

The Rector's State of the Parish Address

February 12, 2006

When we look back on the year 2005, All Saints members and friends will remember it as one of the most notable years in the history of All Saints. No wonder the designers of the amazing annual report before you named it, "A Year Like No Other".

Most of the oral tradition about 2005 will focus on the IRS investigation, to be sure. The IRS letter on June 9 informing us that we were being examined for possible violation of the campaign intervention section of the IRS non-profit status regulations certainly has formed much of our life for the second half of last year. When we refused to confess that George Regas' sermon on the Sunday prior to election day was a political endorsement and the IRS responded by elevating the inquiry to an investigation, we informed the parish and the public on All Saints Sunday when Desmond Tutu was visiting. We have yet to count all the subsequent interviews we did or the number of newspapers and media outlets who carried a report about us, but we do know that 10 national newspapers endorsed our position in their editorial pages, including *The New York Times*. The attention still continues to come our way – most recently a 15-minute spot on News Hour with Jim Lehrer. Just last Friday one of News Hours' correspondents, Ray Suarez, interviewed us for his forthcoming book on religion and politics. Bottom line, after receiving both financial and organizational support from a variety of interfaith individuals and faith communities, the name of All Saints, Pasadena has become known to more people for proclaiming the core Christian values of peace and justice and speaking truth to power as did the prophets, Jesus, and our guiding lights like Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel as well as Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King who have recently passed into the greater life. I thought you would want an update on where we stand with the IRS. Our senior warden touched base with our attorneys Friday who said they had heard nothing, that the ball is still in the IRS's court, and that no news is good news.

Everyone on vestry and staff has been creatively helpful with this issue. Everyone who worships at All Saints had to endure cameras at worship and TV questioners on Sundays. To all of you please accept our deep gratitude. I do want to single out a few folk who have made all the difference.

We hired our new full-time Director of Communications just days before we went public. He plunged into our life with gusto and through baptism-by-fire his Rolodex was immediately filled by media contacts calling him to arrange interviews. Not only did he carry out these extraordinary duties with bounding, acrobatic energy he has as a trained gymnast, he also kept the web site and the newsletter current and produced that amazing annual report you now hold in your hands. I will forever be grateful to the good cheer and stamina of our new communications director, Keith Holeman.

I also want to give thanks for the steady advice and guidance of our wardens.

Our junior warden is so gracefully grounded in both the practice of the law and the practice of the Christian faith and life that she was a rock through all those days. It will be a sad day in April when the current Junior Warden retires from her post for she has cared with prayerful detail for every Vestry committee in this complicated 10 ring circus otherwise known as All Saints Church. And she has cared for and prayed for and challenged me in redemptive ways. I am a better priest and person because she and I have worked so closely together in 2005. I am grateful for Beck Thyne.

Our senior warden has become the god-send of all time. A brilliant and nonanxious attorney, who knows the ins and outs of adversarial relationships and how to deal with hiring specialty lawyers, he also proved himself to be a telegenic and eloquent defender of this church he loves. I will always give thanks to God for the singularly effective leadership of senior warden, Bob Long.

Finally, I want to publicly note how I continue to be grateful for the friendship and moral guidance of our rector emeritus. I love the fact that day in and day out I can count not only on the affection but also on the unwavering and uncompromising stand for justice and peace of George Regas.

Despite the IRS notoriety by which we may remember last year, there are other developments, while not celebrated in the press, which are nevertheless equally noteworthy and certainly will shape what our community is and who we will be in the future.

. First, is the Strategic Plan. We have completed the first of a three-year period led by a plan encompassing 6 areas of our life together. It has kept us on track, kept us accountable, kept us moving forward in Stewardship, Growth and Incorporation, Pastoral Care and Spiritual Growth, Children Youth and Families, Peace and Justice, and Buildings and Grounds.

In Stewardship we can boast this morning of one of the most successful Stewardship Campaigns in All Saints' history. I am deeply grateful both to Ilean Rogers, her assistant, Sarah Stone, and in particular the outstanding leadership from our campaign chair this past year, Maria DiMassa and her co-chair, Susan Long.

In Pastoral Care and Spiritual Growth, Zelda Kennedy and her committee have really worked this Strategic Plan. Again Maria DiMassa had a thrilling idea, Call to Community. Call to Community organizes the entire parish into groups where a church member calls 10 other members regularly to connect on a person-to-person basis and then to share information about church matters. What a difference! Pastoral Care has grown even more through the shawl ministry where members who are ill or needing special care receive a shawl hand-knitted by All Saints members. The GRACE ministry where church members who are experiencing crises can receive special care from one another in the form of casseroles to prayers to transportation has made us a more pastoral community. There is much more we could note but suffice it to say that Pastoral Care has simply turned the corner in effectiveness, presence, and warmth under Zelda's leadership.

Another ministry area, which has also accomplished an amazing turnaround, has been Children Youth and Families. Listen to these figures. In Kindergarten – 5th grade, we have gone from 16 to 40 kids in one year and in preschool, we have grown from 33 kids participating (55 registered) to 60 kids participating (126 kids registered). We have doubled the number of teenagers in Sunday School on Sunday mornings and on Wednesday night youth group we have grown from 50 kids to 90 kids. Shannon Ferguson Kelly and her full staff of Wendy Barrie, Dave Erickson, and Rob Ham and assistant, Isabel Leus are packing them in – literally. Our Youth Group rooms upstairs are no longer large enough for the teens who come and often must sit two to a stuffed chair. There are more exciting developments there than I have time to describe this morning. Shannon will be reporting on all of them in Saints Alive.

The area of Incorporation and Growth is another area which helped us have a year like no other. Although we haven't heard a tenth of what this committee under Cathy Keig's leadership will be producing, this group has already researched and midwived into being two new services – the Spanish-English service at 1 pm on Sundays begun last November (as if November weren't full enough) and in 2006 the new Saturday celebration of the Eucharist at 5 pm under the leadership of Maria and Joe DiMassa and our CYF staff and others.

Mentioning additional worship services demands that we thank the Music Department for providing and overseeing some of the most sophisticated, moving, and spiritually satisfying musical feats in this multicultural place. James Walker and Stephanie Naifeh always have thrilling developments in mind and this past year James added to the music staff the superb organist, Elizabeth Lenti to our team.

Before I mention Peace and Justice and finally, Buildings and Grounds, while noting the bi-lingual service I want to say how much joy Abel Lopez' leadership and priesting last month has brought us. Long ago when Scott Richardson advised me to fly to Austin, TX to interview a native Cuban who had come to this country, learned to speak English from Texas television while he was going to class trying to understand and take notes at the Episcopal Church's seminary in Austin, I had no idea what I was getting All Saints into. But I have given thanks a million times for that turn of events, not only because of the profound rewards in store for anyone who gets to know Abel personally and pastorally, but for all the humor, intelligence, challenge, and multiculturalism leadership he has brought into our lives. On his ordination day, we presented not only Abel but also three other All Saints members who had gone through our discernment process: Liz Munoz, Sarah Nichols, and Neil Tadken. Someday when you have two hours I want to tell you about the fantastic job Wilma Jakobsen does in stewarding our discernment ministry.

Peace and Justice is how we are known to so many in the public sphere. My Muslim friend, Nazir Khaja, calls All Saints the "Peace and Justice Cathedral of Los Angeles". With committee chair Jim Prendergast's fierce determination to make P&J stronger according to the guidelines of the Program Review study of two years ago, we have a streamlined, improved P&J instrument that calls worshippers to put their faith into action every Sunday, with 3 focus areas for our work this year: Ending the war in Iraq, ending the Death Penalty, and bringing every member into building a sustainable world.

Transformational Journeys last year went to Rwanda, Los Angeles, Northwest Pasadena, Arizona and New Mexico, and Malawi and South Africa because of the great work of Lorna Miller and Sam Pillsbury. All of those repeat trips and more are planned for 2006, in fact one group returns today from Mexico. The Office for Creative Connections with the endorsement of our nonprofit, New Vision Partners, has launched a series of *City Conversations* in 2005 with 50 community leaders on the subject of diversity in Pasadena. In January, 2005, professional trainers from VISIONS, Inc. led a day of dialogue and exercises on racism and other forms of oppression at four levels: personal, interpersonal, cultural and institutional. Five roundtable discussions convened by OCC continued the conversation about racism in separate groupings: African-American, Latino, Anglo, Asian, and Armenian. Two additional roundtable discussions were held with mixed groups to determine common concerns across ethnic and racial groupings. The result of these discussions was a commitment to continue dialogue and action together in 2006, beginning with a study of the Aspen Institute report *Structural Racism and Community Building* and its implications for Pasadena. Creative Connections also collaborated with the Pasadena Police Department, The Western Justice Center, YWCA, Office of Reconciliation Ministries and other organizations to sponsor *Points of View*, two public meetings held to improve relations between the Police Department and the community, one of which was held at All Saints Church. I believe that God is using us to intervene in America's oldest self-destructive pattern – that of racial discrimination.

Hurricane Katrina exposed that structural racism in painful ways and All Saints responded with amazing generosity in giving thousands of dollars through collections and a great garage sale as well as personal giving. All Saints sent me to the gulf coast to check on my personal friends, the bishops of Louisiana and Mississippi. They and I talk periodically just so I can learn how our ERD monies are

being used. They are perpetually grateful to All Saints for we were among the record-giving churches in the U.S. The bishop of Louisiana spoke recently to me of adding 12 new social workers to his staff. "Ed they are all African-American! I've never had this many African-Americans on my staff before."

It is important to note that 2005 was the year in which we surpassed the 2000th unnecessary military death in this unjust immoral war in Iraq. No one knows how many thousands of Iraqis have lost their lives. The medical journal, Lancet, has placed the count above 100,000. As we begin to remove ground troops our bombing will increase. We must do everything we can to bring a stop to this war and then turn our attention to the military industrial complex, which President Eisenhower warned us against when he left the presidency. I appreciate your sending me to Crawford, Texas in August, to Camp Casey to experience the part of the peace movement Cindy Sheehan has begun. She will be speaking here soon. I am thrilled to announce that George Regas, our Rector Emeritus, has accepted the responsibility to spearhead our work here at All Saints in our efforts to build a peace movement that can end this war and reverse the buildup of the American war system.

And speaking of George, we had a great 75th birthday party for him right on the heels of your celebrating my 10th year as Rector. If you look at the photos of those experiences, you may notice two things. George and I may look older but we have never looked happier and more fulfilled.

These remarks would be an embarrassment if they did not recognize the group of people who really make this place hum. We had more than 10,000 meetings here this past year – small groups, Covenant groups, committee meetings, gatherings of community leaders and servants, prayer groups, book groups, groups that support one another and groups that train one another to transform the world. There is not one day that passes without my feeling gratitude for those who make it physically possible. . None of it, none of it could happen without the energetic, muscular, indefatigable work of Javier Benitez and the custodial staff.

James Walker, our brilliant organist/choirmaster says that he sees our space problems at All Saints as our being root-bound or pot-bound. There is no more room to grow. For eight years we have been conducting a laborious, carefully deliberate, oftentimes glacially paced Space Study. Don Baker has been at the helm of that study for the past five years and has led us brilliantly. His work in 2005 has led us now to a moment when the Space Study will be sunsetted at the end of February because of Don's brilliant work. Don has steered us to a point that weekend after next at the Vestry/Staff Conference, four different committees working cooperatively will present a unanimously chosen candidate to design a master plan for meeting the space pinches we experience every day of our lives here. A new Building Campaign Committee will take over with Don as a crucial member, but that is about 2006 and we will report to you the Vestry's decision ASAP.

My wife says that you never have a transformative experience and you never have a victory without then being called to work that transformation and that victory. 2005 was one of the most transformative and accomplished years of my life and I think of All Saints' life. God is giving us everything in abundant quantities to work those transformations and accomplishments in 2006. It gives me great pleasure to announce that the Vestry has elected as our Junior Warden for 2006 Maria DiMassa. And I am thrilled to announce that I have successfully persuaded a great, intelligent, and vigorous leader to remain as Senior Warden, Bob Long.

Now are there comments about how you see All Saints changed last year and any questions about this report and what our trajectory is for the future?