

## St. Paul's, Stafford

### **What are some significant moments in the history of your church that have shaped its identity today?**

In what is now beautiful family farm country in Genesee County, nestled between LeRoy and Batavia, a group of hardy souls from Devonshire, England, settled in Stafford, New York. Built in 1841 in Greek Revival/Gothic style architecture and post and beam construction, St. Paul's Episcopal Church was consecrated by Bishop William Heathcote DeLancy, Bishop of the Diocese of Western New York, on April 28, 1842. Seven years later, using the same architectural style and materials, a schoolhouse was built to the east of the church. In 1852 the schoolhouse became known as The Stafford Seminary which continued through the early 1870's. This building currently serves as the church's parish hall.



For nearly 100 years St. Paul's was led by male clergy. In 1972 Pauline Leadley became the first female vestry member elected. In 1994 after being under the leadership of St. James in Batavia since 1936, the Reverend Joye Meadowcroft became the first woman elected priest.

### **What makes your church unique in the region and the diocese?**

In 1832 the Reverend Richard Radley, Jr., who subsequently served St. Paul's for 28 years, built a residence to the west of the church which was used as the church rectory during his lifetime. This residence, the church and the parish hall became part of the Stafford Four Corners Historic District and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. In 2001 the church celebrated the culmination of an 18 month, extensive refurbishing project to rebuild the original foundation, replace nearly all of the internal plaster and lathe walls, lay new subfloor and install new carpeting, restore an 80 year old stained glass window and refurbish and clean the pipe organ installed in the 1930's. The original four boxed pews with doors remain intact. In 2011 St. Paul's and St. Marks, LeRoy, entered into a Covenant Agreement to share ministries and resources with the Reverend Colleen O'Conner as priest-in-charge for both churches. In 2017 Reverend O'Conner was instrumental in establishing the Genesee Regional Initiative (GRI) to share pastoral care among six churches in the Deanery which continues in similar fashion to this day.

### **What are the most vibrant ministries or strengths of your parish today?**

In 2022 St. Paul's celebrated its 180th anniversary and continues today with a small but mighty and devoted congregation. We have continued worship services through years of clergy changes, shortages and sharing; always willing to accommodate the needs of the Deanery. Currently St. Paul's maintains a community Little Library and Pantry, offers yearly back-to-school supplies for local children, adopts a family for

Christmas gifts and is providing assistance to a woman struggling with personal and housing difficulties. We have also participated in and hope to continue to participate in joint pre-Christmas tree lighting festivities with the Town of Stafford.

**Describe a moment in your community's life when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among you. What made that moment possible?**

In 2007 the healthy 18 month old son of a third generation parishioner was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive brain tumor called pineoblastoma. In addition to supporting the family in the usual ways, we made a Tibetan prayer flag which was hung between the church and the parish hall. That young man celebrated his 20th birthday in August. The power of prayer!



**How does your church engage with the local neighborhood, the civic life of your community, or diocesan and/or Episcopal Church-wide initiatives?**

St. Paul's faces the challenge of being a very rural, country church, with no main street lined with businesses and sidewalks full of foot traffic. In addition, the Town of Stafford comprises four school districts! But we are on the "main drag" with lots of vehicle traffic so we make sure our church and parish hall have curb appeal and signs of life. And because our membership involves several neighborhoods, we continue to welcome any and all opportunities to be of service.

**What are the hopes and dreams of your congregation for its next chapter?**

Like many small churches who face an aging and dwindling membership, we continue to be hopeful that by serving our communities, being united in faith and spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ that we can be a beacon of light and a welcoming space for those who are looking to resume or awaken their spiritual experience.