

## **Annual Report, Alexandria Region Covering 2021 with brief review of 2020 and 2019**

The Alexandria Region held its first in person meeting since mid-February of 2020, on September 14, 2021, a joint meeting of the region's Clericus and Region Delegates, with at least 20 people attending, a joyful in person group to celebrate together the new physical home of Church of the Resurrection.

We had continued quarterly meetings via Zoom until our in person gathering in September.

At our September in person gathering, hosted by Rev. Jo Belser and Betsy Faga at the new Church of the Resurrection at 2800 Hope Way in Alexandria, we welcomed three new clergy to the Region, shared a Eucharist together led by our Dean, Rev Randy Alexander of Immanuel on the Hill and Rev. Belser. We shared a celebratory in-person meal. This was a timely opportunity to be together. All of our parishes are beginning the new program year with gratitude to be together and facing at individual parishes and in concert together the continuing challenges we are meeting due to the multi-faceted impacts of living and serving during a pandemic.

Together, our annual Region financial contributions were considered and the recommendations of the Outreach Committee, chaired by Betsy Faga, were agreed upon to support programs that assist our neighbors in need in our City. With gratitude to every parish for generous contributions in an unusually financially challenging time for all, we were able to maintain our contribution level of 2020. Our Region is supporting the following programs:

**ALIVE!** This long-time program in Alexandria became the coordinator for a new Eviction Prevention Program that is a collaboration of a wide network of organizations, including the Lazarus ministries and the City.

**Refugee Ministry and Lazarus Emergency Financial Ministry** With the onset of COVID-19 the Christ Church and West End Lazarus ministries became a remote operation. Eleven counselors have responded by phone, text and email to Alexandria residents five days a week from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. Led by Melanie Gray, Director of Outreach for Christ Episcopal Church, and her able staff; residents have received assistance with rent and medical needs as well as security deposits, transportation expenses, grocery delivery, referrals to other organizations, advocacy, source of information, and equally important – a listening and caring ear.

In 51 weeks in 2020, the Lazarus ministry assisted 1,088 people by distributing \$375,000; triple its normal budget thanks in part to additional funds from the American Rescue Plan. In the first six months of 2021, counselors have helped 615 clients for a total of \$106,400. There is the hope for additional federal monies in the coming months. Evictions have been a major concern. Although a court decision ended the DCD moratorium on evictions, Virginia law requires landlords to take certain steps before initiating an eviction. Alexandria has a collaborative group assisting residents who receive eviction notices and assisting residents in applying for Rent Relief Funds.

**The Afghan Refugee Ministry** which began in 2016 has 24 families being shepherded by teams of volunteers. There are three resettlement agencies in Northern Virginia under federal contract to help the newest families arriving in the States. Although none were planned to be resettled in Alexandria, Melanie is aware of over 30 families in the City.

The three agencies are meeting on 9/15 which we hope will provide a clearer picture of resettlement plans.

### **Meade Memorial Bag Lunch**

Meade Memorial has continued its Bag Lunch program and saw the need increase during COVID. With the help of volunteers from seven churches they have been serving 75-125 people Monday to Friday from 11:30-1:30. The lunches are distributed in the outside garden and guests are very cooperative. On Wednesday a generous donation of groceries is received from ALIVE. The groceries are packaged the same day and distributed Thursday and Friday. The donation from the Alexandria Region is used for utility costs, plumbing needs and cleanup.

### **Grace Church Food Pantry**

Several of the Alexandria Region churches have remarkable food pantries that have seen increased numbers during COVID. Because of its location in the Arlandria Chirilagua area, Grace Church has significantly increased its food distribution. Distribution takes place Tuesday and Friday, and they serve 250-300 families a week with food and non-food personal items. They also have a partnership with Tenants and Workers for distribution. On average their expenses are \$30-35,000/quarter.

In **February of 2021** we were gifted by Rev. Collins Asoyne, Rector of Meade Memorial Church, with an amazing **Zoom webinar**, in celebration of Black History Month. The panel discussion, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Savior, was attended by nearly 50 people on Zoom, most of whom stayed for the discussions for nearly two full hours. The panelists and moderator discussed the **Roles of the Black Church in America, and took questions from attendees**. This program was in conjunction with the PBS Series Premier that aired in February 2021, on The Black Church. Rev. Asoyne put the entire program together with several key speakers including: The Rev. Professor Quardricos Bernard Driskell who is Pastor of the historic Beulah Baptist Church in Alexandria; Dr. Robert Johnson, a pediatrician in Virginia Beach, who is affiliated with multiple hospitals in the area, including Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters and Sentara Norfolk General Hospital; Ms. Ebonee Davis of the office of Multi-Cultural Ministries at the Virginia Theological Seminary, and serving as moderator Ms. Nicole Livas, a Norfolk, Virginia broadcast journalist who is evening anchor and special projects reporter at WVEC-TV in Norfolk and former anchor, producer and editor for Voice of America in Washington, DC.

Rev. Asoyne hosted the Zoom webinar while also participating as one of the panelists. We could not have envisioned such an opportunity only a year earlier.

At our **May 2021** meeting via Zoom we had the opportunity to lift up **Shrine Mont** as a safe oasis and place apart in a second summer living in during a pandemic but moving safely forward. Our guest was Shrine Month Director of Development Kirk Gibson.

We are taking advantage of a unique opportunity to continue to invite to all our meetings, for their input and insights, Rev. David Crosby and Rev. Elizabeth Rees in their respective roles as Region supply clergy, and St. Stephens and St. Agnes Upper School chaplain. Both have served as clergy Region delegates in past years.

The Region had not met in person since February 2020. At that in person meeting we were guests invited to join The Rev. Dr. Joseph Thompson's evening class, at the Virginia Theological Seminary, on Race and the African American Experience. We heard a lively

presentation and discussion among many then new seminarians from around the nation. Dr. Thompson provided additional and brief take-away educational resources which were provided to the Region. It was a great opportunity to meet with Rev. Thompson's class as the previous summer, Dr. Thompson had led, with Rev. Canon Mark Furlow of the Diocese of SW VA, the first of a series of commemorative walks in Virginia, from Alexandria's Contrabands and Freedman Cemetery Memorial to [1315 Duke Street](#) in Alexandria, the historic site which is now owned by the City of Alexandria as a museum to educate about this part of the City's history. [The summer 2019 commemoration and walk](#) was one of a series of events from Alexandria to Abingdon that followed the *Slavery Trail of Tears* with collaboration between the Diocese of Southwestern VA, Virginia Theological Seminary, and many community partners along the way. These events marked the 400th Anniversary of the first enslaved African people coming to Jamestown. The regional pilgrimage was part of other events across Virginia and the United States, and Alexandria Region delegates participated in this walk.

In July of 2020, Melanie Gray, director of Mission and Outreach at Christ Church, hosted a special Region meeting via Zoom with Region attendees and 28 representatives including Alexandria City government agency leaders, social service agencies, various church support organizations of many denominations, and many more. This illustrated the continued critical importance of collaboration and coordination of all of us together in doing God's work. The meeting was [reported in the local news media by Shirley Ruhe](#), who attended at Melanie's invitation.

We were grateful for the opportunity to for the presence of our Region youth delegate at the virtual 2020 Annual Convention, Brendan Wommack, who is currently a freshman at William and Mary.

For the year-end 2020 we also were grateful for the opportunity to financially support together, as a Region, the same programs as in 2021.

Our eight regional churches find ways throughout each year for needed collaboration and to support each others' programs, whether it's a Christmas Tree sale at St. Clements with proceeds supporting their ministries, or participating together in A March for Our Lives in Old Town Alexandria, or drawing together to support the annual pumpkin sale at Immanuel on the Hill supporting their ministries, and which includes, when possible, a youth event for youth of the Region to come together. Together Region delegates support feeding the hungry through Hunger Free Alexandria, and other programs such as gleaning together at The Old Town Farmers' Market to provide fresh produce at food pantries, and collectively supporting social service programs through work with every government and charitable organization tackling these issues.

Our region work is facilitated by our Vice President and Outreach Committee Chair Betsy Faga of Church of the Resurrection, our Secretary Cindi Bartol of Christ Church, and our Treasurer Barbie Frank of Emmanuel Episcopal Church. We are grateful for their ongoing service to implement our Region ministry. We are also kept informed on important Diocese work and goals by Rev. Belser who is serving on the Diocese Executive Board, and by Bob Steventon of St. Paul's who is now serving as our Region representative on the Resourcing God's Mission Task Force.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Susan L. Hahn, Christ Church Alexandria  
Region President



