

**SAINT JOHN'S EPISCOPAL
CHURCH**
ASHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS



196th ANNUAL MEETING
Reports for the year 2016

January 22, 2017

**St. John's Church Annual Report for 2016
Table of Contents**

Agenda for the 196th Annual Meeting

Minutes for the 195th Annual Meeting

Parish Statistics and Nominations

Vicar's Report

Senior Warden's Report

Junior Warden's Report

Music at St. John's

Buildings and Grounds Report

Mission Giving Report

Parish Nurse Report

Pastoral Care Report

Hilltown Churches Food Pantry

Ann Hutt Browning Poetry Series

It Takes a Village Report

**Homily given by Dr. Robert Jonas for the Ecumenical Service
given on November 22, 2016**

Treasurer's Report

Audit Goals for 2016

St. John's Balance Sheet from 2016

St. John's Budgets for 2016 and 2017, along with 2016 actual

Parish Statistics in 2015 for St. John's Church

Baptisms: 0

Renewal of Vows: 0

Marriage: 0

Confirmations: 0

Received: 0

Burials: 0

Memorials: 0

Transfers: 0

Number of services held: 58 with 42 private communions Total

Attendance at all services by year:

2004: 3084

2005: 2770

2006: 2264

2007: 2248

2008: 2269

2009: 1923

2010: 2006

2011: 1520

2012: 1227

2013: 1291

2014: 1411

2015: 1475

2016: 1211

Total Sunday Services: 51

Total Sunday Attendance: 1128

Average Sunday Attendance: 22

Vestry for 2016:

Senior Warden: Susan Todd

Junior Warden: David Bruffee

Clerk: Jane Wagener

Treasurer: Jim Wagener

Vestry Member: Mary Snow

Vestry Associates: Jim Wagener, Mariel Kinsey, Julie Meservey, Sue Craft

Vestry Nominations for 2017

Nominating Committee: Sue Craft and Vestry

Co-Senior Wardens:	Sue Craft and Susan Todd
Junior Warden	David Bruffee
Treasurer:	Jim Wagener
Assistant Treasurer:	Michael Corrigan
Clerk:	Jane Wagener
Vestry Members:	Mary Snow and Rose Clark
Vestry Associate:	Jim Wagener

Convention Delegates: David Bruffee and TBD

Convention Delegate Alternate: Marilyn Berthelette

AGENDA

**St. John's Episcopal Church, Ashfield, MA
196th Annual Meeting January 22, 2017**

Opening Prayer and Welcome

Senior Warden: Susan Todd

Hymn #433 – “We gather together”

Potluck Luncheon

Report of the Nominating Committee

Sue Craft

**Presentation of the Annual Report and Budget for 2017 Susan
Todd**

Group reflection on Adult Education – 2016 and 2017

Director of Adult Education: The Rev. Dr. Jill Rierdan

Closing Hymn #408 – “Sing praise to God who reigns above”

Blessing and Dismissal

The Vicar: The Rev. Eliot Moss

**St. John's Annual Meeting
February 21, 2016
Minutes**

Present: Susan Todd, Eliot Moss, Jane Wagener, Jim Wagener, Sue Craft, Mary Snow, Herb Libby, Darlene Monds, Cindy Burch, Marilyn Berthelette, Mariel Kinsey, Jennifer Walters, Hetty Startup

Nominating Committee:

Senior Warden: Susan Todd

Junior Warden: David Bruffee

Treasurer: Jim Wagener

Clerk: Jane Wagener

Vestry: Mary Snow

Vestry Associates: Jim Wagener, Mariel Kinsey, Julie Meservey, Sue Craft.

Convention Delegates: David Bruffee, Rose Clark

Youth Delegate:

Alternate: none yet.

Slate of nominees approved.

Annual Report: Presented by Susan Todd.

Budget: We had a surplus of close to \$14,000 in 2015 thanks to some generous gifts. Some of this will go into savings for a new furnace in the Corner, repairs for the Church. And another \$5,000 for Mission spending. The budget for 2016 is \$63,159.

Conversation regarding our Ministries led by Jennifer Walters:

Sparked by the survey done in 2015 regarding how the congregation feels about what is happening at St. John's one of the outcomes was that it was felt that this community does a lot, but that not all are supportive of the work that is done. Discussion centered on what we can do as a body to aid in our mission. Some of the answers are listed below:

Help people who do all the work

Ministry-more interfaith collaboration. Think globally in Ashfield.

The more we notice what we are doing, it widens our hearts.

St. John's is a caring place.

Many hands make light work

Share the Warmth started with people from St. John's and the community.

An awareness of the numbers of things that come out of St. John's done by a few people.

An aging church needs new members.
If there is no energy to do something, this has to be part of the reality
Yearn for more families
How do we get people and retain them?
Who is going to be there as the congregation ages out? We have so few
younger people.
For some, it is hard to become old and less able to make a contribution of
time and talents.
Remembering “Prayer dinners” (Canterbury/Covenant?) and Meal and a
Movie night.
Discussion to consider: Pope Francis bringing the Catholic and Lutheran
churches together.
Interested in global concerns.
Agreement with what was said.
When there is energy for something, do it. Consider energy for Fall
Festival, for instance.
Summary of above:
We should consider where the energy lies and go with that.
Consider more partnering with the First Church.
Presence is not inconsiderable. How can we make it known?
In good weather we could open both doors to make the church seem more
welcoming.

Time of Thanksgiving:

Round robin of things that we are grateful for.

Meeting adjourned following hymn and prayer.

Respectfully submitted:

Jane Wagener, Clerk.

Vicar's Report on 2016

We saw a number of changes around St. John's in 2016, most of them good. We said goodbye to the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Walters as one of our Assisting Priests, though we will still see her around from time to time when she is back from her duties at Bryn Mawr. Jennifer, your presence is missed! We are grateful that the Rev. Dr. Jill Rierdan has been able to increase her commitment to various things around St. John's, helping to fill the gap. Thank you, Jill! We have enjoyed great generosity from some large unexpected donations. They are enabling us not only to make sure that we are prepared to replace the aging boiler at the Corner and to be more ready for any major repairs to the Church or Corner buildings, but also to expand our "on the ground" mission efforts.

Speaking of mission, we were proud to help support Bob Harris, Thomas Kreek, and their team on a medical mission trip to Guatemala in August. We thank them for taking the time to educate us about some of the history and situation there in the community they went to serve. We also look forward to supporting them in a return trip this summer. You rock, guys! We also now partner with First Church down the street in the new Cathedral in the Light, Greenfield, helping to prepare and serve a hot meal and sandwiches to take away. This helps remind us of the connection rural areas have with cities, and our mutual dependence on one another. We also saw in 2016 much increased interest and involvement in helping refugees, especially those fleeing Syria. Thanks to Lou and John Ratté for their Soup for Syria events and for providing the opportunity to read modern Syrian books to learn more about the culture, and to Jill Rierdan for helping to coordinate and turn in several "welcome kits" for refugees arriving in the Greater Springfield area. And of course our work with the Mothers Circle continues, and a variety of events including the Ann Browning poetry reading, Catherine Sanderson's presentation on what makes people happy, etc. Following on from joint experiences of worship in Ashfield 250th year, we enjoyed visiting First Church one Sunday and having them join us for one. I hope we can find ways to be supportive of them during their transition time in 2017 when the Rev. Kate Stevens retires. I am sure I have not exhausted the many ways St. John's serves the community and the world in mission and outreach!

But I must mention specifically our successful Fall Festival with the traditional blueberry cobbler. We made progress on organizing the volunteer labor earlier and with less burden to our primary organizer (Thanks, Jane!) and on emphasizing the connection between that event and our various mission initiatives (Thanks, Susan!)

2016 also saw renewal in our adult education and fellowship programs. Examples include Meal and Movie (Love ya, Maggie Smith!), a number of evenings where we shared a meal and discussed the Bible, led by the Rev. Michael Corrigan, and a trip to the Russian Icon Museum. I look forward to seeing what 2017 will bring! And of course

there were our usual summer picnics, which we extended into September and added some singing of old-time favorite songs with our new campfire songbooks.

So how is St. John's doing? Our buildings are in good shape and we are not being dragged down keeping them up. Our finances are sound and are even enabling some wonderful expansion of mission work. Our worship is, if anything, more vital with the fine-tuning we did last year after listening to each other's desires and concerns about how to balance quietness, liveliness, and the amount and kind of music in our worship. We are blessed to have an experienced, Anglican-trained, music director and organist (Thank you, Marilyn!), and to have other preachers and priests to call on beyond me (Thank you, Jill and Bob!). Many people contribute to making St. John's "happen"! Our attendance, while notably less than 10 years ago, seems stable, in the range of 20 persons on an average Sunday. Our leadership team, while small (something we need to continue to work to improve), is both dedicated, and creative in figuring out ways to be effective without being over-burdened. I invite all members to keep in mind the need to cultivate and encourage leaders for the next generation – it will be here before we know it. And it is almost time to start planning how to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of St. John's! We can say a lot more than just "We are still here." We can say, "We are small but mighty!"

Yours in Christ, the Rev. Eliot Moss, Vicar

Senior Warden's Report

Dear Friends, Near and Far,

This is the way I begin my messages to the friends of St. John's when I send out the occasional emails describing upcoming events, news, requests, and such. I often think how odd it is that our email list (and there are those we can't reach by email, of course) is composed of such a variety of people. There are those who are intimately involved with the daily life of St. John's, some who are part-time participants, and those who used to do the work and have moved away. And there are those who have only a distant connection to our parish and still hold us dear. What I have found is that invariably people respond to these informal messages in surprising ways – such as providing a memory, wanting to offer flowers for a loved one, remembering the simplicity of our services. Mostly, they appreciate being “in the loop” and happy to hear that the church they have loved is continuing to do compassionate work. This phenomenon reminds me that though we are a limited cast of characters at St. John's at any given moment – there is an expanse of people beyond our doors for whom St. John's has held great meaning over the decades. It's touching and humbling and eye opening! We are stewards of the moment, and stewards of a past we can never really understand but know exists, and one we do honor, as we move continually into the future.

The pages of this year's annual report contain accounts of our many missions and initiatives. Trusting you will read those happy narratives, I will focus on just one area, briefly referred to in our list of audit goals. That is: the need to prepare a Manual of Operations for St. John's. Over the past few years, in addition to our expanded missions, we have been going over how we operate at St. John's – how we do things – from developing checklists for preparing the altar and counting the offering to policies for being a Safe Church, being prepared for Disaster Recovery, clear about our financial procedures, and, at last, fully backed up with our computer files! This is now the year for putting all of this information in a designated binder so anyone can know the day to day administrative tasks, as well as our liturgical protocols. Perhaps this sounds mundane and unexciting, but, truly, having well thought out guidelines that anyone can follow is humane and responsible. This clarity and organization releases us to do our mission work so deeply.

I believe that how we do our work is as important as what work we do.

Susan Todd
Senior Warden

Junior Warden's Report

This past year, 2016 has been a busy one for me. I have enjoyed doing a number of projects around or on behalf of St. John's. In no special order these include:

1. Meeting with the Senior Warden and Vicar
2. Helping to replace the railings on the porch of St. John's Corner
3. Repairing the bench around one of the trees in the yard
4. Doing some landscaping at the front of the church
5. Purchasing and installing three Smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms, one in the Church and two in St. John's Corner
6. Attending the Diocesan Convention as a representative of St. John's.
7. Establishing a computer spread sheet to record and inventory of Saint John's property
8. Began taking an inventory of St. John's property

I look forward to continued service to St. John's in 2017. And most importantly, I want to thank those people who have helped me in these projects.

Sincerely

David Bruffee

Junior Warden

Music 2016

In January, after meetings with the congregation, it was decided to shorten the service. One result was to go to a spoken psalm and put aside the Portland Psalter. A second result was to eliminate one hymn. After some experimentation, we settled on eliminating the sequence hymn and retaining the post-communion hymn. Occasionally, the psalm is sung to a hymn tune or to simplified chant.

Since getting together a choir for Easter and Christmas Eve had become untenable, I invited members of the Eventide Singers who were not involved in their own churches to sing at our Easter service. Several accepted the invitation and so St. John's had some lovely anthems for our festival service.

As a result of the First Congregational Church having their pews removed to refinish the floor, their parishioners worshipped with us on June 12. They reciprocated by hosting us on October 30, when some of our members joined their choir under the direction of Margery Heins. In November, we hosted the annual ecumenical West County Thanksgiving Service. I asked Margery to lead the combined choir, which was a joy for all concerned.

Beth Sperry fulfilled a long-held dream of starting a Madrigal Group. Their plans are to sing both sacred and secular music and the group is open to the community. Their first time singing for anyone was at our December 18 service. They sang again for us at our late Christmas Eve Holy Eucharist. Thank you, Beth and singers. Also for Christmas Eve, we had the pleasure of having bagpiper Robbie Manatt.

Our historic 1860 Johnson organ is still in fine shape and continues to be a joy to play. Visitors often are amazed by the fine quality of this instrument. Not only do we have a wonderfully built instrument, but it is a credit to our ancestors that it has always been maintained.

On October 1st I began my ninth year as organist at St. John's, for which I am thankful.

Marilyn Berthelette, organist

Buildings and Grounds Committee Report for 2016

As usual, this year included work on many projects at Saint John's.

We are continuing to accumulate funds each year toward the inevitable replacement of the furnace in the Corner.

The church passed its annual inspection by the building inspector, after a difficult battery replacement in two exit lights. Speaking of lights, replacement of the floodlight over the lectern was a challenge.

Numerous gardening activities kept our grounds looking nice. Again this year, Addison Hall did trimming on trees, and assisted Jody with keeping the vigorous garden plants in check. Susan Todd waters and tends plants, especially around the church entrance. Herb Libby continues to maintain the fish pond.

Spring and fall cleanups of the grounds, and periodic lawn-mowing are still contracted out. Carl Nelke is the provider for this service. Also thanks to Jack Burch for a major pruning effort yielding a truckload of brush. And thanks to Michael Corrigan for rope-caulking many windows at the Corner during our fall housecleaning day.

We continue contracting for cleaning services inside the church and the Corner with Ivy Terrill.

We were again given the valuable gift of Corner driveway snow plowing by Ray Sears.

The Buildings and Grounds Committee would like to thank all the church members who helped care for the church property this year.

Jim Wagener

Parish Nurse Report

Parish Nurse activities continue at a slow pace. I am still leading the Healthy Bones and Balance class at the Corner on Thursday mornings from 9.30 to 10.30 a.m. This is a low impact exercise class using weight that focuses on muscle strength to increase or maintain bone mass, and balance exercises to keep us on our feet. All are welcome.

I have decided to resign my position as Parish Nurse effective November 1. I will continue to be a part of the Pastoral Care team but will not be renewing my license. Thank you for your support these past years.

Jane Wagener

Pastoral Care

Be still and aware of God's presence within and all around.

The Pastoral Care Team meets monthly at the Corner House. After an opening prayer we talk about the needs of our parish community and try to identify how the pastoral care team can help. We invite you to let us know if you or anyone you may know is in need of pastoral care. This year personal notes were handwritten by Mary Snow to various parishioners as a way of connecting more intimately with our parish family. In the spring congratulatory notes were sent to all graduating seniors and a dorm shower was organized the pastoral care team for Arianna Monds Burch. Our picnics this year were well attended and the pastoral care team organized a clean-up of the back yard of the Corner House to create a more inviting space. Campfire songbooks were purchased and we had lots of fun singing old favorites. Please join us for any of our monthly pastoral care meetings.

Sue Craft

Thank you to Preston Browning, John and Lou Ratté, and Mary Snow for your thoughtful, wise, and revealing columns for the Ashfield News!

St. John's Mission Team
2016 Mission Giving Report

The Mission Team, Sue Craft, Jane Wagener, Michael Corrigan

This year the Mission Fund had \$5,000 to give away. In keeping with the Mission Team's belief that the Mission funds should be distributed locally, nationally and globally, the Team has decided to give to the following:

Hilltown Churches Food Pantry **\$700**

PO Box 161

Ashfield, MA. 01330

The Food Pantry serves about 10 towns in the area and is supported by local churches. This year, Conway has joined the Food Pantry. The need continues for many in our community.

Community Action Fuel Assistance **\$1850**

Attn: Tammy Butler 393

Main St.

Greenfield, MA 01301

This program offers financial assistance and emergency oil for low income people in Franklin County. Given the reduction in government funds, we have decided to increase the amount we have traditionally given for the need has increased.

Life Path (Formally Franklin Co. Home Care) **\$700**

330 Montague City Road, Suite 1

Turners Falls, MA. 01376-2530 Provides help with emergency donations for food, caregiver support, and general elder emergencies.

Five Talents International **\$500**

P.O. Box 331

Vienna, VA. 22183

Five Talents' mission is "to fight poverty, create jobs, and transform lives by empowering the poor in developing countries using innovative savings and microcredit programs, business training and spiritual development." The name comes from Matthew 25:14-30: "Master", he said. "You have entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more." **Thresholds**

\$50

**4101 North Ravenswood Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60613**

Thresholds is committed to providing help and hope for people with mental illness. They are based in Chicago but have sites in other parts of the country. This donation is made in memory of Robert Hall.

**NELCWIT \$150
New England Learning Center for Women in Transition.
479 Main Street
PO Box 520
Greenfield, MA 01302**

NELCWIT, based in Greenfield is an agency dedicated to helping families survive the trauma of domestic violence and sexual assault. They provide counselors who help people to make a plan to leave an abusive partner, improve their self esteem and find employment to help meet their families basic needs.

**Ashfield Preschool \$200
134 Baptist Corner Road
Ashfield, MA 01330**

The preschool serves toddlers in Ashfield and surrounding towns. This donation is to be used for scholarships for those who cannot afford the tuition.

**National Episcopal Relief and Development \$400
PO Box 7058
Merrifield, VA. 22116-7058**

Episcopal Relief and Development works with church partners and local organizations worldwide to save lives and transform communities. We have earmarked this year's donation to go toward helping the Syrian Refugees.

**Shelburne Senior Center \$125
Main Street
Shelburne Falls, MA**

The Senior Center serves senior citizens from Ashfield, Buckland, and Shelburne. Among their many programs are those providing transportation to medical appointments and shopping, a home repair service-free of charge, home visitation by a social worker, as well as meals, exercise classes and entertainment.

The Food Bank of Western Mass **\$150**
97 Hatfield St.
Hatfield, MA 01038

Because the Hilltown Churches Food Bank receives part of its food from the Food Bank of Western Mass, it was decided that we would make a contribution to them as well.

Southern Poverty Law Center **\$175**
P.O. Box 548
Montgomery, Alabama 36177-9621

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation.

Total Giving: \$5, 000

The above donations reflect just part of the Mission of St. John's. In 2016 the Vestry voted to give \$1,000 to the Medical Mission in Guatemala led by Bob Harris and Thomas Kreek. In addition to this donation, many members of St. John's made individual donations to this mission. (Exact total of this was not available in time for this report)

The church every year gives \$150 to Sharing Christmas, sponsored by the Food Bank, helping to make Christmas a little brighter for many needy families. Other missions include the gathering of many supplies, including bathroom and kitchen supplies for newly arriving refugees and our semi-annual United Thank Offerings.

Our continued sponsorship of It Takes a Village donates over \$3000 to their efforts to help young mothers share their worries and joys.

Looking to the future, we will be giving some of our budget surplus from 2016 to the Guatemala Medical Mission, and other community projects.

Without the help and generosity of all of you, these projects would not have been possible. We thank you for your giving spirit. We ask your prayers for all those who do so much to help those less fortunate help themselves to a better future.

Note: In keeping with St. John's growing concern to aid refugees in multiple ways, we partnered with Jewish Family Services of Western Massachusetts, which has organized and is leading an ecumenical program providing needed household items to refugees who arrive in Western Massachusetts with virtually nothing but what they are wearing. As a congregation, St. John's assembled two kits of cleaning supplies and one kit of basic kitchen/cooking supplies. As well, two additional kits for new babies were assembled and donated by individual members of the church.

New Liturgies

Rev. Dr. Jill Rierdan, Associate Vicar

Episcopal Churches and other mainline Protestant churches are being urged to offer meaningful spiritual experiences to community members who might not otherwise attend religious services or even know what “church” means in contemporary times. I was happy that St. John’s accepted my suggestion that we offer two new liturgies of likely interest to community members and to the St. John’s congregation as well.

In the fall, the Blessing of Animals was moved outdoors on a Saturday morning—a change from what had been the tradition of offering a blessing of animals in association with the Sunday Eucharist. Despite a heavy rain, seven dogs and ten or so humans stood in the garden and were blessed, with Micah, my own dog, serving as host animal. Photos were taken of priest and one of the rescue dogs present, with the picture to be sent to the adoption agency. How lovely that bringing one’s dog for a blessing is seen as a sign of good caretaking! Following the blessing ceremony more animals were blessed at Farmer’s Market and the coordinator of Farmer’s Market asked if the Blessing could be offered at the Market next year—exactly the hoped-for outcome.

During Advent, St. John’s partnered with Trinity Church in Shelburne Falls to offer a Blue Christmas service—a service of consolation and hope. This is a service I had offered in other churches in previous years to meet the needs of people whose pain, as well as hope, needs to be acknowledged during the Advent-Christmas season. Pastor Marguerite Sheehan of Trinity, and Eliot Moss, partnered with me to offer a service that was deeply meaningful to the 30 who attended—a quite large number given that such a service had not been offered in West County churches before. About one third of those attending were members of the Shelburne Falls community—non-church goers who were deeply moved by a service that spoke to their own needs. Marguerite and I were especially appreciative of the prominent coverage that the Greenfield Recorder offered in making this service known to residents of the area.

Adult Education

Rev. Dr. Jill Rierdan, Adult Education Coordinator

An Adult Education and Spiritual Formation Program began anew this year, prompted by requests from some parishioners and made possible through the efforts of other parishioners. The program might well be called *Food and Food for Thought*, since most offerings involved an evening meal followed by discussion.

Michael Corrigan led a one-session dinner and discussion on the Letter of James to begin the program, which was attended by nearly 20 people.

This was followed by an event coordinated with the Summer Community Picnic program, where folks gathered for a cookout in the yard of St. John's Corner and then moved in to watch a film related to the area in Guatemala where Thomas Kreek and Bob Harris volunteer as medical missionaries.

In the fall, Michael Corrigan led a five-part dinner and discussion series on Matriarchs and Patriarchs, figures from the Book of Genesis. For many, it was the most thoroughgoing and continuous reading that they had done (at least in recent history) of the Book of Genesis; again, it was well attended, with a number of parishioners attending all sessions while contributing to, and enjoying, potluck meals.

As well, in the fall, I shepherded a number of parishioners on a "field trip" to the Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton, MA, which houses the largest collection of Russian Icons outside of Russia itself. We received a lively and informative tour of the collection, had lunch, and then had additional time to review the collection before traveling back to Ashfield in our two-car caravan. A special treat was an extended conversation with the founder of the Museum, Gordon B. Lankton, who told of beginning his collection with the purchase of a single icon at a Russian flea market; certainly, he has been a good steward of this collection of sacred art, not only saving it from possible destruction but also by building a museum and sharing the collection with the public.

As an indication that the Adult Education program has already become an important and continuing part of St. John's spiritual life, four possible Lenten programs have already been proposed, along with suggestions for additional trips. Most likely, we will continue Dinner and Discussions on a weekday evening and also have occasional post-worship meetings on Sundays.

2016 Annual Report for the Hilltown Churches Food Pantry

Wow! This year has flown by. It has been a year of growth and hard work by many wonderful volunteers who show up to help week after week, fair weather or foul, and always with a smile on their faces and sleeves rolled up to get to work, we are truly blessed to live here among such folks.

Now, for some numbers; In 2016 we distributed 135,000 pounds of food up from 100,000 the year before. Last year for the month of Dec. we had 414 people signed up, this Dec. we had 473, an increase of 59 people. Our food comes from many sources. In the 11 hilltowns that we serve many organizations hold food drives that added almost 4,000 pounds of food to our larder. Local farmers as well as individual families have donated food from their gardens and orchards. Nolan's Neighbors continues to get us milk at cost. We have two reliable sources of bread with weekly pickups at both Big Y and Bread Euphoria. There's a lot of growth going on in this small church basement! We are trying to spread the word that we are here to help by putting our distribution schedule in the Ashfield News as well as on the town website. Our annual appeal letter was again successful thanks to the ever generous folks that we live among. With good budgeting we will continue to put the food out.

We have recruited more drivers to go to the Food Bank to help pick up our increased amount of food. Most of that food is free to us except for a small stocking fee for some of the goods. More volunteers meet us at the church to help unload and organize the food onto the tables. Miraculously by 2:30-3 o'clock we have about 30 volunteers, each with their own jobs to do. Some bring in carts and set up the ramp, others are ready to check clients in and keep the records, many take up their stations behind the tables to help the clients make their choices of food, someone else weighs the food on the way out the door and another helps clients out the door and down the ramp. Others get food from the back room to continuously restock the tables. We even have a crew that breaks down the cardboard boxes and another who carts it off to the dump.

This year we have worked with the church to add a railing by the back exit door to help make the exiting process safer. We have also helped with a new mat at the entry door that should keep folks shoes cleaner and less apt to bring in gravel which ruins the finish on the floor.

Once again the wonder of the food pantry shines through thanks to the many volunteers who do understand that there for the grace of God can go any one of us and a helping hand up can be wonderful for both those giving and those receiving.

My sincere thank you and best wishes for a healthy and happy 2017.

Pat Thayer, President, Hilltown Churches Food Pantry

It Takes a Village 2016 Annual Report

By Lisa Goding, Family Support Services Manager

2016 was another productive year for It Takes a Village. We applied for and received our own 501c3 status and assembled a strong Board of Directors, including our own Susan Todd who has agreed to oversee our financial operations as our Board Treasurer. The Hilltown Community Health Center renewed their financial commitment to our Home Visit Program for another 3 years, and the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation recommitted funding for our Village Closet program through 2017. Meg Taylor moved on to other activities but she graciously agreed to lend her expertise by remaining on our Board of Directors. Stacey Mimnaugh of Greenfield joined our team for our Fall campaign and began an aggressive outreach strategy to get our name out in the Valley. As a result, we were featured in The Republican's weekly column Voices of the Valley, and in an article in the Hilltown Country Journal. In addition, we were asked to speak at Baystate Hospital and with the Westhampton Women's Fellowship about how we assist postpartum mothers and their children.

St. John's has continued to offer support and partnership with It Takes a Village, providing funds for our weekly Mothers' Circles. In addition, St Johns generously agreed to extend its Fiscal Sponsorship agreement while we have worked through the nuances of our 501c3 application process, allowing us to continue to fundraise and apply for grants to help cover the costs of expanding our free services to families throughout the Hilltowns.

Our Mission is to increase practical and emotional support and to decrease social isolation for families with newborns and young children. Our goals focus on decreasing the financial strain of raising infants and young children, supporting mothers who are struggling, creating spaces for social connection and providing needed resources and referrals to underserved families. Through our free services, we aim to reduce rural hardships, promote maternal self-esteem and resilience, and decrease the risk of Postpartum Depression and its negative impacts on young children. In this way, we can improve social emotional and developmental outcomes for at-risk infants, young children, mothers and families. Over the last year, most of the families we served were low or very low income, including teen mothers, families in transition, mothers in recovery unemployed families, survivors of domestic abuse, homeless families and foster families. Last year, we were able to serve a total of 344 families through our free programs (1230 people).

Since our inception, It Takes a Village has built strong relationships with local organizations that support mothers and children during the postpartum period, such as the Green River Doula Network, Cooley Dickinson Center for Midwifery, Baystate

Hospital, Northampton Area Pediatrics, River Valley Midwives and Midwifery Care of Holyoke. In addition, we partner with community organizations that work with at-risk mothers to address local issues and focus on strengthening the community as a whole. For example, we closely partner with Healthy Families, a national, evidence-based program that seeks to promote positive parenting, enhance child health and development, and prevent abuse and neglect. Healthy Families and It Takes a Village work collaboratively to support, educate and advocate for this very vulnerable group of mothers, many of whom are adolescents. Each month, Healthy Families transports pregnant and parenting teen moms to our Village Closet to collect needed resources for themselves and their babies. These include maternity clothes, nursing supplies, cribs, strollers, baby clothes and diapers. Women leave our location with a new sense of confidence that they can actually do "this mom thing." Moreover, we can offer home visits in addition to the ones that Healthy Families offers. The feeling that "we are all in this together" sets mothers and their babies up for success and improved outcomes. We also partner with The Grace House, a women's shelter for mothers in recovery, and with Community Action, an agency working with low income, at-risk families. In order to combat postpartum emotional complications, such as Postpartum Depression, we are active and engaged members of the perinatal coalitions of Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden County. We also are part of the Franklin and Hampshire County Diaper Task Forces and are the only certified Diaper Bank in the Hilltown region. Last year, we distributed over 10,000 diapers to low-income families in our coverage area.

We could not have accomplished so much without the help of Susan Todd, Eliot Moss, and the support from St Johns Church and its parishioners. We are extremely grateful for Susan's commitment of both time and effort to Hilltown mothers and infants in need. Thank you to St. Johns for your continued support and belief in the work we do to make life easier for rural mothers and families.

So what's in store for 2017? A lot! This year, our plan is to expand the Mothers Support Circles. We have received much positive feedback from the mothers who attend our long-standing group at the Corner House. In early February, we will be piloting a second group in the central/southern Hilltowns. In addition, we plan to run our groups yearround since many moms need support in the summer and we want to ensure we are meeting that need.

If you are motivated by the work we do for Hilltown families, we invite you to join us this year. We always need extra sets of hands and the larger our team, the more we can accomplish. Volunteers can make a difference in as little as two hours per week by being a home-visit volunteer, helping to sort or deliver items from our Village Closet, or assisting with outreach and administrative projects. We also are always accepting donations of new and gently used children's items as well as diapers. We welcome

feedback on how you think we are doing (or if you have new ideas). We are open to all thoughts, collaborations, and connections.

It Takes a Village Mothers Group Report: Making Space

We are pleased that our Mothers Group has been well-attended this year. Anna Westley has returned to It Takes a Village to offer her nurturing style and facilitation expertise to the women we serve. In addition, we have welcomed Liz, a certified therapist onto our team. Women attend to connect with other local moms and to create a support network to help combat the isolation that mothering in the Hilltowns can bring. We also welcomed Camilla, our new and very experienced childcare provider. It is great to watch the babies and toddlers playing in the family room while mothers take a well-deserved break in the mother's room.

As our Mothers' Circle Coordinator said last year, "We hope to create a space where mothers don't have to bear their untold story of motherhood alone – they can voice it instead. We invite in the real, raw story of all that motherhood encompasses and we hold the space for whatever that looks like. We do not sugarcoat the challenges of motherhood but we also look for ways to find the light even in the darkness. We share a deep compassion for the struggles each of us is contending with and strive to find that same compassion for ourselves."

Here is what one recent mother said about our Mothers' Circle:

"I had every risk factor for postpartum depression but with this baby, I wove myself a better net of support. It was still hard but being part of the mothers group and Facebook group, and knowing I was not all alone in this both beautiful and awful journey are some of the ways I avoided having PPD this time around."

Our goal is not only to alleviate rural hardships, but also to offer social and emotional relief by providing an accessible, family-friendly space from which mothers can connect over their shared experiences. It Takes a Village works to promote women's self-esteem and self-confidence by providing opportunities for women to interact in a safe, judgement free space. Motherhood can be incredibly isolating, as our modern culture of parenting is one that keeps mom and baby at home alone. Studies show that women see connectedness and social participation as fundamental to their self-esteem, and women with stronger social ties score higher on self-esteem measures. Our Mothers Circle has become a gathering place where women can share conversation, observe each other's parenting, and ask for help when needed. Data shows that this kind of

active social network helps mothers cope with stress and develop resilience, and the simple act of being around other mothers, increases women's confidence in their own abilities to care for their children and themselves. By facilitating social interaction and connection, It Takes a Village hopes to promote positive self-esteem for women in our community.

Rather than giving advice to new moms who are already inundated with things they "should" do for their children, we simply provide a space to share whatever is true for our mothers and trust that each mother has the intuition and wisdom to be the best mother for her children. To have a place to share openly can be truly an inspiring experience!

If you know of a mom who might enjoy joining us for tea and sharing her truths, please let her know that our Mothers Group meets Fridays at St Johns Corner House 10:00-11:30 AM. For more information, contact: Lisa Goding at lisa@hilltownvillage.org or at 413-455-5008.

***Introduction to the Sixth Annual Ann Hutt Browning Reading,
June 1, 2016***

Tomorrow, June 2, is the birthday of Ann Hutt Browning, which is why we chose this time of year to offer this series. She would have been 81 years old. Each year, as we think of Ann and enact this memorial, the gifts of Ann's life are newly—illuminated – for this is a memorial that blooms once again.

Not long before her death I would visit Ann at the Buckley Nursing Home. We spoke of our desire to begin this series, how we would bring an accomplished poet to Ashfield each year in her memory, a thought that brought such sunshine to her eyes. And often I would read poems aloud to her. One time, after reading several, what I felt, were truly great poems, she said, "That's enough." That memory brings a flood of emotions to me. Amusement was certainly one. Humility definitely another. Did I read poorly, did I make the wrong choices, was it too much thinking and feeling for her? Was she simply tired or tired of listening? I'll never know.

But that memory has led me to reflect time and again about the nature of poetry and upon the glorious fact that a poem is such distilled emotion that sometimes it's just too much to bear – a little at a time we allow the words, the richness of language to infuse our hearts and minds – somewhere along the continuum of other beloved distillations -- maple syrup and single malt whiskey. But it's that very intensity that changes our life and the life on our planet. Emily Dickinson famously wrote: If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry.

And years later Robert Frost wrote: "A poem begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness."

Our young poets tonight and the beautiful featured reader, Daniela Gioseffi, and our dear Ann and her accomplished daughter Sarah have known and know of that lump in the throat, that sense of wrong, that homesickness and lovesickness. Tonight we see the thread that links all of them all and everyone here gathered: a woman who lived a full life ignited by poetry, young people who through language are daring to face injustice and loss and the terror of feeling, a daughter who courageously uses poetry to right wrongs, and a lifelong accomplished and visionary poet, as one writer said, who is "dedicated to planetary survival."

John Kennedy wrote: "When power leads people toward arrogance, poetry reminds them of their limitations. When power narrows the area of human concern, poetry reminds us of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses."

Susan Todd

**Thanksgiving Homily, St. John's Episcopal Parish Ashfield,
MA**

November 22, 2016

(Scripture: Luke 24-36, The Road to Emmaus) by
Robert A. Jonas

The priest, professor and author, Henri Nouwen used to say, Jesus's story is my story, your story, and our story.

Like the fellows on the road to Emmaus we too are walking together down a wintry and windy road, looking for safety and warmth. We search inwardly and among family and friends for hope, love and a creative response to an intense, exhausting, often excruciating Presidential election campaign. Some Americans, suffering with unemployment and a rapidly diminishing White majority, feel vindicated and hopeful for a new politics that values their interests. And others feel that the democratic values we've held dear have been trashed, and that our world is turned upside down. We can't find our footing and we can't remember what's holding us up. We find ourselves talking with strangers and with friends in new ways, hoping to explain the unthinkable events to ourselves and each other, and wanting desperately to fix our feelings and the new reality we face.

But *we* can't be fixed and without a leader we respect, can't fix *anything*.

Who are we now, as a nation?

Who did I think I was, and who am I now?

We're having an identity crisis. And this is good because this is why we are gifted with the Jesus story which is all about our true selves. Jesus's story is our story. . . .

Even though the actors in this national election often seemed to ignore reality, creating false news in order to win, we know that there *is* a reality in here, and out there. We trust that there is such a thing as truth. We trust that the Jesus story is not a fantasy, not a sidetrack into a romantic pretense or denial of reality. It is a story that can stand up to the truth. The great Jesuit theologian and scientist Teilhard DeChardin takes the largest possible view of our identity in the midst of an evolving cosmos. We are the universe becoming conscious of itself as we evolve into a boundless love that

circulates all the way within, through and beyond our immediate bodily pains, interpersonal struggles, environmental crises, existential suffering and political battles. We are in relationship with a love that can take it. This has always been true and will be true forever, no matter what happens on the secular political stage.

Who are we? We are birthed in time by our parents and ancestors. We are born into the one million year history of the human species. And we are birthed into a particular historical culture. And we all live within the bounds of a mortal timeline—the date of our birth, and the date on which we will take our last breath. But our deepest identity is not bound in time, not even bound by the timeline of our family background or the sum total of all our interactions, jobs, worries, and joys.

What happens in our brief duration of life sometimes brings us to the brink of what we know, what we fear and what we think we can survive. So it is good to step back and ask, Who is the I, the You and the We that I can ultimately depend upon? In times like this those of us in the Abrahamic traditions are invited to remember that we are birthed from the bosom of the Creator, from the womb of eternal love, because we trust that ultimate reality, God, is Love.

All Creation and we ourselves are born from what scientists have called the Big Bang and what the Thomas Berry has called *The Great Flaring Forth*--about 13.7 billion years ago. And we are ultimately headed toward what paleontologist and geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ called the Omega point where everything is resolved in love. I wouldn't call the destination a "point." It's a dance. In Greek, God as Trinity has always been defined as a *perichoresis*, an eternal dance of love. Since we trust that we are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), we trust that we are headed toward who we already, and really, are.

We know what the mountaintop looks like. We've glimpsed the experience of being free of time passing. When this happens—in solitude, in nature, in prayer and meditation, and in relationships—we are suddenly seeing from the Forever of God within us. God and God's Love is before, during and after all time. Because time comes from God. Can we take in this astounding truth, that God and eternal life is our deepest identity?

Our egos do not like this idea because the ego wants to be in charge and wants to fix ourselves, to fix others and even God. The ego wants to be the center of attention, rather than allowing God to be the center. But our

egos are not separate, bad inner characters. We need a self, a center of knowing and agency. Our task is to let love dissolve the hard boundaries of our egos until our egos and all our inner characters are transparent to God's Love. This Love is the largest possible embrace of all that we are. And while there are indeed things to fix and things that we can do to help others and the earth, our most helpful contributions will not arise from our self-centered self. They will arise from our deepest, boundless identity in God, from that place where God is living our lives through us.

We don't own our own lives. To think that we do causes unnecessary suffering. The Divine source of life is living our lives through us. God is learning what it's like to be a human being through us. And God is giving God's life away through us.

Why am I saying all this today, during the week of Thanksgiving? Because when you consider this huge 13.7 billion year picture, each one of us is here tonight because trillions of events had to occur exactly as they occurred over the course of the evolutionary dance, or we wouldn't be here. It's surprising enough that our parents met when they did, that we were born, and that we'd be here at St. John's tonight. And what about all the chance meetings, coincidences and graces that brought our grandparents, great grandparents and ancestors together in the course of our million year evolution as human beings? Our chance of being here tonight, right now, is about zero. In fact, it's impossible! It is an astounding and awesome fact. And of course, this realization invites gratitude and a sense of something really new. Our awakening to this miracle opens our minds and hearts to the newness of each moment.

We are not carbon copies of yesterday. Some things look pretty much the same in our community and in our homes day-to-day. And even here at St. John's--even as we sit here, everything is passing from somewhere to somewhere else and we will soon be gone. But surprise, we are here! Now. A Now that will never happen again.

It is a scientific fact that the Big Bang exploded out of Nowhere 13.7 billion years ago. But it is also a spiritual fact that we are being continually birthed from nowhere, from the Great Flaring Forth of God in each moment. This is the eternal Good News repeated so many times in the New Testament: we are gifted with eternal life. Eternal life doesn't come later, if we're good. Eternal life is happening now, and sequential time is flowing through eternity. From this timeless perspective, all that has happened, and all that will happen, is happening now in God, and in us. This is not an

interesting theological idea. It is a reality, but we must exercise spiritual muscles to realize it. We need to awaken to the fact that didn't create ourselves and that we wouldn't have to be here, but we are! A boundless gratitude flows from this realization. It is the Good News that Jesus announced.

But the Jesus story doesn't imply that this awakening will be easy. After all, he was murdered for sharing this vision. Horrible things will happen and God will not step in to make everything be pleasant and to run smoothly. Bad things will always happen in this evolving universe—and in this community and country—but God says that He, that She will invincibly sustain us, no matter what happens. Even in those places where we are fearful, resentful, guilty, sorrowful, disappointed and enraged. There is no place within us or outside of us where God *is not*.

In the Road to Emmaus story, the men are walking along the road with a sense that something totally new and scary has happened, but they do not immediately realize that they are walking with Someone who is a total manifestation of the new reality, the timeless Omega in human form, the Christ.

At some point in our spiritual lives we wake up and realize that we are always walking with Jesus, in the Presence of the One who was here before our parents, grandparents, and all our ancestors—and before this planet Earth, this solar system and all the trillions of galaxies were formed. There is no concrete image of this timeless Christ, no photograph or video, and I, like some medieval women saints, am comfortable with a Christ who is any gender. Christ is the One whom we can totally trust and who knows us better than we know ourselves, and still likes us! As we read in the Gospel of John all things come into being through One whom we call Christ. Nothing that *is* comes from somewhere else. When we listen to our Christ selves, we see all our past and future being realized in love. There will still be darkness, but the light will always shine in the darkness, no matter what—and the darkness will never overcome it.

When we discover our true eternal selves we realize that we are brief locations of the Great Flaring Forth. We are all being born into this present moment with the fresh face of a newborn. The eternity that transcends the Big Bang and final Omega Dance to come are within us, now. The name Christ tells us that Jesus totally surrendered his self-centered armored ego to his infinite and timeless Divinity, a surrender so total that in the silence of his being and in all his interactions, the time-bound Jesus of Nazareth was

manifesting eternal life, the Alpha and Omega of all time. And the next most amazing thing is that he didn't own this eternal identity, but wanted to share it with everyone, and with us here today. He told his friends, "Where I am, you will be also; and I give you my peace and my joy, and your joy will be complete." Jesus's story is our story.

St. Paul really got it. After his realization he declared, Do you not know that you have Christ within you? (1 Corinthians 2:16) He did not mean that we have a separate inner character named Christ. What he meant is that Christ is who we most truly are, if we awaken. Jesus tells us, Please, I beg you, open yourself to the awakening that I offer you. "When you see me, you see the timeless, placeless Divinity, the blessed source of all that really is. If you see me from within the transparent place of your holy Self, you will see my dear Abba, the Creator. And you will know that I am in you and you are in me" (paraphrasing John 14-17). When we become transparent to God and each other in this way, we manifest our uniqueness and yet we are one in Christ. Christ is the name we use for this most inclusive definition of a whole human being. Christ is so kind. He/She tells us, Yes, you have pain now; but I will always be with you, and your hearts will rejoice. And no one will take this joy from you. When we awaken to our true identity, joy blossoms spontaneously within us and we offer compassion to all others. Because this is who God is, and who we really are.

This is the One who walks with us now. Walks with us as we reflect on the recent election; walks with us as we face the challenges of body pains, overdue bills, climate change, dangerous political events and leaders, environmental destruction, more house maintenance, the loss of loved ones and diagnoses. "I know," he says from within us, "I understand, and I am with you."

And so, in all things, we are so thankful for this accompaniment that comes from the Beyond Within, in each moment, now. The great medieval mystic Marguerite Porete called God her dear *FarNearness*--the dear *FarNearness* who leads each one of us beside still waters in each moment, wherever we are. Even as we walk through the darkest valley, our undefended hearts can feel safe and fear no evil, for we can trust this deep reality, that our dear Jesus, our dear *Farnearness* is whispering, "I am with you; I see you, I know you, and I love you. Let's go together."

Our boundaried and defensive egos won't like this, but we can tenderly say to them, "You've done good work, dear ego, and now I release you to a long vacation."

Amen

© Robert A. Jonas, M.T.S., Ed.D. is founder and director of the Empty Bell in Northampton, MA. The Empty Bell was birthed in 1993 in Watertown, MA as a sanctuary for Christian-Buddhist dialogue. See www.emptybell.org

Treasurer's Report

Again, we are deeply grateful for the beautiful generosity of all those who comprise the family of St. John's. From the wonderfully small contributions from a long lost friend to those reaching into the thousands, we are in awe of you all!

For the past two years we have had surpluses at year's end, meaning that we have had the opportunity to allocate money into the future to areas of importance and concern to us as a parish. This year here is a proposal for how we might be directing these monies, placing them as liabilities, to be expended in 2017, but now drawn from the 2017 budget:

- \$10,000 as our match if we are so fortunate to receive a grant from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts for the creation of Transitional Kits for refugees, low income mothers, and recently-released prisoners
- \$3,500 for the medical mission in Guatemala
- \$2,000 for the furnace fund
- \$3,000 for future repair
- The remainder would be returned to our Ford Advantage Fund, perhaps used for additional mission in Mafi-Dove, Ghana and/or proposed work on renovations to the long room of the Corner House.

In addition, we have been able to offer raises for our organist, parish administrator, and financial administrator. As mentioned in our audit report for 2016, our goal was to provide Carbonite back up for our digital files this year. This has been accomplished.

Thank you to David Bruffee and his family for creating an endowment fund in memory of his parents.

Years of working within a culture of creating a conservative budget for revenue and over budgeting for expenses, established years ago, has meant that we are able to balance our budget and assure our parishioners that we are careful financial stewards of their gifts.

Audit Recommendations for St. John's Church in Ashfield
Made in 2016 from 2015 data

- **Inventory:** While we have inventories (both written and in video form) we still have not completed our digital record of the handwritten records. We also need to itemize room by room what our furnishings include. David Bruffee will head this project over the next year.
- **Manual of Operations:** Now that we have completed establishing our Safe Church, Disaster Relief, and Financial Procedures policies, it is time to assemble our manual of operations to include these policies, as well as our checklists for liturgical and parish events throughout the year, in one binder.
- **Process for recognizing/acknowledging all gifts/pledges:** The audit committee recommends that we clarify when the standard IRS letter goes out for gifts above \$250. Should they ever go out for pledges or just for gifts outside the pledging units? Also, the committee recommends that handwritten thank you notes be sent to pledgers as well as gifts from strangers. No gift should go unnoticed.
- **Accountability of Hours:** As the Internal Control Questionnaire requires employees to provide a written record of hours worked, approved by a supervisor, the audit committee recommended that we seek a more formal record of how hours are spent by the financial administrator, parish administrator, senior warden, and vicar, in order to gain a sense of the kinds of activities/tasks that are being accomplished in these various realms at St. John's at this point in time. One auditor mentioned that the work of the Senior Warden at Trinity Copley is vastly different from the work of the Senior Warden at St. John's in Ashfield!
- **It Takes a Village – review of their financial records:** As we are the fiscal sponsor for ITAV representatives from St. John's financial team should review their financial records on an annual basis.
- **Process for writing off outstanding pledge amounts:** The audit committee had questions about the custom of listing pledging amounts that have come in after the fact, as well as those pledges that have not been fulfilled. We will review how these amounts are recorded.
- **Identifying trust accounts:** We have completed research on each of our trust accounts at the diocese. We still need to note on our Balance sheet the restrictions (if any) of our trust accounts by *for no restrictions and +for interest only so that this information will always be at our fingertips.
- **Counting Protocol:** While we outlined a way to provide safeguards for counting the collection last year we need to implement this protocol on a steady weekly basis. This will be done through our ushers and altar guild. We have prepared a recording form and we always copy our deposit slip. The deposit is made by a noncounter.
- **Carbonite Backup:** The audit committee recommended that we use the Carbonite plan for backing up our computer files, rather than using an external hard drive method. At this point the cost would be \$59.99, perhaps less, per year. This was felt to be well worth it. This step will complete our Disaster Relief Plan.
- **The Receiving of Gifts:** The audit committee recommended that we review our protocol for accepting memorial and other gifts, restricted and non-restricted, and how they are received through a clear vestry process. Note: If anyone would like to take a tax deduction for a specific project, St. John's must pay the bill directly for the project with that person making a donation to St. John's that can be reported as a tax deduction.