

RECTOR'S REPORT 2001

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Epiphanytide 2001

Dear People of St. Peters!

If you look way up at the peak of the arch over the high altar at St. Peter's you will see two crossed keys painted in gold on the wall, the symbol of our patron saint Peter. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven," Jesus said after Peter had declared him to be Son of the living God.

Which is to say that the church built on Peter the rock is a community always charged with responsibility. What responsibility? Responsibility to proclaim Christ. Responsibility to do the work of Christ. Responsibility to live in such a way that the world is arrested by the thought, "Aha! So that's what God is like! That's what Christ is all about!"

So there's no limit to what God invites us to undertake, no limit to the journey we can undertake as Christians in community. Of course, we come up against our own limitations all the time, but the painful glory of life in Christ is that in the midst of all the humdrum of our weaknesses and frustrations we yet always have before us the luminous vision of what we were created to be.

Because gospel is a revelation of grace, not law, that perennial contrast need not afflict us with a sense of failure. Instead, it invites us into a more transparent encounter with the God who loves us more even than we love ourselves and whose compassion for us always exceeds our own. We can, therefore, afford to be real about who we are because in God's eyes what we can become is equally real.

It is in that spirit that we undertake the task of looking both forward and backward at this time of our annual meeting, assessing what has happened and where we are now, anticipating what new things God may be inviting us into. To stimulate your thinking I offer my own sense of these things, first in general observations of the parish as a whole, then in a number of particulars.

A helpful turn for me this past year was the sermon I offered in October on maturing in our faith as Christians. It arose out of my sense that as a parish we have not stressed sufficiently the spiritual growth that is essential to our life in God. Here are the four observations I made:

- *The maturing Christian takes responsibility for his or her own life of prayer and devotion.*
- *The maturing Christian experiences God as large enough to meet the largeness of life.*
- *Faith engages both thought and feeling, so the maturing Christian embraces both and is afraid of neither.*

• *For the maturing Christian, the church is a community of transformation, not only a personal haven.*

The scarcest resource for St. Peter's parishioners is not money or space but time. I suggest, however, that prayer and community catalyze a miracle like Jesus' feeding 5,000 from a few loaves and fishes. As we take time for prayer and to be with others, more time seems spun out of thin air or, shall we say, the breath of the Spirit.

So it is important that daily Morning Prayer continue as a standing invitation, that the flourishing Midweek Eucharist grow further, and that we offer retreats seasonally. Equally helpful to maturing in faith is the parish's small-group ministry: the Women's Prayer Breakfast; Sanctus for young adults; the Parents of Young Children, with whom I will be meeting about Christian family life; and the Youth Group, which has matured through offering service to the AIDS orphans of Africa. I hope these can be mustard seeds for more such groups. Recently we have found that there is a ready audience for spirituality forums that focus on the challenges of prayer and faith rather than on conventional themes of inspiration.

"Thinking outside the box" is now a well-worn slogan for innovation in organizational life, but it came up usefully in a recent conversation with the Wardens as we were mulling the question of how we move in these early years of the new century. Remarkable in the parish over the past ten years has been how much of what St. Peter's is known for has come from "thinking outside the box" — Wordworks, Afterworks, CommonCare, Jubilee 2000 activism, outstanding world mission. We've been good at creating an environment in which the new vision of an individual can be expressed and tested so that others gather around it.

It's equally true that what began outside the box eventually becomes part of the box, and we need to keep a ragged edge of our life to the new things that God may yet seek to do among us. We rejoice that St. Peter's is an extraordinarily active and vital parish. Yet the membership-to-work ratio of many parishes often applies to us too, namely, that 20% of the people do 80% of the work, with the consequent dangers of burnout and stagnation. While St. Peter's continues to draw many new people annually, Cantabrigian transience means that real growth depends on new folk exceeding move-aways, and right now we're just holding steady in both membership and attendance.

"St. Peter's needs to move to the next level of performance," commented one Vestry member. This is where the Goals Team, led by Funmi Johnson, is helping us look ahead to where we would like to be in 2005. Leadership training is one early priority, so that ministry leaders can be nurtured in patterns that create community and carry out real ministry. A process is being discussed that will articulate basic qualities for all our ministries and generate specific long-range goals out of each ministry. We are clear that such direction must arise organically out of consultation that includes and excites all parish leaders, and we hope this will be well underway this winter.

2000 featured several major initiatives. One was the culmination of the process of deciding whether to sell, subdivide or retain the Rectory. It was an interesting question, for it brought pastoral, theological, practical and economic considerations into play. This is precisely the kind of issue that can divide a parish community, and St. Peter's was able to avoid that by insisting that the top criterion for any decision be that the consensus of the parish could live with it. This modeled the kind of mutual deference that Paul talks about in Philippians 2, and it is remarkable that the discussions never remotely resembled acrimony. The outcome, as we know, was a decision to retain the Rectory, with a commitment to upgrade the building significantly over time.

A major and high-profile ministry beyond the parish was the sending of three missionaries to Zimbabwe early in the year. Amos Presler served six months as a Volunteer for Mission teaching at Bonda Primary School, and Liz and Lin Parsons left in February for three years of lay education and health work in the Diocese of Manicaland. The Parsons have been remarkable in raising support for their work, which has attracted a good deal of attention. St. Peter's Jubilee 2000 advocacy and the Parsons' work coincided wonderfully as the Diocese of Massachusetts decided to devote its Jubilee Fund, which included \$1,750 from St. Peter's own jubilee commitment, to the Manicaland AIDS Project, and the initial \$45,000 grant was routed through the parish's Zimbabwe Mission Fund.

Healing and visiting ministries have received extra attention recently with the healing ministers gathering in retreat and their members being commissioned with the leadership of Danny Velez. More parish visitors are carrying out their ministry since a check-in meeting with Diane Wong and Daphne Noyes, and we look forward to further strengthening this winter and spring. Since the death of beloved Grace Muller in later October, the Prayer Chain is being renewed by Stephanie Spellers. BridgeBuilders has fielded several welcome brunches with the leadership of Chitral De Mel, but more need to join this ministry to ensure that all newcomers are reached and incorporated effectively into the parish.

The tenure of Ellie Panasevich as assistant rector through the year was a blessing, for Ellie offered wonderful ministry, especially in the pastoral care of individuals and groups. It was sad to bid her farewell on Sunday, 7 January, but we all wish her well in her ministry at St. Michael's in Milton. Right now it is unclear when resources will make it possible to engage a successor, but we pray that it may be so later this year. Meanwhile, it is a joy to have with us the Rev'd Gareth Evans of the UK as priest associate. The year saw the departure of two other clergy associates to other ministries. Anthony Miller is now priest-in-charge at St. Augustine & St. Martin's, the Roxbury parish Jane Butterfield served for three years. Won-Jae Hur is assisting at the Episcopal Chaplaincy at Boston University, where he is also studying for a master's degree, and it was a joy to present him for ordination to the priesthood on 16 December.

Hazel Somerville's arm was put right by her August surgery, thanks be to God, ending her year-long ordeal and returning her to the organ bench in November. We've been very grateful for Matthew Burt's filling in so well, and he's had a rather intense seminarian's

experience! Vyonna De Mel's ministry with children both in the Church School and in Afterworks continues to go well, and she attracts and retains excellent staff members. Bob Mackie continues to serve ably as parish administrator, and many appreciate the pastoral care he brings as a retired rector himself. The sexton's position saw a major transition as Calvin Goffigan moved on after six years of good work and Clarence White came with special skills as a carpenter, painter and handyman that were swiftly put to work. John Manoussakis served well as administrative assistant to the rector but needed a fuller work schedule. His place was taken by Gena Gourley, who brings a helpfully rapid-response approach to this part-time position alongside her vocational exploration as a Micah Project intern. Altogether it is a joy to work with such a fine staff.

The parish continues to be a significant training ground for ministry. Walter Stevens of EDS completed two years of field work in June and left to be ordained to the diaconate in Hawaii. Matthew Burt of HDS is in the second year of his field work. Jennifer Heckart completed her Micah Project internship. As a postulant intern from St. Paul's Cathedral, Diane Wong is working on liturgy, preaching, Sanctus, Sunday School, and Parish Visitors. It has been good to have own Daphne Noyes, candidate for the diaconate, back from her internship at the cathedral, and postulant Adrien Stair's CommonCare ministry continues to grow.

St. Peter's is blessed with good leaders. Meeting with Wardens Lois Bennett and Frank Smith is one of the joys of every week, and it is good for you to know that parish affairs receive such consistent oversight. Susan Fisher is retiring as treasurer after several stellar years, Ann Makarias is retiring as a painstakingly accurate and thorough clerk, and Pat Drake is retiring as she reaches the statutory limit of six years as a discrete, caring and efficient collector. We will miss them on the Vestry, but we are grateful that other very capable people have offered themselves to serve in those ministries.

This June I will have completed ten years in St. Peter's. I hope to have Peter Gomes for a return preaching engagement sometime during the year. I mull the idea of a panel discussion evening on the challenges of urban ministry. I will be gratified as our goals and leadership initiatives get underway. And I would be delighted if the elevator project for the handicapped and elderly moves with our design approved by the city and fundraising well underway. St. Peter's has been a great enterprise in my life. I am grateful to you and eager for our continuing ministry together.

Yours in Christ,

Titus

