

St Thomas Ministries in 2021 and 2022

St Thomas in 2021 – continuing our response to COVID

Despite the prolonged difficulties of the COVID pandemic, St Thomas has sought to continue as a vibrant parish, visibly engaged with parish members. Our clergy team of Father Tim and Father Michael have encouraged a creative approach to ministry, while respecting COVID restrictions. As a result, many of our activities have continued, slightly amended, and we have actually begun brand new ones! Please read on...

Our Eucharist. Early in the year, in-person attendance at Eucharist was again cancelled following a brief open period in late 2020. We returned at once to on-line streaming of services, which again proved very popular. As we gained experience with this, we were able to be increasingly creative in how we featured our choir and our readers, thus adding significantly to the services' variety and diversity. Broadcast quality was greatly enhanced by the new sound system which we acquired, with full funding provided by a significant contribution from COR and the balance from parish members.

As before, our strong sense is that our services were viewed by many members of the wider community beyond St Thomas, as well as residents of seniors' homes whom we could not visit personally due to the pandemic. For much of the year to date, the number of households viewing our Sunday Eucharist averaged at least 150, sometimes rising over 200! We also continued to schedule a virtual Sunday School.

Our clergy continued our Parking Lot Eucharist, welcoming about 25 people per Sunday to an important in-person contact.

A parish couple continued to host a virtual post-service fellowship hour, something they have done for over a year! This provided a welcome opportunity for us to see each other, talk together and interact directly – indeed a luxury at a time of enforced isolation!

Our ministries:

Chat & Chew, our luncheon program for seniors, resumed with meals being prepared at home and in the St Thomas kitchen and then delivered to those who had signed up for the program. In October, 80 seniors, from both the parish and the community, participated in this popular activity. The program ran three times in 2021, with the next meal planned for Christmas 2021.

Our yoga program went on-line three times in 2021, with a total of more than 50 participants. Further in-person sessions are planned for the coming winter, beginning in November.

And we have strengthened our ongoing support of the Heron Emergency Food Centre by creating a new St Thomas Community Garden. Produce from the garden has supplemented the regular cash donation the parish makes to HEFC as well as the personal donations of parish members. The garden has also become something of a community space in the heart of our campus.

Where we are now

In September, we joyfully resumed in-person attendance at Eucharist, while continuing to livestream services. Father Tim and Father Michael continued to offer 'drive-in' Eucharist in the church parking lot after the Sunday morning service.

New parish members from the Church of the Resurrection have made a significant contribution to many aspects of the parish, including acting as readers and intercessors, Parish Council members, choir members, and representing the parish on diocesan bodies. They have also helped to maintain offerings levels. We are indeed blessed by their presence in our community!

Financially, St Thomas has weathered the pandemic quite well. In particular, our Pre-authorized Remittances (PAR) have helped maintain income levels. On the other side of the ledger, expenses were less than usual. For example, when the buildings were empty and activities reduced, lights and taps were off, and fewer office supplies were needed. Helpfully, due to the COVID situation, the Diocese forgave all parishes one month of expenses that are normally paid through the Diocese.

Looking forward to 2022

The arrival of vaccines has allowed us to look towards 2022 with the hope that the end of the pandemic is coming into view. In particular, we aspire to continue to worship in person, while maintaining our on-line services. As mentioned, Chat & Chew and Yoga are planning to resume in-house when appropriate in 2022.

Looking at the St Thomas campus as a whole, we are encouraged by the progress being made towards establishing the Ellwood House extension, which will strengthen our missional role in providing affordable housing for seniors.

At the diocesan level, we are entering a period of significant review of our ministry priorities. Bishop Shane has put in place a Diocese-wide process focused on discerning the Shape of Parish Ministry. As part of this, St Thomas has shared with the Shape of Parish Ministry Consultations team some thoughts on how we see our own ministry priorities, particularly within our community. We will be consulting with other parishes in the Diocese, as well as other faith communities in our neighbourhood, on community ministry needs and potential partnerships to address these. It will be a time to recognize, and act on, opportunities.

We have also undertaken a Building Condition Assessment that will systematically look at what will be required in future to maintain our parish buildings at a level that can sustain our continuing ministries. Such planning is responsible, and necessary, and will help ensure that we develop a multi-year plan which identifies the priorities and finances needed for essential maintenance.

Since we expect the in-person restrictions of the pandemic to end in due course, it will be very important to have plans in place for the resumption of our full set of ministries. Accordingly we will need to maintain our capacity to remain vibrant and actively engaged, as opportunities again open up.

We remain cautiously optimistic about 2022 and hope that we can count on members' continued financial support as we navigate the future!