

Warden's Report – Stewardship
11-13-2011

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John:3:1-3)

This reading during the Bishop's visit was very pertinent then and worth repeating now. I am reminded of last year's report with its emphasis on the blessings bestowed on us through membership at St. Mark's; I am reminded of my pride at being part of that. Last Sunday was a devastating Sunday for the five who were to be confirmed and for the entire St. Mark's community/family. However, as it says in the Epistle, "we are God's children; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: we will be like him for we will see him as he is."

As our vision statement says, St. Mark's has been an evolving, maturing community of Christians attempting to become a total ministry community with a commitment to the Episcopal Church. The "enthusiastically Episcopalian" participation in last Sunday's service—the witnessing by example of those who renewed their Baptismal vows and the entire congregation's support for them in prayer and spirit-filled singing—all made me especially grateful for our community.

The gala reception, held afterward orchestrated masterfully by Patty Crower, was the perfect celebration for successful confirmation preparation, for all the saints, for the renewal of vows and for our membership in St. Mark's. All this went through my mind last Sunday as it does today.

Renewing our baptismal vows—promising to work, pray and give for the spread of God's kingdom—continues from last week to this week to next week and the next week as we attempt to follow Christ's great command: Love God and Love Your Neighbor. Yes, I continue to be very proud as a member of St. Mark's Chapel where we offer Sunday school; Bible study, prayer and foyer groups; and wonderful social gatherings.

Obviously, the issue uppermost in most minds today is what happened last Sunday and the four days prior. As most of you know, the Bishop determined that he would not conduct confirmation at St. Mark's as he had originally suggested but offered instead to include our confirmation with All Saint's in their service on Hilton Head. Our confirmands chose not to do that but instead to postpone theirs until a later date. The people to be confirmed, the Warden, and the confirmation instructor had no choice regarding the location. Today is the first opportunity to provide clarification to the congregation about what actually happened

leading up to that event; immediately after this service, Jack Nietert and I will give you some details, entertain questions, and moderate discussion.

For now, let me turn to some of the issues our Chapel Committee has addressed during the other 51 weeks. For several months, we have been talking with the owner of the building where St. Mark's Center is located about the possibility of also renting the adjacent vacant space, the former restaurant property. After several inspections, once with an architect and a builder, we determined that the expense would be prohibitive. The estimates ranged from \$25,000 to \$35,000. In the first place, we don't have that kind of money, and, second, the move, as one board member said, "...would have been entirely irresponsible when we have so many other important ministries and needs."

The primary financial need at present is for an increase in clergy service and compensation. We are blessed with capable, devoted clergy. As it stands now, their only compensation is for conducting worship services, which by no means covers pastoral care and visits, teaching, developing and planning worship and other priestly duties. The Diocesan compensation schedule for chaplain services indicates our need to add \$15,000 to \$20,000 to our budget in order to support those increased clergy activities.

Last year, we went out on a limb, increasing our facilities expense by taking over the center property on Paris Ave. While we anticipate and hope for more growth in the Christian education program, we are delighted to have had that space for that and for our social gatherings on Sundays as well as for mid-week activities: Bible study, prayer group, committee meetings and confirmation classes. In a goodwill gesture, we have also opened the facility to a group of Port Royal leaders who meet weekly on Wednesday mornings.

Fortunately, last year we were able to absorb that expense because of an increase in contributions and pledging. We hope that this year will enable us to cover the increase in chaplaincy compensation.

Certainly, stewardship at St. Mark's is more than money and more than just an annual fund drive, but the fund drive is necessary to continue the vital and expanding ministries we have undertaken.

Presently, the Chapel Committee is focusing on future clergy leadership for St. Mark's. We are blessed with dedicated, loving, retired Episcopal priests in our area who have been supportive in their ordained capacity and as active "lay/civilian" members of the parish in their own right. A committee has been formed to work with them to develop a "cadre of padres" who will continue clergy support.

In the past, we have relied on one retired clergy person to be the acting chaplain for St. Mark's. Not surprisingly, it has proved to be a difficult assignment for one person given the need for personal retirement travel, prolonged two- to- six-month stays in other communities, and service to other chapels. Consequently, spreading the clergy responsibility among 3 or 4 retired priests seems to make good sense, and we will try to implement such a model.

NO SMALL MATTER is this: St. Mark's is in a period of transition, going from a small family-type church group setting to a second-level, larger membership generally referred to as the Pastoral Level. The eventual goal would be having a full or significant part-time Vicar. In the meantime, we rejoice that we have available such talented, willing retired priests. Please keep our growth in mind when considering your pledge and financial aspects of the stewardship program in the next couple of weeks.

If pride is indeed a sin, pray especially hard and often for me, because as I said earlier, I AM PROUD! I am proud to belong to a group that contributed \$2200 to the Dominican Republic ministry we share with our sister congregation, All Saints'-Hilton Head, \$725 to the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund for relief for victims of the Japanese tsunami, contributions to our ongoing ministry to Family Promise for homeless families which we co-host with St. John's Lutheran Church, contributions to HELP of Beaufort, and our Peace Tree creation at the Festival of Trees. We have also donated on a national basis to the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund and the Episcopal Church a tithe of \$4800.

We have attempted to be involved in the Port Royal community, most recently presenting the Trunk or Treat Halloween festivities. We helped the Historic Foundation by manning a barbeque and rib booth at the Sands for the Fourth of July festivities and, for one of the street music occasions, had a lemonade stand. We also won a prize in the annual Christmas parade last year! Our kazoo band is second to none.

In the future, we hope to have more of those kinds of activities and are considering opening the center to other religious and charity groups' use, and perhaps hosting a Port Royal Day to honor the workers and leaders of our base community. We also established a Chapel administration position, affectionately known as "the verger" and are pleased for Ken Kraft to have filled that position.

Yes, I am proud to be a member of this community of Episcopalians and what we strive to do in discerning the will and guidance of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit certainly was ever with us last All Saints Sunday in our disappointment about the Bishop's decision not to conduct confirmation. It seemed that everyone at the service was resolute in the desire to make that service and the following reception a testimony to the nature of St. Mark's Chapel.

Your Chapel Committee joins me in thanking you for your patience, your spirituality and your ministry to St. Mark's.

Several of us will remain after the final hymn for those of you who might want to ask questions or enter into a discussion, in particular, about the Bishop's decision and its fall-out.

Again, thank you and may God bless us all.

Scott Shaffer,
Warden