

The year of our Lord 2019 was indeed a banner year at Church of the Redeemer. Ann Stephenson-Moe and our choirs once again helped to make our liturgies as beautiful and worshipful as they can be and our many non-liturgical musical events helped to bring many new people into the church. In our Sunday School, all of our classrooms are now located on the now-secured 2nd floor.

Redeemer has already expanded her adult formation offerings, and we expect, by the beginning of the academic year 2020-2021, fully to grow into our new space and offer a wide variety of formation opportunities on Sunday morning and during the week. Redeemer's Mission and Outreach Committee is being run by Orion Marx, and Anit Legare serves as the treasurer. They are doing incredible work, and moving that committee forward to be more efficient, extremely discerning, and are beginning a new initiative to morph from a grant-writing committee to a grant-writing committee/action committee, who will begin to take on missionary endeavors.

Redeemer continues to grow (117 persons joined the parish), and we had a record number of persons donating a record number of dollars to both operating and capital campaigns. But we still need more persons to pledge in 2020 and we need those who can to fulfill the pledges they make.

Our greatest accomplishment was the completion of our new Center for Christian Formation and Ministry, which was completed on schedule in the late fall and dedicated by Bishop Smith on 8 December. This project was truly due to the work of hundreds of people. It is the result of the visioning and strategic planning of the leadership of the parish going back over two decades, culminating in a strategic plan in 2012 that made the building of this building a top priority. To thank everyone by name would be impossible, but I must thank the following people:

Andy Dorr, who shepherded the project from beginning to end, and who, throughout the actual building process was the General Manager, and who did a tremendous job of reporting weekly to the parish, in text and pictures.

Bob Morris, who chaired our fundraising effort, resulting in over 500 pledges.

Father Wilson, who did a tremendous amount of work in gathering major gifts.

Tim Hensey, who oversaw the work being done by the company we contracted with to do the building, Gilbane.

Beth and Ernie Cave, and Lee and Lorraine Holden, for their work in gathering our pledges.

Javier Suarez and Javi Suarez of Suarez Architects, the Architects

Patrick Poehlman, the Construction Superintendent.

Alex McIntire, the Project Manager.

Valerie Dorr, Coordinator of the Public Art Selection Committee.

This beautiful building will serve the people of this parish for generations to come and will help to form Christians in this place for their work in the world. This was really a group effort, and the group was huge.

In the fall, I announced my retirement from full-time ministry. My heart is full of gratitude for the ministry Linda and I have had since I was ordained on 26 October 1982, and especially for the ministry we have had at Church of the Redeemer for the better part of 26 years. Over the last several months as we have prepared for retirement, as you can imagine, we have done a great deal of reminiscing about our ministry in this parish.

I'd like to reminisce with you, and begin by going back long before I came to Redeemer. The Anglo-Catholic nature of this parish really took shape when the Rev. Paul Reeves, later to become Bishop Reeves, shaped the parish that we know today. The current altar, the large Redeemer cross, the design of the stained-glass windows, the devotion to Christian education for both children and adults, and the centrality of Eucharistic worship all began with the Rectorate of Fr. Reeves. During his time here, he called the Reverend Tom Fitzgerald to be his assistant, and when he left Redeemer for another parish assignment, Fr. Fitzgerald took his place as Rector, continuing in the same Anglo-Catholic vein as Fr. Reeves, building upon that foundation and making many contributions to the growth and vitality of Redeemer.

During his long tenure as Rector, towards the end of his time here he called the Rev. Jack Iker to be his assistant. When Father Fitzgerald left to become Rector of another parish, Fr. Iker was then called as Rector, continuing that long tradition that had begun with Fr. Reeves, and continued with Fr. Fitzgerald. Fr. Iker built upon that foundation, adding his own gifts and graces to the mix and contributing to the further growth and vitality of Redeemer. After Fr. Iker left to become Bishop of Fort Worth, neither of his assistants became Rector, and that long line of leadership beginning with Fr. Reeves and lasting for more than 40 years came to an end. It was up to the Vestry at the time to find a new Rector, this one obviously not to be trained by his predecessor.

The parish went into what would become a year-long search. Fr. Iker had left the parish in the spring, and on Halloween 1993 two members of the Vestry, Bill Rethorst and Nancy Boyle, came to Monroe, Louisiana, to pay a visit to Fr. Fred and Linda Robinson. They had a lengthy interview with me that was videotaped for the entire vestry to see later on, and Linda cooked a delicious dinner in our home on Halloween, the evening being punctuated with regular knocks on the door by trick-or-treaters. From that time until the end of January 1994, Linda and I were kept in suspense while we awaited the decision of the Vestry.

Finally, the call came at the end of January 1994. George Bloodworth telephoned me and told me the Vestry had voted unanimously to call me as Rector. At the time, I felt I should at

least pray about the call before giving a definite answer, although I knew pretty much what the answer would be. I told George that I thought I should pray about it for a couple of days and get back to him. I'll never forget his answer. He said, "Fr. Robinson, don't you think you've had enough time to pray about it?" He said the Annual Parish Meeting was that night and he would like to give my answer at the meeting. I responded, "Yes, George, you're right. I've had plenty of time to think and pray about it, and my answer is yes." And the rest, as they say, is history.

The Friday before the Third Sunday of Easter I drove a U-Haul truck with the things I would need immediately until my family would join me in June, to Sarasota and began my duties on 17 April.

I still remember the glorious liturgy on that Third Sunday of Easter in 1994. I had to pinch myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Like my predecessors, I was an Anglo-Catholic and everything Redeemer stood for and everything it did liturgically I was right in line with. Yet, I was new, I was following a very popular Rector who had been here a long time, for 17 years in fact, 15 years of which he had been Rector. Not a few people told me I had big shoes to fill! And some people, who were still hurting because Fr. Iker had left, told me that while they liked me, I would never take the place of Fr. Iker. By far, however, most everyone in the parish gave me a great deal of latitude to lead in the way I felt God was calling me to lead, and always I felt your love and support.

What I came to understand and accept was that indeed I would never fill the shoes of Fr. Iker, and that, in fact, it wasn't what God called me to do. I was called to build upon a foundation that Fr. Iker and his predecessors had built. I came to know in a personal way what St. Paul was telling the Church in Corinth, when the people there were having difficulty with pastoral changes. He said, "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the growth." I realized that I was following a fine Rector and that while I was now Rector in name, I would need to make my way into your hearts if I were to become Rector in reality.

Eventually, that did happen. I have made plenty of mistakes along the way, and sometimes have even hurt some of you, though always unintentionally. But you stuck with us and we with you, and together we've continued to build something beautiful for God in this place.

Now, I'm the Rector who has been here for 25 years and someone new is coming to build on this foundation we have laid. I know that you will give to this new Rector the same love and support that you showed me. I simply want to remind you that he will not be called to fill my shoes, but to build upon this foundation that goes back to John Hamilton Gillespie, the Rectors who followed, and now especially Fathers Reeves, Fitzgerald, Iker, and now myself.

As I said earlier, our hearts are full of gratitude as we come to this place in our lives and in the life of The Redeemer. There are so many people I wish to thank for their contributions to the ministry that we have shared over the last 2 1/2 decades. Again, the list is so long that it's difficult to know where to start and where to stop. But there are a few whom I feel I must thank

by name. I thank Fr. Reeves; Fr. Fitzgerald, who was my spiritual director for many years; Fr. Ferdinand Saunders, who was our priest in charge of pastoral care for many years and who was a tremendous support to me during that time; Ann Baumgartner, who was my first administrative assistant; and George Bloodworth, may they rest in peace and rise in glory!

I thank Fr. Iker for the vibrant parish I inherited from him and for the counsel he gave from time to time when in my early years here. I thank Fr. Marsden, my able associate priest and later Associate Rector for 20 years, for his unwavering support, wise counsel, and excellent leadership. I thank our many excellent Vestries and wardens for their leadership and support over the years. I thank Carolyn Peet, my Administrative Assistant for almost 20 years; Valerie Dorr, my current Administrative Assistant; and all of the persons who have served and are serving on our staff.

I thank Jacki Boedecker, who has served as our Christian Education Coordinator for children for the entire time I've been here, and who has built a Sunday School that is the envy of the entire Episcopal Church; and the Reverend Robert Sherman, who was our first full-time Youth Minister and who got that ministry off to such a fine start; and all of the Youth Ministers we have had since. I thank Ann Stephenson-Moe, our Organist Choirmaster for nearly half a century now and who has built one of the best music ministries in The Episcopal Church. I thank Fr. Mario Castro for his faithful leadership of our Hispanic congregation. All of my priest assistants over the years, including Fr. Croft, Fr. Hayler, Fr. Porter, Fr. Hedman, Fr. Wallace, Fr. Bumsted, and Fr. Lampert. I thank Fr. Chris Wood, who started as our Youth Minister, discerned a call to the priesthood, went to Seminary from Redeemer, and then returned as priest associate. I thank Fr. Charleston Wilson, who has facilitated our tremendous growth over the last several years, both in number of parishioners and financially, and without whom I would not have attempted the building of our new Center for Christian Formation and Ministry.

I also wish to thank the wives and children of our clergy, who add so much to our life in Christ and without whose support your clergy could not do what they do. Specifically, by name, I thank Ann Croft, may she rest in peace; Beth Porter, Erin Scalisi, Amanda Hedman, Nina Saunders, may she rest in peace; Diane Wallace; Lidia Castro, Beka Bumsted; Molly Lampert; Gail Marsden; Kate Wood; and Malacy Wilson. I thank Bishop Smith for his excellent leadership of this diocese and for the wonderful relationship we enjoy with him and with the Diocese. Finally, I wish to thank my dear wife, Linda, upon whom I have always relied for her support, encouragement, and wise counsel.

Any honor you have shown to me or will show to me in thanksgiving for my tenure as Rector, I can only except on behalf of the many who have served and serve along with me.

Church of the Redeemer is the largest parish in the Diocese of Southwest Florida and, the last I checked, was 17th largest in The Episcopal Church. But as far as I'm concerned, there is no parish that compares! Redeemer is a simply wonderful parish with strengths too many to

number. God has called me to step down now, and I have every reason to believe that the next chapter in your history, by the grace of God, will be the best ever.