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## ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CHURCH

120 North Front Street, Baltimore, MD. 21202

[stvchurch.org](http://stvchurch.org)

## ANNUAL REPORT FY2023

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### **PARISH COUNCIL ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES**

Geraldine Sicola, President

Lindsay Dierkes, Vice President

Kate Volpe, Secretary

Aidan Helie

John Gontrum

Mary Hennigan

Jill Huppert

Leah Mank

Catherine Mundy

Kevin O'Reilly

*Rotated Off June '23*

James Casey

Peggy Shouse

Craig Thornton

### **PARISH COUNCIL COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Finance, Mark Palmer

John Moore, Education & Enrichment

Mark Palmer, Finance

James Casey, Church Reform

Anne Maura English, Liturgy

Social Action, Peggy Meyer

Denny McMullin, Facilities

### **CORPORATORS**

Anne Freeberger and Graham Yearly

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### I. OVERVIEW

The “Spirituality of Curiosity” and developing St. Vincent De Paul Parish’s vision for the future were inspirational and energizing foci for much of the year as part of our ongoing Synodal Journey.

The community continues to face challenges, yet remains hopeful, determined and steadfast to being a Eucharistic community – in word, sacrament and service.

The three major challenges are:

- Transitioning from the isolation during COVID to a **new** normalcy.
- Changing demographics due to aging, death, declining membership related to erosion of trust in the institutional Church.
- Engaging the younger generation in internal and external parish activities when faced with so many other demands on time and attention.

At the same time, the community continues to be tenacious, resilient and has momentum for moving forward:

1. Growth of young families with children and single persons in our community
2. An embrace of Pope Francis’s call to Synodality, and an unwillingness to give up on the Church and its promise of the Gospel, recommitting to living and advancing our Vision and Mission statements.
3. Financial stability.

## **II. INTERNAL OPERATIONS: SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL HEALTH OF THE COMMUNITY**

This year was blessed by the slow but sure return to a new normalcy after COVID. There is great joy in the ability to be together again in person. At the same time attendance numbers of long-time parishioners have declined somewhat due to aging and the ability to live stream liturgies, death of several of our sisters and brothers, and some have left related to the sexual abuse and related crisis of trust and accountability, and other critical areas of confusion and division within the institutional Church.

At the same time, we are experiencing some growth with new attendees, especially families with very young children and young single adults. There has also been a concerted effort to outreach to the LGBTQ+ community as a welcoming parish.

There has also been a concerted effort to outreach to the LGBTQ+ community as a welcoming parish. The Parish Council recognizes that the new road map for our future will need to prioritize outreach and growth, factoring in the possible outcome of the Seek the City process and the changing demographics within the geography of the parish.

As demographics change, we realize that we will need to find new and creative ways for members to be actively involved. It is difficult for young families and young adults of today to have the same time and flexibility for engaging in parish activities as in the past. Having said that, several of our young families and young adults are making valiant efforts to participate and be involved.

While the Parish Council and most committees (finance, liturgy, social action, education & enrichment, facilities) continued to meet via ZOOM during COVID, all are now reengaging more actively. Many have opted for continuing to meet via ZOOM, and others, e.g. Parish Council have hybrid arrangements with some members attending in person and others via ZOOM.

### **Financial Health**

The parish continues to operate in a solid position, with both the Council and the Finance Committee regularly reviewing the financial status and actual results compared to approved budget. FY2023 Offertory Collections fell very slightly short of budget, but overall revenue was substantially above budget, assisted by an unexpected bequest donation.

	<b>FY2023 Operating</b>	<b>FY2023 Charitable and Other</b>
Total Revenues	\$868,900	\$146,800
Total Expenditures	\$708,500	\$148,000

We continue to set aside funds for the long-term maintenance of the St. Vincent de Paul Cemetery. We also have been focusing on critical physical plant needs, given the age of our facilities. While we expected to undertake the planned lighting project in FY2023, we deferred

this project to the future as the Archdiocese set limitations on capital projects while the Seek the City discussion is ongoing. We expect to undertake the repairs of the bell tower in FY2024, utilizing resources from the St. Vincent de Paul Church Historic Trust, generous donations from parishioners restricted to that purpose, and our own operating funds. We will also begin to make critical roof repairs to the church. And, based on parishioner feedback, upgrade and enhance our livestream technology.

Over the last few years, we have kept an eye on the inflation rate and its impact on our staff, adjusting as needed. We budgeted a 4% increase in lay staff salaries in FY24 to continue to ensure that staff are compensated fairly while inflation remains above its historical rate. Except for the addition of a part-time communications aide in FY2024, our staffing levels will remain the same as FY2023. While we expected to have a full-time Jesuit Volunteer beginning in August 2023, we were not able to recruit one due, in part, to the drop in young people applying to the program.

Our social outreach programming continues to be a critical part of our mission as described in other parts of this report. Thanks to the commitment of so many parishioners, we have a substantial base of financial resources to deploy toward these critical ministries.

### **Parish Council Work and Initiatives**

Council continued to work on improving the work of the Council itself and the active participation of Council members. To that end, elected representatives, Committee Chairs, Pastor, and Pastoral Associate, participated in a one day, Spirit-led working retreat facilitated by Greg Canderacci, in March 2023. A charette process/methodology was used to tackle the following four priorities as identified by the Council:

- Priority #1: Decision-Making: Procedures for achieving consensus in decision-making.
- Priority #2: Responsibilities: Responsibilities of elected representatives
- Priority #3: Participation: Participation of committees in parish council meetings
- Priority #4: Preparation: When will we begin/end our strategic planning process.

Key decisions based on deliberations included the need to rewrite our existing and quite dated constitution, and approval to move forward on a strategic planning process as Phase Three of Finding Our Why, which would provide the road map to carrying out our mission and achieving our new Vision statement.

The Parish Council did include questions of how St. Vincent's community might be welcoming to those Catholics whose urban parishes will be closed or slated for closure, should we not be directly impacted by closure. We (a community that gathers in an almost 200-year-old church, believing that the Body of Christ will be alive 200 years hence) must somehow effectively communicate our faith in the Good News of God to those who seek it, and welcome them to join us in our own seeking.

This will be an important consideration in our strategic planning process. We will continue to monitor and engage in Seek the City process and to adjust our scheduled activities related to our planning processes as appropriate.

In late Spring, 2023, a working group on the Constitution began an arduous process of reviewing the existing constitution, developing revisions, and designing a process for internal consultation and eventual approval by the parish community in the FY2023/24 fiscal year.

### **St. V's Visioning Process – Finding Our Why**

As reported in the annual report 2021-2022, St. Vincent De Paul Parish Council embarked on a journey of “Finding Our Why” which began with Phase I – responding the Pope Francis’s call to synodality, which focused on who we are today in the context of the larger Catholic Church. The results of our dialogue and discernment process were summarized in a report titled: LET OUR VOICES BE HEARD<sup>1</sup>. We submitted this report to the Archdioceses of Baltimore as part of the Synodal Process called by Pope Francis.

In this past year, an *“intra-parish synodal process that will help our Parish Council and Leadership listen to the Parish as a whole to discern **who we are as a community and what we are called to do...**”*<sup>2</sup> was implemented. This process, Phase Two of “Finding Our Why” was intended to inform/provide the basis for future planning for the Parish.

Between July and December 2022, St. Vincent’s hosted the second set of listening sessions. It surveyed parishioners and external informants<sup>3</sup> to identify our vision for who we aspire to be as a parish. The methodology, again designed by GLP, and managed by a working group and St. Vincent’s volunteer Project Manager, resulted in the vision statement and a survey report<sup>4</sup> identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for our growth and sustainability.

Building on Phase One's work, Phase Two sought to build consensus on what we aspire to become over the next years as a Parish. At the end of Phase Two, we agreed on this vision statement:

*Rooted in Christ,  
We are radically inclusive community,  
Radiating God's love and compassion and love in Baltimore and Beyond,  
Challenging and nurturing every person  
To embrace and celebrate their divine potential.*

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<sup>1</sup> [2022-St-Vincent-de-Paul-Synodal-Report-V-1.0-FINAL.pdf \(stvchurch.org\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Highlights of Listening Sessions](#)

<sup>3</sup> Internal Informants – those who attend Mass at least once a month; External informants – those that read the E Newsletter but do not attend Liturgies at St. V; those receiving social services from St. V; those who have professional relationship with St. V; and occasional visitors to St. V.

<sup>4</sup> Survey report: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EgLLuPoTqY-hMXAimMmpbcrsTDYH4dnCqRiTPgr6Kqs/edit?usp=sharing>

As the community of St. Vincent embarked on this journey, we made a commitment to the spirituality of curiosity, a curiosity to make us more open to the answers that are revealed to us by the questions we ask. Moving through this process, we tried to keep curiosity at the forefront of our minds, so that we could more clearly and deeply understand ourselves and each other. The hope is that the more we begin to understand, the more we will want to learn. Understanding that it would be a challenge to not just discern an individual vision, but also a collective vision, it was essential to proceed with openness which requires a sense of curiosity.

### **Committee Service to St. Vincent's Community**

Several of St. Vincent De Paul's committees serve the parish itself, and some serve both internally and externally. Some highlights from Committee Service include:

*Liturgy* The Liturgy Committee continues to ensure that all our liturgies are deeply rooted in scripture and sacrament and connect to our commitment to service. The Committee itself has attracted new members and has also been successful in growing the number of parishioners who desire to be lectors and Eucharistic ministers. Of significance is the desire for and commitment to active and diligent lay participation, which is deeply appreciated and honored by the community. St. Vincent's makes every effort to plan liturgies that are responsive to the different spiritual needs of the community.

*We Have a Dream - A World Without Racism* This service to the community is an initiative of St. Vincent's Social Justice/Social Action Committee. For three years now the project has continued to organize and sponsor a robust agenda of continuing education and reflection for the community on racism, white supremacy, and Christian nationalism. Seminal books and articles have been shared and discussed, and several prominent experts in these areas, such as Fr. Brian Massingale and Dr. Robert Jones, were guest speakers. In addition to monthly Zoom meetings, discussions, and learning events, a Town Hall was well attended, including the participation of Bishop Lewandowski, during which powerful, transformative, and interactive presentations were made on racism and bias.

This initiative has led to a commitment on the part of St. Vincent's to seek ways to contribute financially to racial equity in the Baltimore community, as described later in this report.

*Committee on Church Reform* The Committee on Church Reform has continued to stay on top of and keep the Parish Council and the parish informed on developments in the crisis of sexual abuse and its cover-up, and the Archdiocesan response. The Committee's scope of work has evolved. It shepherded the Parish's synodal process as envisioned by the Holy Father. The members of this committee spent a great deal of time and effort to stay on top of the global synodal process and the Synod in Rome.

## **Facilities Stewardship**

During the past couple of years several issues emerged related to the Church’s capital plant. The louvers in the bell tower are rotting and falling out of their frames. An outdated lighting system presents safety concerns, and difficulty in obtaining discontinued replacement parts. Finally, the seams of the nearly 50-year-old standing-seam roof are deteriorating; they are leaking in many places.

The Parish appealed the *Seek the City* moratorium on capital projects and requested approval for a new lighting system and the tower louvre repair/replacement. Only the tower louvres project was approved. For the bell tower work, the contractors have been secured, designs approved by the Maryland Historic Trust, and first down payment on that project has been made. Installation will commence in spring 2024. The lighting project will have to wait until the conclusion of the moratorium.

Fortunately, Tony Lassiter, our Facilities Superintendent, has used his skills in electrical maintenance to procure reconditioned circuit boards and replace the non-functional ones in our lighting system. And he works persistently to mitigate harm to the church ceiling due to the leaking roof.

Regarding the roof, the parish is moving forward with the necessary maintenance project of a substantial silicone sealant in spring 2024. This has been vetted by the Facilities committee and staff, and approved by the Archdiocese, as must all maintenance projects expected to cost over \$30,000.

## **III. EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT & SERVICE: SOCIAL JUSTICE & ACTION**

St. Vincent’s community continues to be actively engaged in, and supportive of, a number of social justice/social action activities and projects, including environmental justice/care for God’s creation (the Green Team), outreach to the Catholic LGBTQ+ community as a welcoming parish, and early childhood development.

The Parish’s long-established Emergency Services ministries continue to assist our neighbors with a Friday hot meal, Monday groceries and semi- monthly men’s clothing through the devoted service of many parish volunteers. Additionally, parishioners’ Poor Box donations provide eviction prevention, utilities payments, sober house stays, emergency travel aid, and other invaluable financial assistance to over 100 individuals and their families each year.

Details of some of the areas of parish service are included here:

Racial Equity Fund As mentioned above, the work of the “We Have a Dream – A World Without Racism” initiative led to the establishment of a Racial Equity Fund. The Fund is being utilized in support of and in partnership with the [South Baltimore Community Land Trust](#). The

proposal for this project was presented to the Parish Council and then at a Town Meeting. The Council approved the proposal, and the parish moved forward with this partnership of financial support and solidarity.

Breaking Bread with the Hungry Volunteers from St. Vincent's in collaboration with Our Lady of the Fields continues to provide Friday night suppers for the homeless and those too under-resourced to have regular healthy meals. We estimate that on average 130 people share in meals together at St. Vincent's on a weekly basis.

Making Welcoming Homes for the Newly Housed: TRE The Resource Exchange project, though somewhat less active during the times of COVID, continues to thrive now as a ministry that we are particularly proud of. In partnership with Healthcare for the Homeless, St. Vincent's collects donated furnishings and purchases other household needs to furnish residences for those homeless who are finding permanent housing. In the past year, St. Vincent's resources, and the time and energy of over 30 parish and other volunteers helped to 100 people.

Education – A Priority for Social Justice The potential for children to develop to their God-given potential and thrive so that they have better opportunities and can be responsible members of society is thwarted by inequities in their early years.

- As approved by the Council, we continue to donate to inner-city schools from the parish rebate of the Annual Appeal for Catholic Ministries, to which over 70 parishioners made donations last year. We have had a long history of supporting city schools which serve lower-income African American students. We maintained this commitment in 2022/23 by splitting our parish rebate between Mother Mary Lange Academy and City Springs Elementary-Middle public school, which lies on the parish boundary.
- Fifteen St. Vincent parishioners volunteer as mentors at City Spring Public School.
- The Rev. Richard T. Lawrence Family of Educational Funds, endowed by parishioners and friends, continues to provide scholarships to students in Catholic schools across Baltimore City.
- Council decided that during the next fiscal year, the Annual Appeal rebate will be split between City Springs School and St. Francis Academy.

Participation in Afghan Family Resettlement Efforts From fall 2021 until June 2022, our parish participated in an Afghan Family Resettlement project. We provided two Afghan families with fully-furnished apartment homes. Funds for this, and volunteer time, were donated by individuals in the Parish. Since June of 2022, a number of volunteers have maintained an intensive mentoring relationship with one of these Afghan families, providing assistance with housing issues, set-up and transportation to medical and other appointments, babysitting, liaison work with the resettlement agency, teachers, and social service agencies, school enrollment, cultural trips, enrolling in food pantries, and more. Ten volunteers from St. Vincent's and two additional volunteers recruited outside the parish are providing the needed support to this family beyond the original commitment of the parish.



#### **IV. AN ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE PARISH COMMITTED TO BALTIMORE CITY**

##### **Archdiocesan Urban Church Process – “Seek the City”**

As part of our commitment to the Spirituality of Curiosity and Synodality, St. Vincent’s Parish Council is carefully and actively following the Seek the City process. Early on the Council recognized the important connection between St. Vincent’s own Synodal journey in developing its vision and designing a plan for reaching that vision, and the Archdiocese’s deep discernment about the future of the urban church. Bearing in mind the possibilities of change that Seek the City might bring, about 10-12 members of the parish have attended the consultations with a view to how the Church in Baltimore City will be responsive to the urban condition and its spiritual and material needs and how St. Vincent’s can be part of that response.

##### **Archdiocesan Seek the City Team Visits St. Vincent’s**

In March, St. Vincent’s Pastor, Fr. Chase, Pastoral Associate, Colleen McCahill, staff, Parish Council members and other members of the community hosted the Seek the City leadership team, including Director Geri Byrd and Bishop Lewandowski. We experienced a beautiful and grace-filled liturgy and supper together that was filled with important and Spirit-led conversation and discovery. St. Vincent’s participants felt this synodal process was important for better understanding among us and the Seek the City team, and we especially demonstrated the spirituality and engagement of our community.

Respectfully submitted January 2024

Geraldine Sicola  
Parish Council President