

Annual Meeting Address

The Rev. Dorian McGlannan

January 25, 2009

A couple of weeks ago, I received the newsletter from one of my former churches, Epiphany in Seattle where I served as an associate for eight years. I don't always take the time to read my former churches' newsletters but for some reason I decided to read this one. Perhaps it is because they have a new rector. At any rate, I read the lead article which was by the rector. It read:

I have a sense that I have been caught up in something powerful and glorious here at Epiphany. That was my feeling before I came here and that has been my feeling since I have been here. God has a plan for Epiphany and it has been in the making for a long time.

I received a letter in the mail Thursday that affirmed this belief. It was from a law firm, and it referenced Kay Ogle. Some of you may remember Kay. Epiphany was Kay's spiritual home while she was alive and it is still a place of interest to her as she peeks at us from behind the curtain of mortality. Kay's estate has been settled and she left Epiphany roughly \$500,000.

Oh yeah! As you might imagine, I had a lot thoughts when I read this. The one that surprised me the most was that I really don't remember this woman and I do remember many people from that congregation because I was there for so long. So whatever her relationship was to that church, it was not a highly visible one. But somewhere along the line she prayerfully decided to put the church in her will.

Planned giving is one of the least developed areas of giving in this parish. Following our fall pledge campaign, we discovered that 3 families have included the church in their will. Of course, a few people in the past have left gifts to the church but not many. Our current endowment is roughly \$52,000, a mere fraction of what a church of almost a 100 years of existence and located in a well to do neighborhood should and could have, a mere fraction. This is a situation that must be remedied. For the protection of the church, this needs to change. And as I have always said, leaving the church in your will is an absolutely painless way to give and is a tremendous example for your heirs. Your generosity will model generosity and allow the spirit of generosity to be passed on for generations to come. In case you are

wondering what my goals are for 2009, let me assure you that the establishment of a St. John's Legacy Society is at the top of the list.

Since I have been at St. John's, I have felt like a spiritual repair person. When I arrived in July of 2005, there were so many things that needed fixing that it was hard to know where to begin. St. John's has a compelling and lively history but somewhere along the line, a lot of ministries lost their energy and then there were some that had never been properly developed. At times it was hard to tell. I knew this would be a long process, and so all of us started building, one piece at a time, one day at a time.

So many fabulous things have happened in the past three years, it is hard to name them all. We have worked together to make this happen and without your full support and hard work we would not be where we are today. A full-fledged youth program under the spirited leadership of Fr. Peter is in place and the music groups are all working together under the leadership of our outstanding music minister Scott Elsholz. I joined the parish choir in the fall and have had a great time. It has been good for me to be singing again on a regular basis and I can't tell you how much I love working with Scott who keeps that group as well as all the others, doing quality work and having fun at the same time.

We now have adult education for a lot of different levels several weekly Bible studies and the Discovery series. We have continued the Adult Forum and begun the new ABCs program. We have moved forward with getting the high quality audio-visual system for the Gathering and we are now able to watch many of the very fine adult Christian videos that are available. One of the highlights for me during 2008 was my trip to the Holy Land. It was terrific and I want so very much to share that experience with some of you. There is nothing like experiential learning and this kind of travel, when done as a pilgrimage, is not to be missed. Travel to the Holy Land is one of the best forms of adult education possible so I truly hope to see some of you make this trek to this very special place next November.

One of the areas that looked a bit precarious for a while during the Fall of 2008 was that of pastoral care to the homebound. When Cynthia and Bruce Leidal decided to move to Rochester, New York, I was not all sure how we would handle the day to day pastoral care of our homebound parishioners. Many of you are aware that I do most of the hospital visits and respond to almost all of the crisis situations. Fr. Peter has certainly done a good bit but the majority comes my way. When Cynthia left, I had no idea how we would handle the homebound. Some of our homebound members were being seen by a small group of trained

visitors called Befrienders but I wasn't sure if this ministry would grow and be able to fill the gap left by Cynthia. But prayers are answered and this one certainly has been answered in a magnificent way. We now have a strong, well-trained and very faithful group of 11 Befrienders. Then there was the ministry of the Lay Eucharistic Visitors which needed a bit of recharging. I am thrilled to say that we now also have a re-energized group of Lay Eucharistic visitors who taking communion to between 10-15 homebound members. The pastoral care ministry at St. John's is thriving under the leadership of Judy Brosnan, Becky Nickels, and Hadyn Notestine. We have worked hard at uncovering homebound members who are not being seen. And as some of our active members become unable to come to church, we are making sure that the church goes to them. Communication among those who are visiting has improved dramatically so that all of us are informed about what the other is doing. If people are still falling through the cracks, it is only because they either don't let us know or their friends and family do not inform us, so if you know about someone being who is unable to come to church either permanently or temporarily, the best thing you can do is contact the church office.

Speaking of the office, I know that many of you have been concerned about the instability in terms of office staff. Trying to understand how to staff this position and with whom to staff this position has been very trying since Sue Brandt left in August of 2007. Without going into the history, I will just say that I am very grateful for all that Chad Pryor did to bring stability to this position. He is a computer whiz kid and really did a lot to get us back on track. However, we knew from the beginning that Chad would eventually go to grad school and indeed he has. When faced with his impending departure, I decided to take a different tact when looking for a replacement and tried word of mouth. I am very happy to say that indeed it worked. Our new office manger Catherine Byrd came to us through parishioner Jane Libbing and I am ecstatic. All of the staff is delighted with Catherine's work and I feel that once again we have the promise of having a fully functioning four person team in terms of staff. With the reduction in hours for the staff position, office volunteers have become a critical component of this ministry. We have several very dedicated and capable volunteers who offer a great deal of time to the office ministry and so far, life in the office looks very promising.

Much of this stabilization of the office can be attributed to two vestry members who put in a great deal of time in terms of policy and procedures with regard to finances. Cindy Wisniewski and Ed Couture have established several new systems that have allowed for solid tracking of every expense. The transparency in terms of revenue and expenses is now unparalleled in the history of this church. We are now much more aware of spending and giving trends which I

promise you is a very difficult thing to do in a church. The administration and finance committee still suffers from occasional heartburn when it comes to cash flow but they are beginning to understand that, in the end, the financial situation almost always comes together, even in these challenging times.

Being a warden is a tough job. Wardens tend to feel a lot of responsibility and our 2008 co-wardens were no exception. Ed Couture and Mark Goderis put in a tremendous amount of time and expressed a strong dedication to our church. They are to be commended for being so careful about the church finances and for taking the time to genuinely try to understand the difference between how businesses and churches function. They have taken on a good bit of the grunt work in terms of renegotiating service contracts, hauling and installing the enormous new television in the Gathering and many behind the scenes activities. Time is a precious commodity and these two men have been more than generous in their giving of time. I have especially appreciated Ed's availability and quick responsiveness in times of need.

2009 is promising to be a good year in many ways. I am so very grateful that it is no longer a struggle to find people to serve on vestry. Thank you for being willing to serve. Just this fall, we have gained some wonderful new families in our church and that too is heartening during a time in which so many of our dedicated parishioners have moved out of state. In terms of our future, the greatest challenge ahead of us is evangelism. There are so many people who need to hear the word of God and experience what a loving Christian community has to offer. Our church has a lot to contribute to the fabric of faith opportunities found in Plymouth. The foundation is in place and while there is always more that can be added, our call this year is to attract and retain new members. This can only happen through you.

Some in our church had the experience this past fall of knocking on the doors of strangers. The purpose was completely different, of course, but many of the skills and experience can be transferred. And so...when the weather improves, we are going to look for people who are willing to take on this type of evangelism. Many large churches started this way, just going door to door talking with people about what they would want in a church. And while we will always retain the essence of what makes us Episcopalian, connecting with people in the neighborhood can only make us stronger and more vibrant.

For the more than three years, I have been rector of this church, I have all but pleaded with you to invite your friends to church. Alright, I will correct that, I have pleaded with you. This is not only for the sake of our church but for your friends as well. Many of you have and it has made a

big difference both for the individuals who have come here and for our parish. So I want to thank you for taking that initiative. It takes a lot of person to person effort to grow a church but it can be done. It is fun and it is rewarding because you have the potential of bringing the gift of faith to someone who might really need it.

All of us know how energizing it is when the congregation is full. That critical mass is essential for lively worship. While the 9:00 service is doing just fine, the 11:00 service could use an extra boost. I have to believe that there is still an interest in traditional worship, especially worship that is as lovely as ours. We just need to connect with those who might prefer this kind of service.

These are a few of the things that have been on my mind. Strengthening the strong foundation that has been laid and connecting with the broader community so that we can grow this church. I want to take this time to thank you for the wonderful support you have given me over the past 3-½ years. The spiritual maturity that is growing among our members is truly heartening. Your responsiveness to calls for help have made a huge difference, even for something relatively small such as taking down the Christmas decorations. And so I will end with a story about that. In the first full week of January when I realized that Cindy Blaine and Cami Buckley were planning to take down the Christmas decorations by themselves, I sent out an e-mail, less than 24 hours in advance, asking for people to come help take down the decorations. I expected maybe a couple of people to respond but I think about 20 people showed up. It is this kind of responsiveness that lets me know we are working together for the glory of God. Whether it is in small ways or highly visible and dramatic ways, your service to the Lord is growing each and every day. May we continue to grow together in our love of God and of each other.