

THE AFRICAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS - PHILADELPHIA

A MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

The Very Rev. Canon Martini Shaw

THE 2023 STATE OF THE PARISH

“The AECST Express Journey Continues” (1792 – 2023)

We continued our post-pandemic years of ministry with fervor and intention. Our passion to re-engage previous ministerial destinations—as well as adding several new ones— dominated our focus. Most of our various guilds, organizations and ministries restarted their activities with renewed energy and direction. In doing so, our past informs us of both the challenges and manifold possibilities for growth and provides for a landscape to broaden, further, our network of ministries to proclaim the Gospel.

We continued to encourage in-person worship at the same time providing a consistent livestream component for those who could not physically attend. While we recognize that access is critical to the overall health and growth of our church, we emphasized the importance—and significance—of being physically present to receive the sacrament and to be in fellowship with others. Clearly, in-person worship has softened; however, the demand for virtual connectivity has grown. Ultimately, our mission is to regain in-person worship to pre-pandemic levels and increase our virtual footprint.

Month after month, the AECST Expressed arrived at Sundays of celebrations and observations:

+ In January, we welcomed new parishioners into our church family who had joined during the previous year, 2022, observed and celebrated the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., and celebrated the ministry of our Girls Friendly Society chapter;

+ In February, we kicked off our celebration of Black History Month; observed and celebrated the Feast of Blessed Absalom Jones—with both our Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Michael Curry, and our Diocesan Bishop, The Right Rev. Daniel Gutierrez— worshipping with us, celebrated “Love Sunday,” Mardi Gras Sunday, Scouts Sunday and Episcopal HBCU Sunday. The Season of Lent began during this month with Ash Wednesday;

+ In March, we observed the Lenten Season with weekly Wednesday Eucharists and a theme, “Understanding and Application of the Ten Commandments”;

+ In April, we observed Holy Week (Maundy Thursday and Good Friday) by beginning with our outdoor Palm Sunday procession, and the welcoming of students, staff and parents of St. James School. Members were invited to join the Cathedral for a Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, finally, a glorious Easter Sunday celebration;

+ In May, we celebrated Mother’s Day, Graduate Sunday and a glorious Pentecost Sunday;

+ In June, we celebrated Father’s Day, a festive Caribbean Sunday—to include welcoming our new Associate to the Rector—and Annual Youth Sunday;

+ In July, we celebrated Independence Day with our Scouts joining us;

+ In September, we gathered for a festive Homecoming Sunday, Back to School/Education Sunday and Blessing of Expecting mothers;

+ In October, we kicked off our Stewardship campaign, celebrated O.V. Catto Sunday—with the Mayor of Philadelphia once again worshiping with us. Our Church School classes reconvened, Chosen 300 Sunday, celebrated the Feast of St. Francis, observed Breast Cancer Awareness Sunday and celebrated the return of Judicial Sunday;

+ In November, we celebrated the Feast of All Saints/All Souls, Veterans Day and the return of Family/Friends Sunday;

+ Finally, in December, we observed the beginning of the Advent Season, celebrated our Annual Men’s Day Sunday, enjoyed the wonderful Christmas pageant by our Church School and a festive Christmas Eve Service attended by many parishioners and visitors.

Throughout the year, we shared both happy and sad moments. We celebrated several baptisms, marriages and anniversaries. In addition, as reported from our Financial Committee, St. Thomas ended the year with a balanced budget and an increase in its investments. We are very grateful to almighty God for keeping us alive, strong, vibrant and growing, while proudly proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in novel and re-

imagined ways and opportunities. And, sadly, we mourned the death of several faithful parishioners and family members who entered the joy of the heavenly Jerusalem.

In closing, I thank each one of you—including all our guilds and organizations—for the sharing of your time, talents and treasures during 2023. I am also most grateful to be able to serve with such esteemed partners in ministry: dedicated wardens—Richard Jones and Deborah Camp-Frye; a committed and supportive Vestry and Auxiliary Vestry; Fr. Daren Evans; Fr. Gerald Collins; Kathryn Brossa; David King; a dedicated and hard-working staff—Gladyce DuBrey, Jeannette Jeffery, Dr. Jay Fluellen, Walter Blocker, LaDon Elliott, David McGilberry and the many volunteers who shared countless hours of serving. My continued hope and prayer for 2024 is that the AECST Express continues to “order our steps” as we strive to follow Jesus, proclaim the good news and bring others to know, love and serve Him.

I am reminded of my recently-delivered homily preached: “The Best is Yet to Come.”
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen!