

## 2022 Vestry Candidates

### *St. Mary's Episcopal, Arlington VA*

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#### **Jim Bicksel**

I became an Episcopalian by accident. I was raised as a Methodist, but my mother had been raised Roman Catholic. And though she converted to Methodism when she married my father, her Catholic roots never completely faded, and I became attracted to the broad and deep spirituality of Catholicism.

Upon moving to Atlanta in the late 1980's I decided to attend the Roman Catholic cathedral on Peachtree Street. Armed with a street address and a general idea of its location (there was no Mapquest or Waze), I headed north on Peachtree and a large, beautiful cathedral became visible from a distance, seemingly in the middle of the road. The people who built that church had chosen a hill where the road veered to the right, so the image of the church dominated the view of everyone who drove north on that main road in Atlanta. About half-way through the service, I finally realized that I was in the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint Philip. The Roman Catholic cathedral was across the street. But there was something about the style of worship and the sense of universal inclusiveness that made that church seem more catholic to me than the Roman church had always claimed to be. From that very first service, I fell in love with the liturgy, the music, the preaching, and later the theology of the Episcopal Church, and I was confirmed at the Cathedral of St Philip several years later.



At one point, I considered entering the priesthood and went so far as to form an exploratory committee in the parish. But after several meetings, it became clear to me that my calling lay in an earlier love, which was the field of Medicine. I had done poorly in my pre-med work at UNC-Chapel Hill, but the prospect of life in a dead-end job doing telephone support for computer systems focused my energies, and I retook all of my premed classes at Georgia State University in the evening. During my time in Atlanta, I also made frequent retreats to the Trappist Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers. I vaguely considered making a profession there as well, but the prospect of a lifetime without air-conditioning in Georgia helped to crystalize the limits of my preference for things spiritual over things temporal. I eventually attended medical school at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, followed by Residency at Emory, and Fellowship at Thomas Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia.

I was accepted to Jefferson a year before the start of the program, so there was plenty of time to have fun in Atlanta before I left. A friend from church introduced me to a woman who was likewise only interested in a short-term relationship. Naturally, we fell in love, and I proposed marriage the week before leaving for Philadelphia. But my friend did not know this lady from church. He knew her from work, and she was Baptist. Upon moving to Falls Church and taking a job in Alexandria, I fell into a routine of dual church services every Sunday, going to Saint Mary's at 9:00 and then Mclean Baptist at 11:00. But I became more and more involved in the life of St Mary's. I became a lectionary reader and later a chalice bearer, back in the before-time, when everyone was offered the chalice of wine. I served on the parish committee for one of our seminarians, Lydia Simmons. And I have watched the parish grow and develop from our Funding the Future campaign to the adjustments required by Covid.

I believe that if the Covid Pandemic has taught us anything it is the fact that our parish must always find a way to continue as the mystical body of Christ regardless of the challenges. For as important as it is to keep everyone safe, my inclination would be to find some way to keep the church open, with a modified schedule and multiple precautions, if something were to ever try to shut us down again. The spirit of St Mary's is most palpable to me when we are praising God together with our beautiful liturgy and our magnificent music. If given the chance to serve on our vestry, my goal would be to continue that tradition and extend it as far as possible to all who might like to join us in our journey. I would be honored by the chance to serve our parish and help us move forward through whatever challenges might lie ahead.

## Caroline Montcastle Carlson

I grew up in a Christian home. My dad was Presbyterian and Mom was Episcopalian, so I went to both. I liked going to First Presbyterian with my dad because my friends were there. My parents were a great couple, and I appreciate they went to separate churches. When Dad finally decided to go to Mom's church, well it was not a momentous occasion, but looking back, I liked being together with the whole family on Sunday morning.



I lived in 5 different places after I left my hometown in NC before coming to Arlington. Where ever I moved, I always found a church to go to, whether I went a few times a year, once a month or every week. And, I would get pretty emotional entering a church if I had not been in a while. I would seriously tear up (I'm embarrassed to say). I think it was a feeling of having all my worries and emotional burdens being lifted. That is one piece of advice I will make sure my kids take when they leave the house. Find a church where you live. It could not have been more helpful than the days after 9/11 attack when I was living in NYC. I have the church to thank for getting me through that trauma.

When I moved to Arlington, I went church hopping to find the right fit. SMC was right up the road. It couldn't possibly be the right church being so close. But after making multiple attempts to make other churches work, all signs pointed to SMC. 15 years later, I love this church. I loved every Sunday School class I taught for 7 years. I very much enjoy helping others through the Pastoral Care Ministry, and I have the best time making bagged lunches for A-SPAN (now PathForward). And I am super excited to be a chaperone for the Mission Trip to NC this June!

Whether I become a vestry member or not, St. Mary's will find a place for me. My life at St. Mary's has been an incredible journey and I am thankful for all the gifts St. Mary's has given me. I am honored to be nominated for Vestry.

## Lee Furches

My wife, Amy, my three daughters and I have been members at St. Mary's since 2016. We previously attended several churches in the area trying to find our spiritual "home," and we immediately felt comfortable and welcomed at St. Mary's, more than any other. We have been happy here ever since.

We were particularly impressed by all the programs and ways to get involved at St. Mary's. My three girls have been involved in everything from Youth Group and Youth Forum to confirmation class and children's choir. The semi-annual church clean-ups have been a rewarding way for all of us to get involved in keeping St. Mary's beautiful.

I started helping out with Junior High Youth Forum in 2018 and gradually transitioned from the back-up instructor to the primary in 2020. I enjoy the vibrant discussions with the kids, and I actually learn a great deal myself researching and preparing the lessons. I volunteer with the St. Joseph's Ministry team, which leads facility improvement projects in the church and Rebuilding Together home improvement projects in the local community. I also previously helped out with the Job Hunter's Ministry, providing support to those seeking employment.

In July, I will retire from the Air Force after 29 years. I spent most of my career in cyberspace operations, information technology, and cross-functional plans, programs and policies. I hold a B.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a Master's in Military Operational Art and Science from Air University, and an M.S. in National Resource Strategy from National Defense University. I look forward to transitioning to an economic analyst or policy analyst position here in the local area.

For me, it is a great honor even to sit for vestry. If selected, I plan to listen and learn and contribute in any way I can. Thank you for your consideration!



## Mark Heslep

Upon joining St. Mary's I soon noticed the energy and commitment which its large congregation puts in its many outreach and acts ministries. I hope to protect and renew and continue the energy of St. Mary's with God's help.

I was baptized Methodist, raised in Richmond, Va, coming from a line of Methodists emerging from the Shenandoah. I came to the Episcopal Church by marriage, introduced by my now wife Catherine and the wonderful sermons of Father Frank Wade of St. Alban's parish in DC, where Cath and I were married in 2004. As our three children came into the world, our journey carried us across the river to St. Peter's down Glebe Rd and finally to St Mary's several years ago where we found a home.



Since then, I find myself drawn increasingly to the life and godly work of this church. I enjoy the camaraderie of a weekly bible study at St. Mary's. I attend the Lay Support Team for our Seminarian Freddia Pavia, work on many of the St. Joseph work-repair-setup sessions for the church building, help with the junior high Sunday School, and conduct repairs with the St. Mary's annual major building repair project (this year at the Samaritan Ministry of Northern Va).

Now retired from the life of professional engineer, I'm currently reusing skills learned in construction jobs during summers as a young man. For several years I've led small, skilled volunteer teams on weekly repair projects of low income housing in Arlington-Fairfax, through the local organization Rebuilding Together.

My professional life included 35 years as an electrical engineer in the aerospace and defense industries, large and small business, designing and building the like of radar equipment and working on the DARPA self-driving race. I briefly taught engineering at UT-Arlington.

As it happens, come 5:20-7:00 AM M-F, I'm most often found rowing with a competitive crew team near the Washington Navy Yard, as I have done for some two decades, and where we enjoy the beauty of creation with the daily sun rise. Please support my candidacy for Vestry. Thank you.

## Colleen Mason

I am grateful to have a faith community I call home. St. Mary's feels like home to me. I feel this connection viscerally in so many ways. Each time I come to St. Mary's I am filled with the excitement and anticipation of coming home. I feel this way with each visit, whether I come alone or come with my family, whether I come for a weekday service attended by few or on Easter Sunday service attended by hundreds. St. Mary's is where I want to return again and again.



My husband, Roger, and I found St. Mary's in 2000 when we were visiting Episcopal churches around Arlington. St. Mary's pulled us in. Everyone was welcoming and we quickly made friends that began showing up in our lives outside of church. Roger and I attended Episcopal 101 and he was Confirmed while I was Reaffirmed. During Lent of 2021 I was eager to attend Episcopal 101 again. The experience to grow alongside other Christians during the pandemic and be Reaffirmed again further deepened my faith.

St. Mary's is the faith community to our children John, Joseph, and Caroline. Each received the sacraments of Baptism and First Holy Communion here. Raising young children at St. Mary's easily lent a way to forming dear friendships. Roger and I enjoyed our time volunteering in the nursery and Children's Chapel with other parents.

Over the years I have enjoyed many opportunities to be involved at St. Mary's. Each experience from working in the nursery, teaching Sunday school to Kindergarten class and then the four year olds, participating on the Beacon Committee, and volunteering at Santa Maria food drive have provided me opportunities to connect with other parishioners at a deeper level. These opportunities helped me to fully realize the commitment St. Mary's serves in our greater community.

My favorite connection to St. Mary's has been serving the past fifteen years on Altar Guild ministry. Altar Guild has become my St. Mary's family. My term as Altar Guild President coincided with the pandemic, for me this was a true blessing as I was able to spend time alone in the Nave to prepare the sanctuary for live stream services. Serving in this ministry has been a sacred part of my worship at St. Mary's.

Most recently, I have had the pleasure of participating on the Pandemic Response Team. We are a small group with tremendous energy and hope to bring St. Mary's to the greater community as we navigate post pandemic life. Our small group created visible opportunities for anyone to safely share prayers during the pandemic. We created the Altar for the People along The Point and the community prayer box which offers prayers from people from our larger community to be read during Sunday worship. Our weekly outdoor worship at Wilderness Church has been a great success. Each week, St. Mary's garners curiosity from others as people stop and show interest in our outdoor worship. Most weeks we have first time guests to St. Mary's join us in worship. As we emerge from the pandemic with a new name, I look forward to see what other ways this team continues to welcome those in search of a community like St. Mary's.

Thank you for considering me as a candidate for Vestry. I am honored by the possibility to serve with clergy, staff, and the congregation to focus on our current priorities of caring for God's creation, seeking racial reconciliation, and caring for one another.

## David Smith

My wife Leslie Ann and I joined St. Mary's 25 years ago. Since then the St. Mary's community has supported me and given me many opportunities over the years. I served as Outreach Committee Chair for two years in the mid-2000s, and have been a lay reader from then up through the pandemic. I have taken advantage of marriage enrichment classes hosted by St. Mary's, chaperoned a mission trip, and made life long friends along the way. Most importantly, St. Mary's has always been the place where we have knelt down and prayed when asking for strength to meet life's challenges.



More recently, I have served on the Spiritual Formation Committee for the past several months and benefited from a regular Tuesday morning men's Bible study group for the past 13 months. For the last three years I have also served on the MORE ministry, which seeks to highlight the intersection of faith and racial reckoning. The more I learn about the inequities that are embedded in our society the more I ask myself what role does my faith/our faith play in seeking to address these issues?

We have been fortunate to have raised both our children at St. Mary's. Our kids have gone from the nursery to Sunday school, confirmation, Shrine Mont, Shrine Mont camps, fellowship meetings and outings of all sorts, mission trips, and the "Battle of the Bands," and have helped with the nursery and taught Sunday School. The foundation of their faith, and indeed their life, has been formed at St. Mary's, along with so many other kids who joined them and are now young adults, making their own choices.

As a prosecutor and a policy lawyer for the Department of Justice for almost 30 years, I am well aware of the power of the state and the "long arm of the law." DOJ lawyers have the opportunity to pursue justice as part of our work, but I have learned that justice can be seen differently depending on the eye of the beholder. Ultimately, we are fortunate to have our Episcopal baptismal covenant, which tells us to "respect the dignity of every human being" to serve as our guidepost.

St. Mary's is a special place. We have had a vibrant congregation here for many years, and in so doing have bucked the national trend of declining religious affiliation. While this has been due in no small part to the leadership of our extraordinary clergy, it has also been due to the individual members of this congregation over the years. If selected for Vestry, I will try to support our congregation as best I can.