

Episcopal Church of the Advocate, Chapel Hill, NC

2021 Sr. Warden's Report

Annual meeting 27 Feb 2022

Prepared by Donya Rose

Does every Sr. Warden's report start with "what a year!"? Well, I'm claiming a special right to that phrase for 2021. In that one year we said goodbye to our founding Vicar, Lisa, searched for and called our new Vicar, Marion, learned to dance with Covid as the threat swells and subsides, raised funds for a capital project, and started construction.

In 2021 I learned a bit more about what Vestries are supposed to do and came to understand that a primary responsibility is for the finances and physical assets of the church. I know Nancy, our Treasurer, will go more deeply into the finances, but let me start with a quick update on some of those physical facility efforts in 2021:

- The columns on the front of the Advocate House were repaired and repainted.
- The roof of the Chapel and the siding were repaired to keep things strong and dry.
- Challenges with the Chapel's heating system went on for months and have continued to bedevil us; work on this continues.
- We purchased and placed the right-size air purifiers for the Advocate House and the Chapel.
- We continue to work to control invasive plant species on the property, most recently targeting stands of *Elaeagnus* and Tree of Heaven.
- And I'll have more to say about The Fold and the Field shortly.

Looking back over a year in which so many things happened, the big one was our Vicar transition. In January Lisa announced her plans to retire and shared with the Vestry and the church the special transition arrangement that she and Bishop Sam Rodman had worked out for our special church and situation. This was to include a three-month overlap of Vicars, more like a Bishop transition than a priest-in-charge transition. The Vestry was to serve as the Search Committee with significant effort on the search expended from February until August when Marion was called.

In February we surveyed the People of the Advocate to ensure that we could accurately represent the hopes and value of our church to prospective candidates. I tried to summarize the key themes for this report, but the 12 pages of the report summarize 46 single-spaced pages of your comments (in a small font!). So a summary of that summary just wouldn't do it justice. If you want to review it again (and I commend that activity to you), go to <https://bit.ly/cotasurvey>. But I will tell you that our people care deeply about being good neighbors, doing God's work where we live and beyond, and living out our commitments to one another as a thriving growing community and embodiment of Christ.

In June, with the search process under way, we also launched the campaign for The Fold and the Field. Both parts of The Fold and The Field project are aimed at building community and extending hospitality through shared events, literally feeding folks, and allowing for legal parking of the vehicles that brought them to our site. With an original budget of \$225,000, we expected to be able to raise most of this from donations, and to pay for the balance with a portion of our Capital Fund which is designated for just such projects. As of this moment, we have exceeded the \$175,000 we had hoped to raise and will be tapping a bit less of the Capital Fund to complete the work. The Fold construction is well under way, with much of the work led by Nate Bradford with a group of additional volunteers. And the Field is moving through

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Chapel Hill's very thorough permitting and approval process. Phil Szostak and Szostak Designs have served as our architects and have not billed us for their time in this effort, and for this we are most grateful.

During the search process, we learned how very different The Advocate is from most other Episcopal churches, from a Vicar's point of view. We were surprised to learn that we cast a very long shadow for a little church and are admired and respected well out of proportion to our size, yielding applications from far beyond North Carolina. We also came to understand just how much we manage to do with a relatively small budget. This is thanks to many volunteers, generous donations from supporters who are not part of our worshipping community but who want to be part of our mission, and just basic careful frugality. In addition, we learned that our Vicar has an unusually broad job, covering everything from spiritual leadership and liturgy to administrative duties and construction oversight. In most churches there are multiple people specializing in parts of the job, but in our church, we've got to have an amazing multi-talented flexible visionary spiritual leader who is also an excellent project manager and administrator. Thank heavens God brought us Marion!

As the search process neared its end and we were able to stop searching and start transitioning. The Stewards of Welcome and Farewell were formed under the leadership of Paul Marvin. That group did so much to coordinate Marion's welcome, and also to put together the November weekend of celebration for Lisa's farewell that none of us will soon forget.

And while all these big changes were going on, we continued with our ongoing work to care for our neighbors and ourselves. We had nightly Compline online and weekly Contemplative Prayer. Godly Play continued. AdvoGroups continued and are now in their third round of offerings. AdvoCare provided love and practical support for those among us experiencing health or other challenges. We hosted the Little Free Pantry sponsored by Johnson Service Corps. We offered hospitality to a woman whose life situation left her living in an old RV, welcoming her to our parking lot for a few months so she would have power and a safe, legal place to live. We were also able to extend hospitality to several people with temporary housing for short-term stays when there really weren't other options for them. And of course, our ongoing hospitality to the PeeWee Homes residents continued, along with food donations to the IFC and support for the Rogers Road community through food donation and helping with vaccination clinics.

All of this took place while we were dancing with Covid, with worship moving through multiple formats as the virus changed its challenges for us from month to month. We have worshiped many Sundays online only, have enjoyed many Sundays of hybrid worship outside and online, and have even had a few Sundays back in our beloved chapel with the service streamed for those who felt remote participation was better for their situation. This was all made possible due to the creativity, flexibility and hard work of our Vicars, a small group of paid leaders, and many volunteers coordinated by them.

There is so much to think about as we move into 2022 and beyond, and that is probably not the proper subject of a report on 2021. But I do feel compelled to remind us all of the development next door at 2200 Homestead Road, Homestead Gardens, which is going to give us many, many new neighbors. The

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development will include 120 affordable housing units with both rental apartments and for-sale duplex townhouses. Construction is expected to begin in the summer of 2022. For more information see <https://www.chapelhillaffordablehousing.org/2200-homestead>. Let's all start now to think about how we can extend hospitality to these new neighbors.

In our more immediate future, there is an Episcopal tradition that has developed since Lisa started leading The Advocate called a Celebration of New Ministry. This is typically held in the early months of a new priest's call to a new church, and was scheduled for Marion in late February, but postponed due to Omicron. It is now rescheduled for May 25th at 5:30 p.m. This will be a special time for us to welcome Marion in the presence of our Bishop and be more formally connected to her through a lovely liturgy, so please mark your calendars now.

I'd like to end with some thank yous. First, I want to highlight Nancy Usher Williams, our Treasurer. She will doubtless touch on some of the following in her Treasurer's Report, but I wanted to take a moment to express gratitude to her for her leadership in changing some things that needed changing, and that have taken some real effort on her part. While this year of non-standard financial activity was under way with Vicars and their associated costs changing our spending from month to month and creating a labyrinth of over- and under-budget expenses, she led us through a change to improve our insurance coverage, a change from an outsourced bookkeeping firm to having our own part-time dedicated bookkeeper, a change in our method for accepting online donations, and a very big change to use a new and current church bookkeeping system called Realm. This has meant hours of diligent work on her part, and we are most grateful.

I also want to express gratitude to the members of your 2021 Vestry, who have worked very hard this year, with almost double the usual number of meetings, in addition to compiling and interpreting survey results, hosting candidates as part of the search process, checking references, and meeting for discernment. While we never had time to have a Vestry retreat to get to know each other, we really didn't need one. Through our work together we have developed great mutual respect, and a hard-won ability to disagree constructively. It has been a pleasure serving with this amazing group of Advocates, Antonia Terrazas, Elizabeth Brewington, Amanda Ann Godwin, Nate Bradford, and Andrew Hammond.

And, finally, to you the People of The Advocate, what an honor it is to be part of this earnest, hardworking, loving community. The Spirit is truly at work among us, visible to us and through us to the world around us. Our work matters. Your participation makes a difference. Continuing, together, to "become what we receive" in the Eucharist is our highest calling, both as individuals and as a community.