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Embrace the Incarnate Life

By The Reverend Nathan Stomberg, *Rector*, Holy Communion Anglican Church

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

Over the past several months, really beginning with my reflections on the Advent and Christmas seasons, I have been gripped by the reality of the Incarnation. And the reality grips me for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, by God's grace through the Holy Spirit he has mercifully granted me, as it were, fresh eyes to see the miracle of His Son our Savior Jesus Christ assuming our humanity, in all of its beauty and humility and drama and love. Second, I think it is God's answer to an unspoken prayer: How do we creatively re-imagine ministry to meet the needs of a generation that is hostile to Christianity, yet utterly shaken for abandoning the LORD God as its center?

That answer has taken the form of a vision for ministry, which I will endeavor to describe. While our work to share the Gospel can, and should, take many different shapes, making use of all the tools and technologies at our disposal, it must always give first importance to personal relationships - relationships with fellow believers for the equipping of the saints, and relationships with non-Christians to spread the love of God and so share the Gospel. The mystery of our salvation is possible only because our Lord became truly human in order to redeem us; therefore, our personal and congregational lives must consistently affirm the dignity and goodness of humanity.

In other words, we at Holy Communion Anglican Church (as well as all Biblically-orthodox Christians) must embrace, promote, and defend what I will call the "incarnate life," that is, a life centered upon all which the Incarnation makes possible: that by the grace bestowed in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and renewed in the Holy Eucharist, the incarnate Christ lives in us and works through us to bring salvation to a lost and dying world.

Providentially, our lessons for the Transfiguration offer a great springboard to explore this concept in greater detail.

Understanding the Transfiguration

In this last Sunday after the Epiphany, the Church in her wisdom always provides for us readings on the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. The Feast of the Transfiguration actually falls on August 6th, so were it not for this opportunity at the end of the season of Epiphany every year, we would encounter this narrative only on the years which the Feast falls on a Sunday.

Despite its scarcity in the lectionary cycle - which leads many to neglect it in corporate worship - the Transfiguration is of paramount importance for us to understand the true identity of our Savior Jesus Christ and our communion with Him.

This year our Gospel reading is from Matthew's account of the Transfiguration. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John - the "inner circle" of Apostles, those who were closest to him - up on to a mountain. And though the mountain isn't named in the Gospel text, we can take it as a symbol pointing back to Mount Sinai, where Moses received from the LORD the stone tablets of the law as described in our Old Testament reading from Exodus 24, as well as where the LORD revealed himself to the prophet Elijah.

Matthew then cuts right to the chase: "And [Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him" (Matthew 17:2-3).

Just like that, before Peter, James, and John stood Jesus, manifesting the fullness of his glory, along with Moses, the great transmitter of God's Law, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets. How are they supposed to take it all in?

Mark's Gospel tells us the three were overcome with the fear of God, "they were terrified," he writes (Mark 9:6). Comparing the three accounts from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is evident that even the authors themselves are strained by the limits of human language to properly describe this full manifestation of Jesus Christ's glory.

Peter, who but recently in the Gospel narrative confessed Jesus as the Christ, is the only one who can muster any words to say. And if we read the passage without any historical context, then Peter sounds like he's lost his mind, doesn't he?

"And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah'" (Matthew 17:4).

Peter's words sound so strange in large part because he is in a state of ecstasy. Being the good Jew that he is, Peter knows exactly what is going on - Jesus is showing his true glory as the Messiah, the son of the living God, the fulfillment of the law and the prophets! For Peter, this was better than scoring the winning touchdown at the Super Bowl! He is quite literally having a "mountaintop experience," and therefore he understandably wants to stay there.

Again, Peter being a devout Jew, understood that Jesus' Transfiguration was a sign that the times of the Messiah had come - the time foretold by the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles - which in their day, the Jewish people erected tents in a feast of remembrance of their desert wandering, and anticipated their redemption by a coming Messiah, dwelling with the LORD in the age to come.

It is likely the Transfiguration took place during the Feast of Tabernacles, and so it was easy for Peter to recognize this as the fulfillment of that very feast. "The Messiah is with us in the flesh - we must stay here with him! Why would we ever come back down from the

mountain?” Do you recall this same sensation in your own life, when everything is going well, and everything feels right in the world, and you just want to take a picture of that moment in your mind and stay there forever? This is the sensation which Peter felt, and it is the same divine community which we enjoy today as the Bride of Christ when we receive his presence in the Sacraments.

Coming Down from the Mountain

Are you aware of Christ’s presence with us today? Recognize that when our hearts are in the right place, we can experience this same joy every single Sunday, if not every day. The difficult reality for Peter, James, and John, was that the Messianic Age is not one of hanging out in tents, but is “first and foremost the age of the Cross and that the Transfiguration - the experience of becoming light from and with the Lord - requires us to be burned by the light of the Passion and so transformed,” as Joseph Ratzinger once wrote (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 315).

The Transfiguration also gives greater meaning to Christ’s Incarnation. In the beautiful prologue to John’s Gospel, we are told, “And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us,” which quite literally is, “the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us” (John 1:14). When God took on flesh and descended to be among us, He in the person of Jesus pitched his tent and dwelled with us.

Gregory of Nyssa, a Saint of the Early Church, and Bishop of Cappadocia (now modern day Turkey) in the late-4th Century, explains it this way: “God, the Lord of all things, has revealed himself to us in order to complete the construction of the tabernacle of our ruined habitation, human nature” (*De anima*, 46).

The account of the Transfiguration thus reminds us of two things. First, it reminds us of the reality that the identity of our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed truly God and truly man, taking on our flesh and transforming it with his divine glory. This means that our imperfect human experience is transformed, when we by faith are united to him in his death and resurrection. Our fellowship in the Holy Spirit now embodies God’s divine love.

Second, as with Peter, James, and John, we are not permitted to stay in our tents on top of the mountain forever, as much as we may want to. Jesus is always with us (see Matthew 28:20), and we are called to come down from the mountain, so that like the disciples, we may continually learn how to “listen to him,” as God has commanded. Through Christ, we are in community with God Himself, and it is our job to go out and invite others into this community.

Losing Our Humanity

If through the Transfiguration we gain a greater understanding of Jesus Christ and his relationship to us, then how do we apply this new understanding to our modern context? The answer lies in the diagnosis of our cultural and societal chaos. To borrow from Pope John Paul II and the Second Vatican Council: “When God is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible.”

Pope John Paul II cited this quote from Vatican II in 1986, when he issued his fifth encyclical and denounced Marxism and other forms of philosophical materialism which “defy God as enemies of His own creature.” This same rebellious spirit is still alive and well in the world today, and in the West it has taken the form of neo-Marxist ideologies which have led us down the primrose path to a quasi-authoritarian atomistic individualism, where we worship our personal experience as the ultimate authority in life, while at the same time wielding the power of the state to quash any dissenters who dare suggest that perhaps a higher power exists. If God challenges our ultimate authority, then naturally he must become the enemy.

The obvious result of this collective shift in worldview is that Biblically-orthodox Christians in the West are faced with a totally unfamiliar landscape to navigate, one which requires greater sacrifice than we are used to. But there is another, paradoxical effect of banishing God from the public square. As our society “progresses” toward greater and greater forms of “liberation,” we suffer the effects of becoming increasingly de-humanized. Though we celebrate achievements of increased personal autonomy through technological advancements and social innovations, we are in fact losing the identity of what it means to be human.

Take, for example, the alarming trends on loneliness which have gained attention in our post-Covid news cycle. Last year, multiple health agencies sounded the alarm on what is being described as an “epidemic of loneliness.” A Cigna health poll from 2021 found that more than half of U.S. adults are considered “lonely,” and a shocking 79% of young adults aged 18-24 are considered “lonely” - twice as much as seniors.

At the same time, we have seen an astonishing rise in mental illness and anxiety disorders among adolescents and teens. A CDC poll from 2021 found that 37% of all high schoolers reported having poor mental health, and 44% reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless. Most analyses of this mental health crisis struggle to understand why we are in such a bad mental state. These reports treat the mental health crisis as something which “just happened” to us, as if it were some evolutionary defect.

Others will point to the rise of social media as a factor to our anxiety, depression, and loneliness. This is partly true. Social media, and the whole orbit of applications that come with it, has sold us a defective version of human connection. We may have more access to information, as well as other people’s thoughts and opinions than ever before, but it has come at the cost of true, embodied person-to-person connections. Yet our unhealthy relationship with technology only tells half of the story. The ubiquity of all our bad habits is preceded by the breakdown of marriage and the family at the hands of our worship of radical individualism.

You may have heard it said that we as human beings are a “psychosomatic unity,” that there is an intrinsic link between our bodies and souls. The alarming statistics of our declining mental health demonstrate this idea. As our spiritual health declines, it is increasingly likely that our physical health declines, too.

God out of love made us for community with Him, which necessitates that we also exist in community with one another - first as families, and then as the body of the Church Universal. God's intention for us is reflected in the design of our bodies; our brains are hard-wired for interpersonal connection, and when we become lonely and isolated, our fight-or-flight response sets off alarm bells deep within us to tell us that something is wrong. This problem can be caused by the disordered use of technology, but even more so by the dissolution of those God-ordained institutions which He has put in place for our own flourishing: marriage, the family, and the community of believers. If the biological alarms are not turned off, then the result is a cascade of health issues.

Such is the present state of the Western world. Yet it is important for us to understand these wounds, so we can infer how to best heal them with the salve of the Gospel.

Rediscovering What it Means to be Human

If our present strife, caused by the wholesale rejection of God, is the problem, then our ministry as the hands and feet of the incarnate Christ is the solution. Indeed, if our societal confusion is the result of rejecting our humanity, then embracing the incarnate life in the community of the faithful helps us to reclaim what it truly means to be human.

So what does it mean to be human? In simple terms, to be human means to be made in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. This means, as image bearers of God, when we understand God better, we understand ourselves better, too.

John in his first letter tells us that God is love: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

If God is love, then to be made in His image means that we are meant to be a reflection of His divine love. And what does God's divine love look like? John answers this question in the next verse: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

In other words, the nature of God's love is revealed in the free gift of His Son given to us, so that we may be delivered from our sins and share eternal life with Him. As the presbyter prays in Setting Four of our 2021 Common Prayer Book:

"Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all" (2021 HCAC CPB, 270).

The love of God is thus our beginning, and it is also our end if we are reconciled by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, which is itself the greatest act of love in human history. As Jesus himself says in chapter 15 of John's Gospel, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Therefore, the incarnate life is to live the full embodiment of God's divine love as expressed through His Son Jesus Christ on the Cross. Indeed, John goes on to say in his first letter, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another" (1 John 4:11). Beloved, we are most human not when we are focused inward on ourselves and trying to minimize our suffering, but when we are focused outward, embodying the love of Christ.

Living the Incarnate Life

Now that we understand our human identity in relation to our Lord, who loved us, took on our humanity, and died for us, what are we supposed to do with that information? First and foremost, we must rely on God's grace given to us in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and allow the incarnate Christ to work in us for the spread of the Gospel. But what does that look like once we step outside the doors of the church? It means we must live and defend an ethic which is consistent with the love of God and the dignity of the human person.

If a life lived in consonance with Jesus' self-sacrificial love for us is the truest form of humanity, then anything which distorts and degrades the dignity of human beings stands in direct opposition to God's good will for our lives. Sadly, because Western culture now recklessly celebrates everything contrary to natural law (which is God's loving design for creation), those of us who live and defend a Christian moral and sexual ethic can expect to find ourselves ever more the object of the world's scorn and enmity. The Church must once more re-learn to be comfortable with this difficult reality.

The prevailing secular religion of radical sexual individualism runs totally contrary to the dignity of human life as rooted in the image of God. As a result, as this cancerous ideology marches through every facet of public life, real people will tragically suffer real consequences - be it addiction, abortion, physical mutilation of children and adults, loneliness, or depression - all in the name of "self-fulfillment." When God is forgotten, the creature becomes unintelligible, and the result is real physical, emotional, and spiritual harm.

Beloved, the Church is the only place where people can find true healing and refuge from the failings of a fallen world. Only the Church - filled with people living the incarnate life, strengthened by the incarnate Christ - can offer a sure and steadfast defense of Biblical morality and natural law "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). We cannot sit idly by, looking out the window and sighing, lamenting that our country is going down the tubes! We have an obligation to stand as outposts of truth and sanity amid a culture that is losing its collective grip on reality. It is precisely the Church's job to advance the kingdom of God through the spread of the Gospel.

This requires the Church to no longer abandon her simple duty to point out what is right and wrong (even when it is "controversial"). Shamefully, her abandonment of that duty is what has gotten us here in the first place. Our call to embrace the incarnate life, then, is to accept our duty as the Church - to be the hands and feet of Christ in our communities.

The World Changes, but Our Work Remains the Same

We must be honest with ourselves: our work appears to be cut out for us, does it not? Add to that the acceleration of a world seemingly spinning off its axis, fueled by rapid technological, cultural, and political changes, and we may not know where to start in the work of ministry! Here we must begin with a word of comfort: though the world is ever-changing, our job in sharing the Gospel never changes.

We must also not be surprised at the changes we see all around us. With the advent of dual revolutions in progressive morality and artificial intelligence, we are likely going to witness more social and technological change in the next few years than we can possibly imagine - a generational inflection point not seen since the dawn of the Internet. Yet if we put on the full armor of God, we can face these changes without fear.

As I mentioned in last year's annual report, there is no going back to the "old way of doing things." Now more than ever, it is clear that the church we grew up in no longer exists. But change is a given, and if we wish to reach future generations with the Gospel, we must be creative without abandoning our identity as the Bride of Christ.

This is exactly what we are doing with ministries like the Lively Faith podcast, inviting both the church and un-church alike to consider the glory of Scripture and Church Tradition. Podcasting is one of the fastest growing mediums of the last several years, boasting a broad demographic of listeners but consisting primarily of 12-34 year-olds. By 2024, it is estimated there will be over 100 million podcast listeners in the United States alone. This ministry has allowed us to reach people with the Gospel whom we could have never reached otherwise.

At the time of writing this report, since launching at the end of November, the Lively Faith Podcast has received roughly over 1500 listens from over 500 people! Over 500 people reached in less than 3 months' time, primarily by word of mouth. This success story - thanks be to God - is one example of how we can apply creative thinking to reach new groups of people with the Gospel.

However successful though it may be, technology will not replace our primary responsibility to personally love and serve our neighbors by sharing the Gospel with them. Consider the podcast once more. If we could reach an audience of 500 people primarily by word of mouth, then what might we accomplish if we invited people to church with that same passion and energy?

That is not to say the comparison is perfect. It is obviously much easier to drop a note for someone to listen to a show than it is to convince that same person to visit a church; there is virtually no risk of rejection when asking someone to listen to a podcast. But therein lies the point: Our primary responsibility in sharing the Gospel, as people embodying the love of the incarnate Christ, is to bear the "risk" to our pride by making those personal connections.

What's more, as the world loses touch with true humanity at the hands of unchecked technological and social revolution, it is our willingness to "risk" true interpersonal

relationships, inviting people into the incarnate community of the Church, which will strengthen our Gospel witness.

So, having gazed upon the glory of Christ, as we venture down from the mountain and forth through the wilderness of 2023 and beyond, may we, with the Holy Eucharist as the source and summit of our lives, commit ourselves to prayer and renew our dedication to spread the Gospel by doing the hard work of ministry: serving people, making real relationships, inviting people into real community, and embody God's divine love to our friends and neighbors. May we embrace the incarnate life.

Religion and Morality are Indispensable

By The Rev. Mark R. Galloway (Bishop-retired), BA, MA, ThM, STM

The Farewell Address, a letter written by George Washington (1732-1799), first President of the United States, he who (famously) was “First in war – first in peace – and first in the hearts of his countrymen,” was presented by the Commander and Chief as a valedictory to “friends and fellow-citizens” after twenty years of public service to the fledgling nation. He wrote it near the end of his second term as President before retiring to his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia.

The letter was first published on September 19, 1796 as *The Address of Gen. Washington to the People of America on His Declining the Presidency of the United States*, about ten weeks before the members of the Electoral College cast their votes in the 1796 presidential election, an event which selected the incumbent Vice President, John Adams of Massachusetts, to become the second President. Washington’s *Farewell Address* is perhaps the classic statement of republicanism in American history, one in which he warns his fellow citizens of the moral and political dangers they must avoid in order to remain true to their inherited values and liberty.

Perhaps the most referenced part of President Washington’s *Farewell Address* is his unflinching support of the importance of religion and morality in promoting private and public happiness as well as the political and economic prosperity of the nation. The great General argues that religious principles promote the protection of property, reputation, life, and honor, which collectively are the foundations of justice. He further cautions against the belief that the morality of the United States can be maintained without true religion. Indeed, President Washington in the following quote from his *Address* makes it perfectly clear that religious principle is the foundation of a civilized society. Washington writes:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

John Adams (1734-1826), a signatory (and co-author) of the Declaration of Independence, one of the framers of the Constitution, and the second President of the United States of America, spoke these stirring words, on October 11, 1798, in his second year as the Commander and Chief, to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the

Militia of Massachusetts: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

This famous quote expresses a sentiment widely held among all the statesmen of the Founding Fathers, that no matter how well a constitution is constructed, it will not ensure freedom and prosperity unless it is supported by a moral, virtuous population. President Adams, as did his esteemed like-minded predecessor (General Washington) and successor as President (Thomas Jefferson – the primary author of the Declaration of Independence), believed that any moral system had to be grounded in a belief in Almighty God: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Beloved, as we progress through the early months of the year of Our Lord 2023, the continuing demonstrations and actions we have been enduring in our nation (for some three years) against what is perceived by a significant portion of Americans to be true injustices have in many places actually been hijacked by subversive people for an agenda that seeks to destroy the center of Western (Judeo-Christian) Civilization and the whole of the American historical ethos.

Indeed, rather than protesting in a truly peaceful manner against causes and a history they deem unworthy and unjust, thousands have turned their wrath upon churches with the intent to destroy all symbols of Christianity and removing them from our culture’s public life. Millions of others continue in their crusade to foolishly redefine immutable human biological nature to accommodate a deviant moral code – and in the process allow children to mutilate their bodies. Still thousands of others in positions of power use executive privilege, legislatures, and/or courts, in an overt attempt to marginalize (in particular) Christians in their work of evangelization and rightful service to our nation. An organized assault, which runs utterly counter to the values and beliefs held dear by Presidents Washington, Adams, and Jefferson (as outlined above) have fractured our nearly 250-year-old common identity as Americans and truly threatens to destroy the Judeo-Christian heritage we have been entrusted by previous brave generations of this Republic to be the lasting stewards of.

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold

The third line of the first stanza of the 1919 poem “The Second Coming,” written by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), widely considered one of history’s greatest poets of the English language, and who received the 1923 Nobel Prize for Literature, reads as such: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” Here the poet uses Christian imagery regarding the Book of the Apocalypse and Second Coming of Christ to allegorically describe the catastrophic carnage left behind in Europe in the aftermath of the First World War – fought from July 28, 1914 to November 11, 1918 (the most expansive, gruesome and destructive military conflict in world history to that date – with the number of military and civilian

casualties totaling approximately 45 million: with about 22 million deaths and 23 million wounded).

The poem is also massively influenced by the 1918-19 Spanish Influenza Pandemic, which had ravaged much of Europe, tearing through communities and families without discrimination, with some researchers calculating that as many as 40 to 50 million people had died. In the weeks preceding Yeats's writing of the poem, his pregnant wife, caught the virus and was very close to death, but survived. Yeats wrote the poem while his wife was convalescing.

Following the devastating conclusions of the First World War and the Spanish Influenza Pandemic much of the world was completely unsure what the future would hold. As the centuries old monarchies collapsed, and various forms of political ideologies took hold of their too often sinister grips across Europe (including the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia, the Nazis in Germany, and the Fascists in Italy) nation after nation grappled with a changed world that would never be the same again. Yet through all these trials the Judeo-Christian ethic primarily remained at the center and held most of the Western world together, though admittedly, barely hanging by a string at times.

Today, in America and in the West, there is a notable difference. While we do face the results of our own woke self-indulgence, short-sighted and failed economic policies, major military conflict in the Ukraine and other places in the world, the unpredictability of the world's most repressive dictatorial regime in North Korea, and the ever increasing rise of Communist China as an economic and military power that can not only rival but even threaten the might the United States, it is overwhelmingly a radical public moral shift in axis that has allowed a once firm foundational center of our common life to virtually completely crumble.

The force driving this collapse is the removal of Almighty God from the center. It is the Almighty – and for Christians, specifically Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God – who holds the fallen, fragile world together. The Triune God, however, is no longer the center of our social order. No doubt Covid-19 has revealed our fragility, but this influenza was not the cause of our dysfunction, it was already insidiously present and operating.

Things fall apart when the center cannot hold. The Covid-19 medical and political saga of the last three years has exposed a superficial veneer to the American soul that can only be explained from incremental rejection of Almighty God by our culture. The prioritization of our physical well-being (as important as that is) over our spiritual well-being give witness to a narrow-minded, pagan secular focus on the temporal over the eternal. By removing the very Creator, who has endowed us with our certain unalienable Rights, from the center of the identity of the Republic, our nation has, with meteoric pace, come to the precipice of societal dissolution.

A people that abandons faith in the LORD God Almighty and the unchangeable moral laws of His created order and replaces it with the ego of fallen human nature, is a culture that will not be able to hold its center of a once virtuous identity. As in 1919, as a nation and across

the West we are amid a time of epochal change that shall forever alter who we are and how we are to understand ourselves. The culture of a people is defined primarily by who or what those people worship or place at the center – what they identify as the purpose for their existence. The cultural center held for the nearly previous 250 years because we had a common moral foundation rooted in Judeo-Christian beliefs. I believe that we, who were once a people united in language and a common center ground with respect to our proper place before the Creator, have abandoned our “goodly heritage” (Psalm 16:6) and (paradoxically) have fostered a radical consensus to allow the individual’s opinion and desire to now (illogically) be the ultimate arbitrator of all (their) truth(s).

We have become as country untethered from the immutable Truth that a loving Father created us to know, love, and serve Him in this life, which alone is the assured path to our happiness in eternal life. We indeed have perpetual amnesia about this fact (including a majority of those in “the land of the free and the home of the brave” who claim to be Christians). To allow this to become our collective reality is to surrender (in the timeless words of The (1662) Book of Common Prayer) to “the deceits of the world, the flesh and the Devil.”

Beloved, each one of us must turn anew to the person of Jesus Christ. The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church has the primary universal role in holding the center and purpose of human existence together. Mother Church is the visible reminder that, through the grace bestowed in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the incarnate Christ lives in us and continues to act through us for the conversion of this fallen and sinful world. Is it any surprise, therefore, that buildings of faithful and orthodox Christian congregations across the denominational spectrum committed to the infallible Word of God have and are being defaced and set ablaze in ours and other Western nations, and that even physical harm is being perpetuated against the saints in the name of woke progressive ideology? Some argue that the myriads inflicting this new deviant woke morality are not fully aware of what they are doing (a claim I wholeheartedly refute); but be that as it may, Satan surely is aware of the cause and effect, and the “father of lies” (John 8:44) is no doubt in glee concerning the successes of his evil crusade.

We the faithful remnant who gather as Holy Communion Anglican Church must in this time of uncertainty continue a strong and uncompromising witness to “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3) and to “not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). Today there is no shortage of ways we must all sacrifice.

The source and summit of our Christian life

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we must also make certain that “The Holy Eucharist (commonly called the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion), the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other Major Feasts” as set forth in our 2021 Common Prayer Book, remains (to borrow from the decree of the Second Vatican Council) “the source and summit of our Christian life.” Indeed, as the words of the venerable Anglican

Common Prayer tradition state, the Holy Eucharist, is the Church's "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving," which, on our behalf, the ordained presbyter offers "through...Jesus Christ" to the "Eternal God and our heavenly Father" so that "we and all (the) whole Church may receive the forgiveness of our sins and all other benefits of (Christ's) Passion." Therefore, it is the sacrifice that all other sacrifices should be grafted into. As we move joyfully forward in our corporate Christian life, Holy Communion Anglican Church must be prepared to defend the proper place of worship against all authorities. The Holy Eucharist is essential to the spiritual well-being of every Christian.

The New Testament demands that the Church Catholic, that is, all her Baptized (and especially her Presbyters and Bishops) "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). While our Congregation may be small in numbers our divine call and duty to teach the saving power of Christ is no less urgent. As we our doing through our *Lively Faith* podcast, the Congregation must continue to creatively find ways, as has happened in every century of Christian history, to bring the Gospel to the broken world. Calls, texts and emails, evangelization and catechesis must now be done in innovative ways to bring saving power of Jesus' Name into our communities. And yet, while technology is a useful tool for this work, personal contact of saints witnessing to unbelievers must always continue to be the primary conduit of the Gospel's transmission.

As we continue to move through the course of history, hard decisions need to be made by each one of us due to a whole host of practical considerations. But they should always be made considering the mission given to the Church Catholic to draw all people to the eternally begotten Son of God. If Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the measure by which decisions are made, then we can be assured through the Holy Spirit of this divine Truth which Saint Paul spoke, "that he who began a good work in (us) will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Ultimately beloved, we can only place ourselves before the LORD every day in prayer. If the Church is not praying, then the Holy Spirit is not invited to act. Nature does not permit a vacuum; when we remove Christ from the public square the space is filled with something or someone else. "So Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God'" (John 6:67-69).

Without specific time dedicated exclusively to Almighty God in prayer and worship, then that time will be filled with things that keep us from our loving Creator, and Religion and Morality will then indeed become dispensable. But when we find time daily to put ourselves humbly on our knees before the Triune God to worship Him and seek His will here on earth as it is in heaven, then we can truly discern His voice. It is then that we are converted and radiate to the world the love that God the Father has for each one of those made in His divine image. It is only in that love and obedience that the center of the Christian life can hold.

Let us fervently work and pray, therefore, to keep Jesus at the center so as to be a catalyst that pulls this fallen world to redemption.

As I close, I again return to words from the *Farewell Address* of the first President: “Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue? The experiment, at least, is recommended by every sentiment which ennobles human nature.”

Report of the Vice President/Treasurer

God has blessed Holy Communion Anglican Church with another year of ministry. Our Congregation held 54 worship services in 2022, with an average in-person attendance of about 15, and we reached out to many additional people through the internet. We completed the publication of “An Anglican Common Prayer Book,” and following an Elders’ visioning retreat, we began a new ministry entitled The Lively Faith Podcast, an effort to share the Christian worldview with larger numbers of individuals. We thank God for the opportunities He has given us to worship Him and to share His Word.

During 2022, Holy Communion Anglican Church had receipts of \$53,526.21 and expenditures of \$38,640.07. The balance in our savings account at the end of the year was \$68,384.51. Significant expenses included compensation to our Rector (\$11,960.00) and Bishop-retired (\$4,000.00), worship space rent (\$4,125.00), and the printing of our prayer book (\$3,707.50). Communication expenses included \$4,826.52 to promote our Church on the internet plus \$2,451.57 to initiate The Lively Faith Podcast ministry. Our outreach spending consisted of \$1,700.00 in donations to Harmony Women’s Care (formerly known as CareNet RI), a \$100.00 donation to the Ministry Training Network of Southeastern New England, and \$124.69 in purchases and donations to support Operation Christmas Child of Samaritan’s Purse. Almost all of our income came from tithes and offerings, and our Leadership Team is thankful for the committed giving by the members of our Congregation.

The Operating Budget for 2023 projects \$52,600.00 in income and \$43,800.00 in spending, leaving \$8,800.00 to be added to savings. The Board of Directors approved this budget on December 1, 2022 based on the proposal from a Budget Committee consisting of Nathan Stomberg, Bob Bickerstaff, Shawna Worden, Cindy Hall, and Nancy Blasdell. The budget includes appropriate increases in the compensation to our Rector and Bishop-retired, plus an additional amount in the ministerial expenses line item in anticipation of more spending for conferences or retreats. The communication expenses line item has been adjusted to cover our expected promotional internet costs, and outreach spending for God’s work outside our Congregation is set at ten percent of our projected income.

The next three pages contain a detailed look at our 2022 finances, the 2023 budget, and the in-person attendance at our worship services during 2022. Please don’t hesitate to contact me at any time with questions, comments, or concerns about the finances or financial reports of our Congregation or about any other matters relating to our Church.

Your servant in Christ,
Bob Bickerstaff

Annual Financial Report for 2022

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Balance as of January 1, 2022 | | \$56,156.51 |
| First Internet Bank Money Market Savings Account | \$54,673.87 | |
| Centreville Bank Checking Account | <u>\$1,482.64</u> | |
| Total | \$56,156.51 | |
| Receipts | | |
| Tithes and Offerings | \$52,615.57 | |
| Savings Account Interest | \$710.64 | |
| Credit Card Cashback Rewards | <u>\$200.00</u> | |
| Total Receipts | | \$53,526.21 |
| Disbursements | | |
| Rector's Housing Allowance | \$11,960.00 | |
| Bishop-retired's Housing Allowance | \$4,000.00 | |
| Worship Space Rental Expense | \$4,125.00 | |
| Worship Service Expenses | \$1,238.34 | |
| Communication Expenses | \$8,509.17 | |
| Purchases of Worship Furnishings | \$4,045.58 | |
| Purchases of Clergy Supplies | \$0.00 | |
| Fellowship Expenses | \$230.76 | |
| Administrative Expenses | \$935.19 | |
| Insurance Expense | \$855.00 | |
| Outreach Spending | \$1,924.69 | |
| Ministerial Expenses | <u>\$816.34</u> | |
| Total Disbursements | | <u>(\$38,640.07)</u> |
| Balance as of December 31, 2022 | | \$71,042.65 |
| First Internet Bank Money Market Savings Account | \$68,384.51 | |
| Centreville Bank Checking Account | <u>\$2,658.14</u> | |
| Total | \$71,042.65 | |
| Significant Purchases/Expenses Included Above: | | |
| Communication Expenses | | |
| Facebook and Google Advertising | \$4,826.52 | |
| Initial Expenses for Podcast Ministry | \$2,451.57 | |
| Purchases of Worship Furnishings | | |
| Prayer Books | \$3,707.50 | |
| Outreach Spending | | |
| Harmony Women's Care | \$1,700.00 | |

Approved Budget for 2023

| | <u>Budget 2022</u> | <u>Actual 2022</u> | <u>Budget 2023</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Receipts | | | |
| Tithes and Offerings | \$52,000.00 | \$52,615.57 | \$52,000.00 |
| Savings Account Interest | \$150.00 | \$710.64 | \$500.00 |
| Other Receipts | <u>\$100.00</u> | <u>\$200.00</u> | <u>\$100.00</u> |
| Totals | \$52,250.00 | \$53,526.21 | \$52,600.00 |
| Disbursements | | | |
| Rector's Housing Allowance | \$11,960.00 | \$11,960.00 | \$14,300.00 |
| Bishop-retired's Housing Allowance | \$4,480.00 | \$4,000.00 | \$5,040.00 |
| Worship Space Rental Expense | \$4,400.00 | \$4,125.00 | \$4,200.00 |
| Worship Service Expenses | \$1,800.00 | \$1,238.34 | \$1,600.00 |
| Communication Expenses | \$3,500.00 | \$8,509.17 | \$7,000.00 |
| Purchases of Worship Furnishings | \$3,500.00 | \$4,045.58 | \$700.00 |
| Purchases of Clergy Supplies | \$1,000.00 | \$0.00 | \$1,000.00 |
| Fellowship Expenses | \$500.00 | \$230.76 | \$500.00 |
| Administrative Expenses | \$600.00 | \$935.19 | \$700.00 |
| Insurance Expense | \$1,000.00 | \$855.00 | \$1,000.00 |
| Outreach Spending | \$5,225.00 | \$1,924.69 | \$5,260.00 |
| Ministerial Expenses | <u>\$1,000.00</u> | <u>\$816.34</u> | <u>\$2,500.00</u> |
| Totals | \$38,965.00 | \$38,640.07 | \$43,800.00 |
| Savings | \$13,285.00 | \$14,886.14 | \$8,800.00 |
| Compensation Information | | | |
| Rector's Housing Allowance (per week) | \$230.00 | \$230.00 | \$275.00 |
| Bishop-retired's Housing Allowance (per sermon) | \$160.00 | \$160.00 | \$180.00 |

In-Person Attendance – 2022

| | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|----|------------|------------------|----|
| 1/2/2022 | Sunday | 20 | 7/3/2022 | Sunday | 13 |
| 1/9/2022 | Sunday | 17 | 7/10/2022 | Sunday | 16 |
| 1/16/2022 | Sunday | 12 | 7/17/2022 | Sunday | 13 |
| 1/23/2022 | Sunday | 19 | 7/24/2022 | Sunday | 8 |
| 1/30/2022 | Sunday | 10 | 7/31/2022 | Sunday | 12 |
| 2/6/2022 | Sunday | 16 | 8/7/2022 | Sunday | 12 |
| 2/13/2022 | Sunday | 14 | 8/14/2022 | Sunday | 15 |
| 2/20/2022 | Sunday | 18 | 8/21/2022 | Sunday | 17 |
| 2/27/2022 | Sunday | 17 | 8/28/2022 | Sunday | 15 |
| 3/2/2022 | Ash Wednesday | 17 | 9/4/2022 | Sunday | 25 |
| 3/6/2022 | Sunday | 12 | 9/11/2022 | Sunday | 13 |
| 3/13/2022 | Sunday | 21 | 9/18/2022 | Sunday | 8 |
| 3/20/2022 | Sunday | 20 | 9/25/2022 | Sunday | 16 |
| 3/27/2022 | Sunday | 21 | 10/2/2022 | Sunday | 12 |
| 4/3/2022 | Sunday | 22 | 10/9/2022 | Sunday | 6 |
| 4/10/2022 | Sunday | 27 | 10/16/2022 | Sunday | 11 |
| 4/15/2022 | Good Friday | 23 | 10/23/2022 | Sunday | 12 |
| 4/16/2022 | Easter Vigil | 30 | 10/30/2022 | Sunday | 15 |
| 4/24/2022 | Sunday | 18 | 11/6/2022 | Sunday | 13 |
| 5/1/2022 | Sunday | 16 | 11/13/2022 | Sunday | 15 |
| 5/8/2022 | Sunday | 16 | 11/20/2022 | Sunday | 14 |
| 5/15/2022 | Sunday | 20 | 11/23/2022 | Thanksgiving Eve | 10 |
| 5/22/2022 | Sunday | 14 | 11/27/2022 | Sunday | 13 |
| 5/29/2022 | Sunday | 6 | 12/4/2022 | Sunday | 8 |
| 6/5/2022 | Sunday | 17 | 12/11/2022 | Sunday | 14 |
| 6/12/2022 | Sunday | ** | 12/18/2022 | Sunday | 19 |
| 6/19/2022 | Sunday | 13 | 12/24/2022 | Christmas Eve | 23 |
| 6/26/2022 | Sunday | 12 | | | |

** Service Cancelled

Total Services in 2022: 54

Average Attendance: 15.5

Total Services in 2021: 53

Average Attendance: 17.5

Holy Communion Anglican Church

meeting at the

Rocky Hill Grange
1340 S. County Trail
East Greenwich, RI

The Reverend Nathan Stomberg, Rector

website: holycommunionri.org

facebook: Holy Communion Anglican Church

email: anglicanfellowshipri@gmail.com

Sunday Worship

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| Holy Communion | 5:00 p.m. |
| Adult Education | 6:30 p.m. |

Board of Directors

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| President | The Rev. Nathan Stomberg nstomberg14@gmail.com ▪ 401-588-1226 |
| Vice President & Treasurer | Bob Bickerstaff the4bicks@juno.com ▪ 401-828-7216 |
| Secretary | Shawna Worden dworden7@verizon.net ▪ 401-954-9546 |
| Director | Barbara Bickerstaff babickerstaff@yahoo.com ▪ 401-714-2360 |
| Director | Adam Stomberg stomberg9@gmail.com ▪ 401-743-0403 |

*“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”*

(John 6:53)