

My name is Steve Baker, Canon to the Ordinary for Mission Resources and Chief Financial Officer for the diocese. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the voices from our diocesan body about St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church.

The Reverend Cliff Carr has this to say:

St. Barnabas' began in the late 1950's when Episcopalian faculty members at Kutztown State Teachers College asked the diocese to send a priest to conduct services. I remember Lehigh students from Leonard Hall going on Sunday with the Dean of Leonard Hall to hold services in the Bachmann Funeral Home on the west end of town (across from the airport). Of course, one of their jobs was to "set up" an altar and bring out of storage all the necessary prayer books, hymnals and communion vessels, etc.

When the current building was purchased from the Diocese of Allentown, the vicar invited me and Gwendolyn-Jane to come and talk about transforming the building into an Episcopal worship-space. Our ideas for removing the step-graded and "busy" altar area and opening it up with no altar rail and just an altar and ambon for reading/preaching were taken to heart and a wonderful liturgical space was the result. With no carpet and minimal furniture, the acoustics in the building are amazing - so much so that even a dozen people singing sound like 100!

Although the congregation was never large in numbers, they had a big, welcoming heart for everyone, and I always looked forward to supplying there in the years after there was no permanent priest. Sometimes there might be months between visits, but I was always welcomed with open arms as if I was coming "home".... One Easter celebrated with them stands out in memory because of the way they had decorated the church with streamers of yellow and white cloth festooned from the rafters and banks of lilies front and center - it was a visible witness to the joy of the Easter Feast! Their hospitality was boundless - a hallmark of that being the wonderful brunches that often followed the liturgy.

Hopefully this spirit will live on if the building can be repurposed in some new way of witnessing to God's Love...

Pat Brown, Clerk of the Vestry, say:

My husband Charlie & I moved to the Kutztown area, with our three young children, some 37 years ago. After settling into our new home, we began to look for a new church home as well. One of the first churches we visited was the tiny community of St. Barnabas. At that time, St. Barnabas was designated a mission and met in the basement of St. Paul's UCC.

Despite their small size, we were warmly welcomed and duly impressed with the positive

energy and faith that was so evident among the congregation. During the fellowship hour which followed the service, I can still remember speaking with an active member of the church community. I asked her if St. Barnabas had a Sunday school. She responded with her own question...”how many children do you have?” to which I answered “three.” “I guess we do now!” was Diane’s quick retort. True to her word, my kids began to attend Sunday school each week, taught with fun, creativity, and enthusiasm! The rest, as they say, is history.

In the 30+ years between now and then, we have been active members of the St. Barnabas community. We’ve worn many different hats, served vestry in most every capacity, taught Sunday school, led worship, and consumed more calories at the many food-centric celebrations than I care to admit.

In the early years, we were welcomed into the homes of parish members for fellowship dinners once each month. What a wonderful collection of interesting, engaged, creative and intelligent people! We were blessed to have the services of a number of different and talented supply clergy and eventually engaged a part-time priest. We established a business office on Main St. for a short time until the congregation grew to a point where it made sense to consider the purchase of our own church home. We purchased the Spanish mission style church building from St. Mary’s Catholic Church when they moved into their new (much larger) facility on the edge of town. We were also blessed with members of incredible talent and vision, who transformed the original space into the beautiful worship & fellowship space we have grown to love.

In the subsequent years, our numbers dwindled and swelled over the years, from a dizzying high of 35-40 people to as few as 8-12 faithful members. There was always a core group of very active and energetic people who were willing to work hard, lead the congregation, worship faithfully and engage the larger community in outreach. Among the many gifts and talents that our members willingly shared, we had several gifted musicians. I can’t express how grateful I feel for having experienced such inspiring and beautiful music within our sanctuary! We frequently had guest musicians from Kutztown University who joined our accompanists in worship and celebration, sharing their incredible talent with our faith community.

Our mission statement became “Live God’s love in fresh new ways” and we did our level best to keep that mission before us in the choices we made and the paths we trod. St. Barnabas Episcopal Church became synonymous with community programs, such as a Forum on Healthcare, debate on the Iraq War, Environmental Stewardship & Fracking, Kutztown’s Outstanding Citizen Awards, Arts & Music Festival, and the Sunday Farmers Market. We hosted two alternative schools; The Noble Project and La Escualita preschool. We raised funds and goods for the New Hope Campaign, St. Bartholomew

Orphanage in Kajo Keji, Shelter Box - Haiti, the relief effort following Hurricane Katrina, and Friend, Inc.'s annual holiday food boxes and children's gift project. One of our member's initiated The Elizabeth Project which began by baking birthday cakes for children in residence at the Reading Children's Home and morphed into a mentorship program for children who were on the cusp of "aging out" of the home. We hosted monthly brunches which were open to the public and worked collaboratively with other community groups to assist in the monthly free community meal hosted by Trinity Lutheran Church in Kutztown.

St. Barnabas celebrated its 50th anniversary in November, 2007. At that time, the Rev. John Brndjar was serving as our Priest-In-Charge. He and his wonderful wife, Elizabeth, brought a whole new level of commitment, faith and love to our church family. Fr. John passed away in 2016, working with us right up to the final few weeks of his life. He and Elizabeth both became dear friends and companions on mine and Charlie's faith journey. In preparing for our 50th Anniversary, Fr. John was able to connect with one of the founding members of St. Barnabas. I never had the privilege of knowing Jean Thomson, but the note of support and congratulations she sent to our congregation rings of the spirit that has been part of St. Barnabas culture in all the years I've been there. She describes an intrepid and fun-filled group of ten that met each Sunday in the old borough's fire hall with a card-table altar and wandering, willful, pump organ! I like to think she would have been right at home with our rather casual, usually 10-minutes late, lay-led Morning Prayer on any given Sunday.

Most recently we have been blessed to have the Rev. Laura Howell serve our community with once/twice monthly celebration of Holy Eucharist and any day of the week/hour of the day love and support. We have lost many of our most active and beloved members and found it increasingly difficult to attract and retain new members. Through these difficult years, Mo. Laura has been a constant ally, offering her guidance, prayers, and encouragement.

And what has all of this meant to me...St. Barnabas has been so much more than just a place for Sunday worship, or a list of projects that faltered or goals accomplished. My life has been enriched beyond measure by the people I have come to know and love. I have laughed, cried, steamed with frustration. I've been challenged, inspired, moved, comforted and felt God's loving presence. Through our discussions of liturgy, I've gained a deeper insight into the readings each week. I've realized that I am never alone in my search for meaning and connection, that these precious friends who have chosen to take this same journey are right there with me, questioning, searching, and accepting me with all my shortcomings and vulnerabilities. I've learned that stretching beyond those things you think are possible, living your faith in spite of your personal worries and concerns, and sharing the load with other faithful people can lead you to unexpected places and marvelous outcomes. I don't know where

my path will lead me next, but I know that it will be informed by the growth I've experienced being a part of the St. Barnabas community. I pray that I'll remain open to hearing God's call and granted the courage to act upon the next opportunity.

Doreen Tobin, Senior Warden has this to say:

So many emotions come up for me when I think about having become a member of the St. Barnabas community. As I write this, I am observing the second anniversary of my husband's untimely death. So, while it is a day of sad observance for me personally, I cannot help but reflect on the richness that came into our lives as a result of our membership in the St. Barnabas parish community. St. Barnabas was for the entire time of our membership a small (never more than 20 parishioners), but warm and active community. We were welcomed right from the start and felt the great benefit of being part of this community. The community was different from our past experiences in church communities for many reasons. Though few in number, St. Barnabas was blessed to have a high percentage of gifted musicians, artists, educators and socially conscious citizens within our congregation. The small size and great talent pool of the community lent itself to deep involvement by all in both the worship services and the many civic and social activities sponsored by the parish.

Our Sunday services were a mix of traditional priest led Eucharistic services and lay led Morning Prayer services when a priest was not available. We were very blessed to have wonderful and attentive pastors over the years, and most recently Mother Laura Howell has supported our efforts to remain a vibrant and active community. While receiving communion regularly was important to all, we also came to deeply appreciate the lay led services, in large part because each worship leader was responsible for doing background reading in preparation for the discussion that was substituted for the homily. I know my husband and I came to love these services because involvement in these discussions provided deeper understanding of the scriptures and their relevance to our daily lives. We both had the privilege of serving as lay service leaders and both felt that our deep engagement in these kinds of discussions transformed our spiritual lives.

Our other parish activities were varied and but always focused the engagement and support of our immediate community, then our local community and the broader Christian community. There are a number of things that stand out for me. Coffee hour following services was always a thing, with home baked items and great conversations. However, the favorite thing for all of us was the monthly free brunch. We lingered over the fabulous and abundant food for hours and warmly welcomed students from the university, traveling family members and others curious about St. Barnabas to our table. This monthly celebration and communion with our parishioners is deeply missed by all of us. Other

activities punctuated the annual calendar: the greening of the church at the holidays, collections for holiday food boxes donated to Friend, Inc., sponsorship of gift bags for children at the holidays, the wonderful post-Christmas Eve service social with homemade cookies, wine and hot cider, yard work days, and beautiful Lenten and Easter services.

St. Barnabas also worked diligently to serve and honor the local community. We hosted two schools over the years, the Noble School and La Escuelita preschool. Both were vibrant educational alternatives for children in the area. We sponsored well attended and informational programs on fracking, sludge and other environmental concerns, invited the community to discussions on the Muslim religion and another on the Iraq war, and opened our facility for use by Girl Scouts, AA groups, local Democratic Club, a small weekly farm market and a yoga practice. However, a crowning achievement of the parish community was to establish the Kutztown Outstanding Citizen award. It was our opportunity to recognize individuals who had made a significant difference within our broader Kutztown community. Conducted over three years, it brought attention to the social consciousness of our community and our willingness to take a leadership role despite our small numbers. This level of social consciousness was also in evident in the work done to raise funds to rebuild a home down South post Katrina, regular donations to Kajo Keji, and book drives for overseas communities.

While we understand the need to close the parish at this time, it has left an indelible mark on the lives of all the parishioners. We have been touched by the deep and abiding faith within the community, the generosity of spirit, the willingness to actively support one another in the most difficult times, the laughter, and commitment to living our Christian lives out loud.

I thank you for allowing me to share these reflections. It doesn't begin to capture all that St. Barnabas is to me but I hope it conveyed the really important touchstone it has been in my spiritual and personal life.

Finally, the Rev. Laura Howell says:

I have had the privilege of working with St. Barnabas and its wonderful parishioners, for some years. When I was the rector of Trinity Bethlehem, our clergy took turns providing supply. It was always a great day when it was my turn. Following my retirement, I was the main supply. It has been a delight to be with them, and to be received with warmth, welcome, terrible jokes—and great food! We have walked together through celebrations and holidays, and through the sorrowful times of funerals and illnesses. It saddens me to see St. Barnabas close as a worshipping community, but I think it is the right decision at the right time. I remember Ecclesiastes' words, "For everything there is a season."

I grew up in Shaker country and experienced the grace and faith with which they closed their fellowship. They said, "God is doing something new." I am confident that God is also doing something new with St. Barnabas and its people. I can't wait to see what that will be.

Then all the people said "Amen..."