



ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
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My Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Daily delving more deeply into a busy September, I continually thank you, my dear community (*and* Justi Schunior and Cecilia Monahan, my closest “partners in the sublime” art of parish leadership) for allowing Pontheolla and me to take our annual August vacation!

Although away from you for the month, I never forgot you. Not once. Out of sight you were, but never out of mind. On a particularly blistering South Carolina summer day, the heat and humidity perhaps frazzling my brain, an odd thought occurred: What if St. Mark's didn't exist? On reflection (even imagining the corner of 3rd and A Streets, SE as a vacant lot, and – far worse – *without people*), another question arose: What if our vibrant community of open inquiry, communal sharing of the sacred stories of our lives, mutual care for one another, and healthy tolerance of difference, all in our quest for life's meaning, disappeared? Distressing for us, I'm sure, but also, I believe, for the world around us. Why? Because *we matter!*

We matter because you and I, through our communal ethos, are empowered to live daily as individual incarnations of open-mindedness in a world characterized by disagreement and discord and the politics and ethics of us vs. them.

We matter also because together we are an embodiment of faith nourished by skepticism, hope reflected in the realities (both bright and gritty) of our lives, and love nurtured by countless moments of authentic engagement with one another.

We matter, yes, to ourselves, but also to a world that needs to know that a place, *that a people* like us is alive and real!

Because we matter, I ask for our continued giving of our time, our talents, and our money that we may remain strong *and* grow stronger in our mission and in our witness to the world. I ask each of us to make a pledge so that no one, when thinking about St. Mark's, will ever have to ask: *What if?*

Love and Peace,

The Reverend Paul Roberts Abernathy
Rector