

2018 Annual Meeting – January 28, 2018
Trinity Episcopal Church

As we gather early in a New Year, we pause and look back at the Old Year just past. My task this morning, as at every annual meeting, is to share my sense of where Trinity is at this moment in time, what the canons describe as the “State of the Cure.”

As I did last year, I’ll offer my address both with words and, because they say “a picture’s worth a thousand words,” with some pictures too.¹

The thing is, my perspective is just one person’s perspective. So before I’m done this morning, I want to open up some space for you to share your sense of where Trinity is, as well. And yes, if you’re paying attention, I did pretty much the same thing last year as well.

And on the face of it, not much has changed since the Annual Meeting last year ... or the year before ... or the year before that! Or at least that may be the way it seems, so look a little closer.

There are some real upsides to the continuity! I am grateful that Joan Wellman and Karen Hauswald have agreed to stay on for at least another year as our Senior and Junior Wardens, along with Bill Brisson, as Treasurer, and Judy Warren, as the Clerk of the Vestry. They’re not serving “life sentences,” so there will have to be a changing of the guard sometime, but I’m not ready to break up the band!!

More to the point, at least for most folks at Trinity, the worship life of the church hums along. We gather week by week and through all the seasons of the year to worship the God of our creation, the source of all goodness and light.

And so we have celebrated another round of liturgical seasons since our last Annual Meeting ... Lent into Easter and Easter into the green season after Pentecost, then starting all over again with the holy seasons of Advent and Christmas. (The Christmas Eve Family Service this year was something else!!)

We have celebrated some of the happiest days of people’s lives and some of the most trying times as well. Just one wedding this past year, but some baptisms and confirmations – celebrations full of joy and hope. Sadly, of course, there have been deaths and funerals and memorial services ... though they’re holy moments in their own painful way.

Outside of worship in either of the big sanctuaries or the chapel, we’ve had other sorts of celebrations as well. “Food, folks, and fun,” as the old McDonald’s ad campaign used to proclaim. But I think we do all three better here at Trinity than a fast food restaurant ever could!

¹ The “text” of my report doesn’t tell the whole story. For a glimpse of the images used, please look for the video taped at the meeting. As it becomes available, it will be added to our YouTube station (with a link provided on the church website).

Of course, it's not all "fun and games" all the time. We've engaged in discussions and book groups to deepen our faith. The Adult Forum meets weekly, offering opportunities for conversation and reflection. (Occasionally, one or more members of the "A-Team" have added such depth and wonderful richness to the conversations!)

And we have taken our faith and its implications seriously. We have tolled the bells at St. Helens more than once this past year, not just to announce summer services there, but as a prayer for victims of mass shootings. A contingent from Trinity have been active members of the community-wide "Neighbor-Love Cohort" seeking to support the neighbors in our community most at risk. Others have also taken part in rallies in the public square that testify to our commitment to the promises we make at every baptism.

This past summer, some of our neighbors took us to task for considering a proposal from Verizon to place a cell tower above our existing bell tower at St. Helens. It was frankly a painful experience for some of us, to be taken to task for something we hadn't even decided to do, and to be accused of preferring profits over the safety of children.

But even that had its upsides. As Joan mentions in her report to you this morning, your Vestry really rose to the challenge. They accepted their responsibilities, both for the congregation and the community. And they respected one another. They did the work they needed to do.

And the uproar also helped me, at least, clarify a couple of important truths. In the first place, of course, we are passionately committed to the wellbeing of children – our own children, as well as other children in our community, and children as far away as Africa and Nicaragua. We've made that commitment clear in the ways we raise support and spend money on their behalf.

And that leads into the corollary point that money and stewardship are not dirty words. As your rector, I have a fiduciary responsibility to talk about money, to remind you that your church needs your financial support. And as your pastor, I have a spiritual duty to invite us to consider whether we hoard as private treasure what God so freely gives.

I've just mentioned the Vestry. They deserve a word of thanks, of course. And so, too, do so many others. We seem to be in a pretty good place here at Trinity these days. If that's true – and I believe it is – it's true because of the many, many people – and the committees and teams and work parties – who do so much to keep the place pulled together and do the work needed to pull off movie nights and other festivities. Indeed, it takes a village!

Whenever I stop and think about — and sometimes when it just catches me off-guard — I am amazed by all that goes on here at Trinity. The life of this congregation is active.

And on top of that, we welcome a host of outside groups as well. That, too, the act of welcoming and greeting and hospitality is a critical piece of our calling.

Each of you probably knows some of the activities that happen here, but none of you knows the whole of it. I don't know the whole of it. There's just a lot going on in the gap between one Sunday mornings and the next. For those who miss the occasional frenzy and flurry, I'll just say you've missed something; it's kind of fun to hang out here sometimes – when the teachers fill up Brooks Hall with their noise and their energy, when artists work more quietly to add some beauty to this space and the world they return to. We have weekly Tai Chi classes, as well as Feldenkreis and meditation groups.

For all that remains the same from one year to the next, Trinity is getting better and busier.

It's pretty cool. But it carries a challenge of its own. This past week, it got complicated when I needed to schedule a memorial service on a Saturday afternoon in mid-March. The Environment Center is using Brooks Hall for the whole day. Jan had just scheduled a special AA meeting in the Fireside Room that same afternoon.

The point is, if I can't safely schedule a memorial service a month-and-a-half from now, on a Saturday afternoon in March, I caution you that the health and vitality of our life together requires us to be gentle with one another and flexible in our own planning. (And in all things, it obliges us never to assume we don't need to check with Jan before we schedule an event!)

Well, that's my report to you this year. But when all is said and done, it's just one person's sense of who we are in this moment in time ... my perspective is inevitably only partial.

And so, at this time, before our meeting continues, I'm going to invite you to reflect with me.

[Participants at the meeting were asked to recall one of the photographs presented during my remarks. A conversation followed, first one-on-one, then in small groups, followed by a plenary discussion.]

I don't know what we'll do with what's just been shared with one another here – or if there's anything we need to do with it. But at the very least, I wanted to invite you again this year to join with me as, together, we assess the "State of the Cure" this year.

And I invite you to join with me as, together, we celebrate the life we share here at Trinity, as we keep the faith, as we continue to grow together, as we continue to nurture the vitality of our common life, as we give witness to the love of God in our midst.