

THE AFRICAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS

PHILADELPHIA, PA

A MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

The Very Rev. Canon Martini Shaw

THE 2019 STATE OF THE PARISH

“The AECST Express Moves Full Steam Ahead (1792 – 2019)

During 2019, our parish experienced yet another year of growth, vitality and vibrancy, moved full steam ahead, celebrated 227 years of legacy, faith, and hope, deeply steeped in prayer and worship, scripture and tradition, reason and advocacy.

Our blessings manifested in multifarious ways, many highlights and memories, as we:

- + Started the new year welcoming many new members who joined our parish family during the preceding year of 2018;
- + Celebrated the Life of the Rev. Martin L. King, Jr., Dr. W. Franklin as our guest speaker, president of Voorhees College (Denmark, S.C.), one of our Episcopal HBCUs;
- + Celebrated the Feast of Blessed Absalom Jones, the Right Rev. Carl Wright, bishop of the Armed Forces, as our guest speaker;
- + Culminated the Epiphany Season—in preparation for Lent—with a Mardi Gras-style Sunday worship;
- + Journeyed through “the Wilderness,” our theme, during the entire Lenten Season;
- + Welcomed students from St. James School who participated in our Palm Sunday Passion Reading;
- + Celebrated yet another successful Caribbean service and festival;
- + Welcomed our Diocesan Bishop—the Right Rev. Daniel Gutierrez—who confirmed and received a robust class of 47 confirmands;
- + Celebrated Annual Women’s Day and its guest preacher from the Diocese of Washington, D.C., the Rev. H. Jocelyn;
- + Participated in several city-wide memorials to those killed in gun violence;
- + Celebrated Annual Men’s Day, and its guest preacher, the Rev. Isaac Miller.
- + Blessed educators, students and parents as they kicked off the return of the new school year;

- + Celebrated Judicial Sunday, our guest speaker, the Honorable Karen Shreeves-johns, judge of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas;
- + Joined in worship, the return of the Honorable Jim Kenney, Mayor of the city of Philadelphia, for our annual celebration of the life of Octavius V. Catto; and,
- + Supported our commitment to youth-focused liturgies on Fourth Sundays.

The health of our parish is manifesting in many ways. Stewardship, for example, was quite successful and encouraging. As a result, we ended the year with a sizeable budget surplus, due largely in part to parishioner's commitment to maintaining their faithful-giving pledges. In addition to our budget success, conversations continued around the possibility of housing an early learning center. In fact, the Rector established a "think tank" to explore every possible opportunity to the success of this exciting addition to our church community; this focus will continue into the new year.

Change is forever present, as we've witnessed several transitions. We've mourned the death of so many faithful parishioners who entered the joy of the heavenly Jerusalem, and we will forever remember and celebrate their lives and their contributions to our church family and communities. On a happier note, following three wonderful years as the Assistant Rector of St. Thomas, the Rev. Samuel Kirabi was called as the new rector of St. Peter's, Phoenixville. While we are proud of his accomplishments, Fr. Karabi and his wife, Sylvia, will be greatly missed. Again, we give thanks to God for his ministry.

In the midst of our losses, we give thanks to God for the new persons who joined our parish family, including the Rev. Gerald Collins, one of our priest associates. Both Fr. Jay and our dedicated Vergers have taken on more responsibilities during the absence of an Assistant Rector. We give thanks for their ministries.

As I close, let me offer thanks to the Vestry, supportive staff, volunteers, and all those who've served with their unyielding commitment and dedication. These individuals helped to fuel our AECST Express Train to many successful destinations.

Again, 2019 was another epic and amazing year for our parish. We will continue our track full steam ahead in expanding our mission, christian formation, evangelism, outreach, youth development and stewardship.

I am humbled to serve as your shepherd, your pastor, your rector and your brother in Christ. Please always remember me in your prayers as I shall continue to always remember you in mine.

Stay onboard as our spiritual journey continues into 2020 and every blessing God has in store.