

January 29, 2023  
Vicar's Report  
The Rev. Marion Sprott

In many ways I feel this is my first real Vicar's report. Last year I had been your vicar for about two months and we were just really getting to know one another. Now, 12 months later we know who we are a little better even under the blow COVID gave us this time last year.

The buzz word for the past two years has been transition. That word can mean so many different things and it has in relation to our common life together at The Advocate. But one thing is true about all transitions, some things disappear or change from what they once were and new things come about. Of course, with any change, there is grief along the way. Perhaps you yourself have said, "oh I wonder why we aren't doing...." or "oh, that's not the way we have always done it." I, too, have been on the journey as well of "oh, that's how you do it here." Or "Ok, I'll try it this new way." In many respects this past year has been a transition, yes, but more than that it has been a revealing.

Here in this season of Epiphany, when we are drawn to see the glory of God in new ways, in ordinary ways, in extraordinary ways - ways that are transfigured before us. We are offered the same into our life here. God's glory is breaking through. Even through the challenges of COVID and the transitions of leadership, we are thriving as a community. In this year, we have begun to gather again over meals on Sundays and for weekly Advo-dinners, once a month we gather to discuss a work of fiction at Reader's Roundtable, On Sundays we have Christian formation for all ages and a new Godly Play class which began in late November, and every Tuesday evening faithful folks gather to read and study scripture. Of course nightly compline, which began in early Covid days, continues on Zoom, and weekly contemplative prayer - 20 years strong - is in person and on zoom (with in person and virtual retreats this year). We have also gained new members and many new pledges for the 2023 budget. And I do not want to forget the important work of Sacred Ground which began with it's inaugural group in Jan. 2022 and the second group just kicked off last week. God's glory is being shown and revealed in this place. In this holy and sweet place called the Advocate.

Perhaps you see God here, too. Maybe sitting at a picnic table after church on Sunday, or maybe you've heard God's voice in the laughter of kids each Sunday. And For me, I have seen, heard, felt God's presence in daily interactions with you. Whether over a cup or coffee or a walk in the woods, my joy is seeing and hearing how God is present in your life and in your life at the Advocate. I have witnessed a people who, to quote today's prophet, "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

And here we are at 20 years old this year! We are entering young adulthood and bravely looking at ourselves and trying on a new identity. For Part of these 20 years we were a nomadic people. Our history, our stories often begin, "well, this was when we were at the Unity center" or, "back when we were at the Kahiliah." And then just about ten years ago, this land we are on became a

reality. We learned to be settlers and to discern our ministries that would branch out from Merin Rd. And part our loving this land has been in sharing it with others. Of course with our three residents in the PeeWee homes, with local music teachers, shape note singers, jam groups, CSAs, Whitby, some deer, birds, and the few frogs Whitby has allowed to live.

Now that we have been given insight into some of God's glory shining through, it is now time for us to look at where we have come from and who God is calling us to be today. Who are the People of the Advocate? What has changed from before the pandemic? What needs to come back? What needs to be replaced? And what is that construction happening over there?

As we are entering this new place and witnessing to God's glory revealed, we are uniquely situated to be thinking about the next twenty years. One way we can work towards our future is to begin to discern whether the next step for the Advocate is to move from "mission" to "parish" status.

For those who may be wondering what this church jargon might be, I'll try to help. When a church is planted it is called a mission and relies on the Diocese for many things but most significantly on money. Money to seed the church plant to assist in it's growth. That was the case for the Advocate for many years. Additionally, a mission is under direct authority of the bishop and the priest, then, is called a Vicar because they stand in "vicariously" for the Bishop.

Parish status means a church that is not relying on the diocese for monetary support, and the vestry has more authority and independence from the diocese and the bishop. The priest would be called a "rector" and the primary relationship would be between the rector and the vestry.

Here at the Advocate we have grown, we have flourished and are thriving and over the last 10 years we have become financially independent from the Diocese of North Carolina. No longer is the diocese giving us money to support our on-going operations. We have also grown in membership and are at a place of meeting the threshold required for parish status.

There are two significant benefits for becoming a parish

1. The Vestry and clergy would have more autonomy
  - a. In calling future clergy
2. And in building projects and anytime we want to do something with this land

Anytime we as a community consider taking a step like this we do so together, carefully and prayerfully with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There will be plenty of times over the next year where we will gather to have conversation in the discernment of this next step. You will have several opportunities to ask questions and voice concerns.

Over the course of this upcoming year we will celebrate. We will celebrate turning 20 with events throughout the year and with a big party in September. And part of this celebration is recognizing the movement of the Holy Spirit and God's glory as revealed at the Advocate.

Here's to the next 20!