



Our New Rector

This very *special* Special Edition of the Messenger is the one you have been waiting for! We are so excited to be able to provide information about our new rector – **Reverend Paul Andrew Bennett**.



Paul is a 2020 graduate of the Virginia Theological Seminary. As a seminarian, he served at St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church in Washington, DC where, in addition to leading laity in planning the liturgies and conducting hospital visits and home communion, he learned to navigate formation programming with an intentionally diverse congregation.

Since July 2020, he has served as *priest-in-residence* at [All Saints Episcopal Church](#) in Portsmouth, Ohio and was ordained to the priesthood in February of 2021. During the pandemic, The Diocese of Ohio wanted to support churches that were then without priests so they assigned new seminary graduates to help those churches. Each was the sole clergy in their church and were assigned for a two year period. Paul’s main focus at All Saints has been to provide a sense of calm while creating a space for reflection and healing. While there, he worked to establish a finance committee and the technical transformation needed for combined in-person and live streamed services.

Paul grew up in West Virginia where his father was an Episcopal priest. He was raised around the altar and recalls making pastoral visits with his father. He spent many years participating in an Episcopal church camp that focused on Appalachian spirituality, heavily centered in nature and contemplation. It was this time as a youth that Paul began his lifelong meditation practice.

As a young adult, Paul wasn’t necessarily engaged in church. But when his oldest son started to ask to be baptized, Paul and his wife decided to become active in their local church. Paul became acolyte director and he and his wife became youth ministers. Eventually, through a series of “religious experiences” and interactions with God, Paul decided he could no longer run from his calling and began to pursue ordination.

Paul’s love of nature led him to earn a degree in Environmental Geoscience from West Virginia University in 2003. He then worked for the West Virginia Department of Agriculture for 15 years as an environmental regulator. During this time, Paul saw the link between various systems within nature and how they affect one another. He has carried this view of nature and

connected systems over into his priesthood as a way of seeing the gifts we all have within the larger body of Christ.



Paul will be joining us with his family. His wife Sarah is an elementary school teacher and together they have Andrew (7) and Elizabeth (4). Paul has one adult child, Gavin (24) who lives in West Virginia. They enjoy hiking, biking and all sorts of outdoor activities and they are looking forward to getting to know their new parish family.

He is foremost a husband, parent, and artist, all of which influence his priesthood. He believes the church needs to be more the embodiment of God – to see everyone as worthy of our time and respect. He thinks, “the beauty of the Episcopal tradition is that our liturgy functions within the context of parish life and should represent and be accessible to the people who attend worship. I enjoy ministry across all ages and try to emphasize the importance of intergenerational activities.”

For a sneak peek at our new rector, take a look at this [Easter Sunday 2021](#) service [the sermon is at about 18 minutes in].

The **follow up coffee hour discussion** will be **this next Sunday, April 10th, at 9:15** in the Great Hall. We’ll start by reviewing the *Vestry Priorities*, published yesterday, that guided us through the interview process and we’ll be able to share additional information on a timeline for Paul’s arrival and first sermon.

Join us in person or connect remotely using the Zoom link below (questions can be asked in the chat).

St Mary's is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81368548861?pwd=ZStOemdmSHhzYmU2YWpqRytDWEInUT09>

Meeting ID: 813 6854 8861 Passcode: 830294

Future *Special Edition Messengers* will contain schedules, information, and plans for how we will welcome our new rector. So watch for those! We will need many hearts and hands to plan and complete these tasks—please volunteer to help where you are able.

*For more detail on any of the information covered in this series of Special Edition Messengers, view the information originally published in our [Parish Profile](#), available under the new **Resources** tab on our website [here](#). You can also find past **Special Edition Messenger** issues in that location.*