



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

February 9, 2021

Dear Fellow Parishioners of St. Stephen's,

We are writing to you with mixed emotions. Although we are saddened that Gary has announced that he will soon retire from his ministry as rector of St. Stephen's Church, we feel tremendous gratitude for the many blessings he has bestowed on us during his time here.

For nearly 16 years, Gary has touched our hearts and souls, has deepened our faith, and has expanded our minds by introducing us to many of the world's finest scholars, writers, poets and leaders. Our outreach in Richmond and beyond has grown, providing deeper connections to God and our fellow human beings. Our expanded liturgical offerings have welcomed new people to St. Stephen's, and we have lived into a phrase we have all become accustomed to hearing, "Whoever you are, wherever you come from, we are glad you are here." At a time when so many mainline churches are struggling, we are stronger than ever. We have much to celebrate.

We now honor Gary's extraordinary legacy by working together with great enthusiasm to begin St. Stephen's next chapter, building on that legacy. Your wardens have been in touch with our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Susan Goff. We have begun planning for our future with the search for an interim rector, a search being conducted by the executive committee of the vestry as well as two former vestry members. We will keep you posted.

We will also begin the search for a new rector soon. The process of calling a new rector, which typically takes 15 to 20 months, involves parish self-reflection as well as the careful examination of candidates. This process will no doubt be informed by the parish-wide process we conducted before the pandemic, called "Envisioning Our Future." We will update you on the search process in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, we are blessed that the Rev. Will Stanley, the Rev. Claudia Merritt, the Rev. Cate Anthony, the Rev. David Knight, and soon the Rev. John Jenkins, will help lead us forward, with our talented and hardworking lay staff. It is a great team, and we are thankful for each of them.

We fully support Gary's decision to focus on the next exciting stage of his life, and to be able to devote more time to family and friends. He has given so much to so many! We also want to acknowledge and thank Cherry for her support and her many contributions to our community as well.

Continued

Planning a suitable send-off for Gary and Cherry in a pandemic presents unique challenges, but we will keep you informed of these plans and how you can participate.

I know you all join us in thanking Gary for his many contributions to St. Stephen's and for the significant ways he has positioned us for a bright future. Please pray for our church and for Gary, Cherry, and their family in this period of transition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allison Koschak".

Allison Koschak, Senior Warden

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynn Ivey".

Lynn Ivey, Junior Warden