

Interim Rector's Report
Annual Meeting
Galilee Church (Episcopal)
The Rev. Dr. James B. Magness
April 6, 2008

When I arrived at Galilee in November last year one of the first tasks I assumed was to begin a series of conversations with the people who are Galilee Church. I did this in order to have the opportunity to get to know you on a personal person-to-person basis.

Though most of our conversations took place in my office, I also talked with people in their homes, in restaurants over a meal or in the context of study or fellowship groups. The conversations were based on two questions: "What do you think and feel about Galilee?" and "What do you want for the Galilee of the future."

While talking with over 150 of you I have heard about your joy and sadness; your hurt, pain and jubilation; and of your eager anticipation as well as fear and frustration. At this time and in this type of an address, general observations are somewhat inadequate. Therefore, I will attempt to be a bit more specific.

- Some continue to be very supportive of the former rector who left Galilee last year. Others believe that he and his staff are in the past, and that we must be about the business of getting on with the future.
- Most interviewed were fairly well tied to one of the three Sunday worship services. However, it would be a gross over-simplification to assume that the people of each of these congregations hold to common beliefs and assumptions. You are, I have found, very diverse in your theological, social, cultural and political beliefs.
- From many of the interviews I heard no small amount of suspicion about where the leadership of the church will take Galilee during the next two to three years.
- There are some of you who continue to harbor anger toward The Episcopal Church, and, by extension, toward the Diocese of Southern Virginia and its interim bishop. Others are more than a little confident that the diocese and the larger church will recover from its stumbles and take us where we need to go so we can be the people we need to be.
- Some of you have told me that you want to reestablish Galilee's identity with the Episcopal Church. However, many others are not so sure about such a direction. I heard an equal amount of concern expressed about your fearfulness of having a connection with a denomination that has a questionable moral outlook and standing.
- There is a wide diversion of thought about worship and music, particularly in the context of our contemporary worship service. While some would like for the service to be made up exclusively of contemporary praise music and preaching, others are asking for more, much more. Several parents with young children in the family have said that they would like to have the experience of good and informal worship that integrates a deeper appreciation of the sacraments.

- A number of persons have expressed concern about confidentiality, in and with your clergy. These concerned individuals wanted assurances that information delivered to a clergyperson in the context of counseling and/or confessional setting will be held in strictest confidence by the clergy. I have given assurances that such confidentiality will be honored and the disclosure of information normally belongs to the counselee or confessor. The only exception to this will be in the rare situation in which immanent physical harm to self or others has been threatened.
- The final comment I wish to share with you is a poignant quote that has stayed with me ever since I first heard it: "It got so that when you came to church your skin would crawl. Trust was lost between neighbors."

I have just shared my observations with you so as to give a characterization of the present state of the people, or body of Christ at Galilee Church. The purpose of these meetings was to find out where you have been, who you are and where you will need to go.

A great deal of what I have heard from you has to do with things that are in the past. Sometimes I think it would be great if we could, as some would have us to do, forget about the past and move on into the future. However, we know that our history does affect who we are and what we will become.

I want to say a few things about who we are and what we are doing, today. In short, and to put it mildly, the people of Galilee have been through a very difficult period of time. Over and over again I have heard it said that unless you were here for the last 18 months, you will not be able to understand what happened, and that even then, it is at best difficult to have a good understanding of the things that happened within this congregation. Since the major precipitating events of 2007 you have been led by a group of people on the vestry that literally had to take into their hands the entire operation of one of the largest Episcopal congregations in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. At this time I would like for the members of the current vestry to stand. Though you may not have always agreed with everything they did, they were the people who had the responsibility to open the church doors for every event and upon conclusion close them, ensure that the bills got paid, found clergy to be in the church to lead worship services each and every Sunday, and to do countless other unseen and unnoticed tasks that were for your direct benefit. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I would like for them to hear a round of applause from you to show your appreciation for the work they have done on your behalf. - - - Thank you. Thank you.

In the short period of time since my arrival a few months ago, I have already seen significant changes. Nearly all of these changes have been for the good. Worship numbers are coming back up. We had over nine hundred people in worship services for the Sunday of Easter. During Holy Week and Easter we added three new services to our schedule, including the Great Vigil of Easter.

As you heard in the report from our treasurer, we have unmet financial needs at Galilee. Therefore, we will be initiating a year round program of stewardship. I want you to know that we will need leaders for that program and that persons from that group will be asked to help us.

Though we have one or two gaps in our programming, I believe we are doing very well. By the end of the year we will have had two Alpha courses. We have several ongoing scripture classes at the church. We have a divorce and recovery class. Thursday Nights at Galilee has been a huge success. Sacramental preparation classes are being held on an ongoing basis for baptism, confirmation and marriage. We have already baptized over ten persons this year (some very small persons and others who are somewhat larger), and we will have two more opportunities for baptism before the end of the calendar year. Confirmation preparation, though with a few initial hiccups, is now in full swing. It is our hope to have a bishop with us on the 15th or 22nd of June for confirmation and second opportunity for confirmation later in the year. As you might guess, we have ongoing marriage preparation for matrimonial candidates. I am confident that we have as good a marriage preparation curriculum as any other Episcopal Church anywhere. These are but a few programs that we are running today. Most of the others, which are too numerous to even mention, are listed on the pages in your booklet.

Now I want to say talk about the future at Galilee. Assuming that we continue to be sensitive to God's guidance and that we continue to work in collaborative transparent ways, I have every reason to be positive about the direction of Galilee Church.

Our new Thursday night program entitled, "Soup, Sandwich and the Holy Spirit," for the identification of our spiritual gifts and subsequent integration in to the ministries of this congregation will be immensely beneficial to the pursuit of our mission.

We will continue to learn about the body of Christ through the study of the Outline of the Faith in the *Book of Common Prayer*. For many of our people participation in this study will lead to the Sacrament of Confirmation.

New leadership is emerging for Galilee. Next weekend the old and the new vestries will spend a couple of days in retreat being led by a consultant who will help us to examine who we are and how our leaders can enhance how we do those things God has called us to do.

Though we are at the very beginning of our search process for a settled rector, I have good reason to believe that this will be a successful process.

These are but a few of the activities and programs that I see upon the horizon. I think that God is transforming us, into what I do not know. I believe that God is transforming us for the simple reason that I believe God is in the transformation business. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the followers of Jesus at Rome, Paul writes to a group of Christ-

followers whom he had not met, but of whose help he was in dire need. In the 12th chapter of Romans, beginning at the 1st verse, listen to what Paul wrote to them:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.¹

Yes, God is in the transformation business, and transformation begins with you and with me. As I conclude this address, want to challenge you to be prepared to move ahead where God wants us to go, do and be. It is essential for us to be engaged in fellowship with one another. I believe we need to devote ourselves to the endeavor of getting to know one another again. As it happens in the lives of family members from the best of families from time to time, barriers and road blocks will be set between the members of the family. It is not always important to determine who is responsible for the creation of the barrier or road block. It is important to know who is responsible for taking the barrier down. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

One word that is frequently bandied about these days is reconciliation. I think that if we are going to effectively pursue the mission to which God has called us and is stated on page 2 of the Annual Meeting booklet, we will need to work toward reconciliation in this body of Christ.

There are two things I want you to know and remember about reconciliation. First, though reconciliation is about effective communication with one another, it is as much or more about listening to what the other person is saying about his or her heart-felt understanding, need and concern. We listen when we are in a state of mind to hear what the other person needs or wants to say to us. Second, reconciliation is about getting so vulnerably close to one another that there is literally no impediment between you and the other.

Therefore, to use a word often used by the Apostle Paul, to denote that something important is about to follow, I challenge you to be committed to a year of fellowship with one another. Certainly we will gather together to have various programs and activities, but I want to challenge you to have as much emphasis upon your fellowship together as you do upon learning. I challenge you to spend time with persons whom you do not know. Additionally, I challenge you to spend time with persons with whom you may have enmity or strife.

By the renewing of your minds, God is and will be transforming us. God is in the business of transformation.

¹ Romans 12.1-3, *The Holy Bible: The New Revised Standard Version* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville: 1990)

Now Kate Bobbitt will close our meeting with prayer. Do remember that the results of the balloting will be announced tomorrow through an All Galilee email. If you do not get email and don't want to wait until next Sunday, you may get the names of those whom you have elected by calling the church office.