

## **St Thomas Ministries in 2022 and 2023**

### **St Thomas in 2022 – a cautious move towards ‘normal’**

Despite the continuing challenges of the COVID pandemic, in 2022 St Thomas has moved steadily back towards its ‘normal’ activities as an active, vibrant parish, while prudently relying on multiple vaccinations and recommended mask wearing. It has been an encouraging year!

Rev Tom Hubschmid joined us as Assistant Curate, and was ordained to the priesthood on November 19<sup>th</sup>. We look forward to the energy that he will bring to complement that of Father Tim Kehoe! Please read on...

**Our Eucharist.** We have been able to gradually open up in-person Eucharist services, complete with full choir processions, in-person Sunday School, and maskless reading or speaking during the service. In-person Fellowship Hour has also returned to the Lower Hall. On-line streaming of services continues, reaching between 100 and 150 viewers each week. Our clergy continued with Parking Lot communion, welcoming a small regular group of parish members each week.

### **Our ministries:**

Chat & Chew, our luncheon program for seniors, has opened up in 2022. In March and April we offered two lunches in which the food was delivered to those who signed up. Then in October we held our first in-person Chat & Chew in two years! About 80 seniors, from both the parish and the community, attended this popular event. The program also continued to include delivery of about 20 meals to shut-ins and those still cautious about in-person pandemic risks.

And we have further strengthened our ongoing support of the Heron Emergency Food Centre by doubling the size of our St Thomas Community Garden, which was set up last year. This year we contributed over 170 kilograms of produce to HEFC, supplementing the regular cash donation the parish makes as well as the personal donations of parish members. Parish members volunteer as gardeners, and the garden has further extended its reach into the community by welcoming more local families as plot-holders.

The presence of the garden was also instrumental in attracting a neighbourhood farmers’ market during the summer months. Local vendors sold everything from vegetables to honey, to ethnic food and coffee, to beer! The market organizers have indicated that they plan to return in 2023. Hundreds of shoppers passed through, so that on summer Saturday mornings, our front lawn felt like the social centre of Alta Vista!

The church front lawn was also the site of other events, including those organized by GleeCeptional, a glee club for children and young adults with exceptionalities, which operates out of St Thomas. And our Parking Lot Sale resumed in person this year!

Our Ellwood House Extension project has also made significant progress during 2022, with additional City funding approved for several new steps in the planning process. This important ministry continues to demonstrate our ongoing missional role in providing affordable housing for seniors in Ottawa.

New parish members from the Church of the Resurrection (COR), whom we welcomed in 2020, have made an increasingly important contribution to many aspects of the parish, including acting as wardens, readers and intercessors, Parish Council members, choir members, and representing the parish on diocesan bodies.

Welcoming COR members has come in the context of a strengthened recognition that St Thomas is very much a campus, which also includes the St Thomas the Apostle Nursery School, Ellwood House, Braeside House, the fire station, and the communications centre. In September, a Campus Barbecue in our garden allowed us to finally welcome our COR members appropriately, as well as recognizing all the member agencies on our St Thomas Campus. The event was highlighted by a fire truck demonstration, which entertained children of all ages! About 180 participants attended, and there are strong mentions of a repeat next year!

Financially, St. Thomas continues to weather the pandemic quite well. Pre-authorized Remittances (PAR) provide the largest portion of givings, followed by envelopes, then E-transfers and Canada Helps. Givings to date are almost the same as 2021. However, expenses, particularly utilities, gas, hydro and water have risen more than anticipated. With greater use of the church facilities comes greater impact on expenses. As part of its pandemic-related support, the diocese forgave \$10,161 of our March payment, which we expect will help contribute to a small projected year-end surplus if we continue our current givings practices.

### **Looking forward to 2023**

In 2023, we will continue to worship in person, while maintaining our on-line services. As mentioned, Chat & Chew will continue in person. We will expand our offering of mid-week services of Holy Eucharist, bible studies, Christian formation, and connections with young families and singles. This year we have also undertaken a review of the configuration of the Chapel, including its seating arrangements and layout. This may result in a new, flexible space which can be put to many ministry uses.

Looking at the St Thomas campus as a whole, we look forward to concrete further progress on our Ellwood House extension, which will move us even closer to getting shovels in the ground!

At the diocesan level, our Annual Synod in October approved a range of proposals generated by the Shape of Parish Ministry process, under development for two years. This will fundamentally affect the environment in which parishes such as St Thomas carry out their ministries in future years. For example, in order to bring efficiencies and relieve parishes of certain administrative burdens so they can concentrate more on ministry initiatives, some parish-level administrative functions will be centralized at the Diocese, or will receive increased diocesan support and guidance. A Diocese-supported Parish Advancement program will equip parish lay leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to fulfil their responsibilities. Diocesan support will be available to help parishes with their outreach ministries in their own communities, as well as in creating new forms of worshipping communities.

This new environment will provide exciting opportunities for new St Thomas ministries, and we will look forward to actively participating in it!

***Looking ahead, we must recognize that in 2023 the Diocese is unlikely to again forgive portions of our payments as part of its pandemic-related support. This means that without an increase in adult offerings,***

*we are more likely to run a deficit. We would also be remiss if we did not recognize the additional challenges we face in the current environment of rapidly increasing prices. These will of course have an impact on St Thomas's costs in the next year.*

*We therefore ask parish members to consider both these facts as you decide on your financial support for the parish and its ministries. More pointedly, we would ask all parish members, if you can, to make every effort to increase your planned offerings in 2023. For PAR members, the default pledge to keep offerings at 2022 levels is perhaps too easy to make, and we would specifically encourage you to actively increase your pledges.*

We remain cautiously optimistic about 2023 and hope that we can count on members' continued financial support as we navigate the future!