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December 29, 2022

Greetings to the St. Matthew's parish! I hope this missive finds you all well and spiritually sated from a joyous holiday season!

On behalf of the Vestry, I am pleased to announce that The Reverend Dina Carter Ishler will be joining St. Matthew's as our spiritual leader on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Dina was ordained into the Diaconate on December 11<sup>th</sup> and will serve us in that role until her ordination into the priesthood, sometime in June. After her ordination, she will serve us as Priest in charge until the end of 2024.

Since there will be no service on New Years' Day, Deacon Dina's first service with us will be on Epiphany, January 8<sup>th</sup> -The Reverend Canon Chris Streeter will be here to celebrate with us as well and to bless the elements for Holy Eucharist.

January 8<sup>th</sup> is also our Children's activity day and our monthly breakfast, starting at 9:00 a.m. I hope that you will come to eat a wonderful breakfast and meet and welcome Deacon Dina to St. Matt's!

Future services with Deacon Dina (through June) will also include Father Fred Stevenson, as he will be Deacon Dina's mentor, and bless the elements for Holy Eucharist.

The Vestry and I would also like to extend our sincere thanks to you all for your unwavering support and prayers for us over the past 10 months and we all look forward to the new journey ahead, with Deacon Dina as our shepherd.

Respectfully, your humble servant,  
 Mary Ann Loftus, Senior Warden

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***“And so they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.” (Luke 2:16-18)***

Beloveds in Christ in the community of St. Matthew's, Sunbury, Pennsylvania-

Greetings to you and grace and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

It is a joy to write this first pastoral letter to you.

On Christmas Eve, in a brief homily I shared with the St. Andrew's, Shippensburg, community immediately after their Children's Presentation of the Nativity, I repeated a line that their young narrator said: *"This night is like no other night."* We were remembering together something that I know our St. Matthew's community believes and lives by as well: that because we have seen and known the true Light- which in the Incarnation has so wonderfully broken into our ordinary human existence- we have all been changed forever. In the joy of Christmastide, we rejoice together in our belief that the birth of the Christ Child into our fragile and broken world is the greatest gift humankind will ever know.

This new birth that is the true promise of Christmas reminds us that God always longs for God's people to move towards greater health and wholeness, to more fully know and worship God as creating, redeeming, and sanctifying Presence, to share with deep joy in the kind of holy community that proclaims this in our words, our actions, our way of being. For the transformative Light of God's Grace and God's Love to spread and be known to all people, we must be the bearers of this Light. We must claim, as our Bishop Audrey Scanlan taught us in her Christmas letter to our diocese, that the promise of our Advent journeys will come to fulfillment in both the coming of Christ in the manger and in the end of all time in glory, which as believers is our greatest hope.

And so it is with the most tremendous gratitude and gladness that I eagerly await the beginning of this era of shared ministry as first your Deacon in Charge and then "God willing and the people consenting", as the official language goes, as your priest. Announced first by our senior warden, Mary Ann Loftus, in our Christmas Eve service, and now in this parish-wide communication, it is such a privilege to officially share this exciting news! You have done and are doing such good and faithful work as God's people here in our St. Matthew's community and in the world beyond your doors, and you have indeed shown the brightness of the true Light to everyone you meet. Your worship and outreach and hospitality are examples of this, and it is such a joy for me to imagine being part of all this holy work as both your spiritual leader and a fellow traveler on the Way. It will be our joint responsibility to continue to discern how we will be called to nourish and strengthen ourselves so we may be the hands and feet of Christ in this world, so that this Light which has been born among us will be born again and again and ever more fully revealed to all people. Our own journeys of leaning into the hope and expectation of God's promises have come to rest in our sense of new birth and new life that we hold together for what lies ahead, and this is indeed a wonderful place of deep rejoicing.

Together with my family- my husband Patrick, and our three grown children, our daughter Faith, and our sons Carter and Thomas- I look forward to greeting you all in person very soon, telling you more about my own journey, and beginning our shared life of ministry. We are eager to deepen our connections to the area- our sons own a car dealership in Shamokin Dam- and, as avid campers and kayakers, to explore the forests and waters that so feed our souls.

In this season of Christmastide, I will close with an excerpt from a Christmas Eve letter written in 1513 by Fra Giovanni Giocondo, a Franciscan friar and Renaissance scholar, to one of his patrons and close friends. This is something I have loved even as a child and will have the framed letter hanging in my office- come in, say hello, and read it when I have everything set up! It has blessed every place I've ever lived, and I am inviting its wisdom to illuminate the road that leads onward, a road we will walk together in faithfulness and love.

***“And so, at this Christmas time I greet you; not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem, and with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks, the shadows flee away.”***

Christmastide blessings, and with deep care~

The Reverend Dina Carter Ishler

25 December 2022