

The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas – Philadelphia

A MESSAGE FROM THE 17TH RECTOR

The Very Rev. Canon Martini Shaw

A REPORT ON: THE STATE OF THE PARISH

“Two Hundred Twenty Four Years of Spiritual Life, Growth and Vitality”

To God be the Glory!

in celebration of Two Hundred and Twenty - Four years of dedicated, faithful, committed service, witness and ministry. 2016 was indeed another great year.

- We remained a spiritual community of faith, where the Gospel of Jesus continued to be taught, lived and spread.
- We continued to embrace our history of being the first black Episcopal Church in the nation.
- We remained one of the very active, vibrant and growing parishes in the Episcopal Church.

During 2016, we completed the 5th year of our Parish Five Year Vision Plan, focusing on the areas of the 3 “E’s”: Evangelism, Education, and Edifice. Even though the formal Initiative is completed, we shall continue our efforts in these areas.

We were able to accomplish several things under this Initiative:

- Growth in the number of new families to our parish
- Creation of the Absalom Jones Academy
- Restoration of several areas of the edifice (stained glass windows, carpeting, handicap accessibility)
- Retirement of loan for Restoration of the newly named Absalom Jones House.
- Establishment of a new Capital Building Improvement Fund
- Incorporated new social media efforts as part of our daily parish life
- Continuation of efforts to rectify the problems with leaks in the basement of the Absalom Jones House.

We continued to be a prayerful community of Faith, steeped in Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Worship, evident through the many activities and highlights reported by our many guilds, organizations and ministries underscored in this Annual Report booklet.

Our Christian Formation and Education ministry was blessed with the appointment of a new Church School Superintendent, Mrs. Dorothy Archey. Her appointment has breathed new life and vitality into this very important area of youth ministry of our parish. We thank God for her commitment and dedication, as well as that of her staff.

We also began a partnership with ECS (Episcopal Charities Services) After-school program in providing needed space for their staff work.

There were many liturgical observances and celebrations during 2016. These are but a few:

- + The Annual Observance and Celebration of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin L. King; and the Life of the Rev. Absalom Jones.
- + A Lenten Season filled with reflection and learning; followed by a festive Season of Easter, and spirit filled Pentecost
- + Another Revival to feed the soul
- +The Annual Caribbean Eucharist and Outdoor Festival
- + Annual Mother's Day, Father's Day Women's Day, Men's Day, Youth Day Celebrations
- + Annual Church Outing filled with worship, delicious food and fellowship.
- + Annual Homecoming and Back to School Celebrations
- + A very Festive Christmas Eve Mass to conclude the year.

During 2016, plans began for the Celebration of our 225th Church Anniversary.....a year to be filled with activities. I appointed Co-Chairs during the year to shepherd and guide the Celebration. They are: Albert Dandridge, Catherine Stafford and Monica Lewis Jones. They created and formed sub-committees to begin the planning and work. The theme of the year – long Celebration is: “AECST – Celebrating 225 Years of Legacy, Faith and Hope.”

We ended the year on a spiritual high, financial solvency and energized hearts in preparation for what is to come in the years ahead.

I again say that it has been, and continues to be an immense and humble honor and joy serving as the rector of such an historic parish. I am thankful to you for the opportunity to serve as your pastor, shepherd, friend, and brother in Christ. I am also thankful for your willingness to share me with the wider church and community in 2016: Dean of the Schuylkill Deanery, Chapter Member of the Philadelphia Cathedral, Member of the Bishop's Search Committee, National Vice President for the Union of Black Episcopalians, Chairman of the Episcopal Historically Black Colleges and Universities Task Force, recent appointment as Canon of the Cathedral, and a host of other activities beyond the walls of our parish. Do know that wherever I go, I am always mindful that I am representing the people and Faith community of St. Thomas.

I thank each of you for the many ways that you blessed our church with the sharing of your Time, Talents and Treasures. I especially offer thanks to the supportive staff. Without you, “this train” would have faced many difficulties in reaching its many destinations in 2016.

In conclusion, 2016 was another amazing and successful year for our parish in many ways. As we now engage with the celebration of our 225th Anniversary, let us continue to embrace new ideas, new visions, new energy, new joys, as the AECST Express embarks upon new opportunities, new directions and new destinations.

May God bless you and May God bless the continued ministry of St. Thomas Church.