

Rector's Annual Report for 2008

Baptisms: 25; confirmations/receptions: 52; weddings: 13; burials: 15. In addition, we have lots of new members and the average Sunday attendance continues to grow. God has wonderfully blessed us!

I am thankful beyond what words can say for our church staff who supports this ministry (and me personally!) with whole-hearted loyalty. The vestry has led steadily and prayerfully through very challenging times. I am thankful that they care deeply for our church, and especially Marie Smith and Tom Hardin who have served us very well as Senior and Junior Wardens. You will see in their reports what big and weighty decisions have been required of our leaders this year. It is incredible and humbling to be rector of a congregation of extraordinary servant leaders.

But beware! Dee Hock (former CEO Visa International) was mostly right when she said, "You learn nothing from your successes except to think too much of yourself." And Jesus, too: "Beware of the pride and hypocrisy of the Pharisees!"

How do we deepen and broaden our hold on God, and his hold on us? How do we go from strength to strength in particularly tumultuous times? We can't prevent the storms around us, but we can continue to build a ministry with a high morale, that knows how to behave in good times and bad, and that trusts itself.

Here are some of the challenges we face in the coming year. The recession is obviously worse than anyone predicted and genuinely affecting every family at Christ Church. This is a blow to American confidence and to the sense of security we were accustomed to. It means that we will tighten our Christ Church belts just as every family is doing the same thing. In addition, a culture shift has been made such that it is equally acceptable on Sunday mornings to go to Twin Sisters or work in the yard as it is to come to church. The 1960's "build it and they will come" thinking no longer guarantees our future or our relevance. And the Episcopal Church, the church that has been spiritual home to many of us for a lifetime, seems to be walking the path of innovation and new theologies rather than traditional Christianity. Even though the state of our economy and the state of the Episcopal Church is precarious, Christ Church has the opportunity to continue speaking strong words of encouragement into the anxieties that surround us.

Ten years from now, what will we be glad we did in 2008-2009? Two things I believe are absolutely crucial: that we rededicate ourselves to the teaching of Holy Scripture as The Word of the Lord, and that we find in ourselves the flexibility and creativity to do ministry in a rapidly changing – post-Christian - world.

First, it is easy for a church to make decisions when it is clear about its core values. Christ Church has consistently stood for the traditional values of our Anglican heritage. The dilemma in our denomination has driven many of us to learn about our history and theology (the purpose of *Cranmer's Church*), and to become more acquainted

with the teaching of the Bible. In this way, I am extremely thankful that we have had a crisis! Please keep reading, learning and growing!

And secondly, ministry in the next ten years will require gymnastic-like agility to reach a quickly changing culture. Alvin Toffler said, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” For example I continue to think that if Christ Church doesn’t become a church-planting church we will miss incredible opportunities to reach more people for Jesus Christ. If we routinely turn away people at our doors for major holidays and special events, isn’t that a sign that it is time to consider something new - ministry here on Belknap and beyond our walls? If people in our culture are finding it harder and harder to come to church, then isn’t that a sign that we need to take church to the people (1st century Christianity all over again!)? Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who don’t know God’s love is our reason to exist. So how do we continue to reach people for Christ in a crazy-changing environment? We become crazy ourselves, and creative, and outward focused. Reinvention is the secret of longevity; that is why a fifty-year-old takes up piano for the first time, or why banks took banking to neighborhoods rather than require everyone to drive downtown.

In 1992 the Rodney King trial sparked riots that completely destroyed whole neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Stephen R. Covey, in his book *The Speed of Trust*, talks about how devastating the results were on property and life. But he notes one surprising thing: McDonald’s restaurants were spared destruction; “They were unscathed beacons in the midst of the blackened ruins.” Why? Because in those neighborhoods McDonalds had a reputation for really caring for the community. They supported literacy and sports programs for youth. Micky D’s provided jobs and valuable life experience for kids on the edge of crisis. Ten years from now I hope and pray that we will look back on 2009 and be glad that we did those things that build that kind of trust in our neighborhood, in our city and around the world.

Respectfully,

Chuck Collins
Rector