
Homecoming 2021!

We love you! We miss you!

Many of us have been saying this for eighteen months, haven't we? We said it when we had to close the Cathedral building back in 2020. Then, we said it weekly, online, in pre-recorded liturgies. We said it together during countless Zoom meetings. We said it when we began to re-gather, safely, in outdoor services of koinonia. We said it when we re-opened the building for Sunday services, wearing masks. We said it when we began to be vaccinated. Then we said it when we began to hug each other (safely and vaccinated!)

We love you! We miss you! We want to get back together! For the past twenty years, the Cathedral has observed "Homecoming Sunday" in mid-August, as a way to welcome each other back from summer breaks, and as a way to resume faithful routines and schedules. In the past, we have asked every guild and ministry to display their service in a "Ministry Fair" on that Sunday. And, those events have been festive and glorious!

This year, it goes without saying, is different. About three months ago, we imagined that, just maybe, August 15 would bring us complete freedom from Covid-19 restrictions; some of us even imagined that everyone would be vaccinated and free to hug and share food and drink together! Alas, the Covid-19 virus is still with us. Alas, we were forced two weeks ago to return to the safe practice of requiring masks inside the Cathedral building. We imagined a grand festive gathering inside the parish hall that would serve a double emphasis: a homecoming and an exuberant thanksgiving reception for the Reverend Carolynne Williams. Well, plans have changed.

HOWEVER! THEY ARE BOTH STILL HAPPENING! Giving thanks for Carolynne Williams is still happening! Homecoming is still happening! Indeed, Homecoming 2021 will be happening this week, and the next, and the next!

Instead of a grand festive gathering inside the parish hall, I am thankful that several splendid parishioners have agreed to host "Village Visits" this weekend! We have arranged for Cathedral parishioners to be invited to a neighbor's house or gathering space, in all safety, as a way of greeting each other and saying "Welcome back," and saying "We love you! We miss you!" Actually, there are more parishioners and neighborhoods who wanted to host a Village Visit, but who are waiting for safer and calmer conditions. We understand!

Thus, many of you have received an email invitation to one of these Village Visits. As conditions become safer and calmer, the rest of us will receive our invitations. Our hosts are volunteering some tremendous generosity and love, and each host is designing their own specific event. But the theme is the same everywhere around this beautiful Cathedral community: We love you! We miss you! We want to get back together! But it will take time. Our Homecoming 2021 might well occur over the next several weeks and months. That is fine!

AND! We are still honoring the Reverend Carolynne Williams **this Sunday, August 15**, in a special gathering – outside – between the 8:45 and 11:15 services. After over twenty beautiful years here at the Cathedral, Canon Carolynne Williams actually moved gracefully to retirement this past year. We had no way to thank her, in person, for her beautiful service and ministry. Please do join us, outside in the Cloister Garden, for this special reception for her this Sunday, August 15, at 10:00 am.

Further, we do hope to assemble a Ministry Fair, which will be **next Sunday, August 22**, in the Parish Hall at 10:00 a.m. We anticipate a scaled down event, with safety protocols in place, and we realize that not everyone will be comfortable attending. First, no judgement! Please attend if you feel healthy and safe doing so.

Yes, we are still stretching our patience in August of 2021. Tension and anxiety and concern are still with us. But this Sunday's lesson from Ephesians might speak specifically to us: "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another,

tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 4:31-5:2).

I understand that there are some valid reasons to be tired, and even bitter. But, the Church, the Body of Christ, has more reason to be joyful and thankful. We have been given the opportunity to love! We have a chance to walk together in love, as a fragrant offerings to each other! I pray that these next two weeks of Homecoming 2021 events give us a chance to resume that "walking together in love." We love each other here. We have missed each other here. We want to get back together! Thanks be to God!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Rev. Sam Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip