

Annual Parish Meeting January 31, 2021 via Zoom

Father Hunter welcomed everyone who was joining the meeting from their homes. He indicated that 41 people or households had joined, and 10% of the congregation was needed for a quorum. He therefore declared a quorum and opened the meeting with prayer. He also gave Zoom instructions for the meeting.

Father Hunter then shared some of the accomplishments and changes of the turbulent past year, as well as hopes and plans for the future. (See Rector's Report, attached.)

Elections

Father Hunter introduced Mary O'Grady as the new Senior Warden. He then asked B.J. Reed to give a report of the Nominating Committee.

B.J. explained that the Nominating Committee was composed of the three Vestry members whose terms will expire at this meeting: Susan Burger, Nancy Keith, and B.J. Reed.

Amy Douglass was nominated as Junior Warden. There were no nominations from the floor. Using the polling option on Zoom, Amy was elected.

There are currently two one-year openings on the Vestry. Dave Bauer and Al Morello were nominated for these two positions. There were no nominations from the floor, and both were elected.

There are three three-year openings on the Vestry. Alex Davis, Diane Spillum, and Pam Waterman were nominated. There were no nominations from the floor, and all three were elected.

There are five positions open for Delegates to Diocesan Convention. The following were nominated: Valri Bauer, Stanlie James, Linda Spencer-Walters, Cassandra Swick, and Carmen Valenzuela. There were no nominations from the floor, and all five were elected.

Treasurer's Report

Ann Neal briefly went over the 2021 Mission Plan, projecting gross income of \$535,000. Pledge income is down a little from 2020, and facility income is down since the French American School has left. We once again have a very lean budget, actually a negative one. We have obtained a new, more favorable mortgage. With the return of the bonds, Epiphany is holding \$70,000. The new mortgage will save us \$40,000 in 2021 and \$50,000 per year hereafter. A letter will be going to all parishioners about the closing of the bonds. Those who will be receiving money from this will be asked to make a donation to the Parish *if they are able*. Questions and discussion followed. Ann Tebo moved approval of the Mission Plan as proposed. B.J. Reed seconded the motion, which carried.

Fr. Hunter then asked everyone to turn to "Clergy Compensation" on the final page of the Treasurer's Report. He is our only paid clergyman (Pastor Carmen is in a different category). The total for his

compensation, pension, healthcare insurance, continuing education, and professional/travel expenses is \$112,671.08. He pointed out how fortunate we are to have two retired priests assisting at no cost to us.

Awards/Recognition

Fr. Hunter thanked the three outgoing members of the Vestry: Susan Burger, Nancy Keith, and B.J. Reed, as well as outgoing Senior Warden Peter Crane and Junior Warden Steve Veitch. They were each given a lovely Waterford cross. The congregation have them “jazz hands” on Zoom. He then thanked those who gave special efforts helping us through the year of the pandemic: Dave Bauer, Al Morello, Jerry Adwell, Ann Neal, Jack Harthun, and Tamara Noel. Each was given a cross similar to the one in the courtyard, as well as “jazz hands” from the congregation.

Other Business

Fr. Hunter asked if there was any other business. Michelle Davis thanked Fr. Hunter for all of his leadership and hard work, getting us through this challenging year. Patrick Leach then added his thanks.

Closing Comments and Prayer

Fr. Hunter asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Patrick Leach moved, seconded by Dave Bauer that the meeting be adjourned, which passed.

Fr. Hunter asked Deacon Martha to give the dismissal.

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Ford

Parish Annual Meeting
January 31, 2021
Rector's Report
Church of the Epiphany-Tempe

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" - Mark 4:35-41 NRSV

Perhaps it feels a bit simplistic to use this story as the focal story for my report this year during our annual meeting, but the year that is behind us has been one in which we have found ourselves in the midst of a storm. As we began 2020, we had visions of a year in which our practices as a parish community would, for the most part, continue in the way that is trustworthy and familiar and regular. It did not take us long to see that this would be a year in which we did not have the choice of thinking about change that was needed because change was forced upon our parish as COVID-19 spread throughout the United States. As the pandemic raged in our state and in our nation, our parish showed up as a leader in advocating for the most vulnerable in our midst - including those in congregant living facilities like elder care facilities and prisons. Through the involvement of Deacon Martha Seaman, lay leaders, and myself, we continued to press the importance of taking note of our vulnerable populations as our duty to care for our neighbors. We hosted conversations with Governor Doug Ducey and his administration to advocate for the incarcerated in our state who were expressing fear of their prison sentence turning into a death sentence by virus.

In our parish life, the councils of our parish rallied to meet the needs of our parish in real ways and provide for ways for our parish to remain connected one to another through different programs and offerings to our parish community. As soon as the pandemic began, the Serve Council took on the work of meeting weekly to assess the ways that they might be able to respond to the needs of others in our community. Through that, they gave support to Tempe Community Action Agency and Matthew's Crossing Food Bank as two agencies providing for immediate relief to families and neighbors. The Connect Council worked to create a tele-care ministry in which parishioners called other parishioners to see how they were doing, to see if there were needs in the parish that needed a little help, and to pray with others. The Invite Council took on the work of establishing how we could worship together in a new format as we waited for the day in which we could return to some form of in-person worship. The Grow Council shifted all of its offerings to an online format so that our parishioners could continue to learn and grow into the fullness of the stature of Christ. And this was all in the midst of the first storm that we encountered.

A few short months after our parish went to an online only format of worship for the spring and summer months, we all witnessed the horror of the killing of another black man at the hands of the

police in his community. The storm of COVID-19 combined with the storm of anger and rage at the continued threat to people of color. We witnessed the anger manifest in protests and calls for significant change in the ways that our communities operate and create equal opportunity for all of our neighbors.

Out of this second storm, our parish established the Courageous Ground Task Force to ask how our parish could, in a more intentional way, do the work of becoming beloved community and of taking note of the places that God is calling us to do justice and to love mercy in our local community. The Courageous Ground Task Force engaged the question of racial injustice over the summer months as they discerned how to invite the wider parish into the work of racial justice and reconciliation. From that discernment, they offered an Advent formation program called *Becoming Beloved Community* in which our parishioners hosted conversations about the ways that our parish might be able to begin to engage those questions as one way in which we show up as ministers of justice and peace in our community, in our state, and in the world.

Through all of this, Jesus has been present with us as our boat sailed through the stormy waters of 2020. In all of it, Christ has been faithful to us as we have navigated the twists and turns of a double storm for the majority of the year, and through it all, Christ has been in the back of the boat.

It is the faithfulness of Christ that we should turn toward as we continue to navigate the turbulent waters of these storms. The faithfulness of Christ calls us to look forward to the day that the clouds begin to dissipate as the sun breaks through the storm clouds and points us towards the future. It is a future that remains undefined and uncertain, but it is not a future in which we are incapable of continuing in the mission of God gifted to us in and through Christ. In fact, it is a future that we have the ability, in part, to determine for ourselves and to achieve with the help of God.

This year, 2021, marks the 59th year of Church of the Epiphany-Tempe. We have 59 years of history of engaging in the life of our community and of walking alongside our neighbors. We have 59 years of striving to be faithful disciples here in this place, in this corner of God's hundred-acre wood, and the question before us this year and in the years that will follow is, "How is God calling Church of the Epiphany to show up for God, for each other, and for our neighbors in the next 60 years?" This is a big question that will require careful discernment, a clear vision, and a passion for sharing the love of God in our own community.

To that end, I am inviting the establishment of a creative task force to help us imagine a celebration of 60 years of Church of the Epiphany beginning on the Feast of the Epiphany 2022. I am inviting any who are interested - from those who have worshipped at Epiphany for decades to those who have joined our parish community much more recently - to serve on this task force. If you are interested in serving on the task force, I ask that you let me know by sending me an email or by calling the church office to voice your interest in serving in that capacity.

Let us begin to imagine the future that God is calling us into this year. What is a future in which our parish begins to answer the problem of our debt by actively addressing it through an iteration of capital campaigns that pays down our debt principal on an escalated timeline? How might we be able to enable and empower our parish to be more adventurous in our ministries because we have committed

ourselves to eliminating our existing debt in 10 years' time? In that future, we will have run multiple capital campaigns ranging in value from \$500,000 to \$750,000 every 4-5 years. In that future, we will have given away in excess of \$200,000 in capital funds to care for the vulnerable in our midst. In that future, we have taken on finding a way to move forward as a parish and to finally be free of the anchor of our building debt so that our ship is able to sail into the clam waters of faithfulness that Jesus gifts to us.

In concert with the 60th Anniversary Task Force, I am inviting the creation of a task force for the creative re-imagining of the use of our educational building. For many years, we have benefitted from the income produced by leasing that building to a charter school. Now, we have the opportunity to ask the bigger question, "How is God inviting us to use our buildings and grounds for the building up of God's kingdom while also providing our parish with needed income?" In that future, we might see an opportunity for establishing a coworking space that is defined by the use of the Daily Office and a pattern of prayer and work.

In that future, we might see an opportunity for creating a center for mercy and justice that hosts local nonprofits working for the good in our community. In that future, we might envision a community center that focuses on providing for the needs of our neighborhood as we engage with our neighbors more intentionally and more collaboratively. In that future, we begin by listening to the Holy and hearing how God is inviting us to put our buildings and grounds to use for the building up of God's kingdom.

Today, we find ourselves in the midst of a series of storms as we struggle against the winds and fear that our boat will be swamped by the ferocious waves pounding against the walls of the boat. Even in the space of the stormy seas, Jesus is with us. In the year that has passed, we have been reminded that life is not easy and that we will encounter the difficulties of life. We have encountered that truth more forcefully this year than in many a year, and we have been reminded that we too are part of this created order that is tragic and fallen and in need of God's grace. The storms of the world, however, will not overtake the love of God made known in Christ Jesus, and we are invited to remember that Christ is with us in the back of the boat. We are invited to remember that Christ will continue to be faithful to us and will continue to invite us to be a creative and imaginative community of faithfulness in this corner of Tempe, Arizona.

God is calling us forward through the light of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have an opportunity to create and imagine the future our parish wishes to inhabit. We will begin that process at the invitation of our Vestry to participate in a strategic visioning process beginning on February 20, 2021. In the results of our congregational vitality assessment, we learned that our parish is the mid-range of parishes. We learned that there is work to be done on creating a clear vision for who we are as a parish, and we learned that there is work that we need to do in order to continue growing into a vital and sustainable parish community for the next 60 years.

Through a series of Zoom meetings, our vestry is asking us to consider how we will show up for God, for each other, and for our neighbors. Our vestry is inviting us to remember that Jesus is in the back of the boat, and we need not be afraid of the storms. Our vestry is inviting our whole parish to begin the imaginative work of being a missional outpost of God's kingdom and to bring the love and grace of God

into our community in the ways that we begin to live into the vision of our future that we will create for ourselves. For that to be successful, we need each and every parishioner to join us in our listening sessions to help us listen to the call of the Holy Spirit as we discern our way forward as a parish. Join us on February 27, March 13, and March 27 as we seek to listen to God's call on our parish. Let us begin to name the future we wish to inhabit as a parish, and let us take up the work of building up God's kingdom in spite of the storms raging around us.

After all, Jesus is in the boat, and we need not be afraid.