

Rector's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

Where we've been in 2016

I've been here for just a bit more than a year now. It has, I think, been a good year all things considered. The first year of a priest-parish relationship is really about getting used to each other, just walking together through the whole cycle of the liturgical year and the administrative year.

On the Vestry, we've been rolling up our sleeves and getting on with some of the most pressing work. For the last several years much of the focus has been on the priests here, and really it's been half-a-decade of transition. That takes up a lot of time and energy in the Vestry.

We've been working on how we work together, how we have discussions and make decisions. I believe we work together pretty well. We've been working particularly on the budget. As we told you back in the spring, we had been spending about twice as much money as we were bringing in, which is simply not sustainable. I didn't come to Trinity to close Trinity! But that meant some uncomfortable changes in personnel: letting Barb go, and reducing David's hours, which resulted in his departure.

We're all adjusting to the reality of where we are today as a parish, which is that we are not as big or as wealthy a parish as we might have been at one point. If that makes you feel sadness or discouragement, that makes perfect sense. Nevertheless, we are learning to live closer to our means, and that means a time of simplicity and prioritization.

Many of our ministries continue smoothly: Loaves and Fishes, Youth Group, Episcopal Church Women, Daughters of the King. I hope in 2017 to gently increase the visibility of these ministries here in the parish, so that you all get to find out really how much is going on around here, but often not in the limelight.

We've recreated a Communications Committee, which has worked on implementing some new ways to stay in touch with the parish: through the weekly email newsletter, through the parish bulletins, and through facebook. We're expecting a new website to launch very soon. We did suspend the Jubilate with Barb's departure. We haven't been able to restart it yet because, frankly, it takes a lot of time to put together a newsletter and it takes a lot of cost to mail it out. It's something we'll continue to work on in 2017.

We've implemented a new system for scheduling liturgical ministries. There have been a few wrinkles, but it seems to be working very well.

Finally I was sick for much of September and October and I'm awfully grateful for everyone who helped me and Trinity get through it all.

Where we go in 2017

If year one is most about getting to know each other and attending to some of the most critical needs, year two is mostly about starting to lay the groundwork for a beautiful future. This has two parts:

- Upgrading our institutional infrastructure
- Figuring out our mission

Part one: Upgrading our institutional infrastructure

This is mostly for the Vestry and staff and ministry leaders. It is mostly about policies and procedures. It is much easier to get things done as a team if we don't have to reinvent the wheel all the time, and if some decisions and choices are made once.

This means three things:

1. Looking at our by-laws, and reworking them to meet our current needs. At next year's Annual Parish Meeting, expect a vote to approve a new set of by-laws!
2. Creating or updating policies and procedures. We need wedding, funeral, and building use policies. We need updating personnel policies. Now that we have people volunteering in the front office we need procedures written down so that they can do that work well.
3. Empowering and equipping staff and committees to get their work done, independently and flexibly. The Youth Group, the Buildings and Grounds Committee, the Pastoral Care team, etc. these should simply have a chunk of the budget, a set of goals, and some systems for accountability, and then we should let them get on with their jobs. Ideally, the Vestry should not have to deal with every detail of the parish, and should not be micromanaging the parish.

Part two: Figuring out our mission

Throughout this year, I'd like us to be thinking about this question: Why are we here? Why is Trinity here? Now, of course, we're one part of the body of Christ. We are here because God has called us here and made the church a symbol and sign of the work of salvation. Sure.

But what is our specific mission here in Oshkosh. There are plenty of other churches in town. Plenty of other ways to live a life other than by being a Christian. What do we offer that is different?

The more specific we can answer this big question, the better off we will be in 3 different ways:

- We will have a concise summary of our identity, and that will give us a stronger sense of community. We humans rally together around logos and flags and mascots and slogans. There's nothing wrong with a parish having a strong brand identity, and a strong sense of our mission is the starting point
- We will be better evangelists: if we are clear about what we are doing here, we will be able to share that with other people who need to be here. In business speak, we'll be able to market ourselves better.
- Finally we will have an easier time making good decisions about our finances and our resources. A budget can and should be a blueprint for mission. A vestry can make big-picture decisions much more easily if they can ask "does this effort help our mission?"

Now, the catechism in the prayer book actually gives us a starting point. It's page 855 if you want to look it up.

Q. What is the mission of the Church? A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission? A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission? A. The church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

2017's Big Challenge: The Parish Hall

The Parish Hall was built in 1917, and this is its 100th anniversary. It has an important part to play in the history of this parish, as a symbol of the strength and fidelity particularly of the woman of this parish in the first half of the twentieth century. It is a building that is used nearly every day of the week.

But after 100 years of good and faithful service, is it a building that meets our contemporary needs? Is it a building that justifies its fairly high costs? It is a building that serves the missions and ministries of the parish?

Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. There are all sorts of options for what we could do, from doing nothing, to installing an elevator, to making a more thorough renovation, to building whole new building. All sorts of options.

I want us to tackle that question throughout this year, and to make an informed, reasoned, and clear decision about it. Along the way we will discover that we can't answer that question without answering that earlier question I asked: what is our mission here? What are we doing here?

The answers to all of these deep questions are already hidden in the sacred heart of Jesus. Let us renew ourselves in him, in his most precious word, and in the great fountain of grace which is the Holy Eucharist. Let us live in Christ, and live for the sake of the world!

Respectfully submitted by Father Chris Arnold, Rector