

Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church Vestry Meeting Minutes March 18, 2025

Vestry Members Present:

Tom Van Arsdel, Senior Warden
John Wallace, Junior Warden
Sheeba Thomas, Clerk
Ken Alexander
Jeanine Baker
Rosine Hall
Betty Key
Pam Lovett
Michael Massey
Sue Murphy
Dick Viebig
Shannon Wallace

Vestry Members Absent:

The Rev'd Neil Willard, Rector
Kip Krause
David Madrigal

Assisting Clergy Present:

The Rev'd Katherine Tuttle, Director of Parish Life and Membership

The hybrid in-person + Zoom meeting started at 5:30 PM.

- 1. Check-in and Opening Prayer:** Tom invited personal updates. Dick provided an opening prayer to begin the meeting.
- 2. Review and Approval of Consensus Items:** Minutes from the January 23, 2025 Vestry meeting, as well as consensus items and reports from the Stewardship Council, Finance Council, Deferred Maintenance Group, Senior Warden, and Rector, were all unanimously approved.
- 3. Vestry Guidelines (Jeanine Baker and Betty Key):**
 1. Based on discussion at the February 2025 Vestry Retreat, the following guidelines were proposed and unanimously approved:
 1. Pray daily for each other
 2. Be boldly curious
 3. Be open to other ideas
 4. Expect accountability
 5. Maintain Confidentiality
 6. Be transparent with each other and with the parish

4. Senior Warden's Report (Tom Van Arsdel):

1. Strategic Plan
 1. A special vestry meeting will be held to discuss this on April 15, 2025
2. Parish Councils (Outreach, Pastoral Care, Communications, Membership, Care & Community Engagement):
 1. The roles and formation of these councils will be discussed at the upcoming Strategic Plan vestry meeting
 2. The Rev. Katherine Tuttle will lead both the Membership and Care & Community Engagement councils
 3. Vestry members were asked to provide suggestions of parishioners who might be interested in serving on these councils
3. Parking Proposal
 1. The wardens met with Memorial Hermann Medical Plaza leadership. Negotiations that would potentially allow Palmer members to use their parking garage on Sundays and some holidays, are underway. Palmer would cover the cost of parking. Parishioners would draw a ticket at garage entry, and bring their tickets to church for validation. A scanner will need to be purchased to validate tickets.
 2. A motion was made and unanimously approved to proceed with the proposed parking arrangements
 3. Rosine proposed that once the Memorial Hermann Medical Plaza garage becomes available, priority be given to those with mobility issues to use Palmer's parking lot

5. Director of Parish Life and Membership Report (Katherine Tuttle):

1. ShelbyNext: Over the next month, parish groups (e.g. Men's Bible study, Daughters of the King, Chair Yoga etc.) will be developed for the website.
 1. Group leaders will be trained on how to use these groups to track meeting attendance and communicate with members.
 2. Parishioners will be able to add or remove themselves from groups.
 3. ShelbyNext will be used to facilitate the work of the Stewardship committee.
 4. Currently, Sue Howard and Dustin Jesudason have administrative rights for ShelbyNext. Given the amount of work needed to optimize ShelbyNext, the number of people with these rights (or a subset of these rights) will need to be expanded.
 5. Ken and other members of the Stewardship Council have been beta-testing ShelbyNext.
 6. All confirmed members of Palmer will be able to access ShelbyNext. Palmer staff can manually add "Friends of Palmer".
 7. An App version of the website will be forthcoming in the next few months.

6. Associate Rector Search

1. Ongoing. Neil has received from the diocese new names from within the diocese and also expects to receive names from outside the diocese.

7. Gratitude Reflection (Tom Van Arsdell)

1. Tom gave thanks for the success of Shrove Sunday, including having the largest group of children ever (24 children) led by Roger Hutchison at the 10 AM service.

8. Closing Prayer (Ken Alexander): Ken closed the meeting in prayer.



VESTRY GUIDELINES



Pray daily for each other



Be boldly curious



Be open to other ideas



Expect accountability



Maintain confidentiality



Be transparent with each other and with the parish



Meetings

- Notify the Senior Warden if not attending or will be late
- Start and end each meeting with prayer
- Prepare by reading reports and agenda
- Begin meeting with member check-in
- Honor the time schedule but be flexible
- Produce timely communication
- Submit Council reports on time
- Read Council reports and pull items for agenda
- Submit any additional agenda items
- Receive, approve, and publish Vestry minutes ASAP
- End meeting with clear recap of next steps



Communication

- Express opinions clearly and concisely
- Support opinions with which you agree by only saying "I agree"
- Speak the truth in love
- Do not interrupt
- Allow everyone a time to speak
- Minimize side conversations
- Do not participate in "parking lot" meetings

PALMER MEMORIAL EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Analysis of Revenues & Expenses - Summary
Fund: OPERATING FUND
February 2025

Accounts	MTD ACTUAL 2025	MTD BUDGET 2025	YTD ACTUAL 2025	YTD BUDGET 2025	2025 ANNUAL BUDGET	% of ANNUAL BUDGET USED
Revenues						
BANK DEPOSITS						
OPERATING FUND						
CONTRIBUTION REVENUE	\$199,519.82	\$151,556.66	\$503,738.18	\$303,113.32	\$1,818,680.00	27.70 %
OTHER OPERATING REVENUE	\$33,664.34	\$37,814.34	\$68,898.68	\$75,628.68	\$453,772.00	15.18 %
Total OPERATING FUND	<u>\$233,184.16</u>	<u>\$189,371.00</u>	<u>\$572,636.86</u>	<u>\$378,742.00</u>	<u>\$2,272,452.00</u>	<u>25.20 %</u>
Total BANK DEPOSITS	<u>\$233,184.16</u>	<u>\$189,371.00</u>	<u>\$572,636.86</u>	<u>\$378,742.00</u>	<u>\$2,272,452.00</u>	<u>25.20 %</u>
Total Revenues	<u>\$233,184.16</u>	<u>\$189,371.00</u>	<u>\$572,636.86</u>	<u>\$378,742.00</u>	<u>\$2,272,452.00</u>	<u>25.20 %</u>
Expenses						
PERSONNEL	\$71,886.51	\$86,527.43	\$163,349.30	\$173,054.86	\$1,038,329.00	15.73 %
DIOCESE	\$14,828.75	\$14,828.75	\$29,657.50	\$29,657.50	\$177,945.00	16.67 %
RECTORY	\$584.43	\$1,383.33	\$1,342.89	\$2,766.66	\$16,600.00	8.09 %
CHURCH BUILDINGS						
BUILDING and MAINTENANCE	\$59,924.11	\$46,957.26	\$122,987.16	\$93,914.52	\$563,487.00	21.83 %
DEBT SERVICE	\$4,957.69	\$5,085.75	\$10,262.99	\$10,171.50	\$61,029.00	16.82 %
UTILITIES	\$9,709.10	\$11,750.00	\$19,044.67	\$23,500.00	\$141,000.00	13.51 %
FELLOWSHIP KITCHEN	\$3,859.93	\$1,508.33	\$3,893.68	\$3,016.66	\$18,100.00	21.51 %
Total CHURCH BUILDINGS	<u>\$78,450.83</u>	<u>\$65,301.34</u>	<u>\$156,188.50</u>	<u>\$130,602.68</u>	<u>\$783,616.00</u>	<u>19.93 %</u>
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT						
ADMINISTRATION	\$2,356.26	\$1,886.25	\$2,918.28	\$3,772.50	\$22,635.00	12.89 %
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS	\$1,887.13	\$2,679.16	\$2,178.79	\$5,358.32	\$32,150.00	6.78 %
Total ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	<u>\$4,243.39</u>	<u>\$4,565.41</u>	<u>\$5,097.07</u>	<u>\$9,130.82</u>	<u>\$54,785.00</u>	<u>9.30 %</u>
MINISTRIES						
COMMUNICATIONS	\$3,685.59	\$3,633.33	\$7,827.01	\$7,266.66	\$43,600.00	17.95 %
OUTREACH	\$416.67	\$1,000.00	\$833.34	\$2,000.00	\$12,000.00	6.94 %
EVANGELISM	\$1,594.09	\$708.33	\$1,594.09	\$1,416.66	\$8,500.00	18.75 %
FELLOWSHIP	\$3,271.50	\$1,833.33	\$4,339.47	\$3,666.66	\$22,000.00	19.72 %
MUSIC MINISTRY						
MUSIC-ADULTS	\$380.00	\$1,020.84	\$380.00	\$2,041.68	\$12,250.00	3.10 %
MUSIC-CHILDREN	\$250.00	\$333.33	\$642.21	\$666.66	\$4,000.00	16.06 %
Total MUSIC MINISTRY	<u>\$630.00</u>	<u>\$1,354.17</u>	<u>\$1,022.21</u>	<u>\$2,708.34</u>	<u>\$16,250.00</u>	<u>6.29 %</u>
PASTORAL CARE	\$250.00	\$183.32	\$250.00	\$366.64	\$2,200.00	11.36 %
WORSHIP	\$0.00	\$404.17	\$152.50	\$808.34	\$4,850.00	3.14 %
PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY	\$0.00	\$31.25	\$0.00	\$62.50	\$375.00	0.00 %
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/MEDIA	\$3,022.98	\$3,333.34	\$7,047.48	\$6,666.68	\$40,000.00	17.62 %
Total MINISTRIES	<u>\$12,870.83</u>	<u>\$12,481.24</u>	<u>\$23,066.10</u>	<u>\$24,962.48</u>	<u>\$149,775.00</u>	<u>15.40 %</u>
EDUCATION						
ADULT EDUCATION	\$1,519.64	\$1,333.34	\$2,674.42	\$2,666.68	\$16,000.00	16.72 %
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	\$1,740.26	\$916.67	\$2,656.31	\$1,833.34	\$11,000.00	24.15 %
YOUTH	\$2,570.96	\$1,083.33	\$4,541.19	\$2,166.66	\$13,000.00	34.93 %
PARISH RETREAT	\$0.00	\$416.67	\$5,000.00	\$833.34	\$5,000.00	100.00 %
Total EDUCATION	<u>\$5,830.86</u>	<u>\$3,750.01</u>	<u>\$14,871.92</u>	<u>\$7,500.02</u>	<u>\$45,000.00</u>	<u>33.05 %</u>
OTHER EXPENSES						
WEDDING MINISTRY	\$300.00	\$316.67	\$900.00	\$633.34	\$3,800.00	23.68 %
FUNERAL MINISTRY	\$300.00	\$216.83	\$615.80	\$433.66	\$2,602.00	23.67 %
Total OTHER EXPENSES	<u>\$600.00</u>	<u>\$533.50</u>	<u>\$1,515.80</u>	<u>\$1,067.00</u>	<u>\$6,402.00</u>	<u>23.68 %</u>
Total Expenses	<u>\$189,295.60</u>	<u>\$189,371.01</u>	<u>\$395,089.08</u>	<u>\$378,742.02</u>	<u>\$2,272,452.00</u>	<u>17.39 %</u>
Net Total	\$43,888.56		\$177,547.78			

ShelbyNext Update

ShelbyNext has proven to be an integral part of the Palmer Community. It serves not only as a membership database but as a tool for use in all aspects of parish life. Sue Howard, Dustin Jesudason, Jessica Evans, and Katherine Tuttle have been working through fall and winter to migrate all softwares used for parish life into this system. Previously used softwares were ACS, ACS Accounting, Facilities Calendar Scheduler, Ministry Scheduler Pro, Ekklesia 360 (a subsidiary of Ministry Brands), and Church Life (ACS mobile app). Each of these softwares operated separately. With ShelbyNext all of these tasks can be managed through this software.

The final steps of completing integration are creating groups for all affinity groups and ministries, phasing out Ministry Scheduler Pro, and launching the Palmer mobile application. The timeline to complete this work is a three to four week period. The mobile app might be slightly longer due to coding. Once all groups and leadership roles (with varying degrees of database privileges) are created, we will begin a process of orienting group leaders on how to use the system effectively to communicate to members and build schedules in ShelbyNext.

March 16, 2025 Stewardship Council Report to the Vestry

The Stewardship Council met by Zoom on Sunday March 16th.

Members attending:

Ken Alexander, Chair

Jeanine Baker

Rosine Hall

Betty Key

Dustin Jesudasen

John Wallace and David Madrigal could not attend

2025 Stewardship Pledges

Current totals: 243 pledges, totaling \$1,727,477.00

Action Items:

1. We would like to add additional Vestry and non-Vestry members to the Stewardship Council, and welcome Vestry volunteers and recommendations.
2. Vestry participation in 2026 Stewardship efforts.

As an important part of the efforts in 2024 for Stewardship Pledges for 2025, every Vestry member participated. Collectively, Vestry members reached out to over 300 Palmers regarding Stewardship Pledges, and every Vestry member was assigned a list of Palmers to send letters and emails to and make follow-up phone calls as necessary. We anticipate a similar effort later this year seeking pledges for 2026. It will be necessary to make a new allocation of Palmers among Vestry members, in part because 5 Vestry members last year have retired from the Vestry.

We are working with Dustin Jesudasen to make use of Palmer's ShelbyNext software containing membership and giving data and communication tools with the goal of greatly streamlining and improving our contact with Palmers regarding Stewardship.

Palmer Building and Grounds Council Meeting

March 7, 2025, 12pm

Invitee	Attendance
Tom Van Arsdel – Sr. Warden	Not present
John Wallace – Jr. Warden	Present
Kip Krause – Vestry – Chair	Present
Gerry Sandoval	Present
Johnna Kincaid	Not Present
Ric Tharpe	Not Present
Michael Massey – Vestry	Present
Sue Murphy – Vestry	Present

Discussion notes

1. Future Meeting Schedule

- a. Council will meet first Monday of each month @ 12:00 noon
- b. **Action:** Kip to setup persistent Zoom link on Palmer Zoom account

2. Recent Activities

- a. Gerry reviewed results of recent City and Health inspections
 - i. Identified need for minor plumbing repairs (backflow preventers: coffee machine, boilers, etc)
 - ii. Minor issues with food labeling, calcium buildup in ice machine; all issues resolved
- b. Gerry reviewed Fire Inspection results:
 - i. New requirement to have 2 replacement sprinkler heads on hand (fire suppression) – 2 spares for each head type
 - ii. One sprinkler head covered with paint needs to be replaced.
 - iii. Air conditioning Fire Damper inspection required
 - iv. Fire Marshall inspection due by May 2025
 - v. **Action:** Gerry to find source and purchase additional sprinkler heads (\$1,800 - \$2,500)
 - vi. **Action:** Gerry to schedule inspection with MLN (contract inspector)

3. Priority items / urgent decisions needed

- a. New water stain in ceiling of hall by choir room
 - i. No active leak, may be related to previous roof issue
 - ii. **Action:** Gerry to investigate and determine repair need

b. Playground repairs (GISH requested)

- i. Ms. Bianca (GISH) was presented the quote (\$13k for wood mulch), asked for second quote
- ii. Quote is to dig out for drainage, install gravel, membrane, sand, membrane, mulch.
- iii. **Action:** Gerry to seek another quote
- iv. **Action:** Gerry to raise this with the Diocese foundation inspector

4. Updates on regular priority items

a. Rectory

- i. Soft spot under the tiles in Rectory
 1. We have two quotes (\$9,700 and \$14,400)
 2. Quotes are to remove flooring, replace flooring, replace tiles
 3. Quotes do not include work for possible joist damage under sub-flooring;
 4. **Action:** Gerry to confirm this work included in 2025 budget
 5. Look into short-term stabilization plan while funding is confirmed/sought
- ii. Backyard removal of dead plants
 1. Volunteer opportunity for youth group, congregation, Serve Sunday(?)
 2. Include in overall spring cleanup effort

b. Site beautification

- i. Gerry requested that the Council organize a Spring Cleanup prior to Easter Week
 1. Planting of flowers, power-washing front steps and courtyard, cleaning of teak furniture
 2. Volunteer opportunities for various groups
- ii. **Action:** Kip to discuss with Roger and Katherine Tuttle; seek coordinator for effort while Kip out of country
- iii. Possible dates: March 22 & 29, April 5 & 12

5. Diocese Risk Assessment and Facilities Review

- a. Cavalry Construction has scheduled two inspections for March 11, 2025
 - i. Roof inspection – 3 spots identified in preliminary inspection
 - ii. Exterior plaster work – St. Bedes and other
- b. Other inspections to be scheduled
 - i. Foundation – entire campus with attention to St. Bedes
 - ii. HVAC

Senior Warden Report

For the March 18, 2025 Vestry Meeting

1. Parish Councils
 - a. We have assigned Vestry members to the Vestry Councils. We are soliciting names from the Vestry of non-Vestry members to fill out the rosters for Vestry and Parish Councils
2. Parking
 - a. The City of Houston is using the North Lot the entire month of April for an exhibition called the Great Elephant Migration. They will let us use the lot on Palm Sunday and Easter but otherwise the lot will not be available to us.
 - b. To address our parking needs for April we are asking the city if cars can park on the west side of Main during this time.
 - c. We are also in the final stages of talks with the owners and operators of the Memorial Hermann Medical Plaza garage next door for a long term parking arrangement
3. Facility Sharing Agreements
 - a. Review of all agreements (GISH, Archway and PDAP) are in review with the other parties to be current through summer 2025. Sue Howard has completed interviews with the principals of our tenants, and we have the groundwork for renegotiating and renewing those agreements.
4. We managed the winding down of the Palmer Place Apartments ministry and voted to donate the furniture from that ministry to our refugee ministry
5. Rector Review – the annual Rector review took place on March 7.
6. Warden's Forum – a Warden's Forum is scheduled for March 16 to update the Parish on various topics of importance
7. Strategic Plan Updates
 - a. Working Groups statuses are noted below
 - i. People Strategy
 1. Processes for Personnel related Objectives also in review.
 2. Membership of Parish Councils is in process. These councils include Membership, Parish Life (aka Congressional / Community Engagement), Christian Formation and Outreach.
 - a. Once confirmed, Strategic Plan initiatives with these groups will be launched.
 - b. These are related to the Program strategies
 - ii. Place Strategy
 1. Campus Improvements (Master Plan)
 - a. Discussion of current status and future plans will be the subject of a special Vestry meeting in April
 2. Deferred Maintenance
 - a. This working group is folded into the Building and Grounds council.
 - b. The Council will continue to review the recommendations Cavalry and will determine which repairs to address and when

- 3. Safety
 - a. The security and safety report draft has been completed and is in review with the committee, elements are already implemented.
- iii. Program Strategy
 - 1. Membership of Parish Councils has been in review. These councils include Membership, Parish Life (aka Congressional / Community Engagement), Christian Formation and Outreach.
 - a. Once confirmed, Strategic Plan initiatives with these groups will be launched.
 - 2. These are related to the People strategies
- iv. Pay Strategy
 - 1. The formal objectives of this strategy are to be launched with the Finance and Stewardship Councils
 - a. These objectives are a part of their regular discussion
 - 2. Earned Revenue
 - 3. Donated Revenue
 - Under the purview of the Stewardship Committee.
 - a. Many of the tactics noted are already in the prevue of this committee.
 - 4. Increase Operating Reserves
 - a. This Objective includes Year 2 tactics, so will not be addressed until Earned Revenue and Donated Revenue Objectives are established

The Rector's Report, March 11, 2025, from the Rev'd Neil Alan Willard

1. On Sunday, January 26, we held our Annual Parish Meeting, and beforehand, during our worship services, my yearly Rector's Report for the whole congregation was delivered as the sermon. That report is attached at the end of my report here.
2. Last month I attended the Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas in Fort Worth, along with the Rev'd Katherine Tuttle, Sarah Breckbill, Jackie Campbell, Mac Hall, and Connie Wallace. Also represented there was the diocesan ministry to Rice University, with the Rev'd Beth Anne Nelson and some Rice students. One of the things noted in financial updates was that parishes of the diocese, collectively, receive four times the amount of monetary support that they send to the diocese each year through parish assessments. Those assessments, by the way, are much lower than in most other dioceses in the Episcopal Church thanks to the tremendous support that the various foundations of our diocese make available for use. That's also how more funds flow back to the parishes, collectively, than the parishes send to the diocese. One example of that is the fact that the diocese offers to pay the total cost for family coverage for health insurance for every member of the clergy so that the parishes do not have to bear that financial burden in their annual budgets.
3. In the Bishop's Address at the Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, Bishop Doyle noted that average Sunday attendance in the diocese was flat last year compared with the previous year, which he took to be a good sign — the leveling out of the decline in average Sunday attendance in the diocese on this side of the pandemic. He also put that in the context of the reality that our members are not attending as regularly as they did in the past, which affects that data point and which we have certainly experienced among our membership at Palmer. Many people who think of themselves as core members do not attend every week in the way that they would have before the pandemic. The Parochial Report for 2024 that the Vestry has already approved will be included in the Vestry packet for our March meeting. The context you need to know for that report is that although Palmer's average Sunday attendance for 2024 is slightly lower than it was in 2023, because we made the summer worship schedule our year-round schedule this past fall, we did not double-count the members of the choir and some members of the altar party for the last four months of 2024 (with services at 8:00 and 10:00 AM) as we did for the last four months of 2023 (with services at 7:30, 9:00, and 11:15 AM).
4. Bishop Doyle focused in his address at Annual Council on a new strategic initiative for congregational and mission vitality. Click [here](#) to read first the "EDOT Growth Strategy" that was shared at Annual Council. This is an important preface to everything that follows below. You will see that the challenges faced by Palmer are challenges shared by other parishes throughout the diocese, which is why the diocese is refocusing its efforts, including the use of its financial resources, to help parishes throughout the diocese meet those challenges. Next click [here](#) to read a "History of Congregational Development in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and a View of the Future." And then click [here](#) to read the "Church and School Strategy."

Lastly, click here to read [“A Book of Provocations: Dispatches from the Future,”](#) which was prepared for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas by the Institute for the Future. This “forecast,” looking ahead to the year 2035, was shared with clergy and lay delegates at Annual Council. Note that it is called a book of **provocations**, which is to say that you are not going to like everything that you see in it. I recall resources that the Institute for the Future created many years ago for what was then called the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes (now the Episcopal Parish Network). I shared a highly provocative video from those resources with my staff at my previous congregation in Minnesota. One of them said she didn’t want to live in that kind of world (much of which is now currently true about our world in 2025). I responded by saying that I didn’t think they were asking if we wanted to live in that kind of world but rather how will we choose to live our lives as individuals and as congregations in that kind of world. Let me state this plainly: This book of provocations will confuse some of you because it is written from the perspective of the future. It includes, for example, imagined quotes from people in the future. It is meant to provoke a response from you and to help you think outside the box as you try to imagine living in a BANI world that embodies an increasingly chaotic future. **A BANI world is Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible.**

5. During the month of February, I offered a three-week series via Zoom on the Letter to the Philippians. Then during the last week of February, I attended the last meeting of our most recent series of classes for newcomers, which included a dinner together in St. Bede’s Chapel, followed by a tour of the buildings led by me. Now, on Thursday nights during the season of Lent, I’m working with Roger Hutchison, Director of Children’s and Youth Ministries, to offer a series called Painting the Psalms, which includes an introduction to a variety of psalms found in the Bible, representing a variety of human emotions and prayers, and an invitation to create something as an artistic response to that. I continue to lead the Tuesday morning Men’s Bible Study and, for a season, the Wednesday noon Parish Bible Study. I also continue to hold a monthly “Social Hour with the Rector” outside Valhalla on the Rice campus.
6. At the beginning of this month, following the lead of more and more Episcopal congregations around the county, we had a “Shrove Sunday” event after worship on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday rather than a “Shrove Tuesday” event at night on the eve of Ash Wednesday. That made this community festive meal a much larger gathering than it otherwise would have been. While it was fun to experiment with a public-facing event on Shrove Tuesday in recent years with food trucks in the south parking lot, that made the cost per household rather expensive, and people got frustrated when they had to wait a long time for their food to be prepared. So this year the cost was reasonable, the parish hall was filled with both parishioners and live music, and we actually ran out of food (or had just enough food to offer).
7. On Ash Wednesday, we held services in the church at 7:00 AM, 12:00 PM, and 7:00 PM. Additionally, of course, Palmers volunteered throughout the day until about 5:00 PM to stand on the sidewalks between the church and the medical center to offer ashes and a prayer for anyone who wanted that. Not a year goes by when we

don't hear about someone being invited to go further and enter a workspace or part of a hospital floor. This year one of our members was asked to place ashes on the forehead of a newborn baby in a NICU at the request of her mother. At the end of the day, we had reached out to more than 860 people in this way beyond the walls of Palmer and about 130 people at our worship services within Palmer's walls.

8. With respect to the search for our next Associate Rector, since our last meeting, I've had additional, informal conversations with two priests in Houston to see if they would like for me to seek permission from the Canon for Transition Ministry to have a formal conversation about the possibility of being considered for this position. In the meantime, I have circled back to the Canon for Transition Ministry to find out the names of other candidates whom I may consider. One of the challenges is going to be supply and demand. In recent years, the number of Episcopal clergy retiring each year has been about twice the number of Episcopal clergy being ordained each year. Regardless, I'm more concerned about finding the right person who fits Palmer and complements the staff than I am about quickly filling a slot.
9. In my last report, I mentioned that we will be standardizing the bread that is used in our worship services when we are using Rite II liturgies (with the exception of certain special occasions). I also reported that we had found what seemed like a suitable bread loaf candidate, although that was a premature conclusion. Some people found that whole wheat version a little difficult to swallow. But the good news is that we have now experimented with two different versions of challah bread from HEB and found one that works well for Holy Communion after having been frozen. So we shall stick with that version throughout the upcoming Easter season.

THE RECTOR'S REPORT

DELIVERED AS THE SERMON ON JANUARY 29, 2025

Jesus, Savior, may I know your love and make it known. Amen.

The snowfall last week here in Houston was quite a surprise. Although I wasn't over in Hermann Park on Tuesday, I know hundreds of Houstonians *were* there, sledding down one of the few hills we have, doing something so rarely experienced in this city. Walking around the neighborhood where Palmer's Rectory is located, I was truly delighted to see individuals, couples, and families strolling down the middle of the streets, slowly, as if a sense of awe and wonder, which I believe comes from God, had been reawakened within them. And to hear children laughing while throwing snowballs at each other was a gift.

Having lived in Minnesota before moving to Texas, I awaited with joyful expectation the odd quiet and mysterious peacefulness that comes after the snowflakes have snuggled together on the ground. That was a welcome gift, too, in the midst of an endless cascade of national political news, as if a mighty waterfall had been frozen, if only for a moment.

While we lived up there in the Deep North, a colleague and friend of mine who was the Rector of the neighboring parish church in Minneapolis was elected to become the next Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington in our nation's capital. Many of you were introduced to her for the first time this past week because her name is Mariann Budde.

Having served as a priest at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, I know what it is like — albeit on a *small* scale — when the Episcopal Church is invited to offer a service of worship that intersects with “state religion,” as it were. There will always be people who immediately criticize some of the music, some of the anthems, even some of the hymns as being too intertwined with American themes. Others will inevitably criticize some of the words prayed or spoken for not obscuring the cross with the flag. Although to be fair, simply reading the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and then quietly sitting down would be enough to irritate more than a few people *in every corner of the room*.

I suspect that's because too many of us are fueled by outrage only — not that there aren't things to be angry about. But being fueled by outrage *only*, irritatingly to some of us, runs counter to the Sermon on the Mount. It's what Bishop Budde in the main part of her sermon on Mount St. Alban last Tuesday at Washington National Cathedral — the part addressed to all of us — called “the culture of contempt that has become normalized in this country” and that “threatens to destroy us.” She noted that “it's a dangerous way to lead a country,” and, I would add, it's a dangerous way to lead our lives as Christians.

In a recent interview, Bishop Budde stated what should be but increasingly *isn't* obvious, namely, that it's possible to disagree with her (or someone else) and *not* be contemptuous. Because I know her, I wasn't surprised about the fact that when Bishop Budde addressed

from her pulpit, in her cathedral, the most powerful human being on the face of the earth, she did so in a way that was gentle and respectful of his office and of his self-identification as a Christian as she asked a Christian to show mercy on some of those who are afraid.

Forgotten at this point is a prayer Bishop Budde offered in the public square six months ago after that same Christian was almost assassinated. She appealed to the, quote, “God of all mercies” to “keep him safe,” prayed for his “health and well being,” and asked that our hearts be turned from “senseless violence” and that we be led “in the ways of peace.” And she’ll continue to pray for him because that’s something we do in the Anglican tradition.

This morning, in this parish church, we’ll pray for “Donald, President of the United States, Greg, Governor of Texas, and John, Mayor of Houston.” There’s a *high* likelihood that at any point, in any year, in any election cycle, you will be frustrated with one, two, or three of those whose names appear on this list of office holders. But we pray for each of them in the same way we pray for our congregation, including those in the pews who rub us the wrong way, and in the same way we pray for ourselves, knowing our own imperfections.

Doing so invites us to wrestle with God, to wrestle with the love and, yes, the great mercy we receive from God in spite of ourselves, in spite of our *worst* selves. It’s easy to forget that, but one of the reasons we come to church is to be reminded of it and to receive it — to receive the love and the mercy that God offers to us as a free gift — in our hands at this communion rail. And while we take great comfort in that personally, something else also happens to us collectively. We become what we receive — the Body of Christ, which was described beautifully in our reading from St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians:

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

On this day of Palmer’s Annual Parish Meeting, I invite us, the Body of Christ, to rejoice together as we remember some of the highlights of the past year. One of the most fun activities a lot of us, young and old, participated in was the Palmer Follies. In February, many of you came to one of our two performances in the chapel of this musical revue that included solos, duets, trios, quartets, and large group numbers. As you may recall, one of those duets was done by the Rector and his wife, as we sang “Do You Love Me?” from *Fiddler on the Roof*. The whole experience was Palmer at its creative and joyful best.

Throughout Holy Week and also on Easter Day, the Episcopal Church featured across its social media platforms short, professional videos about the meaning of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Great Vigil of Easter, and Easter Day. I hope some of you had an opportunity to see them because the meaning of those days was explained

by clergy and laity from *this* congregation, *your* congregation, *our* congregation. I was so honored that we were asked to provide both the setting and the voices for those stories.

The Episcopal Church, in fact, was so impressed by [*gestures around*] all of this that Palmer was featured yet again just a few weeks ago as part of a series called *Traveling the Way of Love*. That episode explores how worship connects us to God. And don't worry if you didn't have chance to see it earlier this month because we're going to show it during our potluck luncheon later today in the parish hall. I think you'll be really proud of this.

It was a particular joy for me to announce not one but two surprises during our festival liturgies last Easter Day. The first was the news that a family foundation had made a commitment to fund for three years 100% of the total cost of adding a Director of Parish Life and Membership to our church staff. The dream of being able to do that was one of the most critical recommendations in our five-year strategic plan as we seek to strengthen our congregation and grow our membership. As most of you know, that dream became a reality through this financial gift and the calling of the Rev'd Katherine Tuttle, an ordained Lutheran pastor, who began in this important role on All Saints' Day, November 1.

The second surprise announced on Easter morning was the news that a household had made a commitment to give, in thanksgiving for the life of the late Kirk Waldron, a matching gift of \$50,000 to Palmer's building fund. That meant other Palmers and friends needed to match that gift within six months of Easter Day so that a total of \$100,000 would be added to our building fund. I am grateful so many of you accepted the invitation, allowing us to meet that challenge *and reach our goal*. It was a wonderful way to remember together how much Kirk loved both the people and place we call Palmer.

Separate from those two wonderful surprises, a third gift of financial generosity from an individual Palmer allowed us to purchase a new computer database for the church. Now that might not sound very exciting but it really is, and it will become an important part of the many ways we stay connected to one another and to this church. In fact, during our potluck luncheon later today, members of the Palmer Photography Group will be available to take your photo so that it can be added to our online directory, which is helpful not only for the clergy but also for all of us as we try to put faces with names.

At the same time Katherine joined our church staff, we had to say farewell to the Rev'd Ryan Hawthorne, our beloved Associate Rector, after Ryan was called to become the next Rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Houston. While that's always hard to do, I'm so happy Ryan was invited to step into that new role and so grateful for her time with us. We're still in the process of searching for a new Associate Rector. So stay tuned for more details down the road. In the meantime, please do add this search to your prayer list.

Near the end of last year, Palmer was officially invited to participate in the *Family Faith Every Day* education program, funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., which aims to empower parents to incorporate meaningful Christian practices into daily life. Palmer is one of only 100 churches across the country, one of only two Episcopal congregations,

and the solitary church of any denomination in Texas to be selected for this program, a three-year commitment which begins this year. We should give thanks for this invitation.

The Rev'd Beth Ann Nelson, Diocesan Missioner to Rice University, last year continued to dovetail her ministry with Rice students, faculty, and staff with our congregational life. In addition to the separate worship service she leads on Monday nights in St. Bede's Chapel, Beth Ann is often present with us here in worship on Sunday mornings with her children, partly because there are also Rice students at the 10:00 AM Choral Eucharist. She says they think of Palmer as *their* church, which should make all of *our* hearts sing.

On Election Day, November 5, Palmers were invited to attend a simple service of Holy Eucharist in the church at 6:00 PM. This is something I've offered on three out of the last four presidential elections (once in Minnesota and only twice here in Texas since one of those elections was complicated by the pandemic). About 12 of us gathered here in the church, near this Holy Table, including three Rice students. Each of us was grateful to be there, and those who weren't able to join us were nevertheless surrounded by the love of Jesus through our prayers for our congregation, for our community, and for our country.

Lastly, let me say how grateful I am for *you* — for everyone who crosses the threshold of this church because they know it's better to walk with others than it is to walk alone, for those who work on our church staff or with us as a contractor, those who serve on the Vestry, especially Abigail Follmar in the role of Senior Warden and Tom Van Arsdell in the role of Junior Warden, for the Palmers who sit on our various councils and committees and Palmers who are the heart and soul of our outreach ministries and who also share the love of Jesus, often unseen, with our neighbors after we are sent out into the world.

Before that happens this morning, imagine yourself in this hour of worship as one of those people who were walking down the middle of streets on new-fallen snow several days ago. This holy place can be a peaceful harbor for you, amid the storms of life beyond these walls. Here the gift of awe and wonder can be rekindled within your heart. Here you can receive, from the God of all mercies, love in the music, the words, kindness from a friend or a stranger, and in bread and wine made holy food and placed into *your* hand *today*.

AMEN