

## State of the Parish Address

*Prepared by the Rev. Dominique Peridans, Rector  
and delivered on September 13, 2020*

Thank you to our Senior Warden, John, for your words.

John succinctly and richly communicated the essence of what I would like to say to you: *God is faithful*. I join the chorus that can be both reassuring and tiresome in saying that “these months have been hard”. And, we do not navigate the land of uncertainty very well. Yet, as Saint Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians (1:9), **“God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Even better, in his second letter to Timothy (2:13), Saint Paul tells us regarding this Christ in whose fellowship we stand, that **“if we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”**

This means that, during these months, as many times as we may have dropped the ball, yielded to discouragement, slumped into indifference and isolated ourselves, become angry and mean, not prayed, the Lord has been present and at work. You recall the popular allegorical Christian poem, “Footprints in the Sand”, origin unknown. In it, a person is walking along the shore with the Lord and scenes from her life flash across the sky. She notices that, at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints. She asks the Lord why He would leave her. And, the Lord whispered, “My precious child, I love you and will never leave you. Never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.” The Lord carries us, promises to be with us **“until the end of the age”** (Matthew 28:20).

Let me recall a few highlights of the past year. We have so many reasons to rejoice. Do we have challenges? Certainly. Yet... While still seeking to learn the lessons offered to us, let us be encouraged by the faithfulness of the Lord. It helps us to know that the fruits of such experiences are within us, waiting to be harvested.

Prior to last year’s Annual Meeting, the Vestry undertook, a six-month visioning process facilitated by Richie and Rachel Musser of Kirby-Smith

Associates. The results of this process produced the following three envisioned objectives:

**1. Strengthen Attendance and Involvement**

Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them, as well as current parishioners, into the life of the church, who (1) regularly attend services, (2) meaningfully engage in the life of the church, and (3) have a deeper relationship with Christ.

**2. Improve Visibility and Communication**

Transition the parish offices and ministries from the Parish House to the church building in order to ‘keep the doors of the church open’ throughout the entire week. Continue to develop strategies to become more visible to the surrounding community through local, collaborative ministries and engaging, consistent communication.

**3. Become Financially Sustainable**

Reorganize the current layout of the church building in order to maximize the space for the parish offices, ministries, and community partnerships and events. Continue to develop the spiritual generosity of parishioners.

At the 2019 Annual Meeting, building upon the Visioning Process, we launched a Feasibility Study, again with Kirby-Smith Associates—in parallel to which was conducted a Ministry Audit. Every parishioner was provided a survey and, those who wanted, had the opportunity to schedule an in-person meeting with a member of the Kirby-Smith team. These candid conversations allowed members of our parish to share what is in his/her heart and on his/her mind regarding our church. Our parish response rate was greater than the average church, with 57 households responding to the Feasibility Study survey and 55 interviews. 95% of respondents support the vision—and hold a very good to superior overall view of ASA.

We then began a Strategic Planning Process, the purpose of which is to establish a concrete five-year plan for the life of our parish, which will enable us to achieve the vision, articulated in the three aforementioned objectives. We hired Patrick Ball of CTY Consulting Group, based in East Berlin—Pennsylvania!—who has worked with many churches. A committee was formed, comprised of the following parishioners: Rex Tomb, Deacon Mary, Dan Tarapacki, Julia Manchester, Tony Nester, Colin Downes, Ayla

Ibarra, Mike Marin, Barry Walker, Hamilton Cook, Susan Hawfield and Susan Wiggins (who, with her husband, Paul, returned to Toronto in June). The process began with its first meeting in the late Fall. It was then interrupted by events in the life of the parish, not least of which was the advent of COVID-19. We are looking forward to resuming this important work as restrictions are eased and which will include a parish-wide conversation. Stay tuned!

In October, we welcomed Mother Sarah, who helped launch the ASA School of Theology & Prayer. Generously giving of her time and expertise, she volunteers as an Assisting Priest and we consider her our Theologian-in-Residence. Her work has wonderfully enriched adult formation in our parish. I am most grateful for the rich fare she has provided and look forward to future offerings, in particular in the Advent season.

Our November Stewardship Campaign brought to the fore twelve new pledging households. Alleluia!

### **A look at our ministries...**

46% of respondents marked on the Kirby Smith Associates survey that they are currently involved or very involved at the parish—which means that 54% are not involved...

### **Outreach:**

“Internal”: There have been various parish activities that continue to build fellowship within our community: Parish Picnic; Mardi Gras; and Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. We produced our first Parish Wall Calendar.

“External”: Christmas caroling at nearby Thomas House, monthly services at Thomas House organized by Deacon Mary; N Street Village, housing and services ministry to homeless and low-income woman, in which a faithful cadre of parishioners participate; we have seen an increased use of Rector’s Discretionary Fund (providing overnight accommodations for persons when the shelters have been full, rental assistance, transportation assistance in the form of taxi vouchers and train tickets, food and gas gift

cards). We are working to grow our outreach ministries. Mark, our Parish Administrator, recently met with the Director of Horizon House and Clairidge Tower and our Men's Group is discerning how to serve the residents, our neighbors. Any and all ideas are welcome.

Speaking of **Mark**, in addition to continuing as our Parish Administrator, I have asked him to take on the role of Ministry Coordinator. I know he has already started speaking with many of you and is looking forward to helping our parish discern and prepare for ministry to the community. He has been a tremendous blessing to us in many ways, wearing many hats, anticipating all sorts of needs in our parish, picking up lots of pieces for me and always willing to go the extra mile for our parish. Thank you, Mark!

### **Social Media:**

You may have noticed an increase in virtual offerings to enrich our spiritual lives, during this unusual time, including our blog, Dare to Hope, and worship kits. We hired a part-time social media person, Amanda Bourne, who has done beautiful work on our website, is overseeing our Facebook Page, has revived Twitter and Instagram.

**Grounds Guild:** faithful promoters of the beauty around in collaboration with Mother Nature and our lawn care service.

### **Sunday ministries:**

#### **Sunday School:**

Victoria is nearing 30 years in this ministry (!), and is seeking assistants.

**Child-care** has been provided by our wonderful Maya and her two young helpers, Sydney and Ainsley.

**Music Ministry:** Collin Power became our Interim Organist and Choirmaster in December and was hired as our Director of Music Ministry in February. He is a gifted musician and singer who brings a deep understanding of our liturgy and our musical tradition. We look forward to growing with him and with our amazing choir, as they continue to enrich our worship. We are grateful for them!

**Altar Guild** continues to do its sacred work. Thank you! FYI: there has long been a need for new members.

**Flower Guild:** although on COVID hiatus until last Sunday, makers of beauty: Merci!

**The Usher Guild** On December 19' we lost our beloved Robert Brooks. I am sure that he is watching over us and continuing his ministry of hospitality. Colin Downes and his wife, Natalie Villalon, have kindly offered to lead this ministry. Thank you—Robert, and Colin and Natalie!

**Acolyte Guild:** after many, dedicated years leading our acolytes, Scott Merritt moved and is now attending his local parish. Brian Wesoloski, who has been serving as an acolyte for the past year, has become the head of this vital ministry. Ayla Ybarra, will continue to serve as an acolyte as well and in addition will be sharing her gifts with us as a member of the Vestry!

**Vestry:** I sincerely want to thank you for caring, for your dedicated service and all of your hard work. I would like especially to recognize our outgoing vestry members: Victoria Ebell and Abigail Wilson. I look forward to presenting our new Vestry to you on September 27, when they will be commissioned for this ministry during the 10:30 Mass. And, welcome to our four new members: Dan, Julia, Dave and Ayla. We rejoice to begin and to continue this sacred journey together.

### **Our Campus:**

We have been working hard to make our physical church more beautiful and functional.

#### CHURCH

- dedication of a major capital improvement, the accessibility ramp.
- narthex redo
- church live-stream system
- mosaic “unveiled”
- Saint Agnes altar refinished

#### PARISH HALL

- renovation and reorganization of kitchen (so to be better able to prepare meals for larger groups)
- new coffee station
- new furniture (shared expense with Metro Health)
- new choir room,
- new lighting in kitchen, Sunday School rooms and library

Speaking of **Vestry**, we will be on retreat next weekend—through Sunday lunch, and thus not here with you. Fr. Mac Stewart, a Doctoral student at Catholic university, who has prayed with us on many occasions, will be the celebrant and preacher. The theme of this year’s Vestry retreat will be: Faith, Fellowship, Formation & Future. We will pray, get to know one another more and deepen our ties, be formed in our faith (I have asked Professor Ryan Danker of Wesley Theological Seminary, whom many know, to facilitate this year’s retreat). And, we will have at least three important conversations:

1. Our Statement of Mission and our Statement of Particular Values
2. How best to leverage our assets, including our two row-houses: Parish House and Rectory, the first of which sits largely empty. And, amongst other things, how best to proceed with renovation of our church. Look around at this beautiful church. Look closely and notice its very fragile state. We have been working with a general contractor for over a year, to get a sense of what really needs repair: masonry, roof, HVAC, plumbing, electrical.... We have over \$5 million of repair-renovation. Details forthcoming.
3. How best to respond to the social unrest that we are seeing and experiencing on our society. I am certain that the sure, lasting response is love. As Dr. Martin Luther King preached: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Building on input from staff and preliminary conversations I have had with the Wardens, we will explore how the love given us can and must translate beyond our walls, to bring healing and peace.

We have a hopeful future. THANKS BE TO GOD!