

It is a joy to be with you for our annual meeting, where we will celebrate the ministry of the past year.

First, I want to express my heartfelt thanks for allowing me to serve as your Rector and for partnering with me in the shared work of ministry. I am especially thankful to our Senior Warden, Kim Malcolm; Junior Warden, Barbara Feldon; Treasurer, Anne Bently; and the entire vestry, who faithfully served over the last year. Thank you to the clergy and staff and to the lay volunteers, as we have embraced the lay-led, clergy-supported model.

St. Thomas Church is making a remarkable comeback. We are seeing signs of renewal and growth, which is cause for celebration!

Who does not love a comeback story?! We all do. Whether in sports, business ventures, or our personal lives, these stories are powerful. They speak to the promise of growth, resilience, and transformation in the face of challenge. This is the story unfolding at St. Thomas Church.

Do you remember our first annual meeting? At that time, we acknowledged our challenges. Having just emerged from the pandemic, we, like many churches, were confronting the broader trends of Christianity's decline, nationally and globally. Our membership, attendance, and giving had taken a hit, and many of our programs had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

At that meeting, we recognized that change was necessary. We needed to prune to grow. We needed to right-size staffing levels, increase volunteer participation, and work toward a balanced budget. We celebrated the retirement of two beloved staff members and prayed for guidance as we moved forward in faith. We did all of this while doubling down on our "why" – which is to love God and to love our neighbor as disciples of Jesus Christ

Fast-forward to last year's meeting. We celebrated our progress, rolled out a new organizational structure that relied on lay volunteer leadership with less paid staff, and welcomed an Associate Rector, a two-year Curate, and their families. To our delight, our Treasurer announced that the year ended with a positive financial variance—thanks to your generosity and careful stewardship of our resources.

Over my first 18 months, we kept returning to our guiding scripture through it all: “Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain”(Psalm 127:1). With God’s help and our collective effort, we gained momentum. Over the last year, we saw considerable growth.

Here are some highlights of growth over the past year.

1. **We grew in our love for the Lord** (Worship). Sunday morning attendance increased by roughly 10%, and both Easter and Christmas attendance grew by 19%. Last year, we welcomed 49 new members, comprising of 30 households, a 145% increase from the year prior. We held over 164 services, including Sunday morning worship, Evensong, funerals, weddings, and special prayer services.
2. **We grew in our care for one another** (Pastoral Care Committee). Through our lay volunteers, we offered care through Touchpoints, Stephen Ministry, Lay Eucharistic Visitors, and a Grief Group. Clergy continued to visit people in hospitals, at home, and over the phone.
3. **Our youngest members grew in faith** (children and youth ministry). Our numbers doubled from last year. We have 15-20 children regularly attending Sunday School. This fall, we added a second classroom. We welcomed 20+ kids at Vacation Bible Camp last year and added an extended-day option. This fall, 13 teens signed up for Confirmation class, a class that has not been offered since June 2021.
4. **We grew in love for our neighbors** (outreach and social engagement): Through initiatives like the Porchlight Ministry, we offered hospitality to unhoused men during the month of July; hosted coat and food drives; organized the annual Christmas Giving Tree; and submitted grants on behalf of literacy projects in Cambodia and for St. Andrew’s Anglican Church in Ramallah. We increased our social engagement by hosting Medina Days, Rabbi Weiner and Father Fadi Diab, doing a pulpit swap with Temple De Hirsch Sinai, attending the Pride Parade, as well as inviting guest speakers such as Canon Carla Robinson and her staff; and David Porter, to teach us about the Ministry of Reconciliation.
5. **We grew in love through music**: Despite staff transitions, our music program thrived. We celebrated Doug Cleveland’s tenure and warmly welcomed Paul Meier. Our Chorister program continues to be one of the largest in the area, with 45 choristers, thanks to Jacki Sullivan’s leadership. This August, the choir and the choristers will do a choir residency at St.

Paul's Cathedral - London, a remarkable opportunity thanks to a generous donor that has not occurred since 2019. We host St. Paul's dean, Dean Andrew Tremlett, this fall to prepare for our trip. The Music Guild hosted its first gala, and their concert series continues to be well-received by the wider community.

6. **We grew in our shared vision for St. Thomas:** Thanks to our Senior Warden's leadership, Kim Malcolm, our strategic plan came to fruition. This plan has been instrumental in helping us define our path forward, and I'm excited to see it take shape. Kim will share more in just a moment. I also want to mention the Forward in Faith Campaign, another sign of growth in our spiritual lives, which will be discussed shortly.

Beloved, we have momentum at St. Thomas Church, and this is truly a time for celebration. While there is still hard work ahead of us, I do not doubt that, with God's help, St. Thomas will continue to grow and will remain a vital presence in the Eastside community for years to come.

Thank you again for being part of the story that is being written at St. Thomas Church. With God's help, we will continue to build something lasting, and I can't wait to see what the next chapter holds.

*Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the church, and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.*