

## **Report from the Vestry**

### **February 10, 2009**

The Vestry of Church of the Ascension met on February 10, 2009. Members of the Search Committee were present by invitation to participate in delivering that committee's much anticipated final report.

After the Vestry's usual practices of celebrating Eucharist at 6:00 PM, dining on pizza at 6:30 PM., and reciting the prayer of Bishop Clay Matthews at 6:40 PM., it moved to its agenda items.

Treasurer Vaiden Taylor gave the January financial report. She reported that pledge income was on a par with that collected in January last year, but short of the 2009 budget by \$14,300. Special donation receipts were also less than budgeted by about \$3,500. January expenses were controlled very well, nearly matching the budget exactly. As a result January ended with a shortfall of approximately \$17,000. Taylor said it was too early in the year to be overly concerned, although given the difficult economic times, the committee would be monitoring revenue and expenses closely. She noted that the early February revenue was looking positive. Chair of the Finance Committee John Pannell reported on the status of Ascension's debt restructuring efforts. Our old \$100,000 line of credit has been rolled into the building debt and the bank has lowered the interest rate for all of the parish's debt from 7% down to 6.5%. This amounts to about \$4,800 per year in savings to Ascension. The bank agreed to establish a new line of credit of up to \$50,000. Any amount drawn on the line would have to be paid back at the end of each year. Our plan would still be to borrow from the building fund if budgeted income during the year does not fully cover expenses. The Finance Committee recommended having the available borrowing capacity represented by the line of credit serve as a backup in the event of an emergency during times when we are borrowing short term against the building fund. Everyone was reminded that when the parish uses the building fund as a line of credit to cover short-term cash flow needs, we reimburse it with the same interest those funds would earn from the money market fund. Thus, the building fund is not adversely impacted by this practice and the parish is benefitted because it can borrow at a much lower rate from the building fund. Bob Wadley distributed a more complete analysis of the parish's spending on outreach efforts which showed a total of \$148,632 budgeted for outreach spending. This represented between 10.5% and 11% of anticipated 2009 revenue. Listed on the analysis as receiving support from the parish included Family Promise, FISH, mission trips to Bolivia and Johns Island, South Carolina, Tyson House, Endowment Grants, the Refuge at Volunteer Ministry Center, Blount County Community Chest, Lyons View Neighborhood Support, portions of funds given to the Diocese earmarked for outreach in East Tennessee, and others.

The priest-in-charge gave a short report during which he distributed copies of the Parish Profile which had been prepared as part of the work of the Search Committee, with the assistance of Dan Hoskins in identifying photographs. Both Father Howard and the Senior Warden thanked the committee for its efforts and patience throughout the search process. Search Committee Chair, Bob Parrott, then re-

ported for the committee by reading his letter of February 3, 2009, to the Senior Warden, which in material part stated the following: "This is the recommendation of a candidate to be considered by the Vestry of the Church of the Ascension for the position of Rector of the Parish. In accordance with the Charge to the Search Committee adopted by the Vestry on May 18, 2006, that committee, appointed by the Vestry on October 2, 2006, reports as follows: We, the Search Committee of the Church of the Ascension, Knoxville, Tennessee, following due consideration and assessment, have voted unanimously and do hereby present to the Church Vestry the Reverend Doctor Howard J. Hess to be considered for appointment as Rector of the Parish." Tom Hale asked the members of the Vestry if there were any issues, concerns, or questions they would like to ask Father Howard prior to the vestry's beginning its deliberation of the Search Committee's recommendation. There was only one. Robin Kell asked Father Howard if he "would be inclined to accept?" Father Howard responded "I would be inclined to accept!" Tom then asked Father Howard to leave the room while the vestry considered the recommendation before them. With Father Howard absent, Tom again asked if there were any issues or concerns that should be brought to light before the vestry made its decision. The room was silent with anticipation. Tom then asked if anyone would like to make a motion that the recommendation be accepted. All fifteen members of the vestry requested the honor of making that motion. The vote was taken. Approval was unanimous.

Father Howard took the opportunity to reflect on what he called a recent "moment of insight." This moment of insight revealed how life's journey goes in circles. Not long ago he received a letter from the church in South Carolina where his ministry began. That letter invoked strong feelings because it is the church where he was ordained. This church is going through the process of finding a rector and was asking Father Howard if he would consider being on their list of rector candidates. Of course, at that time, the same process at Ascension was nearing completion. As he looked at the Parish Profile for the church in South Carolina, he realized that he was not the person they were looking for. They were looking for someone else entirely. This is in contrast to the Parish Profile for Ascension where he believes the fit is excellent. Father Howard went on to say that he has found the leadership at Ascension to be extraordinary, exceeding his expectations in many ways. But now there is much work to be done. We must work together to establish solvency, so that we aren't praying every year for a big collection of pledges in December. We must do more toward implementing the Great Commission. We must provide more for our young people, with mission trips that will let them see the needs of the world for themselves. We must bring in new people who are reluctant or may have found other churches intimidating. They must find Ascension open to them. We have an ambitious agenda, but we must continue to do new things at the Church of the Ascension.