

Rector's Annual Report 2017-2018
Presented at the Annual Meeting
Trinity Episcopal Church, Hartford, Connecticut
June 3, 2018

We do not proclaim ourselves: we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. . . . But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

God is Good. All the time. All the time . . . God is good!

Good morning, Saints! It is my privilege and honor to be with you this morning for our combined worship and annual meeting. This is my 15th opportunity to share with you my perspective on the state of our congregation – how we have journeyed together during these past months and where I envision our journey taking us in the months to come.

I want to remind us all of what we mean when we are talking about the health of a congregation in this year of 2018: In the words of our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, we are the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement. More than a building, more than a gathered community that calls this place our spiritual home, I pray that each and every day each and every one of us is feeling the excitement and intensity of God doing something new in our lives, modeling them on the life and teachings of Jesus.

And I couldn't be more pleased to report that this has been an extraordinary year for the Parish of Trinity Church. If you have not done so already, I encourage you to read the entirety of our Annual Report to see the truly remarkable ways that the love of Jesus powered by the Holy Spirit is making a difference – in our own lives as we grow as disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ, in our city and because we are interrelated, in our surrounding suburbs. As we look back at the last year, I want to focus on two areas that stand out: Finances and Community Partnerships.

Finances

It was about 7 years ago when then-warden Mark MacGougan opened a sermon with the now immortal words, “What would you do if you went to your doctor and the doctor told you that you had five years to live?” It was a grim pronouncement of a very real possibility: That this congregation, as it was functioning at the time, was in very real danger of not being able to sustain a viable ministry in these buildings over the long haul. Indeed, it was only several years ago when this congregation was the biggest red dot on a chart of financially troubled churches in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. And it was only several years ago that we were told by our consultants from Partners for Sacred Places that we were not ready for a capital campaign because our finances weren't stable.

As I reflect back, my entire 14 ½ year ministry among you has been defined significantly by the need for budget cuts – from annual

budgets of over a million dollars per year to our present level of under \$700,000 per year. We have gone from a staff of two full-time priests, a full-time musician, a full-time Christian Education director, a full-time financial manager, a full-time Parish Administrator and two full-time sextons to what we have today: one full-time priest, a half-time musician, volunteer Christian Education director, a part-time financial manager, one full-time Administrative Assistant to the Rector, and a part-time property manager and part-time custodian. We have filled the gap, as best we have been able, with an enormous increase in parish volunteers who have allowed us to continue to increase the number and breadth of our ministries even as we cut costs. The system of configuring our ministries into four functional areas – worship, outreach and mission, Christian Formation and Parish Care, with lay volunteer leaders for each area, has allowed us to strengthen lay leadership and continue to expand our ministries even in the face of financial constraints. We have even established Trinity Academy and the Choir School of Hartford.

And I am pleased to share with you the good news – small “g” and “n” – that just as God led the Israelites out of Egypt, so our faith in God gradually has led us out of a world of financial desperation. This calendar year of 2018 will be the second year in a row that Trinity has a balanced budget with a sustainable draw on our now modest endowment. With the help of a challenge grant from a group of generous parishioners, we were able to meet our financial pledge

goal of \$390,000 this year. I must say that we can still do a lot better in our financial stewardship: We seem to suffer from a pervasive sense that a certain well-off few will provide the bulk of our financial support. Each and every one of us needs to understand the significance of the widow's mite – that it is not the size of our gift but the faithfulness with which we give it that causes God to break into a big smile. Each one of us needs to continue to pray for the courage to gradually, and meaningfully, increase our support of the parish each year. Our Vestry has established a task-force to explore ways in which we as a congregation can continue to be more faithful across the breadth of our congregation.

But wait! There is more good news. If you examine our budget which Janet will share later, you notice a line item of income labeled “Funds Not Under Vestry Control.” These funds are trust funds established by benefactors many years ago that contribute to our annual budget. We have typically budgeted between \$70 and \$80 thousand dollars of income from these sources. We learned several months ago that for 2018 and for future years, that amount is expected to be increased by nearly \$100,000 per year due to the growth of the Woodward Trust. For that we give thanks to God for the generosity of the Woodward Family. Now, it would be easy for us to say, “Let's store up riches for ourselves and use this new found money to build up our endowment.” Your vestry has, in fact, decided for 2018 to use these funds conservatively in order to shore up what

has been until now a shaky financial balance. As we look to 2019, however, I am of the firm conviction that the Woodward Family intended this money to be used as investment capital for God's mission and not to build up Trinity's coffers. I'll come back to this in a moment.

But wait! There's still more good news. For several years, under the leadership of Mark and Linda MacGougan have led the Goodwin Legacy Circle – named after the Rev. Francis Goodwin and his family whose generosity sustained the construction of much of our present buildings. We have been encouraging parishioners and others to make planned gifts to Trinity Church as part of their estate planning. Those efforts are bearing much fruit in the reality that in the past 18 months, at least 5 parishioners who have passed from this life have remembered Trinity generously. During this time, we have received over \$350,000 in planned gifts, all of which are designated to go into the so-called “new” endowment that our Vestry created 6 years ago – from which we are allowed to draw only up to 5% per year. This is prudent management and will help to support our continued financial sustainability as a parish into the future.

So we can celebrate a great deal of financial good news.

Community Partnerships

During the past year we have continued to focus on Community Partnerships in the conviction that there is no need in the Asylum Hill community that someone is not already addressing, and that

God calls us not to reinvent the wheel so that WE can be glorified, but to join with others so that GOD can be glorified. I am pleased to report that

- Our missional partnership with Grace Lutheran church down the street continues. For two years we provided space in our undercroft for them to launch their Fresh Start Pallet Products enterprise, giving them time to obtain valuable commercial space in the Veeder Root building which will allow that ministry to flourish into the future. We continue to share worship with that community, as they joined us for Pentecost and we plan once again to join them at Grace for Reformation Sunday.
- Our missional partnership with our brothers and sisters at St. Monica's Episcopal Church continues as we plan to join them for worship and their Summer Cookout on June 24, and they will join us for our parish cookout on September 9. And, by the way, put that weekend of September 7,8 and 9 on your calendars for a special celebration of the music of Grayson Warren Brown.
- In the past year we have entered into a new missional partnership with Emanuel Lutheran Church on Capitol Avenue, a church with which we share many characteristics, and their dynamic young pastor, the Rev. Dr. Paula Mehmel. Beginning this fall, our Music Director Jack Merrill will be

collaborating with Jonathan Reuning-Scherer of Emanuel to enlarge the ministry of the Choir School of Hartford, bringing to fruition the original mission of the Choir School to be a resource for our entire community. Emanuel and Trinity are also exploring closer partnership in supporting the ministry of Trinity Academy.

- And finally – this just came up within the past several weeks – we are in the advanced stages of exploring a possible merger of Trinity Academy, a co-ed elementary school, and Covenant Preparatory School, a middle school for boys. The schools have similar missions with the same population, and together would provide a continuum of education from Grade 1 through Grade 8. 7 of our 8 graduating boys from Trinity Academy this year will be attending Covenant Prep next year, and so this possibility makes all kinds of sense. I ask your prayers as we continue our work to make this a reality.

I have to tell you, few things energize me more than finding God in the middle of partnerships with other members of our community.

Pathway to the Future

So we have all of this good news: With our new-found financial resources, and having assumed a course to encourage our own faithful stewardship of our personal resources, engaging creatively with community partners. I believe we are entering a new chapter in the life of our congregation. I realize as I listen to financial

discussions that we have begun to think of ourselves as “poor” and sometimes have begun to act that way. I see times when we are nervous or reluctant when it comes to taking risks for God’s mission. But we always have to remember: If there is anything that Jesus taught us, it is that when we live in Jesus’ love, we always receive back more than we give. In fact – and I have always felt this from the first day that I arrived here – this parish is overflowing with both human resources and, increasingly, financial ones. I believe that Trinity is ready to enter a new chapter in its history, a chapter in which we boldly step into an uncertain future, knowing we walk with the assurance of the risen savior to further the Christian movement that Jesus started. As Saint Paul reminds us in this morning’s Epistle, . . . *we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.* We can’t rely on ourselves. We need to trust that when doing God’s work without fear, God’s Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus are always on our side.

As I have contemplated this new chapter, I have of course prayed over and contemplated my own role in it. As many of you know, in August I will observe my 68th birthday. I feel it is 68 years young, but any way you slice it, that number 68 is there. This weekend, I have been joining my fellow classmates from Glastonbury High School as we celebrate our 50th reunion.

For over a year now, I have heard God whispering in my ear that it is time to start thinking about retiring from full-time ministry. If I had any doubts about what I was hearing, they were erased when I went through that period last October when I was in and out of Hartford Hospital like a revolving door with heart-related issues. I have come to believe deeply that just as God called me here 14 ½ years ago, God is now calling me away from this place so that you can continue to move forward under new, younger, more energetic and more inspired leadership than I can offer. When I experience the energy and excitement of the gifted seminarians we have had over the years, including young Ben Wyatt who was ordained as a deacon in Tennessee yesterday; when I spend time with the exciting young and energetic clergy of our diocese and see the amazing things they are doing, I realize that this congregation that Debbie and I love so deeply will be better served by new leadership to explore and lead you into the next chapter. I just know that it is time for me to give thanks for the blessing of having served with you and among you for what will be more than 15 years and make way for someone with new ideas, certainly more energy, who will continue with you the journey we have begun together. It is true that for every individual and institution, there comes a time in which change is necessary in order to move forward. And so today I share with you, my beloved parish family, my intention to retire

sometime in the next 12 months, when I will be fast approaching the age of 69.

In the meantime, however, we still have a lot of work to do together! God is not done with me yet! God is calling us to some exciting work in these coming months, work that will provide you all and my successor a solid foundation on which to continue to build. I envision that work to evolve during the coming months, and here is what I see:

1. First, as I announced last Sunday, Deacon Ben – I can say that now – will be pursuing a Master of Sacred Theology degree at Yale Divinity School for the coming year. Bishop Bauerschmidt of Tennessee is placing Ben here at Trinity for his diaconal service, and he expects to travel up here to Trinity to ordain Ben to the priesthood sometime in December. With money the Vestry has already allocated for a very part-time priest following my health problems last October, I intend to hire Ben beginning in mid-July as a part-time curate for the coming year. You will get to know him and love him much better, and Ben's year of service will assist us in imagining how we might review our staffing patterns to have the additional paid clergy and other staff support this parish needs and deserves.
2. Exploring and deepening existing Episcopal and Ecumenical partnerships holds tremendous promise for the future of this parish. The exciting work that Jack Merrill is doing with Trinity

Academy, the Choir School of Hartford and its partnership with our friends at Emanuel Lutheran Church beginning in September holds great promise for allowing the Choir School to grow into its mission as it was originally envisioned. The deepening relationship between the parish and Trinity Academy continues to change the lives of the students we serve and their families. And of course, I will be actively involved in the evolving discussions between Trinity Academy and Covenant Prep in what will most certainly be a “win-win” for both schools and a model for independent, faith-based urban education.

3. There is no question that the major work that lies before us for the remainder of 2018 is engaging in and concluding a successful capital campaign for mission. A great deal of the preliminary work has or is being done, and in an hour or so we will have our project architects here to share their findings about what our buildings need. They will also listen to your questions and concerns about how to update and upgrade our physical plant in ways that will enhance our ability to serve the needs of our worshipping community, our Asylum Hill community and the region. I envision this capital campaign to actually have two phases:
 - a. The first, which Ray Giolitto and Sean Donadio will explain, unfortunately will involve a lot of fire and safety

upgrades – not the sexiest or glitziest projects, but ones that we must do to keep our buildings user-friendly, safe and welcoming. You should know that in addition to our Trinity Academy students and Choir School students our buildings are the “safe haven” for both the Boys’ and Girls’ Club and the Salvation Army in the event of natural disaster or other emergency in their buildings. We need to make our spaces safe.

- b. Phase 2 involves the future of our parish house, for which I envision attracting a lot of outside financial support. It is far more space than we need for offices, and it is illegal for us to use it for anything other than church-related purposes. I have a dream for that space: That we explore moving our office space into the education building and converting that building into a spiritual center. One possibility is the formation of an intentional Christian Community which would serve the social and spiritual needs of our surrounding community AND provide a uniquely spiritual dimension to our life and worship as a congregation. There are many possibilities for this, with one model being St. Hilda’s House at Christ Church in New Haven. With the support of the Vestry, I have begun exploratory discussions with the Chaplain at Trinity College and also the Dean of Hartford Seminary as

possible mission partners in this project. The idea has the support of our bishops, and I think it would add a new and wonderful dimension to this already dynamic community at Trinity.

So, I guess that is all that is going on here. I hope you agree with me that it is truly a blessing to be an active part of such a dynamic and exciting community of faith. My prayer as always for this community is summed up in the blessing from the Daily Office:

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to God from generation to generation in the church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.