

## **Rector's Report November 11, 2012**

"Where Anglican tradition engages the contemporary world, Grace Church opens its doors on Madison's Capitol Square, inviting all to join us in sharing the love of Jesus Christ in worship and in outreach to our neighbors and the world."

Our new mission statement, appearing above and on the Annual Meeting agenda received final approval from the vestry at its October meeting. The statement was almost three years in process of development with input from vestry members, staff, and parishioners. Even Bishop Miller weighed in. The lengthy process of formulation reflects the seriousness with which those who participated in its crafting took the task, but a mission statement is not an end goal, an accomplishment. It is the articulation of who we believe we are called to be as Grace Church on Capitol Square. Now comes the greater task, living into and embodying that mission as we seek to live out and proclaim the gospel.

If there is a dominant theme in my ministry at Grace, it has to do with adapting to the rapidly changing context in which we live, both the larger culture, and more importantly, within Christianity and most particularly, within the Episcopal Church. The old certainties have given way and we are charting new territory. It's tempting to look at the stone walls of Grace Church that have stood for more than 150 years on this corner of Capitol Square, the oldest building still standing on the square, and imagine that Grace will be here in 150 years as well. But members of our Buildings and Grounds Committee can tell you that the foundation on which those walls stand is not permanent.

The Master Plan process is one way of helping us move into the future. It is a courageous, even daring, move into the future. Our physical plant was designed with the ministry and mission needs of the nineteenth and twentieth century in mind. It no longer suits our purposes or needs. More importantly, it limits how we might engage the future and our neighborhood. It has shaped how we live in our community. The remark we so often hear from passers-by, "I walk past this building every day, but I've never been inside," is more than sad; it reflects the priorities we have had—that this building exists for us and not for the city. Think about all of those marathoners or tri-athletes or visitors to Taste of Madison or Art Fair on the Square, who run or walk by the closed doors of Grace while we complain that there's no parking. How can we connect our congregation's life to the lives of all those who live, work, and play downtown? How can we share the good news of Jesus Christ on the sidewalks of Capitol Square, not just inside our red doors? The Master Plan and whatever renovations result from it will be a failure if we do not ask those questions as well as questions about accessibility, functionality, and attractiveness of our space.

While we work to strengthen and enhance the physical spaces of Grace Church, we also need to work on strengthening the ties of community that bind us together.

Those of us involved in the Master Planning process were overwhelmed by the response and involvement of so many people in the early stages of providing input. That's a sign of the vibrant life of our community. But we need to do more. We need to find ways of building opportunities for fellowship within the parish that go beyond coffee hour. We also need to work at deepening our relationships with Jesus Christ.

I was surprised to discover from the survey we handed out during worship services in September that more than 40% of those who responded have been attending Grace for less than five years. What are we doing to incorporate them into our parish? How are we providing opportunities to become disciples of Jesus Christ? These are urgent questions that come up again and again as I meet with newcomers who are looking for ways to get involved at Grace. I hope this will become one focus of the vestry's activity in the coming year. To that end, we will again be offering a weekly Eucharist on Wednesday evenings during Advent and Lent and this year I will be offering an opportunity following the Eucharist to engage in conversations about faith, theology, and our life with Jesus Christ.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Grace's clergy and staff. Deacon Carol Smith continues to be the "go-to" person for pastoral care. She coordinates our Eucharistic Visitors and maintains relationship with our homebound members. I'm also grateful to the ministry among us of the Rev. Margaret Irwin and the Rev. Charles Granger. Charles regularly celebrates the Eucharist at our 12:00 service and Margaret provides leadership to our Healing Prayer team.

Our staff continues to work creatively and with humor in a challenging environment. This year we've seen increasing stability with the formal designation of Janet as Financial and Parish Administrator. Jody and Lauren have become familiar with Grace and with the curiosities of the Episcopal Church and together with Janet have been flexible in responding to new situations and problems. Greg and Berkley have continued to offer beautiful and profound music, most notably in last week's presentation of the Faure Requiem. In her short time as Food Pantry Coordinator, Lorraine has done a great job of providing leadership and guidance during difficult times and is beginning to cast a vision for the pantry's future that is both exciting and transformative for the lives of those we serve. And then there's Russ, who is in many ways the heartbeat of Grace. His contributions to our common life, our ministry and mission are too many to list, but I think it's safe to say that we wouldn't survive long without him.

I would also like to thank personally our outgoing vestry members. The members of the class of 2012—Mary Ann Germanson, Terry Gibson, and Kenn JeSchonek have each given of their time, their gifts and skills to enhance our common life and administration. We will be hard-pressed to fill their shoes. Mary Ann has served as chair of the Nominating Committee; she coordinates volunteers for First Monday, and is a member of the Master Plan Steering Committee. She also sings in the choir. She will continue some of those responsibilities. Terry chairs our Personnel

Committee, which has been very active in the past years, producing position descriptions, conducting ministry reviews of staff, producing a personnel handbook and other policies and procedures, as well as assisting with the hiring of new employees. Kenn JeSchonek has been active in stewardship for many years and currently serves on Finance Committee, is a trustee of the Development Trust, an usher, and our unofficial photographer. I would also like to thank Stephen Rhody who agreed to fill out the remainder of the year's term for Ginny Shannon when she became Junior Warden. I have come to rely on Stephen's wisdom, insight, and perspective.

Thanks to the members of the Executive Committee. We saw transition this year with the resignations of Bruce Croushore as Junior Warden and Nelson Flynn as Treasurer. Both of them did a great deal to establish a firm administrative grounding to our organization. They were replaced by Ginny Shannon as Junior Warden and Stan Kruger as Treasurer. Along with Senior Warden Mary Ann Cook, our lay leadership has a wealth of diverse experience and perspective, deep commitment to Grace, and a vision for the future that will help us move forward as a congregation.

2012 has been an exciting and busy year. 2013 promises more of the same. As we continue to worship and work together, let us pray that we continue to experience God's presence among us and that we continue to share our love of Jesus Christ with our neighbors and the world.

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