SNIPPETS OF REMEMBRANCE

The Story of St. Paul's Parish

1967–2027

Celebrating 60 Years



Kevin Olifiers
2026

St. Paul's Parish

DIAMOND JUBILEE PRAYER

1967–2027

Heavenly Father, with grateful hearts we praise You for 60 years of faith, hope and love in St. Paul's Parish. We thank you for the generations who have worshipped here, for the clergy, religious, and ministry coordinators who have guided your people, and for the sacraments that have strengthened our lives.

Bless St. Paul's Parish, its families and all who enter these doors seeking mercy and peace. Renew us in the Spirit that we may continue to proclaim the Gospel, serve the poor, and grow in unity and holiness. May Blessed Virgin Mary, our patron Saint Paul, and all the saints intercede for us now and always.

Amen.

Introduction

As St. Paul's approached its 60th anniversary, it seemed an appropriate time to look back at the journey that began in 1967. This history grew from a desire not simply to record dates, pastors and buildings and events, but to remember how a community was formed, how it responded to change, and how the vision of one generation was carried forward by those who followed.

This is not a complete history of everything that happened at St. Paul's. It is a series of snippets of memories woven together to create a story of St. Paul's. It tells the story over four intervals of time:

Era I. Founding and Formation 1967–1972

Era II. Expansion and Community Building 1973–1990

Era III. Maturation and Transition 1991–2010

Era IV. Adaptation and Resilience 2011–2026

Much of the story has been assembled from surviving Bulletins, newsletters, Parish Board and Pastoral Council records, other parish documents, and the memories of people who were part of the community. Some records have been lost over the years, and no collection of documents can fully capture the experiences of thousands of people who have called St. Paul's their parish. What follows is therefore best understood as "Snippets of Remembrance," selected moments that help tell a larger story.

That larger story begins with a parish founded at an extraordinary moment in the Catholic Church. Vatican II had called Catholics to a renewed understanding of the Church as the People of God, with greater participation by the laity, renewed worship, concern for those in need, education in the faith, and a responsibility to carry Christ's message beyond the walls of the church. St. Paul's founders embraced that opportunity. They often expressed it more simply: the Church is the people.

Over nearly sixty years, pastors changed, generations changed, buildings changed and the circumstances facing the Catholic Church changed. St. Paul's grew dramatically, built and expanded its Parish Center, developed ministries, confronted difficult periods, celebrated milestones and, in more recent years, learned how to continue its mission with fewer people and resources.

As you read these pages, the important story may therefore be found not only in what changed, but also in what endured. Again and again, different generations of St. Paul's were faced with the same underlying question: "how do we respond to the circumstances of our time while carrying forward what was entrusted to us?"

These pages are an attempt to remember how St. Paul's answered that question. They are also a reminder that the story is not finished.

Era I: Founding and Formation 1967–1972

The Founding: A Parish Rooted in Vatican II

St. Paul's began in 1967 at an unusual moment in the life of the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council had recently concluded, and its call for greater participation by the laity, renewed liturgy, shared responsibility, and a stronger understanding of the Church as the People of God was fresh. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen appointed Fr. John Walsh as the founding pastor. Fr. Walsh later captured the opportunity in a memorable way: "we didn't have an old way."

The founders were not simply organizing another parish and later attaching Vatican II language to it. They understood themselves to be creating a parish that could begin with the Council's spirit already in view. The practical decisions that followed, where to worship, how to teach, how to govern, how to build, and how to involve parishioners, were all opportunities to translate that vision into parish life.

In later generations, Vatican II would be reflected less in repeated references to the Council and more in what St. Paul's inherited from its founders: worshiping together, participation, shared leadership, simplicity, service, education, and a strong sense of community.

A Place to Worship

Before St. Paul's had a church building, it had to become a worshiping community. Sunday Mass was celebrated at Sweet's Farm, a party house in Webster owned by Mrs. Mildred (Merle) Sweet, a parishioner of St. Paul's. The setting itself became part of the memory: tables had to be moved, an altar set up, the room prepared for Mass and then returned to ordinary use afterward. It was not a conventional church environment, but it made an important point. St. Paul's existed first as a gathered people, not as a building.

Daily Mass deepened that same idea. Mass was celebrated in parishioners' homes, with a telephone network used to let people know where the next gathering would be held. Worship was therefore not something that began only when the Parish Center opened. From the beginning, worship brought the new community together.

The liturgical life also reflected the wider post-Vatican II changes in the Church. Through the Liturgy Action Group, parishioners participated in preparing liturgies, while lectors, ushers, choirs, young adults, and others assumed visible roles in worship. This participation became one of the clearest ways St. Paul's lived the Council's renewed understanding of worship.

Educating the Children

From the beginning, educating the children was also a priority. St. Paul's had no classrooms, but waiting for a permanent building was not an option. In October 1967, the School of Religion used space at Holy Trinity in Webster. In September 1968, classes moved to the Methodist Church in Webster.

Education was not something that waited for a building. The School of Religion would eventually become one of the strongest and most visible ministries at St. Paul's, but its roots were present from the beginning.

Educating at St. Paul's also meant more than children's religious education. Adult faith formation, sacramental preparation, guest speakers, Bible study, articles in the Good Newsletter, parish retreats, and other forms of faith formation were also important.

Governance and Shared Leadership

Shared leadership was another important part of the new parish. In late 1967, St. Paul's elected a lay Parish Board, the first in the Diocese of Rochester. Fr. Walsh initially did not have a vote. Action Groups, rather than committees, were formed to carry responsibility for key areas of parish life.

This was one of the strongest expressions of the founding vision. Parishioners were not merely helpers carrying out assignments from the pastor. They had meaningful roles in decision-making, ministry, planning, and implementation. This expectation of lay participation became part of St. Paul's identity.

The first parish constitution grew from this same experience. During 1971 and 1972, St. Paul's began putting its approach to shared leadership into writing. In May 1972, a draft constitution was mailed to parishioners for input and subsequent ratification. It became the first parish constitution in the Diocese of Rochester and a model for others. Governance was understood as a shared parish responsibility.

Caring: Good Sam and the Custom of Looking Outward

From its earliest years, the Good Samaritan (Good Sam) Action Group helped St. Paul's look beyond itself. Its purpose was not only to provide help to people in need, but also to connect St. Paul's parishioners with social and religious agencies involved in helping the needy throughout the Rochester area. Over time, it also took on a broader social justice role.

St. Paul's concern for the poor was not simply one ministry among many. It influenced how resources were used and how the building itself was conceived. The conviction that money should not be tied up unnecessarily in a building when it could be helping people in need became part of St. Paul's from the beginning.

A phrase that appeared later in St. Paul's history captured this commitment well: "if it is a principle of Christianity, we act." From the beginning, the Good Sam Action Group used a portion of St. Paul's revenue to help people in need. In March 1983, that commitment was formalized when the Parish Board approved tithing ten percent of the prior year's revenue to Good Sam. To ensure good stewardship of the funds available to Good Sam, a member of Good Sam participated directly with the donee, or the donee participated directly with the Good Sam Committee.

Building the Parish Center

As St. Paul's began considering a permanent home, an ad hoc building committee was formed. Before deciding what to build, the committee wrestled with a more fundamental question: what was the purpose of St. Paul's? Out of those discussions came the conviction that the building should be simple, flexible, and multipurpose, serving worship, religious education, meetings, ministries, and community life. With that direction established, an architect was hired in 1968.

The building's simplicity was itself part of the message. Visible cinder blocks and I-beams, folding chairs rather than pews, no kneelers, and a multipurpose design created an environment that felt

different from many Catholic churches of the time. The building cost approximately $205,000 and was built to accommodate about 400 people. Parishioner participation also helped minimize costs. A simple, movable wooden altar was made by Bill Sullivan, a parishioner; an altar that would later be retained when St. Paul's expanded.

A 1972 Good Newsletter captured the philosophy in a sentence: "Space created for function and not for the purpose of embellishment." The building was intended to serve ministry rather than define it. Its simplicity also allowed St. Paul's to preserve resources for helping people in need.

The first Mass in the unfinished Parish Center was celebrated on May 3, 1970. Bishop Hogan formally dedicated the Parish Center on May 2, 1971. The building gave St. Paul's a permanent home, and now all the dispersed activities of St. Paul's were under one roof. By then, much of what would define St. Paul's had already begun to take shape.

Financing Through Participation

Financing the Parish Center required parish-wide participation. The first fundraising appeal, "For God's Greater Glory," raised approximately $156,000. In November 1971, QUEST asked parishioners for commitments not only of treasure but also of time. Parishioners went door to door throughout St. Paul's to make the request, as they had for the first Parish Center appeal.

QUEST was more than a capital campaign. It reinforced an understanding of stewardship that joined financial support with personal involvement. The later RE-QUEST deliberately built on that earlier experience. Giving to St. Paul's meant more than contributing money; it also meant giving time and becoming involved.

Only after the Parish Center had been funded and was under construction did Fr. John Walsh, affectionately known to many parishioners as "Knobby," allow consideration of a parish rectory. The rectory was built in 1971. The sequence reflected the priorities of Fr. Walsh and the founding community: the needs of St. Paul's came first.

This approach would recur throughout St. Paul's history. When a major need arose, the response was often not simply to raise money, but to invite parishioners to contribute treasure, time, talent, and practical expertise.

Community

Community was also taking shape during these founding years. It grew through the experience of building St. Paul's together, but also through an early tradition of gathering and celebration. The term "Soiree" was used for a variety of events, often built around a speaker and sometimes including social time, a meal, a presentation, or Mass. Another memorable tradition was the Annual September Fest, a bratwurst party featuring food, beer, and local entertainment, including accordion players and sing-alongs. On November 6–7, 1970, a two-day variety show, produced by Betty Folger and starring St. Paul's parishioners, offered another early example of the community spirit taking shape at St. Paul's. Family Enrichment, started in the 1960s, educated parishioners on many religious matters, and helped build a strong community. It continued into the early 1990s. These gatherings, together with the shared work of establishing the new parish, helped people get to know one another and turn a collection of new parishioners into a community. A significant aid to community building in this era

was the introduction of the monthly St. Paul's Good Newsletter which kept parishioners well informed of all the activities and events of St. Paul's.

Around the Cross: Worshiping, Caring, Community, Educating

St. Paul's expressed itself through worshiping, caring, community, and educating, and this became how St. Paul's understood itself. These came to represent the four circles of St. Paul's life. The four circles were placed around the cross. What the circles represented was already visible in the imagery of the ornamental altar backscreen of the founding years. The imagery later became the logo of St. Paul's appearing first in a 1971 Good Newsletter. It has been in all subsequent published newsletters and weekly bulletins since then.

Worship came first because St. Paul's was formed around the Eucharist. Caring took shape through Good Sam and its assistance to the needy. Community emerged through shared work, Masses at a party house and in homes, celebration, and participatory governance. Educating began immediately through the School of Religion and the adult formation activities of parishioners.

The four circles gave a name and a visual expression to values that had been part of St. Paul's from the beginning.

Closing Reflection on the Founding and Formation Era (1967–1972)

St. Paul's built a parish before it built a permanent home. By the time the Parish Center opened, the community already knew something about how it wanted to worship, teach, govern, serve, and participate.

The founding generation's achievement therefore was larger than constructing a building on Hard Road. They established a parish culture. That culture would be tested by growth, leadership transitions, financial pressures, and wider changes in the Church, but what the founders began would continue to influence how later generations understood St. Paul's.

Era II: Expansion and Community Building 1973–1990

A Parish Comes of Age

The years from 1973 through 1990 were a time when St. Paul's moved beyond its founding years and began dealing with the opportunities and growing pains that came with success. The Parish Center and Rectory were in place. The Parish Board and Action Groups had established a strong tradition of participation. Religious education, worship, caring ministries, music, and community life were all expanding.

The central issue of the era was growth. The Town of Webster was expanding, and more families were registering at St. Paul's. More families, more children, more ministries, more meetings, more staff, more cars, and an increasingly crowded worship space all placed pressure on the building and on the way St. Paul's operated.

Growth was welcome, but it also brought new challenges. Could St. Paul's become larger, more organized, and more professionally staffed without losing the participation, simplicity, and sense of community that had characterized the founding years?

Worshiping: A Distinctive Worship Environment

A newcomer entering St. Paul's in the 1970s or 1980s encountered a worship space that did not look like a conventional Catholic church. Cinder blocks and I-beams remained visible. Folding chairs were used instead of pews. There were no kneelers. Music included adult, folk, children's choirs, and even accordion players.

The first impression could be: something is different here. The building, the variety of music, the flexible seating, and the atmosphere reflected choices St. Paul's had made about the kind of parish it wanted to be.

Music became a particularly important ministry at St. Paul's. Music and liturgy went hand in hand, enriching the worship experience and helping the gathered community participate more fully and more expressively.

Educating: Religious Education and Faith Formation

Religious education grew dramatically during this period. The School of Religion served increasing numbers of children preparing for First Penance, First Eucharist, Confirmation, and ongoing faith formation. By the mid-1980s, it had grown into one of St. Paul's largest ministries.

As Director of Religious Education, Sr. Kay Heverin oversaw the largest group of religious education students in St. Paul's history. Her approach emphasized that faith formation begins in the home, with parents having the primary responsibility and the School of Religion supporting them in that role.

Adult faith formation also grew through speakers, programs, Bible study, sacramental preparation, and parish communications. The Good Newsletter and weekly bulletins were used not only to announce events but also to teach and explain. Educating children and adults continued to be an important part of life at St. Paul's.

Caring: Good Sam, Tithing, and Social Justice

The Good Sam ministry continued to be an important expression of Caring at St. Paul's. Its work included direct help to people in need, through connections with social and religious agencies, and increasing involvement in social justice issues.

A December 1979 statement captured the approach clearly: "if it is a principle of Christianity, we act." It expressed the belief that faith should lead to action.

In March 1983, St. Paul's formalized its commitment to Caring when the Parish Board approved tithing ten percent of the prior year's parish revenue to Good Sam. The decision gave a specific financial measure to a commitment that had been present from the beginning.

Community: Building Belonging Through Participation and Celebration

Community at St. Paul's was not built only through formal ministry. Social events, shared work, parish meetings, celebrations, picnics, and informal gatherings helped build relationships and a sense of belonging. As St. Paul's grew larger, these opportunities to bring people together became increasingly important. New ministries emerged such as the Marthas, Adult Education, Prayer Shawl, and others to allow more opportunities for community building, caring and educating.

One of the most memorable examples was "20 Cost," the Pentecost celebration marking St. Paul's twentieth anniversary and Fr. Walsh's 43rd anniversary as a priest. Bishop Matthew Clark joined the celebration, and parishioners transformed the Parish Center to look like a giant birthday cake. It was a memorable example of something St. Paul's did particularly well: bringing people together and building community through celebration.

From Volunteer Structure to Paid Ministry Leadership

As family registrations increased and ministries expanded, St. Paul's gradually added paid part-time and full-time ministry directors. These directors could devote more focused time to increasingly large and complex ministries and bring professional expertise to their work.

Volunteers remained essential to St. Paul's, but paid ministry leadership represented an important change in how some of its growing ministries were organized and supported.

This growth created practical consequences. Directors needed office space. Ministries needed meeting space. Religious education needed classrooms. Increasing Mass attendance put additional pressure on the worship space. The same successful programs that demonstrated St. Paul's vitality also created pressure on the original Parish Center.

The addition of ministry directors did not diminish the importance of parishioner involvement. For example, when Sr. Kay Heverin began her work as Director of Religious Education, the Parish Council formed a committee of parishioners to work with her. Professional leadership and parishioner participation continued to work together.

Growth Produces Space and Parking Pressures

By the 1980s, St. Paul's was bursting at the seams both inside and outside the building. Worship space was crowded. Religious education competed for rooms. Community groups and ministries needed meeting space. Staff needed offices. Scheduling of activities through the parish secretary became critical.

Parking became one of the most visible problems. Cars spilled beyond the available spaces. Neighbors complained about vehicles on lawns, blocked traffic, and congestion.

The need was not simply for a bigger building. Increasing Mass attendance, religious education, ministries, staff, and community activities were all creating demands for additional space. Several short-term fixes were put in place to deal with this, but it did not solve the basic issue, "the box was just too small."

Leadership Transition: Fr. Walsh to Fr. Ray Booth

Fr. John Walsh retired in 1988, closing the founding pastoral chapter of St. Paul's. An avid reader and aviator, Fr. Walsh had shaped St. Paul's through its first twenty-one years, from a new parish without a permanent home to a growing and established community. Fr. Ray Booth was appointed pastor on June 28, 1988.

The transition in leadership mattered. With a new pastor came a natural question for a community that had known only Fr. Walsh: how would St. Paul's change under new leadership?

Fr. Booth inherited a parish with a strong foundation but also a clear practical problem: the existing Parish Center could no longer comfortably support the life of the growing community. Addressing that need would become one of the defining efforts of his leadership at St. Paul's.

Building Together: Listening Before Deciding

Expansion discussions had begun before Fr. Booth arrived, but work was paused until the new pastor was in place. Under Fr. Booth's leadership, St. Paul's resumed the process with broad parishioner involvement.

The Building Needs Investigative Committee helped lead the project. Rather than beginning with a predetermined design, questionnaires were sent to parish leaders and ministries to establish their space needs. A parish-wide survey then asked parishioners to consider three broad choices: do nothing, build a new church, or enlarge and renovate the existing Parish Center.

Approximately seventy-two percent favored enlarging and renovating the existing Parish Center. The results were shared at a Town Hall before moving forward. The decision echoed the founding years: before deciding what to build, St. Paul's first involved the community in deciding what it needed.

Defining the Specific Needs Before Designing the Building

A Needs Interpretation Committee worked with ministries to identify present and future detailed needs. Rather than asking ministries to fit themselves into a building plan, St. Paul's first tried to understand what worship, education, caring, community activities, staff, and volunteers needed in detail.

Architect Michael Doran developed and refined the plans based on the needs that had been identified. Parishioners with construction and trade expertise also contributed their knowledge and experience. The project brought together professional design and the practical expertise of St. Paul's own parishioners.

As the project neared completion, the Parish Council agreed in August 1991 to dedicate space for the John T. Walsh Library. An avid reader with a strong interest in adult education, Fr. Walsh was honored in a way that connected his own interests with St. Paul's continuing commitment to faith formation.

Difficult Choices: Cost, Simplicity, and the Spirit of St. Paul's

As plans were finalized and construction moved forward, unexpected costs emerged. The naturally wet conditions of the property required additional work, while other needs surfaced after the budget had been established. With the overall budget already set, added costs had to be offset by trade-offs elsewhere or, in some cases, by postponing expenditures. Landscaping was among the projects postponed as costs increased.

Another of the trade-offs was seating. St. Paul's chose to keep the folding chairs rather than purchase new seating as part of the project. In addition to controlling costs, the decision temporarily preserved one of the more recognizable features of the original worship space.

The organ presented another challenge. As plans for the enlarged worship space developed, the Music Committee determined that the existing organ would not be adequate acoustically for the larger space. A replacement had not been included in the approved building budget. Rather than add the full cost to the project, an existing organ was purchased, with the Music Committee and its supporters raising funds to cover much of the additional expense.

Throughout the process, the Parish Council considered how the expansion could move forward while preserving the "Spirit of St. Paul's." One important concern was the ten-percent tithe. Even with construction costs and a coming mortgage, there was a strong desire not to let the building project diminish St. Paul's commitment to helping people in need.

A Parish Builds Together

Construction became another occasion for participation. Parishioners painted, monitored the work, and contributed their labor and professional expertise. Meanwhile, parish life continued throughout construction.

The enlarged worship space also provided an opportunity to carry St. Paul's founding philosophy forward. An Art and Environment Committee, working with Fr. Booth and the Parish Council, sought to continue the principles of Vatican II, maintain simplicity, and keep the gathered community centered around the altar. The original altar, handcrafted by parishioner Bill Sullivan, was retained, creating a tangible link with the first Parish Center. Bill Keyser of RIT's School for American Craftsmen was commissioned to create new liturgical furnishings characterized by simplicity, dignity, permanence, and clarity of purpose.

Not everything worked as planned. The initial backscreen separating the altar from the reservation chapel proved too transparent and became a distraction. The Art and Environment Committee responded by reworking the design, reusing the original narrow slats and adding slats to provide the needed separation while still meeting diocesan guidelines. It was another example of parishioners working together to solve an unexpected problem.

The project also significantly expanded parking on the south side of the Parish Center. Creating the additional spaces required removing trees from an area parishioners knew as "Merrigan's Woods." The expanded parking addressed one of the most visible problems created by St. Paul's growth.

The expanded Parish Center was dedicated on the weekend of September 14–15, 1991, completing a project whose need, planning, and fundraising had grown out of St. Paul's experience during the 1970s and 1980s. The celebratory Mass brought together Bishop Matthew Clark, founding pastor Fr. John Walsh, and Fr. Ray Booth, followed by a reception with the St. Paul's community.

What Era II Expansion and Community Building (1973-1990) Means in the Larger Story

Era II showed that preserving St. Paul's founding vision did not mean standing still. As Webster grew, family registrations increased, bringing more people into worship, religious education, ministries, and community life. St. Paul's responded with expanded ministries, paid ministry leadership, and eventually a major expansion of the Parish Center.

Through all that growth, St. Paul's continued trying to preserve what had been important from the beginning: participation, simplicity, caring for people in need, religious education and faith formation, meaningful worship, and a strong sense of community. The transition from Fr. Walsh to Fr. Booth and the building project demonstrated that St. Paul's could change while continuing to carry those values forward.

Even as St. Paul's celebrated its growth and prepared to use its expanded Parish Center, changes beyond its walls were beginning to shape its future. Concerns about priest availability, Catholic school

funding, greater cooperation and sharing of resources among the parishes, and broader diocesan planning would increasingly affect St. Paul's in the years ahead.

Era III: Maturation and Transition 1991–2010

Opening

The dedication of the expanded Parish Center in September 1991 marked both an achievement and a transition for St. Paul's. The building project had addressed many of the practical needs created by years of growth. But as St. Paul's entered the 1990s, new challenges were emerging that would increasingly come from beyond the boundaries of the parish.

St. Paul's continued to grow and develop internally, but increasingly it also had to respond to changes taking place in the wider Church and the Diocese of Rochester. Questions about the role of the laity, the future organization of parishes, fewer priests, Catholic education, diocesan resources, and cooperation among neighboring parishes began to affect life at St. Paul's more directly.

The Synods and the Role of the Laity

There was an important connection between these developments and St. Paul's founding vision. Fr. John Walsh and the founding generation had deliberately sought to build a parish reflecting the principles of Vatican II. Lay participation had been present from the beginning through the Parish Board, Action Groups, liturgy, religious education, caring ministries, and the many parishioners who assumed responsibility for the life of St. Paul's.

In 1987, Pope John Paul II summoned a Vatican Synod of Bishops whose central theme was "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World". Among its conclusions were affirming the lay vocation, the need for and importance of pastoral councils, and expanding non-ordained ministries. These questions had particular meaning for St. Paul's, a community that had already spent twenty years developing significant lay participation.

The Diocese of Rochester began a Diocesan Synod process in 1990, followed by several years of listening and discernment at both the parish and diocesan levels. St. Paul's became deeply involved. By 1992 and 1993, a St. Paul's Ad Hoc Synod Committee, working with the Parish Council and ministry groups, was reviewing recommendations from the listening and discernment phase, establishing priorities, and providing input to the Diocese.

At the closing of the Diocese of Rochester General Synod in October 1993, five recommendations were presented to Bishop Matthew Clark: lifelong religious education, a consistent life ethic, Catholic moral education, the role of women in the Church, and small Christian communities. Fr. Booth then convened a team to evaluate the Synod recommendations, consider how they related to what St. Paul's was already doing, and identify areas where additional efforts might be appropriate.

The review showed that St. Paul's was already doing a considerable amount of what the Synod was recommending, reflecting the continuing influence of the Vatican II principles that had shaped St. Paul's from its beginning. The team also identified areas where additional efforts could strengthen parish life. Among the responses were Stephen Ministry, a Grieving Group, Homebound Visitation, Young Adult Ministry, Junior High Youth activities, John Walsh Forum programs, small Christian

communities, welcoming efforts, volunteerism, and community-building activities. The Ad Hoc Synod Implementation Committee eventually became a standing committee, helping St. Paul's continue to evaluate and respond to the Synod recommendations.

In an important sense, the Synod both challenged and affirmed St. Paul's. The Synod therefore became another link between the Vatican II vision of the founders and the continuing journey of St. Paul's.

Looking Beyond the Boundaries of St. Paul's

St. Paul's had already begun to experience what looking beyond its own boundaries could mean. Early in the building project during Fr. Booth's pastorate, the Diocese introduced a Quadrant Plan for Catholic schools. Part of that effort called upon financially stronger parishes, including St. Paul's, to help support Catholic schools and communities with fewer resources. For St. Paul's, which was simultaneously facing the financial demands of its own expansion, this introduced a different kind of responsibility. Decisions could no longer be based only on the needs within St. Paul's. The needs of the larger Catholic community also had to be considered.

In 1997, Bishop Clark introduced Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium. The planning called for greater cooperation and sharing of resources among the parishes, increased lay leadership, and preparation for a future with fewer priests, working together in a cluster with St. Joseph's, Holy Spirit, Holy Trinity and St. Rita's. Coming near the end of Fr. Booth's pastorate, it continued a movement already underway at St. Paul's, asking the community to consider not only its own needs, but also its responsibilities within the larger Diocese.

Together, these developments represented a significant change in perspective. Earlier planning efforts at St. Paul's had largely asked: What does St. Paul's need, and what should we do about it? Increasingly, another question had to be considered: What does the larger Church need, and what responsibility does St. Paul's have in responding?

Fr. Booth's Later Years

By the latter years of Fr. Booth's pastorate, St. Paul's was increasingly engaged with issues extending beyond its own boundaries. The expansion of the Parish Center was an important accomplishment of his years, but it was not his only legacy. Through the Quadrant Plan, the Synod process, and the beginning of Millennium Planning, he helped lead St. Paul's toward a broader understanding of its responsibilities within the Diocese and the larger Catholic community.

At the same time, the everyday life of St. Paul's remained strong. Worship continued at the center. Religious education involved children, youth, and adults. Caring ministries expanded, social activities strengthened community, and lay people continued to assume important responsibilities as volunteers and members of the parish staff. The four circles embodied in St. Paul's logo — Worshiping, Caring, Community, and Educating — continued to provide a recognizable expression of the values that had shaped St. Paul's from its earliest years. It was seen as a way "to stretch staff and financial resources to a wider community."

Fr. Booth left St. Paul's in June 1999. His years had begun with a community struggling to accommodate substantial growth. They ended with a larger St. Paul's that was increasingly aware that its future would be shaped not only by what happened within the community, but also by forces and decisions extending beyond the boundaries of the parish.

A Difficult Pastoral Transition

The departures of Fr. Ray Booth and then Fr. David Simon brought St. Paul's into a difficult period of pastoral transition. Fr. Simon's short tenure needs to be understood through two separate issues. Tensions developed within St. Paul's over governance and authorization of changes that Fr. Simon made without discussion and caught people off guard. Separately, his tenure ended abruptly because of prior sexual abuse elsewhere. There was no allegation of abuse at St. Paul's during his tenure.

Before his removal, Fr. Simon's relationship with St. Paul's governance structure had become somewhat strained. Changes to the rectory, movement of the pastor's office to the Parish Center, a new telephone system, and other decisions raised a larger question than the individual expenditures themselves: who had authority to make decisions at St. Paul's, and what role did the Parish Council have in authorizing them? Fr. Simon emphasized that the body was a Council, not a Board. For a community whose history included unusually strong lay participation, that distinction touched a deeply rooted understanding of how St. Paul's worked.

The Parish Council suggested seeking clarification from the Diocese about the respective roles of pastor and council. The issue illustrated a tension between St. Paul's culture of shared participation and the formal authority of a pastor within the Catholic Church. Before that tension could fully settle, Fr. Simon was removed in May 2002. The abruptness of the event, and its connection to the wider clergy sexual-abuse crisis, further damaged trust in Church leadership.

Healing and Rebuilding Trust

Fr. Brian Cool, a priest in residence, was appointed Administrator by the Diocese to assist in the transition to a new pastor. He helped St. Paul's through the immediate transition. He held a special prayer service for the community and brought a calm, direct presence at a time when parishioners were trying to understand what had happened. The ordinary life of St. Paul's continued, but the experience could not simply be put aside. Trust had been shaken, both locally and by the larger abuse crisis confronting the Catholic Church.

When Fr. Stan Kacprzak arrived in June 2002, St. Paul's faced several challenges. Among them were the need to heal and rebuild trust, the expectation that St. Paul's would continue to respond constructively to diocesan planning initiatives and increasingly act as part of a larger Catholic community and do this while understanding the practical reality that St. Paul's still appeared to be growing while many other parishes of the Diocese were shrinking.

Fr. Stan was energetic, approachable, and deeply engaged himself in the life of the community. He earned the trust and respect of many parishioners, but he also brought a very human and memorable personality to the role. He was an unapologetic Steelers fan in Bills country and was known for riding

his motorcycle and inviting parishioners to join him. On June 21–22, 2003, he organized a 35th St. Paul's Anniversary celebration and along with Fr. Walsh and Fr. Booth celebrated Mass together followed by a reception after each Mass. Each of St. Paul's ministries set up a booth under the theme "Catch the Spirit." These were small things, but they were part of how parishioners came to know and remember him.

Millennium Planning and a Larger Catholic Community

Fr. Stan did not introduce St. Paul's to diocesan planning. That work had already begun during Fr. Booth's pastorate. What Fr. Stan did was help St. Paul's move more fully into the changing environment envisioned by second phase of Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium which was introduced in November 2002. The process asked parishes to prepare for fewer priests, greater lay leadership, and more cooperation across parish boundaries.

That effort was reflected in St. Paul's participation in the second phase of Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium. In November 2005, the pastoral plan developed by St. Paul's was accepted by Bishop Clark, another indication that the community, under Fr. Stan's leadership, was working to respond constructively to the direction of the Diocese regarding the need for changes.

The Webster Penfield Catholic Connection

One increasingly visible expression of that direction was the Webster Penfield Catholic Connection, or WPCC. Cooperation among the four parishes required St. Paul's to think differently about scheduling, ministries, worship, and the use of resources. For parishioners accustomed to a highly independent St. Paul's, the change could sometimes feel like a loss of autonomy. Others more readily saw the advantages of sharing opportunities and resources across parish boundaries.

The sharing of calendars among the four WPCC parishes was more than an administrative convenience. It made programs throughout the Catholic community more visible and accessible. A speaker or formation program offered at one parish could draw interested people from the others. The same was true of special liturgies and other opportunities for worship and spiritual growth. Over time, some cooperation went further, with ministries such as Health Ministry becoming collaborative efforts serving the broader community, particularly senior adults. Joint activities included more support for Holy Trinity's Hope House, bringing the four communities together following Hurricane Katrina to assist St. Clement of Rome Parish near New Orleans, Masses to bring all four parishes together such as on June 4, 2004, when the 4 pastors (Fr. Kacprzak, Fr. Michlatek, Fr. Latus, and Fr. Halfrich) celebrated a Mass together at Schroeder High School with a reception that followed Mass. In September 2006 WPCC agreed to assist Habitat for Humanity build a home on 79 Dickinson St. WPCC therefore represented not only an adjustment in how St. Paul's operated, but also an expansion of the opportunities available to its parishioners and a way for St. Paul's, working with others, to help people beyond its own boundaries.

Growth and a Changing Church

At the same time that St. Paul's was adapting to greater cooperation with neighboring parishes, it was also confronting questions about its own worship space. Diocesan planning called for parishes to move toward no more than three weekend Masses, and by early 2005 Fr. Stan and the Parish Council were discussing that change. St. Paul's continued to have substantial attendance, with weekly Mass attendance reported at 1,337 in April 2005. Moving from four weekend Masses to three brought renewed attention to whether the existing worship space would adequately serve the community.

By late 2005, the question of worship space had become more immediate. For safety reasons, St. Paul's learned that approximately 70 chairs needed to be removed, reducing the legal seating capacity to 488. With the Diocese calling for no more than three weekend Masses and St. Paul's continuing to grow, the Worship Needs Investigative Committee became active. Its initial task was not to design a new building, but to study the community's worship-space needs, listen to parishioners, and explore possible solutions.

In January 2006, St. Paul's held a Town Hall to hear from parishioners about the worship space and the recommendations of the Worship Needs Investigative Committee. The process reflected a familiar St. Paul's approach. Before moving toward a particular solution, parishioners were given an opportunity to understand the issue, express their views, and participate in determining what the community needed. The WNIC could then use that input as it continued to study possible solutions.

The discussion did not move quickly toward a building solution. On June 17–18, 2006, St. Paul's officially moved from four to three weekend Masses. Through 2006 and 2007, St. Paul's continued to listen, study alternatives, and gather information. Following two Town Meetings, the Parish Council was still exploring architects and possible approaches to expanding the worship area. In 2008, LaBella Associates was engaged to help St. Paul's develop conceptual plans for additional space and improvements to the existing facilities and grounds. Parishioners continued to be invited into the discussion as St. Paul's looked toward its future needs.

By 2010, the planning had reached the point where LaBella Associates could present a conceptual design for another substantial addition to St. Paul's at a cost of $2M. Fr. Stan emphasized that no decision had been made and described the effort as proactive planning for a future in which St. Paul's might continue to grow while the number of available weekend Masses declined. The proposal addressed a real concern about worship space, but its size and potential cost also required careful consideration. Recognizing a need was one thing; deciding that another major expansion was the right response was another.

The proposal never became a building project. Rather than being rejected at a single moment, it gradually lost momentum as the circumstances surrounding St. Paul's changed. Financial pressures were becoming more apparent, participation patterns were beginning to shift, and the priest shortage and increasing diocesan coordination made the future less predictable. The question was no longer simply whether St. Paul's could use more space. Given everything changing around it, was this the right time to make another major investment in its facilities?

Fr. Stan's Departure

Fr. Stan's departure in August 2011 to Our Lady of the Lakes came unexpectedly. The decision was made by the Diocese, and St. Paul's had little opportunity to prepare for another pastoral transition. His farewell was relatively simple, with many appreciative comments and a reception at the conclusion of each Mass. Yet his departure marked the end of an important period for St. Paul's. He had arrived when the community needed healing and renewed trust, and during his years as pastor he helped St. Paul's respond to increasing diocesan planning, build stronger relationships with neighboring Catholic communities, and confront difficult questions about St. Paul's future.

During Fr. Stan's years, "Seeds for the Journey" was introduced as a regular feature in the weekly bulletin, with Fr. Stan and others contributing reflections, sometimes on a rotating basis. His final farewell returned to the image of seeds for the journey. It was an appropriate way to close his years at St. Paul's. The community he was leaving had changed, but the seeds planted during those years would continue into the next stage of its journey.

Era III Maturation and Transition 1991–2010 in Retrospect: Carrying the Four Circles Forward

By the end of this era, St. Paul's remained a strong and active community, but the world around it had changed considerably. Diocesan planning, fewer priests, parish consolidations and closures, greater cooperation among neighboring parishes, financial pressures, and the clergy abuse crisis had all challenged assumptions that once seemed secure. Even within St. Paul's, questions about future growth and another major expansion were giving way to greater caution about what the years ahead might bring.

Yet through all of this change, the foundation upon which St. Paul's had been built remained visible. Worshiping, Caring, Community, and Educating were not simply words inherited from an earlier generation. They continued to provide a framework for how St. Paul's responded to new circumstances. Worship remained central even as Mass schedules and space needs changed. Caring increasingly reached beyond the boundaries of St. Paul's. Community was rebuilt during difficult transitions and broadened in conjunction with neighboring parishes. Education continued for children and adults even as participation patterns were changing.

The circumstances were very different from those the founders had faced, but the underlying question remained much the same: could St. Paul's adapt while carrying forward the vision that had shaped it from the beginning? By the end of Era III, the four circles (Worshiping, Caring, Community, and Educating) remained a recognizable thread connecting the St. Paul's of 2011 with the community that had begun its journey in 1967.

Era IV: Adaptation and Resilience 2011 to the Present

A New Pastor and a Changing St. Paul's

Fr. Paul Gitau arrived at St. Paul's in September 2011, replacing Fr. Stan Kacprzak. He inherited a parish with a strong identity and traditions developed over more than four decades, but also one beginning to face changes that would become increasingly important during his years as pastor.

St. Paul's remained an active parish. The traditional Advent and Lenten programs continued. Good Sam continued its longstanding outreach to people in need. Children prepared for First Penance, First Eucharist and Confirmation. Youth ministry, Vacation Bible School and adult faith formation continued. The choir remained an important part of worship. The Pastoral Council and numerous ministries remained active, while the annual parish picnic and other gatherings continued to be part of community life.

The fundamentals of St. Paul's had not changed. What was beginning to change was the size of the community supporting them. Participation had been declining from the much higher levels reached decades earlier, and finding enough volunteers remained a continuing challenge. Fewer parishioners participated in committees and ministries, but those groups continued doing their ministry.

Fr. Paul also brought elements of his own spirituality to St. Paul's. Among them was a particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, rooted in his childhood and his mother's influence on his prayer life. That devotion became increasingly visible at St. Paul's, including greater emphasis on the Rosary and eventually the creation of a Marian prayer space at the back of the church. It was one of the ways a new pastor added something of himself to the traditions he had inherited.

Community remained important as well. That was especially evident during St. Paul's 50th anniversary celebration in 2017. The anniversary was marked by multiple activities during the year, with a highlight being the Pentecost celebratory Mass with Bishop Salvatore R. Matano, followed by a parish reception. The celebration concluded in October with a Dinner Dance at Webster Golf Club, where Bishop Emeritus Matthew Clark gave the keynote address. For a parish that had always known how to gather and celebrate together, the 50th anniversary became another important community milestone.

The anniversary also carried a natural sense of nostalgia. Nearly fifty years after St. Paul's founding, the celebration offered an opportunity to remember the people, experiences and traditions that had shaped the community, even as St. Paul's continued to move forward.

Growing Pressures

As Fr. Paul began his pastorate, the changes that would eventually reshape St. Paul's were not necessarily easy to see. Only a short time earlier, St. Paul's had been considering a building expansion estimated at about $2 million, and the move from four weekend Masses to three had made the

worship space feel fuller. Yet participation was beginning to drift downward, part of a broader decline in religious participation that was occurring nationally. The September 2010 St. Paul's weekly bulletin reported that "while our parish has grown by 8% since 2000, Mass attendance has decreased 34%. Church attendance has decreased 25% in the past year." The trend becomes measurable in the other records, by 2014–15, when average weekly attendance was 691, and by 2018–19 it had declined to 524.

The decline did not mean that parish life stopped. Liturgies, Faith Formation, Good Sam, music, adult education and community activities continued much as they had in the past, but generally with fewer participants and volunteers. The Town of Webster was also no longer experiencing the rapid population and school-age growth that had helped fuel St. Paul's expansion in earlier decades.

Financial pressure appeared early in Fr. Paul's pastorate. Fiscal year 2011–12 ended with a deficit of approximately $48,000, and $38,000 of savings were used to pay bills and disbursements, including the disbursements to Good Sam. The latter was a red flag. An increased-offering campaign and fundraising followed, but the January 2013 Diocesan-led audit made clear that revenue increases alone would not be enough. The Diocese recommended a combination of increased giving, reduced tithing and staff reductions. After consultation with the Pastoral Council and Finance Committee, St. Paul's ended the specific ten-percent Good Sam tithe while asking Good Sam to continue to support other charities like Hope House, Rice Bowl and others. Its commitment to helping people in need could also be accomplished through volunteerism and soft goods and food collections. The full-time Music Director role was reduced to part-time.

The changes were difficult precisely because they touched practices that had long been part of St. Paul's identity. Fr. Paul told parishioners that it was not easy for him as pastor to accept the Diocesan auditor's recommendations, but that St. Paul's could not continue living beyond its income. The fixed ten-percent tithe, one of the strongest expressions of the parish's historic commitment to caring for those in need, had become financially unsustainable. Other ways to assist the needy had to be found.

The pressure continued through the decade. St. Paul's used fundraising not simply for special projects but increasingly to help balance the annual budget. Chicken barbecues, wine tastings, memorial bricks and other efforts raised money while also providing opportunities to build community. Catholic Ministries Appeal shortfalls also remained a recurring concern.

By fiscal year 2018–19, the financial pressure had become more pronounced. St. Paul's recorded a net operating loss of approximately $46,000 and an underpayment of approximately $34,000 toward its Catholic Ministries Appeal obligation. Both shortfalls were covered from savings. St. Paul's still had resources available to meet its obligations, but repeatedly drawing upon savings was reducing the financial protection available for the future.

By 2019, the clergy sexual abuse crisis had entered another difficult stage. In an August letter to parishioners throughout the Diocese, Bishop Salvatore R. Matano spoke directly about the "horrendous scandal" of the sexual abuse of minors and described both the suffering of victims and the wounds experienced by the larger Catholic community. His letter came as New York's Child Victims Act opened a window for previously time-barred claims by survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Bishop Matano pledged that the Diocese would respond earnestly to those seeking assistance.

At St. Paul's, a prayer for victims of abuse appearing in the Bulletin was another acknowledgment of the continuing crisis.

For Fr. Paul, as for pastors throughout the Diocese, the continuing abuse crisis presented another challenge largely beyond his control. He had not created the circumstances confronting the Church, but he was responsible for helping St. Paul's live through them. His role was pastoral: to acknowledge the suffering of victims, pray with the community, and continue the everyday work and mission of St. Paul's while the Diocese dealt with the consequences of the crisis.

COVID: Finding a Way Forward

Then came COVID-19. In March 2020, public celebration of Mass was suspended throughout the Diocese of Rochester. For the first time in St. Paul's history, parishioners could not physically gather for Sunday worship. Holy Week and Easter Sunday were celebrated without a congregation present.

St. Paul's responded by finding new ways to remain connected. At first, something as simple as a cell phone on a tripod became a way for Fr. Paul to bring Mass into people's homes via Facebook. Livestreaming improved as the months went on, allowing parishioners to worship from home, while electronic communication became increasingly important in keeping the community informed and connected.

Reopening the church did not mean returning to normal. Federal, state and diocesan requirements involving masking, social distancing, sanitizing and other precautions required St. Paul's to develop operating practices unlike anything it had used before. Worship, Faith Formation, meetings, ministries and community activities all had to adapt. St. Paul's found ways to work within those restrictions and continue its mission. The experience became another example of the resilience of a community finding ways to carry on when familiar ways of doing things were no longer possible.

As churches across the country reopened, faith communities discovered that reopening their doors did not mean that everyone would return. A Pew Research Center study found that by November 2022, 20 percent of U.S. adults said they were attending religious services in person less often than before the pandemic, compared with 7 percent who said they were attending more often. Pew also found that in-person attendance had rebounded from the early months of COVID and then appeared to plateau. St. Paul's was caught in that same broad pattern. Some parishioners came back quickly, others more gradually, and some did not return to regular in-person worship. At St. Paul's, a decline that had already been occurring before COVID was dramatically accelerated by the pandemic.

A Smaller St. Paul's

The numbers after COVID revealed a significantly smaller St. Paul's. Average weekly attendance, which had been 524 in 2018–19, fell to 159 during 2020–21 at the height of the pandemic restrictions. It subsequently recovered to 269 in 2021–22 and 309 in 2022–23. The direction was encouraging, but even by 2024–25 attendance of 343 remained well below the level immediately before COVID. St. Paul's had come through the pandemic, but the community gathering physically for worship was considerably smaller.

The change could also be seen in children's Faith Formation, once one of the largest ministries at St. Paul's. In 1980, 650 children were enrolled in the School of Religion and another 70 participated in the Confirmation program. By 2024–25, only 37 children were enrolled in Faith Formation; two children received First Communion and 9 were confirmed. The programs and terminology had changed over more than forty years, so the numbers are not directly comparable. Even so, they illustrate the magnitude of the change. A ministry that once involved hundreds of St. Paul's children was now serving a much smaller population.

Being smaller did not mean that St. Paul's stopped being active. What had changed was the scale. Once again, St. Paul's demonstrated resilience by adapting to the people and resources available. In 2023, the parish adopted the year-long theme, "Raising Up St. Paul's." Teams began developing activities that combined fundraising with friendraising, not only to bring in revenue, but to strengthen relationships. These became part of the annual calendar. In 2025, fundraising events netted about $13,000. Meanwhile, in July 2024, St. Paul's welcomed a new tenant, Rochester Hearing and Speech Center, making use of underutilized space. Together, these steps reflected a smaller St. Paul's adjusting to new circumstances, while continuing the underlying work and mission of the parish.

Listening to the Church

In 2021, Pope Francis began a worldwide initiative with the somewhat unfamiliar name, the "Synod on Synodality." Put simply, the Church was being asked to listen better: to one another, particularly to people who might not ordinarily be heard, and together for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Centered on Communion, Participation and Mission, the Synod asked Catholics to consider how clergy and laity could share responsibility more effectively, how people could participate more fully in the life of the Church, and how the Church could better carry out its mission in the world.

St. Paul's took the process seriously. In early 2022, parishioners were given information about the Synod and invited to participate in listening sessions. With COVID still affecting how people gathered, Zoom was used with the leadership team and parishioners were also given an opportunity to provide written input. For eight weeks, the Bulletin featured "Sunday Gospel Synodal Connections," relating the Gospel message each week to a Synod theme or its broader message. In the spring of 2022, St. Paul's listening input was forwarded to the Diocese as part of the larger diocesan consultation.

From there, the process moved beyond the parish to the national, continental and ultimately worldwide Church in Rome. St. Paul's had no direct role in those stages. The Synod eventually recommended greater local shared responsibility, continued listening and increased lay involvement, but it did not prescribe a specific program that every parish was required to implement.

For St. Paul's, the timing was significant. It was emerging from COVID with substantially reduced participation, fewer resources and increasing financial pressures. The circumstances made undertaking another initiative difficult. The Synod's themes were recognized and discussed, but to date there is little significant new activity flowing directly from the process.

Seen across the longer history of St. Paul's, however, there was something familiar in what the Synod was asking Catholics to consider. Listening, lay participation, shared responsibility, community and mission had been important principles at St. Paul's from its founding in the spirit of Vatican II. Most

parishioners participating in the Synod process may not have consciously connected those discussions with what had happened at St. Paul's more than fifty years earlier. Looking back across the history, however, the connection is difficult to miss.

Continuing the Journey

As St. Paul's moved beyond the immediate effects of COVID, financial pressures remained. Staffing had already been adjusted, some needed improvements to the Parish Center had been postponed, and savings had provided an important source of financial protection during difficult years. That changed significantly when, in October 2023, St. Paul's was required to contribute to the diocesan settlement of sexual abuse claims. The "Channeling Injunction Payment" of $250,741 consumed approximately 70 percent of St. Paul's savings, leaving about $111,000. Savings still provided some protection against unexpected needs, but the financial cushion that St. Paul's had relied upon in the past had become considerably more modest. In 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, St. Paul's showed resilience once again and rebounded financially. It had positive net operating revenue gain of $81K while falling short of the CMA goal by $17K. Average weekly mass attendance in 2024-2025 was 343 up significantly from the Covid level of 159.

COVID perhaps provided the clearest demonstration that St. Paul's ability to adapt had not disappeared. Faced with circumstances for which there was no established solution, parishioners and volunteers found ways to continue worshiping, serving and remaining connected. Ministries adjusted, livestreaming improved and endured, and St. Paul's found a way forward.

That response was not entirely new. Throughout its history, St. Paul's had repeatedly been required to adjust to changing circumstances. The challenges differed from one generation to another, as did the solutions. But the determination to preserve what mattered remained.

As St. Paul's approaches its 60th anniversary, the challenges before it are real. It is smaller, its resources are more limited, and the future of Catholic parish life continues to change around it. But nearly 60 years of history also offer another perspective. St. Paul's has never remained exactly the same. It has adapted, sometimes by choice and sometimes because circumstances required it to do so, while continuing to worship, serve, educate, build community, and seek ways to live the vision on which it was founded.

The story, therefore, does not end here. Like the generations before it, the St. Paul's community faces the question of how to carry what it has inherited into circumstances that will inevitably be different. The answer will belong to those who continue the journey.

Epilogue: Reasons for Hope

A history of St. Paul's cannot tell us what the next decade will bring. The challenges facing the parish are real, and the Catholic Church itself continues to change. Yet nearly sixty years of experience provide reasons for hope.

St. Paul's has never depended upon remaining exactly as it was. From worshiping at Sweet's Farm, to building and expanding the Parish Center, to responding to changes in the Diocese and the wider Church, to placing a cell phone on a tripod when COVID closed the church doors, each generation has found its own way to carry the mission forward.

St. Paul's current Mission Statement adopted in 1991 can assist us in the journey ahead. "St. Paul's family exists for the purpose of witnessing and proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ, that message proclaimed in word, worship, service: love God, love your neighbor as yourself."

There are signs of the capacity to carry the mission forward. Parishioners continue to worship, serve those in need, support St. Paul's financially, educate children and adults in the faith, gather as a community, and assume responsibility for parish life. Technology has opened ways of reaching people that earlier generations could never have imagined. And the approach of the 60th anniversary provides an opportunity not simply to celebrate the past, but to rediscover what earlier generations believed was worth carrying forward.

The broader environment also offers some cautious reasons for hope. Webster remains a large and stable community. Its population has remained relatively unchanged in recent years, although the school-age population is somewhat smaller than during St. Paul's major growth years. Nationally, recent research suggests that the long decline in the share of Americans identifying as Christian has slowed and may, at least for now, have leveled off. The Catholic share of the population has also remained relatively stable in recent years. These developments do not establish that a religious revival is underway, nor do they suggest that the circumstances that fueled St. Paul's earlier growth will return. They do suggest, however, that the future need not simply be an extension of the steep declines of previous decades.

The future St. Paul's will almost certainly be different from the St. Paul's remembered in these pages. That need not mean that its essential character will be lost. If future generations bring to their circumstances the same faith, willingness to participate, concern for others, and determination to adapt that marked those who came before them, there is good reason to believe that the journey will continue.