

Rectors Annual Address
January 31, 2021

What a difference a year makes!

Last year at this time we were celebrating three years of growth.

We were celebrating the calling of a rector and a big service and party.

We were celebrating the consecration of a new bishop and her first visit to St. Philip's.

It's really hard to believe that that was just a year ago isn't it?

It feels like a lifetime ago.

I don't need to tell you how challenging this past year has been in so many ways.

The disruption to all of our lives has been immense.

The loss of life has been tragic.

The anxiety over our own health and that of our loved ones.

The loss of jobs, a sharp recession, and for those who had jobs, the need to reinvent them instantly.

For some, it meant risking infection by continuing to work in person and in public.

For others it meant figuring out how to shift to working virtually, quickly learning and sometimes fumbling with new and unfamiliar technology.

For parents and kids and teachers, the challenges and uncertainty of where and how school would continue.

For those who live alone, especially seniors, coping with isolation and loneliness.

For those who live and work in nursing facilities, the terrible toll of infections and deaths and the constant fear and isolation from family members.

And to add to that, this past year saw a sharp rise in political polarization and animosity culminating in an armed insurrection at the Capitol.

Of course all of these challenges have affected the church deeply.

We are in many ways a microcosm of the society at large.

We are not immune from pandemics, or political polarization, or the economy.

Part of the pain of this year was that just when we needed the church most, a place of peace and stability, we felt cut off from that as well.

I don't know about you, but I have a new and deeper appreciation for things I always took for granted— Singing hymns, hugging at the peace, receiving communion together.

I know its not just me because a couple of times people who came into the church to read for our livestream have found themselves in tears, just being in the sanctuary again.

So because Ive missed these things so much, because I have missed you all so much, I've spent a lot of time reflecting on what makes the church the church.

Because make no mistake, we are still the church.

We may not have been able to come to church, but we have been the church in some remarkable and amazing ways.

Jen Hatchett our outgoing Senior Warden will review some of these later in our meeting

Worshipping in new ways, continually adapting

Faithfulness in prayer — including Saturday centering prayer and daily noonday prayer

Participation in classes from St Philip's and the diocese on Zoom
Sunday School and Youth Group
Vestry meetings, phone calls to parishioners
A huge amount of work on our buildings and grounds
Outreach through giving and working

And your generosity which has continued through this challenging year. I don't want to steal Larry's thunder, but we ended 2020 financially in far far better shape than I think any of us could have imagined. And at the same time we met our fundraising goal for the new roof. That is all thanks to you and your faithfulness and generosity.

Thanks also to our wardens and vestry, and the many many lay leaders who really make St. Philip's shine. I'm sure I will forget people, but here are a few honorable mentions:

- Pat Wagner and the Sunday School
- Kathy Gravino and Jane Brown and the Youth Group
- Elaine Hernandez and the ECW
- Eric Hatchett and Jonathan Lindley who took on both teller duty and recording and livestreaming
- The Covid-19 Task force members for helping us develop a workable plan to get through this year
- The Stewardship and Finance Committee, who ran a successful stewardship campaign and hosted the fun light up the night celebration
- Laura Cumberworth and the Altar Guild who had to deal with a constantly changing worship set-up
- Larry Ciaramitaro our treasurer who you will hear more from later

And thanks to our wonderful staff who have rolled with all of the punches:

- Bonnie Haacke our bookkeeper who came in faithfully to keep the bills paid (even when she probably should have stayed home)
- Brian Vlaming, our sexton, who took the opportunity to do some maintenance and deep cleaning
- Susan Mason our admin who left us this year to take a full-time job at Kroger. We wish her every blessing in her new job.
- Krista Hughes, our new admin who has stepped into the role seamlessly and is doing a great job
- Jim Bain, our director of music, who has come in faithfully to play, to livestream and to record music for our worship.

This new year comes with anxieties of its own. Will the vaccines work? Will we all get them in time? Will we be able to heal the divisions in our country? But this year also comes with hope. Each month I expect things to improve gradually.

I wish I could tell you today when we will be able to return to in-person worship. I know the Bishops of Michigan are using the best available data to assess the risks. We will start I am sure with restricted numbers and then eventually get back to full capacity. I know the ECW is already thinking about a festive celebration when that happens.

And I am excited about the possibilities for St Philips going forward. We have a good and clear mission. At the end of our meeting you will have a chance to talk about your hopes and dreams — the ways you want to live out that mission. Because it comes from you. It is your energy, your vision, your actions that will carry us forward into this new post-pandemic world. Do you have an idea that fits with our mission? Go for it. We need you, your energy, your passion, your ideas, your leadership.

In closing I want to say how grateful I am for the opportunity to be your rector. I value my relationship with each one of you. I love you dearly and just want to remind you that I am here for you. If you are going through any kind of hard time, please call me.