

Rector's Annual Report 2022
St. James Episcopal Church
January 30, 2022

I am struck this morning by the first reading from Jeremiah:

Today I appoint you...to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Jer 1:10

Today I am happy to say that I bring a report that is much more about building and planting than it is about destroying and overthrowing—and I guess that is a good thing. Even during a pandemic that just goes on and on, we have continued to worship and pray and minister here in Pullman and around the world. And for that I know God says to us, thank you good and faithful servants—and I say the same. So, what have we been about this past year: 2021?

First the building and planting part: **Our New Garden!** We have updated our entrance and the weed farm to an inviting, low maintenance and water friendly space. Most of you see this every time you come to the church. This project is not done yet. Some plantings have been made on the hillside along the top tier of the parking lot, but more will be done when nice weather returns. I especially thank Sharon Nitz for spearheading this project and her planters and designers Kathleen, Becky, Jim, and Ted.



Not all the planting has been of the gardening kind. This year we started a Regional Center for the **Community of Hope**—a training and support program for lay caregiving ministers. We had participants from St. James, St. Mark's, and Nativity and all of this was done via Zoom due to the pandemic. This group continues to meet for support and continuing education monthly. I especially want to acknowledge the 4 graduates from St. James: Catherine, Dean, Maureen, and Gia. Congratulations on completing lots of study and reflection.

Liturgy this year has been traditional yet innovative. After the pandemic shut us down in 2020, we began the year totally online. We started back to limited in-person Eucharist on Palm Sunday while continuing much of our socializing via Zoom. We gradually added an in-person coffee hour outside once the weather cooperated, and in September went back to our usual schedule of two Sunday services and coffee hour following each of them. Our Adult Forum also met first by Zoom and then in person. What we have continued is the live stream of our 10:30 Eucharist on our website with the recording staying up the rest of the week. I encourage you to view these recordings if you can't be here in person. It is also a good way to invite someone to our church—letting them preview the service before coming in person. We also live streamed the funeral of Dianne Lowe, someone who had many connections throughout the country. This is our all-time record online viewing of 92 people. Our choir has been back most of the time since September and I am grateful to all of them and to Elena for the beautiful music that helps us in our worship of God. As you know, we have just gone back to online only worship, and we are trusting what we have heard from other parts of the world: that this omicron variant which has increased in our area very quickly will decrease just as quickly so we can be together in person soon. Thanks also go to Linda Adams and her very flexible crew of altar guild for helping make Sunday morning a smooth-running experience.

Our **Vestry** has been a delight to work with—though I could say that about all the vestry's I've worked with here at St. James. But this year, they have been very helpful in discerning what we can let go of as a parish and what we need to keep. We have met entirely on Zoom this year which has been helpful to see each other's faces while we share and deliberate. In this unprecedented time, we have combined some events into one big event celebrating St. James and our community. The goals of this year's vestry have been to update the website; to put together a welcome brochure highlighting who we are and what we do; and involving kids more into the life of the church. All of these have had significant work done on them this past year and you will be seeing the fruits of that in the days to come. I especially want to thank Jim Reece for agreeing to continue as Senior Warden. You have been an immeasurable help to me in your steady, calm presence and counsel during this pandemic that just won't let us go!



The project I am most excited about planting this year is our new **Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist Campus Ministry or ELM**. I work with a Lutheran Deacon, Karla Neuman Smiley and a Methodist Pastor Lesli McGowan to host a dinner and program each week for whoever comes. It is a delight to work with a team on this project and we are happy with our results so far. We have a small but dedicated group who were in person and always masked except when we were eating but this semester, we have only been online. We have received a Campus Ministry Grant from Province 8 of the Episcopal Church to help us pay for some of the food and to hire a student part time to do social media posts. If you know anyone with social media skills and a WSU student, please let me know. We have applied for 2 more grants for additional funding for leader training and for improvements to our meeting space. Thanks to Linda Adams, Alison Mixter, Jane Sielken and Sylvia Hutton for contributing baked goods to our meals. The students really appreciate homemade goodies.

And finally, I want to take a few moments to look ahead to my **Sabbatical**, which affects not just me. The sabbatical is also time for refreshment for the congregation with a different priest and new ideas. My sabbatical is funded through a Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Grant. I will be starting my sabbatical on April 1, 2022, and will be back on July 1, 2022. During that time, Sunday Eucharist will continue with the Rev. Linda Bartholemew as the Presider. She will be coming down each weekend from the Spokane area. The Vestry, Senior Warden, Deacon Ted, and other ministries here at St. James will be handling other business and pastoral care during those 3 months. My sabbatical consists of visits to 10 different National Parks in the West including 2 in the state of Washington. As many of you know, I love to camp and be out of doors and I hope that a prolonged time in nature will be refreshing for my soul. My hope is also to do some writing connecting spirituality and nature—and maybe even put together a few videos sending “notes back” from the field. Of course, Gia will be joining me on part of this “pilgrimage”, as I am calling it, as will my younger son Ben.

While I am away, the congregation will have the benefit of some talks from experts in the field of stewardship of the land and ways we can be more earth conscious in our choices both at the church and at home. We will have one speaker each month and will hopefully open the series up to the wider community. In addition to this, we will have a celebration, of course! We will have a sending Eucharist with celebratory brunch on the last Sunday in March as well as a welcome back brunch when I return in July.

I will be pulling together the final details of what will happen here while I am away in the next few weeks, in consultation with the vestry and wardens. So, you may be hearing from me with a little job request.

In all, as a parish we are doing well. It is hard to know where the next few years will take us, but I think we will need to be vigilant. As you are I'm sure aware, there are less people in our pews than before the pandemic. The vestry goals this past year were meant to address this and they will continue to be goals as we move into 2022 with a new configuration of vestry members. As Jeremiah also says in our first reading, "Do not be afraid...for I am with you...says the Lord." Amen.