

2021 Annual Parish Meeting

Rector Report of 2020

January 31st, 2021

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

I would like to begin my report expressing my sincere gratitude for your continued support in our common ministry.

The year 2020 drastically interrupted the normality of life and forced us to face the vulnerability of human life with a pandemic that even today continues being somewhat out of control. For this reason, the immediate judgment of the year 2020 could be negative or with disapproval for some individuals, especially those who lost loved ones and experienced grief in isolation, illness, unemployment, or any hardship in first person.

While I agree with the common opinion about the distress of the pandemic situation, in my capacity as rector, I had the privilege to also witness an extremely positive side that needs to be shared.

The first three months of 2020 went according with the usual calendar of activities. We had the opportunity of hosting two successful fundraiser events-

a garage sale in February and a fish fry in March. The new Movie Ministry offered the opportunity for many to gather and enjoy two good movies on our parish hall big screen. We had fellowship moments like the Super Bowl party, Mardi Gras Pancake Supper, reading and studying theology, and advancing in our spirituality and prayer groups.

When our Vestry followed the advice of the Diocese to close the church building due to the fierce pandemic, our ministry at Christ Church never stopped, but rather flourished. I saw the beginning of proven resilience and strength experienced in our church community. We had the collaboration of parish members caring about other members. A special thanks to Kathy Davies, Armando Barrios, Deacon Andrea, John Cathey, Javier Gutierrez, Cat Crandell, Rene Schmidt, and many others to create and expand a Telecare Ministry to become a vital way of staying in touch. I am grateful for the members who took time to call or write a note for others to feel the care of the Christ Church family.

The capacity for the whole community to adapt and move forward according with the circumstances was highly demonstrated on March 15, 2020, the first Sunday of having the church Sanctuary closed. We had a teleconference Service connected with the National Church and many of you were there. This desire to

be together demonstrated that despite the distraught pandemic situation, the community was able to respond quickly and efficiently to make it better.

The unprecedented move came to pass from the phone to internet and Zoom Services. Many members learned to login and participated in a totally new way of being community. Although it is never the same as being in person, we have learned to listen to God in a virtual way. We suddenly understood that more than the physical building, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) is the spiritual community of living members.

On Pentecost Sunday, May 31st, we celebrated the 130th Anniversary with a High Mass, higher than we have ever had at Christ Church. Our altar table and Holy Eucharist was literally celebrated in the highest place of the building—upon the Sanctuary roof! We did so to maintain social distancing practices (and to have a good internet signal) with the assembly outdoors in the parking lot. From this experience, we worked to offer our own radio station to allow people to participate directly from their vehicles during the hot summer days!

Almost immediately after reopening our Services in person, we had to close our church building down again to ensure everyone's safety and thus we went exclusively online. I want to publicly thank the Vestry, Javier Gutierrez the Senior Warden, and John Cathey our Junior Warden, for their wise decisions

and considerations in this delicate situation. Although some families were directly infected with COVID-19 and a few individuals required being hospitalized, I must satisfactorily report that we did not have any direct member of the church pass to eternal life. However, sadly we had many families that experienced the death of someone in their family (especially abroad); and to these parish members we express our closeness in their sorrow.

In becoming an online community, we quickly discovered the opportunity to grow spiritually through worship while maintaining the fellowship with others. The Daily Office in English is prayed in the morning and in Spanish in the evening; and let us not forget our Children's Chapel on Saturdays makes us a powerful praying parish. One of our greatest strengths today is we are truly blessed to have constant communication with God. Each day we thank Him, we ask Him, and we intercede for others, ourselves, and the whole world.

The capacity to adapt made it possible for us to continue being relevant in offering ministry that connects people with God. The online services never stopped the desire and selfless love of church members for our community or others. Even with the many obstacles, our regular Dinner with Christ, food distribution, and support of our local public school continued. One of the best moments of last year was our partnership with OCCEA and Crossroads to offer

a massive monthly food distribution for our neighbors and families in need. I am ever grateful to all the volunteers that made this ministry possible!

While we lived in financial distress from the loss of our projected income, Christ Church was also grateful to have received in August the income from the sale of Fr. Lee's condo that was inherited from his estate and passing in 2016. Many members were generous, understanding, and answered the appeal to support the finances of the church in a special way. I take this occasion to express my gratitude to all of you who are committed and generously supply for the needs and expenses of the church, and I invite all who can to follow this example. Know that there is not real discipleship until we commit our time and resources to the church community.

Overall, I remain grateful for all the blessings received in 2020, and I am hopeful for the continued display of God's grace in our community of Christ Episcopal Church Dallas for 2021. While we experience a shifting of paradigms in our being church, we learn that although the human life is frail and limited, our Christian life is a gift from God that needs to be constantly shared with others. I invite you to continue learning, exploring, and committing to God who never ceases to love you. Amen.