



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

April 28, 2017

Dear People of St. Stephen's,

Well, we all knew this day was coming. Weston Mathews came to us almost three years ago, right after he graduated from seminary. He was so excited about joining the clergy staff at St. Stephen's that folks on Facebook found out about his coming before I could get the word out to our parishioners (#ZealForYourHouseHasEatenMeUp).

From the beginning, Weston was clear about the desire to eventually have a church of his own. He thought he would be with us for two to three years, while his wife Hannah worked on her Ph.D. at the University of Virginia, allowing him to get the experience he needed to lead a congregation. This, of course, is one of the most important ministries St. Stephen's has to offer the larger Episcopal Church – helping lift up and prepare young clergy like Weston for ministry in churches across the United States. And what a pleasure it is for us to experience and learn from good people like Weston in the process.

Everyone who knows Weston will attest that he has been exemplary in so many ways. His energy, faithfulness, and intelligence have inspired us. His deep commitment to those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or poor has strengthened our church's witness in the larger community and started important conversations in the parish about the intersection of faith and social action. As a newly ordained clergy person, Weston has been eager to learn all facets of parish ministry, and he embraced his myriad responsibilities at St. Stephen's as opportunities for personal and professional growth. If he made a mistake, or if his #zeal perhaps led to a misunderstanding, Weston was consistently a model of charity, using the occasion to learn and grow.

But most of all, Weston has shown us that he has a pastor's heart. He has loved you faithfully; and nothing energized Weston more than visiting parishioners in their homes, in the hospital, in his office, or at a coffee shop, offering prayer, counsel, a listening ear, and the assurance of God's love. We are going to miss Weston and his extraordinarily gifted and supportive wife, Hannah. I'm sorry to see them go, but I am also very happy for them. They are going to an excellent parish church—Grace, The Plains—where the lay leadership is eager to embrace them.

Weston's last Sunday is May 14, when we will formally say good-bye. I regret that I long ago promised to be the guest preacher on that day at a church in Charlotte whose rector is on sabbatical. The following Sunday is the day of the bishop's visit at St. Stephen's, and the Sunday after that is the beginning of our summer worship schedule. So the timing couldn't be helped. But I know that those of you who are able will join the vestry and staff for a reception in Weston's honor on May 14, following the 11:15 service.

Sometimes I can't believe that I get to work with such an incredibly talented, faithful, and caring group of people at St. Stephen's. Every single person on our staff is kind, considerate, and fun. They love each other, and they love you. Weston has fit in beautifully, and we are proud to launch him into this next chapter of his priestly ministry. It has been, and continues to be, a blessing.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Jones
Rector



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Dear Friends,

Today I write to share the bittersweet news that I am being called to be the rector of Grace Church, The Plains in the Diocese of Virginia. My last Sunday at St. Stephen's will be Sunday, May 14.

Saying goodbye can be hard. I know that it is for me. My ministry at St. Stephen's has been a profound blessing to me over nearly three years, and I hope to all of you as well. When I arrived in July of 2014 as a newly ordained deacon and recent graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, your overwhelming love and embrace of my wife Hannah and me made learning what it means to be a parish priest in a large, vibrant parish feel more like getting to know an extended family. Working with the most talented staff of any Episcopal parish in the United States made things even better!

During our time together we have celebrated countless sacraments, shared many, many meals, welcomed new infants, celebrated weddings, buried friends, baptized adults and children, and shared in the joys and challenges of a common life together. We've prayed, laughed, cried and found joy together in so many different places: in your homes, in hospitals, at Westminster Canterbury and Cedarfield, in Palmer Hall, at Morning Prayer and Evensong in Holy Spirit Chapel, at Shrine Mont, on street corners, on hikes at Powhatan State Park, and at Celtic Evensong by candlelight. We've learned from each other in unforgettable Inquirers Classes, retreats and countless "Thirdsdays" for young adults, built community with incarcerated women and men at the Richmond City Jail, connected with our interfaith sisters and brothers, served LGBTQ+ youth at Side by Side (formerly ROSMY) and continue to bear witness to the beauty of God's creation here in Richmond and beyond.

I am most grateful to have known the life-giving and liberating love of Jesus with you in all of these places and many more. In moments of challenge and success, I have come away with the profound sense that everything is sacred because that is who God made each of us to be.

Grace, The Plains has a mission and community that is exciting to me and this move seems right for my family and me now. Over the next couple of weeks it is my hope that we can celebrate the ministry we have shared, and say goodbye.

You all have truly blessed me. I have learned to be a priest serving with you. Witnessing your faith has helped me grow in my own. Thank you!

In Christ,

E. Weston Mathews