

Epiphany 2, Year A  
The Very Reverend D.S. Mote, PhD  
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL  
January 15, 2023  
Isaiah 49:1-7  
Psalm 40:1-12  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9  
John 1:29-42

## Missional Budget

*What are you looking for?* These are the first words Jesus speaks in the gospel of John.

*What are you looking for?*

How would you answer that question today? Is it the same answer you would've given a year ago? Or ten years ago?

*What are you looking for?*

It's important to be clear on what we are seeking. As we explored on the Day of Epiphany, everyone is not looking for the same things. However, gathered here in this place on this day, chances are a number of us are probably looking for many of the same things.

The Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, whose birthday is today and whose birthday we commemorate tomorrow, clarified another question for us: *What are our neighbors looking for?* What do those in our community beyond St Paul's seek?

Throughout his work in the civil rights movement, the black freedom struggle, from the first mass meeting at Dexter Street Baptist Church where he pastored in Montgomery in 1955 through his final sermon in Memphis the night before his death in April 1968, Dr King focused our attention on addressing what neighbors other than ourselves are seeking.

In what turned out to be his ultimate sermon that April evening, as he preached in solidarity with black sanitation workers in Memphis, he put it clearly: The question is not what will happen to me or to my job or my to convenient schedule if I don't stop to help the sanitation worker. The question is what will happen to the sanitation worker if I don't stop to help.

Putting Jesus' question, his first words in John, together with Dr King's question—*What are you looking for? What are your neighbors looking for?*—and holding them in tension, we can begin to determine how to address them both in combination. And if the question of what I seek is balanced over against the question of what my neighbor seeks, if the question of what we as St Paul's seek is balanced over against what our neighbors in Key West and the Lower Keys seek, we begin to get a grasp on our mission.

Since soon after my arrival, installation in June 2021, I've been talking about the need to discern our common work in this season, the moment in which we are living, the times through which we are passing, and in this place. I've suggested a number of times that we are, at a minimum, called to restore relationships within the congregation and the community and to restore these beautiful historic, iconic buildings which are entrusted to our care.

So in January of a new year, a week away from our annual meeting as a congregation and in the midst of finalizing our 2023 budget, what are we looking at in terms of being able to carry out our mission? What does it appear that we are looking for? Dr King taught us that budgets are moral documents. They reveal what we really value by disclosing where we spend our financial resources. How do our priorities look in terms of that mission of restoring relationships and restoring buildings?

Our proposed 2023 budget is lean. As is the case in most congregations, our largest expenses, our biggest spending categories are personnel costs and maintenance or operating costs.

If we understand personnel costs as necessary spending that furthers the mission in our context rather than merely as operational costs, then personnel costs are missional expenditures; they further the mission. By the same token, if we understand uses of the buildings entrusted to our care as part of the mission of restoring relationships, inviting people in, empowering people to go out, gathering various kinds of congregations here on many days of the week, then building maintenance costs can also be understood as missional expenditures.

It was a great week this past week, speaking of missional operations in and around these buildings. We had Bishop Chilton Knudsen, retired Bishop of Maine, visiting the Keys Deanery and staying in the historic rectory; Canon Licia Affer, Canon to the Ordinary of our diocese staying in the historic rectory. On Wednesday, Tim and Irie and a number of other musicians connected to the Southernmost Chamber

Music Society did a music program for over one hundred children in the parish hall. At the same time, the Key West Literary Seminar was using the conference room and the living room of the historic rectory. It was busy around here, y'all, particularly busy in these specific booked uses of these spaces. And in this space, Wednesday Eucharist at 10 AM, yes, and all day every day like all day every week, hundreds, literally hundreds of people passing into and out of this space where they come to say a prayer, light a candle, catch their breath.

This space and this campus are gifts of beauty and hospitality, ministries of beauty and hospitality, made possible by your gifts that invite in all the people passing by. People take their lunch break in the shade of the memorial garden or the courtyard at the back of the church. People spend time on these grounds. The ministry of St Paul's in this place, because so utilized by so many, is in fact part of our mission.

So, what makes the difference, if something is missional or only operational? I'd say it's whether what we are paying for is only for us, only inward-facing and members-focused, or whether it really is part of a welcoming embrace of the entire community in which we find ourselves embedded and all the visitors to this community, an embrace that happens both in this space and on this campus and beyond them as well.

So, I have good news for us. The vast majority of our spending at St Paul's can be properly understood as missional spending. Why? Because this space is not a clubhouse but a house of prayer and a safe space for all people.

The budget is lean, and the spending it specifies is largely missional, including personnel expenses because Tim and Aubrey and I are engaged on your behalf in activities day-in, day-out that not only benefit you but everyone who is near us and around us.

As a document, our current proposed budget indicates our values. It says we value the restoration of relationships, the restoration of buildings, and the ongoing offering of beauty and hospitality to everyone who makes their way here and everyone who lives around here.

And I have some not-so-great news for us. Giving at St Paul's has increased a little each year since 2020, but it needs to increase more in order to close some gaps created by market declines in 2022 and by increases in the cost of everything. Y'all go to the grocery store, too; I don't need to tell you, right?

How can we close these gaps? How can we be more confident than not that we won't have a budget shortfall in 2023?

One way we can do that is by knowing fairly early in this year how much St Paul's people are planning to give in 2023. That's why we are asking everyone or every household to complete a pledge form which is available online via a link in your bulletin, and we'll have hard copies here starting next Sunday. If everyone pledges and if everyone who pledged in 2022 will increase their pledge, we will close our budget gaps easily.

A pledge is a commitment to the congregation, to the church, to God we make in faith, and it can be increased or decreased as needed through the year. It will help us to know what level of giving we can expect, and this is especially important in those summer and early fall months when we are the thinnest on the ground here in Key West, when there are there are the fewest number of us here.

How much should you pledge? The biblical tithe is 10% of one's income. Tithing is viewed in different ways by different people. And, quite frankly, tithing is not possible for some people in some seasons and stages of life. If a tithe of 10% is possible for you financially, will you think and pray on making a tithe of 10%? And if you could comfortably give more than that, will you think and pray on that possibility and listen to what the Spirit may be nudging you to consider, to give, to make possible in this year 2023?

I am not anxious talking about money with you because you have demonstrated in the eighteen months I've been here time after time after time that you are tremendously generous people in every way I can think of. You are generous in service, generous with your time and talents and energies, many of which are things you carry out behind the scenes. I see you, and I appreciate you. We all appreciate you. And I am confident that having been aware that we have some gaps to bridge, that same generosity will lead you to help us close those gaps. Becky and I invite you to join us in pledging and tithing.

*What are you looking for?*

I don't know everything each of you is looking for. But the eleventh verse of today's psalm has a pretty good list of what many of us, I suspect, are looking for: God's righteousness and faithfulness and deliverance and love. That's a good list. We are looking for these, and we reliably find these in our life together with God as we seek to follow Jesus.

We need not be anxious about money or about anything else. Why is that? As the epistle reading from 1 Corinthians puts it, we have everything we need for our life together as the body of Christ. As St Paul our patron says, we are not lacking any spiritual gift that is needed to live the life to which we are called. We are many members of Christ's one body. God help us continue to live this life of following Christ together in this place in peace and joy and integrity. May it be so.