

Senior Warden's Address
2009 Annual Meeting
Bud Billups

I stated in my **written comments for the annual meeting** that the key word for 2008 for St. Margaret's is the word "**transition**". It could just as easily be the word "**change**". Change is a word that many people will offhandedly say is good for us or we like to have change, but my experience is that when real change takes place, many of us actually start feeling a little queezy, a little unsettled, a little nervous. As the Diocesan Deployment officer, **Mark Gatza**, told us when he visited here in November, the greatest enemy during an interim period is anxiety. Anxiety is a response to change. My sense has been, in my short history as Senior Warden, that anxiety here is actually quite low and that we are simply moving on, as we need to do.

In September of 2008, the **Vestry affirmed my becoming Senior Warden**. That September meeting was the **first St. Margaret's Vestry meeting** I had ever attended. Some of the Vestry **members didn't know me** and I didn't know them. There were **subjects brought up** at that meeting about which I knew absolutely nothing! I can almost here that some of you might be thinking "So how is this guy going to succeed at being our Senior Warden?"

But if you stop and think about it, I have resources that many Senior Wardens at other parishes can only dream of having. For starters, **Beth Knorr, our former Senior Warden**, with five years of solid success behind her, prepared materials and information for me, and offered advice and counsel, which remain available to me today. I have not only had access to her wisdom, but also that of former **Senior Wardens Mac Ridout and Jim Hall**, both of whom have been most helpful to me. I sit down with George Saroch, Junior Warden, for the past year as well as this new year, to get his advise, to learn history on issues, and just be a recipient of his thinking. When you put all of that experience together, any Senior Warden here has a stable of thoroughbreds to call on.

I also have confidence that things are running as they should be. **Stewart** is doing a great job at seeing that day to day operations are covered. He is working from experience and he has taken on additional tasks with willingness and confidence. He has a wonderful staff with him of **James, Ruth, Nancy, Pat, Jim, John, Joan and Karen**. It is a terrific team and we would be at a significant loss without any one of them.

I have been told that an occasional comment has been made questioning as to why we aren't moving faster **in getting a Rector search underway**. Let me briefly address that issue. In my first communication to this congregation, I explained that there would first be a **search for an Interim Rector**, that we would then get a **Parish Profile** prepared, and that would be followed by a **search for our new Rector**. These actions build on one another. We have been doing just what I outlined. We want to make good progress, but we also want to do it **covering all the bases and doing it well**. That is our goal, our plan, and that is what is happening.

The Personnel Committee, chaired by **Larry Lorton**, developed a sound process for the Interim Rector search and implemented it well, concluding with our calling The Rev. Lori Lowe as Interim Rector. I want to point out that the composition of the Committee was **Janice Roper-**

Graham, Jim Hall , George Saroch and me. I could not have asked for a more **professional or more cohesive group** to work with, and I, and you, owe all of them a vote of thanks for their fine work.

Because most Rector searches are often twelve months, and can be eighteen months or longer, getting an **Interim Rector in** place was the highest, short-term priority. We have begun working on the **preparation of the Profile**, with a committee chaired by **Spencer Johnson**. Working with him on that team are : **Joe Barsin, Tom Bowers, Dave Brown, Maggy Cullman, Gwen Davis, Jim Ferguson, Jane Piche, Anne Sessions and Carly Wilson.**

When we have the Profile in place, the search for our new Rector will be underway. Regarding the Profile, you will soon be asked to participate in a survey that will be used in the Profile. The Profile will only be as good as the quality of the responsiveness of the parish. Please respond, and respond promptly, when you are asked. The Profile is important for a quality search process. This document says who we are. Just as our Interim Rector search spread across the country, we can be assured that the Rector search will be nationwide. We want to present ourselves well and you can help us do that.

I came into the position of Senior Warden knowing that we were going to be experiencing **considerable change**. As naturally fearful as many of us are in dealing with change, it also creates the natural avenue of bringing in **new people, whose ideas** will in all likelihood be different in some areas from what we are used to, their history and experience can be added to generate additional concepts or solutions to our issues. Some of our current practices may be challenged. **Lori Lowe sat in on our Vestry meeting** last week, and during discussions of several issues, she put a different slant on ideas, and even created different outcomes than might have happened without her voice in the room. These are the tensions, and also the growth activities that change brings. This is also a time when previously untapped **lay leadership** develops in parishes.

In mentioning the **Vestry**, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize that group, which makes up our governing body of this parish. I have been a member of a vestry before, but **for me** this one is different. I have now been to five meetings, and I have learned that this is a group of people who puts their parish first, who works together as a unified team and who listen and think well. I ask that **all the vestry members**, including those who are going off the Vestry, please **stand and raise your hand** so we can all recognize you.

Thanks to all of you.

If your reaction was like mine, you felt **personal sadness** for the losses of both Mark and Dina. But along with that sadness, there is, as a result of their departures, a need to fill gaps, which brings with it that opportunity for new thinking, new ways of doing things, building on the strong bases that were left by those who have moved on.

It's a bit like the way **life** works, isn't it? None of us are here forever. While we are here, we can each do our part to make this a better place, and at some point, it becomes someone else's time to pick up where we left off.

I have seen in my short time as Senior Warden such an outpouring of the goodness and competence of people in this Parish. One after another of you have offered to be of help. I have enough offers for people to serve on the Search Committee that I could form several such committees. And when I have asked people for help, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. This parish has strengths that most Parishes could only wish for. We are fiscally sound. We have no debt (which is highly unusual). At a time of serious financial crisis in this nation, our pledges are increasing (that is certainly not the norm today). At a time when we have lost two of our three clergy, our congregation is growing (Mark Gatza told us that is was not unusual for him to see a parish drop 10 to 20% when a rector leaves). There is no question that we are going through change, but this is change at its very best! At last Sunday's sermon, **Tom Andrews** made the comment that "**God is good**" and that "**God loves us**". All we have to do at St. Margaret's is just glance around us to know that **Tom got that one right!** We in this parish are the recipients of bountiful blessings and it is our job to do the very best that we are able to do with the gifts we have been given.

While I was thinking about what I was going to say today, I was filled with the awareness of the **attributes, the human talent, the caring** - so much that we have - that is centered in this parish, and for whatever reason, **one phrase** kept running through my head, time and time again. It was one line from what the Vestry uses to close its meetings - the doxology. The phrase that kept coming to me was the first line - "**Praise God from whom all blessings flow**". I would ask that we close this meeting today as the Vestry does with its meetings. Let us all stand and sing together the doxology as we close this session.