

**THE AFRICAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS
PHILADELPHIA**

A MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR
The Very Rev. Canon Martini Shaw

THE 2022 STATE OF THE PARISH

**“The AECST Express on a Re-Imagined Journey”
(1792 – 2022)**

After several years of a pandemic (COVID19), we finally began to witness and implement a Re-Imagined journey. During 2021, we remained in the midst of many pandemic challenges. During 2022, we were provided with many opportunities to begin a new journey forward. We were reminded and challenged by our past, while looking at new ways to interpret and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each guild, organization and ministry was asked to re-imagine its ministry: how it loves and how it serves.

We continued to encourage in-person worship at the same time providing livestream for those who could not physically attend. Emphasis continued to stress the importance of being physically present to receive the sacrament and to be in fellowship with others. While in-person worship attendance was not what it had been pre-pandemic, it continued to grow, and continues now each week.

Our re-imagined journey during 2022 included some of the following Sunday Observances and Celebrations:

- + Welcomed new parishioners into our church family both virtually and in-person;
- + In January: observed and celebrated the Life of the Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. and the relevancy of our Health Ministry;
- + In February: observed and celebrated the life of Blessed Absalom Jones and welcomed the rector and people of St. Peter’s Church to join us; celebrated our Episcopal Historically Black Colleges and Universities; celebrated a Mardi-Gras- style worship before the start of the Lenten season;
- + In March: observed the Lenten Season beginning with Ash Wednesday and the blessing and distribution of ashes;

- + In April: observed Holy Week with in-person worship, being joined by the chaplain and students from St. James School on Palm Sunday; celebrated Resurrection Sunday In-Person following a few years only virtually;
- + In May: celebrated an official Visitation of our Bishop which include the Rite of Confirmation; celebrated Mother's Day and Women's Day;
- + In June: celebrated Pentecost Sunday, Graduate Recognition Sunday, Father's Day and Youth Sunday;
- + In July: celebrated Independence Day with our Scouts joining us;
- + In September: celebrated Education Sunday and welcomed our new superintendent of Philadelphia Schools as our guest speaker; celebrated a very festive Homecoming Sunday, intentionally welcoming folks back to in-person worship;
- + In October: began our Stewardship Campaign; celebrated Catto Sunday with the Mayor of Philadelphia once again worshipping with us; observed Breast Cancer Awareness Sunday;
- + In November: celebrated the Feast of All Saints/All Souls; observed Veterans Day, and the beginning of the Advent Season;
- + In December: celebrated our Church School's amazing Christmas Pageant; and a festive Christmas Eve Service which ended the year of 2022.

Our re-imagined journey also included the following:

- + In Celebration of our 230th Parish Anniversary, the renaming of a portion of Lancaster Avenue to become Absalom Jones Way, guests included our bishop, diocesan leaders and many elected and community officials;
- + We welcomed two outstanding new seminarians assigned to our parish;
- + The rector and parish were honored by St. James School at their Annual benefit for our past commitment and involvement with hosting COVID19 Vaccination Clinics at the church;
- + We continued our Outreach efforts with Chosen 300 ministry;
- + Our amazing livestream ministry continued to grow and serve parishioners, friends and visitors each week both near and far;
- + In addition to our superb photography ministry, we added a new state of the art videography ministry to our communication structure;
- + We continued to include and incorporate our youth and young families in all facets of ministry;
- + Our Church School and Bible Class remained alive and well;
- + We completed numerous property enhancement projects throughout the year;

Once again, to our delight, we ended another year with a sizable budget surplus, thanks to the many parishioners sharing their treasures in faithful giving. While this is great news, we are mindful that we have not had a full-time associate rector in a few years. A search began in 2022, with the hope of the calling of one in 2023. This will necessitate assuring that robust faithful giving continues to exist. And with the increase in in-person activities, it will be necessary to once again have an evening and weekend sexton on duty.

Sadly, we mourned the death of several faithful parishioners and family members who entered the joy of the heavenly Jerusalem.

In 2022, we definitely continued our re-imagined journey. We give thanks to Almighty God for keeping us strong, vibrant and proudly proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in new and re-imagined ways and opportunities.

I am most grateful for each one of you. I am further enormously blessed and grateful to be able to serve with dedicated wardens: Deadra Cannon and Kelvin Johnson; associate colleague in ministry, Fr. Gerald Collins; Seminarians: Kathryn Brossa and David King; a very supportive vestry; a dedicated and hardworking staff; and many volunteers who share countless hours of their time, talents and treasures.

My hope and prayer for 2023 is that the AECST Express continues to journey forward, re-imagining even more, what God has in store for us in the days, months and years ahead.

May God continue to “order our steps” as we strive to follow Jesus, proclaim the good news, and bring others to know, love and serve him.

To God be the glory for the things God has done, is doing, and shall do.