

The Rector's Message: State of the Parish Address, January 27, 2008

On this special opportunity we have today to look together at our common life, to pray and consider what God has in store for us in the process of discernment during this coming year, I would like to frame my remarks today in the Collect which prepared us for today's scriptures. So, please join with me in the Collect which we prayed at the beginning of the scripture readings. Let us pray.

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and all the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

One might say that in that prayer we see exactly a description of what our common life is intended to be; our purpose for being the kind of parish that we are. All of our peculiarities are grounded in that common vision: that we are trying to respond faithfully to the call of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to proclaim in thought, word and deed, and in all other aspects of our life, the Good News so that everyone might "perceive the glory of his marvelous works." We are here to give testimony, to bear witness to God, that others who are not yet in the knowledge of Him may have that knowledge of Him. In that context, then, who are we? (Or who are we *not*, in some cases?)

I found in reflecting on the nature of our parish community these last couple of months that in some ways it is more focused to find out what kind of church we are *not* than what kind of church we *are*. But there are a few things that describe our identity, some of which may be familiar to you; some of which may be a bit surprising. One thing that I did discover is that we are not simply a neighborhood church. Those of you who had to drive some distance today know that. But what you may not know is that according to our most recent list of active church members and those connected with the church, 62 % of our members and 60 % of our addresses are not found in zip codes 92106, 92107, or 92110. That means that whatever qualities we have as something of a neighborhood church, these are themselves overshadowed by the demographic of our parish community. To give you an outside perimeter, we have members from Coronado, Tijuana, Chula Vista, Spring Valley, El Cajon, Scripps Ranch and Escondido, among all other parts of San Diego. So we are a diverse congregation demographically, and this says something about who we are and who we are not. To get here, in other words, people are coming not because of *where* we are, but because of *who* we are. This is one insight to be gained.

Another thing to note is that we are not a large church. For example, when we learned that The Rock moved into NTC and brought with them about 5,000 members, we realized that whatever "large" might mean, we're not it. We also recognize that people are not coming here because of our programs. My oldest son, Adam, whose girlfriend has been attending The Rock from time to time, gave me a list of the various services they have throughout the week, and it sounds like a virtual Community Service Center. They have meetings and gatherings for all sorts and conditions of people all week long. Clearly, people who are looking for the WalMart of churches, rather than the mom-and-pop shop, are not coming here. They will look for that in a place that can provide that range of services. So that also tells us something about who we are *not*: we are not a parish that people come to simply because of our programs. Fortunately, we have some courageous new members (as well as some long-standing members) who are willing to participate and shore up the programs and the activity groups that we do have here, but that's not the primary reason for people coming. We are going to look at some of these other aspects of our identity a little bit, but I think these are important parameters for recognizing who we are.

Numerically speaking, during 2006 we averaged an attendance of 101; during 2007 we averaged 109, a significant increase in numbers. Considering that last year was our first year of transition in terms of our affiliation, I think that is significant: a sign of stability and a confirmation that we are moving in the right direction.

There are at least three areas in our common life that we can focus on and begin to see something of who we are in terms of how we flesh that out in our activity. First, in terms of Worship and Education. Some of you will remember about two years ago, when we had a visit for the first time from the new *Sheep and Goats* columnist. If you read him regularly, you'll see that every church that he ever visits gets 2 ½ stars. That's the summary assessment. Within that context, we received four stars, the highest mark, for our liturgy, for our worship. Clearly, our worship is distinctive. And as we are now enjoying a certain higher degree of fellowship with some of the other orthodox congregations no longer a part of the Episcopal Church, we find that our style of worship is *still* different from many of our evangelical and charismatic churches. People who are looking for traditional liturgy, with stately language, and with meaningful hymns that don't just speak of the feeling of the moment, are going to find that that's one of the things which draws them to our style of worship here. My son, in describing his experience at The Rock church when he went there was: "20 minutes of a band playing music followed by 45 minutes of a video-taped sermon shown on large TV screens." That's not the kind of worship you will find here on a Sunday morning. Clearly, our worship has been a testimony to why some people are coming here, and we have seen affirmation of this, not just in that Reader article of a couple of years ago, but also in the increase we've had in people like choir members, readers, ushers and other participants in our Sunday worship. We've also seen an increase in attendance in our mid-week services, particularly noticed on Thursday evenings at 5:30 where a number of young people have been coming.

When we turn to the issue of education (or in Biblical language "equipping the saints"), there are some parts of this that have been particularly good and strong in our parish and some others that need some work. On the strong side, I would suggest you take a look at what kind of adult education is offered in other churches and I think you will find that we offer some of the most substantial and worthwhile programs of any church in Southern California (and perhaps beyond). Not that you have necessarily the best teachers in the world (that's up to your assessment), but at least you have a lot of good books to read: challenging, meaty, good materials for adult education are available in a way that I don't see in many other places. We have also done a number of things this past year to add to our education ministry. Since the fall, we are offering a class for teens, taught by one of the priests. Fr. Trebbe and I are taking turns, and I'm going to have the youth class during Lent. We want to make sure that our teenagers (as well as our adults) are equipped for their faith journey through our educational classes. That has been significant. We've also added this year (just starting) a men's prayer breakfast, meeting Saturday mornings at 7:45 a.m. In 2007, we had an incredible enrichment in our parish website. As a navigational tool that can lead you to other wonderful sources of information, I urge you to use our parish website. Mike Lemieux has been doing a great job, and he has been working in conjunction with a new parishioner, David Turney, who does another website called San Diego Anglicans. So if you want any source of information globally, they are very up-to-date and have all kinds of enriched materials for us. We have no excuse not to be the best educated people in terms of what is going on in the world and the church. I think for this year, the challenges we face in worship and education are more in the field of training for lay ministries. As many people have come here who have been active in other churches, and would like to be active here, we have not always been providing training and raising up and support for people with lay ministries. I hope we will work on that more intentionally this year. I also think it's important that we

consider our children's education: we've had a number of our children live long enough to become teenagers in recent years, so we've done a lot of work with them, but our younger children have not been as well addressed in terms of their needs, and there is a new crop of younger ones coming in. This is an issue that we will continue to try to address, with a great deal of parental support needed in order to support our children's ministries. We also are in a position to reconsider our worship offerings: with the influx of new people, and with the challenge of our ongoing ministry, we need to consider whether or not evening services should be offered again, as we did for a year on Sunday evenings, and to consider other midweek offerings that might be more suitable, or in addition to, what we are already offering. All of us are also challenged to support the programs and the worship and the services that we continue to offer.

Another area of our common life that is noteworthy is our service to the community. Most of you know that we are the home for *Loaves and Fishes*, that passes out food to people three days a week. Even for only the two hours a morning that we do this, we've been getting several hundred people a month coming for food. Also, we continue to host seven AA meetings per week (including one every morning except Sunday), and we've also supported (through our membership) the Kairos prison ministry, projects sponsored by Episcopal Relief and Development Fund, and our own Western Service Workers addressing the needs of the working poor in San Diego. We have also provided ministry through our Concert series, and through the *Prayers and Squares* ministry that has been expanded during this past year. Just this last year, we've been able to complete a gap in our outreach ministry by now being able to say that there is a free dinner served to the needy of this community every Wednesday. Our own people do this only once a month, but it's through our hospitality and generosity that we've been able to find others who will also come and offer food to those in need. Meeting the needs of the poorest of the poor in our community, we can now say we have at least one free hot meal every week. We've also added this past year a drama ministry, as an adjunct to our Concert series. As recently as yesterday the Drama team had a meeting with their spearhead, John Cochran, and they're going to have lots of things in the works this new year. That's been another enrichment to our outreach to the community in the past year. Finally, we provided a link between our newly-revitalized men's activity and our pastoral care partners (some of you may not yet be aware of this). Now when our pastoral care partners call to ask you for any prayer requests, they will also ask if you have any other needs that you have difficulty fulfilling. For example: someone may be unable to get all the leaves and pine-needles cleaned out of their gutters or their roof, something that they need at home, or some other kind of service. Under Fr. Trebbe's coordination, we will provide a link between those needs of the parishioners, the pastoral care partners, and a volunteer core to address those needs. So this year I do not anticipate yet any new ministries, but I think it is a good challenge for us to support those ongoing ministries and new ministries which we've added in the last year.

Thirdly and finally in terms of our activity level, is our involvement in the larger church. As you know we are a parish of the Diocese of Argentina, in the province of the Southern Cone, which is six countries of South America. That province has added two dioceses this last year: the Diocese of Recife in Brazil, and the Diocese of San Joaquin in Central California. They've increased their numbers, not just by little parishes like ours, but with 40-plus parishes in the case of San Joaquin and a significant number from Brazil as well. Our link with that community is also extended to the rest of the global south primates, and the great stretch of the global Anglican Communion worldwide. The global south primates, representing about half of the *provinces* of the Anglican Communion, represent about $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the *membership* of the Anglican Communion. We were also blessed through our association with our companion Bishop, Valentino Mokiwa in Dar es Salaam, to renew that link this last week when he was with us. I spoke to him just a couple of days ago when he

was back in South Carolina, and getting ready to attend the consecration of the new Bishop there yesterday. We continue to support his ministry: of the tithe which we send for our commitment beyond the diocese, 90 % of that goes to the Southern Cone (which is then used at the discretion of the primate wherever his needs are,) and the other 10% goes to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. I'm also grateful to be able to say that through your generosity we were able to raise an additional \$3,000 to \$4,000 for Bishop Valentino's ministry as a result of his visit. (If you would like to jack that number up a bit, the directions for how to do that are in your bulletin.) These things are also supplemented by our involvement with the Western Anglicans group, comprised of the about 20 congregations of Southern California which are now outside the Episcopal Church. Some of us have leadership in that. We continue to be involved in Forward Faith, Common Cause and the Anglican Communion Network. We are not just keeping our private life here in this little corner of San Diego, but we are intimately involved, and indeed our parish is recognized as being in the forefront of the realignment that's going on in the Anglican Communion. These are some of the things that describe who we are, and our involvement.

Finally, I'd like us to consider what's next? Where are we going from here? In the light of who we are, one of the key things we have to take into account is that we now live in a glass house. We are not again a small church tucked away in a small diocese where no one pays any attention to what we do. We are under constant scrutiny. People are always paying attention; some looking for us to stumble, some looking for us to succeed, but none-the-less we are constantly observed. In the last year, we've had three bishops express varying degrees of support to us. First, verbally and by a visit from the former Bishop of San Diego, Bishop Hughes. Then, we had the courageous visit from Bishop MacBurney in June to confirm for us. And most recently, the visit from Bishop Valentino. I want to assure you and warn you that all three of those bishops have been contacted and discouraged from supporting us, from being involved in our ministry. They've been put on the block, as it were, and served notice that this is not acceptable. They've been willing to do this, and we are very grateful for it. But it's a reminder that when we may think we've having a little visit from someone, people are paying attention. We are being observed. Because of our affiliation we are also subject to a great deal of bad-mouthing, type-casting and prejudice from people who don't know who we are, but who like to think they know who we are. From a local rector who described worship at Holy Trinity as providing a message of hate, to a church outside of San Diego farther north who told some former parishioners of ours (who called to find out about services) that they should go back here and not attend their church. Things of that nature. It is a challenge for us. We have to recognize that our visibility is costly. So, what do we do about that? First, of course, we have to be careful. We have to mind our P's and Q's because many are watching and waiting for us to fail. Secondly, we have to make sure that we are positive; that we say what we can affirm and what we want to preserve and promote. In other words, what we believe in. We are here because of those very words that we heard in the Collect earlier: to promote the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Just because someone doesn't want to be saved doesn't mean that we are doing them a kindness by withdrawing the offer. Just because someone does not want to hear the challenge of a consecrated life, and to surrender oneself to something greater than themselves, doesn't mean we stop challenging people. Yesterday, I read an article about a church in Houston that has over 40,000 members, whose pastor was here in San Diego recently. In the article I was reading (I know nothing about this but what I read) the author kept referring to the way in which this pastor gives a message of the prosperity gospel: if you come here and you tithe and become an active member here, you are going to have all the benefits that God will provide, whereas others may not get those same benefits. And you will have all sorts of blessings in this life, not just salvation. That may appeal to people more than a life that says, "Come, jump in, get your feet dirty, and your hands challenged to work, and God will offer you the promise of salvation." As some people say, "What have you done for me lately?" "What's in this for me

today?" And so, the challenging message that not everyone wants to hear (but it is the one that we have been given) is that it is in giving our lives in service to God that we gain everlasting life. So, we need to make sure we're very positive about that and that our attention is always on Him who makes us holy. Thirdly, to avoid being either defensive or negative. I would hate to have us be observed as people who are always bad-mouthing other Christians, or badmouthing other churches. We are not here to say negative things about other people. We are not here to be defensive about who we are. We are not here for a political agenda. But we are here for the Gospel agenda of the Good News of salvation through the one and only Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The last thing I would recommend and pray that we will be prepared to do this year is: Ask more questions, say more prayers, seek better discernment so that each of us will be better equipped to embody the Good News in the way in which we treat other people. You and I are living in this glass house. We always were, from God's point of view; nothing we ever did was outside of His view. Now more than ever it is important that we be prepared to make that winsome witness to our Lord so that others may find Him. During this new year, as we continue to recognize this new relationship we have to the community, we need to think how to let other people know who we are and what we have to offer, and invite them to come here. We need to continue that message, not just for the sake of the Gospel, but also because it is a challenge that God has placed upon our hearts. He has called us out in order that we may do the work that He has called us to do, not simply to enjoy freedom from what we no longer have to deal with. I pray we will support these activities. You are about to get a Lenten booklet that offers all kinds of things for Lent, coming up in a week and a half. I'd also like to commend to your attention some other means to challenge ourselves to grow. In the month of May, we are anticipating the first Anglican Cursillo, offered to those outside the Episcopal Church: a great opportunity for laypeople to hear from other laypeople in ways that can often challenge and encourage them to take responsibility for their own prayer life and Christian living. We also have a men's retreat, to be led by the Primate from the church in Uganda in May. Our own parish silent retreat is coming up. In June, there's a Forward in Faith Assembly at the largest outdoor shrine in North America, Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois. So there are plenty of opportunities for us to get on board. Please, do not think that we will be able to *coast* as Christians. God does not offer such an option. We are to continually give our lives over to Him and pray as we do so for our daily bread that will equip us for His service. So, as we prepare to continue our worship, in which we will receive that strengthening grace of the Body and Blood of Christ, and then as we prepare for the other part of our day, our meeting, where we will look pragmatically at, and hopefully have some discussion about, some of the things we've been looking at here, may we pray that God will continue to remind us and keep ourselves focused on that mission. And with that in mind, I'd like us to turn once again and pray together the Collect for today: Let us pray.

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and all the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Faithfully yours,

Fr. Lawrence D. Bausch