

# *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD...*

*...plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*



## **A Vision for Saint James' Long Branch**

That phrase from the writings of the Prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29: 11-14) has been a guiding light for the visioning process that has been underway at Saint James' Church for nearly two years. In its entirety, it reads "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>1</sup>When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD, ..."

The Vestry of Saint James' Church and members of the congregation have contributed in various ways to discerning a vision of what God would have Saint James' work towards being, to his glory, at the beginning of 2018. Why seek a vision led by God? There is additional Scripture that has guided the Vestry in this undertaking: "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that

keepeth the law, happy is he." (Proverbs 29:18) and "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." (Ephesians 2:10) Put the Scripture from Jeremiah, Proverbs, and Ephesians together and you have a strong explanation of why a congregation needs to discern a vision; God has a plan for us, he created us to do his work, and without a vision from God, there is no future

This sacred work has been assisted by guidance from Father Bud Holland, of The Dialouge Center in Plymouth Meeting, PA, and Michael Redpath, a member of Saint James' who has worked in the Diocese of New Jersey and neighboring dioceses on congregational development for many years. Neither gave input as to what Saint James' should do or become, but rather provided guidance for a faithful process.

Considerable time, effort, and prayer has gone into discerning this vision for our future. We began with a congregational process with Father Bud Holland. He helped us to draw out aspirations and concerns of all of those who chose to participate in the gatherings. We allowed space for the Holy Spirit to work and then convened a discernment session of the Vestry. That work and the work done with Fr. Holland then informed a narrative describing St. James' in 2018. Again, space was made for the working of the Holy Spirit. This effort

### **The Visioning Process for Saint James'**

**Congregational listening sessions with The Rev. Bud Holland**



**Vestry discernment session based on congregational input from listening sessions**



**Vision drafting and finalization**



**Vestry retreat to consider how to progress towards vision**

has been to discern God's yearnings for us and the Holy Spirit informing our planning to bring those yearnings to fruition.

The Vestry met October 5 of this year for a full day retreat to explore the vision and set priorities and next steps. The Vestry has been energized and encouraged both by the vision and direction that has unfolded and the promise of the passage from Jeremiah. The process of discerning and taking next steps for working towards the vision will occur regularly. It was decided that, rather than initially laying out plans through 2018, logical short-term steps would be undertaken and then more next steps determined for a period of time. This approach will: build foundations for further progress, engage more people from the congregation and the community, assist in better defining the next set of steps based on what it has taken to accomplish the current steps.

There are four initial key areas of action towards the Vision for Saint James':  
Communications - Vestry Champion: Nancy Francese  
Activities - Vestry Champion: Nancy Ali  
Funding - Vestry Champion: Audrey Palmatier  
Community Partnerships - Vestry Champion: Reggie Tynes



This has been a lengthy, richly faithful, process. This is a serious commitment to both discerning God's purposes for St. James' and to carrying out those purposes. In that context, this effort is far from the desires of any individual, any individuals, or any group. This has been a sacred work with what God wants at its center. We invite you to join us in our commitment to bring this vision to fruition.

## A PRAYER FOR VISION

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves; when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little; when we arrived safely because we have sailed too close to shore. Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of the things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the water of life. Stir us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes and to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope and love; we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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**St. James' Church**  
(Episcopal/Anglican)  
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# A Vision of Saint James' Church, Long Branch, in January 2018

St. James' Church is a sacred (thin) place where spiritual peace, serenity, and service permeate the community and fervent worship of our Lord anchors all that we are and do. Our setting in the middle of Long Branch, in the midst of the redeveloping downtown, gives us both visibility and accessibility for the community.

Our parishioners are among the best and brightest people from all walks of life and with an incredible diversity of talents and backgrounds. Their skills produce results in evangelism and mission to the glory of God. All find a friendly community here, a sense that they are "home". We listen to each other with kind hearts. Those who come because they are distressed find a people and place where they experience healing, quiet, and prayer. St. James' is particularly adept at filling that emptiness in people throughout the community often characterized as "the God-shaped hole." Many are attracted to the ethnic diversity of the congregation and community.

The Bishop consecrated in 2013 maintains the same affection for Saint James', its people, and Mother Val as Bishop Cuncell had. Mother Val leads the church with stout conviction. She helps each member of the church to embrace their own gifts. She enables us to bring community assets together. She inspires and encourages us with liturgy and lessons in a positive way. She encourages us to be financially responsible and completely understanding that outreach means trusting that God has us in his hands. Lay leadership follows Mother Val's example and provides effective, Christian leadership in the congregation and the community. Members feel included through active communications. The Holy Spirit has moved people to be happy and welcoming.

The members of St. James' have outgrown fears surrounding money and focus on the mission to which God is calling us. St. James' members are committed to tithing. Financial support and energized members allow us to serve the Lord in a glorious, respectful and joyful way! Our fund-raising events not only generate additional funds, but also enhance our church community socially. We are continually surprised by joy.

Our impact on the Long Branch community continues to grow, as does the desirability of being involved with St. James'. The congregation experiences continued, slow, steady growth. Getting people in the door as a first step to involvement is a particular capability of St. James'. Congregation members make a point of bringing friends and relatives to church.



Worship is anchored in Anglo Catholic tradition, in which people participate energetically. The worship is filled with words, actions, and beliefs that stir the congregation to follow the Word of the Lord in action and deed. Alternative worship experiences are offered periodically. Our Acolyte Guild is enthusiastically filled with people of all ages devoted to serving the Lord by assisting with worship. The sister, non-Episcopal, congregation that worships in our sanctuary joins us in all of our ministries while making fuller use of our worship space.

High quality sacred music continues to be an important ministry to the congregation and the broader community. There is a full choir, incorporating professional singers and volunteers from the congregation, that sings with the voices of angels. The worship space is filled for Gospel concerts, summer concerts, and a year-long schedule of other sacred music concerts. Concerts include: visiting choirs, youth choirs, cantatas, and instrumental performances. One of the most valuable and valued of our treasures, our magnificent organ, is frequently showcased. Our music education programs for the community have an outstanding reputation.

Involvement with Monmouth University and Brookdale Community College provides a connection with talented young adults who both assist with ministries and participate in the life of the congregation. Our lovely sanctuary is overflowing with families, from newborns being baptized to our seniors with a history of participation at Saint James'. Adults who had experiences with Saint James' as young people return with their chil-



dren. A well-rounded schedule of activities for children and young adults draw young people from the community whether or not they belong to St. James'. Our Youth Group is busy not only fulfilling community service needs, but participating in Bible study, learning how and why we serve Jesus. Our Vacation Bible School both serves families of all religious affiliations and draws families to join Saint James'.

A spacious and welcoming outreach center building sits adjacent to the Parish Hall and facilitates the integration of a variety of activities that serve the community. The building's vestibule features two stained glass windows which clearly communicate that the building and all it enables are connected to St. James' as a holy enterprise. The outreach center houses a storefront for the thrift shop, and dedicated space for St. Brigid's Pantry, St. Brigid's Kitchen, the Long Branch Concordance, and other partnering non-profit tenants. The building includes a state-of-the-art professional kitchen, including pots and utensils hanging in easy reach. A small "restaurant," similar to the Red Bank Soul Kitchen, offers meals weekdays to people for what they can pay. Our programs for community families and children are both a service to the community and a source of new families for Saint James' and our sister non-Episcopal congregations.

The outreach center is spacious enough to allow people to wait inside for a table or groceries. There are many volunteers who serve on a rotating basis. There is adequate warehouse space which also includes loading ramps to make it easier to accept shipments.

The thrift shop is accessible through both the storefront and the outreach center so that clients can shop and visit the Pantry or kitchen without having to step outside. While the Pantry has grown, staffing is minimal because we have computer programs that track and provide reports on goods, services and the families being served. A ministry to the homeless offers shelter periodically. St. James' Day has grown to be a popular parish and community event. Our community vegetable and herb garden continues to expand. The St. James' van facilitates stocking of the Pantry as well as moving parish members around for various programs, transporting those who need transportation to and from the church, and delivering meals.

The outreach center has freed the recently-renovated Parish Hall to be available for a parish calendar that is energized with a full schedule of activities that utilize our members' gifts, fulfill their needs, and provide fellowship. These include Taize, Yoga, AA, and educational programs, to name a few. Activities such as the book club have multiplied and offer a great variety of involvement. Fun meals, such as monthly breakfasts, quarterly pot-luck suppers, and periodic galas contribute to the sense of community. People from the congregation and the community want to be part of it all.

Our sense of community and caring is reflected in the upkeep of the grounds and the buildings as beacons of the beauty of The Lord. They communicate to the community that they are tended with love and dedication in the same way the congregation is tended with love and dedication. St. James' buildings are kept in excellent condition through a regular and preventive maintenance program. The grounds are a place where the community keeps returning to see the lovely gardens.

Saint James' is recognized far and wide as a church that has successfully risen against the influences that were causing the widespread decline of churches at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century.

### **A PRAYER FOR VISION**

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