

**St. Peter's Church, Salisbury Parish Annual Meeting**

**RECTOR'S REPORT**

**The Rev. David Michaud**

April 18, 2021

This has been an historic year in the life of St. Peter's, Salisbury Parish. In the past year the pandemic has altered the operations and ministries of St. Peter's in ways no one could have predicted. I am pleased to report that despite the challenges to our life as a parish, we continue to carry out the mission and ministries of St. Peter's, often in altered and creative ways, we continue to have the resources for our operations and I believe we will be in a strong and healthy place to move forward in a post pandemic world.

In the past year there were two motivating factors that your leadership team took into consideration as we managed our affairs during this time of pandemic: 1) the safety of parishioners and staff; and 2) the continuity of parish life. Let me speak to both of these. First, safety: The threat to the lives and health of members of this congregation and the staff that supports them by the coronavirus is real, and St. Peter's worked to mitigate this threat in a number of ways. When the bishop shut churches in the diocese on March 15, 2020 and told staff to work from home I transitioned the parish to on-line worship and on-line meetings, and we moved equipment and office materials to the homes of our staff, at some cost to the parish. Then when the bishop allowed churches to reopen last summer we altered our worship space and set in place protocols that were approved by both the Bishop and the Wicomico County Health Department to allow people to come together to worship in as safe an environment that we could with necessary protections. While many other churches decided to stay closed, thanks to the good work of the property and worship committees, the altar guild, the music ministry, the ushers and your staff, we were able to figure out how to worship in person in safety. In fact, I was made aware over the past year of at least three instances where people came to worship asymptomatic and later tested positive, and yet no one else in the congregation was at risk and considered a contact because of our mask, social distancing and other safety protocols. We will continue to adhere to safety protocols until health authorities in our community deem it safe to go back to our normal worship experience.

The safety of parishioners and staff was also a factor in bringing all meetings on-line, and we ended up with two parish zoom accounts because of all the meetings we were having on line, sometimes simultaneously. We invested not only in zoom equipment and accounts, but we invested over \$21,000 in a new remote control camera and audio system for our livestream worship, allowing those who were not able to come to church to participate in the livestream from the safety of their homes, and to see and hear all that was going on clearly. We are learning on the fly with these new technologies and I thank people for their patience as we incorporated new technology in the life of the parish.

We discovered in looking to make our space safe for in person meetings that the Parish Hall had inadequate ventilation that made it unsafe for people to use. We invested and installed in February an ionizer in the HVAC units that kills coronavirus and other harmful particulates in the air, allowing us to reopen the Parish Hall for use. Other parts of our buildings remain closed until it is safe to relax social distancing and mask requirements to allow many people into smaller spaces.

I could not live with myself if we allowed unsafe conditions to result in someone getting very sick or even dying from COVID-19 and while I have had to have many uncomfortable conversations with

people who question why we are taking some precautions and have listened to complaints about the rules I love you all too much to compromise our safety and hope for your understanding of why we are having to do these things and ask for your continued patience.

The second factor I want to address is that in the past year your leadership team has been firmly committed to continuity of parish life. We are one of the only congregations in the diocese who has celebrated Sunday Eucharist in the church without a break every Sunday, even if it has been just livestreamed at times. My belief is that just because the building is closed does not mean we cannot worship God as a congregation. This idea that we continue to worship and to pursue all our ministries has led us to be creative and intentional in how we operate as a church during these pandemic times. Just because we are not allowed to sing in church does not mean we have no music, and the result has been an incredible and creative music ministry under the direction of Daniel Cherrix. The creation of a virtual choir, a cantor leading music at services, guest musicians, the Hymn of the Day, livestreamed concerts, the continuance of Evensong and the beginning of Sung Compline, and of course the continuance of our hand bell choir are all proof that music and worship continue to be part of parish life.

Under the leadership of Rev. Adele our pastoral care ministries have become more robust and creative, from the establish of Shepherding groups and the retooling of our Eucharistic Visitors ministry to using phone and videos and outdoors to visit people and have our knitting group continue to meet on line. The Comforters Intercessionary Prayer Group continues to meet every Monday on zoom to pray for those in need, and in fact was one of the first parish groups to meet online once the bishop closed the church buildings. Thank you for your loyal ministry.

Our Education Committee has been creative in ensuring that children and youth continue to have Christian formation. The Committee has directed resources to an excellent series of online Sunday school classes and weekly email correspondence and our Youth Group has used zoom and emails to communicate and has found creative ways to meet outdoors and in the church to continue learning and providing outreach ministries to those in need. We were also one of the only churches this year to carry on the tradition of a Children's Christmas pageant which debuted on video the fourth Sunday of Advent.

For adults, our Christian formation learning opportunities have expanded since the pandemic began. We are offering more opportunities that we had before, including bible study, book club, video meditations, Adult Forum, Fall and Lenten studies – all on-line and engaging new people.

Through the creativity and hard work of the Fall Bazaar Committee we went virtual in our fall bazaar and ended up making more than \$5,000 and learned some things that we'll incorporate at the next bazaar.

We also continued many of our Outreach ministries, taking into consideration safety protocols. St. Peter's was a major contributor to the men's emergency homeless shelter, Joseph house feeding program, and continued to help Wi Middle with the donation of backpacks for computers and assuring the staff of our support.

There are so many other things that have happened over the past year that all signal the continuity of parish life. Please read through the reports of our committees in your Annual Meeting packets. We have not shut down, we have not stopped being a parish; in fact we are working harder than ever to continue our parish life during the pandemic.

Because of our commitments to the safety of our parishioners and staff and for continuity of parish life, we continue to have your support both financially and as volunteers whenever you are able. Financially we are in good shape. We were able to secure two ppp loans, one in 2020 and a second one in 2021 which has supplemented the income we are receiving and resulted in no withdrawal of endowment in 2020. Our stewardship campaign saw continuing strong support for pledges in 2021. We also were able to cut back on utilities and repairs, and gave no cost of living or merit salary increases for staff this year. We were able to increase the hours of our music director and now have him covered on church health and dental insurance

The challenges we face post pandemic is to have folks come back to church, to engage more fully in our ministries, to grow our numbers, to minister more effectively to a new online membership and to grow our financial support in 2022 when things like PPP loans won't be available. We also need to get back on track with our plans to grow our small endowment to over a million dollars, and to emphasize planned giving.

But the most important question we need to wrestle with and for which I don't have the answer, is what kind of church do we want to be in the post pandemic world, given what we have experienced in this year. For our one Sunday service over the past year we are seeing attendance both in-person and online that is triple or more what our entire morning of church service attendance used to be. We are reaching and ministering to more people through technology and creativity, we have developed more tools and techniques during the pandemic and these can all continue to be used. We can't go back to exactly where we were when the pandemic began. We will need to move forward into a new reality. That is going to take dialogue and discussion, that is going to take a vision by the people of this parish and your vestry. This needs to happen in the next few months, and it will begin shortly under new business when we will ask you some questions and provide some time for conversation and continue at the Vestry retreat in two weeks. Now is the time to begin planning for our future.

This concludes my report. In closing I want to thank you personally for your support of me as your Rector and for your love of Jesus Christ and his church. It has been quite a year. I look forward to working with you on our future here at St. Peter's Church.