

2019 Annual Meeting – January 27, 2019
Trinity Episcopal Church ¹

I have two jobs this morning. The canons say that I am to preside at this meeting. They also say that I am supposed to make a report. The language is a bit arcane ... describing my report to you as my assessment of “the State of the Cure.”

It parallels other reports by political executives. The Governor offers an annual “State of the State” address. In a normal year, the President offers the “State of the Union.”

In a typical “State of the Union” address, it’s commonplace for the President to offer words of reassurance, to declare (at some point) that “the state of our Union is strong!” In the current political climate, it’s a hard case to make. My task is easier.

I’m not sure “strong” quite fits, but I’d be safe in saying that the state of our parish is “solid.”

The mood is generally pretty good around here. There’s good energy afoot. There’s a lot happening. And, for the most part anyhow, you folks seem to get along.

What’s more, we have good organizational elements in place:

An active Building and Grounds Committee, for example.

An engaged Liturgy Team.

A vigilant Finance Committee.

A strong Pastoral Care Team.

A vibrant women’s group – more than 30 of you here the other night for a planning potluck.

And a plucky men’s group – gearing up for *Mardi Gras* this year!

Our outreach efforts are stronger than ever.

And, as you’ll hear a bit later, our financial situation is as stable as it’s been since before I came. For the second year in a row, we’ll be presenting a balanced budget for your approval.

I thank you for all the ways each of you plays a part. For, as St. Paul reminded us in our epistle this morning, we are each of us members of one body, each of us called to build up the whole. So I thank you one, and I thank you all.

¹ My report was accompanied by a slideshow full of images from the past year – and a cartoon or two – related to points I was drawing to our attention. Words without those images are less poignant, so the reader is encouraged to use a little imagination.

And so, for all these reasons, I say that the state of our parish is solid, indeed.

And yet, I'll add a small caveat. It's the point made on every employee review: "there's room for improvement."

In terms of our finances, it's good to bring you a balanced budget – and I thank you for your gifts to make it so. Even so, there are a few items we didn't even discuss this year, things we couldn't do for fear of a deficit:

- ✓ We didn't discuss cost-of-living increases or merit raises for any of our staff. I think we have a terrific crew – an asset we should invest in.
- ✓ We are obliged to set aside funds for support for theological education, an investment in the future of whole church.
- ✓ And, speaking of the future, we had asked to begin setting some funds aside to build up our capital improvement funds for some future "rainy day." Room for improvement.

Our Stewardship Team organized last fall's appeal. I thank them. And, again, I thank all of you who responded. Here's the good news: they've all already signed up for another year (which is pretty amazing!).

And here's more good news: they want to do more all through the year. They want to talk more about our financial giving, yes. And they also want to encourage a deeper reflection on other facets of God's call on all the good gifts we have been given ... as St. Paul reminds us, gifts given us for the common good. Room for improvement.

In the four plus years I've been here, we've been blessed with exceedingly strong leadership. Peter Lovering and Tom Lowery were the Wardens at the time – a godsend through the whole rebuilding project after the fires ... and a hard act to follow. But Joan Wellman and Karen Hauswald – dedicated and hard-working in their own right!! – stepped in and stepped up to all challenges. But we knew this day would come ... and now it's time to "break up the band!"

"Room for improvement" doesn't quite fit here, but now is a time for some changes – at least a "reset" in some of our expectations. The new Wardens won't step into all the old jobs some of us take for granted. They may not be as quick to jump when someone asks them a question or raises a concern. (They may not jump at all.)

We also have four new members on the Vestry, so we're all going to have to spend some time as we get up and running to talk about what to expect of one another. The Vestry's having an orientation day next Saturday. We'll talk more about roles and responsibilities. Stay tuned.

This is part of the "State of the Cure" address this year. To this point, I've offered my perspective on the current state of things here at Trinity: solid ... with room for improvement.

But this is hardly the only occasion for thinking about how to talk about the state of things. This past year, I introduced a clipart graphic design of a tree, along with three simple words:



The past couple of weeks, I've asked you to help me reflect on the first of the two words ... and how you experience them here at Trinity.

Rooted.

Many of you said that your experience of worship is like coming home. Worship in Trinity. Worship in St. Helens. Some old standards. Some new expressions.

The seasons of the Church Year: Holy Week and Easter. The seasons of life: Baptism and growing up. The holy season of the Incarnation: Christmas at our house!

We gather to hear the Word. Preachers preach. And we are so deeply blessed by such a depth of preachers, opening up ancient texts full of meaning for 21st century people.

And we gather in other places to hear and study the Word. Young. And not-so-young.

Ancient roots sometimes express themselves in a new place. Last year, we took a medieval prayer vigil for the blessing of crops out to Smith Rock Hop Farm in Terrebonne ... to bless a very local sort of crop.

Open.

Quite a few of you – presumably women – responded with appreciation for the ways in which women gather to be with one another. To listen. To open themselves and their lives to others.

The strongest words probably had to do with Trinity's commitment to love our neighbors. Our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua. Sending at-risk children to camp through Cove/COPY. Toys for children and food for families were both strongly supported. Alternative Christmas giving.

I join the parade of those who are proud that we are, in ways both subtle and overt, open to all God's children – including our LGBTQ siblings. This year's Pride weekend was a blast – especially with Michael Curry (or a reasonable facsimile of him) on hand for the occasion!

Our faith is not contained within the walls of a church building. At last summer's General Convention, The Episcopal Church once more lamented gun violence in our nation and reaffirmed our call to love the stranger and immigrant among us. Here at home, some offered pledges of nonviolence.

We treasure good old-fashioned fellowship. (I've said it before ... and I'll likely say it again, the old McDonald's commercials were on to something when they used to sell "food, folks, fun.")

And we're a curious bunch. Hungry for intellectual stimulation. Open to new ideas. Eager to open our doors to others who long to make deeper sense of their lives in a modern world.

Those are some of the ways you've shared thoughts about being rooted and being open.

Growing.

But what about growth? Well, yes, there are signs of growth in our midst. Children in our midst. A newborn baby earlier this month.

But a word of caution, I suppose. It was Edward Abbey who said that "Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell." Growth for the sake of growth is not my intention.

Growth, if it's going to be good for us, has to be more than just more kids and families in the pews and more bucks in the bank. Growing into maturity. Bearing fruit. Growing in love and service. Growing in the Spirit. There are lots of ways to think about growing.

Where do we see good and vibrant growth here at Trinity? And more to the point, what sort of growth did you see in yourself because of your being part of this branch of the tree?

I don't have any more pictures to show you right now. I'm going to stop for a few minutes and ask you to talk amongst yourselves. What do you see when you look around ... what do you experience for yourself that's green and growing here at Trinity?

[Participants at the meeting were asked to reflect on the last questions regarding where they've seen and experienced "growth" at Trinity. Time allowed for sharing.]

I don't know what we'll do with all this – 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 – rooted, open, and growing.