

## **SENIOR WARDEN'S REPORT**

### ***A. 2019: A Year of Transition***

2019 was a year of transition in which we were blessed to see our goal of transforming our physical space into one that is more reflective of our core values of Welcome, Diversity and Community come into fruition. We owe this blessing entirely to the commitment, dedication, and generosity of all of you! Indeed, in 2019, we completed the most successful capital campaign in the history of this church, both in terms of the dollars pledged and the number of people who participated. As a result, we have made our worship space brighter and more flexible, both physically and spiritually. The kitchen is back and, because of the new upgrades, we are better positioned to use it both to serve our internal needs and to service the community beyond our walls. Our more accessible bathrooms look great but continue to be a work in progress (we are almost there) and we look forward to enjoying our more inclusive stained glass windows and refurbished organ in the New Year. We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to the members of the capital campaign steering committee for their great work and to each and every parishioner who participated in and supported the capital campaign.

In 2019, we also celebrated our 150th anniversary as a parish. We celebrated that milestone at a fantastic birthday party on February 24th at which we reflected on our journey of the past 150 years and looked ahead as we publicly launched the Capital Campaign and next 150 years.

We were also blessed when, on February 8, 2019, the Rev. Laurie Anzilotti joined Holy Communion as our seminarian and then, later in the year after her ordination, as Assistant Rector. Laurie and her family have been an invaluable addition to our community and we are grateful for all she has done.

2019 was a year of transition in the Diocese as well. It was announced at the beginning of the year that Bishop Wayne Smith would be retiring in April 2020 and there would be a series of listening sessions for the selection of the next Bishop of Missouri. In November, delegates from Holy Communion cast ballots at the Diocesan Convention and helped elect Bishop-elect the Rev. Deon Johnson. We are grateful to the members of Holy Communion who gave their talent and time to participate in both the search for and nomination of the next Bishop of this diocese.

### ***B. 2019: A Year Of Living Into Our Goals***

2019 also marked a year in which we (in earnest) began the transition from goal-setting to taking the steps necessary to live into our goals. It is gratifying to point out that average Sunday attendance continued to increase in 2019, even when we were exiled from the sanctuary during renovations! This metric is a clear indicator of our health as a congregation and is due, in no small part, to your lay and clergy leaders' focused attention to achieving the goals we have set for ourselves as a congregation.

For example, one of the goals set by the Vestry last year was to welcome more people through social media and other online avenues. In attempting to meet that goal, we increased our engagement on websites like Next Door, engaged more on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and increased the availability of video from services online. If you have noticed a number of new faces in the pews/chairs at church—you should know that some of these new faces are likely the result of this expanded online presence. We are counting on each of you to demonstrate to every new

face you see that, as people who aspire to walk in the way of Jesus, we welcome them all—as they are, where they are.

The Vestry also set a goal of increasing printed communications to ensure that we aren't leaving behind those who do not live online. In setting this goal, the hope was that it could be accomplished in a way that is sustainable and mindful of the environment. That goal was met in 2019 with the issuance of printed quarterly newsletters and a stewardship brochure.

Regarding our core value of diversity, throughout 2019, we continued to live into our commitment of becoming a Beloved Community. For example, as we have done in the past, we kicked off the year with a special service in January honoring the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. In addition, throughout the year, we heard from dynamic speakers like the Rev. Dr. Ben Sanders from Eden seminary, who enlightened us about the development of black theology and its impact on the broader church and the Rev. Starsky Wilson, who together with our own Rudy Nickens, helped us mark the anniversary of the death of Michael Brown and the start of the movement that arose in the streets of Ferguson.

We also “walked the walk” of a Beloved Community when, in June, a number of us turned out to participate in, and support, the Pridefest Interfaith Service and parade and, in August the Rev. Laurie Anzilotti and a group of about 10 from Holy Communion joined other leaders from across faith communities in St. Louis to travel to Oklahoma to protest immigrant detention.

We celebrated our diversity as a church by dedicating a gorgeous new altar covering and clergy vestments made with pieces of fabric brought in by members of the congregation—everything from Scottish tartans to bright Nigerian fabric. We also made strides throughout the year toward attaining our goal of expanding the diversity of music offerings—a goal which was reflected in the Blue Christmas service. In November, about 25 members of the congregation gathered at the St. Louis Galleria to watch “Harriet” the inspiring movie about the life of abolitionist and underground railroad conductor, Harriet Tubman. More than half of the group stuck around to discuss the movie over dinner at California Pizza Kitchen.

In the latter part of the year you heard that, as part of our commitment of becoming a Beloved Community, the Rev. Laurie Anzilotti would be convening a group to explore bringing a “Rhythms of Grace” worship experience for all ages and abilities to Holy Communion. Earlier this year you heard from Laurie about the great strides she and the group have already made in bringing this goal to fruition.

Finally, in 2019 we made great strides toward attaining goals set by the Vestry aimed at further developing our internal and external community. One of those goals was to develop and support smaller group communities within our broader church community. Stand out events like Family Advent Night and Cookies and Carols, which were well attended by our families with younger children, are great examples of how we lived into that goal. Other outings and initiatives that took place throughout 2019 like Parish Adventure Day at Pere Marquette, the summer softball league spearheaded by the Rev. Marc Smith, outings hosted by the 20's/30's small group, the Wednesday movie screening, Bible study and so many others all helped deepen our sense of community as a church.

In terms of our goals of deepening community ties outside of our walls, in 2019 we continued to do so through ministries like Trinity, Barbara Jordan, Episcopal City Mission and Laundry Love. 2019 also saw new and different community engagement through activities like Make a Difference Day, during which a number of parishioners partnered with others to perform yard work and other chores for seniors. We continued deepening our partnership with Cristosal when our Rector and several members of Holy Communion traveled to El Salvador. Finally, we are making strides toward accomplishing the goal of building interfaith relationships to advocate for justice in our community. Specifically, in 2019, we pledged \$2,000 to help fund the possible establishment of an Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) interfaith community organization affiliate here in St. Louis. In late November, we began advertising an upcoming screening of the documentary, "Rigged: the voter suppression playbook" which we will present in conjunction with Kol Rinah Congregation. It is my hope that the movie screening will serve as a figurative launch pad for even deeper external community involvement in 2020.

For all of the reasons mentioned above, I hope you will all share the pride I feel looking back at all we accomplished as a church in 2019, and join me in excited anticipation of all that is to come in 2020.

Dated: January 24, 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shirley Mensah", written over a horizontal line.

SHIRLEY MENSAH

SENIOR WARDEN