

Rector's Report  
Annual General Meeting for 2020

February 28,2021

For all intents and purposes the year 2020 looked as if it was going to be a very promising one for the St. Matthew's Anglican church family. It seemed as if this community was in a definite growth mode ,in terms of weekly Sunday attendance. In addition, there seemed to be a feeling that we were ready to increase our level of outreach and caring pastoral influence in and for the greater St. Albert community.

But then came March 14,2020. It was a Saturday morning and my phone rang. It was Bishop Jane informing me that she had made the decision to close all Anglican Churches in the Edmonton diocese owing to the alarming spread of the Covid- 19 virus. I assembled a team of wardens and vestry members to do a rather hurried parish phone out to all members of the parish advising them that there would be no Sunday services for the foreseeable future. Sunday, March 15, dawned and for the first time in my pastoral career I awoke on a Sunday morning realizing I had nowhere to be and nothing to do. None of us knew for how long we were going to be closed.

The question became what to do? It seemed impossible to simply do nothing. Somehow ' church" had to happen ; somehow our people had to have an opportunity to be connected to God and things "Holy" in a time that was anything but holy. All communities of faith and clergy were endeavoring to figure out how to "do Church". Some opted to do a zoom time of prayer from their own homes.... Some clergy chose not to want to do Eucharist. They felt that since congregations couldn't be present to receive the sacrament that they, in solidarity with their flock, would not celebrate the eucharist.

As your Rector, I made a decision not to adopt that particular sentiment. In my 10 years with you, I have known you all to be a Eucharistic centered and grounded people. Your normative worship has always been BAS P.185 and onwards. I felt it was necessary, once we had determined we could live stream services into your homes, that we utilize the same old and loved words/format that you were all familiar with. In other words, the world might be going slightly crazy but you, on

any Sunday morning could tune in and vicariously engage in the style, pattern and essence of the worship that you had always known.

Our first “live streamed eucharist” was on March 22,2020. It was completely different from anything I had ever done and with the equipment we had at that time it was, charitably speaking, something of an adventure. What must not ever be forgotten was the incredible contribution to this new way of doing church, in a pandemic, of Angela Bokenfohr. Her expertise and enthusiasm for this mode of enabling worship was nothing less than inspiring. In addition, in those early days we had the uplifting and insightful contribution of musical accompaniment from Lisa and Matthew Furry. Despite initial picture and sound “issues” in those early days we got better and as we went along we expended monies,with vestry approval, to update and enhance our overall audio- visual capability. This new equipment better enabled us to deliver a clearer picture and much better sound.This would not have been possible without the hands on support of Tom Kennedy and his electrical expertise and Mark Smith in building a platform for our new camera. During 2020, there was 14,161 recorded views of our weekly Eucharistic celebrations. In that number it is impossible to tell exactly how many people availed themselves of the opportunity to tune in. One view might be one person or it might be a family of four. What we quickly learned was that his methodology of Live Stream was reaching a far wider audience than was imaginable. We had recorded views, and still continue to have recorded views from Australia, South Africa, Spain and all across Canada. This live streaming has forever changed the way That St. Matthew’s will set about being the Church. Even when we return to regular uninterrupted worship, because of its potential for outreach, I feel that continued live streaming will be our new norm in addition to in person worship.

As the spring turned into summer, and the Virus fluctuated up and down, there was a thought that some parishes might be able to re-open for some sort of in person worship. St Matthew’s was invited by Bishop Jane to be one of the pilot parishes in this initiative. As such we had to prepare a “re-opening plan” and submit it to the Bishop for approval. In addition, we had to set about physically preparing the church to be a Covid 19 facility with screening assessments, cleaning supplies, marked socially distant seating, hand sanitizers, educational signage, and a methodology for enabling those who wished to come back to book

a seat in a church with a maximum capacity for 32 people. It was a tremendous undertaking which could not have been accomplished without the hard work of all members of the parish Vestry. From initially meeting in person to moving to a Zoom format Vestry worked wonderfully to insure that the business and well being of the parish remained constant. Thanks must go to Cliff McCallum, Sue Trenchard, Angela Bokenfohr, Penny Holmes, Sandra Smith, Nicole Javdan, Susan Fredette and Heather Leslie. All of them worked tirelessly. As a result we were permitted to re-open for in person worship on August 23. Sadly, owing to the constantly fluctuating nature of the pandemic, it was found necessary to have a government shutdown again on November 15, which has remained in place until this present time.

During that brief window of re-opening, those choosing to continue watching church via live streaming far outnumbered the people who chose to come back to church. In the twelve weeks we were offering in person worship we had a total of 218 people attend (an average of 18 people per week).

It was heartening during this challenging year to see that certain of our usual parish ministries were still capable of carrying on with business. During the return to worship phase in August, the Friday morning Prayer group, an intercessory prayer ministry, that had continued during the initial lockdown period, met together again in our Sanctuary. Thanks belong to Jenny Stuart, Joanne McFarlane, Deb Phillipchuk and Marie Kennedy. As always, The Parish altar Guild did excellent work, completely behind the scenes, to insure the Sanctuary looked wonderful and to insure that I was completely kept in Communion supplies. Thanks to Shery McCallum and the whole Altar Guild group. St. Matthew's support of the Inner city pastoral Ministry luncheon initiative to help provide lunches for those in need also continued despite the pandemic. In August and again in January of 2021 St Matthew's people stepped up and generously enabled many people to receive a good meal. Thanks to Penny and Stewart Holmes for coordinating our efforts in this worthwhile ministry.

Of all of the ministries that were hit hard by the pandemic, I think without a doubt, our Sunday school program took the most severe hit. With the highly contagious nature of this virus and the vulnerability of young children, Our Sunday School/ Nursery program was essentially mandated into closure for the

last year and into the future. Yet despite this challenge, the Sunday school staff of Carolyn and Meghan Dunlop and Gillian Edwards still managed to make a difference to our young children. They did so by appearing (twice) on our live stream services with a special message for the children, as well as by arranging and sending Christmas cards/Valentines to all of the Sunday school children. Once vaccinations are completed I am in hopes that we can get back to regular classes and childrens participation in returned Sunday worship.

Since, as the pandemic went along, people became increasingly more proficient with “ zooming” technology, one benefit of this was that the Monday Morning study Group was able to re-start their regular gatherings albeit virtually.

The last ministry that must be mentioned in this report was that of the Women’s group. Two incidents in particular come to mind. One was an ice cream treat handout to people driving by the parish that was sponsored by our Women. This saw several of our ladies standing by the front of the church waving and handing out ice cream treats to passersby as a way of showing that we ,here at St Matthew’s, were all alive and well even during a pandemic. The Women’s group also held their annual Women’s retreat in October. The usual Friday- Sunday retreat at Star of the North was replaced by a one day virtual retreat of some 35 women who prayed, studied scripture, sang, made crafts and otherwise despite their separation, felt as one. I think that doing this the way they did showed conclusively that we at St Matthew’s would never let anything ultimately overwhelm us. Many people contributed to the success of this retreat but special thanks must go to Sandra Moloney.

As mentioned earlier, the roller coaster that was 2020 saw us forced to shut down again in November for In Person worship. As it had done during the Lenten/ Easter timeframe this required shutdown significantly curtailed Advent/Christmas observances, customs and practices. Curtailed but did not eliminate. We just endeavored to do the best we could and provide meaningful seasonal worship via live stream.

There were two other events/happenings that I want to report. Firstly, 2020 saw the commissioning and completion of a new stain glass window given by monies from the estate of the late Jan Alexander. The window depicts “ StMatthew” and is designed in a Celtic motif to match our other window. With improving weather

we have high hopes of an early spring installation. The second issue that we were involved in during 2020 was contributing money to the Diocese so that it could keep several rural Anglican Church's solvent during this Covid crisis. Utilizing the existing monies from the REACH account (created to fund Ministry) we gifted the Diocese approximately \$20,000. These monies enabled ministry to continue in places like Drayton valley, Westlock, Barrhead and Cold Lake. I made a decision to seek Vestry support for this based on 2 Corinthians 8- the story of the Macedonian Christian community giving to help the mother church in Jerusalem during a severe famine. Vestry unanimously voted to send these monies to help brother/ sister Anglican churches. I honestly can say I have never been prouder of a group of Christians than the men and women who make up our vestry and the parish as a whole. Our offering was greatfully accepted by Bishop jane. I also like to think that our parish, being one of the first to render tangible aid, probably pricked the conscience of other well to do parishes.

I am aware that this is a very lengthy report but since there are no other reports (other than the Financial) I felt this report had to be a relatively responsible "snapshot" of a Parish year.

As we now crest into 2021, the pandemic with new variants is still with us. Vaccinations have been slow in coming but may now be ramping up, which is good news. Churches are considered to be part of Stage 3 of any re-opening plan. We currently are still in Stage 1. So the way ahead is still somewhat uncertain. Maybe the Spring? Maybe the Summer? One cannot know as of this moment. Ultimately, I think people individually will decide when the time is right for their return to regular worship. I am committed to continue to provide services via Live stream and pastoral care as needed. I ask that if you are out there and in need please call the parish office at 780-458-5488 and I will call you.

Lastly, though this doesn't fall within the 2020 timeframe it should be noted that 2021 will see the election of a new Bishop for the Diocese of Edmonton. An electoral Synod will likely be held in the mid summer, probably near the end of June. As an Archdeacon, I will be actively involved with the planning and preparations for this electoral Synod. I will do my best to insure that nothing falls through the "cracks" pastorally speaking during this time.

Thank you to all of you who have supported my ministry in this place both this past difficult year as well as in the past nine years. For whatever time I have left I hope to have it with this group of people I have come to regard as the best congregation I have ever served.

Respectfully Submitted

The Venerable Lee Bezanson

Rector- St. Matthew's, St Albert