

**Rector's Annual Address  
Annual Parish Meeting  
January 24, 2010**

Let's talk about elephants.

You have heard, of course, the story of the blind men and the elephant, a fable from India. An elephant is surrounded by blind men, each of whom draws a conclusion about the object in their midst based upon the particular dimension of the animal within their reach. One man holds the leg, and identifies the thing before them as a pillar. Another holds the elephant's trunk, and is certain that the object is a snake. Another feels the tusk, and imagines it to be a spear, another the tail and takes it for a rope. The moral of the tale, of course, is that knowing something in part is, by definition, partial; but wisdom comes from seeing the whole.

Fourteen months ago, at Focus Groups in which our capital needs were described, I spoke about the elephant in the room. (I even had a visual representation of that elephant before us; and here he is, back again.) The "elephant in the room," of course, was the economy – the worst in some seventy years. But it turns out that, like the elephant in the Indian fable, our "elephant in the room" had more than one reality. The dismal economy was real, and it was a part of that elephant. But another part of the elephant in the room was the excitement of those who had helped shape our long-range vision. And another part of the elephant was the commitment of a large group of people to work towards that vision with a capital campaign. And another part of the elephant was the extraordinary generosity represented by every level of giving on the part of campaign supporters. And another part of the elephant was one that nobody could see, which was the breath that enlivened it – which is to say, the Holy Spirit at work in our midst.

The miserable economy, real as it was and still is, was yet only one part of the elephant. Other parts were excitement, commitment, generosity, and God's Spirit. And the total reality of all those parts put together is here today blowing its elephantine trumpet with joy!

In my Annual Address a year ago, I invited us to think theologically about the campaign, and indeed, about every undertaking in our lives. I suggested that

The Christian life of faith is always the calling to live between harsh present realities and hopeful future possibility, and to affirm the possibility. It is not a naïve refusal to recognize challenging realities, but rather in the face of those realities to claim hope and promise on the horizons of our life with God. We "look down," we look to the task at hand and deal with challenges and set-backs as we encounter them. But we do not fail also to "look up." To remind ourselves of our aspirations for the future, and our faithful expectation that if it is God's will, and by God's grace, we will be empowered to live towards that future. [*Rector's Address, 1/25/09*]

I believe that we have glimpsed but one instance of that power this year. And I thank you. And with you, I thank God.

So: Where do we go now, with our five million dollar milestone target reached? The Facilities Team has been working diligently to formulate recommendations to the Vestry for the staging and sequencing of the various projects which you saw described in the Campaign booklet. Factors in the staging decisions include objective priorities, subjective preferences, anticipated cash flow, ever-evolving estimates, logistics of the liturgical year and the program year, Cleveland weather, and more. Staging and timing is a bit of a Rubik's Cube, really. But

there are some projections I believe we can make with confidence. So again, I say: Let's talk about elephants.

*Q. What time is it when an elephant sits on your fence? A. Time to get a new fence.*

Which brings us to **infrastructure issues**. Work already completed includes the major roof repair. Repayment of the invested funds which allowed that project to go forward in 2008 will be made incrementally from capital campaign receipts. We are, on account of that project, safe and dry in our buildings.

Nearly completed in 2009 was work on the high, clerestory windows of our nave – securing, re-leading, with improved weather-proofing and upgraded ventilation. Some panes were on the verge of falling in on us. Now they are strengthened and safe.

Being completed, literally this week, are diagnostics for repair of the heating pipes embedded in our nave floor. In all, 2010 should bring completion of about two-thirds of our mechanical and electrical upgrades – boilers, wiring, heating and cooling. None of these things is exciting, most will not be visible, but each one is necessary, most fairly urgent, and we will be better off for their completion.

*Q. How do elephants get up trees? A. They sit on an acorn and fall asleep.*

Which brings us to **handicapped access**. The first truly visible improvement in 2010 will be the new elevator for full wheelchair access to Tucker Hall. It's long overdue; it will happen this year.

*Q. What is large and grey and goes around and around in circles?*

*A. An elephant stuck in a revolving door.*

Which brings us to our **new North Entrance**. In 2010 or 2011 we expect to move ahead to replace the current, confusing stairway-landing entryway with a new North Entrance. It will be fully accessible, and will serve as a clear and welcoming entry point.

*Q. How do you tell when an elephant is under your bed?*

*A. Your nose is squashed against the ceiling.*

Which brings us to our **renovation of Tucker Hall**, reclaiming the full capacity of our beautiful hall for large parish and community events. The Tucker Hall renovations are currently projected for 2011.

*Q. Why do elephants paint the soles of their feet yellow?*

*A. So they can hide upside down in the custard.*

Which brings us to renovations in the **Kitchen and Dining Room**. Those are likely to take place in 2012.

*Q. Why are elephants grey and wrinkled?*

*A. Because they don't have the Altar Guild to wash and iron them!*

Which brings us to the **Nave**. Renovations in the Nave are likely to be in 2012. The more modest projects in the Sacristy and Choir Room will be worked in, perhaps as early as this year or next. Here may I say that I am not unaware of concerns and varying opinions about some of the proposed nave renovations. We have lots of time before 2012 to reflect together on those concerns, and I pledge you an opportunity for such conversation before plans are finalized.

Towards the end of our 5-year plan will be **additions to the endowment** for Facilities and Staffing. **Apostleship** spending and Apostleship endowment growth will be spread evenly across the 5 years. Let me speak about those Apostleship funds from the Capital Campaign Tithe which have already enabled exciting developments near and far.

One of our cherished hopes has been to see the expansion of the Open Doors from its St. Paul's site to launch a similar after-school program at Miles Park Elementary School in

Cleveland. We anticipated allocating a significant portion of the Campaign Tithe to help make this happen. Astonishingly, events overtook us, when federal stimulus money enabled Open Doors to expand this past fall not only to Miles Park, but also to two other sites. The fact is, however, that the economic crisis of 2008-09 had hit Open Doors hard, with a radical reduction of foundation grants. Had St. Paul's not been able to undergird Open Doors' finances in late spring and summer, the staff and administration of the organization might have been so diminished as to make very difficult the swift expansion when government grants suddenly materialized. Our bridge funds came in large part from the Capital Campaign Tithe, and we should feel very good about that.

And then there is the AIDS Foster Home for children in Ocean View, South Africa, a project of our sister congregation, St. Clare's Anglican Church. In May St. Paul's, through the Capital Campaign Tithe, provided funds amounting to half the purchase price of the house for this new Foster Home. After some remodeling for its new purpose, and the hiring of house parents, the House will have its grand opening while Richard and Mary Nodar are there in the next couple of months. We have also provided operating funds for the Home for its first quarter. Here is a note from the Rev. Pamela Parenzee, AIDS Officer for the Diocese of False Bay.

*It is with an overwhelming sense of Gratitude that I wish to say THANK YOU, ... for helping to establish our Foster Home for orphans and vulnerable children. We have 1.2 million children in our beloved country infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. ... Sometimes this problem of AIDS amongst children seems too big to do anything about; but then we partner with you and we know that we are going to overcome this problem as we did during the years of "Apartheid". Once again I say 'Baie Dankie' – Thank you.*

I am so grateful that we are sharing the blessing of our Campaign funds with other important partnerships in ministry, near and far. Such mission is a part of our core identity as a parish – indeed, as Christians.

Well, so, in the stewardship of our facilities and in outreach, our Campaign is already bearing fruit, and promises much more in the months ahead. Thanks be to God!

Finally, there is this. We have, by necessity, focused much of our attention this year on the capital needs of our Long-Range Plan, on our **Stewardship of Finance & Facilities**. But there were many other, non-capital dimensions of that Plan. We had high hopes and grand visions two years ago when our various Implementation Teams started to flesh out the Long-Range Plan. We still have those high hopes and grand visions.

In **Discipleship**, the vision of more lifetime learning and the development of a Center for Christian Formation is still before us. Our expanded offerings with the Cleveland Ecumenical Institute, the new daytime Education for Ministry group, and such programs as our third annual downlink of the Trinity Institute are just a foretaste.

In **Apostleship**, the vision of ever-greater hands-on participation by all parishioners is still before us. Last month, after 85 families received Christmas gifts from our parish through the Fairhill Center, the sign out front of the Center on Fairhill Road said, "*Thank you, St. Paul's, for making dreams come true.*" To live up to such an accolade is a tall order. This project and many others like it are yet just a foretaste.

In **Leadership**, we articulated a yearning to play a role in the wider community as it wrestles with systemic issues of poverty and racial reconciliation. With others, our hosting of producers of the documentary *Traces of the Trade* is just a foretaste.

In **Kinship**, we remain determined to keep our size from overtaking our depth of community. Improved communications, such as our upgraded website and the weekly email update; together with kinship events such as a 75<sup>th</sup> birthday cake in a crowded Tucker Hall – these are but a foretaste.

In **Worship**, our determination to know the altar as the truest center of all we do is still before us. Praise, nourishment, and reconciliation – these are at the heart of who we are. Expanded offerings such as more frequent Healing Prayer, a new Ash Wednesday service for children, and our October celebration of the Healing Professions on the Feast of St. Luke – these are just a foretaste.

Let's talk about elephants. One more fable, this one from Arnold Lobel.

*The Elephant and his son were spending an evening at home. Elephant Son was singing a song. "You must be silent," said Father Elephant. "Your papa is trying to read his newspaper. Papa cannot listen to a song while he is reading his newspaper." "Why not?" asked Elephant Son. "Because Papa can think only about one thing at a time, that is why," said Father Elephant. [He] lit a cigar and went on reading.*

*After a while, Elephant Son asked, "Papa, can you still think about only one thing at a time?" "That is correct," said Father Elephant. "Well then," said Elephant Son, "you might stop thinking about your newspaper and begin to think about the slipper that is on your left foot." "But my boy," said Father Elephant, "Papa's newspaper is far more important and informative than his slipper." "That may be true," said Elephant Son, "but while your newspaper is not on fire from the ashes of your cigar, the slipper that is on your left foot certainly is!"*

*Father Elephant ran to put his foot in a bucket of water. Softly, Elephant Son began to sing again. [Arnold Lobel, **Fables** (NYC: Scholastic, Inc., 1980), p. 32.]*

For the past 8 months we have focused a great deal of our energy and attention on our campaigns. That has been vital, because thus will so much be enabled, in Christ's name, and for the good of the Kingdom. But God calls us to think about more than one thing at a time, and to rededicate ourselves to the fullness of our vision for mission and ministry at St. Paul's. Our slippers may not be on fire, but our hearts surely are – burning with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Kindled by that flame, may our witness burn just as brightly.

I thank you for your faithfulness. I remain, as ever, grateful to serve alongside you in this place.

*The Rev. Alan M. Gates  
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