



ANNUAL PARISH REPORTS – 2020

CHRIST CHURCH IN LA PLATA

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ANNUAL PARISH MEETING, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

PARISH REPORTS – 2020, CHRIST CHURCH IN LA PLATA, MD

You will find here written reports on many of the ministries and committees of Christ Church. Written reports are not required and some ministries are not represented. If you want to know more about a particular group, please contact the office and we'll put you in touch with the right people.

REPORT OF THE RECTOR

The Rev. Kate Heichler

A recent *New Yorker* cartoon shows a man with his checkbook, saying to his wife, "It's 2021, but I'm still writing 'yearlong fever dream of chaos and despair' on my checks." That's one way to sum up this past year! It was a year when our lives were disrupted in just about every possible way. Who would have thought that a global pandemic would be the most manageable of a host of crises?

Yet it was also a year of amazing strength and growth:

- ◆ We launched **Christ Church Casual**, a new worship service in February, with a band and weekly supper, which had exactly three services before Covid-19 shut us down. We laid a foundation on which to build.
- ◆ We finally got our **worship online** – took a pandemic to do it, but we now stream live, participatory worship each week. Our ability to use technology has grown steadily from our first online service on March 22, so that now we live-stream from our sanctuary with a majority of worshippers attending via Zoom. Many churches simply present a pre-taped service on Sundays; we are live and present with each other and the Holy Spirit. This is ambitious, complicated – and positions us to reach far beyond our geographical area with worship that is creative, participatory and engaging.
- ◆ We welcomed 11 **new members** in November, who have already jumped right in and are changing the landscape of our congregation with their energy and ideas.
- ◆ We launched a bi-parish service of **Night Prayers** (Compline), initially to connect during the first shut-down, and support our congregations in prayer. But its participants have kept it going. It's a beautiful addition to our worship landscape, and could only have worked online.
- ◆ Responding to emergent situations in our country, we finally began to study and discuss issues of **racial justice**, with people from beyond our parishes joining us (*see more in the Outreach* section.)
- ◆ Our **Vestries** have begun to meet jointly every other month, and all church meetings now occur online. We have found we're still able to have discussions, and the savings in time, energy and gas we yield from not trying to meet in a physical location is translated into more meaningful engagement with each other.
- ◆ Far from seeing a decline in income as many churches have, our **giving** has stayed strong and many have made the transition to giving online, which can help ensure a steady cash flow.

Our new reliance on technology required a steep learning curve for me – not only using the new equipment and upgraded bandwidth which our wardens provided once it became clear I'd be working from home, but also learning new platforms and modes of connecting in digital space. I attended countless webinars and master classes to learn how better to connect with busy parishioners who might not have time for an in-person class but could listen to a podcast or respond to a "playlist." These are also ways to connect with people beyond our congregations – the amount of time it takes to post everything on two websites and multiple social media platforms has led us to create a new position for a Digital Assistant.

You will see as you peruse this report that our outreach life continued, and we found ways to engage our community online even when in-person events were canceled. Our strategic planning process was in many ways superseded and jump-started by the pandemic; we have formed a new steering team to guide that effort going forward. (*See more in that section of this report.*) In outreach on behalf of the parish, I have also led an

effort to launch an interfaith commission in our county, am Community Service chair in our local Rotary Club, and serve at the Bishop's request on the Diocesan Council.

I have been so grateful for the vision and leadership of our wardens, **Barbara Palko** and **Steve Christofferson**, who led the way on the Bell Tower repair and supporting our technology upgrades. The Vestry has been supportive and creative, flexible and willing to work in new ways. The same can be said of our musicians, **Eileen and Michael Peerless**, who began to record the hymns so we could include them in our Zoom services, and then returned to play live when our hybrid service started in late fall. It has been a frustrating time for artists of their standards and abilities, but they have supported worship wonderfully, as have **Alicia Cordelle** and **Tim Illick** with more contemporary music.

Our Parish Administrator **Marie Webber** took on new responsibilities and learnings, even as some of her weekly duties, like bulletins, were curtailed. While the building was essentially closed, she sorted through many file cabinets of old records, throwing out the obsolete and discovering some important historical documents. She does an increasing amount of bookkeeping and is often the first point of contact for pastoral care. We are blessed beyond measure to have her at the heart of our ministry.

This year we also welcomed our new deacon, **Joan Crittenden**, after Steve Seely was reassigned. Though our buildings closed shortly after Joan's arrival, she has been a stalwart support online, providing leadership in developing a Lay Pastoral Care team, in our Regathering Team, in taking our worship online, forming a greeting card ministry and in many of our outreach ministries. I am so grateful to share ministry with this wise and joyful servant of God.

There is so much on the plate for the coming year -

- ◆ creating a clear pathway for spiritual growth that both longtime and new members can navigate with ease, going deeper in faith and wider in ministry;
- ◆ revising and implementing our Strategic Plan,
- ◆ improving our support for our children and youth;
- ◆ strengthening our outreach through the Food Pantry, our outreach to youth at risk, our new tutoring program and racial justice programs;
- ◆ connecting with those beyond our parishes through ministry in digital space - and
- ◆ reintegrating in-person activities when we finally pass through this pandemic.

Hmm... that's quite a list, and it may be missing a few things. But we are quite a community. As I begin my 18th year of ordained ministry on the date of our Annual Parish Meeting, I rejoice that I get to live out my calling with such an amazing, creative, joyful, generous group of people. God has a lot for us to do - and God has a lot of blessings to pour upon us.

REPORT OF THE DEACON

The Rev. Joan Crittenden

As a deacon I am ordained by the church to bring the word of God to the community and those in need; to promote and aid the charitable works of others. I began my service with the two Christ Churches in the middle of the pandemic, making it impossible to visit in-person to care for the sick, the heartbroken, the needy and the lonely in our congregation and community. Instead I jumped into assisting the Rector with her efforts with online worship, interfaith community work, and pastoral care. I drafted several working documents: the EDOW COVID SOMD worship schedule, Interfaith Commission Bylaws, our Regathering plan, a Collaborative Pastoral Care Plan, and held a 40-hour Community of Hope Pastoral Care training for both churches that was open to all Charles County Episcopal Churches. Nine people were commissioned as COHI Chaplains.

I performed several funerals, became involved with our Food Pantry, journeying into the Southern Maryland Food Bank; worked on outreach with Bill Hoxie and “The Miracle Box,” helped to educate many on how to use Zoom, technology and bitmoji, and started a collaborative Card Ministry.

In the broader community, I represent Christ Church in the United Way Faith Leaders team and Charles Community Nonprofit Team, remain active as a hospital Chaplain where I am called often to provide spiritual care and comfort, both in-person and via phone, and continue as the Palliative Care Chaplain at SagePoint. Due to COVID and my medically fragile grandson, my liturgical duties continue to be performed online, as do duties assigned on the Sunday Rota.

REPORT OF THE SENIOR WARDEN

Barbara Palko

On February 8, 2020 vestry members from both Christ Churches, La Plata and Wayside, participated in an annual retreat. The major question of discussion was, “What are the organizational outcomes we want to see by the end of the year?” Plans were developed to create a culture of teams with a designated leader and one vestry member for each of our specific areas of parish life, such as: Pastoral Care, Outreach/Good works, Spiritual Growth/Sunday School, Finance, Building and Grounds, Newcomer Integration, Stewardship and Community Engagement/Growth Initiatives. We seemed to be on a roll for a productive year. Then all 2020 plans, initiatives and routines were interrupted by the COVID pandemic. Interrupted for many months.

As it turns out, the Holy Spirit is wireless. Reverend Kate, in her determination to keep us connected, launched into a huge technological learning curve. She investigated, registered for classes, improved our technological capabilities, developed a vestry phone tree and created a digital ministry providing a venue for us to worship together and to continue to communicate with each other.

A Regathering Team was assembled to ensure standard operating procedures and sanitation protocols were in place for when it was feasible to re-institute in-house worship. Our phased-in reopening plan was approved by the diocese. We began phase I with outdoor worship in August and have slowly progressed to hybrid worship with some present in the sanctuary and most continuing to participate through Zoom and Facebook Live. This has required the installation and implementation of significant technological changes in the Sanctuary, but we’re working out the kinks and enjoying lively, participatory worship.

I would like to thank Kate for her dedication and extremely hard work over these many months. With her leadership we have had the opportunity to continue to worship. Although a bit different worshipping via the internet, there have been opportunities to connect during the Lenten season, through a beautiful Easter service, all the way through Advent culminating with a spiritual Christmas Eve worship service and pageant. The Christmas Eve candles and consecrated communion wafers brought us all together as a church community in a time when hope was important to share.

We have also had the opportunity to spend 40 days before and after the election in prayer for our country and to become a part of social justice study groups. We continue to have the opportunity to attend Bible study, to participate in weekly learning hour sessions, to participate in a student tutoring program and to enjoy peaceful endings of our day with Night Prayers. The Holy Spirit truly is wireless at Christ Church.

REPORT OF THE JUNIOR WARDEN: BUILDING & GROUNDS

Steve Christofferson

No surprise – 2020 was a year like no other. The dominating project was the renovation and reconstruction of the Bell Tower. The process of identifying the issues and researching the prospective bidding contractors started in 2019, culminating in the bid being awarded and the work begun. Many thanks to the advice I received from experienced stone masons and the architect of the capital. The Bell Tower team of **Bonnie Rafer, John Wilkinson, Mike Jenkins, Barbara Palko** and **Paul Eldridge** met regularly and gave direction and oversight of this project, ensuring its successful completion as a proud monument that will last at least another 100 years.

The HVAC system got some attention:

- ◆ Through a partnership with SMECO several thermostats were replaced.
- ◆ The air filters were upgraded.
- ◆ The ducts were cleaned as part of the regathering committee's work.

An office computer no longer in use is now is part of the technology that allows us to broadcast Sunday worship to the monitors in the sanctuary and to Zoom and Facebook.

Still on the to-do list is a permanent fix to the too-frequent flooding of the basement and food pantry, and renovation of the restrooms. A special thanks to **Paul Eldridge, Chris Estep,** and **John MacCoy** for their quick response whenever I ask them to help with a project. Many thanks for all the support and guidance this year. I look forward to serving you in 2021.

GROUNDS

Our grounds also got some much-needed attention this year – **Dale Hupp** undertook the renovation and refreshing of the three benches that sit in our Meditation Garden (*though its most frequent visitor this year, due to Covid, was one of our resident groundhogs – note, this picture was taken prior to Dale's ministrations!*). Some groundhog or other also undermined the concrete pad under our oil tank – they're cute but do present some issues....



Julie Simpson maintained the plantings and landscaping of the Meditation Garden; **Ted Hoxie** did some major pruning of bushes around the church; and **Langston Wilkinson** worked hard on grounds clean-up and plantings, along with **Brett and Jackson**. **Melanie Coe** continued in an advisory capacity this year, due to illness, but began to get back to the dirt as her energies allowed.

CEMETERY COMMITTEE

Chris Estep

The Cemetery Committee functioned well by email this year, fielding an increasing number of calls and inquiries regarding our Mount Rest facility. Marie Webber anchors this ministry from the parish office, and many thanks to Chris Estep who has worked with Dave Chapman to streamline operations and response time. **Deacon Joan** presided at several graveside services this year, extending our pastoral care to grieving families.

Current committee members are: **Dave Chapman, Chris Estep, Kate Heichler, Lucy Dettor,** and **Marie Webber**

Like many aspects of our parish life this year, our efforts around Christian education and faith formation got a boost from the restrictions imposed by Covid. Having a significant number of people become comfortable meeting online finally freed us from the complexities of trying to schedule in-person classes at given places and times. Instead, many were now able to participate in our weekly Bible study, where formerly they'd have been commuting during that time. Even Rev. Kate was able to participate in Sunday morning adult ed, as she was no longer spending 70 minutes in the car every Sunday, driving up and down the road between the two churches and three services. Here's what we did together this year:

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN

We began the year with Sunday School as usual, led by a rotation of teachers, **Russ Gomaere, Jane Hobbs and Janet Niemi**, with **Corissa Jenkins** providing week-to-week continuity. When churches were closed at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sunday School was also suspended. But by late summer, we had **Alicia Cordelle** on deck to start an online Sunday School, dubbed "Kids Forum," which takes place during the new 10 am Learning Hour, at the same time as adult offerings, using the breakout room function in Zoom. Within a few weeks, Alicia was learning how to design "bitmoji" classrooms with links, and had a growing number of parish children eager to join each Sunday, even when they were visiting grandparents! Kids Forum is one of the many success stories of 2020, and continues to grow. Here is Alicia's report:

In August 2020, as the church entered into the fall still in a distance ministry, Kate asked if I would be interested in teaching Sunday School. I was elated. I have never before been able to teach Sunday school since I was usually participating in the worship music for the main service. So my answer was a resounding YES.

This has been so different for everyone I decided to be so bold as to rename our weekly gatherings to Kids Forum trying to provoke a sense of ownership for all the kids participating. We meet every Sunday during the same time as the Learning Hour for adults. Our attendance averages anywhere from 6-9 participants. We take the first few minutes every week for a check in time for the kids so I can hear their concerns or high points and low points. We then proceed with a time to hear the weekly prepared Bible story using an interactive Bitmoji map that is designed by a Deacon from the Southern MD clergy group of the EDOW. We have a resource of short books and stories and songs. I will add other things that seem relevant to our specific age group of participants.

We have a wide age range (Kindergarten through 5th Grade) so keeping the whole group engaged can be challenging. Janet Niemi has agreed to join me and for this I am very thankful; the kids have really engaged with her. It has been a great support to have Janet and her wonderful ideas to plan and implement more for the kids to do. We try to have an ongoing project to give the kids an experience with the subject of the lessons. I have tried to keep the projects and themes to span several weeks so that they kids have ownership and meaningful participation.

My plan is to keep this program growing and work to develop a Teen Forum in addition to the Kids Forum that would have virtual activities perhaps with an evening group meeting and then a watch party for a movie. I feel a need to reach out to the teens we have in the Christ Churches and begin a program of virtual engagement that can grow into a time when we are able to meet in person. I do want to thank Deacon Joan and Kate and of course Janet for the support and ideas and technological support and assistance.

While our annual Palm Sunday procession with the decorated donkey and Easter Egg Hunt fell victim to pandemic closures, we managed to do our Christmas pageant by videotaping it at Grace Haven Farm in Newburg on a warm October Saturday. The videos of our children, costumed and enacting the scenes (with real sheep in the background!), were edited by **Sheila Guttenberg** and shown with live narration during our "Christ Church Christmas At Home" Christmas Eve service. Next year, maybe we'll try it with sound!

ADULT CHRISTIAN FORMATION CLASSES

Adult Christian Formation Classes are short-term classes offered at various times during the year on Sunday mornings. They are often accompanied by a book and a short video presentation. Participants are asked to read a chapter in the book each week. However, anyone who wishes to “pop in” and come to any class is welcome without reading the book and will surely learn something from the session. Mary Kercher had just announced a series on Adam Hamilton’s *24 Hours That Changed the World*, to start March 15 – the very Sunday we first went online due to the pandemic. This course will be offered in 2021.

With the launch of the Learning Hour at 10 o’clock Sundays this past September, Mary did offer a book study of *The God We Can Know: Exploring the “I Am” Sayings of Jesus*, by Rob Fuquay, while Rev. Kate led another group in exploring the seven spiritual practices in the *Way of Love*. That was followed by a stewardship series on “**What Does the Bible Say About Money,**” led by Rev. Kate and Kirk Vandezande, and then an Advent series on “**How Do We Live In An Upside-Down World.**”

We’ve also held group studies this year on racial justice – see more in the Outreach section of this report.

BIBLE STUDY

Bible studies been challenging to schedule – do we meet at Wayside or La Plata, daytime or evening? No matter when or where, some people couldn’t participate. Until Covid hit and were forced online – which proved to be the perfect space to welcome any number of people who want to study the bible and grow in their faith. Starting last spring, we revived the weekly Wednesday Bible Study. By fall, there was a core group of people from both Christ Churches, as well as several residents of Toronto, Stamford, CT and other places. The Bible Study has finally found its home, where many can find it. We completed a study of the Gospel of Mark, and then did some studies linked to Sunday morning classes.

DIGITAL FAITH FORMATION

We also began to offer digital resources for faith formation with the launch of an Advent series of “Playlists” designed by Rev. Kate, with links and exercises for people to go deeper into each week’s theme in the “Upside Down” series – to peruse, ponder, play, pray and practice. There was also a section for families. We will be doing more with podcasts and playlists in the coming year.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GROWTH

In 2019, Christ Church launched a number of initiatives intended to get us better acquainted with our neighbors, and vice versa. These included hosting the HeartSongs open mic night series and the Gingerbread Extravaganza, and attending the Kent Avenue Block Party, in addition to ongoing events like the Afternoon Teas, National Night Out, Blessing of Animals, and Kirking of the Tartans. We intended to continue with all of them in 2020 – but most of these were suspended due to the Covid pandemic. We’re holding their place for the coming year!

AFTERNOON TEAS

The popular Afternoon Teas were well subscribed for 2020 – but the very first one, scheduled for March 28, had to be canceled as Covid closures began, and circumstances were no safer for the other three. We hope to resume this offering when it’s safer to gather to share food indoors – and after the organizing team have all received Covid vaccinations.

BLESSING OF ANIMALS

We held this event online for the few stalwarts and their pets who participated. Most pets were happy they get blessed without having to leave home!

GINGERBREAD EXTRAVAGANZA!

We were looking forward to our second foray into the world of gingerbread house decoration – another casualty of Covid. Let’s hope for December 2021.

HEARTSONGS OPEN MIC NIGHTS

Our monthly Open Mic Night was held once, and then fell to the spate of Covid cancellations. Though this is an initiative we could do online, we have not yet revived it.

KIRKING OF THE TARTANS

This annual celebration of all things Scots marks the Feast of St. Andrew – and though we were offered some pipers, it was too challenging to think about mounting an outdoor celebration in late November.

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

We love to get outside our building on this national “take back the streets” event, with a dance, a concert, and plenty of food – maybe 2021 will we can do it again?

OUTREACH

Outreach can refer to projects by which we seek to meet needs around us, such as hunger with our Food Pantry. It can mean working for justice in our communities and in the world, as with our Sacred Ground Racial Justice study. And it can label our initiatives to reach out to people in our community who are not members of our church, some of whom have never met Jesus. How do we mean it? All of the above! Here are some of the ways Christ Church has reached out in the past year.

CHRIST CHURCH FOOD PANTRY

Mary Rice

The Food Pantry has long been an outreach ministry of Christ Church, La Plata. Each Friday (except for some holidays), the pantry is open from 9 to 11 am. The pantry provides food items to residents of Charles County, such as canned fruits, vegetables, and meats, and when available, fresh produce, dairy, and eggs.

Over the course of 2020, **Walter Coy** of our sister parish, Christ Church Wayside, and **Fraser Tuffee** continued as core volunteers of the pantry, and regularly performed a variety of tasks essential to the pantry’s operations. Beginning in early 2020, Fraser also organized and spearheaded the cleaning out of our store room and the building of shelves to better organize the pantry’s stock, helped greatly in everything by Walter.

Long-time volunteers **Ron Callahan** and parishioner **Dolores Burgess** performed key roles in distribution until the COVID-19 precautions required them to step back in March. **Pam Thompson**, a long-time volunteer, has continued supervising the Friday distribution. Newcomers to the distribution schedule included parishioners **Langston and Jackson Wilkinson**, **Janet and Tim Niemi**; **Alicia Cordelle** and her daughters **Victoria and Cecilia Carter**. **Deacon Joan** and her husband **Ron Crittenden** signed on to do pick-ups of donated bread and pastry at the stores, and are helping with the shopping and pick-ups at the Southern Maryland Food Bank. **Mary Rice** continued as coordinator.

The main news for 2020 has been how the pandemic safeguards (and the guidelines of the Diocese of Washington) have affected the Pantry. Fortunately, the Diocese has allowed food pantries to continue operation during the pandemic. Since March, we have changed the way we acquire food, the way we distribute it (curb-side pick-up only) and the ways our volunteers have been able to continue to work safely or have had to step back completely while the pandemic continues.

The Diocese of Washington also made funds available to assist Food Pantries – we received a Covid-related grant of \$1,000 in July, and in December received a grant renewal from the Diocesan Hunger Fund in the amount of \$5,000. We are grateful to be part of a larger system of generosity.

BABY SHOWER FOR MARY AND JOSEPH

This Advent, we held our traditional Baby Shower for Mary, with some having dropped off baby supplies in advance, and some holding them up to Zoom cameras. What a joy to see the enormous pile of baby clothes, diapers and other infant supplies to the altar after the sermon. Supplies were offered to the Angels Watch Shelter for women with infants.

INTERFAITH COUNCIL

As we realized the destructiveness of Covid-19 to health, economy and community, Rev. Kate reached out Charles County Commissioner President Reuben Collins to offer an interfaith prayer service. We held one online, and then in the summer, as racial justice issues became more urgent, held another that was both in-person (in our back parking lot) and online. Commissioner President Collins then asked Rev. Kate to put together an Interfaith Council for Charles County, as she has extensive experience in community interfaith work. Deacon Joan brought her organizational prowess to the Steering Committee, and by year's end the Board of Commissioners had approved the group's application to become an official Commission of the County. We look forward to hosting interfaith events and engaging in the interfaith life of our community.

NATIONAL HOMELESS PERSON'S MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE

Christ Church once again hosted this community service marking the National Homeless Person's Memorial Day (December 21, the longest night of the year), this year online. Area clergy participated in the interfaith service of prayers and readings, which culminated in the lighting of candles, each one commemorating a person who died homeless in our communities this past year, as the names were read and candles were lit, and a song of lament was sung.

RACIAL JUSTICE

This is one of those pressing issues we seemed never to get around to facing – until our nation exploded in protest after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and far, far too many more Black persons. This open hostility toward people of color, on top of centuries of racism woven into our systems of finance, housing, education, employment, and religion, finally got the attention of many. The Christ Churches responded by offering a book study of Debby Irving's *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*. We advertised the group on various Facebook platforms, and had people from beyond the parishes join us for an eye-opening exploration of discriminatory practices, white privilege – and a host of unexamined assumptions many white people grow up with in America.

In September, we launched a **Sacred Ground** dialogue circle, joining thousands of people around the country to engage this 10-session video and reading-based series developed by the Episcopal Church. Every three weeks some twenty people gather online to discuss what we've read and watched, learning more about this painful history we share. And every session we all say, "I can't believe I didn't know that...." We hope

more parishioners will join the next round of Sacred Ground, and look forward to some initiatives arising from our time in that crucible. One action for 2021 will be joining the Diocesan invitation to study the history of our parish, how the system of chattel slavery may have financed and influenced our churches.

YOUTH OUTREACH

In early 2020, under the leadership of Lisa Akers, we began preparing to host another Prom4All event, at which young women and men in our communities who lacked the resources to buy prom clothing and accessories could come and “shop” for the perfect outfit. We got donations, sorted, tagged and prepared displays for the big day March 14... only to find our church buildings closed due to Covid. Did that stop us? No way! We held Prom4All right in the parking lot, and helped about 15 young people get their prom gear. While those proms may well have been canceled or postponed or held outdoors, we know we helped a few young ladies and gentlemen see their true beauty.



We are working to develop a volunteer tutoring program in 2021, which would help us build relationships with some of the youth in our county who are homeless or in foster care. Once we can safely gather again we hope to host monthly meet ups for youth to eat, play and meet mentors. **Bill Hoxie** and **Martha Hazen** attended a meeting with the Department of Social Services to begin to make those connections. *The Youth Outreach team:* Lisa Akers, Neal Bankenstein, Alicia Cordelle, Susan Estep, Karen Hile, Bill Hoxie, Martha Hazen, Barb Palko, and Chris Zabriskie,

REGATHERING TEAM

Kate Heichler

As we navigated through the changes wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic, we convened a team from both Christ Churches to think through every aspect of our operations, from worship to fellowship, finance to outreach, and draft a phased plan detailing the protocols for gathering in each phase. This team, chaired by Barb Palko, met weekly for many months, ultimately drafting a report available on our website, guiding our operations and use of our buildings by outside groups. *The Regathering Team:* Joan Crittenden, Alex Deem, Lou Demas, Beverlie Ludy, Barb Palko, Eileen Peerless, Larry Poe, Marie Webber, and Langston Wilkinson

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Kate Heichler

We started 2020 with some clear goals and initiatives to more effectively reach out to young families new to our area, as part of our mission to **Carry God’s contagious love into the world** by:

- ♦ Conducting the power of God’s Spirit into human life (*worship, healing*)
- ♦ Cultivating Jesus-centered lives (*formation*)
- ♦ Catalyzing transformation of our communities, nation and world, one person at a time (*mission, outreach*)

We began work on some initiatives, and even launched a new worship service aimed at that population – and then the coronavirus struck. While that new service was suspended, we found that other aspects of our action plans, like reaching out more in digital space and making our worship more accessible, happened naturally as we adapted to these new conditions. Our actual strategic planning process, however, went dormant, as leaders were diverted to other tasks, and we scrambled to do everything we were used to doing, but doing them in new ways.

We have now reconstituted our Strategic Planning Steering Team, and are working on a revision to the Plan, geared more specifically to fostering diversity, with initiatives to be enacted in 90-day increments. Stay tuned for us to be more intentional about how we move and grow in this coming year.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Kate Heichler

This report details many of the ways the crisis induced by the coronavirus created opportunities for Christ Church to thrive and grow. Nowhere is that more true than with our worship. We already had a rich worship life, rooted in tradition while increasingly diverse. But we had not made the move many thriving churches had already made – livestreaming our services so that we could reach beyond our walls and congregation to invite others in. We did not have the technology or the expertise or, frankly, the desire on the part of most people. Until we hit a situation where worshipping together required us to be online. Our congregations adapted quickly to these new circumstances, despite the steep learning curve.

That first Sunday after our churches were closed, March 15, we were invited to log in to the Cathedral's service, which was lovely. But by the next Sunday we had begun to gather on Zoom, with recorded music and our own voices. Where many churches began to produce videotaped services, your rector was committed to worship that was live, interactive and participatory. We needed to be together and hear each other's voices, as messy as that can be on Zoom. Each week we found new innovations, adding video of our acolytes lighting candles in both sanctuaries, going from hymns sourced from YouTube to having our own **Eileen and Michael Peerless** provide recordings made in our own sanctuary. Having recorded music also made it easier to include music accompanied on instruments other than organ, and **Rev. Kate and Alicia Cordelle** began to record other worship songs, with help from **Cheryl Reckeweg**. By fall, we'd recruited **Tim Illick**, our *Christ Church Casual* piano player, to accompany this music, and he produced beautiful, lush arrangement with strings and woodwinds.

When the weather warmed up, we experimented with outdoor services augmenting the main Zoom service, which was hosted from the parish hall by Rev. Kate with her laptop. Starting in the summer, **Gerald Poe** developed a plan to wire our sanctuary with audio and video to enable us to livestream hybrid services with some in-person participants. He worked for months, without pay, running yards and yards of wire under floorboards and around corners, creating a control room in the base of the bell tower, installing monitors and cameras and connecting audio system. We launched our first hybrid, live-streamed service in mid-November, eight months to the day from when we'd last worshipped in the building, and have steadily improved as we've gone. We now have a full complement of worshippers on Zoom, a handful in the building with Rev. Kate, a stalwart crew of volunteer in the control room producing the stream – and the Holy Spirit bringing us together across the miles. Some join through Facebook Live, and soon we'll add YouTube to the list of streaming options. Now we just need to start inviting people to join us!

NIGHT PRAYERS

The other Covid-related innovation in our Worship life is the addition of Night Prayers each weekday evening. Initially launched as a way to combat the isolation many felt in those first months of sequestering, this service soon took on its own life and drew a dedicated group of participants from both Christ Churches, many of whom now rotate leadership each evening. This core group has kept this ministry going, so that every weeknight our two churches come together to lift in prayer the church, the world, our communities and one another. The depth of sharing and prayer; the familiar rhythms of prayer book and scripture; the joy and laughter and camaraderie have been a great gift. Try it out at 8 pm, Monday – Thursday at its dedicated Zoom link.

ALTAR GUILD

The Christ Church Altar Guild is entrusted with responsibility for the weekly preparation of the chancel and its furnishings. As such, from March 15, when we first began to worship online, until November 15,

when we held our first hybrid in-person/online service, altar guild duties were very limited. They did welcome a new member, Sheila Guttenberg, joining Altar Guild Chair **Melanie Coe**, **Jane Hobbs** and **Margaret Mona**. Longtime member **Courtenay Wilson** moved to St. Mary's County; we're delighted she can continue to worship with us online, if not be present to set up and clean up the altar.

HOLY WEEK, EASTER AND CHRISTMAS

It is worth mentioning how we managed to celebrate our holiest festivals this year. As Easter fell early in our learning how to worship on Zoom, we elected not to have a service Easter Sunday, but instead hosted a watch party to "attend" the service held at the Washington National Cathedral. But we did Holy Week – and with more participation than we would have had in person. We held prayer services Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; we held a Maundy Thursday service with each household invited to have elements of that liturgy by their computers; we did a virtual Stations of the Cross on Good Friday – and we had our first-ever Great Vigil of Easter online. Many had never experienced that service – just imagine what it will be like in the sanctuary!

Christmas Eve was even trickier – it was important that we worship together, and distanced worship with masks and no singing was just not going to cut it. So we delivered to every household (thanks to **Dale and Karen Hupp!**) a gift bag containing a votive candle labeled "A Christ Church Christmas At Home," a quantity of consecrated communion wafers, and a Christmas card with instructions how and when to log in. The centerpiece of the service was our children's Christmas Pageant, which had been videotaped on a local farm in October. At home, we could sing the carols to our heart's content, and we shared eucharist together though separated. Christmas came and we shared that joy together.

STEWARDSHIP

The Rev. Kate Heichler

It is amazing how congregational giving stayed steady this year; we even gained new pledgers. This year we had 39 pledgers, totaling \$103,048 (almost identical to last year's total), 4 of them new pledgers, with increases by 14 renewing pledgers. Eight people did not renew (several had moved), and a few lowered their pledge. We also have many consistent givers who do not pledge. Many thanks to Danielle Webber for helping with our pledge effort.

As we continue to grow, and more and more parishioners give in faith, pledging a percentage of income, we will find ourselves on stable financial footing and able to engage in more mission.

Where do you fit on this spectrum? Annual pledge amounts for 2019 from highest to lowest are:

\$ 7,384	\$ 5,000 (3)	\$ 4,200 (2)	\$ 2,600 (3)	\$ 1,820	\$ 1,300	\$ 800	\$ 600 (2)
5,400	\$ 4,800 (3)	\$ 3,600	\$ 2,500	\$ 1,800	\$ 1,200 (4)	\$ 780	\$ 520 (2)
\$ 5,200	\$ 4,500 (2)	\$ 3,000	\$ 2,080 (2)	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,000	\$ 720	\$ 364

If you have not pledged, you can do so any time by calling or emailing the parish office – 301-392-1051, or office@christchurchlaplata.org. WE are how we fund our ministry.

PARISH STATISTICS

Baptisms:	2		<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
Confirmations	0	Average Sunday Attendance:	56 +/-	69	66
Marriages:	0	Total Easter/Easter Vigil Attendance:	97	112	135
Funerals:	4	Total Christmas Attendance:	95	167	184

TREASURER'S REPORT

Sharon Richardson

It seems a miracle given the year we've had, but we ended 2020 with a surplus of over \$31,000 – which helps, as our projected 2021 budget shows a deficit. Overall Operating Income in 2020 was \$297,585.45 and Operating Expenses totaled \$266,008.01. Those figures include outreach expenditures. What accounts for the surplus? Many of our expenses dropped dramatically due to the constriction of our operations – functioning online is a lot cheaper than heating buildings and printing bulletins. We also had three key sources of income:

- ◆ We applied for and received a Payroll Protection Program loan in the amount of \$18,000 and change (many thanks to Wayside's treasurer, Diana Havenner, for shepherding that process along) – that loan is eligible for forgiveness, thus becoming a grant.
- ◆ We received grants from the Charles County Health Department to cover all Covid-related expenses – PPE, sanitizers, duct and carpet cleaning, and the machine with which Dale Hupp fogs the sanctuary each week. Many thanks to Howard Haft for alerting us to these funds, which came to over \$4,000.
- ◆ You gave generously, many transitioning to online giving, which is easier to process and often provides a steadier cash flow. Thank you!

We also received \$6,000 in Diocesan grants to our Food Pantry, and have unspent funds from grants received in 2019 for our Christ Church Casual worship service. We returned a \$2,500 grant meant to fund a concert series – we can reapply when we're ready to offer that. Unanticipated expenses to equip our sanctuary for livestreaming worship came to a little over \$16,000, but happily were covered by spending shortfalls in other areas. We were blessed with Gerald Poe's expertise given to us at no charge.

The budget you see here for shows the first time our finances alongside those of Christ Church Wayside, with our common expenses shown in the center column. Though each parish's income and expenses are calculated and shown separately (there is no "mingling" of funds), this layout gives us better perspective on our shared ministry. This also created some confusion – if we put the full amount of Wayside's reimbursements, we need to show the full amount of the expenses on our side, not only our portion... to navigate this, we are putting the **full amount in the sub-total line**, and showing **our share** of each item line.

This budget funds a new part-time position, a Digital Assistant to work with Rev. Kate on our social media and website presence. It continues to fund the work of a Sunday School coordinator, who will also develop programs for our youth. We are committed to increasing our Diocesan Pledge by a percentage point per year until we reach 10 percent, based on the prior year's income. A full 4% is over \$11,000 – we will budget it and pay quarterly, holding back at the end of the year if necessary. We have received much more than that from our Diocese in the past few years. All in all we are well placed for a new year of challenges and, we trust, growth in ministry and reach.

Bell Tower: We also undertook the restoration of our bell tower this year. Our hardworking Bell Tower team reviewed eight different proposals and settled on a contract for \$260,570. The project ended up costing an additional \$32,120 due to unforeseen conditions – a need for roof repair and additional stone, bringing the total to \$292,690. From previous year's carryovers and CDs, endowment increases and interest, and the Preservation Fund, we were able to come up with \$253,570, requiring us to raise an additional \$7,000. We found another \$11,000 in endowment increases, and needed to raise \$28,120 more from church and community members; as of this writing, we've raised all but \$4,963, but we're nearly there. Between the generosity of current congregants and endowment funds restricted to buildings, we were able to take care of this iconic building while keeping our eyes focused on mission. God is good!

2020 FINANCIAL REPORT AND 2021 BUDGET - *Separate attachment.*