

Annual Chaplains Report - 2009

January 18, 2009

*“A Trustworthy Prophet of the People”
- I Samuel 3:20*

I thought I would start with some good news about the Episcopal Church (Pause).

Well, it's hard! I almost thought I would have to go with “visions were not widespread” from 1 Samuel 3. I did find something though; the Church Pension Fund announced that our retired clergy will receive a 5.8% COLA in 2009! I also considered using the California Supreme Court's decision upholding the Church's right to property once controlled by congregations who have now disassociated themselves from the Episcopal Church. Perhaps Gene Robinson's inclusion in the Obama Inaugural festivities.

But both those seemed more an indication of the general bad news. There are substantial divisions within the Anglican Communion. The presenting issue is gay marriage, a gay Bishop. The real issue is power and authority in the Anglican Church. The majority of Anglicans live in the southern hemisphere, in former English colonies. They are biblical literalists. Money and education belong to the churches of the northern hemisphere.

The Archbishop of Canterbury finds himself between that rock and that hard place. The solution he proposes is an Anglican Covenant. We are not very good at these kinds of broad confessions. The Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) are valued as a window onto the soul of Elizabethan religion. As a normative theological statement; not so much . . .

The Episcopal Church has experienced this same division. It has lost big dioceses (Pittsburgh and Ft. Worth) and little dioceses (Peoria and Sacramento). The Church will survive. But the membership loss is real. The cost of litigating property disputes is substantial. Our preoccupation with this single issue means little other emotional resource may be available for the rest of the gospel.

The Diocese of Indianapolis is not much moved by GLBT issues. We are small, progressive, and generally agreeable. The Diocese is, however, greatly affected by the downturn in the U.S. economy. 60% of the Diocesan budget is dependent on endowment proceeds. 70% of our budget comes from the diocese.

The Diocese has also undergone an administrative reorganization. Unless you are a church hobbyist, you will probably be unaware of any organizational change. However in this reorganization, I moved from being a church pastor paid by a parish to a manager of a diocesan program unit paid directly by the diocese. I have never felt called to manage a program unit. I have, for the last 24 years, believed I was leading a church with a particular mission. My compensation is unchanged. But the salary portion of the Good Shepherd grant will leave our books, and so the budget we will present at the annual meeting will stand in need of adjustment.

We might have done that already, but we have had no communication regarding the size of our program check, and the diocese's initial attempt pay me using direct deposit failed. You have loaned me one-half my monthly salary to tide me over. My wife and children thank you!

Good Shepherd is about the same as last year. Literally. In 2007 our attendance was 3298. In 2008 our attendance was 3258. 63.4 people a Sunday. 62.8 people a Sunday. We “made” about \$10,000 profit, and this in a year in which we hosted a rock concert and bought a room full of furniture.

Next year will be harder. We will miss the Anderson-Rays. Our gift income has fallen with the economy. Our investment portfolio is down 23%. If we maintain our pledge income, all should be well.

Undergraduate ministry continues to be difficult. We did try a couple of things in 2008. A Stewart center display. Advertising on WBAA. A call out that featured “We the Living”. The plan was to move kids who liked the concert into a Sunday evening service whose music was bigger and better, beefed up with paid musicians. In spite of the rain, the call-out cookout attracted 80 people. Sunday attendance was helped only a little, and that by the connection of the players to their friends. We will have to reevaluate this idea.

This year was also marked by the disappearance of the registrar’s religious preference list. Each fall the registrar’s office had generated a list of self-identified Episcopalians (and Catholics, Methodists, Bahai’s, etc.). In the 1980’s that list ran to more than 400 Episcopal names. Last year, about 80. This year, 8. With the debut of My Purdue and One Purdue, the program that culled those names became a legacy program.

This list was like an old friend. It was reliable. Not generated by us, we could not delude ourselves about the size of our base. It was ideologically neutral. It picked up conservatives from Kokomo and liberals from Bloomington. While not always complete, it was a free mailing list from which we could gain another 10 or so new registrations for each 100 names. We will no longer add 10 names each year. We will subtract 10 names with each graduation cycle. Our “Baptized Members” count is headed down.

This will be a challenge for Mario Melendez, our new ESA President, and Tammy Conrad Salvo, this year’s ESA Faculty Advisor. How do we identify and maintain our base - what might hold the interest of our own high school graduates – while we continue to engage the wider culture?

What will be new in 2009? The Bishop will visit us twice this year; first on April 25th for our Deanery Confirmation, and again on October 25th for her biennial parish visit. There will be some discussion with our friends at St. John’s as to how we might manage our parish operations more efficiently. Those of you who work with our children will be asked to take part in the diocesan “Safeguarding Our Children” program.

But the bigger change will be in the cultural climate following the Presidential election. We are moving from an era ‘when vision was not so widespread’ to a new presidency and a new progressive era. Without rehearsing the inauguration, the Obama election is indeed a milestone in American history.

In 1987 Michael Douglas starred in the movie “Wall Street.” (Him and a couple of Sheens.) His big line was “greed is good”. For more than 20 years that was our creed. Greed is good. Starve government. Corporate profit profits the individual. National victory. Ideological certitude. Pre-emptive self-defense. American exceptionalism.

Now we search for a trustworthy prophet. Now we search for community.

Abolitionist Theodore Parker (a canonical figure in the Unitarian Church, a saint) wrote in the 1850’s, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” So said Martin Luther King. And now Barack Obama. Can we be a community of trustworthy prophets?

Is our vision long enough to look 150 years on? Is it sharp enough to see how we might move the direction of our common life just a little in the course of our lifetime? In 2009 we will be called to be trustworthy prophets, called to mark out the grace in the transition of the ages, creating and sustaining the next generation of trustworthy prophets.

We Episcopalians are thought to be a boutique people. Writing in Newsweek this week, an author described Bernie Madoff and the people he conned as “Jews who wanted to be Episcopalians, naming their kids Tyler and Kimberly, learning to play golf, eager to make money in the markets.” As of Wednesday then, we were still understood to be the children of J.P.Morgan and Bishop William Lawrence, the “Banker Bishop”, who with his Harvard buddies yes, founded the Church Pension Fund that we made note of earlier.

Who are we apart from that cultural history and the aesthetic indulgence it implies? We give voice to a full and free expression of the Christian faith in the English tongue. We do that at Purdue. What does that look like?

Happily for more than 50 years we have always had examples.

I am easing into the awards portion of the program here . . .

Two people, past award winners, need to be singled out as we begin. First, my thanks to Cathy Barron as she completes her second stint as Senior Warden. In a ministry not easily organized, her warmth, energy, and dependability are much appreciated. Particularly appreciated as we made the transition to this space, and began the renovation of these spaces. So, a personal word of thanks to Cathy! She deserves a round of applause.

We also need to acknowledge the work Bruce Cooper has done over the last 10 years as parish treasurer. As this need not be a life sentence, I'm sure Bruce joins me in thanking Matt Holt for taking on this job.

Last week the winner of our Nellie Johnston Award spent part of her time tacking down the silver threads that had come loose following our dry cleaning of the altar cloth Nellie wove for us. Now there is an image; literally continuing Nellie's work. But the real reason Meg Foley is this year's award winner is her devotion to our kids and so to our Sunday School.

Campus ministries don't have Sunday Schools. Well, if you conceive of campus ministry only in program terms you don't. If you think of them as intergenerational mentoring communities, then a Sunday School makes perfect sense. Meg, a professional teacher and an excellent mother, has made this thing work year after year in all sorts of awkward spaces through myriad comings and goings. Making it work well. Our 2009 Nellie Johnston Senior Mentor Award goes to Meg Foley.

The Angela Falzone Student Leadership Award goes to Ed Battjes. Ed is recognized all around the Purdue campus as a role model for his work leading Boiler Gold Rush, Purdue's freshmen orientation program. Here he had the great idea of putting our annual Episcopal Student Association call-out on steroids. He contacted the band "We the Living" and put their concert here together with our kick-off call-out cookout. Of course it rained. But we still had five times the people we usually have at this event. Ed is also in charge of the Pharmacy Club members who man our parking lot for the men's basketball games. From Valparaiso, IN, born and raised an Episcopalian, I give you Ed Battjes.

Trustworthy prophets.

Our annual meeting follows upstairs immediately after the service. An organizational meeting of the new vestry will take place down here following that.

Amen.