

Dear friends in Christ,

A year ago, on the last Sunday in September, the Rev. Kristine Johnson gave her first sermon as the new Rector of St. Mary's. The whole parish celebrated with her as we began a new ministry and a new chapter in St. Mary's long history. Reading back over last year's fall stewardship letter, we remember at that time that we were rejoicing over the faithful care of our historic buildings, at our being able to add new staff, our strengthening our programs and ministries and launching some new ones, and reaching out to the community through Christian Social Concerns (CSC), I-Help, a partnership with the PG Library, and Walking Together.

It is hard not to feel that that was a long time ago. The Covid-19 pandemic hit the United States early in 2020 and by the middle of March, we were sheltering from it in our homes. St. Mary's closed its buildings in response. Since then we have not been able to be together physically to worship, sing, share fellowship or classes, or do many of the activities and ministries that gave our lives meaning. We mourn their temporary loss.

But God does not abandon the people, especially not in their challenges, dangers, and distress. We feel God with us, strengthening and inspiring us. While we stay safe, our parish has pulled together using our resources of energy and commitment to be St. Mary's in new ways.

- Our Rector Kristine has led St. Mary's onto the new communications frontier of Zoom by creating moving church services that sustain us with liturgy, sermons, organ interludes, and coffee hours, all happening from our little boxes on screen. It is different, but it is also familiar. We are so grateful for the support of our communications team of John Willoughby and Sandy Moon, and for the musicians, readers, and intercessors who make this possible.
- Kristine has encouraged classes and ministries to meet weekly over Zoom, and these include the Youth Group, Bible study using *Lectio Divina*, pastoral conversations about race, spiritual writing, and prayer shawl ministry. Celtic music jam meets at a social distance on the patio.
- CSC has adapted our traditional help to those in need by organizing social distancing on the patio to interview clients, putting together food bags from donations, and expanding our food outreach to local school sites to supplement their offerings with ours from the Monterey County Food Bank. From the typical 150 clients that were served weekly just on the patio, CSC is now serving between 700 and 900 people weekly from the patio and the 3 school sites.
- I-Help for homeless men and women continues in a new format, with one church opening its facilities to provide shelter, and various churches offering food for the clients. St. Mary's is not providing shelter, but provides food for the men on the fourth Saturday of the month and for the women on the second Saturday.
- A group called *On Purpose* began this summer meeting over Zoom to explore the mission of St. Mary's in this new time. Together we have read materials on scarcity and abundance, the uses of pledge campaigns, and a parable on the evolution of institutions, and talked over how these relate to our parish.
- Walking Together (WT) now meets over Zoom to plan and organize actions to support the needy in our larger community during this time of crisis. With the 28

other COPA institutions, WT has developed information on Covid-19 and how to stay safe, and presented it over Zoom to over 500 agricultural and hospitality workers. Last week COPA hosted a Zoom call with 210 people tuning in to hear how the 4 candidates for Supervisor in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties would support COPA's goals.

- The vestry continues to meet monthly on Zoom, the Junior Warden (this year it is Robert Daunt) continues his indefatigable attentions to the needs of the church campus, and the Senior Warden (Elizabeth McCorkle) keeps the parish organized in countless ways. A new temporary labyrinth has been laid out on the front lawn, in hopes St. Mary's can install a permanent labyrinth in the future.

The point of reminding ourselves of all the things St. Mary's is doing these days is to realize that although we live in a strange time, we thrive and grow in old and new ministries, working to bring God's kingdom closer on earth.

Our staff has had to shrink, and the expenses of keeping our buildings open are somewhat reduced while they are closed, but we members of the parish still need to financially support St. Mary's if we want the church to continue its work and to be a strong support for us, now and when we can gather in person again.

Please pledge your financial support to St. Mary's for the coming 2020-2021 year. Each pledge helps to keep the ministries so many depend on humming along. We cannot do it without you. Our monthly expenses are roughly \$22,000, and we hope to be able to meet those with pledge income, so that other gifts might be used to expand ministries and make some of our dreams reality. In 2020, we have 70 people or households pledging to St. Mary's, and others give without pledging. Pledges are crucial because they are our basis for budgeting. Prayerfully consider pledging if you have not in the past. And if your financial situation is healthy, an increase in your pledge this year would be especially appreciated. A pledge card is enclosed, along with a proportional giving chart. Please return your pledges to the church office by mail or email to accountant@stmarysbythesea.org by November 1, All Saints' Day. We follow a long line of saints at St. Mary's who worked to build what we enjoy today; let us make our commitments to build for the future.

The apostle Paul spent most of the last years of his life in prison, writing letters to the congregations he had started. We read parts of his letters in church each Sunday. His words of hope and encouragement to the church at Philippi seem right for us, in this time:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4-9)

Faithfully,

The Vestry of St. Mary's