

2022 Annual Parish Meeting

Rector Annual Report of 2021

January 30th, 2022

By: The Rev. Dr. Fabian Villalobos

Since my annual rector's report is the acknowledgment of our ministry together at Christ Episcopal Church Dallas, I would like to begin thanking God and each of you faithful members and companions of the Christian journey. **Thank you!**

The first months of the 2021 year were somehow lived in the same way our 2020 year ended due to the difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic. We continued to worship online and operate like most churches that choose wisely to put the community welfare of all before the personal preferences of some.

Thank you! Thank you for your endurance, resilience and patience with me, the Vestry, and the Diocese, during this long period of the pandemic time. Today with honesty and satisfaction, we can report that with the containment measures implemented at the community of Christ Episcopal Church, we protected and prevented our church from becoming a virus spreading place. For this protection, we are grateful to God, and we also recognize your collaboration.

Operating with the building online does not mean that we stopped the mission of the church. Those first months of 2021 were a great start of an ongoing monthly outreach of food distribution that directly involved a minimum of 45 members of Christ Church. These dedicated volunteers of men and women of different ages and backgrounds, found the time and energy to pick-up, download, prepare, and distribute food to our neighbors in need. **Thank you!** Thank you, good and faithful servants! Each month your dedication and efforts brought the gospel to life. Your capacity to care for others anticipate the answer

that God requires from each one of us, “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat” Mt 25:35.

With the collaboration and partnership with Oak Cliff Churches for Emergency Aid (OCCEA) and the generous support of Crossroads, the fruitfulness of our monthly drive-thru food distribution served more than 4,000 families and distributed more than 139,000 pounds of food in 2021. **Thank you!** Most of the volunteers involved in these distributions are members of Christ Church. Our food ministry also included the monthly feeding at the Agape Houses and Ewing House communities; and during the summer, we distributed the “Summer Meals” program for DISD students. Our flourishing food ministry received two food grants from the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas and placed Christ Church Dallas among those churches that strive to preach the gospel with our actions.

Alongside our food drive-thru for several months, we had the opportunity to host a Covid-19 test site for neighbors and members, and later we offered Covid-19 vaccines as they became available to the different age levels.

Once the Covid-19 vaccines were available and members had the opportunity to receive them, we returned to worship in-person in our church building by Easter Sunday. The importance of being physically together under the same roof has the same significance that the disciples experienced at Pentecost: The Holy Spirit is manifested when we intentionally gather to become the Body of Christ. The sense of belonging in the church community was restored, and with the proper protocols, we enjoyed the opportunity to be back together.

In 2021, for the first time after 19-years of ordained ministry, I had the opportunity to enjoy a sabbatical time, thanks to the Vestry and the Diocese for their collaboration. **Thank you!** The sabbatical time was spent resting and relaxing, visiting family and friends, and learning about leadership and ministry. My sincere gratitude especially to our wardens, John Cathey (Sr.

Warden), and Mark Rojas (Jr. Warden), and to Armando Barrios (Director of Latino Ministries) for their dedication, leadership, and support during my sabbatical. **Thank you!** Their constant presence and guidance were instrumental to assure the continuity of our commitments and programs for our church community. We resumed our Summer VBS and Christian Formation in-person. Of great financial accomplishment in reducing our property tax, we completed the renovations to the rectory house for further ministry as planned by the Vestry.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we understood that our church community was affected in membership and financially. Like most churches, we lost members who went to other churches or decided to stop going to church for a variety of reasons. This decline points out the fragility of the human commitment in front of God and the “cultural religion” of consumption that works only for individual purposes. In the annual study day for clergy as part of the diocesan convention 2021, the invited speaker Ed Stetzer, underlined how the social, cultural, and political challenges of our American Christianity influences the way how churches and people are divided in the manner how they answer to these challenges. The most pressing which currently remains COVID itself, has people and churches alike divided by science, politics, and personal opinions.

The effects of this decline, besides the number of members lost of our Christ Episcopal Church community, is manifested in the lower number of pledges received. We recognize the families and members who fill and maintain a yearly pledge. Thank you! For those who give without a pledge commitment, we urge them to consider the spiritual progress is incomplete since their financial commitment is lacking.

Thank you! Among the financial blessings of 2021 are income received for the first time from the Canon Harrison Lee III Foundation of \$64,000; a one-time donation from a family inheritance of \$28,000; and the continued support

from all donors and benefactors. However, we continue to fall short and use our endowment fund; last year we took \$74,000 to complete our \$300,000 annual budget.

In times of crisis and hardships, I remain overall optimistic and forever grateful to God for our ministry together and recognize that all is possible with God when we live with true authenticity of our baptismal vocation and relationship with God. In this sense, I am honored and much appreciative to see the unfolding growth of the spiritual life of the people who are in the morning and evening, praying the Daily Office. This community of virtual and very real members who take time and make space for God in their daily lives to pray for everyone on our prayer list and all those who have asked for prayer, they pray for the needs of our church and the holy church universal, and they pray for God's mercy upon us and upon the whole world. They are the backbone of our church today. ***Thank you!*** Thank you for your testimony and prayers.

I invite all of you to trust in the Lord with all your heart and do what it is in your power to live a faithful and fruitful life always. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Fabián Villalobos
Rector