2026 Rector’s Report to Epiphany

The Rev. Peter Frank

October 25, 2026

Earlier this month I shared with you my concerns about falling attendance at our main 10:30 a.m. service. A good number of you (15–20) took the time to respond to my invitation to share what you were seeing and thinking, and I’m grateful. The vestry and clergy are considering what you shared as we think, pray, and (when God shows us the way) act.

What touched me most was how many of you not only shared your thoughts about where we are and what to do, but also told me you are praying for our church. I want to encourage all of us to keep doing that. We are Christians. We believe that prayer matters and is effective. Let’s pray together, and trust that God will show us not only what to do, but what He is doing in and through Epiphany.

As we gather to consider the life and health of our congregation, **I want to offer two pieces of perspective.**

The first is simply this: God loves us, and He cares about this church more than we do. We continue to preach the Word, gather for worship and service, and love our neighbors as Jesus commanded. Those things matter. We have done them in season and out of season, and we will keep doing them.

Here is some of what has been growing at Epiphany this past year.

Ministry to Children

Rebekah was a brand-new staff member at our last annual meeting. Since then, she has revitalized our Sunday school, restarted Vacation Bible School, and, with Mtr. Pamela and me, is finding new ways to include children in our family Christmas Eve service. So far, this investment in children’s and youth ministry has not drawn new families into our church, but it has encouraged more consistent attendance by our current families with children. That is great, and we are only a year in.

Discipleship

At the beginning of 2026 we made a big change to our church schedule. Before the change, our many musicians were unable to attend discipleship class. Now they can, and they are, along with many others. Our classes usually had just over thirty people before the change. Over three rounds at the new time and schedule, we have grown to around fifty attending, roughly half again as many. That is a significant shift.

Connection to Other Christians and Our Neighbors

On October 24 we joined the fall festival at Centerpointe Church, just up the road, and got to pray with and meet many of the hundreds who attended. We are building a relationship with Centerpointe, and I'm glad of it.

This spring we had an incredible opportunity to sit down to dinner with our Turkish Muslim neighbors in our fellowship hall. While interfaith events like this are hard to do well, I think we managed it. I loved watching our people mix, talk, and share a meal with the forty or fifty Turkish neighbors who joined us in our building. But the highlight was hearing Mtr. Pamela pray the Lord's Prayer over them in Turkish as we blessed our meal.

These are signs of life at Epiphany, and I'm grateful for them. They are green shoots, and green shoots lead to growth.

The second piece of perspective is this: it will take intentionality and investment from all of us to keep doing what Epiphany does well.

Friends, to say it plainly, it is a hard time to be a small or midsize church in America. I won't belabor the point, but despite some news stories that have popped up in the last few years suggesting revival, the data we have confirms that we remain in a time of religious, specifically Christian, decline. According to the Barna Group, practicing Christians have fallen from 46 percent of American adults in 2000 to 24 percent today. We are also in a time when people struggle to commit to institutions of any kind.

We see this locally among Anglican churches. Congregations across Northern Virginia, small and large, are working through the same headwinds, and many have seen significant losses. Even Truro, our mother church, has a bit more than half the attendance it had a decade ago. I don't say this to discourage anyone, and certainly not to question the leadership of any church. These are our brothers and sisters in

Christ, and I hope we will pray for them too. That nearly all the arrows point the same way tells us this is bigger than any one church. We are all in this together.

There is no denying that Epiphany has seen decline too, and it is discouraging. In 2015 our average Sunday attendance was 177. In 2025 it was 155. This year, forty-two Sundays in, it is 144.

Where Does This Leave Us?

I have three hopes.

First, that we look reality in the face as a church. We are not in a season when churches get to coast downhill; we have to climb. Climbing is a choice, and I hope we keep making it.

Second, that we remember Epiphany is a valuable place. Good things are happening here. We are living out our mission: encountering God in beautiful worship and believing prayer, building a multigenerational congregation, and "equipping every member to publicly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Continuing to build and grow a church like Epiphany here in western Fairfax County is worth the effort, and we can see green shoots.

Third, that we keep praying about where we are and what is next. We need God's guidance through this time, and clear leading from Him on how to proceed. My own sense is that God has consistently spoken to this church when we have asked Him to. He spoke to us and led us to this building, for instance. Let's ask Him to lead us again as we head toward Advent and into 2027.

It is a privilege to be your rector, and I am grateful for all of you and for all we do and are together as Church of the Epiphany. We celebrated forty years of ministry just a few weeks ago. Let's build this church and trust God for its next forty years.

God bless,
Peter