

**Rector's Annual Address
at the Annual Parish Meeting
January 22, 2012**

Let our first words always be words of thanks. And let my first words be my gratitude for the dedicated staff with whom I am privileged to serve. I stand before you each year to talk about the accomplishments and dreams of the parish in the year past and those upcoming. But it is the commitment of all of you as members of this congregation, its volunteer leaders, and the devotion of our staff, which makes it all happen, by God's grace. The staff is listed on the back cover of your Annual Report. I hope you will look at it, and be reminded of how much talent and dedication resides there. And I would ask all staff members who are present to stand, that you might be recognized and know our gratitude.

Let me comment on a couple of staffing changes in the recent past and immediate future.

Paul Winter joined us last summer as full-time Youth Minister. No stranger to us after an earlier, 3-year internship here, Paul has hit the ground running, shoring up cherished traditions and developing new ones in our youth ministry.

Kirby Colwell remains faithful Deacon on staff, but no longer carries the title of Volunteer Coordinator. Non-outreach volunteer activities for which he has been responsible are being handed off to other staff. However, in fulfillment of his ministry as Deacon, he continues to serve as the inviting organizer, and motivator for many of our apostleship activities – as this week's delivery of 375 care kits to the Homeless Stand Down demonstrates.

Kim Fry serves no longer as Communications Coordinator, but now bears the title Director of Communications. This seemingly small shift represents very significant ways in which she has moved beyond the production of publications alone, to a higher level of communication strategies and big-picture planning.

Pam O'Halloran, previously part-time Stewardship Director, will now be our full-time Director of Congregational Development. This moves us more fully towards our vision of integrating the ministries of Stewardship, Membership, and Fellowship. Pam is helping us to see how fundraising is not an isolated activity, but rather a function directly related to the ways that people are engaged in other vital dimensions of parish life.

Finally, as you know from my recent column, we will bid farewell in six months to the Rev. Dr. David Mason, who has served as an adjunct priest here at St. Paul's for forty years. We can scarcely imagine St. Paul's without David. So, we will remain in denial for a couple more months, and then make sure we find the moments and the words to express our debt to this beloved pastor. An all-parish celebration of gratitude for David and Margie will be held following worship on Sunday, June 3.

So, what about 2011? Was it a good year? As a matter of fact, it was!

In 2011 we completed the McCracken Entrance and opened our office annex in Coventry House. In 2011 we had distinguished guests in the pulpit – Bishop Martin Barahona of El Salvador; Rob Radke, President of Episcopal Relief and Development; Elizabeth Eaton, Lutheran Bishop of Northeastern Ohio.

In 2011 we renewed our joint study sessions with Olivet Institutional Baptist Church. We extended hospitality for the memorial service of Cleveland legend Bob Feller. (Who'd have imagined a St. Paul's liturgy carried live on the Sports Time Ohio cable network?) In 2011

scores of parishioners joined with 2,000 other people of faith to mark the Founding Assembly of Greater Cleveland Congregations.

2011 saw the ordination of Christopher 'Zeke' Coughlin to the priesthood, and Anne Pillot to the vocational diaconate; and we sent Matt Humm forth to Illinois and his first full-time Rectorate. In 2011 we welcomed 16 South African pilgrims, and heard the sound of Afrikaans and Xhosa voices. Later we heard the sound of Jacobean English when we observed the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. And then the voice of St. Mark the Evangelist spoke across two millennia, courtesy of actor Wayne Tierney.

These are but a few of the highlights of our life together last year. "Glory to God, whose power working in us can do more than we can ask or imagine."

Dave Hartt spoke about our capital projects. We are excited that the Tucker Hall renovations will be done in March, and our kinship and fellowship events will finally have the space they deserve. It is likely at this point that the nave renovations will have to wait until the summer of 2013, while kitchen and dining room improvements may be able to happen this summer. The Vestry will decide on this timing soon, when all the necessary information is in hand.

Meanwhile, David spoke briefly about our regular annual operating budget, and the challenges we are experiencing in funding the fullness of our ministries at St Paul's. That will be further described by the Treasurer in just a moment. The building and the budget, of course, are not the focus of Christ's ministry in this place. They are the vehicles for that ministry. The building and the budget are not themselves the things to which we are called, they are things that enable the work to which we are called. They are the How, but they are not the Why of St. Paul's. Let me say a few words about the Why. Why are we here?

A Word about Forming the Faith of our Children. This past fall our church school curriculum underwent a major renewal. Thanks to the hard work of staff, board, and volunteers, two new programs were undertaken. Godly Play and Workshop Rotation engage our children in song, drama, art, and storytelling, in ways that delight and shape them.

I stumbled upon a story sheet from Godly Play. It told the tale of the Hebrew people, taken captive in the Babylonian Exile. "*They could not go home. They hung their harps on the weeping willow trees and sang sad songs. They dreamed of home, ... [but] slowly, God's people began to understand that God was in this place, too. God's presence came to them as they gathered to read the scriptures, tell the old stories, and pray.*" Our own children, gathered to read the scriptures, tell the old stories, and pray, are coming to know that God is in this place, too. There is nothing more delightful on Sunday morning than to be nearly mown down by a child who is barreling down the hallway to get to his next Workshop Rotation. It means our parish is alive, and will remain alive.

In my desk drawer, I have a folder into which I put positive notes I receive, so that when I have a tough day or get to feeling beaten down, I can reach in and pull one out to remind me what it's all about. Here is one I got once from the Fifth Grade Church School Class. Hand-lettered and colored, it says: "*To Alan Gates: Thank you for helping people at our church. Keep up the good work.*" Of course, it's not about my work, it's about the church's work. And if there's a 9-year-old out there who thinks that "helping people" is "good work" worth keeping up – well then, we are doing something right.

Why are we here? To make sure that our children know the stories, know that God is with them in this and every place; to make sure they want to keep up the good work of helping people.

A Word About Young Adult Vocations. On Sunday mornings at the 11:15 service, you will see in the Senior Choir a number of young adults. Many of them are students from the Cleveland Institute of Music or the music program at Case Western Reserve. Some receive a stipend for their service as soloists, which helps them with their tuition. They are here not because St. Paul's, out of some arrogant need to have the region's finest church music, desires to pad the ranks with ringers. No, they are here because in our distinguished history of musical quality we have a very great gift to share and a legacy to pass on. Our choirmasters – all three of them – are gifted teachers and mentors. By drawing in young adults and exposing them to the vocation of church music, St. Paul's lifts up the next generation of musicians who – professionally or avocationally – will carry on a tradition of which we are stewards. If not us, who?

Richard Ollarsaba was one such musician. You may recall this tall young man with a lion's mane of dark hair and a resonant base voice. Two years ago he graduated from CIM and went to opera school in Winston-Salem. Recently he sent a letter to Karel Paukert to tell him that he is now singing at St. Paul's in Winston-Salem. *"I have to thank you and Dr. Plank so much for all that you offered and gave me while I was in Cleveland. There is so much that I learned and came to love in the Episcopal tradition that I have not found anywhere else"*

Why are we here? To raise up young adults with a heart for serving God – in music, in Christian education, in youth ministry, and in the ordained leadership of the Church.

A Word about Giving Hope. In July we received the most extraordinary blessing when we were visited by sixteen South African pilgrims from our two partner congregations. They travelled here together, though at home they represent two parishes across their own post-apartheid racial divide. They got to know one another. They got to know us. We got to know them. We even got to know ourselves better. They ate with us, stayed in our homes, watched 4th of July fireworks with us, cheered the struggling Cleveland Indians with us, served the homeless at St. Luke's with us.

Later in the summer I got a note from one of their priests, Fr. Richard Martin, who spoke about the aftermath of their trip. *"There is a renewed energy and they all seem to have matured so much I sense a definite pride in the knowledge that they could hold their own in a different society. I know you were uncertain about how this trip would make a difference [to our young people] but it has. I am especially proud of those who would never utter more than a single phrase in the past – they seem to have suddenly found their voice. ... The trip to Ohio had a profound effect on me also, it has given me a renewed hope for the future.... The best gift we can give our people at this challenging time in history is HOPE, and I'm set on keeping my end of the deal. And as God's servant, I can do it because I'm hopeful for a future so bright 'we'll have to wear shades!'"* In a period of continuing intra-Anglican tensions, we have a partnership that embodies Christ's love for all people, and gives hope.

Why are we here? To know one another as brothers and sisters, to give one another hope, to envision a future so bright 'we'll have to wear shades.'

A Word about Beloved Community. On April 29 a member of St. Paul's named Steve, the father of two young children, dropped dead in his home, out of the blue. It goes without saying that it was devastating for his family. In their grief, they were enveloped with care by members of this parish. Families from the Church School brought meals, and offered rides. Church School teachers and classes surrounded Steve's children with care and understanding. When the funeral was held, Dr. Nelson and the St. Cecilia Choir sang, to provide a musical sign of life and love, and to welcome Steve's daughter into her accustomed place in their ranks, providing at least a moment of comforting normalcy.

At such times, to our eternal regret, we cannot eliminate the pain or 'fix' the problems. But with God's help, we can *share* them. For this family, and for the countless individuals and families who have sustained their own occasions of grief or loss this year, we strive to be a place of support and compassion, a manifestation of Christ's invitation, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-burdened."

Why are we here? To do our best, by God's grace, to be agents of grace, in the Beloved Community of Christ.

You heard from the Senior Warden that we face challenges with our annual operating budget. Indeed, we do. As your rector, I take seriously those challenges, and the need to close our operating deficit. But we must not turn to ministry reductions too readily, lest we fail to live up to our calling in this place. Operating efficiencies are vital, of course – but for us they will be virtues only because and to the extent that they help us serve more faithfully. Our first and most passionate effort must be to muster the resources to accomplish what we feel called to do. When faced with feeding the 5,000, Jesus refused to reduce the size of the crowd to make it proportionate to the resources of food at hand. Instead he invited the disciples to expect that the resources could be expanded to feed the crowd. And so they were!

Why are we here? To worship, and learn, and raise up, and give hope, and share the Beloved Community. To do so with a spirit of abundance and confidence and grace.

Two years ago I ended my address with some elephant jokes (for the economic elephant in the room) and last year I wrapped it up with some knock-knock jokes (for our new north entrance). Then in November at the Senior Saints luncheon I shared a few Hallowe'en jokes and was told in no uncertain terms by one of the senior saints that I'd better not give up my day job! So I am abandoning my efforts at stand-up comedy, and I close this year instead with these words from the Rev. Reid Isaac.

The person of faith approaches life in the confidence that in all times and places there is something to learn, someone to love, something to give, and good comrades.

I am grateful to be here with you, where there is, indeed, much to learn, many to love, a lot to give, and ever such good comrades.

*The Rev. Alan M. Gates
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