

## Spiritual Condition of the Parish 2012

Meredith Potter's retirement as our Vicar has understandably raised questions and concerns about my own retirement plans, so this year in my Report of the Spiritual Condition of the Parish I want to outline what I believe our parish needs to begin to do this year and continue to work on until these things have been accomplished.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, I will retire sometime between my 66<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2016, when I will be eligible for full Social Security and Medicare benefits, and my 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday in 2022, the mandatory retirement age according to the Canons of the Episcopal Church.

So within the next four and a half to ten and a half years, our parish will need to address three key areas: Staffing and Compensation; Giving and Stewardship; and Spiritual Renewal.

### Staffing and Compensation

The last time St. Gregory's searched for a new Rector was in the fall of 1987. At that time an eager, relatively young priest, with 3 years' experience in a small Cathedral parish in Davenport, Iowa, and 7 years' experience in a large midtown Manhattan parish, received an invitation to enter this parish's search process for a new Rector.

I accepted the invitation because St. Gregory's was a full service church with a full service staff: a Rector, a full-time Assistant Priest, a full-time Parish Secretary, a part-time Organist and four professional section leaders for the choir, and a part-time Bookkeeper.

Today, St. Gregory's has a full-time Rector, a full-time Youth Minister, a part-time Organist, and four professional section leaders for the choir.

We do not have an Assistant Priest.

We do not have a Parish Secretary.

We have a part-time Bookkeeper, but she pays her own salary so it's not a true expense in our budget.

Now I love this parish, and I am committed to each and every one of you, a fact which I remember each time I call you by name at the altar rail. I would love nothing better than if God's continued call and my continued good health allowed me the joy and privilege of being your Rector until my mandatory retirement.

But if I were an eager, relatively young priest with 10 years' experience in well-staffed parishes today, *and didn't know and love this parish as I do*, St. Gregory's wouldn't interest me at all.

So one question this parish has to answer over the next 4½ to 10½ years is this:

“How attractive will St. Gregory's be to potential candidates for its next Rector?”

But there's an even more pressing and immediate question:

“What level of staffing does St. Gregory's want and expect?”

St. Gregory's is essentially the same size it was 24 years ago— a little under 200 households and a little over 400 parishioners.

Also, as things now stand, 2012 will be the fourth year in a row that neither our gifted and wonderful Director of Music Ministries, Jim Collins, nor I, have received any increase in salary. And although Erica's decision to leave wasn't primarily because she hadn't received a salary increase in *three* years, it was a contributing factor. As things now stand, our new Youth Minister Bret won't receive a salary increase in 2012.

My 1988 Letter of Agreement includes this provision: “Salary review takes place toward the end of each calendar year with resultant changes effective January 1<sup>st</sup> of the next year.” Until the last five or so years, the Vestry had used a variety of approaches to make salary decisions, and our initial budgets included a line item with potential salary increases for the Vestry's consideration. Salary increases weren't always provided, but they had always been included in the budget process.

I think the Vestry needs to create a formal mechanism to review salaries annually as a part of this parish's commitment to care for its paid staff. Looking to the future, we have 4½ to 10½ years to establish a salary review track record that won't discourage a potential candidate for Rector, or, for that matter, potential candidates for a new Youth Minister or a new Organist, when that becomes necessary.

### Giving and Stewardship

Annual budgeting is essentially a three-step process: first: determine expected income; second: establish priorities; and third, develop a balanced budget.

From time to time St. Gregory's has had stewardship committees which have been responsible for bringing our financial needs to the parish's attention, and running our annual Giving Campaigns. During these past several years of national economic hardship, when we most needed to communicate financial information and encourage giving to the parish, our stewardship efforts have been largely ad hoc and last minute.

I think the Vestry needs to create a year-round stewardship committee comprised of regular parishioners as well as Vestry members. In addition to running more intentional Giving Campaigns for our annual budget, the stewardship committee needs to address our larger capital giving needs and planned giving, from bequests by will to charitable trusts and life insurance vehicles. (One parishioner's bequest gave us the funds for air conditioning our church; another parishioner's bequest gave us seed money for calling our first full-time lay youth minister.)

In 2009 we conducted a survey called the Congregation Assessment Tool. It included a section on aggregate financial information for the parish as a whole and without any individual information. We discovered that household giving averaged 2.03%, a long way from the 10% standard of giving in the Episcopal Church.

Furthermore, approximately one-quarter of our income came from the households of retired parishioners.

Now that the Vestry has reaffirmed and budgeted for a full parish tithe, I hope that a new stewardship committee will once again encourage households of employed parishioners to work toward tithing by increasing their giving each year by at least 10%.

Increased giving and year-round stewardship education will be essential if we are ever to return to a full service church with a full service staff which can meet the needs of a parish of our size, and make us an attractive parish for future staff members.

### Spiritual Renewal

Over the years, St. Gregory's has been blessed with many opportunities for spiritual growth. These included the Daughters of the King, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, and our Disciples of Christ and Education for Ministry Programs. Today we have our Centering Prayer group, the Grovers and the Brookies, the Thursday Morning Bible Study, the Wednesday Morning Eucharist with Healing, Children's Church, and seasonal opportunities like our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, and the Easter Eve Service of Water and Light. We also have a wonderful resource for spiritual growth in our Sally Craig Memorial Library.

Two years ago we introduced occasional Healing Services at all three of our "Practices"—that term itself pointing to a recognition that we need to take our worship into our world.

But we have never systematically taken our parish's spiritual pulse, and systematically looked at how we can help one another grow spiritually. As I hope all of you know, we are in the midst of taking our spiritual pulse through the Spiritual Life Survey, and in the weeks and months to come we will have the opportunity to develop ways to grow spiritually. If you have not yet taken the Survey, please do so as soon as possible. The Survey comes to a close on Monday, February 6, and I hope all of you will have taken the survey by then.

Nothing can be more important in the life of a parish than its spiritual growth in Love of God, Love of Others, Reflection on Scripture, Prayer, and Serving those in Need. This will be one of my top priorities in however many years I will be your chief pastor.

I do want to conclude with some special thanks.

First, a great thank you to three dedicated parishioners who volunteer to do some of our secretarial work— Catherine Martin, Cathy Leimbeck, and Margo Ramtin— and they know how grateful I am to them for all they have done and are doing.

Second, Gretchen Bayer has been our volunteer Church School Coordinator for five years now, and she has brought not only creativity and imagination, but also planning and order— qualities not always present in one person. Next Sunday we will have the joy of another wonderful skit, and I hope you'll all make a point to attend it, and to thank Gretchen for her ministry.

Third, I want to thank Susie Dutcher for her new ministry as our Pastoral Care Visitor. Especially with Meredith's retirement, this will mean important continuity in our visiting of the sick and shut-in, and bringing them Holy Communion.

I am also grateful to Pat Auch, who has been visiting and is now also bringing Holy Communion to her fellow residents at Sedgebrook.

And I am happy to announce that Shirley Traettino will soon be part of our pastoral care team.

Finally, many if not all of you have seen Leigh VanderMeer, either in the pulpit preaching, or in the pews worshiping. I can also tell you that she has been a contributor of record to our parish for two years. Just as Meredith began worshiping at St. Gregory's and preaching and celebrating after her *second* retirement from Seabury-Western (!), so Leigh will begin joining us in preaching and celebrating on a more regular basis.

Leigh has other opportunities to do supply work, and having served effectively as the Chaplain at Northwestern University's Canterbury House, with parishioners Stuart Babcock, Scott Schaper, and Emma Martin among her students, she is looking for a full-time position. In the meanwhile, I look forward to working with her and having her be another preaching voice in our pulpit.

And now I'll conclude my Report as I have these past 23 Annual Meetings:

"Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen" [Ephesians 3:20-21].