

2012 Rector's Report submitted by The Rev. Richard A. Towers

One could argue that my annual report could be 1/6th the normal length because I arrived in November. Instead of looking back, I am going to look forward and hopefully help set the tone and direction for our shared life in 2013.

Over the last 2 1/2 months I've had the opportunity to get to know many of you, serve along side you, and assess the ministry of St. John's Episcopal Church. This is a healthy and engaged congregation. The stress of transition is real and I believe you are recovering nicely.

Throughout my coffee conversations a single theme has emerged. You describe St. John's as poised. Poised for renewed ministry, poised for new growth, posed for further engagement in the community.

Being poised to do new and better things is an exciting proposition. As with any task, there are steps we will need to take to accomplish our mission.

I have adopted three major foci for 2013:

Outreach

Education

Stewardship and the Physical Plant

Before I delve into my focus areas let me say that we are here to keep the main thing, the main thing. We gather for worship and growth in Christ. Outreach, Education, and Stewardship are key components to our worship.

Outreach

Outreach is almost always harder than in-reach. We lead busy lives. Sometimes it seems like making it to church on Sunday is a heroic act, adding additional service to the world can seem impossible with our schedules.

I have tasked Scott Russell, who is out of town this month, to create short-cycle, multi-generational outreach opportunities. You have already been engaged in this type of service. Response natural disaster has been short and long-term. I believe that compelling mission is one of the ways that younger adults will gravitate to us.

I have been told that there are 750 registered non-profits in Tompkins County. There are passionate people with passion projects all over the place. There is obvious, chronic, and acute need all over the place as well.

We are not here to compete with the already existing public service sector. But we are also compelled to serve people in need as a direct response to the grace and love that we have shown. In a town with so many options, a faith community may not be the most effective vehicle to deliver public services.

That is why I believe that Loves and Fishes is our low-hanging fruit. You will read that the soup kitchen served more than 37,000 portions this past year! If you happen by the church during the week you are likely to see the most vulnerable population finding sustenance right here at St. John's.

What has been a surprise is how little involvement we have with them. I do know that Ted, Dale, and Charlie are active members of the Board of Directors but I know of very few others that have

spent a little time in this most relevant outreach. Father West and the Cornelians are here more often and in greater number than we are!

The Rev. Culver has agreed to preach in the New Year and I am making it my outreach priority for us to do more than loan them space and give them parking.

Education

Education can be in-reach and outreach. The education for current community members is going to be another of my top priorities. Age appropriate opportunities will be undertaken.

Adult education opportunities will also be shorter-cycle. Lenten book study for adults is already being planned.

I will be tackling youth education and fellowship this year. I promise fun and engaging programming. I ask parents to support participation by making it a family priority. Confirmation is also great way to deliver faith formation and has a limited shelf life. If your kids are over-programmed, get them to attend confirmation. I hope it will be so engaging that they don't treat that sacrament as graduation. If you are approached to be a confirmation mentor, please consider that your contribution to educational mission of St. John's.

Stewardship

There is the story of a preacher who got up one Sunday and announced to his congregation: "I have good news and bad news. The good news is, we have enough money to pay for our new building program. The bad news is, it's still out there in your pockets."

I am not going to delineate a theology of stewardship here. Please know that I believe that stewardship is far more than dollars and cents. 2013 will be a year that we will have to take seriously the financial cost of being St. John's Episcopal Church at the corner of N. Cayuga and Buffalo. Simply put, the biggest asset in being a vital faith community is quickly becoming our biggest liability.

Tackling deferred maintenance has to be our audacious goal. The bills for the physical plant are coming in and we need to continue to address some serious problems.

We will begin conceptualization of our next capital campaign. This is a question of how, not just when, we continue investing in the legacy of this proud church.

The budget is an example of the way we have been endeavoring to use resources wisely. My time and expertise in youth ministry and increased emphasis in digital communication are two ways that we are economizing. Please note that paper church newsletters are being phased out all over the country. My goal is by 2014 we will not be sending periodical church communications that way. Facebook, robust websites, and email blasts will be the way we stay connected in the future.

Conclusion

I am so grateful for all the ways that you serve. There is a ton of work that gets accomplished every week. Your paid team is hard working, engaged, and laboring in love for you and God.

I want you to know that I am so very blessed to have been selected as the 22 rector of St. John's. I hope you are happy with the decision. I know I am! I invite you to the renewal of our ministry on Wednesday evening at 7:00 PM.

I ask that you continue to step forward to volunteer. I ask that you let the new ideas and passion to bubble up. I ask that you continue in your faithful service in 2013.