

Vestry Vision

Introduction

We are all called to be saints in the church of God. Not because we are perfect, but because we are prepared to face the difficulties of being human in a way that creates space for grace for others and ourselves. Join me in creating this space for you and your family, and our whole community.

Back in August the Vestry got together to talk about Transfiguration past, present and future. We wore funny hats to break the ice, and shared our hopes and fears.

The issues we face

The conversation was valuable and we identified some of the challenges we face as a community. We looked hard at our finances, our staff resources, our volunteer resources and the situation we found ourselves in after the long interim.

During the period of the interim we scaled back from two full time clergy to one. At the same time the country (the whole world in fact) was experiencing a financial downturn, which has inevitably affected Transfiguration's finances. It is not realistic for us to consider appointing a second full time clergy person in the near future because of this.

We were also aware that the jobs people do in church might not always be the best fit, and that the long interim had caused some to experience 'burn out' in roles that they could not see ending.

We were mindful that people had busy work lives and that the environment of the peninsula is often a pressurized one, and that time for church events was often limited. This also means that time for socializing with people at church can be limited. The creation of deep and lasting 'bonds of affection' can suffer in this kind of environment.

Finally we were aware that our three services on a Sunday did not allow for maximum mixing between the various congregations that gathered each week, and that some greater interchange might be welcome.

Vision to address these issues

In order to face these challenges the Vestry worked hard to distil into a brief statement what we think is wonderful and remarkable about Transfiguration.

Responding to our call to serve God we:

Pray Thoughtfully

Think Openly

Serve Joyfully

We believe this sums up who we have been, who we are and who we aspire to be. This statement can help us to focus our energy on being a better version of what we already are, but also what we could be even more deeply in future.

1. Pray Thoughtfully

So we **pray thoughtfully** – when we come to worship we do not check our brains at the door, but we engage in worship in ways that build up the community and also our intellectual as well as our heart felt appreciation of our faith. Our patterns of worship really aid this goal, but we could do better at focusing worship to achieve this goal more deeply.

In order to mix more in worship and also experience the energy that comes from the whole congregation meeting together and we have decided to try merging the 9:30am and 10:30am services once a month, on the first Sunday of the month, for the first six months of 2012. By doing this we hope to have a sense of ourselves as a gathered community. We have decided not to ask the 8am congregation to merge every month, but to still do so four times a year. This merging of the 9:30am and 10:30am congregations will take place at 10am and we hope to provide some adult formation classes before and after the service in the space that opens up. Please give this new arrangement a go – we are going to adapt both the 9:30 and 10:30 liturgies in creative ways to make sure that things fit and work for both communities. A child friendly liturgy of the word will be provided in a variety of ways in these services, sometimes by the children going to their own special story time and sometimes in the service itself. We will also seek to provide a nourishing adult focused sermon at each of these services.

2. Think Openly

We **think openly** – it is our desire as Episcopalians to balance faith with rationality. We are engaged in asking deep questions about faith and exploring them thoroughly. In the busy life of the peninsula it is hard to find time to do this, but many have said to me that they feel ‘undernourished’ in their church life. It is this area that we can develop most and will have most benefit in the long run as we develop a ‘deep’ faith as well as a lively one. This means finding spaces when we can meet for deeper conversation about Faith. I am trying to create these kinds of spaces, but need to ask those who have sought ‘nourishment’ to create that space in their own lives and make use of the resources we offer.

This fall we have offered the Charis class as an introduction to Christian faith; we have held our parish retreat and the womens’ retreat, youth retreat and mens’ retreat will take place in the year to come; we will offer a lent course and some presentations on topics of interest on Sunday mornings around regular services from time to time. These opportunities are all there to be taken and are as much for building relationships as for learning about faith.

3. Serve Joyfully

Finally we hope to **Serve Joyfully** – but there is a real sense that joyful service is not possible if we all feel under pressure to deliver without enough time to do it. One of the realizations the Vestry and I made whilst talking about this was that some people have taken on tasks as volunteers that they saw needed doing, and have then committed to them indefinitely, even though they do not seem to be a good fit for them. We are starting a project today that offers three concepts that will help to restore joy to our volunteering service.

Firstly, choice!

Secondly, change!

Thirdly, Sabbatical!

There are two notice boards set up in the hall – one represents volunteering for the last year. The other represents choices for the coming year.

Please put a post it note on the 2011 board for anything you have been volunteering for in the last year. We want to note who is doing what and give thanks for that service – we also want everyone to ‘see’ what it takes to run the church in terms of volunteering.

Then look at the 2012 board. It is blank! It is full of the volunteering opportunities that are available for the coming year (starting Calendar year 2012). Put your name up where you want to volunteer. You can choose where. If you want to do the same thing over again then please do. If you want to choose to change then please do. There is a description of every volunteer role under the boards along with a list of those who coordinate each role if you want to see who to talk to about it. But it is up to you to choose a role that will energize you.

There are some jobs that no one wants to do, but need to be undertaken in order for the church to run. Please consider doing something you enjoy alongside one of these other tasks that might be thought of as more ‘mundane’. Please also note: **YOU ARE ONLY COMMITTING FOR A YEAR!** We will review volunteering again next November, and you can change what you are doing then. So perhaps one of these more mundane jobs can be managed for a year!

So that covers ‘choice’ and ‘change’ what about ‘sabbatical’?

Volunteering Project

Some people need a break, that is clear from conversations I and the Vestry have had. If you need a break from one or more of the roles you are doing put your name in sabbatical. If you want a complete break from every volunteering role, put your name in sabbatical and no where else.

If your name is there we promise not to ask you to do anything for the duration of the time your name is in that category. You can come into church knowing that if anyone asks you to undertake a task you can simply reply – I am on sabbatical.

The worst case scenario of this ‘burn out’ phenomenon is when someone feels that they cannot get out of a volunteering role unless they leave the church entirely. I am really keen that we bring that to an end immediately. No one is to suffer in silence here doing a job they can no longer do due to burn out. The second element of the worst case scenario is that people don’t come to church some Sundays because they are afraid they will be asked to do one more thing. This volunteer board and the sabbatical section will be one way we can tackle that phenomenon. Again, if you are in the sabbatical column **IT IS** your volunteer choice for the year, and if someone asks you to take on an extra task you can say: I am on sabbatical.

What is a sabbatical? It comes from the word for Sabbath in the Old Testament. After God created the heavens and the earth in six days he rested for one. We have a weekend now for rest and recuperation, but sabbaticals have also become important for professionals (particularly for academics and clergy). We are all meant to take a sabbatical once every seven or so years. Fields were meant to be allowed to lay fallow once every seven years according to the Old Testament. This was so that they could be refreshed and not drained of all nutrients.

When we work without rest we risk being burned out and then not being able to 'serve joyfully'. The sabbatical idea at Transfiguration is to allow for those of us who are in need of nourishment to get it. Now, I have to add that 'sabbatical' does not just mean 'doing nothing' or taking a 'break from church'. It is a period in which you do things differently in order to refresh your spiritual life. So you don't volunteer, but you do commit to attend worship as a way of refreshing your spiritual life, and to talking to the Rector or other clergy about your experience of being burnt out, and undertaking some other course, retreat or activity in the year that is designed to nourish you. Under the banner of 'Thinking Openly' we are putting on a wide range of spiritually and intellectually 'nourishing' activities in the coming year. Those on sabbatical should seek to undertake one or two of these opportunities. They will help you grow in community, faith and refreshment.

Some of you will find it very very hard indeed to take a break! I know that full well. I have had conversations over the years with habitual volunteers who go through cycles of enthusiasm and burn out. Part of the sabbatical process is to ask yourself why you do that, and to seek help from the clergy in balancing your prayer life, study life and volunteer life so that you can sustain the level of volunteering that is right for you. This is an attempt to avoid the 'spiritual boom and bust' of over committing and then getting burned out by that process.

For some, this will mean sitting with the pain of receiving. I don't use that phrase lightly. For some of us we are much more comfortable giving until we have no more to give rather than sitting and receiving nourishment or ministry. Well we are called on by God to be good stewards of all he has given us, including our own energy and capacity – so it is not good enough just to give in to the desire to serve every time we are asked. We sometimes need to say no and simply receive the love and nourishment we are being offered in the church.

There is a real difference between two kinds of 'No' I hear in church circles. There is the big 'NO' and the little 'no'. The little no is the one we can never utter – when someone asks us to do just one more thing we cannot say the little 'no' and we say yes until we are so overburdened that we wind up saying the big 'NO' to everything. We leave the church burnt out and disheartened.

I want to help those of you who have trouble saying the little 'no' to set boundaries for yourself in church and life that help you to reach a happy medium.

There are two sides to the question of volunteers experiencing burn out – the institutional side, and the individual side.

The institutional side is about the way in which the institution asks us to undertake tasks. We are working really hard in this project to address the culture of our institution to create healthy patterns of asking people to volunteer within their capacity. The individuals' responsibility is to acknowledge how much they can do and say yes or no accordingly.

Community Building

The last thing I want to talk about is the idea of **'deepening the bonds of affection'**, or growing together in community. This phrase: 'deepening the bonds of affection' is often used in Anglican circles world wide to describe the kind of relationships we can have between different parts of our world communion. Sometimes it does not seem that the 'bonds of affection' run very deep at all – they have to be worked on. The same is true for Transfiguration. We have to work on developing a real and vital community life. If we follow the three steps outlined above: praying thoughtfully, thinking openly and serving joyfully, each will aid our growth as a community. We need to focus on welcoming newcomers though, and maintaining a thriving parish communal life in the face of increasing demands of life on the peninsula. There is a responsibility on individual parishioners to explore their priorities in relation to worship – this is not to add one more pressure to life for you – but if you value the life of Transfiguration then regular attendance and support will benefit both you and the community. However, the Vestry and I bear a responsibility to make sure that your time here is worth while, spiritually nourishing and a positive experience of Christian community. To help facilitate this the vestry has created a new board in our governance structure called the 'Community Building Board' to gather together all activities that help us to grow in community. We hope this will indicate how seriously we need to take the job of 'growing together in love.' Remember 1 John 4v7 says: 'beloved, let us love one another.'

Vestry meetings, Boards and Budget

A word on our board structure: on our reflection day, as we thought about the overburdening on people of meetings we decide to invest effort in developing our board structure, but also in lessening the load of meetings on every volunteer in the Vestry and on Boards. We will have six vestry meetings a year next year instead of 12, and ask each board to meet no more than six times. The Vestry will meet in January, March, May, July, September and November. The Boards will be asked to meet in between so that no one has to make more than one meeting a month (this is on the basis that all vestry members will also be asked to take a board role).

The Boards we have decided to have for the coming year are:

- Buildings and Grounds – Tim Fox (Chair)
- Faith Formation – Kristen Kearns (Chair)
- Outreach – Rev Davidson Bidwell-Waite (Chair)
- Community Building – Virginia Fox (Chair)
- Liturgy – Coleen Travers (Chair)
- Communication – Mike Robinson (Chair)

There will also be a standing committee of the Vestry on Finance. I have also asked Jan Jensen to be an advisor to the Rector and Vestry on Administration. Finally we will be

exploring Childcare during the 10:30am service in a working group to be set up in the new year.

We hope this board structure will support our mission over the coming year and if you are interested in any of the areas mentioned then please come and speak to me or the chair of that board.

Finally a word on the budget: The Vestry took very seriously the challenges of setting a budget in the current financial downturn. We were not sure how the Stewardship campaign would unfold, and the fact that it has been successful beyond our expectations could not be guaranteed at that point.

The Vestry had decided, therefore, not to set a deficit budget for 2012 as we believed that it was an unsustainable practice and we could not be sure of extra funds coming in during the year to bolster pledging and space use. We are working very hard to secure more income from space use, but that too is struggling in the current financial circumstances. We decided to hold a robust Stewardship campaign, with the understanding that it should be completed by the end of November and budget decisions for 2012 would be taken in early December. The Vestry was prepared to make the hard decisions to make our budget balance. This could have included cutting programs and reducing staffing.

It is too soon to give a full analysis of the Stewardship campaign – but we are in a stronger position than we had anticipated, when the Vestry has fully deliberated on the budget we will report back to the parish on the budget for 2012.

Conclusion

So here you have it: a description of our challenge, a vision for addressing it, and practical ways in which we hope to move forward together to fulfill our vision.

This is my report on where we are in terms of challenges, vision and strategies for moving forward together. Today I am asking that you help in making this vision of our community a reality by committing to it for the coming year. Thank you.

We are all called to be saints in the church of God. Not because we are perfect, but because we are prepared to face the difficulties of being human in a way that creates space for grace for others and ourselves. Join me in creating this space for you and your family, and our whole community.

Amen.