

RECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT - Parish Annual Meeting 2009

I want to begin this year's report by quoting excerpts from a letter I received last year. It was from one of our parishioners who had moved from San Diego, and had been looking for a local Episcopal Church.

"I always knew All Saints' was special.... I didn't realize, however, just how unusual the parish is. Here we are still looking for a church home. We spent the past couple of months attending one church.....and we realized that while the people of that church were incredibly friendly, and the parish programs were numerous and active, we felt nothing during the service. There was no holy heart of worship – rather, the church seemed like simply a place for like-minded people to gather in order to participate in social programs and carry out good works.

Please know that you, Fr Krulak, all the church staff and Vestry, and the congregation, have created an amazing, blessed church. After hearing so many seemingly casual and/or ill-educated preachers here, and seeing almost no one who seems to have a deep reverence and worshipful regard for the Eucharist, I appreciate you all more than ever before."

Those of you who have attended other Episcopal churches will understand the sentiments expressed in this letter. I do not share these words with you to boast, but to highlight why our parish is happy and growing, in contrast with many other churches. The contrast is even more evident when compared with the atmosphere of division, decline and unpleasantness that seems to be the mark of our Episcopal Church nationally. Many think we are just old-fashioned – but from the Bishop down it is acknowledged that, yes, there is something special and unique about All Saints'.

It is not just the fact that we use Rite 1 – for that could be celebrated in just as careless or irreverent a way as Rite 2. The secret is really the anglo-catholic tradition which this parish is based on and celebrates. In our faithfulness to catholic tradition and worship, emphasis on the sacraments, and the centrality of the Eucharist, we are proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. At All Saints' every Eucharist is another Christmas and the altar is another Bethlehem.

The letter I received also highlights what contributes to the atmosphere that gives All Saints' a "holy heart of worship". It is the combination of clergy, staff and congregation which creates this "amazing, blessed church". And it is not just about a beautiful building, vestments and ceremonial.

The whole of our liturgy and its ritual at All Saints' is there to emphasise things that words alone can not fully express. Also, our former parishioner said that good preaching is part of it, too. And although it was not said, at the heart is the feeling of community.

As I said, many of you know this to be true. However, we often forget how special and unique All Saints' is. So it is good to be reminded of this. To use trendy jargon – I want to affirm our tradition. It is also good to note that the things All Saints' stands for are a concern for no less a person than Pope Benedict. He may not be successful in calling the Roman Catholic Church to a new awareness of traditional liturgy and devotion – but how nice that he shares our priorities!

ANOTHER YEAR OF GROWTH

A reading of the annual reports shows that once again our parish has grown. Financially it has been a significant year. The generosity of parishioners, both in regular giving and in special and memorial donations, has been most generous. In addition the income from rentals, etc into the Property Account has given us a fund that we can use for projects and maintenance in our facilities. In former years we could only do simple maintenance or appeal for donations. Now we can actually plan ahead, and do things that were just on a “wish list”.

However, it is the worship and life of the parish, not our facilities where growth continues to happen. The growth in new members, particularly families, has continued. Last year we also lost 18 parishioners through moving. This was quite a loss – especially as most of them were involved in every aspect of parish life and ministry. Fortunately we had almost as many join the parish.

A glance at the statistics shows a sharp increase in taking Holy Communion to people at home or in hospital. This is a quiet ministry, and I share it with Fr Krulak, Norma Dreyer & Priscilla Fleishans. Some of the people are parishioners unable to attend Mass, others long term shut-ins, and there is a small group of ladies I visit every month at Atria Nursing Home. I can not adequately describe the appreciation and joy the visits with the Sacrament bring. I am always happy to take the Blessed Sacrament to people in such circumstances, as well as other ministry to the sick, such as Holy Unction. However, I was not given a crystal ball at my ordination, and do need to be kept in touch when parishioners are sick.

PROBLEMS

It is in my nature to be positive – but I would like to highlight 2 problems we face.

SUNDAY SCHOOL: Our Sunday School continues to grow, and we need new accommodation. Mrs Locke also needs assistance.

PARKING: Parking on Sundays has been a problem for some time. It has also become a problem during the week

Both of these are good problems to have! The Facilities Committee is finding a solution for the Sunday school. New rooms are being provided for the music director and choir, thus allowing the Sunday school to use the Fireside Room. Plans are also in hand for extra parking spaces.

The children's ministry is a delightful growing problem. The Vestry solved part of the problem by employing a staff member of the Pre-school to provide professional nursery care at both Sunday Services, and this has been well received.

Last year I prepared a group of children for First Communion – the first such class here in many years. It was a great test of my ability and patience, but what a delight for us all! This year I have another Communion class, and also a youth Confirmation class. The Bishop will be here to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation on Wednesday March 25th, the feast of the Annunciation.

FINANCE

One “problem” I have not mentioned is our finances. That is because I regard parish finances as an opportunity, not a problem! When you look at our 2009 budget you will see we are facing a challenge. This is no different to every other church or organization in the nation. America is in a difficult financial situation, and many parishioners are affected by this. This year our income from pledges and investments will decrease, and we are looking at a deficit budget. I am, as always, grateful to everyone for their financial commitment to our parish. In faith the Vestry presents this budget, knowing that the people of All Saints' will respond with joy to the work that demands our commitment.

WORSHIP

The worship offered at All Saints' continues to be inspiring. We are all thrilled with the standard of music at High Mass, and delighted with our 4 soloists. Sometimes after the offertory anthem I am quite overwhelmed. Thank you to Robert McLeod – what a treasure he is!

The music has improved because of the commitment of parishioners to the music fund. This fund allows us to employ the 4 section leaders, and I encourage everyone to donate to this fund.

The excellence of our music is matched by the dedication of our acolytes. They perform a dedicated and necessary service, and it is great to have more young people in their ranks. I would like to pay a special tribute to Ralph Gordon. Apart from his many other jobs, Ralph serves at 8 am every Sunday. Thank you for your example of commitment and service, Ralph.

Another wonderful servant of our parish is Norma Dreyer. Assisted by a happy team of altar guild members, Norma ensures that everything for worship and the sacraments is ready, and the best we can offer. On many occasions I have said to Norma that maybe we should get a bed for her at the church – thank you, Norma! I would also like to thank one special group who make our worship so beautiful - the flower guild. This year I have been struck by the beautiful creations Sunday by Sunday. I encourage more people to donate gifts to the flower fund as a memorial or thanksgiving offering.

PARISH LIFE

So many people are involved in organising or helping with the various activities that happen at All Saints'. It would be foolish for me to name them, as I am bound to miss out some. The annual reports contain a good overview of parish life and the people who make things happen. Please note the names listed in each report, and give thanks to God, with me, for them.

I would like to make mention of the Vestry. Once again we have had a Vestry and office-bearers ready and willing to ensure that the parish is administered in a responsible and professional way. It is a joy to work with a team who are able to share vision and enthusiasm for our parish.

There are 2 things I particularly thank the Vestry for. Firstly, their support of my sabbatical. This was a wonderful experience for me, and also confirmed to me that All Saints' is the best parish in the whole world! Secondly, as a result of my review I was given a bonus to honor my 5 years as your Rector. I was truly grateful for that acknowledgement.

PERSONAL THANKS

I am blessed to be supported by a wonderful group of "so-called" retired priests. Fr Krulak is my ever-reliable assistant. The parish ministry – to say nothing of your Rector - would suffer without him. We all hold him with great affection, and this was shown at the Requiem Mass he celebrated for his father, General Krulak. The All Saints' family was there, both in the liturgy and in the congregation. To Fathers Edwards, Thrumston & Barta, I extend my thanks also for your assistance and friendship.

We are blessed with fine lay staff. Jim Mickelson keeps our finances, property & business in good order, and Homero is our ever-willing sexton. We are grateful to both of them for what they do, and always being prepared to assist.

My final thanks are to our Parish Administrator, Terry. This time last year he was still fairly new. Now we can appreciate what a difference he has made in so many areas of parish life. He is an excellent and talented administrator, who has brought youthful enthusiasm and professionalism to our parish office – and laughter! No task seems beyond him, and in addition he has a wonderful relationship with young people. It is no coincidence that there is now an increased involvement of young people in the parish. If there is one problem, it is that Terry spends more time on church work than he is paid for.

FAITHFUL DEPARTED

I conclude by paying tribute to 4 parishioners who died during the year, all of whom are greatly missed by their families, and by the parish:

Ying Hing Tsui, Eric Borchert Jr, Russell Litchfield and Eleanor Herzman.

Rest eternal grant to them O Lord: And let light perpetual shine upon them.