

## Rector's Annual Report 2020

In the sermon for this morning I spoke with you about the way the Lord uses times of interruption in our lives to get our attention. They are times the Lord uses to get us to step back, reassess, and pivot, to follow his call more faithfully. This last 11 months have certainly been an interruption of the first order. In going over the last year I have grieved how much had to be canceled or postponed until this pandemic is over. I have lamented how much time had to be spent navigating what we could and couldn't do, learning to use new technological tools to shift to offering services, studies, and meetings online, and the time spent in production knowing that even our best work would be a poor substitute for being together in person. Before we are able to talk about what we could do in spite of the restrictions of operating in a pandemic and the way those learnings will strengthen us in the future, we need to recognize that so much was lost. We as a church had to sacrifice so much, and many families had to face extremely limited celebrations for weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Those sacrifices have been significant and need to be recognized. The isolation caused by our inability to gather for fellowship and worship has been extremely painful especially for those who live alone or who are going through hardships. The good news is that no one contracted Coronavirus at church and those who did catch it in other places were able to recover. We have made every effort to operate safely during this time, but we lament the necessary restrictions that have limited our response.

As hard as this time has been, I know the Lord has been working to bring good out of it as well. Some of that good we have already been able to recognize; and some will be realized in the months ahead. In many ways it has been like a pregnancy. It can be terribly uncomfortable and painful, but the eventual outcome is the birthing of new life and opportunities. In the sermon this morning, I have spoken with you about the way the Lord works for good in times of interruption and some things I am hoping to see developed in the very near future at Christ Church as a result of stepping back to reassess. In this report I will be talking about things that have already happened in 2020 or are already in the works at this time.

Before we were shut down by the pandemic we were able to have a very full two plus months. After a dinner party at my house the night before, the vestry had a retreat at Middle Georgia State led by the Rev. Canon John Thompson-Quartey, who heads the diocesan ministry of Congregational Vitality. We had a wonderful day of team building and developing a vision for the future. (Little did we know what a turn the future would take.) We held a Pancake Supper for Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, cooked and served by our youth group and their families, while being entertained by a number of very talented parishioners. It was a wonderful family gathering of all ages. February was also the time of the Feagin wedding; and the 8:00 congregation hosted an engagement party for a young couple in that congregation who got married at the beginning of this month, Marissa and Rhett Hudson. It was a wonderful opportunity for that congregation that had developed such a sense of community, to gather for fellowship and to help this young couple feel loved, supported and celebrated by their church. They later faced the strictest limitations of all in their wedding this January, at the height of the pandemic.

During the shut-down we were able to hold the Robinson wedding in August with a dramatically reduced guest list and many precautions to keep those attending safe. The couple (and family) was able to graciously adjust and move forward in whatever way they could. The celebration was such a success in spite of all the restrictions, it was featured as a note of encouragement on the local news. The Henderson wedding later this fall was moved entirely off site due to the restrictions in our space. Baptisms have similarly required flexibility and creativity. The Harper baptism took place this summer in the river at Ginny Rozier's river house, the Meadors/Schorr baptism took place on Allen Meador's back patio, the Warren baptism was in the Memorial Garden under the tent, and the Weatherbee baptism (newcomers and niece of Betty and Tommy Talbot) was a combination of a tiny group at the font and the rest on zoom. While the Confirmation service scheduled for May had to be canceled, the bishop came in November to do a series of outdoor services in the Memorial

Garden to confirm all those who were available at relatively short notice on the weekend before Thanksgiving. We Confirmed 21 youth and adults, about half of those who were waiting to be Confirmed. The bishop plans to return to us once we are able to have large gatherings again to confirm anyone else who is waiting.

This has been a year of losing some beloved parishioners at a time when we were not able to gather to celebrate their lives in the way we would have liked. Those services were primarily graveside services or held in our Memorial Garden in substantially reduced numbers. It is our hope, when we are back to having full gatherings in the church, to do a special service specifically to recognize and remember all those who died during the pandemic and were not able to have a full service in the church, singing together their favorite hymns, and sharing remembrances from their lives in an expanded bulletin.

In order to keep people safe while on our campus, any gatherings at all have required a great deal of work, on behalf of staff and volunteers, to manage the process of gathering safely and to do contact tracing if the need were to arise. (It did once, but because there were so many other safety measures in place, no one got sick.) There were so many churches in the diocese that chose simply to do everything online during this time. We have tried to take every opportunity possible to meet the needs of the parish. Even during the time when the buildings were entirely shut down we kept all the staff on the pay role with the assistance of the forgivable government loan, the PPP. It was also during this time that Robert had two surgeries, the second being a long anticipated back surgery. He was able to convalesce at a time when we were functioning in an extremely reduced capacity and is now back, fully restored.

While the pandemic has significantly limited pastoral care, I have continued to make hospital visits whenever I have been able to get in, and to visit people in their homes whenever I can to the degree they are comfortable, and observing safety measures, often sitting on a porch outside and wearing a mask to visit safely. My screened porch has often been the location of pastoral counseling, and I have utilized the phone and zoom whenever I can. I look forward to a time when we can have our full pastoral team of lay ministers and clergy functioning in pastoral care to more fully meet the needs of the parish.

We have learned to use technology to more effectively reach those who cannot be physically present with us. During the pandemic this was helpful for everyone with access to a computer. It has given us a tool for offering worship, Bible studies, and meetings to our members without endangering anyone's safety during the pandemic. Those who were already shut in due to their health and lack of mobility have found themselves feeling much more connected to the church than ever before, and those who live far away or travel have been able to "attend" worship at Christ Church regularly. While this is no substitute for in person worship in the church, it has both sustained us during this time and shown us how important it will be to continue to offer this option in the future when we are back to worshipping together in the church. We are in the process of equipping the church with state of the art (but unseen) audio visual equipment and setting up the staff and volunteer team to support that ongoing ministry. This has been a mammoth effort on the part of Phil Groce, the technology Committee headed by Virgil Warren, and Phil's team of young men from the parish who are working to run the wiring. This will mean we can have high quality recordings of our services in the church once we are back to worshipping in our space and for the years to come.

When we initially moved online and were learning to record with our phones with makeshift tripods and often less than perfectly quiet recording studios, Jonathan was teaching himself production so he could piece together the recordings to become the beautifully produced online services many of you have been enjoying during this time. (We had people from other churches who were not making the adjustment as quickly, tuning in to Christ Church services for their worship.) As much as we have learned in this time, preaching to a camera will never be the same as preaching to a live audience so I apologize for any stiffness we might have. Recognizing that the need for an online presence will remain, we have realized we will need to expand and

restructure certain ministries and staff responsibilities to best meet the needs of the parish. We will be restructuring Jonathan's job responsibilities to be the Director of Music and Liturgy as one full time position that includes the production of service bulletins and any other liturgical and planning support for services, continuing to direct and develop the music ministry of the church, and the management of the production process for any online services. We will be hiring a part time Parish Administrator to manage the office and to handle communication with the parish and the various Christ Church ministries (while removing the need for a knowledge of our Episcopal liturgy). This will be a 28 hour/week, Monday-Thursday 9:00-4:00 position. (We will continue to fully utilize the office volunteers once they are able to return to working in the office.) This will facilitate a strong return to our in person parish life focusing that position to allow for more effective communication while maintaining the online aspect that has been developed in this time. The full description of both positions are part of the vestry minutes from this January's meeting which are available on request. Pete Tosh will be managing the process of hiring for the new position.

As soon as the diocesan parameters allowed for any in-person services or gatherings we have stepped into those opportunities. People have been able to sign up to come into the church during organ practice for quiet reflection and prayer. Sunday worship in the Memorial Garden (even in the cold weather) has been an opportunity for those who are looking to gather in person to celebrate a Eucharist on a weekly basis. We have appreciated the beauty of that space more than ever before. When it first became clear that we were going to be using this space for worship, the Lay Weeders worked to transform this garden into an ever more beautiful and cared for space. A donation was also made by a parishioner in memory of his parents to purchase the new cross and develop that corner of the garden more fully. That work will be completed as the weather allows with the addition of another white azalea. We rented a tent to help protect people from inclement weather, added little white lights as Christmas approached, and large outdoor heaters as the weather turned cold. Blair Sumrall has worked over time managing the registration, seating charts, and safety requirements to keep us safe, and many others have participated in the support ministries needed to have both online and in person services.

While some of the Bible studies stopped meeting in March as zoom was either not a viable option or overused by those on it for work all day, the 9:00 Women's Bible Study has remained strong on zoom, even meeting through the summer and adding to our numbers with people from parishes I have served in Connecticut. The expansive opportunities have been a blessing for that group and we will continue to have that available when we move back to meeting in person. The Adult Sunday School has continued to meet online utilizing zoom as well. Our Adult Inquirer's class that started in January with 28 participants had to shift midstream to zoom due to the pandemic. We will wait until we can meet in person before starting another class. In the spring and summer of 2020, the Rev. Mother Lutricia Richardson and I recorded a series of conversations on prayer covering a variety of aspects of prayer. Elizabeth Jones and Virgil Warren were each participants in those conversations on different weeks. These were offered as a weekly online series and remain accessible online. Lutricia was new to the parish before Christmas of 2019, was confirmed in the class this fall, and has become a welcome addition to our team of teachers for adult education as well as a member of our women's Bible study.

Virgil Warren is preparing to train a new team of parishioners to participate in the healing ministry utilizing online resources for the training so they will be ready when we are back to worshipping in the church. Other new developments that are being planned as we gather once again include the development of an "Inreach Committee" to provide support and development of our various ministries to parishioners, the addition of an Evangelism ministry as an element of Outreach, and a Christ Church garden tour this coming spring. More about those in this morning's sermon.

I have been so moved by the faithfulness of our parishioners during this time. In spite of the severe restrictions we have faced you have continued to support the church in various ways and to support one another by reaching out by phone or email, and when possible in person, to stay connected and to be the church in this very difficult time. Now more than ever we have been dependent on the “priesthood of all believers” as the body of Christ has stepped up in new ways to meet the needs of this time. We have had to live with the constant reminder that the church is not the building- as much as we dearly love ours and look forward to the time when we can be back in it together. As beautiful as it is, we have seen that our building does not define us. It is the people of Christ Church that are the church and we have continued to be that even in a pandemic. The loss of opportunity for fellowship and to lift up our voices together in song have made us realize just how much we miss being together. It is my hope that we will come back strong when we are able to gather again safely. Many in the parish are getting the vaccine already so I am hopeful that time will be soon. Thank you to all those who have given so much of their time, talent, and treasure to make us able to continue to be the church in spite of all the shut downs. I would like to especially thank Rebecca Grist who has been our senior warden during this very difficult time, Julie Groce, our junior warden, who has managed extensive work on the property in the past year, Malcolm Burgess who has remained a very calm presence as our treasurer in a stressful time, Katherine Coleman who has demonstrated her financial administration expertise as we have added new challenges such as applying for the PPP loan, and Bubba Edge who has kept us all organized and accountable as parish clerk. A special thank you to Rebecca, Bubba, and Trish Whitley, who have just completed a three year term of faithful service on the vestry and to Burt Wilkerson who stepped in to fill the remaining year of a vestry position. Thank you to the staff for all their hard work in pivoting to find ways to carry out your ministry in these very challenging times.

Blessings to you all as we look ahead with hope to the promise of being together again.

-the Rev. Cynthia Knapp