

Hello!

I'd like start by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to serve St Thomas -- my family's church home for almost 20 years -- and to do it alongside our committed vestry and our executive committee members, which include Mother Liz, Anne Bentley, our Treasurer, Valerie Wang, our Junior Warden, and Doug Weigel, our new Chancellor. And I'd like to say a thank you to Andrea Sato-Borgmann for her many years of service as our previous Chancellor. It has been a blessing to work closely with people who are so dedicated to the St Thomas community!

As we live into the hard and joyous work of our mission to be a welcoming, caring, inclusive Christian community, I want take a moment to show appreciation for all the work that's been done by our dedicated staff and the many volunteers of St Thomas in the past year. I want to thank our hard-working staff, who has become leaner in recent years, but continue to take care of so much for this church community. I also want to acknowledge our St. Thomas volunteers for the many hours they put in to help make services, music, child education, meals, outreach, and community events all happen. Let's take a moment to give a round of applause to our amazing staff and volunteers! We appreciate all of you.

And, welcome to our new members! So many people have found us, seekers from a wide variety of backgrounds, and we are so happy you are here.

Looking back at 2025 and looking ahead to the rest of this year, we have much to celebrate!

- Gifts of Generosity: In 2025, we received some amazing gifts of generosity from our parishioners. I want to call out two in particular, although so many people have made significant contributions. First, I want to thank the Lane sisters, Martha and Katie for their extraordinarily generous gift of the land upon which we will be able to build a permanent rectory that will be a major asset for the church. A home not just for Mother Liz, but for St. Thomas rectors in perpetuity. The vestry and the executive committee have heard from multiple experts who've expressed to us the importance of a solid rector housing solution in ensuring ongoing success and stability for a church. And I want to thank Nancy and Peter Pitarys again for their generous gift. As you know, we've given them the naming rights for the Nursery in connection with their gift. And I just want to let folks know that there are still plenty of rooms in this life center waiting to be named....
- Parishioners Supporting Special Projects. Over and over again, our church family continues to step up when needed. Our choir took a once in a lifetime trip to England to perform at St. Paul's Cathedral, and that was paid for by an anonymous

parishioner. Last week Bishop Skelton blessed our beautiful new stained-glass windows celebrating the women of the bible – these were also funded by individual parishioners outside of their pledge commitments. We were finally able to find a new sound system that would significantly improve the church-going experience, but it wasn't in the budget to pay for a new system in 2025. We reached out and were able to get it fully funded through additional parishioner contributions. There are numerous other examples like this, and we are so appreciative of the generosity of this congregation.

- Progress on Rector Housing. Later in this meeting, Mark Nelson will speak to the progress we're making on a permanent new rector home on the land donated by the Lane sisters. As you will hear, it will take up to three years before that house is ready. In the meantime, I'm very happy to announce that due to a generous parishioner donation, we are now looking at putting Mother Liz and her family into a rental house on the Eastside for the next few years. The rector housing committee is actively looking with Mother Liz at potential rental homes, and we hope to have more specific news to announce on this in the near future.
- New sources of revenues. We've formed a Revenue Committee to look at how we can increase our source of revenues beyond pledges. The committee has worked diligently all year and has made significant progress in this area. They have identified several possible sources of significant revenue. There is a page in your booklet that shows the expected timeline and categories of revenue they are exploring. We expect these potential new revenues to start paying out in late 2026 and beyond, with most revenue coming in starting in 2027. We know that movement in this area can seem slow, but we have seen real, significant progress recently on this issue. The most promising revenue solutions are also the most complicated, and we want to make sure we're fully informed and prepared before we make any permanent decisions.
- As Mother Liz noted, we continue to grow in terms of new members, and it's been great to see so many new parishioners in church every week. We also had a great year in terms of community outreach events, such as a successful vacation bible camp, another July spent housing and feeding the men from Porchlight, and building tiny homes to shelter the unhoused.

So, we have much to celebrate. But in the spirit of full transparency, we do have challenges we also need to confront. To continue a theme from Mother Liz's sermon, we can see

Springtime coming, but we are still in Winter and need to address current issues to enable us to make it safely to Spring.

We have short-term financial and resource challenges, and long-term sustainability concerns that we will need to confront, discuss and find ways to address. We have substantially trimmed our staff over the past few years, and have asked more and more of our volunteers. As I noted, our Revenue Committee has started to explore new revenue opportunities, and we believe those will come to fruition, but it will be 2027 and beyond when we start to see most of those revenues. So, we have short-term financial matters to resolve. Specifically, the vestry has not yet approved a budget for the church for 2026. Tim Diller will discuss this in more detail during the Financial Committee report, but I want to speak to a few aspects here.

One key reason for not yet approving a budget is that we have not yet met our stewardship goal for this year. Our stewardship goal was an aspirational \$1.25M, and we currently sit at just over \$1M in pledges (and we are grateful for every one of those pledges). We still have a number of pledging units who have pledged faithfully in the past who we have not yet heard from. Based on past pledges, they represent nearly \$50,000 in pledges. We encourage those folks to get their pledges in. But even if we receive those pledges, we're still short of our goal.

If we cannot meet materially increase our pledge total for the year, the finance committee and the vestry will have to take a hard look at what is already a very lean budget and may have to make some difficult decisions. To that end, I'm making an ask today that everyone in the parish prayerfully consider or re-consider their pledge for this year. If you haven't pledged yet, please do. If you have, please consider increasing your pledge. I can tell you that Mary and I had already increased our pledge for the year, and we have now decided to increase it further. I know that we are in uncertain financial times, and a pledge commitment or increase can be a scary thing, but as Bishop Skelton said in her powerful sermon last week – Go ahead and feel the fear, and do it anyways.

In the next few weeks, after the vestry feels that it has an accurate final estimate of what our pledge amounts will be, they will work with the finance committee to set a budget for 2026. And the vestry is committed to keep the parish informed and updated on the final pledge amount received and any budgetary decisions. The Vestry and Finance Committee plan to have a Town Hall to provide that update and to answer questions about the decisions made.

Finally, I want to say thank you to Barbara Feldon, who has accepted the call to serve as your Senior Warden for 2026... and to our new incoming vestry members for their

willingness to join in the work. They have significant challenges and opportunities ahead of them, but I have full faith that God is with us, and that with the support of our amazing staff and wonderful parishioners, they will meet them all successfully!

Fred Williams
Senior Warden