

Report from the Vestry
Vestry Retreat – April 27 – 29, 2007

Your Vestry just returned from our weekend planning retreat. We prayerfully, candidly, and lovingly sought to be stewards of the legacy begun by our charter members, and fostered by all of the Wardens and Vestries before us. Before each working session – four times over the course of the weekend – we prayed a prayer attributed to Bishop Clay Matthews. Hear what we earnestly asked of God.

Disturb us Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,
and we have arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the water of life and the bread of heaven

Stir us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
to venture on wider seas where storms will show you mastery,
wherein losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push outward the horizons of our hope,
and to push us forward into the future in strength, courage, hope and love.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

Each time we recited this prayer, we heard different phrases and became more and more disturbed by the Holy Spirit. We addressed many issues, some relating to our past, but more and more, we focused on our future. We were pushed outward, and called to ministry. Our hope was pushed beyond our anticipations, as we set the course for our future.

Specifically:

1. We set the course for our Christian Formation program for children, youth and adults. We will support this ministry by more clerical and lay workers, and by renewing our` commitment to cooperative and shared ministry.
2. When Fr. Howard spoke with the Vestry before coming to join us, he disturbed us in the fashion of Bishop Matthews' prayer by asking whether we viewed ourselves as the spiritual leaders of the parish. At this retreat, we embraced that role. You will see increased Vestry presence at worship and in fostering other ministries throughout our parish.
3. We unanimously committed to developing and supporting a Stephen Ministry program in our church. Amy Morehous will lead this ministry, and I'm pleased to announce that our Bishop has appointed her to our parish for the next two years.
4. We also committed ourselves to a renewal of Lay Eucharistic visitation program within our parish, and will include a sending forth prayer within our liturgy.
5. We discussed both the need for and the appropriate venue for a Contemporary Worship Service. We will begin offering those services during the summer at 5:00 Sunday afternoons, and will interface those services with programs for youth.

6. We set the course for resolving issues relating to our building fund, and will be developing a plan over the next few weeks. Those of you who contributed to that fund will hear more as soon as we have resolved some details.
7. Ultimately, we embraced a vision of shared ministry, and adopted a staffing model that will place 3 full-time priests on our staff within the next year and a half. Fr. Howard is already with us, and I believe we understand his role. Caroline Vogel will join us in May to become a Transition Deacon and ultimately a priest in about a year and a half. Part of her focus will be children's ministry and work with young families. We are committed to hiring a new Assistant Priest who will share pastoral responsibilities and will focus on ministry to and for our youth.

Presently, we do not have the budget to fund this level of ministry, but our horizon of hope forced us to stray from the comfortable and to enthusiastically embrace what we believe is a renewed spirit, a Holy Spirit, at Ascension.

I believe every member of the Vestry felt God's spirit as we set this uncomfortable, yet courageous course for our parish. You will hear much more of this over the coming weeks. We thank you for your prayers, and we ask for your continued prayer and commitment as we embark on our future in strength, courage, hope and love.

Originally delivered as part of a dialog sermon, April 29, 2007
Tom Ladd, Sr. Warden