**GREETINGS from the DEAN**

SINCE the cathedral closed in March of this year, I have spent a great deal more time than usual in a room at the deanery that has a small sofa, a couple of bookshelves, and now a standing desk setup for this makeshift “office away from the office.” I suspect many of us have adapted a space in our homes with similar equipment that affords us connectivity to others in this time of pandemic distancing. I am grateful for those connections, especially with this community of Saint Mark’s.

On the bookshelf just to the side of my standing desk, at eye level, is a photo of our family white water rafting down the Ocoee National River that straddles the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, a place where I learned to kayak in college. We returned to the river nearly twenty years ago, with two daughters in their early teens, and with a guide in the stern, we made our way down this stretch of river that hosted the 1996 Olympics, with rapids descriptively named for their peculiar challenge—names like “Double Suck” and “Diamond Splitter.” The photo was taken by the rafting company in one of those moments when our attention was fully focused on the rapids lapping all around us. Fitted with personal protective equipment of helmet and life jacket, we were soaked through but finding our way.

I reflect on this photo often during Zoom meetings. It is an image that captures not just the memory, but also the challenges of this most remarkable year when pandemic and racial strife and economic setbacks and a crisis in our democracy seem to present a relentless series of assaults. Make it through one set of rapids, and just when you think you’re in calm waters, the next turbulence presents itself. Many of you have spoken of this sense of foreboding this year. What’s next? What more can there possibly be?

The key to white water rafting is making your way as a team, striving to keep the boat pointed downstream with momentum to ride the rapids through. It’s an apt image for our time, and I am convinced that our family made our way to the take out point that day, soaked but safely through, because we paddled together, with intention, guided by the young soul in the back who knew the river, and quickly came to know us and our respective strengths. He encouraged us—that is, he helped us stir up the courage to be as one and face the river together.

I’m similarly buoyed by so many in this cathedral community whose words of wisdom and willingness to lean into this challenge embolden me to trust that we will make our way through together. There is resilience here, and I marvel at your courageous ways, many of which are captured in word and photo in the pages that follow here. So allow me to express my gratitude for you, and for this community. I am glad to be in the boat with you all. I am,

Your Brother in Christ,

The Very Rev. Steven L. Thomason
Dean & Rector
ONLINE SERVICES
during the closure of the cathedral building

SUNDAYS

11 A.M.
Livestreamed service of Holy Eucharist at saintmarks.org/livestream and on Facebook

4:30 P.M.
Livestreamed Choral Evensong (first Sunday of the month) at saintmarks.org/livestream and on Facebook

9:30 P.M.
The Office of Compline, broadcast live on KING 98.1 FM and king.org

WEEKDAYS

MONDAY–FRIDAY, 6:30 P.M.
Evening Prayer via Zoom

THURSDAY, 7 A.M.
Morning Prayer via Zoom

Other liturgical offerings, such as the Contemplative Eucharist, Centering Prayer, and Cathedral Yoga, are currently suspended and will recommence gradually as the situation allows.

See details and updates at: saintmarks.org/worship

Learn about plans for reopening of the building and the resumption of in-person worship at: saintmarks.org/reopening

ON THE COVER: A Black Lives Matter banner was placed in front of the cathedral building in June 2020. Saint Mark’s Cathedral’s mission includes a commitment to practice Christ’s message of justice. The photograph was taken September 10, 2020, and the unusually beautiful colors of the sunset are the result of the thick smoke from the deadly wildfires in California, Oregon, and Washington.

ABOVE: A view from the videography booth, where livestreaming technology connects thousands for worship.
SAIN'T Mark’s Cathedral, Seattle, began livestreaming liturgies using permanently installed, professional equipment on Easter Sunday, 2017, and for the following three years it served a loyal but small community who worshipped from home each week. In March of 2020 that changed. The cathedral building was closed due to COVID-19, and the entire worshipping community began to gather virtually. Since then, the livestream cameras have allowed all to participate in weekly Sunday morning worship, in addition to the sacred liturgies of Holy Week and Easter, Seattle’s famous Compline service, priestly ordinations, experiments with pre-recorded scripture and music, outdoor liturgies, and more.
God’s creative energy forged order out of chaos and charged humankind with the stewardship of creation. Modeled here is a partnership of care and oversight that values human beings as co-creators in God’s holy and life-giving plan. If it seems chaos has gained the upper hand in the political, social, and environmental landscape, Christians can do far more than throw up their hands in exasperation. The invitation—no, the charge—is to participate in the restorative work of creation’s ongoing story.

One way to actively engage in this work is to support our sacred democratic duty to vote. Voting is the engine that drives the active, ongoing work of democracy. As a means as well as an end, voting and advocating for voting rights can be framed as a spiritual practice, reflective of the co-creator synergy inherent in God’s plan for the created order. According to our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, voting is no less than an instrument to restore the soul of the nation. In a sermon preached at the 2019 gathering of the Union of Black Episcopalians in Pasadena, Calif., Bishop Curry said, “We must help America find its soul…. We can’t tell people how to vote…but we can tell people ‘you must vote.’”

Presiding Bishop Curry asserted his confidence in one of the bedrock values of this nation: the belief enshrined in the Declaration of Independence that all are “…created equal.” He acknowledged that Thomas Jefferson, the founder who wrote those words, had significant moral failings. However, he goes on to say, “He may have had some issues, but when he wrote [The Declaration of Independence], that was the Holy Ghost talking!”

Spurred on by the hope that, at its best, the American democratic experiment can be a force for human dignity and equality, the Episcopal Church put its weight behind a get-out-the-vote effort in the run-up to the 2020 election. The Episcopal Church’s Office of Government Relations assembled an Election Engagement Toolkit in collaboration with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ. The toolkit, “Vote Faithfully,” provides practical resources for “getting souls to the polls,” and empowering Christians to vote their values.

In the fall of 2019, Saint Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle along with Episcopal cathedrals across the country committed to support voter education and advocacy in their local contexts. Early in 2020, a group from Saint Mark’s Cathedral held a ‘get-out-the-vote’ event in their city with a focus on highlighting the church’s role in civic engagement.

“VOTING IS NO LESS THAN AN INSTRUMENT TO RESTORE THE SOUL OF THE NATION.”

“It is a Christian obligation to vote, and more than that, it is the church’s responsibility to help get souls to the polls.”

—The Most Reverend Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

by The Rev. Emily Austin & Adam Conley
Mark’s began making plans to put the “Vote Faithfully” toolkit into action, but with the onset of COVID-19, had to adjust to pandemic realities.

Voting rights advocates in the Saint Mark’s community decided to partner with the non-profit Vote Forward (VoteFwd.org). Vote Forward’s mission is to “empower grassroots volunteers to help register voters from under-represented demographics and encourage them to vote.”

Vote Forward provides names and addresses of registered but infrequent voters with a template for a letter of encouragement to vote. Letters are personalized with a handwritten note, and avoid partisan bias or attempts to steer the recipient in particular political ways.

Saint Mark’s parishioner and #VoteFaithfully advocate Sue Tait is a frequent Vote Forward letter writer and a staunch believer in the power of voting. She says, “I vote in every election because I care deeply about our communities and country, how the people we elect represent us, and the possibility that together we can create a better society. I also vote to remind myself that a democracy needs to hear all our voices, even cynical ones like mine, in an act of trust in the wisdom of others.”

Voting is like so much in a life of faith. We do not control the outcome, but we can be engaged and active co-creators on the journey. We are invited to hear our own voices as precious and worthy. When we love our neighbors as ourselves by advocating on their behalf, we elevate their voices, too. Engaging in the democratic process makes a statement that we value the dignity of every person. When this happens, a nation might rediscover its soul.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. To register to vote, go to: www.vote.org/register-to-vote
   In Washington State: www.vote.org/register-to-vote/washington
   Washington State registration deadlines:
   ♦ in person: Election Day (Tuesday, November 3, 2020)
   ♦ online: 8 days before Election Day (Monday, October 26, 2020)
   ♦ by mail: Must be received by 8 days before Election Day

2. Check in with family and friends, and encourage them to register if they have not.


4. Start conversations and practice fully present listening.

5. The “Vote Faithfully” Election Engagement Toolkit and Action Alerts may be found here: https://episcopalchurch.org/OGR/civic-engagement

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VOTE FAITHFULLY

“We are blessed as a nation to vote. As citizens of this country, this is a right, an obligation, and a duty. Go vote. Vote your conscience. Your conscience informed by what it means to love your neighbor, to participate in the process of seeking the common good, to participate in the process of making this a better world. However you vote, go and vote. And do that as followers of Jesus.”

- Presiding Bishop Michael Curry

REGISTER MOBILIZE COMMUNICATE ADVOCATE

#VoteFaithfully

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3 Curry, “Look to the Rock.”


How Not to Confirm on Horseback

Q: What is Confirmation?
A: Confirmation is the rite in which we express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop.

Q: What is required of those to be confirmed?
A: It is required of those being confirmed that they have been baptized, are sufficiently instructed in the Christian Faith, are penitent for their sins, and are ready to affirm their confession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

—The Book of Common Prayer

by The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel

People ask me all the time, “What is your most favorite part about being a bishop?” And this question has never been difficult to answer. Of so many wonderful things this vocation offers, and which I love, none of them is as special or meaningful or life-giving as Confirmation and/or Reception and Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows. In that special moment, the person stepping forward is vowing in front of God and everybody that they are Christian, that they plan to follow that “Way” as an Episcopalian, and that the kind of life they intend to lead will be one that closely emulates our Baptismal Covenant.

In the theology and polity we have built around it, and in that special moment, it is my role as bishop to stand in for the Church. It just happens to be a human, named Greg Rickel, who is standing there. It is one of those moments in our sacraments of physical touch, the laying on of hands, an ancient sign and ritual.

At that moment, I like to remind all those who step forward that this “touch” tactilely connects the person all the way back to the apostles. There is a literal line of succession for bishops, one for the Episcopal Church, and then one that goes back beyond that to the apostles. This line has not always been pure, but for the most part...
it is. What we say is it has always been the Church’s intent to keep the line pure.

Every bishop is issued a number at their consecration. Mine is 1021. No other bishop in the Episcopal Church will ever have that number. This means I am the 1,021st bishop in the American succession since number 1, who was Samuel Seabury. Seabury was consecrated in Aberdeen, Scotland and then that line goes all the way back, and on, and on.

One of the seven sacraments of the church, Confirmation is described in the prayer book as the “mature commitment to Christ,” because in most cases the person being confirmed was baptized as an infant. Adults made the profession of faith and took the vows on your behalf. In Confirmation or Reception, you take them for yourself.

If you have ever been in one of my pre-Confirmation meetings, and we have had enough time, I often tell the story of St. Hugh of Lincoln (1135–1200), also a bishop. At that time bishops frequently rode into town on horseback. They would often not get off their horse, and simply ride through town tapping people on the head, perhaps saying a prayer, but moving on. As I like to joke: “drive-by confirmations.” There are even a few stories from that time of people getting trampled or hurt by horses.

Bishop Hugh was different. When he died, his people made a list of things they loved about him and on that list was this: “He never confirmed on horseback.” We can laugh at that now, and when I tell it, people often do. But I believe it was quite serious. Bishop Hugh was known for riding into town, dismounting his horse and getting at eye level with the people.

I have always felt it was on me to attempt to figure out how, in this day and age, I never “confirm on horseback.” This is why I have never confirmed more than one person at a time, even if I have had 100 people to confirm, which I have! Because, as I always remind anyone who asks about it, “For them, this is the only time!” It is also the reason I leave lots of silence when I lay hands on a head. In that silence I ask all those present to think and pray about all those millions that have gone before them who did this very thing all through the ages. Now they are in that same line.

On one such occasion I was dealing mostly with teenagers. One young woman in particular, through my telling of Bishop Hugh’s story, just rolled her eyes, made faces, and generally made it clear she didn’t buy any of it. I asked her, which I do often, if she really wanted to go through with it.

As I tell folks, if you don’t believe this, don’t do it. Confirmation is your adult profession of faith. It is your mature “confirmation” of the vows that were made for you, in most cases, at your baptism. If you don’t believe that, or don’t want to follow the course set then, don’t do this today. The young woman wouldn’t budge. She gave me the answer some do, “I want my parents off my back!” I gave her an out, but she didn’t take it.

During the service, the young woman stepped up in front of me just like everyone else. I laid hands on her head, and I left the silence I leave. One of the blessed gifts of being bishop in this moment is that I am the only one that can usually see their faces. This young woman who had not smiled since I met her suddenly had a big smile on her face. And then tears started rolling down both cheeks. Her tough exterior did not match what was going on inside her.

I leaned over and gently whispered, “I won’t tell anyone.” When I said the prayer and let my hands go, she looked in my eyes as if to say thank you, then as she turned she went right back to that tough exterior. But I knew what had happened in that moment. And that is why I love it, the greatest blessing of my vocation.

It is especially difficult right now in this time of physical distancing to not be able to connect in tactile ways. But even that, I remember, is simply a sign, an act we instituted to symbolize what we know to be true all the time: No matter what, God is not only connected to us, but within us, always.

Confirmation is the act of going deeper into your faith. The vows are meant to change your life, and hopefully the world around you as well, moving you and this world ever closer to the dream God has for us all.
The church springs from the divine authorization to those who follow the path of Jesus to love one another and to forgive one another, a meeting of justice and mercy. In Matthew, relationships in the house church are built on equity. Rather than slide into the spiritual wilderness of unrestrained power, prestige, and possessions, the disciples are commissioned to repair the world through the little way, that of community, with the homeless, the incarcerated, the immigrant, the sick, the lonely, the abandoned, the least, the last, and the forsaken. Following the way of Jesus means seeking first God’s reign of justice and peace, love and mercy. Communities whose relationships embody forgiveness are ripe to grow into the countercultural path of restorative justice. Restorative justice is a seedling of a liberation movement that victims and offenders can encounter one another, confront truth, express accountability, and potentially foster understanding in relationship. It holds forth possibility to address harm and heal trauma. At the national level, the arduous and risk-taking example of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa upon liberation from the cruelty of apartheid, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, stands out. In his book No Future Without Forgiveness, Tutu says: Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment but, in the spirit of Ubuntu, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships... Thus, we would claim that justice, restorative justice, is being served when efforts are made to work for healing, for forgiveness and for reconciliation. To be given the authority to bind and to loose, as Peter and the disciples were, implies having our hearts broken open to the ways of God. It is to partake of the sacred and human act of forgiveness. Such authority entails that we have sought and experienced forgiveness ourselves. We see this mutuality as essential in marriage, close relations, and friendship. The church too needs forgiveness for our complicity in white supremacy and racism. For the ongoing detention of immigrant children, for the acceptance of mass incarceration and law enforcement violence toward Black and brown people, for the marginalization thrust upon Native siblings, we are charged to lament, repent, discern, and act. The church has the capacity to draw forth the transformation needed for such a time as this. Does the church have the audacity to join God’s initiative for reconciled community?
The theologian James Cone speaks a word to the people of God who would seek to restore justice in our land:

There can be no forgiveness of sins without repentance, and no repentance without the gift of faith to struggle with and for the freedom of the oppressed. When whites undergo the true experience of conversion wherein they die to whiteness and are reborn anew in order to struggle against white oppression and for the liberation of the oppressed, there is a place for them in the black struggle of freedom. Here reconciliation becomes God’s gift of blackness through the oppressed of the land. ²

Archbishop Tutu likened his commission’s role to that of a midwife of a new nation; that is, through the thorough unmasking of pain and suffering the healing balm of Gilead might be felt. Perhaps our Great Commission for this moment might be movement from privilege and domination-system values toward new and renewed interrelationships with Black, indigenous, people of color, and to do our own necessary work, such that we might be prepared to see the world more as they would have us see it and that, together, we might more approximate the restorative justice that leads to shalom in the city.

On the long-running news magazine 60 Minutes recently, the story was re-told about how the Ethiopian Orthodox church gathers and worships in 800-year-old rock carved from the clay four stories down into the earth. ³ Hundreds of thousands of people, with much sacrifice and having endured famine and war, make the pilgrimage to the church born literally from the earth. It was said that it was built by angels. They were seen assembled at an all-night vigil to welcome the birth of Jesus. Ethiopians then and now, like South Africans in the freedom struggle, were ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Faithful people of God. The rock on which a church of a faith that does justice is built.

We are, together, Black and white, Latinx and Native, Asian and of diverse backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and identities, a people of God. For the church that is in the process of rebirth, the key for entrance is the humility to seek forgiveness for our racism and white supremacy, as the first gesture of seeking right relationship with God and God’s dream of beloved community.

A second step is to put on the mind, heart, soul, and strength of the midwives who dared empire in refusing to give into the demands to destroy the lives of an oppressed people. For every Moses who is drawn out of the water and nurtured to maturity as a liberator by a God who cries with and suffers with, there are midwives who have borne the burden first, who are themselves the instigators of movements of parting waters and bringing new life from the womb. These midwives are us, when we face the conflict of our culpable blindness and the harm this has caused our siblings and make reparation through listening and learning, through accompaniment, solidarity, and resistance, that is, restoring justice through Christ-like reflection and action. The church will be reborn through the shining of light on injustice and by drawing on the love of the person of color from Galilee who too had to flee execution as a child and met the violence of the cross as an adult. A savior who through us continues to liberate, such as we dare to cooperate. ◆

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³ 60 Minutes. “Inside Lalibela, the mysterious holy site visited by 200,000 Ethiopian Christians on their Annual Pilgrimage.” CBS, August 2, 2020.
Life in Sanctuary During a Pandemic

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAIME RUBIO

“My son and my wife are my world, and I love them with all my heart. I am just waiting for the day that we can walk outside without the fear of being separated.”
—Jaime Rubio

Jaime, how has the pandemic impacted you and your family?

Before the pandemic, even though I had been living in partial isolation for more than a year, I was fortunate to spend time with friends and people from the congregation in-person. My family and I were able to attend Sunday services at Saint Mark’s Cathedral and it was always a good opportunity for me to have conversations and to get to know people. I never really felt alone because I was always surrounded by wonderful and caring people.

But I have to say that I wasn’t prepared for total isolation from the outside. Before the pandemic hit, I could have visitors, or I could volunteer in the cathedral side-by-side with other volunteers. In my small circle of friends, I could still have some face-to-face communications and social life. I never felt alone or afraid.

When the city shut down and social distancing became mandatory at the end of March, I was very scared and uncertain. I felt vulnerable. I think it was the first time I really felt afraid because the people that I used to talk to and work with could no longer be physically around.

Did your experience in Sanctuary prepare you for the pandemic in any way?

I thought I was prepared for social distancing. I was already used to the idea that I can’t go out. I have learned to identify what is important and what is necessary. Through living in Sanctuary for a year, I realized that there are many things that I was holding onto and I learned to let them go.

What are some ways that you continue to nurture friendships and maintain connections to your community?

I keep connecting through multiple platforms such as phone calls, text messages, Zoom meetings, and Skype. My family connects with the church community by attending the Sunday services online at Saint Mark’s and by messaging each other saying, ”Peace be with you.”

Some of my friends and I started a cooking meet-up via Zoom, in which someone teaches a new recipe every week and we learn it by cooking together. One of my favorite recipes is gumbo from a friend in New Orleans. I had no idea what I was doing when he had us mix oil and flour to make roux, but after it was combined with the rest of the ingredients, I was pleasantly surprised how tasty it was. Okra, sausage, shrimp, vegetables, and spices combine to make a fantastic dish!

I continue to be a part of Latin Dance community in Seattle, and I enjoy training with my friends over Zoom meetings. It is not an ideal set-up, but it is our new reality for now.

Do you have practices, or are there activities that are a source of comfort and encouragement for you right now?

I still practice dance, focusing on body conditioning and choreography, although it is hard sometimes to
find the motivation to do the training alone. I used to practice in a group setting and doing it alone does not project the same energy. I am trying to be consistent and need to keep working on it.

The chance to use my knowledge of construction to do socially distant repairs and improvements at the cathedral makes me feel helpful. I really enjoyed refinishing the hardwood floor of the organ loft and building decking for storage in the “crypt.” It feels good to give back to the community.

Being around my family definitely gives me comfort. This includes taking care of my son, playing with him, helping him with schoolwork, talking to my wife, cooking together as a family, and planning the future for my family. All those things are incredibly valuable to me and I am eternally grateful to everybody that makes this possible. Without the friends and the support of this community, I would not be able to enjoy those things in my life.

What is the biggest challenge for you right now?

Talking to my child about our situation is difficult. My wife and I both understood that finding a legal remedy will take some time. I know that our son is happy that I am here to play, talk, and read books with him. But, from time to time, he asks me hard questions such as, “When will we be back home?” or “Why we can’t go to a park, a lake, or a camping site the way we used to?” or “Why can other friends go out for a trip with their entire family, but we can’t?” These questions really break my heart because I just can’t find the right answers for him. My son and my wife are my world and I love them with all my heart. I am just waiting for the day that we can walk outside without the fear of being separated.

Where do you see hope right now?

I believe that I have the same hope as everyone—a good outcome for the presidential election. If there is something that America needs now more than ever it is leadership. We need someone that can unite us as a nation and not separate us based on race, color, or religion.

How can we continue to support you and your family in this time of pandemic?

Vote, Vote, and Vote! Something that I’ve learned during this pandemic is that we need to educate ourselves to really understand the problems that we are facing in the country, not only the immigration policies, but discrimination against race, sexual orientation, religious belief, and so on.

We must understand that the country is stronger when we are united. If we can put ourselves in the shoes of others, we can make the change we need. The passage from Mark 12:31 that says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” carries a strong message for me. We truly understand this when all of us stand up and do our part to make this world a better place. As long as there is injustice for one person, there is injustice for many. We belong to the same race, the human race. Vote!

Jaime Rubio has been living in Sanctuary at Saint Mark’s Cathedral since March of 2019, as he works toward a legal remedy which will allow him to stay in the United States with his wife and son.
by The Rev. Canon Cristi Chapman

Between 2001 and 2013, Tent City 3 (TC3), a movable community of people who have experienced homelessness, took up residence at Saint Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle for three months each year. After a hiatus, they returned this summer in the midst of a global pandemic, arriving to set up camp on July 7. Tent cities began in Seattle in 1990, when a group of citizens experiencing homelessness came together to create a self-managing community run according to grassroots democratic principles. Thirty years later, the organization that grew out of this initiative, called SHARE/WHEEL, runs 11 indoor shelters and two tent cities, housing almost 500 individuals. During that time, the crisis of homelessness in the Seattle area has only become more acute. Today, Seattle has the third-largest homeless population in the nation, despite being only the 15th largest city.¹

Per an agreement with the City of Seattle, Tent City 3 sets up its facilities on the property of a church or other host and stays for approximately 90 days before moving on. Living in a tent is not the secure, permanent housing that everyone deserves; however, for some of those for whom such housing is inaccessible, a Tent City can be a better situation than more traditional homeless shelters. Unlike many shelters, it allows mixed-gender couples to live together and some animal companions can join them. In addition, the residents are not bound to restrictive curfews, which removes a significant barrier to employment (most residents of Tent City are employed full- or part-time).

TC3 resident Mary moved to the camp in late August after returning from Florida. She says it has been difficult for her to figure out how to finalize her claim for disability after a recent accident. In Florida, she had

“PHYSICAL DISTANCING REQUIREMENTS MADE MINISTRY MORE DIFFICULT, BUT DIDN’T STOP IT FROM HAPPENING.”
to meet with people in person to verify her claim, but with COVID-19, those offices were closed. She moved back to Washington, in part, because the state offers more pathways for her to receive benefits. Mary was grateful to find a home at TC3 while she sorted out what was next. About TC3 and COVID-19, Mary said, “You make the best out of whatever situation you find yourself in.” Mary’s motto was shared by many others who made their homes in tents outside the cathedral building this summer.

TC3 residents were not the only ones who had to adjust to COVID-19. So did members from Saint Mark’s. In the past, many different groups at the cathedral would regularly interact with residents from the camp. While this summer’s building closure and physical distancing requirements made that more difficult, it didn’t stop ministry from happening. Instead, new ways developed to connect residents with the community. Members of Saint Brigid’s Banquet provided meals while adhering to the governor’s precautions. The cathedral provided pallets of water. Individuals brought other basic needs like socks, jeans, t-shirts, and can openers.

Parishioner Kathy Albert recently said of the work done by Saint Brigid’s Banquet: “We need to continue doing this kind of work! We could conceivably shut down this ministry out of consideration for our own health needs and those of the people around us. But what about the needs of the most vulnerable among us? Our faith tells us their needs are to be considered first.”

Tent City 3 packed up and moved to their next host on September 15. In this extraordinary and dangerous time, their presence was a gift and a blessing to the cathedral in so many ways. We continue to remember them in prayer, we decry and denounce the dehumanizing and degrading treatment to which those who have lost their home are subjected in this country, and we continue to work for a world in which all can live with safety and dignity. 

1 Coleman, Vernal. “King County homeless population third-largest in U.S.” Seattle Times, December 17, 2017.
This pandemic season has been a time of loss: the tragic loss of life, loss of livelihood, loss of being together, and on and on. All of us have lost something—many things—even as we live in faith and hope as we lean into this challenging era. Those of us who attend church have lost in many ways: the chance to worship in our sacred spaces, to physically exchange the peace, to connect with friends and do ministry in person together…

Of all the disruptions and loss caused by the pandemic and the building closures at Saint Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle, so many people have named missing singing together. It is a big part of worship in our tradition, of course—and Saint Mark’s is blessed with a congregation of hearty singers!

For me, singing in the cathedral’s choirs has perhaps been the most painful loss. The intensity of the experience of singing in a church choir is a powerful thing. Each choir member’s voice is essential to the group’s sound, but only insofar as it becomes seamlessly blended with everyone else’s voice. If a single member’s voice is missing, the choir’s sound is altered; but if any one voice stands out above all the rest, the sound is no longer that of one choir. A choir breathes as one. A choir makes their prayers and praise to God with one voice. The choir member must use their whole self—their entire body and spirit, their intellect, their expressivity—in order to subsume that self into something bigger, into the one-ness of the choir. At its best, choral singing is an all-encompassing spiritual experience.

In normal times I would sometimes sing three different cathedral liturgies on a single Sunday—beginning with the Cathedral Choir’s rehearsal at 10 a.m. for the morning Eucharist, followed by Choral Evensong later in the day, and concluding with Saint Mark’s famous Compline service, which ends at 10 p.m. No matter what else was going on in my life, I knew that on Sunday I would be able to ground myself, breathe deeply, be valued for my personal contribution, connect with my friends in a profound way, and create something beautiful. All of that was taken away from choir members in early March, when choir rehearsals in close spaces became potentially deadly, and the cathedral turned to livestream-only liturgies.

But for me, it wasn’t taken away entirely. Saint Mark’s is a very large, well-ventilated space, with a choir loft placed far away from and above the main worship space. During this era of livestream-only worship, with careful grounding in the science and following professional recommendations regarding air exchange rate and filtration, cathedral leadership determined it would be safe for the role of the choir, normally numbering 40–50, to be taken on by four individual singers, standing at a sufficient distance apart. Choir members who could hold their part on their own with minimal rehearsal...
as a group, and who were not in a vulnerable population, were invited to take turns in the Sunday quartet. The highly skilled all-volunteer choirs of Saint Mark’s have quite a few members who meet those criteria, and so the job of singing in the quartet each week could be shared among them.

Singing in a quartet is both similar to and completely unlike singing in a large choir. Like normal choral singing, the quartet members must remain intensely aware of the singers around them, striving to match into- nation, pronunciation, cut-offs, and dynamics with the other singers—in a word, creating a perfect blend. But unlike normal choral singing, each member of the quartet remains at all times a soloist as well. They must fill the cavernous empty nave with their voice, and without anyone else to cover weak patches or mistakes, the quartet singer is like a tightrope walker without a net.

The emptiness of the cathedral was especially poignant at the late-evening service of Compline. The Compline congregation at Saint Mark’s is unique in the world, a combination of cathedral members in the pews and students lying on the floor, the very old and the very young, the devout Christians deep in prayer and the spiritual seekers in the lotus position. I was a member of that congregation for many years before I was asked to join the choir, and for me, chanting the office to an empty nave just does not feel right. It even sounds different, with an unfamiliar echo reverberating off the vast expanse of empty concrete floor. Compline as sung at Saint Mark’s Cathedral is not a service for an empty space. It is a service that is created in community.

Quartet singing is difficult. Singing every night through Holy Week and Easter was physically and emotionally exhausting! But I have to admit that singing in these solo quartets has been one of the most gratifying and artistically thrilling musical experiences of my life. The intensity of focus and attention to the smallest detail has prompted everyone who participates in the quartets to sing at the highest level of which they are capable. And when four strong musicians are pushing themselves, and connecting with each other, to the limit of their ability, the music that results from this synergy is beyond anything I thought we were capable of.

I have always known that the opportunity to sing in a choir that is as skilled and disciplined as those at Saint Mark’s was a precious gift—and yet, it never occurred to me that that gift could be taken away from all of us so suddenly. The choirs of Saint Mark’s will gather again. The congregation will gather in person again. We will make music with each other again. At some point in the future, perhaps far in the future, choral and congregational singing in all our churches will look like it did before the pandemic. When that day comes, I doubt we will take it for granted again. And until that day, you can see me on a tiny screen, standing twelve feet apart in the choir loft, walking on a tightrope without a net. ◆

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