

St. John's, Royal Oak
 100th Anniversary
 Exodus 33:18-23
 October 18, 2026
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Come Holy Spirit, and enkindle within us the fire of your burning love. In your most blessed name we pray. Amen.

Good Morning!

100 years in this place, and 1000s of people throughout this community, on this corner of Woodward and 11 Mile. St. John's, Royal Oak.

"We have come to claim a firm, undying commitment to inclusion. So here is our invitation to you: regardless of your cultural background, ethnicity, gender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or heterosexual identity, economic status, physical or cognitive ability—you will not be labeled, singled out or excluded here. You will be welcomed, affirmed, embraced and celebrated."

So says your welcome statement that you affirmed by unanimous vote at your annual meeting in January 2010. Which by the way was pretty forward thinking for 2010. Queer people were not trendy then. I know.

It was certainly not the welcome that your new rector, the Rev. Linda Northcraft experienced at the beginning of her tenure in 1997. So much has changed in your century plus of ministry and yet so much of who and how you are, is lodged in your DNA, the marrow of your historical, spiritual bones.

A strong lay woman was deeply involved in your beginning, Mrs. Mary Ann Parr, spouse of sea captain Gorges Parr. One of the three founding families: Mary Ann and Gorgess emigrated to this country, from Belfast. Gorgess, seems to have struggled with some health and mental health issues, dying as a patient of the Michigan Eastern Asylum in Pontiac. Yet Mary Ann, Mrs. Parr had some money, property and by all accounts many children.

Mrs. Parr co-owned the building where the first services took place, and then she leased the second piece of property where services were held, to this nascent community \$1 for three years. Mary Ann Parr's continuing financial investment in this community of faith, was unusual in that day.

From the beginning this is place that has been a bit ahead of the times. While I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about your buildings, I do want to note that by my reading this is the fourth iteration of your locale, with at least two different starts, before this community was able to achieve some stability. What that tells me is that tenacity and adaptability is also in your DNA.

Something else that also stands out is your century long commitment to young people. Church school, children's and adult formation, has been core to your historical identity.

Martha Pray, director of Christian Education here for almost 40 years, was more than a force with whom to be reckoned.

And music. Marjorie Grulich was the music director for 35 years, starting in 1947 and overseeing the installation of the Schantz Pipe Organ in 1988, 2334 pipes, no small investment, no small sound.

It's not just been strong women, leading this amazing community. The Rev. Charles Jatho stands out. Your fourth rector starting in 1929, a former WWI POW, gets here with a new church building and then the Wall Street Stock Market Crash, the Great Recession and he's looking at \$70,000 worth of debt a fair amount in that day. He is scrappy, adaptable and tenacious and St. John's is leading the way feeding people. Everyone was hungry, no one had money and St. John's was at the center, making sure little ones got a pint a milk a day. Jatho lead this community of faith for 31 years. Burning the mortgage in 1944. Offering a vision for what was to come next.

It was under the Rev. John Shufelt's tenure, that St. John's was the site for an interfaith service honoring the late Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 8, 1968. That landmark service ended with a 200 person march that was supposed to process along 11 Mile Rd. to the Royal Oak City Hall. There was however, a state-wide, emergency prohibition on assemblies of more than three people. The police stopped the procession. No doubt the people in that procession knew they would be stopped. They went anyway. The newspaper reports that 108 adults and 23 juveniles were arrested by police from Royal Oak and other surrounding police departments. St. John's, being outloud and bold.

The Rev. Robert Eidson, rector from 1973 to 1991 also stands out to me. Under his leadership and with the help of Martha Pray, church school director, St. John's received the National Church's designation of a Jubilee Center. Which meant, you were one of a rare group, recognized by the National Church as a model for Outreach ministry. "New to You" and "Open Hands" were instrumental in this designation.

I first stepped foot in St. John's in 1992 when my partner, now spouse, Susan Harlow had received a job offer as a seminary professor in Chicago. We were living in New Jersey. I began the process of scouring the Midwest for possible positions. You were looking for an associate rector and I was drawn by your amazing outreach ministry. You'd been designated a Jubilee Center, which was a big, big deal. I remember standing in the center aisle looking at this magnificent altar, thinking wow, I wonder if I could ever work here. It didn't go very far when I realized just how far suburban Detroit was from the City of Chicago...But what I knew, even then, was that this was a community who cared about your neighbors.

Faith in God, outwardly focused, forward looking, tenacious, adaptable and ahead of the times in your choices for leadership, this is who you all have been, and these gifts and attributes are what we need in our congregations and it is what our communities and country so desperately craves in this brittle, anxious, non-linear, and sometimes completely incomprehensible times in which we are living.

When I spoke with the Rev. Linda Northcraft about you, she said to me, "St. John's is a community of faith that genuinely believes that God has called them to two significant

ministries: to practice the gospel of social justice, and to invite and welcome others to join them on their faith journey.”

When I spoke to the Rev. Beth Taylor, (who says to say “Hi and that she misses you,” she said, “St. John’s continues to push the edges on inclusion and justice, they always have, going back to their beginning.” And she said, “They take being a multi-generational church seriously, kids are leaders, they not only participate, they lead, and they loved when we became a teaching congregation, because that’s what St. John’s does, they raise up and form leaders.”

The Rev. Gerarado Aponte-Safe said he loves, St. John’s, “Because of your welcome and commitment to widen the circle and bring others in, even when that is hard.” They he spoke of how profoundly moved he was when he realized that during the 80s when other churches wouldn’t even bury gay men who died of Aids, that St. John’s routinely hosted requiem masses for the people who died of AIDS throughout the area.” Gerardo says, reaching out even when it was hard.

Lastly the Rev. MaryJane Peck says, “Its such a healthy parish, where people just want to serve, if you want to feed the hungry you get to, if you want to be involved in the politics of the day-there’s a way, if you want to take care of children you can do that.” Mary Jane went on to say, “I’ve done 6 different interims, I’ve never seen a congregation so welcoming. It’s just in their DNA.” Then she told the story of a family who was visiting recently, someone met them at the door, showed them to the place where their little ones could play. And then two other folks left their pews to make sure the visiting family had all they needed. As MaryJane said, “You can’t teach that, its in their DNA.”

So here you are. More than a century of embodying the Gospel. I could not be prouder to be here with all of you. Knowing your gifts, and some of your struggles, you aren’t perfect, but oh my, the way you embody the Gospel. Well I’m here to say that it matters. You matter.

Thank you so very very much! I can hardly wait to see a portion of your next 100 years of ministry!

Amen.