

Report from the Vestry March 10, 2008

At the March 10, 2008, meeting of the Vestry, the first item of business was to receive a very favorable report from the Treasurer and Finance Committee. Treasurer Vaiden Taylor reported that the pledges and related revenue were ahead of expectations for the end of February. She also noted that the line of credit utilized by the parish had been reduced further, after earlier reductions and paying off the short-term loan that the Vestry authorized from the Building Fund in 2007. Pledges received for 2008 now number 309 for a total of \$1,016,000. The Finance Committee is working on a revised budget for presentation at the April vestry meeting to reflect the increased revenue and other expenditures noted at the February vestry meeting.

The Priest-in-Charge reported on a recently released nationwide study on trends in religious habits and attitudes (the "Pew Report"). He made the following observations about the findings of the report: This may be the last survey to show Protestantism as the majority movement in the U.S. Affiliation with mainline Protestant churches comprised 18.1% and 16.1% were noted as being unaffiliated with any religious tradition. The Episcopal Church comprises 1.4% of religious affiliations which is both a proportional and numerical decrease. Other mainline Protestant churches are also decreasing proportionally and numerically. It appears that the rate of participation in church activities decreases in younger age categories. Father Howard pointed out that the survey reflects a competitive religious environment with people being open to things that draw them to a church, rather than being drawn by a strong lifelong influence of church affiliation.

The Senior Warden encouraged the members of the Vestry to take actions to cause their Commissions to meet in order to discuss parish needs in the areas served by the Commission and to formulate specific Commission goals for the remainder of 2008. It was noted that reporting by specific Commissions would be on an assigned basis so that every Commission would not report at every vestry meeting as has been our practice. The Senior Warden encouraged any vestry member who felt a report from a Commission would be beneficial to feel free to request to be on the agenda. It was also noted that in light of the recent studies about shifts in church affiliation the wardens and the Priest-in-Charge had discussed the creation of an ad hoc committee of parish members to study the Pew Report in more depth. In order to draw people who are not presently attending, the committee would study the development of a vision for the parish, taking advantage of current trends to communicate effectively the parish's reason for being. The committee is currently being formed.

The Junior Warden reported that the young families group has started developing a way in which they assist each other as needs arise — sort of a "families helping families" idea. It was also noted that Brett Backus, the Deacon who will be joining the staff, visited the parish with his wife, Carla, the previous Sunday and a reception had been held in their honor. Babs noted that a baby shower would be planned for the Backuses after their arrival this summer.

During new business, at the request of the Outreach Commission, the Vestry voted unanimously to sponsor two grant applications to the Diocese of East Tennessee Opportunity Grant Fund.

Ann O'Connor spoke to the Vestry concerning a grant request to seek funding (approximately \$7,000) to help establish a Saturday morning Montessori class for the children involved in the Family Promise program. The second grant request had been written by Parishioner Pat Crumpton for funds (approximately \$5,000) to formulate, create and promote an interfaith coalition of churches for the purpose of public education about and support for the fight against child abuse and neglect. The goal of the coalition would be to raise public awareness of the extent and severity of child abuse, to recruit volunteers for the CASA program (court appointed special advocate), and to conduct small fundraising events in support of CASA. Scott Poland and Ben Davidson presented an overview and general discussion of the charge of the Great Commission Commission which was focused on three areas:

- (1) Visitors, new members, retention of existing members;
- (2) Fellowship/Parish life, and
- (3) Developing creative ways to attract people to the programs of the Parish/Evangelism.

Finally, the Vestry spent some time at the request of the Search Committee discussing questions or areas of inquiry for the Search Committee to consider including in the parish-wide self-study which it is in the process of designing. It was explained that this parish-wide self-study was part of the Diocesan process the Parish had agreed to when the decision was made to follow the Priest-in-Charge model as opposed to the traditional search process. The Search Committee is currently working to develop the parish-wide self-study survey which it hopes to distribute to the parish before summer vacation time.

The Vestry is a very congenial group and seems to be working well both together and with the staff. The staff has been very, very busy during the Easter season. A pat on the back and word of encouragement would be in order.

Tom Hale
Senior Warden