ministries for disparate age groups: (1) Children's Chapel, a program during the first half of the 9 a.m. service that introduced Bible stories, hymns, and the liturgy to ages 4–8, and (2) XYZ, a senior lunch and program, now called Prime Time. Ken Cook launched the church's first (one-page) website in April 1999, sang in the choir, trained acolytes, and more. On Pentecost Ken made a point of wearing a unique red shirt.

## Worship & Adult Education

Like their parents' generation, in September households trekked to the Shenandoah valley to enjoy the annual parish retreat at Shrine Mont, the rustic diocesan conference center. The getaway provided (and still provides) respite and rejuvenation for body and soul, exploring, for example, the relationship between faith and science or themes in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Since 2016, the church has generously paid retreat expenses for children to age 18.

*“The final Eucharist Sunday morning is my favorite time at Shrine Mont. To be in God’s beautiful outdoors under a blue sky . . . is so uplifting.”*

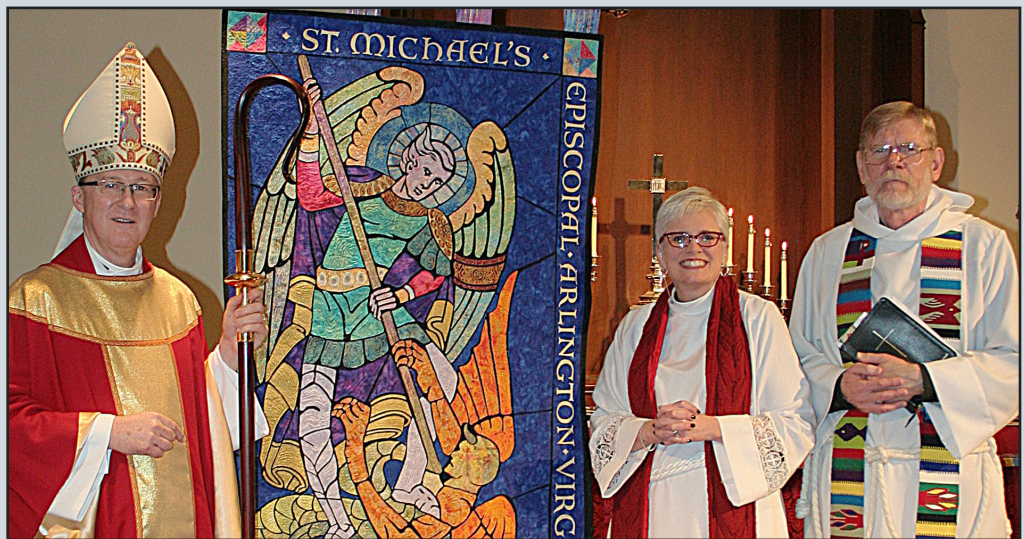
—Dorothy Quimper

In the summer of 2006, vestry minutes mention a “slowly declining membership,” and pledge units slipped downward. The Rev. George Caldwell joined the parish on Sundays as a priest associate (2006–2015) and scheduled preacher.

A welcoming campaign encouraged personal outreach to draw newcomers into the fold. In 2008, three Sunday morning Eucharists consolidated to two, times of which subsequently fluctuated. In late 2011, after hiring Melanie Monahan as Director of Christian Education for Children and Youth (2011–2019), the Sunday worship attendance increased. For spreading the good news of the St. Michael's community, kudos to Cindy Matlack, tagged “our communications genius,” and Tim Matlack, the website designer. A St. Clare Society (named for the patron saint of television, who knew?) recorded Sunday sermons, which were then posted on the short-lived parish blog, YouTube, and eventually Facebook.

With florists drastically raising their prices, if not closing down, in 2016 the Altar Guild under the direction of Linda Denson turned its creative hand to arranging flowers, often from personal gardens or the churchyard. This effort eventually led to the formation of a Flower Guild that works alongside the Altar Guild.





The St. Michael stained-glass window in the narthex was featured in a 2004 hardcover book, *Our Churches Tell the Story* by Denise Z. Park. In 2015, the church first displayed a newly commissioned processional banner based on the window representation, quilted by North Carolina fabric artist Astrid Loveland. Pictured with the banner: Bishop Shannon Johnston, Mtr. Leslie Hague, and Fr. George Caldwell.

A wide array of Christian education offerings were led by clergy (such as a Pastoral Listening series) but also by laypeople, notably a series on Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Wednesday Nights at St. Mike's; Monday Mugs with St. Mike's at Westover Beer Garden; Women of Wisdom; Bible Challenge and Beyond(ers); silent retreat days; and book groups. The labyrinth, bricked out in the yard as a teen's Eagle Scout project, facilitated quiet reflection. From 2008 to 2012, the Episcopal churches of Arlington (Region 3) combined spiritual enrichment, often presented by seminary professors, with table fellowship, sponsoring Lenten Soup Suppers in a rotation of parish halls.



A long-standing Monday night book group enjoyed an annual dinner, here at the home of Betty Weber (far left).

Spiritually challenged by St. Michael's clergy and community, since 2002 four congregants considering second careers have discerned and fulfilled a vocational call to the priesthood: Kathleen Christopher, Corry Weierbach, Ann Truitt, and Kevin Laskowski. The congregation sent them forth with blessing. Additionally, Mary Cushing is currently a postulant for the vocational diaconate.

## Community Life

In this season, biblical nomenclatures claimed the day. The Caring Friends in-reach ministry found new life in the Samaritan Guild. The Fellowship Committee was reimagined as Loaves & Fishes (LAF). Ease of access to the parish hall multiplied exponentially thanks to the 2008 installation of an institutional-grade elevator, given in memory of Elisabeth Heath. Frequent events included ice cream socials, neighborhood caroling, Octoberfests and trivia nights, spaghetti suppers, potlucks, (sometimes themed as in a PieUs dinner), even a Stone Soup supper. The women's guilds, though losing momentum, enjoyed an annual tea, hosted by the baby boomers for their older friends.



A 2005 tea party hosted by the Lydia Guild in honor of the older women of St. Michael's.

*"The first time my family and I walked through St. Michael's red door, I had no idea what a special place it is . . . Gradually, I got it: It's a real community."*

—Corry Weierbach

For more than 20 years, through 2016, Foyer Groups, later called Dinner Circles, enhanced the congregation's sense of camaraderie. Once or twice a year, a newly formed

group of four to six households committed to hosting at home one round of dinners. Over six months, acquaintances became friends. Unscripted conversations cemented inter-generational ties and revealed journeys of humble but memorable parishioners. Life stories linger: When Clyde Elliott was drafted in 1944, he vacated an entry-level government bookkeeping job. After the War, he could have returned to his former position. Not so fast. Feeling it unfair to displace the man who'd replaced him, he sought employment in another office/agency. That noble decision changed the course of his career, he said. Eventually he was treasurer of the Pentagon Federal Credit Union.

## Mission & Outreach

The M&O landscape didn't fluctuate much in the tenure of Mtr. Leslie. Specific financial outlays changed periodically, depending on parishioners' interest and personal connections, serving as an NGO's advocate. In addition to local outreach, supported international ministries included South American Mission Society and work in Darfur, Malawi, Ramallah, Uganda, and Haiti.



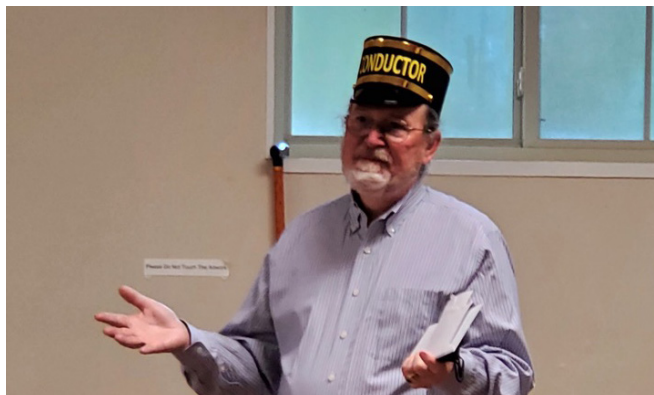
The Rev. Rosemari Sullivan leads a Saturday morning workshop session at a Shrine Mont parish retreat.



## Transition

In 2016, as a major Moving Forward in Faith capital campaign wrapped up—successfully funding significant facilities upgrades and renovations—Mtr. Leslie Hague accepted a call to a parish in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. In a moving liturgy, she ceremoniously handed the church keys to the warden. The congregation had changed since her arrival in 2002. Many baby-boomer career government workers had moved away, maybe “back home” or near their children. One again heard whispers of generational change and volunteer fatigue. But in the ensuing interim year, the congregation remained stable in the care of the Rev. Canon Rosemari Sullivan. She gratefully acknowl-

edged the right-hand support of Parish Administrator Wil Harkins (2016–2022), who took on an ever-increasing role in the oversight of facilities and systems. As interims are wont to do, Mrs. Sullivan prepared the congregation for a new round of changes.



**Parish administrator and train buff Wil Harkins streamlined church management functions. Pictured here at a retirement luncheon in the parish hall.**



**The church chancel and reredos, decorated for Easter.**



# RECTOR BETH MAGILL FRANKLIN

(2017-Present)



Beth Franklin presiding at an infant baptism.

**O**n Sunday December 10, 2017, notably the beginning of the liturgical year, St. Michael's enthusiastically welcomed its seventh rector, the Rev. Beth Magill. Beth, as she preferred being called, changed her surname to Franklin upon her 2018 marriage to Nic Franklin.

## Settling In, Switching Out

Beth quickly introduced a concentrated Dwell-ing in the Word practice—at the beginning of vestry and committee meetings reading and discussing a passage over and over through a full year. In 2018, the key Scripture was Luke 10:1-12, where Jesus tells disciples to “Go into the neighborhood; travel lightly.” Members of an Experimental Taskforce strolled the surrounding streets, attuning their spirits to the needs and resources at hand. As one parishioner said, “We have always just been a

church in a neighborhood. Now we're contemplating what it means to be a neighborhood church.” Discernment became a watchword for seeking the Spirit's direction and laid the groundwork for new ways and means.



Scene from the newly envisioned block party on the side lawn.

In 2018, the annual Fall/Harvest Festival, in recent years a fund-raiser held in the parish hall on a mid-November Saturday, was newly envisioned as an outdoor free-to-all block party, featuring musicians, BBQ, a moon bounce, pumpkin painting, and more. That day, in memory of Kim Sutter, an Inova blood mobile set up shop on the street, now an annual event. The Children & Youth Ministry Committee switched out the five-evening Vacation Bible School for a one-morning Faith Formation Festival. Weekly school-age Sunday school was streamlined to a once-a-month intergenerational session. The Sunday liturgy took on less formality, and children of all ages stayed in the sanctuary for the whole service. New families found St. Michael's, often through the upgraded, welcoming web-

site or possibly an informative Neighborhood Newsletter. The 2019 September parish retreat at Shrine Mont drew the largest attendance in decades, with a third of participants under age 18, thanks to full scholarships for children.



**The Shrine Mont gathering, 2019.**

A restructured Mission & Outreach effort no longer featured a mission-of-the-month congregational focus. Outreach giving became a focus of the St. Michael's budget, making disbursements a thoughtful and intentional act instead of the ad hoc nature of the yellow-envelope system. Aware of hazards of "toxic charity" and formulating a decision-making guideline—"living as doers of the Word alongside Christ and others"—the Outreach Committee consolidated efforts on fewer nonprofit community partners who are working directly with our neighbors and occasional international disaster relief efforts, such as World Central Kitchen and ERD. In addition to the congregation's generous financial and in-kind contributions, volunteers currently support the following organizations:



**Church volunteers in the era of Covid restrictions bagging staples (beans or rice) at AFAC.**

Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC, food insecurity). Volunteer teams monthly gather at AFAC in Shirlington to sort and bag canned goods and fresh produce.

Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH) and PathForward—formerly ASPAN (housing insecurity). In addition to facilitating on-site activities and spreading holiday cheer at Fisher House in Westover and The Springs in Ballston, at nearby Sibert House, parishioners have helped residents build raised beds and plant gardens.

Doorways (safe shelter from domestic abuse). Volunteers have provided and delivered toiletry gift bags and hosted a lunch for residents.

## **Drastic Interruptions**

Recent history isn't complete without acknowledging the seismic effect of the Covid-19 pandemic stay-at-home mandate enacted during Lent 2020. For how long? Too long. For all intents and purposes, the church building shut down. The door was locked to nonparish groups that used the facilities, such as Al-Anon, Yoga Emergence (Saturday



yoga classes), Brownie Scouts, and Sur Andes Native Community.

Phone lines buzzed, as a team of caring “shepherds” reached out to isolated households. The internet became the congregation’s survival tool—from prerecorded Sunday services and children’s sermons, to a modified Morning Prayer Zoomed from the rectory then the sanctuary. From his family-home quarantine in Tennessee, current Music Minister Noel Warford prerecorded hymns, even engaging the choir for synchronized Zoom sing-a-longs. With herculean effort, in August the church showcased an undervalued resource—its spacious lawn. Fifteen judiciously spaced patio umbrellas shielded household groups, everyone wearing masks; Mark Haynes designed and built a small, stable, hardwood altar. Hymns at first led by an amplified guitar later rose heavenward accompanied by new electronic keyboard. For one service the handbells rang out. Pedestrians walking their dogs noted the faithful cohort.



**Worship on the lawn, summer 2020.**

As the new normal dragged on, spiritual formation opportunities expanded, with online book studies, special forum speakers, and a Holy Listening series. Beth introduced

a weekly podcast, interviewing voices from across the Episcopal Church. Indoor Sunday worship was largely curtailed until spring 2022.

At every stage, church leadership agonized over appropriate levels of risk. At first, should the church apply for the Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program to protect staffing? Later, should they require preregistration for services? Eucharist? There was no precedent to rely on.

The pandemic resulted in potentially permanent changes. These include an emailed Weekly Newsletter replacing the twice-monthly *Guardian* and reduction in Sunday morning worship options—at present, one service at 9:30, available in person, live via Zoom, and delayed on YouTube. One thing hasn’t changed—the unbroken tradition of a volunteer choir augmenting St. Michael’s worship.



**Workers expertly removed and replaced the church’s original slate roof.**

Speaking of long-standing traditions. The sanctuary’s original 1948 slate roof, which had kept worshipers mostly dry for 72 years, was at last hopelessly decayed. The Covid restrictions did not hinder the replacement of all the



church's roofs, the construction overseen by Warden Caroline Haynes. In short order, rectory upgrades burgeoned into major repairs and renovations. Parishioner-architect John Kelleher, who's been cited as "advisor for Buildings and Grounds," and others continue to keep the facilities in shape.

### **New Emphasis on Arts & Faith**

Noting the success of a one-day September 2010 Arts Festival, in 2018 Maureen Doallas—parishioner, poet, and art devotee—presented a proposal for a comprehensive church-based arts ministry. Starting in 2019 with the visual arts facet of the arts spectrum, seasonally rotating art exhibits enhanced the parish hall and eventually the upstairs southside hallway. A 2020 exhibit titled "Artists and Poets Respond to the Pandemic" is the first of many currently posted on the church arts & faith website page, which has garnered national attention. New exhibits include artist statements and in-person artist talks, when possible. In 2022, the expanding ministry established the permanent St. Michael's Art Collection and Arts & Faith Fund, seeded by ten woodblock "Psalms Visualized" prints by Kreg Yingst.

*"Art is one way for us to show appreciation that we're involved with something larger than the parish."*

*—Maureen Doallas*



Kreg Yingst, "Psalm 81," Hand-carved and -painted Block Print from *Psalms in 150 Block Prints*, 2016.

### **New Emphasis on Interracial Relationships**

In the 1980s, the Rev. Al Moss, an African American priest living in Westover, attended St. Michael's with his family and occasionally preached. As early as 1994, Region 3 sponsored a pilot Saturday morning program titled "Racism: It's Everybody's Problem" at Trinity Episcopal. Did St. Michael's consider it to be only a South Arlington issue? It's not clear. A March 24, 1996, "green envelope" offering went to help rebuild four Black churches in rural Alabama destroyed by arson. And in 2000 the pastor of Calloway United Methodist Church preached at St. Michael's as part of a Thanksgiving Eve interfaith preacher exchange. Parishioners may have had personal inter-racial relationships, but the congregation as a whole remained relatively insulated.

That changed on June 21, 2015, the Sunday after the tragic shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. To show solidarity with the local Black church community, St. Michael's parishioner Anne Jacoby drove to Green Valley, near Shirlington, to worship with the Lomax AME Zion community. She periodically returned, sometimes with Maureen Doallas, for worship or a Saturday senior breakfast. Brenda Cox, director of the Lomax Senior Ministry, reciprocated, visiting St. Michael's. Informal relationships developed, engendered by the first (2017) of several joint "field trips" to bi-annual Sacred Threads quilting exhibits in Herndon.



**Parishioners from Lomax and St. Michael's at the 2019 Sacred Threads quilting exhibit.**



**Pastor Nelson and Rector Beth Franklin.**

Then in 2020, at an Arlington Black Lives Matter event, Rector Beth Franklin met the Rev. Dr. Adrian Nelson II, pastor of Lomax. The two leaders, discovering symbiotic goals, drew tighter bonds between the congregations, now considered "sister churches"; they have cohosted Covid-era Zoom presentations, listening sessions, and book discussions exploring the nature of reconciliation and the complex issues of deeply rooted racial injustice. Beth Franklin hosted twice-monthly Zoom meetings, connecting seniors of the two congregations. Our journey toward racial reconciliation continues.



Since at least 1994, clergy have encouraged parishioners to join them on occasional pilgrimages—to the Holy Land (1994; 1999), England (1997), Iona (2014). In June 2023, parishioners from St. Michael's and Lomax AME Zion filled every seat of a coach bus heading to Cambridge, Maryland, to visit sites related to the life and liberating work of Harriet Tubman. After the visit, the two congregations jointly sponsored a brick in the pathway around the Tubman memorial in Cambridge. The text reads:

**Lomax AME Zion & St. Michael's, Arlington VA, Journey to Freedom  
"Oh, Freedom 2023"**

**The churches anticipate additional joint pilgrimages.**



## Becoming Beloved Community



The congregation's current work toward racial reconciliation, healing, and justice is guided by a framework envisioned by the national church: Becoming Beloved Community. Ministries and themes can be visualized by four quadrants of a labyrinth, tweaked to the local level:

**Telling the truth**—identifying the congregation's past and present relationship to and in the neighborhood and wider community. Research revealed that the original title deed to the church site included a seemingly "standard practice" covenant that barred any non-Caucasian from owning or leasing the property. Though the county no longer has the right to enforce the clause, in July 2023, the church officially removed the racially restrictive covenant from the property deed.

**Proclaiming the dream** of Beloved Community—played out by reading and reflectively discussing monthly "pocket practices" that illustrate and explore God's dreams and our dreams. An October 2022 Lomax–St. Michael's preacher exchange challenged both congregations to pursue justice, peace, and mercy.

**Practicing the way** of Jesus's healing love—Since 2021, 43 St. Michael's congregants have signed on to participate in Sacred Ground Dialogue Circles, an intensive film-based, peer-led, 11-session race & faith curriculum produced by the national church. Participants have listened, learned, talked, cried. Sobered and stimulated, they have energized the entire congregation.

*"I 'selfishly' joined a Sacred Ground Circle as a way to further connect to my new parish. I'm happy to say that this indeed happened, but so much more . . . Sacred Ground opened my mind and heart to the truth of racial injustice."*

—Paula Dierkes

**Repairing the breach** in society and institutions—Postcard-writing parishioners have partnered with Reclaim Our Vote, a nonpartisan organization that encourages underrepresented voters to fully participate in elections.

## Youthful Promise & Support

A 2023 class of confirmands comprised six high school students who wrestled with biblical teaching as they faced life in a particularly fractured post-Covid world. Weeks before their confirmation, the six wrote a letter to the vestry: “When recently asked about how we might like to positively impact the greater Arlington community, we didn’t have a hard time deciding what was most pressing for us. The frequency of drug overdoses and threats of violence in schools is frighteningly common . . .” About drugs: “It’s terrifying and heartbreaking to see our friends looking for comfort in places where there is no comfort to be found.” Further on: “Growing up at St. Michael’s has taught us about the generous love we encounter in Jesus.” The letter, appealing for adult support, served as a wake-up call. After the teens told their personal stories at a Sunday service, those

present, received training to administer Narcan, distributed by a county representative. Beth is eager to share the letter with a wider audience—in Arlington and beyond. This endeavor harks back—full circle—to the congregation’s 1969 crisis-hotline connection.



**On July 13, 2023, four teen confirmands, with advisers Karen Ruff and Beth Franklin, met with staff members of Sen. Tim Kaine after the teens’ letter of concern for today’s youth was entered into mental-health-hearing records of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.**



**The St. Michael’s congregation as it welcomes Rector Beth Magill Franklin in December 2017.**



## Age-Old Emphasis on Nurturing a Spiritual Community

As St. Michael's marks its 75th anniversary as a worshipping community, it celebrates the best of its traditions. It humbly repents of its errant or neglectful ways, known and unknown. With gratitude it acknowledges the individuals, known and unknown, who have faithfully served at the altar, by the stairs, in the choir loft, the kitchen, the office, the classrooms or nursery, and the yard on this holy acreage. And also those who have individually or collectively gone forth to serve God in this neighborhood, this county, this world by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia.



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