

Rector's Ramblings:

(At the request of numerous parishioners the State of the Church Report from the Annual Parish Meeting is included here.)

I am almost half-way through my third year as the Rector of the Church of the Mediator. Today I give you update on how things are going from my perspective.

When I was called to be your Rector I was called to address four primary goals. They are:

1. To 'grow' the church
2. To start and complete a Capitol Fund Raising Campaign.
3. To maintain and strengthen Children and Youth Ministries
4. To deliver good and meaningful sermons.

Here is a brief update on these goals. They have in no way been fully realized.

The Mediator has grown. We are averaging well over 100 people at the 10:30 service. With the additional numbers from our 5 and 8 o'clock services, we average close to 150 persons per Sunday (with the exception of summer vacation). Our average attendance for 2007 was 124 for combined services.

The Children and Youth Ministries have been strengthened. We moved from a part time to a full time Youth Director and an additional staff person who works with our teenagers 10 hours per week. Use of the bus enhances community for our youth and saves parents money when children travel to camp Bratton-Green or on other outings.

The Physical plant has been improved as you will hear in our Jr. Warden's report.

The Vestry has determined two priorities for this next year. The first is to explore the feasibility of a Capitol Fund raising campaign and relate these findings to the congregation. The second is to develop a 'master plan' of our organizational structure in order to improve communication as we continue to grow.

While I know that not every sermon is a 'home run' most of the feedback has been positive. As always, please let me know how I can improve. Reminding you of the original agreement between myself and this congregation, I want now to tell you that there is bad news and there is good news.

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The good news is: THE HONEY MOON IS OVER

When the "honeymoon" is over, the real work on the relationship between us begins. In the third year of our lives together, we will have choices to make in how we choose to live together.

Dr. Jacques Hadler at Virginia Seminary offers the most succinct description of how congregations move from the 'honeymoon' stage to a new, promising and more meaningful stage of life together.

1. For the first year or so, the Rector and congregation make connections with one another. I think most of us would agree that attention was paid to 'connecting.' This congregation truly extended to Charles and me and our children radical hospitality so that we could 'connect.' That will always be a highlight of my time at the Mediator.

2. The second year, says Hadler, the Rector and Vestry work on a mutual vision based on the goals of the Rector's call. There can be resistance and sabotage of the very vision being worked on. This is especially true if the vision is for the growth of a pastoral sized congregation (like the Mediator) to expand its mission and ministry. The task of the Rector, vestry and lay leaders is to stay on track and not get de-railed or de-moralized.

Here is a re-cap of how we at the Mediator have been shaping a vision for the Mediator of the future and how we communicated this.

In May of 2009 our Newsletter, The Mediorite, stated: "the weekend of September 11-13 would be 'A vision for the Mediator' weekend. Traditionally, Rally Sunday, this weekend will involve the church in a process of sharing the best of the Mediator of the past, celebrating who we are in the present and visioning what we want for the future." Our intent was to begin early to ask folks to set aside the September date so planning could take place. Rally Sunday was chosen because most families would have returned from vacations and would be able to participate.

3. In August of 2009, the front page of the Mediorite again announced the Vision weekend along with Seeds of Faith and the start of Sunday School. For 6 months building up to the Vision weekend, announcements were made during the service a sermon was devoted outlining the completion of projects from the last vision initiative 6 years ago and our need to have one again.

The front page of the Mediorite in September was devoted to a report on the outcomes of the weekend. The Web site communicated information about the weekend. A phone tree announcement was made as well. All voices were needed work on our vision for the future. As a result of the Vision weekend, these new ministries were begun:

- A Food Bank for the hungry.
- A Labyrinth weekend to offer an introduction to the Labyrinth.
- A book club that will explore aspects of faith, but is not strictly theological.
- A Dinner Club. Our first get together is set for March. Details to follow.
- Expansion of bus transportation for people from assisted living to services.
- Outreach to children in our area. Conversations have been started with the Boys and Girls club organization.

Finally as a result of the weekend with some 65 congregation members participating, these are the attributes that congregation members said best describe Mediator's Identity:

We are a church that takes sharing God's unconditional love seriously. Acceptance of others is

our highest value. The following values were also important to the identity of the Mediator:

Practicing radical hospitality.

Valuing intellectual freedom.

Valuing our worship. Tradition and our sense of community.

These are the top items on a longer list of all the things that are valued by persons at the Mediator.

Now back to Dr. Hadler:

By the third year, those who feel most displaced by the implementation of the vision or for whatever reason were not part of the decision making process, begin to be aware that change is happening. Often the Rector, Vestry and the vision are undermined. The task of the rector and the vestry is to keep articulating the vision, stay in touch with people who feel disenfranchised, and work with those who are committed to the vision. If this doesn't happen, difference can turn to chronic anger and adversarial relationships. Relationships both between clergy and congregation and between congregation members can lead towards the dissolution of relationships and cracks in the fabric and life of the community.

So, here we are at the third year. At the Mediator, we are right on target with where congregational development theory said we would be.

The good news is that the honeymoon is over. Now is the time when relationships move from euphoria to deeper and more meaningful sharing.

People are invited to get real with one another without becoming adversaries.

Everyone finds a way to 'buy in' to the overall vision so that no one who wants to be included is left out.

Most important, we find ways to communicate better with one another for our mutual benefit.

My brothers and sisters, we are at a crossroads at the Mediator where we must continue to find ways to grow and work together and resist what might be called, 'the bad news at the end of the honeymoon.' If the real work of relationship is not done, distrust, suspicion and possibly the seeds of the end of relationships are sown.

As your Rector, there are moments when I feel tense, vulnerable and insecure. When I feel this way I poorly communicate what I think and feel and believe. Sometimes, I suspect that many of you experience similar feelings.

But the important thing is that God is with us. How we proceed is up to us.

I will end this State of the Church report by restating our Gospel from Luke 4:18 which is on the front of your bulletin.

“The spirit of the Lord is upon us.
because he has anointed us
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent us to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

God is and always will be at work in this world. No matter how we reflect this, God continues to be with each and every one of us.

So, may we answer ‘yes’ to the Voice of God that speaks to our hearts.

That Voice is not our Voice. It comes from heights and depths we cannot scale or fathom.

In short, this is not my church or your church this church belongs to God. It is God’s will we must pursue - not my will or your will. In the days ahead my brothers and sisters may we:

1. Speak the truth in love
2. Stay in the tension with one another if there is tension.
3. Accept one another and treat one another with dignity and respect.
4. Listen to the Voice of God with all our might and Celebrate as one body in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen