

Annual Parish Meeting  
Rector's Address  
February 1, 2015

As usual, let me begin by saying that it is my honor, privilege, and pleasure to be addressing you for the fifteenth time at an annual meeting. Let me also begin by thanking you for your support of our mutual ministry here at Christ Church. You are the ministers of the church, as defined by our Book of Common Prayer. Without you, there would be no Church. The laity is obviously the largest order of ministry, and they are involved in every level of leadership in the Episcopal Church. From our local vestry and commission chairs, to representatives from our parish to regional council, and diocesan council (as Jim shared with us about this morning), to deputies from our diocese to the general convention that will convene in Salt Lake City late this June, the laity are involved in setting budgets, establishing policies, and even doing theology in the Episcopal Church. So, thank you for being the Church.

I have already thanked the three members of the vestry who are rotating off, but let me thank the rest of our vestry too: Ray Crafton, our Senior Warden; Jeri Phillips, our Register; Mary Williams, our Treasurer; Linda Smith, our Assistant Treasurer; and other vestry members: Missie Jarman, Beverly McNeill, Roy Smith, and Tim Watts. I want to especially thank those who serve the parish for compensation. Two of the officers of the vestry, the treasurer and assistant treasurer, are paid. They and another five employees of the parish have taken a pay cut in 2015. The most drastic cut was in eliminating pay altogether for the Director of Christian Education, Jenny LeBlanc. Thanks to Jenny for continuing to chair the Education Commission, and to do many of her old duties as a volunteer; and thanks to everyone whom she recruited to take on some of her old duties. The others I'd like to name and thank are: Hannah Massey, our Organist; Kristine Clifford, our Choir Director; Bill Butler, our Sexton; and Ruth Feltner, our

Parish Secretary. Give these people a pat on the back for all the work they have done and continue to do for our parish. As I have heard Ray has say in the past, we don't really pay them what is right; it's more an honorarium than a wage. But we can show them how much we appreciate them.

Of course my thanks go to all of our ministry leaders, all commission chairs, everyone who serves on a commission, or who has any responsibilities for ministry. It's been a year now that Deacon Margaret has been officially with us. Thanks to her for her ministry. A big thanks to everyone who volunteers in the Thrift Shop. Cheryl Moynahan, the manager, and her two assistant managers, Kelli White and Angie Musten, deserve a lot of credit for the fact that they had their best year ever last year. Without the volunteers, not all of whom are members of Christ Church, the Thrift Shop would not be able to operate. Thanks to all of you.

I offer more thanks to everyone who has pledged to support the parish financially this year. As you know, we have had a wonderful response to a second appeal and a challenge grant.

Further thanks to everyone who has pledged to the Sharing in Ministry Capital Campaign. You have put us within striking distance of eliminating the debt on All Saints Hall. That's a remarkable achievement as we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this building this year.

I wish that everything I had to talk about today was good news. In my article in the current newsletter, I wrote about how we have been growing while we have been shrinking. As our average Sunday attendance has been shrinking, along with our pledges, we have at the same time been expanding our outreach ministries, and interacting with more and more people as the Church. What's more, I would say that our impact has grown. Our Thrift Shop's business is growing, I think expanding the customer base. The county's 208 Sale Trail introduced a bunch more people to our little shop. The people served by our Food Pantry are a pretty stable bunch these days, but we seem to keep getting more deeply involved with them. I normally come down

and say a prayer with them before we open the pantry. In November, we started doing a prayer service, complete with music, with our pantry clients and volunteers. It has been really well received. More than that, the week before last was the funeral that I wrote about in my newsletter article for one of the pantry clients. And another of our clients recently talked with me as she is doing some planning for the future. She asked if I would do her burial when the time comes. Of course, I agreed, and we will be working together to pre-plan that service. The same woman told me that she has named Christ Church in her will. I was touched. I was blown away, really. Obviously, she sees our church as her church, even though she does not worship with us on Sunday morning.

I have talked before about the powerful sense of community that exists between volunteers at the Thrift Shop and its customers, between volunteers at the Food Pantry and its clients. These relationships continue to grow and deepen. I see this as a very good thing, and an example of the kind of Incarnational Evangelism that I talked about in my sermon last Sunday. More than that, I really do believe that this is something like the shape of the Church in the future—more loose affiliations, more people relating to the church through community outreach rather than “regular membership”, and more creative ways to finance ministry, like the Thrift Shop and rental of space in All Saints Hall. No one knows what the Church will look like as this new century continues. The only thing that seems certain is that it will look different.

There are efforts ongoing to be intentional about shaping the Church of the future. For the past year the clericus in our region have been having a conversation about creative approaches to parish ministry, and Bishop Susan Goff is convening what she is calling a “Think Tank” of people to talk about this very thing. Earlier this month I was invited to be part of the Bishop’s Think Tank—it has always been a dream of mine to be in a think tank. So the future remains to be discovered, or invented.

This unknown future may be exciting, but it doesn't come without anxiety. I must admit that our financial issues and shrinking congregation have caused me plenty of concern. In fact, I'd be lying if I said that it isn't downright discouraging sometimes. As the vestry recently began to ask the question: How can we grow the parish? I found myself thinking, "I have been trying for 14 years to grow this parish. I don't know what else to do." Yet, when I find myself thinking those kinds of thoughts, and worrying about how our little parish will survive, I have to remind myself that the Church of Jesus Christ has been around for two millennia. It has survived persecution, heresy, internal conflict, changing cultures, many different kinds of government, wars, reformation, and all manner of threats to its survival, and still it endures. Why should I worry, why should any of us worry, that the Gospel will not be proclaimed. If we were silent, even the rocks would shout the Good News.

No, I believe that the Church for which Our Lord gave his life will continue. And our little 175 year old parish will continue too. There will definitely be changes coming, but we need not worry about them. God is in charge. Yes, God is in charge, but we must continue to do our part. No matter what shape the Church will have in the future, I believe that we will survive primarily by *being the Church*. Proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ by word and example; loving God, and our neighbor as ourselves; reaching out to our neighbors in need; and inviting people to 'Come and see', to have their own encounter with the divine as they worship with us. These fundamentals, if you will, are the bedrock of the faith that was once delivered to the Saints, and they must be our focus now, and always. Any future that includes the kind of commitment to Christ that I see in our members and in our ministries is one that I want to be a part of.

May God continue to bless this little parish.