

Meeting.....

If you were not at our Annual Meeting, you really missed something. It was amazing, a time of celebration and gratitude. Perhaps circumstances made it impossible for you to attend. I've therefore include my recap of 2024 and some of what we hope to accomplish in 2025 below (with a few edits and additions here and there). If you'd like a pdf of the entire Annual Report, please email Teri in the office, info@scbythesea.org and she'll be happy to send you one.

Rector's Report:

It has been another great year at St. Clement's by-the-Sea. There are a number of things to note, and to be grateful for, about this past year. If there was an overarching theme, it would be environmental stewardship. In 2024, we did some big things as "caretakers of creation."

We completed the conversion of our grounds, which saves substantial amounts of the precious resource of water. The gardens are also pleasing to the eye and we even won an award for this conversion. We also installed solar panels on the pergola. We are generating a good bit of power, even in the winter months, when we have shorter and often foggy days. We made other changes that were less obvious, like upgrading a water heater and an air conditioner to more efficient models. And we have striven to make better use of real dishes and reduce our use of paper and plastic products during our events and coffee hours (substantially reducing waste that we produced previously).

These changes reflected the courageous leadership of your vestry. It isn't easy to act so boldly, and to commit to projects of this scale (like entire landscape conversions and installation of solar panels). Yet today, our water use is way down, and the panels have cut our energy bill in half and will do even more as we head toward Summer. These changes were also done well. Most people don't even notice the panels on top of the pergola or the battery on the back of the parish hall. So, there is no detracting from our beautiful architecture or aesthetic.

We are presently awaiting a rebate from the state for our battery, and we have filed for a direct payment from the Federal Government, under the provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act, for the whole system. We are hopeful that in the end about 1/3 of our overall investment will be recaptured in rebates, which will reduce our payback period.

We also completed some security improvements that we had begun in 2023. That year, we had installed cameras in numerous locations around our campus. In 2024, we installed a few more where we had blind spots. Further, we finally gained approval from the city for the installation of three security gates. These gates, also in keeping with our aesthetic, are now in place and have been amazingly effective at deterring the "activity" that was happening behind our church in the past. We've seen an almost a 100% reduction in such unwanted activity. Our neighbors have also been grateful.

We have seen more in-person worship attendance in 2024, which has been a real blessing. I've noticed more of those who have joined in recent years also stepping up for leadership roles, and that has been inspiring. They are leading ministries. They are suggesting new ones, which we are exploring. Several will even stand for vestry at this Annual Meeting. It is wonderful to see these faithful souls move from visitors, to regulars, to fully engaged members of the Body of Christ.

We've continued our faithful outreach in 2024. It was our eighth year offering Laundry Love, a ministry we share with Christ Lutheran, and one for which we will assume more leadership in 2025. We continued our care of young Marine families, through our support of the San Clemente Military Family Outreach and Mary's Feast ministries. We continued to support Family Assistance Ministries, financially and through food distribution, participating in the Hunger Walk, and in 2024 through the adopt-a-family Christmas ministry. Of course, we continued to offer comfort from the cold and a safe place to sleep for our community's unhoused through our partnership with iHope, and we remain the only parish in San Clemente doing so.

We have some challenges that continue to stymie us. It remains difficult to find consistency with ushering and with finding coffee hour hosts (see the pleas above in this eblast). We've tried everything we know to do. We have signup sheets at coffee hours, which we occasionally pass around at services. We announce our need. We name our need in eblasts. We provide a means to sign up electronically. And when all of that fails, we get on the phone and we call people. This takes a lot of time and is not efficient use of our clergy or parish staff. So, these are challenges that must be solved, and soon.

Of course, if the above is our main challenge, we should be extremely grateful to God, for these are not insurmountable. And we can turn our gaze toward the future and what we hope to accomplish with God's grace in the year ahead. One of the things that we plan to continue in 2025 is the educational offerings we began in 2024. You'll recall that we had a forum on estate planning. We had another on a mission experience in Poland and Ukraine. We are going to offer a screening of "The Philadelphia Eleven" in February. And we will have a Lenten series on Spirituality. These are diverse offerings, reflecting our parishioners' diverse interests and needs. So, this will continue to be a place of holy learning. Our covenant groups that were started during the pandemic are part of that formation. Today, four groups meet in a combination of in-person and online formats.

God only fully knows what is in store for us in 2025. Some areas that we plan to develop include our programming and formation for young people. We have an excellent nursery and Sunday School but offer little presently for tweens and teens. We are still discerning what form this will take, but we hope by Easter to have age-appropriate instruction for our tweens in our English congregation in place. We intend to hire Sunday School leaders and nursery attendants for our Spanish congregation very soon. We hope to offer a mission trip experience for teens, who have the energy and desire to change our world for the better. All of the above, and some of what follows would likely be led by the family-ministries clergy person we are seeking to hire.

We would like to see more of our young people taking leadership roles in the parish, including serving as acolytes, MCs, crucifers and torchbearers. We have several young people being baptized in 2025. Some of these young people will be having their First Communion in late April. And, we have an Episcopal visitation slated for late October, when we will Confirm and Receive others. Lastly, we have a parishioner who is beginning the process toward ordination to the diaconate. All of these are signs of our growth "into the full stature of Christ."

We can say of 2024 that we have been well blessed. Our hearts are filled with gratitude. And as we have been blessed, so must we be a blessing. Whether it is in the way we respond to the recent fires in our diocese, our care of immigrants and the recently arrived, or in simply continuing to do the important ministries that we do here each and every day, we will reach out with the loving hands of Christ to a world in need. We will continue to welcome all God's children in Christian love. And we will strive to live the values of the Kingdom of God in our world.

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Patrick