

## Interim Rector's Address

*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name; \* worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

—Psalm 29:2

It was the Rev. Ralph Hayden, Rector of St. Thomas' from 1919 to 1933 who was responsible for much of the physical buildings we now know as St. Thomas' Church. During his tenure, the present church was completed in 1924, one hundred years ago. The parish hall was added two years later and the Lady Chapel and bell tower were constructed in 1930. You have every reason to be proud of this architectural gem located in the heart of Camden. We literally *worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

Thanks to Chris Glass and others, the entire campus works today as a whole with the skillful melding of further additions incorporating the old rectory which now houses accessible class rooms, church offices, a two bedroom apartment, and the creation of a cloistered garden area. The architecture and landscaping create a magnificent setting in a picturesque mid-coast community, long known for its fleet of windjammers, quaint shops, and stately homes. At times I do have pinch myself to be sure I am not on the set of a PBS television mystery.

We, indeed, have been given a great legacy by previous generations...and it has proven to be both an asset and a challenge to us as a congregation. In addition to maintaining a large physical plant, we still have not resolved the serious structural issues of the bell tower and chapel. We will need to come to some determination about the best path forward and my hope is that we can have a general parish meeting (with all stake holders at the table) at a date yet to be determined.

In this year of our Lord 2024, we also mark the centenary of the completion of the present church building in which we worship. I will be working with our vestry to prepare appropriate celebrations to mark this milestone in our history.

I commend to you the work of our Junior Warden, Br. Donovan Bowley, for the yeoman's job in keeping track of all the moving parts when it comes to our buildings and grounds. In the very near future, I anticipate that we will name a reinvigorated Buildings and Grounds Committee whose members will develop a master list of tasks with the oversight of the Junior Warden and then divide responsibilities among themselves so that all tasks will not fall on the shoulders of one individual. The repair, care, and cleanliness of buildings is quite often a reflection of the spiritual health of any congregation.

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Perhaps it goes without saying, but I hope we are aware that the church ultimately is not a building. It is us, you and me, the people of God who are the church. Buildings have practical uses: they shelter and inspire but they are not an end in themselves. In every way, buildings should support the mission to which God calls us. Discerning and defining that mission is a top priority and gives us a lens to focus all our other plans throughout the year.

Some may be wondering where we are in the search process for a new rector. The short answer is that for now, we need to get ourselves sorted out before we can embark on such a venture. This will take time and I ask for patience. The Vestry will be engaging HolyCow! Consulting to help us develop a factual snapshot of where we are in our life together.

Another step towards greater congregational health is to develop clearer behavioral boundaries and norms. The Vestry and I will meet on retreat in March to work on a Covenant to govern our life together and we'll share that work with you as other groupings within the parish may want to adopt it's use.

At our gathering today, I am going to ask you to find a relatively friendly looking stranger and ask you to describe to them your best experience here at St. Thomas'. Be as detailed and specific as possible in describing that experience. At the end of the allotted time, switch roles. Next, speak with your partner and describe the particular mission you believe God is calling us to.

This, as much as anything else we do today, begins the process of discernment. As we begin to identify specifically where God is calling us then we will be better equipped to discern the leadership we'll need in our next rector. It's a process and let's take the time it deserves; it is holy work.

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I am grateful to parish leadership and especially members of our Vestry. 2023 was an unprecedented year which required tremendous devotion to this community of faith. I suspect it was a growing year, as you discovered strengths and weaknesses among yourselves. Thank you.

Thank you to Anne Rogers-Popejoy for being our interim administrator and to our office volunteers, Grayce Sivigny, Jan Lyle, and Diane Kirkman. I am thankful to Terry Mello for her organizational skills and attention to detail. Thank you for your tireless efforts on our behalf as parish treasurer and most recently for assisting with the methodical transfer of information and training necessary to bring our new administrator, Kayla Clay, on board.

The role of the Senior Warden is demanding and I am so very grateful to Elizabeth Moran for her counsel, wisdom, and perspective as a long time member of St. Thomas'. Thank you.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all of you because you make this community of faith what it is. I am grateful to you for trusting me to help us navigate a path forward with the eventual goal of discovering whom God has called to be your next Rector.

Think, for a moment, of all that will happen in the coming year – the decisions that will be made, relationships started (or ended), career changes, schools entered, illnesses endured, challenges surmounted, risks taken, adventures dared, love shared. So much will come along in the coming weeks and months. Some of it we may anticipate and be prepared for, and much of it we simply can't imagine. It can be daunting until we remember that God is with us through all of it. God is on our side. God will not abandon us but will walk alongside us, strengthening us, encouraging us, granting us grace sufficient to become the people God wants us to be.

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The Rev. Paul R. Briggs II, Interim  
The Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany 2024