What happens when we let our faith lead our lives? What happens when we let God’s love, Christ’s compassion, and the Holy Spirit’s inspiration lead how we live in this world…how we love, how we prioritize, how we make decisions, how we choose paths, how we repent, how we forgive, how we resolve conflict, how we strive for justice and peace, how we respect the dignity of every human being? What happens when we let our faith lead our lives? We’re finding out at St. Paul’s.

We have so much good news to celebrate at St. Paul’s because you love this community, the people and the ministries, because you desire to grow in your faith and live out your faith in this world, because you care for one another, our greater community and our global world. So, let’s take a look back over the past year and a look forward to the coming year.

Last spring, a group of parishioners and staff members met for six sessions to engage in a facilitated dialogue based on Beverly Tatum’s book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* The participants were guided toward a heightened sense of awareness, excitement, collegiality, empowerment, humility and curiosity around differences. Though challenging, a dialogue on race is critically important for our faith community and for all of us trying to live faithful lives in this world.

Another highlight of this past year was welcoming Leah Romanelli, our new Director of Youth Ministries. Leah has integrated seamlessly into the life of St. Paul’s, since she joined us in October, getting to know parishioners, particularly the youth and their families, organizing meaningful and fun programming, customizing curriculum, and planning for the Youth Pilgrimage to Taize, France in June. There are still several fundraising opportunities in the coming months to allow the youth to participate in this transformative trip, so please stay tuned. The renewed energy around our youth programming is palpable and exciting. I am grateful for the Search Committee - Geoff Johnson, Dorothy King, Jim Ptacek, Elizabeth Roeder, Susan Vodrey, and Meg von der Heydt - who gave much time over ten months considering our youth programming needs and interviewing candidates. I am grateful, also, for the valuable input of our youth in this process. My thanks to the many volunteers who stepped up in many ways during the transition to ensure programming continued. Meg von der Heydt and Eppie Miller assisted with strategy, curriculum development, volunteer recruitment, and communications. Gavin Smith coordinated Sunday and Wednesday evening youth groups through the spring with steadfast help from Ken Brown, Jim Ptacek and Brian Kerr-Jung. Jim Gray organized Sunday morning Youth Forum, and Elizabeth Roeder organized the Confirmation Program. Ken Brown, Kari Greenwood, and Paul Winter led 22 youth on a week-long mission trip this summer to Harlan, Kentucky. My thanks to all, including the many volunteers who assisted with Youth Forum on Sunday mornings, Youth Group on Sunday evenings, and Confirmation.

New and renewed programming got started this fall. We launched Foyer Groups, groups of 8-10 adults getting together periodically over the year for dinner and conversation – an
opportunity to deepen relationships and form new friendships, nurturing and enjoying the gift of community. In September, we were treated to a two-week organ festival, arranged by Karel Paukert with a lineup of renowned artists, reminding us that music is prayer beyond words. In October, twenty women of St. Paul’s gathered for a retreat, sharing their stories about how they connect with God. They came away renewed, inspired, and grateful for new friendships. In October, November, and December, parishioners along with members of Olivet Baptist and Forest Hill Presbyterian met to discuss The Book of Joy by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. We were enriched by ecumenical fellowship and conversation.

Our collaboration with EDWINS continues. This past year we celebrated graduation with the students over lunch and the gift of a monogrammed knife set to kick off their new careers. We painted walls, organized clothing, cleaned up gardens, and hung holiday decorations. A couple of fun facts…our very own Tom Nobbe served as Interim Director this past year while Brandon Chrostowski was running for Mayor of Cleveland, and a documentary about EDWINS, entitled Knife Skills, has been nominated for an Academy Award in the category of Best Documentary Short.

In November, we participated in the celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Diocese of Ohio through Diocesan-wide events with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, including worship, special meals, and programming for our youth. My thanks to William Vodrey for serving as St. Paul’s Bicentennial Missioner. Finally, my thanks to you all for having your photos taken for the new parish directory. We are in the middle of proofing – the directory will be ready for distribution before Easter.

I would like to say a word of thanks to our Stewardship Committee for a successful Annual Campaign: Brian Murphy and Tami Brown, Co-Chairs, Lael Carter, Char Glatley, Mike Knoblauch, Daniel Moss, Karen Moss, Anne Payne, Suzanne Stratton-Crooke, Andrea Turner, Paul Victor, and Andy Wheaton. I am so pleased, that after many years of discussion, we are able to put into the budget an allocation to our Capital Reserve Fund, to assure we will be able to cover our current deferred maintenance and be proactive in maintaining our beautiful buildings in the years to come. 32% of contributing households this year increased their giving and 16 pledges were received from new parish households. We would still love to hear from those who have not yet pledged. Thank you and my thanks to the Vestry, Pam O’Halloran, Kim Fry and the many, many volunteers who wrote notes, made phone calls, and made personal visits – I’m so grateful for your time and for your commitment to ensuring the funding that will allow us to grow the Kingdom of God.

So much to celebrate...together, our worship, music, pastoral care, formation, outreach, and fellowship ministries form our faith and inform how we live our lives. The opportunity to learn and grow and enjoy continues. I am looking forward to our Adult Forum series coming up in Lent this year in which we will continue the race dialogue. On three of the Sundays in Lent, parishioners who participated in the Race Dialogue this past spring will speak about their experience in the program and lead us in a discussion around a series in Christian Century magazine entitled Unlearning Racism. These articles will be available in the information rack outside of the church office in the next week or so. We will have guest speakers with us on the other two Sundays in Lent who will engage with us in the dialogue. Bishop Rob Wright, the first African-American Bishop in Georgia, will be with us to preach and lead the forum on March 4th. Some of you may have heard him preach when he was here in April 2015. He is a dynamic,
compelling speaker. The Rev. Stephanie Spellers, Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Evangelism and Reconciliation, will be with us to preach and lead the forum on March 18th. Stephanie will speak on Becoming Beloved Community – The Episcopal Church’s Long-Term Commitment to Racial Healing, Reconciliation and Justice. General Convention in 2015 allocated $2 million to this program asserting that it is time to tell the truth about the church and race, to proclaim the dream of a beloved community, to practice the way of love, and to repair the breach in society and institutions.

We have great programming lined up for Wednesday evenings in Lent, also. We begin at 6:00 with Holy Eucharist followed by dinner. From 7:00-8:00, five different program options will be available. Rich Israel will lead a bible study based on Brian McLaren’s recent book, The Great Spiritual Migration. This study is a preview for Brian’s visit here at St. Paul’s at the end of April. Brian is a revered author, speaker, and theologian. He is a passionate advocate for a Christianity that is just, generous and collaborative with people of all faiths for the common good. Brian will facilitate a retreat on Saturday, April 28th and preach and lead the Adult Forum on Sunday, April 29th. Also, on Wednesday evenings in Lent, Dale Grandfield and I will facilitate a discussion on the Episcopal Church in general and St. Paul’s in particular: history, mission, worship, formation, and ministries. This program is for parishioners who are new to St. Paul’s, or those who were raised in a different faith tradition and are considering confirmation or reception in the Episcopal Church, or whose simply want to know more about St. Paul’s and the Episcopal Church. Leah Romanelli will lead our youth in Bible Study, which the youth have requested. Meg von der Heydt will lead families in a discussion of Madeleine L’Engle’s, A Wrinkle in Time, which will include, hopefully, a group screening of the movie which is being released in March. Finally, the Labyrinth will be available in Tucker Hall to walk, pray, pause, or simply breathe while exploring this ancient symbol of wholeness, centering, and life’s journey. Please join us for Wednesday evenings in Lent.

I hope you have all heard by now that the 2018 Evangelism Matters conference will be held here at St. Paul’s March 15-17th. I’m afraid the word Evangelism scares us Episcopalians. No worries...this is all good news. Evangelism is Presiding Bishop Michael Curry broadcasting and celebrating the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement. Evangelism Matters is all about the joy in being inclusive, in radically welcoming the stranger and opening our hearts to being transformed by new life. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry will give the keynote address and preach at worship. You can register for the conference on the Evangelism Matters website. Please note, the registration fee of $100 will increase to $125 after February 1st. Last I checked, over 200 people have registered from over 60 Dioceses from around the country. The National Church is covering the programming, communications, and technology (including drones and live streaming). We have a committee in place to assure we are covering all aspects of hospitality and logistics: Betsey Bell, Pam O’Halloran, Michelle Bandy-Zalatoris, Chris Chance, Char Glatley, Dianne Hartt, Dixon Morgan, and Tom Nobbe. We need lots of volunteers to welcome and direct and answer questions and help participants feel comfortable and informed. We’re ready to take your name to volunteer, so please stop by the table and sign-up after we conclude our meeting.

It is hard for me to find the words to express my thanks to our extraordinary staff, all who give so much of their time, energy and heart to St. Paul’s. We have the A Team – skilled, collaborative, dedicated, and fun. It is an honor and pleasure for me to serve with them each and
every day. A note on our new employees…I mentioned Leah joining us this fall. Lauren Dockery joined our staff this fall, also, as our part-time Children’s Ministries Assistant, working with Meg von der Heydt. Her efforts have catalyzed exciting programming, both in and out of the classroom, for Workshop Adventures (grades 4 and 5). Amanda Schoen came on staff this year as our Administrative Assistant. She assists with all administrative needs from in-house printing to database management to special projects. Fred Tucker is a recent addition to our Sexton staff. We got to know Fred from our cleaning service through the Y-Haven Green Team. When John Rynes needed to stop working due to health reasons, Fred joined our staff. So, to:

Our clergy, Rich, Dale, Kirby and Denny
Our Pastoral Associate, Marge
Our Music staff, Karel, Rick, Steve, Lois, David and our current intern, Kelsey
Our Director of Children’s Ministries, Meg
Our Director of Youth Ministries, Leah
Our Children’s Ministries Assistant, Lauren
Our Director of Congregational Development, Katy
Our Director of Operations, Pam
Our Director of Communications, Kim
Our Admin team, Brenda, Gail, Amanda, and Anne
Our Sextons, Steve, Paul, Rich, Fred, Chia and Ethan, my sincere thanks.

Now, I’d like to invite Rich Israel forward to say a few words.

(Rich announces his retirement effective June 15, 2018)

We’ll have plenty of time to celebrate Rich. For now, Rich, please know what a pleasure it has been for me to serve with you and know that your passion for social justice and your pastoral heart have greatly enriched this parish.

All, please read through the Annual Report when it arrives in the mail over the next few weeks. We have so much to celebrate. Together we are growing in faith and learning how to let our faith lead our lives. Thank you for giving your hearts to this community. I am so grateful to walk in the light of Christ with you.

The Rev. Jeanne A. Leinbach, Rector