

THE STATE OF THE PARISH

April 17, 2016

As I think about this wonderful community of faith in preparation for undergoing a transition in pastoral leadership, I am, as you might say, “mighty proud” of where we are. Our standard metrics are all holding steady with our baptized membership, attendance at worship and numbers of baptisms, confirmations and receptions all holding steady as well. We have seen a modest increase in annual giving while remaining faithful to our capital commitments. Apparently the economy is improving enough that we are also seeing some increase in the number of weddings we are celebrating. While ‘holding steady’ in today’s ecclesiastic terrain is something of a victory it is still clear that we need to be developing imaginative ministries that are attractive and life giving to people, especially among younger adults, if we wish to remain vibrant in the future. We have learned a great deal about components of what such ministers might include from our four years of the All Saints Atlanta Project, and we will soon have available close to \$800,000 for supporting whatever ministries we devise in the future. My intuition is that the money will probably support some staff time for a program or series of programs that demand high commitment over the course of a year for a group or groups which meet regularly, (once each week) for reflection and vocational discernment, for worship and the development of community norms, in addition to undertaking some kind of practice of service and generosity whether as interns or volunteers. In other words, something very like ASAP with more attention to vocation, and not simply religious vocation, and without an essential residential component.

I am pleased with our introduction of worship to Wednesday Night Supper and believe that we are beginning to see the fruits of more regular worship in the lives of some who attend. I am hearing our brief homilies quoted back to me in other situations. Expanding that offering to those who attend children’s choirs but not supper will, I hope, be high on the priority list when we begin a new program year in the fall.

My other experiment of gathering a group to consider developing new communities under the umbrella of our parish but not necessarily as a program of the parish did not take off. A wonderful group of mostly youngish and newish parishioners met with me and Janet Todd for a year. The bottom line is that our meetings bore some fruit in some of the participants but that overall, my vision was too fuzzy, the expectations of leadership felt to be too high and the idea of beginning or discovering communities of worship, service and generosity elsewhere to counter intuitive for those who were fairly newly enjoying precisely the opposite, namely being part of things here.

One other program and ministry that I would like to highlight is now in its fifth year but still somewhat under the radar. It is the All Saints Talents Roundtable, or ASTROs. Each year a group of about fifteen leaders have met, nominated by the previous group, to get to know others in the parish, to break down ministry silos, to strengthen to bonds of community through mutual knowing and being known, and to deepen understanding of all the issues that

have to be considered in leading this relatively complex system. It is not uncommon for members of this group to find their way into vestry service sometime after spending a year meeting once each month for dinner with guests who lead conversation and consideration of various areas of our life and ministry.

There are many other initiatives that I could and would mention in detail if time allowed. For now, let me simply praise our vestry who have in recent years set aside some money for growth initiatives, and raise up our staff and, in particular Lauri Begley, for taking advantage of those funds for which anyone in our parish can apply.

I'm keeping things short this year because you really need to be hearing about transition matters including the appointment of an interim rector and the chair of a search committee from Michael Gragnani.

Before I conclude, however, I have some people that we need to thank. Michael Gragnani is one of them, former treasurer, Board Chair of Covenant Community and, we believe the second youngest Senior Warden in our history. He is completing this first term of vestry service. Our Junior Warden, Elizabeth Barton was married here and her children were baptized here. Charley Brickley, a second generation vestryman, has most recently helped usher in a formal relationship between us and the other All Saints in our Diocese. You will hear more about our working together before too long. My personal flippant goal for that work will be to get them to add an apostrophe to their name. Alvin Moore does everything around here and then adds vestry service. He designs the flowers for our festivals, designs our worship space in Ellis Hall. He is a verger, an acolyte and youth leader as well as a member of our All Saints' Choir. Frances Zook has helped guide our extensive Buildings and Ground works with a gracious and professional hand. Last, but absolutely not least, is John Mears. In fact, I'd like John to come forward. John Mears has not only served on our Capital Campaign Steering Committee but has also overseen on our behalf the myriad details of the various capital projects, ably supported by his compadres in the Gang of Three: Chuck Konas and Doug Mullins. John has given countless hours these past years during which he has also buried his father, moved his mother into Canterbury Court, and possibly most difficult of all, for him, offering a fabulous mediation to open a recent vestry meeting. John, I know this is a tad premature as you, perfectionist that you are, know there are a couple of things yet to complete. Nonetheless, we want to honor and thank you for sharing your gifts. Could I ask our entire current vestry to stand so that we can honor you? Our thanks also go to those of you who will begin your terms of service and a few short weeks.

Another person, who cannot be present today and was honored at a recent meeting of the Budget and Finance Committee, is Martie Zakas. Martie is stepping down as chair of that committee after ten years of exemplary leadership and service. She has been unfailingly gracious, thoughtful, easily and non-anxiously on top of the details of the financial life of our parish. Martie was always going to be a hard person to follow, so we must thank God for nudging David Aldridge to accept the mantle. David was the Senior Warden during our last

transition and the Senior Warden of the vestry who called me here. Martie Zakas and David Aldridge.

We are going to have a festive leave taking for me with our staff. I'm not going to name everyone here, much as I would like to at great length. We have a staff who have matured as a team over quite a number of years. There is no one who is not a major contributor, but those with whom I have worked most closely and in a supervisory relationship are Noelle, Tim, more recently Mandy; Ray of Light Chenault; Ellen Hayes—from whence cometh our help; Lauri 'Life of the Parish' Begley; Kathy—good deed in a naughty world—Roberts; Pat Kiley who will ever have my undying loyalty and gratitude for taking me on in dark days and hanging with me all the way through; and Nancy Dodson who has grown in her role to the point where she is really indispensable to the smooth running of this system. I love everyone else as well. I'm grateful to all of them and would like those present to stand so that we may all express our gratitude.

Finally, (really), it is my honor and duty to nominate the Senior Warden to the vestry for election. Tomorrow evening at our changeover meeting I will nominate Ken Stewart as the warden who will lead us through the transition, during which the vestry is the ecclesiastical authority even if they delegate substantial work to the interim, with whom I have already been meeting. Thank you Ken for accepting this role. And thank everyone of you for the ways in which you bear witness to Good News through your love, generosity and service. I hope you will mark your calendars for Trinity Sunday, May 22nd when we will celebrate our life together with abandon.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

The Rev'd Geoffrey M. St. J. Hoare
Rector