

# THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN

145 WEST FORTY-SIXTH STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10036-8502

TELEPHONE 212.869.5830, [www.stm virgin.org](http://www.stm virgin.org)

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Laurence, Deacon & Martyr (†258)

Dear St. Mary's Family and Friends:

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
then were we like those who dream. (Ps. 126.1)*

I love that verse from the Psalms. It often comes to my mind at Holy Hour on Wednesdays or when I'm waiting for the Daily Office to start — just some of the countless times I dream about St. Mary's every week. By now, I hope you've had opportunity to read the August 1 letter from the Board of Trustees announcing they have temporarily suspended the rector search process and called me to extend my time at St. Mary's, serving as Priest-in-Charge for the next three years. I'm exceptionally proud of the work your Board of Trustees has done these past 18 months I've served as Interim Rector, acknowledging where God has strategically placed us post-pandemic as a church at the crossroads of the world. I am delighted to have their trust and, I pray, yours in this work of dreaming and building.

The decision to suspend the search for a time is really an advance, not a retreat. You should not expect a change of quality to our liturgical life — we retain a deep commitment to excellence in our music and the Mass, and the cycle of prayer and fasts and feasts remains the constant in our life together. Those are the lifeblood of St. Mary's, and they will continue to be.

As we begin this next phase of ministry, I thought I'd share my first thoughts about some goals for our time together, the germ of a three-year-plan of sorts. During this time, we will:

- **Transform** — Whatever work we're called to do together, I'm convinced we all need to deepen our conversions and "be transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12.2). To that end, you can expect a robust program of Christian formation when the program year begins in a few weeks. From our traditional Sunday morning formation slot, to a new weekly Bible Study, a Wednesday night Basic Christianity class, Parish Quiet Days, and a weekend Parish Retreat, your staff is working hard to create opportunities to enrich the lives of every parishioner. And that's exactly who Christian formation is for — *every* parishioner — so we have dreams of dramatically increasing involvement in classes like these over the next three years.
- **Grow** — While numbers are most certainly not the measure of God's calling on our life, healthy organisms *do* grow, so we will continue to look for signs of new life here in Times Square. Firmer goals will come as we get clarity on a shared vision, but consider some examples: Can we triple the number of St. Marians involved in robust Christian formation? Can we double attendance at our Solemn Mass? Can each member invite one neighbor, friend, colleague, family member to "come and see" what life at St. Mary's is like? Evangelism and invitation will be high on our list of priorities.

- **Pray** — This one's listed third, but it's absolutely my number one priority. If you're looking for my vision for us as a praying parish, it's summed up in Anglican theologian Martin Thornton's "three-fold regula" (or "rule") which encompasses: (1) Eucharist; (2) the Daily Office; and (3) personal devotion. I'm teaching a short class on this in Advent, but suffice it to say I'm personally asking God to add to our little praying "remnant" who gather daily to say the Daily Office and pray for God's blessing on our work, our neighbors, and our city. If you can't physically join that group, would you consider committing to praying with us from home in the weeks and months to come? As Charles de Foucauld said, "*since my prayers can do so much good, may I pray and pray and pray, for myself and those you have placed beside me in my life.*" Whatever comes these next three years, may it be said of St. Mary's that we pray and pray and pray.

Transformed by God, growing in faith and numbers, and formed by this life of prayer, we'll continue to go out together on mission, carrying the good news of Jesus Christ. Our dedication to open doors and loving service to our neighbors in New York continues unabated. In fact, I've come to think of us as an Anglican apostolate here in Times Square — a group of Christians sent to evangelize and serve the world, starting right here in our own backyard.

One last point — Renee and I are excited and humbled by this call. And I enter upon this work with great hope. I look forward to hearing your own hopes and dreams at one of the listening sessions on Sunday August 20 or September 24. God is still at work in Times Square in and through St. Mary's, and the success of our venture depends not upon our ingenuity or the intensity with which we will work. Our future is in the hands of God. In words from Theodore Kitching,

*How wonderful it is to walk with God  
along the road that holy men have trod.  
How wonderful it is to hear Him say:  
Fear not, have faith  
'tis I who lead the way.*

Please pray for each other; pray for me; pray for those far and wide whose lives we are called to influence. And may God's kingdom come, God's will be done, in New York as it is in heaven.

Under the mercy,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sammy Wood", followed by a small cross symbol.

Fr. Sammy Wood  
Interim Rector