

Rector's Report
Church of the Resurrection
11/23/08

Before I started to write this report, I read last year's Rector's Report. I began writing it early in the morning on January 13th before I left for a Youth Worker's Convention where I would meet and begin getting to know Jill Sethness, now Jill Altom, who soon became our youth minister. Also that day, three ladies from our parish began training to become catechists in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Now Pat Smith and Margaret Anderson are well under way in their training, and they are leading our children in the Catechesis every Sunday. A month later, at the February vestry meeting, I informed the vestry of the appointment of Hildegard Cox as our interim organist and choir director. It was not long before we removed the word "interim" from her title. While all of this was going on, the preschool was working out a plan for growth. We would soon begin a search for our new Little Lambs Preschool director, who would be Pat Smith.

As we were addressing these important staffing concerns, lay volunteers were working hard in many areas of parish life. The finance committee was beginning to seek refinancing for our loan. We had our vestry retreat, where we got to know one another much better, got better organized, and contemplated ways to accomplish our mission for the coming year. Linda Varnell began working with me on a plan to recruit and train new altar guild members. We created the volunteer position of "Coordinator of Children's Ministries". The finance committee worked with me on a budgetary plan so we could finance both our new organist and choir director and a full time youth minister. Sam Lechleiter became the point man for EYC activities, which continued as we prepared for the time when Jill would come on board. We held our first Youth Sunday within recent memory. Our Little Lambs Preschool Board, led by Abbie Hudgens, met repeatedly to interview prospective teachers, so that we would have the fine teachers we enjoy today and be ready for more than twice as many students this fall. A second mission trip was planned and carried out completely by lay leaders, involving children and adults in a continuing relationship with the Church of the Annunciation in New Orleans. Abbie began working on a year round Stewardship program that would stress all our gifts and talents, as well as money. Bill Gleason, Molly and Mary Fourier, Ed Fay, and Maclin Davis put in many hours in the early spring so we could have well planned liturgies for Holy Week. Pam MacArthur accepted my invitation to begin developing a ministry for and by senior saints, who now have been meeting for some months for fellowship, mutual support, education, and service. Pam organized an excellent series of summer Sunday classes for adults during the hour between services; and several volunteers stepped forward to hold summer classes for the children, too. And plans for our fine vacation Bible school began taking shape. All during this time, Lucy Moore and our chief office assistant Ann Bishop kept us in service leaflets, broadcast emails, up to date schedules, monthly editions of *The Herald*, and timely announcements. The men's club, with help from the ladies of the parish and the youth, put on one of the most successful July 4th

Barbeques in parish history, this time with the addition of a festive music program entitled “God of our Fathers”. There were other signs of new and continuing life at Resurrection, but this sampling is enough to show that we have been busy here over the past year, with staff being assembled, old traditions being continued, new traditions being formed, and lay people working, praying, and giving for the spread of the kingdom of God.

When your search committee and vestry interviewed me in the spring of 2007, it was clear that this was a parish that wanted and needed revitalization, and that many of the people were committed to doing all they could to bring that about. My brief summary of what has been happening since our last parish meeting shows that the foundation is laid for new life at the Church of the Resurrection. As Randy said in his senior warden’s report, we need to build on the foundation that has been laid. I want to say something about that foundation and what we need to do to build on it.

Before I came here, Fr. Kew, the interim rector, told me that he wanted me to be able to join this parish as if I were jumping on to a bus that was already moving. This parish was already going somewhere when I got on the bus. At our November 2nd celebration of the 25th anniversary of this church, it became clear that we have all come here at different times. The timeline in the hallway to the church and the poster with its photographs of groups of people according to when they joined both show how we have all jumped on the bus while it was moving, and we have all benefited from the momentum and the direction of the bus. An informal count I did showed that about 50 new people have started coming here since March, while only a few have moved or left. Average Sunday attendance for 2007 was 154. While it is hard to make any conclusions until the whole year is finished, the average Sunday attendance since October 14th has been 161. This may indicate a trend towards growth that has begun this fall and may continue for some time to come. The moving bus we are on right now needs to be highly conscious of the need to welcome and make room for newcomers, and not just those who have joined us from the Church of the Good Samaritan. We are having many visitors from other churches, from people moving in, from people returning to church after not going for years, and from former members returning. A troubled economy may mean others will come seeking spiritual strength, support, the hope which the gospel of Christ offers, and fellowship with other Christians. This is a time when we face serious challenges, but it is also a time of unprecedented opportunity to make a witness for Christ in the world as to what we believe, whom we serve, and our love for one another.

When reflecting on the theme of foundations, I knew I remembered a verse of scripture saying something like, “Others have built the foundation, and you have entered into their labor.” Well, that saying might be in the Gospel According to Joseph, but it doesn’t exist in any Bible I could find. Instead, I found these words of Jesus: “For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” (John 4:37-38) This

verse places our presence in this parish in the context of the life of the whole Body of Christ. If the disciples of Jesus themselves have entered into the labor of those who went before them, we have certainly done so. In one sense, the fact that we come into the Church at the end of so much history, after so many sacrifices have been made, so many souls have been converted, so many insights have been put into words, so many people have been healed, and so many hymns have been sung makes us the inheritors of a treasure house of spiritual riches and traditions. Just look through the book of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* to get a brief glimpse of the saints of God we commemorate in our tradition. Truly, we stand on the shoulders of giants.

In one sense, we are blessed to reap the benefits of what we did not sow, for we gain so much from those who went before us. This very morning, we stand on the floor laid by Bill Ferrell and Ed McNabb, if my memory serves me true. Others have worked so hard to provide a safe and comfortable house for us to live in. But there is a challenge inherent in the words of Jesus. True, others have labored, but we “have entered into their labor.” The work is not finished. Jesus did not even say that the *hard* work, or the *most important* work, has already been done. The labor that lies before us is no different from the labors accomplished by the saints who populate the pages of the Bible and *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. Our story just hasn’t been written yet. We are writing it even now. Or perhaps, to give credit where credit is due, the Holy Spirit is writing our story out of our yesterdays, our today, and our tomorrows. The greatness of our story depends on the depth of our love and the completeness of our self-offering.

The fact that we inherit such a great tradition means we have something of great value to pass on to the next generation. As we continue in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, we are apostles to those who come after us. Not only are we coming to know Christ ourselves in word and sacrament through life in the Church; we are also preparing the next generation of teachers who will hand this great tradition on to the generation that follows them. We have the chance not only to help our children know *The Narnian Chronicles*, but also to raise up the next C. S. Lewis. Every age needs its apologists for the catholic and evangelical faith in Christ; every generation needs to know its place in the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

As the Apostle Paul has written to the Corinthians, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.” (I Cor. 3:10-11) There is one foundation—Jesus Christ. Paul warns us to “take care” how we build on that foundation. My main work here has been, and as far as I can see, still needs to be, building on the foundation of faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Administration, pastoral care, and outreach all are important ministries that we share together as part of our mission; but proclaiming Jesus as Lord gives us our direction and purpose, connects us with the one who gives healing and life, and offers love and forgiveness to those in need. That is why I

teach a regular Wednesday night Bible study and a class every Sunday nine months out of the year. That is why I have a sense of urgency in my preaching. That is why I stress giving sacrificially of our money, giving a proportion of our income. In my lucid moments, it amazes me how much God loves us, how much he wants to help us live a better life, and how closely Christ wants to dwell with us and work with us, if we just give him the chance. Such insight is too wonderful for me to enjoy alone; but when shared through the ministry of word and sacrament, I hope it can become a source of joy for all as we work together to fulfill the mission to which Christ calls us, “to know Christ and make him known.”

So I ask you in the coming year to give priority to worship, prayer, and study. Worship the one true Lord with us here together every Sunday when you can possibly be here and bring everyone you can get to come. Give God his due; he is worthy; no other thing and no one else deserves to be number one in our life. It is his “worth-ship” for us to give him thanks and praise. Pray daily so that your life may be spent in the will of God. Check in with him regularly throughout the day to ask his guidance and to thank him for both blessings and trials. If you do not feel like you are in such a close relationship with him now, ask him how to draw closer to him; ask him often; and he will draw closer to you. Study as if the life of your friends and loved ones depends on your knowing who Jesus is and what the Apostles believed about him; to quote the title of a short story by Flannery O’Conner, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own”.

In the coming year, we may have many more families come to our church seeking fellowship with Christ and his saints, if the present trends continue as I believe they will. It may be that we are the ones who will help them find what they need. We will raise up new teachers and leaders, because our teachers and leaders will call and equip others to help them. We may develop our children’s ministries and our classes until we will realize that we need more space for classes on Sunday morning. We will pray for God to show us how to manage our finances so that we can continue to support the steps we have taken this far to revitalize the church and build on the foundation that was laid before we got here. Together, we will also face challenges and changes we can’t even imagine now; but if we do it as the Body of Christ, building on the one true foundation of Jesus Christ, we will continue in God’s will and we will be faithful. That is all God ever asks of us.

And now, “Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.”