

## Pastor's Report - Annual Meeting 2024

As I look back over the last year, for Good Shepherd it was one of growth and service, with an incredible challenge.

As we began the year, we set out to implement our work over the previous year in the Discernment committee, truly focusing on the question, where is God leading us, and how Good Shepherd could work to become a sustainable parish. As the new year dawned, we were lead by a new Senior Warden, Linda Webster, who creatively and tirelessly work with the Vestry and me to form the Teams with committed Team Leaders to put this Discernment work into practice. I really like that we settled on the theme, *"Becoming Beloved Community"* to characterize this work. Each of the Team leaders has done a great job to focus the work and make these ideas come to life. We had a great kick off with Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown and also we have had the great support of the Rev. Lorenzo Lebrija, who has been our consultant in this work.

In addition, in response to the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria, we responded with a fundraising dinner, collecting more than \$5,000 for earthquake relief. We followed this up with another "Comfort Food" dinner and raised over \$3,500 for relief in Ukraine and for the Good Samaritan Haven. Over the first few months of the year we were busy carrying out our mission and thankfully joined by some new members as well. A great first half of the year.

And then the flood! Barre and Central Vermont were hit with historic floods in July, wiping out over 13% of our households. But from the start Good Shepherd stepped up: as the waters receded we opened the church as a relief center, we distributed over 350 cases of water, cleaning supplies and personal hygiene kits, offering help where needed and of course, putting on boots, picking up shovels and getting to work. Our "service" on the Sunday after the flood was to sing a hymn ("Higher Ground!" Thanks, Marjorie!), say a prayer and then out of the church to clean up in Barre. And the flood recovery and rebuilding work continues: this will be a focus for us in the year(s) to come: and I'm pleased to say that Good Shepherd has been one of the most visible organizations in Barre taking the lead in this important work.

Throughout all this, we are being joined by new members, the number of pledges has increased (along with the amount pledged), there is better attendance at our services (both in person and on Zoom) and we are more visible throughout the community: giving out ice cream on a postponed Barre Heritage Day, blessing a motorcycle rally for cancer victims, blessing pets on St. Francis' Day and with our fundraising dinners. By the end of the year the renewed life of Good Shepherd was even more visible: we were the only parish to submit two resolutions the the convention of the Diocese of Vermont, one about ending gun violence and the other in support of the Vermont Declaration of inclusion (both were adopted by the convention), we raised \$1,000 for the Diocese of Jerusalem and relief in Gaza (which was matched by another \$1,000 from the United Thank Offering) and for the first time in at least fifteen years, we had a children's service for Christmas Eve. It was a great way to end the year!

And now the mission continues for 2024: we will still ask God to inspire us in *"Becoming Beloved Community."* We have made a great start toward sustainability for the future, but there is still a way to go. We will continue to find the way to reduce our carbon footprint and to care for creation. We will seek to be a leader in caring for our neighbors in a housing crisis and seek to make sure all are cared for with respect and dignity. We will learn to care for each other deeply and to be a leader for our community. In all that we do, may we show the love of Christ and the light of the Gospel to all, offering a hope in a desperate world. Our sanctuary is hewn from the granite that lies beneath us: may our faith be a deep and as sustainable as that foundation.

Faithfully submitted:

The Rev. Earl Kooperkamp, Rector