

*Looking Toward 2021, Anticipating Changes, and Getting Your Input*  
*A Letter from Rev. Shirley Smith Graham*

Dear Christ Church friends,

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5). This is what I have seen of you and our Unstoppable Church. Not even a pandemic stops Christ Church from praising God, caring for one another, and serving the most vulnerable. All because Jesus, the Light of God, remains with us, and you have been faithful. Hallelujah.

Thank you for your financial gifts, which have enabled the church to not only weather 2020 but also fuel God’s work in our diocese and among our mission partners: CARITAS, FeedMore, Shalom Farms, Crossover Healthcare Ministries, Habitat for Humanity, Forward Foundation (formerly Sophie’s House), Hope and Resurrection School in South Sudan, the Lespwa Timoun mothers and children’s health clinic in Haiti, and Communities in Schools.

It’s a good thing the light shines in the darkness, because there is some darkness. The consequences of not gathering in-person indoors since March are damaging. Our church has not received much of our planned non-pledge income, and we have missed the offerings of Easter and Christmas even though we celebrated these highpoints of our church’s life. While it would be premature to anticipate how we will end 2020 financially, the vestry and I anticipate that we may incur a significant deficit. If you had planned a gift but not yet made it, we ask you to [use this link](#).

For 2021, the vestry is contemplating a draft budget that reduces ministry costs to minimal levels and drastically decreases ministry performed by employees. This draft budget contemplates reducing my rector position to 3/4 time, eliminating Rev. Richard’s position starting April 1, not replacing Rev. Darren’s vacant position, not continuing the independent contractor services that Michael Compton has been doing in worship management and pastoral care coordination, and reducing David Ellis’ facilities manager position to 3/4 time. The draft budget does maintain our diocesan and other mission and outreach giving at 2020 levels.

Obviously, these are significant changes which will affect how we do ministry, but this strategy will help us navigate 2021, which may have significant uncertainty in terms of public health, financial conditions, and social complexities. No final decisions have been made, and we hope you will offer any input you have to current vestry members and attend our Annual Meeting (Zoom) on January 10 at 1 p.m. The new vestry elected on January 10 will vote on a 2021 budget at its meeting on January 20.

Advising this budget has been one of the most painful experiences of my 18 years as a pastor, and it has been difficult for our stewardship team, finance team and vestry. I'm sure you also have dealt with painful realities associated with COVID-19. But, moving toward 2021, I suggest we allow the Savior who promises to ease our burdens to guide us.

“Consider the lilies, how they grow ... But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” (Luke 12:27-30)

I believe 2021 will be a bridge year into 2022. It's our calling as church to get everyone safely across to a future that desperately needs God's Good News and transforming ministry. We can do this by being the worshipping community that serves God's children inside and outside of the church. Keep the faith!

In the love of Christ Jesus,

Rev. Shirley