

STATE OF THE PARISH

Dear people of St. Andrew's, what a year it has been.

What we thought would be weeks has turned into months and will likely turn into a year, as we walk through this pandemic together. We have all been stretched thin as we learn new ways of doing even the most routine tasks and carry the weight of uncertainty and grief without a clear end in sight. And still in the midst of the stretching and breaking, this community has found countless ways to remain knit together in this time. In a time where so many are hurting and experiencing loss and injustice, this community has sought to speak and enact the good news of the gospel we have been given.

As we look over this past year and set our eyes on the next, we do not want to shy away from naming the challenges of this moment while still holding onto the many signs of life and hope within and beyond St. Andrew's. While this past year has taken a drastically different shape than any of us could have expected, there is still much to celebrate.

A New Way of Being Church

So much has changed, and yet some things remain the same. People are still getting married, people we love pass into the nearer presence of God, and members of our community suffer grief, incertantiny, pain and loss. In the midst of these ongoing needs we have learned to hold small, intimate gatherings in the Prayer Garden on the Roby Road side of the church to celebrate weddings and mark the passing of loved ones. We have the power of connection that is possible through Zoom, phone calls, and hand written notes. We have come together as a community to care for one another celebrating our joys and naming our sorrows.

As we moved through the summer months gathering for Sunday Morning Prayer via Zoom, we realized that streaming our services is something that we should have begun a long time ago. We have members of our parish who wisely avoid the snow and ice each winter. We have members of our community who, for a variety of reasons, have not been able to attend our Sunday services for quite some time. We know that families sometimes get up and dressed on Sunday morning, with every intention of coming to church, only to have one of the kids get sick on the way out the door.

When we regather for public worship it will not happen in one glorious moment when we all return at once. It will be a slow trickle as the limits on gathering are eased, little by little. Many of us who are at high risk, have been warned by our doctors to stay away from public gatherings until there is a safe and effective vaccine. We have heard from people in all of these circumstances that they hope St. Andrew's will continue to live stream even beyond the life of this pandemic. Live streaming our services during the pandemic has been an adaptation to a specific moment that will serve us well into the future. That is why the Vestry voted to commit significant resources to the purchase of the equipment that is now allowing us to live stream from the church. Even better news is that St. Andrew's applied for, and received, a grant from the Diocese of Milwaukee, significantly offsetting the cost of that investment, such that the equipment itself is paid for and our only expense is the upgraded internet service!

Adaptation has been a key concept this year. The St. Andrew's staff has had to rethink the ways in which we exercise our vocations, pursue our mission, and serve the community together. We collaboratively reworked the position descriptions of each staff member to reflect the ways in which we are currently working and to explore new goals and possibilities in this season. We all know we may be reworking these job descriptions again in the spring as the context in which we work continues to change, but we are all committed to working together as a team to serve and nurture our community. Please take the time to read the reports from Ruth Kearley, our Children's Ministries Coordinator, and from Ken Stancer, our Music Director, that reflect the ways in which they have adapted their ministry. They are doing creative and important work!

The staff at St. Andrew's aren't the only ones who are learning new ways of being church. This past month, members of the four of the Madison Episcopal Churches gathered around St. Andrew's parishioner, Heidi Ropa, as she organized a discussion of the powerful documentary, *13th*, which provides an in-depth look at the prison system in the United States and how it is connected to racial inequality. This initiative and other conversations have generated significant interest in discerning St. Andrew's role in promoting racial justice here in Madison. Another St. Andrew's parishioner, Ryan Pierce, is facilitating a Contemplative Prayer Group on Monday nights. They meet to pray and to discuss Martin Laird's book, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*.

It is clear that we are all adapting to life online. The Men's Group is engaging in an online book study and are already picking their next book. Members of the Choir are gathering weekly for fellowship and conversation. The Tuesday Morning Women's Bible Study was meeting via zoom last spring and will continue using that medium this fall. Over 30 people participated in our summer study of Philippians! This fall we have people signed up for Grief and Grace small groups, and St. Andrew's has purchased a Zoom Account for members of the community's use in hosting online gatherings

Our contact with one another isn't just virtual! We often hear stories about people who have taken it upon themselves to write cards to other members of this community. The Casserole Brigade is still delivering meals, and we have had parishioners step up to rake each other's leaves when life has become overwhelming.

Newcomers to St. Andrew's often remark on the quality and depth of our community, "I could tell as soon as I walked in the door that people here care about one another." Not even the pandemic can change that. We continue to adapt, to grow, to learn; and most importantly, to be the Body of Christ.

NAMING THE CHALLENGES

This season has presented us with many challenges; many of which have been already felt and others that will impact us moving forward. In September Resurrection Presbyterian Church ended their contract with St. Andrew's as a result of our reopening guidelines from our Diocese that would prevent them from regathering in our building at this time. Our partnership with

Resurrection Presbyterian has enriched our community over the past three years, and we grieve that they can no longer worship in our space. In addition to the loss of an ecumenical partner, their departure means we will lose the \$16,690 in rental income for 2021, and fall short of \$7,390 that was budgeted for 2020.

A second financial challenge comes in the form of congregational turn over. Historically St. Andrew's experiences a significant turnover of parishioners as a result of the transient culture of a university town. In a standard year, we would also see a similar number of individuals join St. Andrew's as new members. With Sunday worship not occurring in our building, we have not seen the same number of new individuals come to St. Andrew's as we have in the past. This loss of foot traffic signifies a decline in membership, which can lead to financial decline. As we look to 2021, it will be important for us to determine what it looks like to reach out to our broader community and incorporate newcomers into the life of the church.

LOOKING AHEAD

While we begin to reimagine how we reach beyond the new virtual walls of St. Andrew's, we also want to discern how we as a gathered people will continue to be gathered together and sustained in the midst of uncertainty, loss and change. At the Annual Meeting, we will be sharing a parish-wide survey that will not center around re-opening, but rather what our common and shared life might look like in the interim. As this pandemic has gone on much longer than anticipated, we want to take a pulse of the parish to help shape how we operate moving forward. This survey will be emailed to the full parish eNews list after the Annual Meeting.

In the early months of the pandemic we heard from many who indicated that they were going to "opt out" for the time being until we are able to re-gather in person. Friends, if you find yourself with that thought, we strongly encourage you to reconsider and explore ways to connect with your parish community. While it has taken a radically new form, there have been so many life-giving expressions of community and grace in this season. Please do plan to join us in this new space.

WITH GRATITUDE

There have been so many of you who have been a part in making this season a place of grace and community, and we would like to say thank you to some individuals who have guided us in remarkable ways.

Thank you to the members of the St. Andrew's Reopening Task Force, who spent numerous hours creating a reopening plan for St. Andrew's that was adopted by the Vestry. Task Force members include: Jeff Bowen, Carolyn Chadderdon, Mary Hastings, Janet Hyde, and Sara Seigmann.

Thank you to all members of the St. Andrew's Vestry who have wrestled with difficult questions and provided leadership for our parish in this challenging moment. Vestry members and officers include: Sara Siegmann, Doug Rahn, Mark Koch, Becky Otte-Ford, D'Arcy Becker, Ben

Blagogee, Jeff Bowen, Larry Bechler, Manjula Hettiarachchi, Christie McConnell, Daniel Cross, Erin Gasser, Helyn Luisi-Mills, and Judy Mills.

We also want to extend our thanks to all those who have agreed to stand for election at this year's Annual Meeting. It is always a gift when people are willing to offer their gifts and their time by serving the community in these very intentional ways. That gift feels even more profound in this time of uncertainty, change, and ongoing adaptation.

As you recall, St. Andrew's was successful in securing funds from the federal Payroll Protection Program totalling \$49,000. Our success in getting these funds would not have been possible without the quick response and expertise of Doug Rahn and Mark Koch. Doug has continued to keep a close eye on the loan status, ensuring that St. Andrew's will be able to achieve loan forgiveness in the months ahead. Thank you Doug and Mark!

We also want to extend a double helping of gratitude to Doug Rahn as this year marks his final as Junior Warden. Doug has provided exceptional care for our facility over the past three years, and has given so much of his strengths and experience to this role. Thank you, Doug!

We cannot express enough gratitude for our Senior Warden, Sara Seigmann, at this moment. Her wisdom, courage and leadership have been a gift and guide in a strange and challenging season.

We also want to say thank you to the St. Andrew's staff - Ken, Ruth and Dorie - who have adapted their work to a new landscape and worked to gain many new skills along the way.

Finally, we want to thank all of you, the people of St. Andrew's, for all of the ways in which you have adapted to our new context and circumstances; for the ways in which you have held one another up; and for the ways in which you have held us in your hearts and prayers. These have been difficult times, filled with new challenges, new tasks, and new learnings. It is the community gathered, in whatever form that may be, that offers the rewards and gifts that make this work and this ministry such a blessing to us and to all who encounter us.

As we look to the future, let us be quick to remember that we do so with hope. As Christ-followers hope is a central part of our identity as we can be confident of God's faithfulness. It is this hope that gives us the strength to face our challenges with courage and recognize the gifts of grace scattered along the path.

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