

Sr. Warden Report

The year 2020 started with such promise. Bishop Brown's New Year's message shared the up lifting and inspiring words given by Father Cary, SSJE to the Sisters of St. Anne-Bethany. St. Thomas' Vestry, with the feedback and counsel of our parishioners, charted a course for 2020 based on guiding principles, goals and objectives. The Bell Tower had been wrapped to protect it from further decay and we were developing long-term plans for the refurbishment of our parish properties.

And then..... The world experienced and continues to experience the worst pandemic in a century. We were isolated and sheltered in place. We no longer socialized with one another. Unable to share a meal with a friend, offer a handshake, or provide a much-needed hug. Schools and universities were limited to remote learning. Many of us were unemployed or forced to work from home. Parents were required to juggle their family and career obligations, as family members shared kitchen tables transfixed on computer screens. The economy shut down and went into free fall.

Since the dark days of March and April, we have experienced something out of Charles Dickens; Tale of Two Cities - *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."*

We have seen all time financial market highs, real estate prices have soared, witnessed incredible innovation, medical break throughs attained, became proficient with Zoom and FaceTime, shopped online and certain sectors of the economy flourished.

Meanwhile many of us have experienced great sadness. We have lost over 400,000 fellow Americans. Many remain unemployed. Small business owners have seen a life's work devastated. Maine's tourism and hospitality industries stand on the precipice of ruin. Students have been forced to learn in hybrid and remote environments. Depression and substance abuse run rampant. And we experienced peaceful protest, riots and political strife.

St. Thomas' was not immune from this dichotomy of light and darkness.

During 2020, St. Thomas' launched a series of virtual ministries: Noonday Prayer; Compline; Coffee and Check-in; Bible Study; EfM; Rector's classes; and prerecorded Sunday Morning Eucharist, increasing the opportunities for worship beyond traditional Sunday morning services. Parishioners participated who could not have done so in person due to safety concern, personal health or physical location. We continued our Loaves & Fishes and Food Pantry outreach ministries. For many, St. Thomas' was a light in a sea of darkness.

For others, our virtual ministries were hollow substitutes for in person fellowship and worship. Many of our fellow summer parishioners were unable or unwilling to return. We attempted in vain to reopen the church, but were limited to outdoor worship. Many felt their spiritual journey left adrift; neither providing solace or comfort, nor helping them attain well-being.

Our inability to meet the needs of all parishioners will forever mark the year 2020.

As we look forward to 2021, I ask we continue to utilize our guiding principles to chart our course as a Christian community:

- St. Thomas' welcomes all in our greater community; those who worship traditionally, as well as those who are searching, or have been unable to attend traditional services;
- St. Thomas' will be true to our Christian Episcopal foundation;

- St. Thomas' will embrace all; nourish spiritual growth and not be judgmental;
- St. Thomas' will evolve and grow to meet the needs of our parish and the greater community;
- St. Thomas' members are encouraged to participate in ministries which align with their spiritual journey; if a ministry is currently not available, members will be encouraged to start one; and
- St. Thomas' will ensure its continued relevance to its membership and the greater community, by growing and renewing its parish leadership.

It has been an honor to serve as your Sr. Warden for the past three years. The fellowship and wisdom garnered from the parish was far greater than I could repay. I pray and wish the best for our Parish, Rector, Vestry and Sr. Warden, Elizabeth Moran, in the coming year. I believe our best days are yet to come.

Respectfully and humbly submitted,

Carlos Mello
Sr. Warden