

Rector's Report 2021

The Rev. Mike Angell

2021 got off to a great start as we worshiped in our newly renovated church. Attendance had grown, even while we worshiped in the crowded parish hall. A Lenten Program on the "Modern Mystics" was well attended. Our newly elected (and at the time not yet consecrated) bishop paid an impromptu visit to the church and stuck around afterward for over an hour to greet parishioners.

In March, we noticed attendance begin to slip, and the peace became a bit awkward, as the coronavirus pandemic began to reach our shores. We were the first parish in the Diocese to take our worship online for safety and health. Within two weeks the bishop's office announced that all worship was to be held online for the foreseeable future.

I postponed my planned sabbatical as we continued to watch the pandemic. We appointed a task force: Alison Nash M.D. , Susan Norris PhD, Rachel Penczykowski PhD, Karen Pechtl (local small business owner), Rebecca Rugen M.D., and Sarah Stange M.D. The task force advised on safe practices, including our outdoor worship services in the Jackson Park elementary parking lot, and limited in person visits to pray in the church. The committee continued to advise against in person worship. We made the decision not to contemplate returning to indoor in person worship until infection numbers are drastically reduced.

Even as the COVID pandemic raged, this summer our nation again uncovered the effects of systemic racism. Clergy and parish leaders marched with our new bishop through the streets of Clayton and University City, seeking justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. The vestry voted unanimously to place "Black Lives Matter" signs in front of the church and to commit ourselves to the work of dismantling systemic racism.

In the midst of such a tough year, our talented parish staff worked incredibly hard. Cheyanne Lovellette ably served as "Director of Operations" helped to set safe policies for the building and to ensure that staff members were given the opportunity care for themselves and their families in the midst of the pandemics. Jim Kern kept a competent eye on our books as Financial Administrator. Heidi Olliff brought our children's ministries online as we saw increased numbers at virtual Godly Play. Mary Chapman facilitated and arranged virtual choirs and brought in musicians to further diversify our music offerings.. The Rev. Marc Smith's deep network in healthcare in Missouri and The Rev Chester Hines' long commitment to anti-racism were beacons in this year.

This was also a year of staff departures. The Rev. Laurie Anzilotti, just over a year into her time with us, was called as priest-in-charge of a young congregation, St. Francis in Eureka. Now four women from Holy Communion are leading congregations in the diocese. Jae Park resigned as organist to become Director of Music at Emmanuel in Webster Groves. After 19 years, our sexton Jerome Harris retired. We had a celebration online, but plan a party when that is safe.

We also had a few folks join our team. In summer Zack Campbell-Hovland took up the work as sexton, and has brought great energy to the work. He is currently planning native plantings for our flower beds, and is using the building closure to clean out and organize spaces in the church. Emilee Walker-Cornetta came onboard this Fall as seminarian, and added her thoughtful voice to our preaching and worship leadership. Hannah Shanks, joined us in December on a short-term contract to help Grace Gathering make its next steps until a new Assistant Rector can be called.

There is no doubt, 2020 has been a difficult year. And it has also come with unexpected blessings. Twice as many people are worshipping with us online as did in person. I never thought I'd become a parking lot preacher, but this year has made our work more available to the community, and the community is responding. Our investments in technology also helped us to host the first virtual convention for the Diocese of Missouri.

I am incredibly grateful for this congregation. For members whose generosity, creativity, and passion for justice push us to make a needed difference. For a staff that inspires and challenges one another, and who so often puts up with my next "great idea." I am thankful for a community that helped Ellis and me celebrate the adoption of our son, even in these strange distanced and virtual days. I am incredibly thankful for your vestry leaders as well.

In some ways, I hope 2021 is a vastly different year than 2020. I hope we get more time in one another's physical presence. But in one way, I hope we stay the same. Holy Communion proved it is a deeply connected and passionate community. We wouldn't let any pandemic stop us from being a Welcoming Diverse Community seeking to follow Jesus and reveal Christ's love. I hope that never changes.