

Rector's Report

delivered January 2021

This past year was a Church year unlike any of us have ever known. Since none of us were alive during the pandemic of 1917/18, we were thrown completely when church attendance, as we knew it, ended. People suggested to me that the church has never closed before, ever. That isn't true. It did shut down briefly during the earlier pandemic last century. But many died, including St. Thomas' rector at the time, the Rev. Gilbert Foxwell.

So mid-March, everything changed.

On the one hand, it's been the most difficult year in all my 61 years—probably yours as well. On the other hand, I thank God that this time around we have many different ways to stay in contact—ways that weren't possible in 1917. We have phone (*audio and Facetime*), internet (*Zoom, Facebook, email*), more knowledge of things like pathogens and aerosol transmission, and masks—so many masks—of all shapes, colors, and styles. And so many deaths.

I again give thanks to God that—as I write this—we haven't lost one parishioner to COVID-19. We have, however, lost others. We've lost family and friends that we couldn't be with through their passing because of COVID. And we've lost 400,000+ fellow countrymen and women who will leave a gaping hole in our nation, going forward. May they rest in peace.

Some of us had to slow down. Some of us have never had to work faster. Some of us discovered that they now had more than one job every day, while others lost their jobs.

St. Thomas' buildings may have closed, but our Church continues in the risen life of Christ's followers in the world.

First, let's not forget what happened prior to closing: we formed a new children's choir which joined us in worship, and we had one of the most successful music series (at least for 3 weeks) that we'd ever had!

And after closing the buildings:

- We continued classes: Rector's Class, Bible Study, EfM, and even briefly, children's classes.
- We have fed the hungry at Loaves and Fishes, and the Camden Area Food Pantry.
- We have continued to worship in new and unusual ways.
- First: we learned how to livestream Morning Prayer on Sundays.
- We began livestreaming Daily Noonday Prayer and Compline, which still continue. We began a new adventure with video services on Sundays—finding that everyone who wanted to, could participate—even those who hadn't been able to make it to the

- physical church in years. We welcome their presence and their participation once again.
- We began having Vestry on Zoom. Strangely, the vestry seems to love Zoom.
- We formed a COVID task force primarily made up of people with experience in the sciences: doctor, biologist, food inspector etc. to assist with decision-making.
- We began classes again online via Zoom. We even have people participating from other states.
- We initiated a phone tree for those without smart phones or computer access.
- We had outdoor services when it was safe—so we could come together again.
- We opened our church once a week for private prayer in our beloved sanctuary.
- We opened a new prayer garden behind the parish hall for people to come, reflect, pray.
- The “Weed Whackers” continued their ministry with landscaping, offering a space in our garden of both peace and solace—not just to us, but any who stopped by to meet friends and to pray.
- We added WiFi to our Sanctuary so we can continue to bring all our services to you on *YouTube* and *Facebook*.
- We redid *Tidings* so it can be read easily both online and with our smart phones.
- We redesigned our Website so it functions better, and is more easily navigated—as well as being much more attractive.
- Instead of a theater program with all of our kids—we had a hilarious Film 101 class as we videotaped the pageant--while learning about microphones, props, camera angles and “takes.” I look forward to more video work with them.

And I am looking forward to adding some MORE things:

- Better signage outside directing people to our online presence.
- Writing an article for the paper to highlight what is going on both virtually and in person.
- Purchasing and implementing the equipment to really make our videos shine—even after we are back together in person.
- Beginning a podcast where everyone has the opportunity to contribute--accessible to everyone—either through phone or computer.
- Continuing our *Video Ministry* with many more volunteers as we make sure that ALL our people—even those who are not in the pews due to mobility, illness or vacation— can still be a part of Jesus’ *Beloved Community* through the assistance of this team of people who will bring inclusivity to a new level for us.

Of course, the thing we are all looking forward to **the most** is opening up the building to in-person worship again. I certainly hope vaccination goes quickly and we are in a safer place

where we can open: first with masks and distancing, and then – finally – when we can worship together unmasked.

We've spent nearly a year struggling to hear each other through the masks, and not recognizing our best friends in the store because of the masks – but I want you to reflect on the fact that to God, *we are completely unmasked*. God knows us anywhere, anytime, no matter what we wear or how intricate our mask: God sees us. Always.

Let us end this tumultuous year with a prayer:

Loving God, you have led us to this place and time, not to shield us from heartache and the pain of human life, but to – in this moment--heal us, to gently redirect us, till we see the world as you do and love it with your love, no matter what befalls us. Amen.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Rev. Canon Lisa Fry+