

**St. Andrew's 2021 MMR Report**  
**February 20, 2021**  
**Encinitas, CA**

## **The MMR Process**

In my role as a diocesan MMR facilitator, I met with St. Andrew's Rector, Rev. Brenda Sol, at her request, to plan the 2021 MMR for St. Andrew's Encinitas. Due to the pandemic, the MMR was embedded into an all-day virtual Vestry Retreat and shortened to a 3-hour time frame from 1:00 to 4:00 pm, including a short break and small-group discussions in breakout sessions. I adapted the MMR discussion model methodology to the virtual Zoom reality and working with the Rector and the wardens, we selected the discussion questions we wanted to address. We then sent an invitation letter to prospective attendees, asking them to give thought and prayer to the questions in preparation for the MMR. In addition to incoming and outgoing Vestry members, key staff and lay ministry leaders were invited to join Vestry in the MMR, comprising a group of 28 people representing clergy, staff, Vestry and ministry leaders of the parish. Mother Brenda and I decided to conduct the review of the Rector's Letter of Agreement (normally a part of an MMR) in Executive Session at an upcoming regularly scheduled Vestry meeting.

After an opening prayer and a quick round of introductions, I reviewed the agenda for the meeting and the purpose of doing periodic MMRs that offer a time of reflection and safe discussion of how mutual ministry efforts were progressing in their church. We had divided the group previously into four discussion groups dealing with the discussion questions, now grouped into four breakout groups:

- Achievements & Celebrations
- Disappointments & Setbacks
- Vestry and Lay Leadership
- Rector and Staff Leadership

After the breakout discussions, each group reported back with their conclusions that were discussed and complemented by participants from the other groups. These amended conclusions and respective questions follow:

## **Achievements and Celebrations Group**

### **What have been St. Andrew's achievements as a church community in the last 12 – 18 months?**

- Finding new ways to worship...online, outdoors, and in our cars.
- Learning to do so much with the internet. Keeping community via zoom and online services: Coffee hours. Becoming masters at zoom.
- Food pantry – amazing job of creating a new way to distribute food and keep up with demand.
  - Average was 80-100 people now 175-275 people. Crazy increase in demand.
  - How we need to keep everyone safe. 12 people helping outside.
  - The government is helping to support too. Getting pallets of fruits and veg. So hardly have to pay for much right now.
  - Community help – like call for boxes.

- Grant Award.
- Idea of cards to hand out to those who might need us.
- Saturday lunch – reimagined, found a way to do it safely.
- Showers of blessings was able to keep going as far as they can. 15-20 people a week. Dedicated volunteers.
- Faith in Action Committee –
  - Safe Parking-lot advocacy.
  - Network with city, county supervisors, and community members – able to give them input and feedback on planning.
  - Outreach for the homeless. How can we help make effective housing.
  - Candidate forums.
  - Neighborhood center planning.
- Continued and creative Christian Education outreach – even with the Pandemic –
  - Zoom Confirmation Class,
  - Book Club,
  - Children’s Education outreach (Pageant and newsletters and advent kits),
  - Lenten Kits
- Fundraising for Angel Tree and Freezer project.
- Pledge income is good. Were able to do the PPP loan, with full forgiveness of the loan.
- Hard, but feel we did the closing of the Preschool the best we could have. Good severance [package for teachers].
- Did a good job addressing the issue of racial inequality by discussion group and Sacred Ground group. Mother Brenda has spoken to it in sermons and living room chats.
- Messages from Bishop are more visible. Seems like we are more connected directly to the diocese.
- Architectural committee – creative changes and new path forward
- Supporting [homeless outreach] volunteers by helping them understand how they can get their COVID vaccine.
- Little things – ministry leaders who keep in touch with their teams.

**What does the congregation need to recognize as such and celebrate?**

- Mother Brenda and all the extra work she has done during this time and being so accessible to her parish family.
- Share our accomplishments with the community so they can also be thankful and appreciate it.
- Anne and committee – the reward is to be seeing the happiness on their faces. The ministry itself is fulfilling. Volunteers and thanked all the time. Gift cards and given to connections.
- Do a little feature on a ministry and saying “Thank You” in our eBlasts and website. Add back in the “Gratitude” section in the eBlast?
- Diocesan recognition? (Servant Ministry Award, another?)
- In the new building plans, can we have a memorial/marker to commemorate this time [of pandemic]?
- Parish family contribute to the building? Names in the walls?
- Recognition of the staff ministry members (Erin, Constance, Virginia, Jack) – acknowledge that their jobs could be harder and not as fulfilling in this “virtual” time.
- Recognition of dedicated volunteers, those that are showing up every week to keep us going – Chase and Hope

## Disappointments and Setbacks Group

### Have there been disappointments or setbacks in the last 12 – 18 months? If so, what were they?

- Qualifiers –
  - It's not that we didn't try, or pivot, or forgot lessons from the last pandemic 100 years ago.
  - This is not a performance review, but rather an acknowledgement of the transformative power of God.
- Every program was disrupted, including those indirectly related to St. Andrew's (Boy Scouts, AA).
- The closure of the preschool was disappointing to a lot of people (including families, teachers) but will now be the Neighborhood Center.
- We needed to cancel Women's Retreat for two years in a row (affects 25 to 30 folks directly, and parish indirectly).
- There were opening/closings of Saturday Showers and Meals, which led to a loss of momentum.
- The Christmas Gift Shop for Food Pantry clients closed but pivoted to gift card/PJ distribution.
- There was a pause on construction progress, and the scope of project changed (shrank) due to construction costs, etc. The committee experienced the frustrations of continual change, and there is some concern about presenting changed plans to the parish.
- The campus closure (worship, meetings, etc.) affects us all.
- We need communication and balance of risk aversion in decision-making (closure of outdoor services, for example).
- There is a lack of engagement by the congregation (for example, attendance at programs offered, responding to surveys)
- A major setback is understanding what people need, how they are feeling, what their spiritual needs are.
- Risk aversion became the prominent topic of discussion (initial Food Pantry closure).
- Pivotal moments are missing for children (Children's Ministries/Youth Group or VBS).
- There are two years of missed Youth Group mission trips.
- The loss of Rev Richard meant a greater workload on Mother Brenda.

### Do these disappointments still need attention? What losses might the congregation need to lament before moving on?

- Construction –There is anxiety for what we had to give up, but recognition of those aspects we kept (replace a dedicated youth space, increased meeting room for community service/improve process for outreach, and indoor/outdoor flow). We need a thoughtful process for communication to the congregation.
- Preschool – We need acknowledgement/gratitude of God's transformative process (preschool to Neighborhood Center).
- We should debrief on lessons learned on how to pivot more efficiently (for example, Saturday meals could have been delivered to folks).

- Engagement of congregation – We need to get a better idea of where folks are spiritually, physically. Folks might get out of the habit of church attendance. We need to maintain digital engagement (for example, Saturday Women’s Group, Wednesday book group).
- Lamentations – We should acknowledge missed time together, community pain and isolation, stress of families and individuals in a really big way. We should create multiple ways to acknowledge loss while at the same time recognizing transformations with gratitude.
- Rev Richard’s loss – We should corporately acknowledge Rev Richard’s diminished time and Mother Brenda’s increased workload.

## **Rector and Staff Leadership Group**

### **What have the Rector and/or staff done particularly well in the last 12 – 18 months?**

- Our leaders have kept us alive and connected. It would have been easy to lose touch and fall apart. They have given us a reason to persevere and stay connected.
- We underwent significant transitions unrelated to the pandemic in the loss of Father Richard being full-time, Gillian and Tammy leaving. The transition has seemed seamless and Alison has done a tremendous job taking the reins and excelling at responsibilities that are and even are not in her job description.
- Difficult decisions such as the closure of the preschool.
- Paula and so many people on the staff have done weekly email and creativity of so many people on staff, such as membership, to continue.
- Constance has done an outstanding job evolving the youth group to keep the kids connected. She has had to consistently pivot based on ever-changing safety guidelines and the start of the school year. She has kept the kids connected while being sensitive to what the rest of their life looks like, i.e., being on soon 6 hours a day for school.
- Erin O’Brien hit the ground running starting her position the day after the shutdown. Her creativity and effort in bringing projects, supplies and materials to families has been incredible.
- Mother Brenda has been the supreme leader through this pandemic. She has been resilient, communicative, flexible and a strong example for all of us. Her leadership cannot be overstated.
- “My Living Room to Yours”: the short, manageable segments are wonderful “snacks” to connect. Her resilience, communication, creativity, flexibility and a strong leader for all of us.
- Virginia Sublett and Jack Deane for the gift of their talents and Virginia’s effort to keep the choir connected and practicing.
- In a year of constant change, the entire staff has rolled with the punches and continuously pivoted to fit the needs of the congregation.
- The Christmas pageant team for putting together a successful and fun pageant at a moment’s notice.

- Anne and the food pantry team - we can't thank you enough for the incredible job you did adapting and keeping the community fed.
- A HUGE thank you to Estela (cleaning lady and volunteer extraordinaire) for being the glue that holds so much together.

### **What would you like the Rector and/or staff to pay more attention to in the future?**

- Challenges coming out of COVID and bringing us back into the new reality. Retaining members and having them come back in-person. New budget challenges.
- What do we continue offering virtually?
- How the loss of the preschool affects people's experience when they are on campus. Being prepared for members of the congregation grieving the loss of the program.

### **How could the congregation and lay leaders better support the Rector and staff?**

- Opportunity for one-on-one contact. Having members of the parish reach out and connect to other members who may have lost touch over the past year.
- Recognize that Mother Brenda takes great care and reflection on the hard decisions she has to make. She has had a very hard job and every decision has been made prayerfully and thoughtfully, and after consultation with the vestry.
- Be prepared to know that there may be decisions that were made that you may not agree with. Take the time to understand why the decision was made before complaining.
- Support by being involved. Take the time to support and encourage Mother Brenda on the tremendous job she has done.
- Look for people who may be leaders in our community and encourage them to be involved.
- Parents can support the youth program by making sure the topics that are discussed are relevant in their current daily experience. Help keep lines of communication open to Constance, so she knows the realities of what is going on in our kids' lives. She would rather be over-informed than under. Establish parent liaisons from each high school who can keep Constance informed of possibly traumatic events that occur.
- Knowing that there will be an adjustment period as we come back to campus and many people realize for the first time the changes that have happened.
- Reestablishing relationships with other congregations.

### **Consultant Observations & Comments**

**1) CAT Survey Results:** While the MMR did not delve into the results from the 2019 Church Assessment Tool (CAT) Survey conducted at St. Andrew's, they formed an intriguing backdrop to the MMR discussions and results. The 2019 CAT survey positioned St. Andrew's solidly within the Transformation Quadrant of the Satisfaction/Energy Map with the members reporting both high satisfaction and high energy related to their St. Andrew's experience. This often translates as members finding new meaning and purpose for their lives

through their experience as a member of their church community. On another dimension of the survey, Church Style, St. Andrew's positioned itself in the center-left of the MAGI style quadrant, attesting to a highly progressive theology coupled with a highly adaptable approach to life. The survey was conducted in Q4 2019, well before the pandemic arrived. These high levels of energy and satisfaction together with a progressive theology and adaptable approach appear to have stood St. Andrew's in good stead for the radical changes imposed on the church by the pandemic: stay-at-home health orders and the closing of church buildings. Indeed, St. Andrew's was an early adopter of Drive-in Church, and the MMR participants recognized and applauded the many creative ways of doing ministry differently in the midst of a pandemic. (eg., Repurposing the pre-school building, modifying the food pantry distribution, redefining community meals.)

**2) Tough decisions:** Several difficult decisions were made during the last year, for instance: budget challenges, the transition of key clergy and staff members, closing the much-loved pre-school, reducing the scope of the construction project. Notwithstanding, none of these major changes seems to have left open wounds or divided the congregation. To the contrary, MMR participants uniformly recognized the seriousness of each of the decisions, gave credit to clergy and lay decision-makers and contributed with ideas of how to minimize potential negative consequences as people begin to return to campus in the foreseeable future.

**3) Use of this report.** It is recommended that Vestry review this report, and especially the suggestions from the MMR participants, for any decisions or resolutions requiring Vestry action and/or for defining priorities for clergy, staff and ministry leaders. At the Rector's and Vestry's discretion, portions of or this report in its entirety may be shared with the broader congregation. While current norms do not require that the report be submitted to the Diocese, I recommend that the Rector and Senior Warden forward a copy to Canon Gwynn Lynch with any explanatory comments deemed necessary.

**4) Review of Rector's Letter of Agreement.** As discussed previously, I recommend a facilitated conversation in Executive Session with the Vestry to review Mother Brenda's Letter of Agreement. Usually, wardens are up to date on the content of the terms of employment and it is important that every Vestry member is cognizant of Vestry responsibilities under that agreement.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with St. Andrew's.

Respectfully submitted,

Allan S. Dorsey