

2022 State of the Parish Report St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

As I prepared to offer this, my 16th State of the Parish Report, I was tempted to say that this will be a report unlike any that I have given. Two and a half years of pandemic, streaming recorded services on Facebook and zoom, livestreaming on YouTube; online gatherings, celebrations and even funerals... These past few years have been a thing all to themselves. And yet, the core of the message that I am sharing today is much the same as the message it has been my privilege to share with you these past many years.

St. Andrew's is strong and growing! We are smaller than we were when we met for our Annual Meeting in 2019 but, just two Sundays ago, on All Saints Sunday, we had the highest Sunday morning attendance, not counting Easter Sunday, that we have had since Christmas Eve in 2019! We launched a retooled, in person, Church School with 5 kids in the K – 2nd Grade class and 7 kids in the 3rd through 5th grade class. This afternoon members of the Youth Group will gather in the Parish Hall to bake cookies, and next Sunday evening, we will gather for pizza, fun, games, and fellowship, with a little learning thrown in for good measure!

We have folks meeting in person during the week. We are gathering as the St. Andrew's Benedictine Cell Group, gathering for Episcopal 101; and we are gathering to discuss the creative process behind the Regent Mass the service music, written by our Music Director, Ken Stancer, that we are singing today. The Outreach Group has gathered folks in the Parish Hall to discuss the impact of systemic racism in the housing and mortgage industries, leading us to a new way of thinking about our own wealth and about the generational wealth gap those policies have created between the Black and white communities here in Madison. And I have to tell you, the first time I sat in the Parish Hall with members of this community, in person again, it almost brought tears to my eyes.

St. Andrew's has, through the monthly InGatherings and the Clergy Discretionary Fund, given over \$41,000 dollars to ministries, programs, families and individuals here in Madison. That amount is equal to 9% of our annual operating expenses!

We host AA Groups, sponsor a Cub Scout Pack, offer our facilities for music recitals and concerts; and this year, we are sharing the Newell House with West High School's Blue Lion Program, a credit recovery program for girls who are in danger of not graduating. Please note that we are "sharing" the space. We are offering the space as a gift to the community, to West High School, and to the young women who need an alternative learning program so that they can finish their high school education. When we remodeled and renovated our building, we said that we wanted our space to be a resource for the community. We are living into that vision! Walk through those red doors on a Sunday morning and you can feel the Holy Spirit moving in this place! That sweet, sweet spirit in this place... that hasn't changed. And God willing, it never will! But these past two and half years... They have changed us. Walk through those red doors on a Sunday morning and you can't miss the fact that there are fewer of us here on Sunday mornings.

- In 2019, our Average Sunday Attendance or ASA, was 137
- In 2020, from January 1st through March 19th of 2020, before we suspended in person worship, our ASA was 123
- In 2021 we began to gather in person, here in the building in June, and our ASA for the remainder of that year was 73

In the summer months we typically experience low attendance. Those lower number are balanced by higher attendance during the program year. I know that this isn't comparing apples to apples, but if we look at the ASA for September and October of this year, we see ASA of 80 and 88 respectively. Then on November 6th, All Saints Sunday, we saw 142 people in the pews.

I know that statistics can be used and manipulated to slant the interpretation, and I will admit that I am doing that by comparing full ASA for full years to our ASA for single months here in the fall of 2022, but bear me out for a moment. The ASA we reported for 2020 and 2021 were for partial years. They only reflected the part of the year when we were able to gather in person. While we have been gathering in person since June of 2021, it wasn't until this fall that we changed our policy, saying that masks are welcome but not mandatory at St. Andrew's. We have been preparing for in person church school and, this fall, we began offering in person fellowship and formation offerings. This fall feels like a relaunch, a new start, and measuring our ASA as we begin anew, feels like a way to measure the vitality of our community in this exceptional season and time. From that perspective, an ASA of 80, then 88, with an All Saints Sunday attendance of 142, feels like progress! It feels like momentum has shifted back to our side of the field. Combine that with that ever-blowing wind, the Holy Spirit that is moving in this place, and we have a lot for which to be grateful and excited!

Of course, as is always the case in a boat that is being driven by the wind of the Holy Spirit, there is much that we don't yet know...

With our ASA down, we have to wonder where people are. Have some members of our community drifted away over these past two and a half years, or are we all still here, but coming less frequently? Despite my efforts to keep track of who is here from week to week, I have to admit that I just can't tell. I know we have lost some people, I am just not sure how many.

At the same time, we have new people walking through our doors every week, and those folks seem more ready to engage than new folks in past years. I think that, after these past few years, there is a real spiritual hunger driving people to look for meaningful engagement, community, and a way to make sense of the world around us. I also think that our livestream allows people to pre vet us in ways that were not possible before. Folks who are looking for a church community can log in on Sunday morning and experience the liturgy, hear the music and the preaching, and get a good sense of who we are and how we experience one another and God. Those of us who have been "churchy" types, can easily forget or underestimate how hard it is to walk through the doors of a church for the first time. I think that our livestream lowers the barriers that make that first trip through those red doors so hard. All of that raises a question that I don't think we can answer yet... Who are we?

We could ask that same question every year. Our history tells us that, in this college town, where the state government and the university are major employers, we turn over about 50 people a year. Fifty people, graduate, take new jobs, feel called to other communities, and die. And each year, for the whole time I have been here, fifty people arrive, keeping our membership and attendance pretty stable. This year is likely to be different, just as the past two and a half years have been different. I don't think we can count on that balanced exchange of folks out and folks in. There are new factors in play, new drivers in the equation, and the stasis that we have experienced may be a thing of the past. That means we need to be asking questions with a renewed level of attention and intention.

Who are we? Who is still here? Who are the newer members of the community? What do we, those of us who have been here for a while, and those of us who have recently arrived, need and want from the community at 1833 Regent Street? What questions are we asking of God in or new context, in a community, city, nation, and world that has been, and continues to be changed at a stunning, and sometimes overwhelming pace? Most importantly of all... What is God calling us to do, to be, in this place, at this time, for the people within the many concentric circles of community to which God has bound us?

What is God calling us to do, to be? As we begin, as a community, to discern God's call to us, as we engage the new Mission Statement that this community crafted to describe itself, as we look to meet the needs of our community, and the community around us, we will need to take stock of the resources we have available, both financial and human, to support that work.

It is intriguing to me that our pledged revenue hasn't taken as big a hit as our ASA. I wonder if and why people who are no longer active are still making pledge payments to St. Andrew's. I think it is possible that some of those people might, given the inflationary pressure we are all experiencing, decide that this is the year that they stop making a pledge out of a sense of duty or nostalgia. And I have to say, I don't believe that St. Andrew's has seen the full financial impact of the pandemic. Needless to say, all of this will have an impact on the work we undertake in the coming year. The resources will, of necessity, determine how much we do. Who is here, the make-up, the demographics and needs of the people, will need to determine what we do.

All of that being said, I think that we are going to learn a lot from this year's stewardship campaign. In addition to gathering and assessing the resources we will have to engage in ministry for the coming year, we will have the opportunity to do a little data mining, to see who is, in fact, still here and who we have lost. As we ask that question, there is one loss that we can name.

Last year, when Mother Melesa accepted the call to become the Rector of St. Thomas of Canterbury in Greendale, we decided not to call another full-time priest. That seemed like the right decision then, and that decision is borne out today. We are projected to end this year with a surplus that is only about half of a second full time priest's compensation. A second full time priest on our staff would have meant a deficit of around \$40,000. It was the right decision.

Over the past seven or eight years, we have prioritized clergy staff. We have chosen to emphasize the pastoral relationships, diversity of preaching and voice, and the ability to have

both male and female clergy, young, and not so young, in our pulpit and at the altar. That model has served us well.

Because we have prioritized clergy staff, the past two Associates and I have carried a lot of administrative tasks that do not require a seminary education or a collar. Now that we are a one clergy parish, I simply do not have time to do the things that require that education and collar, and the administrative tasks that our former associates and I have shared.

Fortunately, there are now funds available to pay an administrator with computer skills that surpass my own, who can, with a few more hours, accomplish many of the administrative tasks that have fallen to me since Mother Melesa left. Dylan Thomas has been a fabulous addition to the staff!

What I want to be sure we acknowledge here is the loss of people hours devoted to pastoral care, Christian formation, liturgy, preaching, and spiritual direction. Our associates and I were able, even while we were sharing some administrative tasks, to do the work of 1.75 full time clergy. How will we cover that .75 of a clergy FTE? Are there people in our midst who can step into those roles that are not being covered now? Are there other ways to do the things that we have been able to do with more staff on board? Are there things that we will have to let go as we move forward? That .75 is an issue we will need to continue to address as we discern God's call, our needs and the needs of the community; and as we learn how to be church in our new reality.

Change is hard. We will, quite appropriately, grieve what was. We will, inevitably, experience some doubt and resistance to this new reality. We don't yet know who or what we are, what we will become, what we are now being called to do; but the change that has come upon us is inexorable. It is the result of forces that are beyond our control. The question that confronts us, the challenge we face... How will we respond to our new context, our new reality? How will we respond to this moment, in this place, at this time?

It's too soon to suggest the technical fixes, the changes in the way that we do things that will keep us whole, the Body of Christ, continuing Christ's work here on the near West Side of Madison. We don't have enough data to name the new programs, offerings, teachings, and practices we will need in the days and months to come. What is clear is that we need to change the ways that we listen, process, discern and respond to the data points we have. We aren't ready for a technical solution, but we surely need an adaptive response to what is happening around us and within our walls.

We are in liminal space, liminal time. The roadmaps we used to navigate the world have either disappeared or lost their meaning. The benchmarks and landmarks, we used to help us know where we are, have been moved or replaced with unfamiliar standards. We are no longer what we are, and we are not yet what we are to become. That is the definition of liminal space, liminal time. A time of transition, where the old is no longer available, useful, or relevant; and the new is not yet clear, understood, or even available. We are in that space, along with the parishes of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee, the State of Wisconsin and beyond. We are in that space with Churches across denominations, and across the world. And like all of those other

communities, large and small, local and far away, we need to be patient, to pay attention to what we see, hear, and feel; and to have faith in the God who has, and will, show us the way to the new creation that God is bringing to fruition in our midst.

The adaptive response that is required of us in this liminal time: to remain faithful, trusting in God's providence; to trust the journey and not rush prematurely to a technical solution that might ease our discomfort in the present while causing more problems as the future continues to unfold; to be intentionally attentive to the changes, both subtle and obvious, in ourselves, in the people in our midst, and in our context, the world around us, looking the new signposts that God will be placing in our paths; and to hold one another up as we travel this road together, knowing that our strength lies in community, communion with one another.

Technical fixes, specific changes we need to make, will present themselves along the way, and we will need to consider them carefully, discerning their utility and fit for our community; but the most important response we can make to the moment in which we find ourselves, this liminal space and time, is to be open, willing to change the way we listen, see, discern, and love; all in service to God's call to us, and God's dream and vision for all of creation. And if all of that sounds more than a little daunting right now, let me remind you that momentum has shifted back to our side of the field. Combine that momentum with that ever-blowing wind, the Holy Spirit that is moving in this place, and we have a lot for which to be grateful and excited, and we can rest in the assurance that we do not travel this path alone!

May the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, God of God's Son Jesus Christ. And the blessing of God almighty; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with us now and always!

Peace,
Andy+