



LENT 2024

THE ORACLE

ST MATTHEW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

LENT

St. Matthew's Family,

Throughout the season of Epiphany, we have repeatedly heard Gospel stories of Jesus manifesting God's presence among us. As those marked as his own forever, we must therefore discern those ways in which, as individuals and a parish, we can extend the light and life of Jesus to this world. But, in order to do that effectively, we must first make sure that we are walking that path ourselves. Do we practice what we preach? At times, all of us need to recenter ourselves; making sure that, in thought, word, and deed, we are modeling a Christ-like life.

An opportunity for a spiritual 'tune-up' is gifted to us by the Church with the season of Lent. There is the familiar refrain that during Lent we should give up something, especially if it has an inordinate hold over us. This could be lessening our time spent on electronic devices, or watching non-stop news, or chocolate, or even (for the very brave at heart) their daily coffee.

But Lent should also be a time for adding things to our routine, practices that draw us closer to God. Once again, St. Matthew's will offer several such opportunities with a daily Scripture regimen, a daily devotional, and a Friday night Lenten program. For outreach, we will return to a cause that was well-supported two years ago, RIP medical debt relief. The purpose in all of this is to prepare ourselves for meeting our Lord and Savior on Easter Day with joyful hearts readied to manifest the Good News through our daily witness.

Speaking of how we are to live this life in love for God and others, I want to highlight one particular event on our upcoming schedule. On Saturday, March 2nd, from 2 to 3:30 pm, St. Matthew's will host a Legacy Forum. I cannot emphasize enough that one of the most important things we can do for those we love is to adequately prepare for the end of our own life. Making sound plans and ensuring that information is accessible assists our survivors greatly in relieving unnecessary burdens during what will be an extremely difficult time for them. At the forum, professionals in the fields of medicine, law, finances, funerals, and the church will offer advice and materials that will help you make informed preparations. People of all ages are welcome to this free event, and you are encouraged to invite friends and neighbors.

May all of you have a blessed Lenten season that deepens your faith, strengthens your bonds with one another, and kindles in your hearts a fire for manifesting the light and love of Jesus with all.

With Love in Christ,



Rodney +

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 3

CHILI BINGO NIGHT 5:30-8:00PM

FEBRUARY 10

VESTRY RETREAT 8:00 AM - 1:00PM

FEBRUARY 13

PANCAKE SUPPER 6:00 PM

FEBRUARY 14

ASH WEDNESDAY EUCHARIST 12:00PM & 6:00PM

FEBRUARY 16 & 23

STATIONS OF THE CROSS, LENTEN SUPPER &
LENTEN PROGRAM 6:00PM

MARCH

MARCH 1, 8, 15, & 22

STATIONS OF THE CROSS, LENTEN SUPPER &
LENTEN PROGRAM 6:00PM

MARCH 29

GOOD FRIDAY 12:00PM

STATIONS OF THE CROSS (ZOOM ONLY) 6:00 PM

MARCH 30

LITURGY OF LIGHT 6:00PM

MARCH 31

EASTER HOLY EUCHARIST 7:45, 9:00, & 10:30 AM

Lenten Opportunities

Lenten Devotional | Listen . . . is that Jesus inviting you to walk with him? **40 Days with Jesus, Celebrating His Presence** is a compilation of bite-sized devotions from Sarah Young's best-selling *Jesus Calling*. This 48-page booklet, written from Christ's viewpoint, will draw you closer to our Savior as you travel with him through Lent, mourn his death, and celebrate his resurrection.

Lenten Fridays | At 6 pm on the six Fridays before Good Friday, you are welcome to join us for Stations of the Cross, followed by a Lenten Supper and educational program. This year, we will be using a video and book series from the well-known Methodist minister, Adam Hamilton. **Creed** explores what Christians believe, why they believe, and why it matters through the Apostles' Creed. Books can be purchased from Fr. Rodney for \$13.50.

RIP Medical Debt Outreach | RIP Medical Debt (RIP) is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit with a 98% rating on Charity Navigator, whose purpose is to abolish financially burdensome medical debt around the United States. Every dollar donated to this organization erases an average of \$100 in medical debt. In 2022, St. Matthew's families donated enough money to eliminate \$352,400 in medical debt for families in need! Can we do even more this year? Offerings may be made via check with 'RIP Medical' on the memo line, cash, or online at tinyurl.com/SMEC-RIPMedical Learn more by going to: ripmedicaldebt.org



Lenten Bible Reading Plan | Throughout the weeks of Lent, we encourage you to join other members of the St. Matthew's family in reading "Journey to the Cross". Each day in Lent, excluding Sundays, there is a brief passage from one of the four Gospels, covering the period from Palm Sunday to the Resurrection. The readings for each day can be found on a handout available in the narthex, on our website, or on our Facebook page.



SPEAKING PLAINLY ABOUT ISRAEL

BY RABBI MARX, BETH OR

One feature that I would like to add to each edition of the Oracle is to leave space for the voice of another faith leader. As people of God who live in a community, we need to listen to our neighbors, especially those whose background and views may be very different from our own.

As several of you know, I've been attending a Shabbat (Sabbath) service at Congregation Beth Or each month since the October 7th attacks in Israel, offering support and a presence during this very tumultuous time for the Jewish community. Their voice must be heard, if for no other reason than because it has been silenced time and again throughout history, often at the hands of the Church itself.

I asked Rabbi Greg Marx, who has tirelessly led Beth Or for 35 years and will be retiring in June, to share some words with us. The request was to describe the lived Jewish experience, particularly to a non-Jewish audience. Here are his unedited words. Know that he thanks St. Matthew's for our support, for listening, and for walking alongside his congregation. Rodney+

I am profoundly grateful to Rev. Roehner for giving me an opportunity to speak to St. Matthews in this article. He asked me to write about how the Jewish community is fairing during this crisis. The honest answer is not well. Many of my members have commented on how afraid they feel. Hamas has called out to the Muslim community to commit a day of rage and destruction against the Jewish community (not against Israelis but against Jews). This has terrified my community, compelling additional security at Beth Or. On that day, many did not send their children into our school. I can't say I blamed them. While there is trauma, there is also resolve and tremendous unity. We do not agree on many issues, but when we are attacked, we have an ability to unite and support one another. In fact, I am currently working on a volunteer mission to Israel. Only a people that cares for one another, would willingly travel to a war zone to help others. I am proud to be organizing this mission and I know that it will be meaningful for those who go.

Allow me to share a few observations. First, too many are getting their news on social media. There, they watch usually emotionally wrenching short videos that are meant to influence and persuade. What is missing is context, history, and depth. One cannot fully appreciate a complex crisis by watching a meme of suffering people. If all you see are suffering children in Gaza, then viewers with naturally blame the conflict squarely on Israel. Hamas has pledged that it will repeat October 7th again and again. They refuse to even admit the existence of Israel and the Jewish people's claim to the land. This is not shared on X or Instagram, but it should be.

Second, Zionism is the liberation movement of the Jewish people. It was founded to restore the people of Israel to their ancestral homeland after a two thousand year exile. Those who claim that Israel is a western colony that has no place in the Middle East refuse to see that the Jewish people have deep roots in Israel. The Hebrew Bible states in Genesis 12 that God gave Abram and his descendants, Isaac and Jacob the land as an everlasting covenant. True, we lost that home as a result of the Roman empire's conquest of the land, but that does not erase our ancestral claim to Israel. To demoralize the Jews, the Romans renamed Judea Palestine, after the

SPEAKING PLAINLY ABOUT ISRAEL

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Philistines, who were a Greek sea faring people who lived on the coast and were Israel's arch enemy. The Story of Samson in Philistia lays this conflict out.

Third, there is no excuse for terror. This cannot be said enough. I have heard people say that "Israel had it coming." This is nothing short of "victim blaming," in which those who were brutally assaulted, kidnapped and killed on October 7th were seen not as the victims but rather as the terrorists themselves. They were either directly or indirectly guilty of oppressing those in the Gaza Strip. Conversely, those Hamas terrorists, who committed the atrocities were not in fact, terrorists, but rather the victims of Israeli aggression and their attacks were justifiable. We need to be clear, just as those 3,000 Americans on 9/11 were victims not oppressors, despite what Osama bin Laden said, so those who died in Israel were the victims. It is absurd that I have to say this, but obviously in today's climate, I do.

Fourth, some have been critical of Israel because in the modern world, there should be no "ethnstate." I rarely hear this critique of religious or ethnic states elsewhere, but only with regard to Israel. So, my question is a simple one: why do others have the right to have an Islamic State, a Hindu State or a Christian state, but the Jews have no such right? Israel is the Jewish homeland, its calendar is a Jewish one, and its religious sites mark our values, while still affirming the rights and place of others.

Finally, in the eyes of the left, protesting against Israel has become "a metaphor" for all different types of people looking to "fight oppression." Well-meaning progressive Americans are looking to stand up against injustices in the world – that's a good thing. Unfortunately, many of them don't understand the nuances and context of what is happening in Israel, and see the "plight of the Palestinians" as another injustice happening against oppressed people. This has created an alliance of those looking to be vocal against oppression and they have chosen the Palestinian issue as the place to have their voices heard. But too many of the protestors carry signs with swastikas on them; they chant "From the River to the Sea" which call for Israel's dismantling, and they call for violence, boycotts and killing Jews. We need to point this out to those who march with them, that calling out for violence, boycott and the death of all Jews is not social justice.

I stand with Israel as it seeks to defend itself against Hamas and those who seek Israel's destruction. I am aghast at the suffering of the innocent. I believe in Israel's right of self-determination but do not countenance hate of any kind. Hatred only begets hatred. Darkness cannot drive out light, but light can dispel the gloom of despair. I will hold on to faith in God, our ethical mandate to be a "light unto the nations," and confront evil wherever it may reside, including in the human heart.

MINISTRY UPDATES

See something . . . Do something!

There is a commonly used phrase in incident management that goes like this "See something; Say something." The idea is: if you see a puddle on the floor—speak up and notify facilities management of the situation. The same is true when traveling . . . if you see a suspicious bag . . . do something—report it! Similarly, church ministry is helpful to all when you see a need and act! What do I mean? Consider one church ministry – coffee hour.

During coffee hour we feed many people, but what you may not know is that it is the work and ministry of many people. Gwenyth saw a need—she saw that we needed help with cutting the bagels on a regular basis. So what does she do? Every Sunday she is at church, she comes about 30 minutes prior to the start of the 9:00am service just to help cut bagels and get them ready for coffee hour.

Lorraine and Josephine saw a need—they saw that we could use help clearing off the table at the end of coffee hour, so they often stick around to help clear the table and ensure that the food gets put away.

Joey sees a need almost every week to bake something and help wash dishes after coffee hour. Manny and Toni pitch in to help also when they are at church kids or no kids! Jim and Derek and their families often move the coffee hour tables back to ensure they are cleared for the Nursery School program the next day.

Carolina, Alexa, Sophia and Jane help every week to make sure the food is placed on the table for coffee hour. All of these people saw something that needed to be done to further the ministry of Saint Matthews and took it upon themselves to do it! What a gift these people have been to coffee hour!

As you look around church at all the things that need to be done, what do you see? What needs to be done? How might your gifts, time, and/or talents be used? How could you contribute? Maybe it is counting, reading, ushering, greeting, donating, contributing, praying, and/or pledging these are just a few things to consider. There are many ways to contribute – in small or large ways to our life and ministry at Saint Matthew's. Never doubt that your help is needed! Just take a moment to help! You may even meet someone new!



The Arise Band

Many thanks to Xavier Buesgen, Sophia Roehner, Alexa Roehner, and Dave Robinson for helping the Arise band lead worship on Christmas Eve. We are so blessed you all are willing to give your time and talent, helping lead the congregation in worship during the Christmas season. We sang a joyful noise to the Lord!

As we approach the Lenten season, we will be focusing on songs about reflection and forgiveness and remembering the sacrifice of Jesus. Let's lift up our voices in song this lent. God gave us the voice, he wants us to give it back to him in prayer and praise.



**In Christ,
Martha Reynolds (Coordinator) and Anne Flood (Conductor)**

Fellowship

The highlight of our fellowship this winter will be our Chili Bingo Night on February 3 at 5:30. Chili will be provided by parishioners and prizes will be offered for bingo winners.

During Lent there will be regular weekly Coffee Hours on Sunday mornings at 10:00 am. A Coffee Hour sign-up sheet is posted in the kitchen if you would like to help with Coffee Hour.

The Fellowship team is always looking for extra people to help with planning, cooking, set up and clean up for all Saint Matthew's events. Please let Trent Coombs know if you are interested in helping with this ministry.



CHOIR



Soli Deo Gloria - Glory to God Alone - Johann Sebastian Bach

He was, perhaps, the greatest composer of liturgical music in his time. His music is revered in every church, in every denomination. He is the immortal Johann Sebastian Bach.

Our adult choir is looking forward to exploring the immense repertoire of JS Bach chorales during this Lenten and Easter Season. We are planning to introduce a new Bach chorale each Sunday during Lent. We will also have solo, ensemble and instrumental offerings from our Bach library throughout the Lenten Season. My title above is the imprint that Bach used on his sacred compositions - SDG. Bach studied the scriptures intently, and has been reverently called the "fifth evangelist" because of his devoted interpretation of biblical sources. A noted Swedish bishop referred to the Bach cantatas depicting the life of Christ as the "fifth Gospel."

We will also begin to explore creative options for the weekly psalter. The 150 psalms in the Bible represent an anthology of Hebrew religious hymns, and, contrary to common beliefs, not all are attributed to King David. The psalms of praise are joyful and uplifting, while the psalms of sorrow and lament call us to penance. Psalms of thanksgiving and pilgrimage remind us of the bountiful goodness of God toward his children.

We will change up our service music for the Lenten Season, using selections from the 1982 hymnal. We will sing Kyrie #S89, Sanctus #S117 and Fraction hymn #S163.

Do you celebrate Candlemas? February 2 is the last feast day of the Christmas/Epiphany season. It marks the return of light, a symbol of protection and prosperity, and commemorates the presentation of Jesus at the Temple, at 40 days of age, referring to him as the light of the people of Israel. In many European countries, the tradition of having home candles blessed on Candlemas continues to this day.

Our handchime choir continues to grow and learn, providing special music at the 10:30 am liturgy. Anyone who may be interested in this multi-generational, fun-loving group is welcome to attend a rehearsal and try us out!

Your comments, suggestions and input are always welcome. New choir members - full or part time are encouraged and welcomed.

Happy New Year to all! We look ahead to 2024 and new opportunities to be creative and energetic!
Judi Kearney, Organist and Choir Director

NURSERY SCHOOL UPDATE

Oh, what fun we had preparing for Christmas! December began with the annual Lunch with Santa Claus. Families came to school to enjoy a delicious lunch provided by Phil's Tavern and after lunch made some Christmas crafts and had pictures with Santa. As December moved along the excitement built for the two Christmas concerts. Families waited with anticipation as the children processed into church to sing adorable Christmas songs sure to put one in the Christmas spirit! Parents then joined their children for parties in their classrooms.

The children are excited to be back and are all settling into the school routine after a nice Christmas break. Compared to December, January will be a quiet month. Hopefully Mother Nature cooperates with a mild winter so that the children can still get out on the playground. In the months ahead there will be celebrations for Valentine's Day in February and St. Patrick's Day and Easter in March. Also in March the children are very excited to bring their Dad or Very Important Person to school and enjoy an evening of fun together.

In conjunction with Chapel during the months of January, February, March and April the children will be bringing in items for the Ambler Food Cupboard. In January they will be bringing peanut butter or jelly to chapel, in February laundry detergent, in March bars of soap and in April toilet paper.

Registration for the 2024-2025 school year is well underway. Nursery school families and church members have registered their children and open registration for the community has now begun. If you know of anyone who is interested, please have them call the school at 215-646-4466.

Warm regards,

Jackie Anderson,
Director



Saint Matthew's Spotlight: Judi Kearney



If you haven't regularly attended the 10:30 am service during this past year, you may not have met our Organist & Choir Director, Judi Kearney. You've probably read her articles in the Oracle, describing the choir's activities, but you may not be aware of her experience in and around our community before she joined St. Matthew's.

Born and raised in Collingswood, NJ, Judi followed her older brother into classical music. She began studying piano at 4, and organ lessons at 12. Her first organist position, at 14, was a small Methodist church in her hometown. After high school, Judi attended Trenton State Teacher's College, taking courses in music theory and composition.

After marrying and moving to Pennsylvania, Judi and her husband, Tom, settled in Ambler - across the street from St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church. As the family grew, Judi became one of the assistant organists. With guidance from the priests at St. Anthony's, Judi enrolled in the Pastoral Musician Certification Program at St. Charles Borromeo Theological Seminary. She also accepted a position in the Archdiocesan Department of Youth Activities, managing junior high student workshops throughout the archdiocese. Through her connections at the Archdiocese, she became a member of the Archdiocesan Choir, and sang in the Cathedral Basilica when the Pope John Paul I came to Philadelphia.

A neighbor in Ambler talked Judi into organizing and leading a Gaelic choral group, based at the Commodore Barry Irish Center in Mount Airy. The group sang at local Irish events and parties. Judi also became a volunteer at the Artman Home, playing for Sunday afternoon services and hymnsings.

She accepted a position as organist at St. Bridget's Catholic Church in East Falls, serving for several years. She was offered a position as Director of Music at the Church of St. Robert Bellarmine, creating a music program during the construction of a new church. During her time at St. Robert's, she organized a contemporary music group, developed a choral program, and produced and directed "Celebrate Life", a musical drama about the life and ministry of Christ.

It was time for a change. Judi accepted a position closer to home - Grace Lutheran Church in Wyndmoor. She served as organist and choir director for 13 years, repeating her production of "Celebrate Life" again before deciding to retire and enjoy her grandchildren.

Retirement didn't last very long. Soon, Zion Lutheran Church in Flourtown asked Judi to guide their music program. Sadly, after 5 years, the church closed its doors.

After a brief respite, St. Luke's UCC Church in North Wales offered Judi a "part-time" position, which quickly became full time. St. Luke's closed its doors in May, 2022, which led to a wonderful opportunity for St. Matthew's to benefit from Judi's many talents!

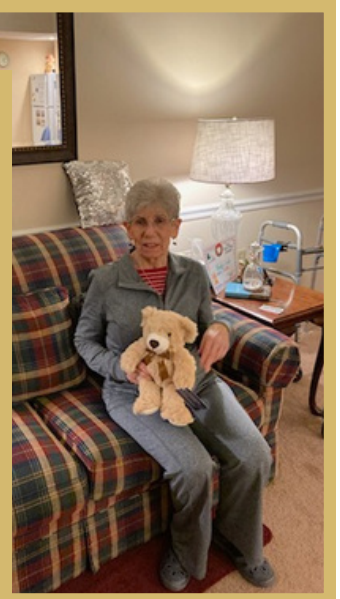
CHRISTMAS 2023 - PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS

Nursery School



Operation Bear Hug

Christmas Pageant



OUTREACH UPDATE

The Little Pantry

How much food does it take to stock the Little Pantry? On any given day, the Little Pantry is stocked with spaghetti sauce, pasta, peanut butter, jelly, Velveeta macaroni & cheese, soup, rice, dishwashing liquid, toothpaste, and paper towels. If you were to add up all these popular pantry items, the groceries might total \$30-\$35.

Now consider that the Little Pantry is visited by several people on any given day, and the groceries are restocked once a day. This means that every week (7 days) the groceries that are donated through the Little Pantry total about \$210-\$245.

The cost of stocking our Little Pantry is not unlike your family grocery bill. Much food is needed. When you consider your donations to the Little Pantry, consider these options:

Option A: Consider donating what it costs to fill the Little Pantry each day. Use this dollar amount as a guide for your donations. You may want to contribute: \$30-\$35 worth of soup, Velveeta macaroni & cheese, pasta, spaghetti sauce, rice, peanut butter and jelly on a monthly basis or as frequently as possible.

Option B: Consider focusing on adopting one popular item that you will supply to the Little Pantry each month. This might mean in any given month you supply 4-4packs of individual containers of Velveeta Mac and Cheese. Or 10-15 cans of Chunky Soup. Or 10-15 plastic jars of Spaghetti Sauce. Or 10 boxes of pasta or rice. Or 5 bottles of dishwashing liquid. Adopting an item might mean that every time you do your family grocery shopping, you buy a quantity of this item to stock Little Pantry.

With a better understanding of the needs and costs to maintain the vital ministry of the Little Pantry, would you consider the ministry of contributing Option A or B? If that is not possible at this point, would you consider purchasing at least one or two items whenever you visit the grocery store? Every little bit helps us provide for the needs in our community. Thank you for the donations!

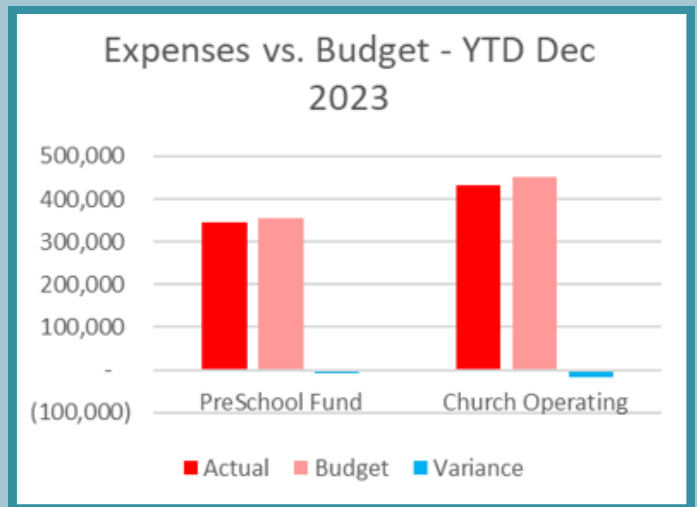
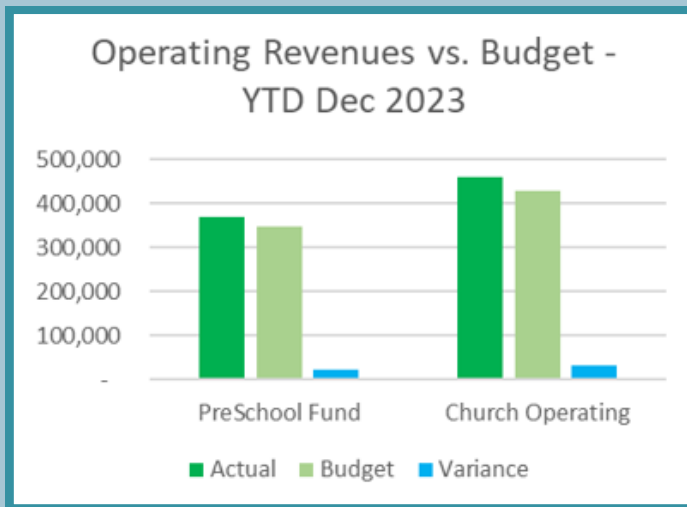
Many Thanks!

To those of you who have donated to The Little Pantry and Mattie Dixon Food Cupboard! We see the need in our community increasing and are grateful for your contributions. Thanks for your frequent donations!



TREASURER'S REPORT

January is the perfect time to both look back at the year that has just ended and, perhaps more importantly, to look ahead at the next year. I'm happy to report that our 2023 financial results were even better than what was discussed at the Annual Meeting.

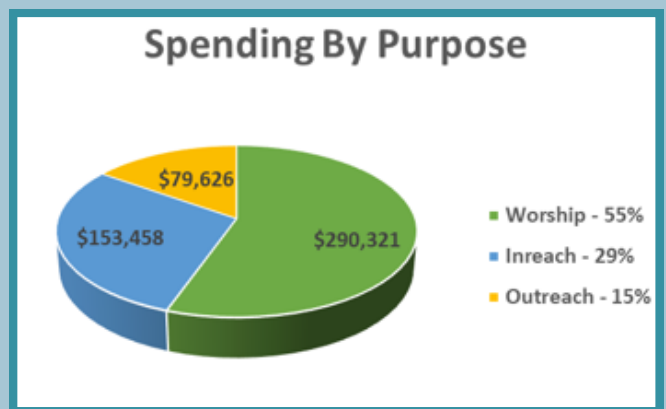
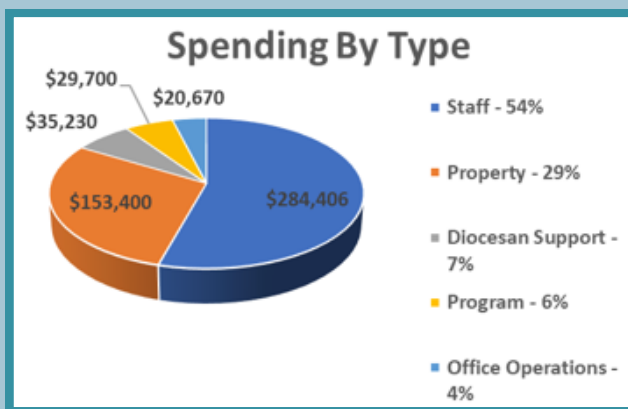


You can see by the two “positive” blue columns in the Revenues chart that our collections this year were higher than we had budgeted (by \$50K in total). Some of this was timing between fiscal years but most represents real increases in support and participation from our parishioners and PreSchool families.

And the two “negative” blue columns in the Expenses chart show that our spending this year was less than what was budgeted (by \$25K in total). In the case of the PreSchool this reflected staffing challenges earlier in the year, while the favorable Church results were helped by having had no snow last winter but were mostly true savings.

Looking ahead to next year, our budget is similar to 2023 in that we are projecting a small operating deficit (about \$10K) and capital spending from investments similar to last year (\$30K, includes parking lot sealing and lining, signage, Parish Hall improvements and smaller items). In addition, we are planning on replacing the Parish Hall roof (est. \$30K) as the first of three major roofing projects anticipated in the coming years.

The traditional way of looking at budgets is by type of spending (salaries, supplies, repairs, etc.). Indeed, that is the way that the budget is built. For churches, a more valuable way of thinking about budgets is to look at what the money is being spent on. This involves allocating each type of expense to the ministry area that it pertains to – Worship, Inreach (nurturing our parishioners and PreSchool families in their faith journey) and Outreach (witnessing our faith in service beyond our parish). These two approaches to looking at our planned 2024 spending are illustrated below.



So, in what way is looking at what the money is spent on valuable? Notice that the smallest pie slice is Outreach – serving and spreading the Word to those beyond St. Matthew’s. And that pie slice would be even smaller still if our Diocesan Support was not allocated there.

Something to think about as we move forward together!

Jim Garrison, Treasurer



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LENT IS NOT ABOUT
BEING PERFECT.
IT IS NOT ABOUT
ATTAINING SOME
IDEAL STANDARD OF
HOLINESS, BUT
RATHER IT IS ABOUT
MAKING TIME AND
SPACE TO CONNECT
WITH GOD AND GROW
CLOSER TO HIM.

