

# St. Vincent de Paul Parish

## 2017-2018 Annual Report

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### Parish Staff

Rev. Ray Chase, *Pastor*  
 Colleen McCahill, *Pastoral Associate*  
 Laureen Brunelli, *Administrator – outgoing*  
 Bridgid Casson, *Administrative Assistant – incoming*  
 Barbara Hodnett, *Director of Records and Sacred Vessels*  
 Anne Gibson, *Minister of Education to Children*  
 James Dimmer, *Superintendent – outgoing*  
 Anthony Barajas, *Maintenance– incoming*  
 Joseph Organ, *Minister of Music*  
 Sue Goodman, *Cantor*  
 Patrick Fisher, *Outreach Coordinator/Jesuit Volunteer*

### Parish Council

Michael Jacko, *9:30 Representative/ Council President*  
 Eve Prietz, *7:15 Representative/ Council Vice President*  
 Anne Freeburger, *Corporator/ Council Secretary*  
 Graham Yearly, *Corporator*  
 Joe Yingling, *9:30 Representative*  
 Mary Kate Fries-Hershfeld, *9:30 Representative*  
 Dan Rolandelli, *9:30 Representative*  
 Denise Hamilton, *11:45 Representative*  
 Audrey Rogers, *Liturgy Committee Chair*  
 Rita McMullin, *Education and Enrichment Committee Chair*  
 Dennis McMullin, *Facilities Committee Chair*  
 Mark Palmer, *Finance Committee Chair*  
 Peggy Meyer, *Social Action Committee Chair*



## Overview

Our Parish Constitution stipulates that the Parish Council President is responsible for submitting an annual report to the Council each September and to the Parish thereafter.

This year has been one of significant challenges and profound grace for our Parish. Noting changes in our demographics and a gradual decline in mass attendance, we considered ways to attract and retain worshipers by evangelizing our neighbors and ourselves. We were displaced from our beloved sanctuary for seven months, but the experience reinforced our commitment to each other, and we proved to ourselves what we always knew: a beautiful space is not a prerequisite to beautiful liturgy. We re-examined once more our commitment to the poor in the persons of those who visit our park by launching a new initiative to coordinate the efforts of the many donor groups who minister there. In the midst of all of these developments, we considered how best to use a tremendous financial gift that will help sustain our work for the next two decades.

Through all of the trials and blessings of the year, our Parish has remained proud of its commitment to remain a community of Word, Sacrament, and Service.

## Financial Health

	FY 2018 Actual	FY 2018 Budget
<b>Operating Revenues*</b>	\$785,061	\$753,980
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>	\$756,667	\$668,466
<b>Charitable Income</b>	\$65,226	\$54,816
<b>Charitable Expenditures</b>	\$65,964	\$83,000

A detailed FY 2017 Income Statement is available on the [www.stvchurch.org](http://www.stvchurch.org) website.

	FY 2018	FY 2017
<b>Total Attendance</b>	11,540	11,858
<b>Average Weekly Attendance</b>	222	233

A detailed FY 2017 Offertory and Attendance Summary is available on the [www.stvchurch.org](http://www.stvchurch.org) website.

\* In an effort to increase transparency, the Finance Committee this year began separating completely in its reporting that income which is restricted to the Parish's various social outreach ministries ("charitable income and expenditures") from the remainder of the Parish's operating budget ("operating revenue and expenditures").

The Council's year began with news that the Parish would be receiving a gift from an anonymous donor who agreed to provide \$3 million to be distributed over the next twenty years. This gift, which commenced on the occasion of Fr. Lawrence's retirement, was intended to help sustain the Parish so long as it maintains its current mission and character. In light of the donor's objective that the gift help provide for the long-term sustainability of the Parish, the Council recognized a need to consider how best to use this gift both immediately and in the future. The Council commissioned an *ad hoc* committee to make some projections about anticipated needs and projected income, should the average age of our parishioners continue to increase. In the short-term, an immediate financial need came in the form of the unanticipated collapse of a portion of the church's ceiling. (*See below.*)

### Repairs to the Church Ceiling

In early November, a sizable piece of ornamental plaster molding fell from the ceiling of the church. Fortunately, no one was hurt. However, it took several months before a reliable assessment of the extent of the problem could be determined, and we could arrive at an appropriate response. Three different contractors were consulted, each providing a unique assessment of the scope of the underlying problem and the corresponding solution. The bids ranged from \$60,000 to \$600,000. After much deliberation and consultation with a variety of professionals, the Counsel elected not to solicit an independent engineering report (i.e., to hire a firm who would diagnose the problem but who have no relationship to any group that would actually do the work), because such an option was deemed too costly to be worth the investment.

Ultimately, Worcester Eisenbrandt was selected to perform the work. The firm re-created, replaced, and reinforced one hundred linear feet of plaster molding surrounding the glass laylight in the ceiling. Because we were displaced and the scaffolding was deployed, our contractors made other plaster repairs to the ceiling; reinforced some areas in the uppercroft; painted the upper portion of the walls; and repaired and refinished the floors of the Church. The total cost of the work was \$145,000. Fortunately, the Parish was able to pay for this work without incurring debt or drawing down our investments. Our enviable financial position was due in large part to the generosity of several donors. In addition to the gift from the anonymous benefactor discussed above, the Parish received numerous donations specifically allocated for our ceiling repair.

From early November until early June—a period covering the most significant events of the liturgical year—our Parish was displaced from our worship space. It required a herculean effort on the part of many different people to sustain our sacramental life in the meantime. The 7:15 Saturday Mass, the 11:45 Sunday Mass, and all weekday noon masses were held in the gathering space. The 9:30 Sunday Mass was held in the undercroft. Every week, dozens of person-hours were required to reset the space in the undercroft after the Friday night dinner in anticipation of Sunday Mass, and again after Mass was over each Sunday morning. Dozens of

volunteers dedicated their efforts to decorate the space so that it provided a suitable venue for worship in Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, and Easter. While worship in the undercroft was certainly less convenient, numerous parishioners commented on certain benefits to the experience. The most common theme was a new sense of closeness with each other that came with worshipping in a smaller space and being forced to move from our customary locations within the church. Another observation concerned the surprisingly good sound quality we were able to achieve in the space (the Parish had just begun investigating an improved sound system in the church at the time we were dislocated – a project that now has to be resumed).

Work on the church was complete on Friday, June 8, which met a firm deadline since that weekend the Parish hosted a wedding and a special anniversary celebration for Fr. Dick and Fr. Ray, who celebrated 50 and 40 years of priesthood, respectively.

### Adjustments to Lenten Liturgies

As we approached Lent in the winter of 2018, the Liturgy Committee proposed several amendments to our traditional observance of Holy Week. Some of these suggestions were brought on as a practical necessity in light of the fact that our customary worship space would be under construction. Other suggestions were proposed in recognition of the ways our worship community had continued to change over the years. The Council elected to hold a town hall meeting in February at which all the proposed changes would be explained to the parish. We solicited feedback and ultimately enacted the following proposals by the Liturgy Committee:

1. Seder – Catered food was served in the undercroft. The cleanup procedure was streamlined and the seating was rearranged from former layouts to allow the tables to remain in place for the mass that would follow the meal.
2. Holy Thursday Liturgy – Mass took place in the undercroft immediately following the Seder. Those who had to depart left quietly, but approximately half of the congregation remained for mass.
3. Good Friday – The service was pushed back to allow time for cleanup after the Friday night dinner.
4. All-night Prayer Vigil – Rather than being a part of the Easter vigil liturgy, the all-night prayer vigil, with hourly reflections offered by a number of parishioners, took place from Good Friday evening into the morning on Holy Saturday.
5. Easter Liturgies – Instead of holding one mass that began with the lighting of the Easter fire on Holy Saturday and continued through to Easter morning, the Parish hosted two Easter masses: one beginning at 8:00 p.m. on Holy Saturday, ending later that night, and a separate mass at 10:00 a.m. on Easter Sunday, followed by brunch (and a visit by the Easter Bunny). Each mass had its own personality, and both were well attended, with some parishioners choosing one or the other and others attending both.

The biggest change was to the format of the Easter liturgies. Prior to Lent, the Liturgy Committee and the Council made clear to parishioners that we were considering the possibility that this change might be permanent, depending on our experience this year. While many parishioners were certainly sorry to see a beloved tradition change, many others were pleased with the fact that they could attend mass at our beloved Parish either on Saturday night or on Sunday morning and still experience a complete liturgy. According to a survey conducted by the Liturgy Committee after the fact, the Holy Week celebration was generally well-received: all respondents who attended the Easter Vigil reported being “very satisfied” or “mostly satisfied” with the experience, and all but one who attended the Easter morning mass responded with similar approval. Given this response, we expect to continue this two-liturgy format next Easter. As for the other modifications that were required by the circumstance of our construction project – the Liturgy Committee indicated that it would consider what could be learned from our experience this year that might benefit our worship in years to come.

### Focus on Church Attendance and Membership

Beginning in April, 2018, the Council began consideration of ways to address a diminishment in Parish mass attendance and membership. The decline has been neither sudden nor drastic, but it has been consistent over time. The Parish had put significant effort into its consideration of the topics of evangelization and outreach in recent years, resulting in a Strategic Plan in 2015 and a Mission Readiness Statement in 2016. There was no desire to repeat the work of the committees that researched and drafted those plans, but we did want to learn from those experiences and to consider which of their proposed changes had been successful and which were never implemented.

After a fruitful period of brainstorming, proposals generally fell into three categories:

1. The creation of a “welcome ministry”: This group would identify guests to the Parish and attempt to introduce us in a non-threatening way. Among other things, the ministry might connect new members with resources, publically recognize guests and new members who were open to it, and arrange for social gatherings or gifts.
2. A focus on young people: The average age of the parish continues to climb, and we see few new members in their twenties or thirties. We considered changes in the region that might put us in a good position to attract young Catholics living in Harbor East, Canton, and East Baltimore, many of whom are affiliated with Johns Hopkins Hospital. Ideas on how to break into this group generally focused on non-liturgical programming we could offer as a way to increase awareness of St. Vincent’s, for example: yoga classes, art exhibitions, or lectures on social justice topics.
3. Attracting young families: All recognize that a crucial demographic for St. Vincent’s is families with young children. A meeting of parents was convened to solicit ideas about how the parish could better serve them, and further meetings are anticipated. One focus was on ways to more fully involve children in the liturgy (*e.g.*, inviting children to

assist with the offertory, to offer a petition at mass, and to include more children-focused and children-led Masses per year). Another focus was on how families might support each other (*e.g.*, by encouraging the formation of support networks or creating a separate family newsletter). One change that was implemented after a successful experiment during liturgies in the undercroft was the creation of a space for families at the back of the church where children could play or draw during mass. When we returned to the church after construction, two pews were removed to create such an area that is currently being enjoyed by several families with toddlers and preschool-aged children.

The suggestions and plans described above are still incomplete. The challenge of increasing Parish membership is an ongoing discussion that will be inherited by the next Council.

### St. Vincent de Paul Park

How best to respect and serve the homeless population staying in St. Vincent park has been an ongoing challenge for the Parish for decades. In the summer of 2017, one particular set of problems brought to the Council's attention involved the numerous groups of donors who came to the park to distribute food, clothing, and other items. While some of these donor groups kept semi-regular schedules, many would appear without warning or notice. Few had any open lines of communication with any parishioner or staff member, nor did they communicate with one another. The result was that on some dates, two or three groups would appear simultaneously while on others, there would be no one in site. Most of these donor groups came on the weekends, duplicating each other's efforts and creating a "party atmosphere" in the park. However, during the week, there were often no donors in sight, and many residents went hungry in the evenings as the region offered no options for free hot meals between lunch and breakfast the next day. When donors did come to the park, many groups would bring far more food than the gathered population could consume, and too often the donors would depart without cleaning up the leftover food and packaging, attracting rodents and creating unsanitary conditions. The significant burden of cleanup was generally falling on the Parish. Most importantly, this pattern was disrespectful to the humanity of those who reside in our park, as the donors rarely asked what the residents needed, and too often neglected to engage with them in meaningful dialogue.

In the fall of 2017, the Friends of St. Vincent Park, under the leadership of Mike Kelly and with significant involvement by Fr. Ray, set about addressing this situation. While the suggestion of temporarily closing the park was considered, that strategy was rejected – at least until other remedial efforts could be attempted. The team created a database of all donor groups who came to the park, gathering contact information and details about the frequency, scale, and content of each group's donations. These groups were then invited to participate in a series of meetings. Eventually, a series of guidelines were proposed. Donors would be able to schedule themselves to distribute a meal at a frequency that worked for their group (Fridays would be

blacked out so as to avoid conflict with the longstanding hot meal being offered in the undercroft that night). Food would be distributed for a 60 to 90 minute window in the evening, and would provide a balanced but nutritious meal for approximately thirty people. Each donor group would be responsible for cleaning up, but guests in the park would be expected to contribute to the effort. Interaction with park guests would be prioritized and non-food donations would be prohibited. After a significant number of donors indicated their assent, these guidelines were approved by the Council.

The new guidelines went into effect in June. One of the donors, Marie Dekowski of St. Margaret Church in Bel Air, has taken over the role of organizing more than forty groups who signed on. Presently, the schedule she maintains is full for several months out. Any donors who cannot conform with these guidelines are now being directed to other area organizations where they might be of service. Thus far, the effort has been a great success: the park is clean, a reliable evening meal is now available for our park's guests every night of the week, and donors are forging valuable relationships with the guests as well as with each other.

## Social Justice

The Social Action Committee remains one of the most active parts of our Parish's life. Their ongoing projects are too numerous to list here, but one new initiative deserves mention. In the fall, the Committee invited the Council to consider whether St. Vincent would join a group of churches across the country that pledged to offer support for some level of sanctuary to undocumented immigrants who were in fear of action by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The "sanctuary agreement" being proposed by these churches included three levels of membership. It was decided that St. Vincent would sign on as a "supporter," indicating a commitment to stand in solidarity with groups and individuals who are actively offering sanctuary and with those who choose to pursue civil disobedience and to raise awareness about the issue of sanctuary.

## Final Words

As I reflect on the past year, it seems that the Council left more than a few issues unresolved. This is not a choice we deliberately made, but rather an acceptance of the fact that new circumstances beyond our control have continued to arise to demand our complete attention. Even at the time of this writing, the Council's need to continue the unfinished business discussed above is about to be set aside so that we can address the even more pressing need of discerning our Parish response to new and very public revelations about sex abuse crises in the Church. These challenges have not, however, led us to despair. Rather, we have been buoyed by our shared faith, our commitment to our community, and by the constant encouragement and example of our Pastor and our Pastoral Associate. May God continue to bless us with more of the same grace.

Respectfully Submitted to the Council and the Parish,  
Michael Jacko