

6 December 2023



Dear friends,

This year marks the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saint Francis' creation of the first live nativity scene, an ancestor of the porcelain and olive wood and paper cut-out sets that appear in our houses at this time of the year. According to his biographer, Francis was so moved by a visit he made to Bethlehem that he later recreated the scene of Jesus' birth – made it real for himself and those around him. As we arrange the shepherds and angels and animals in our living rooms, we have the chance to do the same. We can imagine the wonder of Mary, the excitement of the shepherds, the stillness of the world into which God comes once more.

That surprising choice – coming to be with us – is God's gift to us at Christmas. We don't really know how to ask for it and don't always do a good job of showing our gratitude. But at the start, at the manger, all God asks is that we say yes. I invite you to join us for Christmas and in all the days that follow as we at St Thomas's renew our "yes" to God and God's mission in the world.

We welcome everyone to join in that mission regardless of who they are, where they are in their journey of faith, or what mix of gifts they bring. We need everyone! But we also need the resources to enable everyone to make the most of her or his ministry.

And so, I ask that you consider giving a Christmas gift to St. Thomas's. ***If you have already given all that you can this year, please do not worry or feel guilty.*** Instead, I ask for your prayers for the ministries of our church. If, on the other hand, you can give a special Christmas offering, know that your gift will be received gratefully and applied faithfully to the work we all wish to continue. There are a number of ways to give, including the envelope enclosed with this letter and through our secure on-line donation option – visit our website ([stthomasnewarkde.church](http://stthomasnewarkde.church)) and then click on Giving and choose the link for our on-line giving site). A gift of your time and skill would also be most welcome.

Please join us at Christmas - at 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM on Christmas Eve, and 10:00 AM on Christmas Day. Please invite those close to you to come along. And thank you for remembering St. Thomas's at Christmas and all through the year.

Yours in Christ,

Handwritten signature of Fr Howell Sasser.

Fr Howell Sasser  
Rector