

January 21, 2024

Pastor's Report to the Congregation

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Thank you for your continued support of the St. Martin's staff and the daily work of the congregation. Sometimes it is hard to remember all that we did together, and I appreciate this opportunity to look back at 2023 and anticipate all that we will do in 2024. Thank you for your continued support of my call as your pastor. Each of you is a gift to me and I look forward to experiencing God's inclusive love, mercy, and grace together throughout the year.

Pr. Ellen Williams

Senior Pastor

Worship

Worship was alive and vibrant in 2023. Attendance continued to grow throughout the year as those who watched at home joined in-person and others discovered our uniquely Lutheran worship services through our online presence. Thanks to Scot Salmon, chair of the video committee and Eddy Jennings, videographer extraordinaire, for coordinating the streaming of alternating 9AM and 11AM services each week.

We offered our 45-minute Family Services at 9AM and 11 AM Traditional Services thirty-two Sundays in 2023, with our Summer Worship Services during the fourteen weeks from Pentecost through Labor Day. Adding in our Holy Week and Christmas Eve services - that's *a lot* of dedication, planning and bulletins! The St. Martin's church staff spends about 40 percent of our time preparing for worship and many, many dedicated volunteers spend hours too.

There isn't much of an Epiphany Season in 2024 - Ash Wednesday is February 14th, Easter is March 31st, and Pentecost comes on May 19th! We move to Summer worship after Pentecost until Rally Day on September 15th. We look forward to worshipping with you throughout the year.

(From Dr. Tim O'Brien, Director of Music)

2023 was a rewarding year for St. Martin's music ministry! We provided music for a little over one hundred worship services, singing, ringing, or playing just about one thousand pieces of music this year. We provided music from six centuries in styles ranging from Gregorian chant, through Renaissance and Baroque music, to Classical and Romantic works, as well as the gospel, pop, jazz, Latin, and country music of our twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We also featured many new compositions, arrangements, and improvisations created especially for St. Martin's by our music staff.

This season's highlights included a full performance of Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*, multiple collaborations between our 9:00 band and our 11:00 choir, many services elevated by the outstanding work of our symphonic winds and handbell choir, and our festival worship Sundays, particularly Reformation Sunday, Weihnachtsfest, and the spiritual music making of our three distinct Christmas Eve services. We intend to build on this fantastic year in 2024, continuing to look for innovative ways to provide fresh and interesting musical worship while also remaining deeply connected to our remarkable Lutheran musical heritage.

Associate Director Haller, Maestro Cross, and I were aided this year by the work of more than 75 different people. At the heart of this group is the very best volunteer pool of musicians with whom I have been privileged to work. Our volunteer singers and players come from all walks of life and musical backgrounds to provide weekly worship music as well as large-scale music for special services. They are joined in these efforts by our staff musicians and guest professionals, drawn from the area's finest musical organizations. We were also aided tremendously this year by the expanded technical team under the

direction of Eddie Jennings and Scott Salmon. On behalf of Austin and David, I would like to offer the sincerest thanks to everyone who participated in our music ministry for the craft and spirit they lent to our worship, as well as profound gratitude to the congregation of St. Martin's for so unwaveringly and generously supporting our music ministry.

Faith Formation for All

2023 was a year of transition for our Youth and Family Ministry. Our beloved and energetic leader, Cason Miller, left to pursue another career after five years with St. Martin's, of which three were COVID years. We bid him farewell at both services on October 1 and celebrated him with a party after the 11AM service. Austin Shortes joined us in July as Youth Minister, overlapping with Cason to allow transition of our program. He is a student at the Austin Presbyterian Seminary in the Center for Youth Ministry Training Master's degree program.

Austin has scheduled monthly activities for Middle and High School students for 2024, which began with 12 students staying overnight at St. Martin's for the January Middle School Lock-In. Eight students will be affirming their baptisms on Pentecost. Nine High School students and 4 adults are registered for the 2024 ELCA National Youth Gathering in New Orleans July 3-6, 2024. Students began fundraising for the trip by wrapping gifts for tips at BookPeople during the 2023 Christmas season. You can anticipate more fun opportunities to support our youth as they prepare for this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Dedicated teachers have led JAM and Godly Play classes each week for our Elementary school students and the Nursery has been open Sundays through both services welcoming children 0-4 years. Pastor's children's time (and goldfish crackers) during services has been popular also.

Adult faith formation opportunities grew this fall with the help of Anita Salmon. A committed multi-year Crossways class will read and study the entire Bible over 2+ years. This group meets on Sunday in the Room 231. Come as You Are (CAYA) continues to offer a casual setting to discuss faith and the realities of life. Meeting in the Parlor, you are welcome to drop in and experience their welcome and deep conversation. Three Companions in Christ small groups meet weekly. New groups are forming as people are interested. Please let Pr. Ellen know.

Connections within St. Martin's

Our theme for 2023 was "At the Table" and during our worship services we heard from many of our members with their reflections of what "At the Table" meant to them. We heard about lots of love shared through food and times together at a table, times of separation from the table, questions about who isn't at the table and even a story of the sharing of the table itself.

Our theme in 2024 is "Invitation" as we reflect on our connections to each other and how to invite others to share our connections which have been deepened through many activities together within and outside worship services. Susan Jensen and Karen Cross have invited us to get together for trivia, breakfast, snacks between services, and many more opportunities to enjoy being together. We look forward to many more opportunities in 2024 for community activities and hope that you will invite others to join us whenever you can.

St. Martin's Serves

You have generously supported monthly benevolence opportunities throughout the year with your financial and physical gifts to organizations including Mobile Loaves and Fishes, Austin City Lutherans (ACL), and Lutheran World Relief. WELCA Tack and Pack members generously made quilts, hygiene kits, and backpacks

which were shipped out to be distributed around the world to those in need. Locally, our Lunch Bag Ministry fed our neighbors who are living unhoused around us. We saw an increase of 50% need as individuals are moving closer to us from the University of Texas area. ACL Bread for All food pantry volunteers from St. Martin's helped distribute food to more than 130 Austin families each week. Upbring Move-In Ministry furnished homes for young people leaving foster care, families moving out of homelessness, and refugees arriving from Afghanistan. Susan Jensen and Bob Daemmrich were again awarded Volunteers of the Year by Upbring for their dedication to caring for others!

Administration

2023 was a year of administrative transition. Mike Kaase retired after years of service as Business Manager and overall keeper of St. Martin's. Katherine Lutter replaced in Mike in April.

Katherine developed our new narrative budget, which helps us communicate our stewardship of your contributions and make sure we are aligning our spending with God's work and call.

Fay Jones was hired as Office Manager and Volunteer Coordinator in September. She comes to us with many years of Episcopal church office experience. Her role is vital as we hope to invite everyone to find a place to serve in 2024.

Kathy Edgar returned to St. Martin's after a short retirement as our Communications Coordinator. She is updating our website, sending out your weekly Shares and Worship with Us emails and any special electronic announcements that we need. Additionally, she is working to invite others to our worship services through better signage and announcements on local radio. Share your ideas for making St. Martin's known in our community. She would love to hear from you.

Essic Williams continued his dedication to caring for our physical building and our overall security during 2023. We are grateful to him for making coffee on Sunday mornings, monitoring security cameras during worship, and supervising all the weekend building activities. We anticipate that groups will continue to use our building in 2024. Thanks to Mop and Hammer, led by Bob Daemmrich, Norm Hummell and Essic, for keeping our building healthy and safe!