

Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Chatham, VA Rector's Annual Report

Dear Members of the Body of Christ in the parish of Emmanuel Church,

Blessings! We are doing something wonderful for God. The members of the parish of Emmanuel Church took the necessary time and personal commitment to find a way forward as a parish. The parish as a whole walked the complex process that led to the hiring of a new clergy leader. I also went through a complex process of holy discernment. And together we have made a commitment with each other and to each other. And, make no mistake, this is something wonderful for God, because through our mutual commitment we have the necessary diversity of gifts to serve each other and the world in Christ's name.

Part of that process was to look at yourselves, both as individuals and as a parish. You identified gifts and strengths, as well as patterns that were unhealthy and counterproductive. And while at the end of the process the focus has been on you welcoming me and Stephen into your parish, the work that you did to prepare for that and for your continuing part in integrating our relationship, I think it is important to reflect back. You yourselves have been shaped by the process. Please pause to acknowledge the hard work that has been done. Please reflect on the gifts you discovered in yourselves, in someone else, in the parish, in the larger community. I was not part of that process, but I am enjoying and will continue to enjoy the fruits of it. It is as much of what needs to be reported to the annual meeting as anything I have witnessed since becoming part of your community.

I will read you something from the Constitution & Canons of the Episcopal Church,

Title III: CANON 1: Of the Ministry of All Baptized Persons: Sec. 1. Each Diocese shall make provision for the affirmation and development of the ministry of all baptized persons, including: (a) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ's name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church and to serve Christ's mission at all times and in all places. (b) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian formation.

I am delighted that, as evidenced by the interest in Christian formation, including the Confirmation Classes, participation in choir, the broadening base of those who are ministers for the Eucharist, visitation of the homebound, participation in civic committees and organizations, and in other inquiries for future service, the parish is committed to the ministry of all baptized persons.

The parish walked with the Rev. Dr. John Ruef in his final illness. You were with his wife, Jane, keeping touch and making sure she could do what she needed to do. You celebrated their 65th anniversary with them. You held them in your heart and in your prayers through the long months. The parish was then host to his family, friends, and colleagues for a funeral and reception that truly reflected Dr. Ruef. This experience was a singular milestone in the history of this parish. I felt privileged to have witnessed it, to have been invited by you to play my part.

You outpoured love and generosity of time, spirit, gifts. In doing what you could, you did good, and you did it well.

You have also walked with others. Members of the parish have needed visiting, rides, compassion, listeners, people willing to run errands, time out, and/or a chance to have their voices heard. At your best, that is what you gave each other. We had a few close calls with health emergencies, as well as long-term care. What I said about the care you gave Dr. Ruef and his family applies here as well: you outpoured love and generosity of time, spirit, gifts. In doing what you could, you did good, and you did it well.

In worship, you exhibited a commitment to fine liturgy done with dignity yet without fussiness and stuffiness. Many of you weekly fulfilled the expectation stated in the Constitution and Canons describing a communicant in good standing “All communicants of this Church who for the previous year have been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, are to be considered communicants in good standing.” That willingness to regularly show up and be counted in worship services and in service is essential to our growth as a parish, and your personal spiritual growth as beloved children of God.

As a parish, you have also shown commitment to music both in the liturgy and for the larger community’s wellbeing. I note with some humor that, though there is no mention of annual meetings in our national or diocesan Constitution and Canons, provision for church music is. The canons require that music be provided for worship, the music during Episcopal worship is normative. For the purpose of my report which is a review of the past year, I note that you take the responsibility seriously and have provided the financial and organizational support for a music program. When the previous organist moved, you sought out a knowledgeable and personable liturgical musician, Kenyon Scott. You took your canonical responsibilities seriously and now enjoy the benefits. By being hosts and sponsors of the Chatham Concert Series, you have reached out to the larger community, reflecting back to the community the values of fine music.

We struggled to get to this point together. We know that there will be further struggles because that is real life. Having formed the bonds of community, we will not be alone in our struggles. Because we are the Body of Christ, we are bound together through Love Himself.

Faithfull submitted,

(The Rev. Dr.) Regina Christianson
Dec. 11, 2016