



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church

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The Rev. Jerrold Thompson

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany; the Sunday of the Annual Meeting

St. Mark's on the Campus

January 28, 2007

MOST OF YOU KNOW how particular I am that the sermon be related to the readings of the day. It's simply good liturgy! So whenever that's not that case, I feel obligated to explain myself. Today is the day of the Annual Meeting, so my remarks are going to be more an interpretation of this faith community than of the scriptural text.

As I was getting ready for the Annual Meeting, I found myself reading the Annual Report. As I did so, I felt something akin to what I feel when I sit and watch one of my children playing in band or fencing or dancing or receiving some award. I felt proud of what this parish is doing in ministry. I felt pleased with how deliberately and seriously this parish takes its call in Christ. The ministry of the baptized is alive and well here at St. Mark's on the Campus, and I hope that in the coming years we can only continue to nurture it and make it even more vibrant than it already is.

Let me share with you some of my own hopes, dreams, and plans for the coming year, as we continue to serve Jesus in this place. As all of you know, our staff continues to be in flux. Several months ago, we welcomed Kurt Knecht among us as our new Music Director, and I express with confidence how pleased we *all* are with God leading Kurt to us.

Ben Carlisle has faithfully been serving as our Interim Administrative Assistant since the end of March last year. And even though he's now working at First Plymouth on Sunday mornings, let me take this opportunity to thank Ben publicly for his service to this

community during these months. I have appreciated both the skills he offers as well as the enjoyment of having him around the office during this time.

That said, the time has now come for Ben and Jerry's to close shop here at 13th & R. A search has begun for a permanent person to fill the Administrative Assistant's position. The incoming Senior Warden, Susan Musick, and Anne Puls, a woman of many talents—including human resources—have agreed to conduct final interviews with me when we arrive at that point.

One of the changes that we'll be introducing with the new Administrative Assistant is that he or she will assume some of the bookkeeping responsibilities that the Treasurers currently are doing. We anticipate that this transition will enable the Treasurers' positions to return to volunteer rather than paid positions in the not too distant future.

To turn more directly to the ministry of the people of God here at St. Marks on the Campus, I always like to think of the priorities expressed when you were in your search for a new Rector as I consider what and how we're doing as a community in following the call of Jesus.

Many of you will remember that the first priority was increasing campus ministry. We continue to work hard on that goal, as you'll see in the Annual Report. If I have any words of wisdom about our endeavor, they would be to remind us all that expanding campus ministry is going to remain hard work for some time to come. In order to continue expanding our campus ministry—in order to continue to live into the vision that God has for our ministry as St. Mark's on the Campus—it will require many things:

- first and foremost all of our prayers, deliberately and intentionally offered daily to God as we continue to discern the Lord's leading in our corporate life;
- our courage to try new things and to succeed at some and not to succeed at others;
- an ever-deepening passion and love for the students to whom and with whom we are called to minister;

and, the deliberate effort on everyone's part to begin thinking about how the ministries that are already in place dovetail with our campus outreach efforts.

In other words, expanding campus outreach cannot be just the effort of one committee coming up with new ideas; it needs to be the effort of all of us thinking and working together about how to use the ministries already in place to create new opportunities for students to connect with Jesus Christ through this community.

Staffing is an issue in the area of campus outreach, as well. One of the things I've become aware of during my time as your Rector is that there are two jobs here: one as Rector and Pastor of the parish and one as Chaplain to the university. As much as they overlap with one another, they also can be easily distinguished from one another, and in some ways they need to be. They require a different focus and the use of different gifts for ministry.

During the financial stewardship campaign, you heard that we might be taking on a Curate beginning this summer. He would be paid partially by this parish but primarily by the diocesan family. A Curate is *not* a Chaplain. A Curate is a newly ordained person directly out of seminary who is placed in a parish under a seasoned priest for two years to get his or her feet wet. A Curate is expected to have a wide variety of parish experiences, and any curate coming to St. Mark's on the Campus would have that variety of experiences.

However, in this place, he also would have as a focused responsibility serving as the priestly liaison with campus ministry.

This potential remains only a possibility at this stage. The Bishop assured me that we are moving close to the point where I can meet with this person and see if I believe him to be a good match both with this parish and with myself. This week I've been in touch with him and in the not too distant future I'll be traveling to Chicago to meet with him.

I want to underscore that anyone coming to serve as a Curate would only augment the work the people of God are doing in campus ministry within this community.

As is true with your Rector, a Curate—or even a Chaplain—would primarily lead and support the ministry into which all of *you* are called. None of us are off the hook if we get a Curate this year!

I want to mention several other items this morning as I look ahead to the coming year. Firstly, I hope that we can continue to work on improving communication within our community. To this end, I have initiated the Vestry Summary in the Roar, regular notes from vestry meetings so that everyone has a sense of what your leadership is dealing with and thinking about. I also am asking that the deadline for the Roar be moved back even more so that we can get it into parishioners' hands before the beginning of the month.

Those are relatively simple things to do; I admit that making the deadline of the Roar earlier will be as hard on me as on anyone; changing habits can be difficult—and boy that month rolls around fast! But there's another dimension—a more challenging dimension—to communication that I would like to see us thinking about; that is to have us all focus on communicating *for the newcomer*, not for the person who already knows everyone's name, address and social security number. It's so easy for *any* of us to assume—I catch myself doing it on a regular basis now that I know you—that the person or people to whom we're talking know who Susie is or John is, for example, rather than using someone's full name, their responsibility with a particular event that's being talked about, and sharing how to contact them. In other words, when we're speaking or writing about something, we must assume that the listener or reader knows nothing—because the newcomer often knows little more than that. Of course that's true about the old-timer where new initiatives are concerned. And in a community filled with vibrant, creative, faithful people such as this one is there will always be new initiatives coming forward.

Secondly, I trust that we will continue making progress toward much-needed building improvements in the coming year. As we do so, it will require another level of

commitment on all of our parts. A lot of care for what God has entrusted to us has been deferred over the years here at St. Mark's on the Campus, and it's time for us to begin addressing those needs. Doing so might very well require a long-term vision and long-term approach. We're up to it—because we are up to whatever it is that the Lord calls us into—not on our own, but as we say in the baptismal liturgy, “with God's help.”

Two final notes. I hope that 2007 is the year that I can initiate a liturgy committee to begin thinking about our liturgy in a deliberate fashion. As Episcopalians, as Anglicans, our worship of God is at the heart of all that we do, and I want to have a group that is focused on our liturgy in a very deliberate way. Likewise, I hope that it's also the year that we can initiate a Technology Committee so that a group of people is thinking about how we best use technology to support and promote our various ministries in Jesus' name, especially because God calls our primary outreach to be to an age group that lives and always has lived connected to wires.

So. 2007 is shaping up to be a busy year as we manifest Jesus here at the corner of 13th & R. It's shaping up to be an exciting year, too. Full of ministry and service and faithful activity. Full of the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding us and leading us and *moving* us into the future, firmly rooted in the faith of those who have gone before us in this place, built on the one who is the chief cornerstone, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Once again, as I've said so many times before, thank you for granting me the immense joy and privilege to serve among you. It is a pleasure for which I thank Jesus daily, as I pray for the guidance of His Spirit in living out my particular ministry among all of you who are the community of ministers that comprise St. Mark's on the Campus.

God bless you, and may all we do in the coming year be a blessing to God as well.