

January 2021

Dearly beloved,

I am so sorry that we can't all meet together this year as usual for a brunch and a celebration of what God has been doing among us at church. Instead, this year, we'll be holding the annual meeting in three parts, open to anyone who is registered for one of our services this weekend. For those unable to make it, we've also placed two videos online. The first is a brief version of my presentation to the meeting, and the second is an overview of the church finances. The news is good, but somehow I have managed to make it sound horrifically dull. I don't know how I did that, because really, as we look at the story of what God did here last year, and plans for us this year too, there is so much to celebrate.

Last year we began by looking at the letter of Ephesians and saw that in Christ we are ready for anything that the world might throw at us. Little did we know, back then, just what that might mean.

I'm really proud of our church in the way that we were able to adapt and respond to 2020 so many times. As you read the annual report, you'll see a glimpse of what it was like for the staff, adjusting their work and launching new things almost every few weeks. Last year we launched a church app, started a new Podcast, began broadcasting our services on two different platforms, figured out how to serve Holy Communion safely, at a drive thru communion rail, in the parking lot, on the lawn, and then back inside the building again. With all of these efforts, we managed to reach a lot of people, as you will see from the statistics page in the annual report, in some ways, we even grew.

Overall, our church did well financially last year too. Income was up a little and expenses were down by a similar amount, leaving us with a modest surplus to invest. The Vestry's plan is to re-invest a little of it in the Capital Reserve Fund, which we use to improve, or repair things that are not in the operations budget. But our intention is to use most of it to form what we are calling the Pandemic Reserve Fund – some money, set aside, to help us through what could be a couple of really lean years.

As you look at the budget details for 2021, you'll see that even with reduced income, we've been able to make considerable savings and present another balanced budget. We also plan to undertake a pretty thorough review mid-year, as the economy and pandemic life changes.

As for the leaders in the church, I'd like to take the opportunity, specifically, to thank Rev. Connie for her ministry as she begins her retirement. She's been a brilliant counsellor, pastor, and friend to me and many here. I'd also like to thank Anne Malone for serving as Senior Warden. She has been an amazing colleague and I can't say enough about how much we should all appreciate her work and service here. She makes me a much better pastor that I would otherwise have been and the whole Vestry will miss her deeply.

If you're unable to attend the meeting in person, and you're unable to watch the two videos I mention above, we will be happy to send you a printed copy of the report (just call the office at 412-963-8938.) We've also figured out a way to ensure that every member can participate in the votes by one means or another. With this letter you'll receive a ballot which you can return to us either electronically or by mail. *If you mail it, it just needs to be postmarked by Saturday, January 30 at the latest.*

This year Bill Gordon is serving as our Secretary. Anne Malone is serving as our Judge of Election, and Bridget Michael as our Teller. There are two items on which to vote. The first is for three candidates for the Vestry. You can read about them in the report and I warmly commend all three to you. The second item is a change to our bylaws that allows the Vestry to vary in size, year to year, from six to nine depending on the availability of candidates in any given year.

The Current Vestry, Parish Counsel, Diocesan Standing Committee, and Diocesan Chancellor unanimously approve this change. Many successful churches function with smaller vestries than they used to have, especially now that electronic communication is so much better. It also allows us to adapt the running of the church to how God is shaping it, and it makes room for *ex officio* members of the Vestry or guests to be invited to speak at meetings.

I do really long for the day when we can gather, eat, laugh, and celebrate together as we usually do. In the meantime, thank you for your role in the life of our church during this crazy year. It's been monstrously tough at times, but God has also done some wonderful things among us.

I commend the report and one of the videos to you. As for the financial, presentation, perhaps, at least, you'll find it soothing.

With much love, in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alex', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev'd Alex