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The Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas to close in 2021

(Hallowell) Facing increasing financial challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and considering the question of long-term viability, the Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas has made the decision to close permanently in 2021.

This closure reflects a troubling trend seen across the country, with churches and other houses of worship seeing a substantial loss of income as a result of COVID-19.

“We did not come to this decision lightly,” says Senior Warden Patricia Buck-Welton, “The church no longer has the finances based on present pledges and resources to remain open for the long term.”

The Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas has a long history in the Hallowell community, beginning with its inception as St. Matthew’s Church in 1859. In 2016, St. Matthew’s Church and St. Barnabas Church of Augusta began worshipping together and began to consider how to formally operate as a single worshipping community. At the Diocesan Convention in 2017, the two parishes were officially recognized jointly as The Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas.

The Vestry of the Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas consulted with the Episcopal Diocese of Maine and Bishop Thomas J. Brown in reaching their decision. Members of the congregation were informed of the decision in late October by the Vestry and have access to continued pastoral support. The church leadership at the Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas is working with Bishop and Diocese regarding the church's assets.

There will be a final in-person service at the Episcopal Church of Saints Matthew and Barnabas at a future date. Currently, the majority of Episcopal Churches in Maine are not meeting in person and instead worshipping together online during the pandemic.

“I know this news deeply impacts the hearts of our congregants and the community, and mine as well,” says Buck-Welton, “But remember that although we are closing a church, we are not closing the Church. Wherever we are, we are still called to dedicate our lives to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comfort the comfortless: in short, to be the hands of Jesus Christ in the world.”

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