



**The Senior Warden's State Of The Parish Address**  
Annual Meeting Part I  
February 5, 2006

**Ed Bacon:**

I have been deeply grateful that God put Bob Long in his role in this particular year. No one else could have done what he has done in terms of representing us, not only in legal spheres but also in media spheres. He is one of the most telegenic Senior Wardens that God has ever created. Now he is going to speak to us about the State of the Parish.

Without further ado, please, Bob Long!

**Bob Long, Senior Warden:**

By any way of measurement, 2005 has been truly an extraordinary year at All Saints Church. I would have to say that, for all of us in this room, to be a part of this faith community and all that it represents has been equally extraordinary. I know this is certainly true for Susan and me. All Saints Church has become the center of our lives. This is where our friends are found; where we get our spiritual food, our sense of balance on sometimes an uneven path of life, and the encouragement and support we need to live out our baptismal covenants. This is where we get charged up to go out and work for God's love, compassion, peace and justice. I think you can understand how grateful I am for the privilege and the challenge to serve our Rector, our staff, our Vestry and our Parish as the Senior Warden. I have had a lot of wonderful professional opportunities in my life, but this is the most professionally satisfying that I have ever had.

It is a tradition at All Saints that the Senior Warden addresses the Annual Meeting, but as far as I can tell there is nothing that specifies what that address is supposed to be, and no one suggested a single thing that I should speak about or what approach I should take, or even asked what I intended to say. So at the outset, here are a few disclaimers I want to make:

First – now listen very carefully: I do not intend to tell anyone how to vote!  
[Laughter] Second, it is unfortunate that this speech happens to coincide with the State of the Union speech, and I just hope like hell that I don't sound like George Bush delivering that speech. Third, those two lines will probably be my only attempts at humor. My predecessors in this role, in addition to their other amazing skills and talents, have the gift for wit and clever lines. I do not. Nonetheless, feel free to laugh whenever you want, even if it is not particularly funny. Fourth, and this should be obvious by now, the points I intend to make are really mine and mine alone, not those of the Rector, the staff or the Vestry – not that I would think any of them would disagree with any of these points, but if they do, that is just fine. As

Susan Russell has so ably taught me, disagreement is in the best tradition of Anglicanism. We can disagree but we are still brothers and sisters. So with those disclaimers, here we go.

The year 2005 has been such an amazing year, one that causes us to pause and ask some very important questions that I know our Rector intends to ask next week in his address. It has been such an amazing year that I am overloaded with possible topics. So I have decided not to talk about some of the obvious highlights, the things that will form the basis for next week's incredible financial report and the encouragement of our Rector. Instead I want to talk about some of the less obvious and less visible and sometimes less recognized aspects of life at All Saints Church.

I want to start with a brief mention of just four aspects of our staff's truly exceptional work in 2005 and in prior years. We all know about these four areas, because we witness them week in and week out. We sometimes take them for granted, and we sometimes take for granted the incredible work that produces them. Here they are:

1. The liturgies of All Saints Church, which by my count are as many as 10 per week, week in and week out, lead us creatively and compellingly in worship and the Eucharist, open us to God, fill us, comfort us, stir us and send us back into our lives in the world around us. These liturgies, our worship together, are at the heart of what we do as our faith community. Our staff leads us in worship with energy, creativity and passion in what I can only describe as just pure excellence. The phrase, "Just another typical Sunday at All Saints Church," has really become the rule around here, not the extraordinary.
2. All Saints Church is known far and wide for its strong pulpit and prophetic preaching, a long, deep history. For 2005, in my view, the preaching of our Rector in particular but also his clergy colleagues, didn't merely add to that tradition; it pushed it and us to new levels. So strong has been the proclamation of the message that, I swear, the pulpit continues to smoke and simmer. Just as worship sustains us, it is powerful preaching from that pulpit that challenges us, drives us, makes us very uncomfortable on occasion, but leads our faith community.
3. There is the music of our choirs and our organists, who every Sunday, at all festival services and throughout the year, lead us in worship, open our hearts and make our spirits soar. Our music ministries are simply the best that any Parish has or could hope for in quality, variety, quantity, freshness and familiarity – by whatever measure you want.
4. And 2005 was another year of very special programs. Program offerings started early in the year with the Lent Event, moved through the year with such events as "Speaking Truth to Power," the celebration in the street of Ed Bacon's tenth anniversary here at All Saints, the celebration of George Regas' 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the weekly procession of compelling Rector's Forums and strong Adult Education offerings. On Sundays it is so difficult to decide whether to go down here to the Forum or stay upstairs for another program; it is such a wealth that we offer every Sunday.

We have all been the beneficiaries of this; we have all experienced it first hand. I don't need to say anything more about these four areas, but I ask you to join with me in thanking our entire staff in making all of this possible. [Applause]

Let me now turn to the main focus of my comments, which is the work of your Vestry. There are many people in this room, as I look around, who have served on Vestry and know what the Vestry does and what Vestry service means, but I am also aware that there probably are some people in this room who do not. So I just want to say a couple of words about that.

In the corporate charter of our church, and traditionally among Episcopal Churches, the Vestry is the board of directors, the governing body, elected by the Parish as we have just done and charged with the primary responsibility of providing for the stewardship, for the finances for the work of the Parish, for the creation and maintenance of our buildings and grounds, and for hiring the Rector and working in collaboration with him. It is the Rector who is the chair of that board and the chief executive officer of the Parish, and he hires the other clergy staff. He has responsibility for the management of the staff, sets the program year, and provides for the liturgy, preaching, music and program. That is the traditional approach of Episcopal churches, and that is what we do here.

But in our Parish we also have a whole range of additional areas where the Vestry, the Rector and the entire management staff collaborate together, set the course, roll up their sleeves and get the work done. Whether it is our Peace and Justice ministries, Pastoral Care and Spiritual Formation, Children, Youth and Family programming, Communications, Space, strategies for Inclusiveness, lifting up leadership in the Parish – there is a whole wide portfolio of work where the Vestry and the staff work hand in hand. As I see it, this is the work that provides the foundation from which everything else in our visible ministry flows and flourishes.

So I have opted to talk about the sometimes invisible work of the Vestry, some things that I think you would want to hear about. So here are my observations:

1. This lengthy portfolio of work would not get done, and it would not get done with the excellence that it gets done, without the extraordinarily talented and dedicated Vestry members. We have seen that in evidence here this morning. Peggy Adams used to say that the All Saints Church Vestry is the hardest-working volunteer board she had ever worked on, or had ever seen. I really believe that to be true, and I would add that it is also one of the most productive. I am not tooting my own horn here; I am tooting all of your horns [gesturing to the Vestry members].
2. The staff-Vestry working relationships in this Parish are incredibly strong and respectful. We are so fortunate to have such productive relationships between all of our Vestry committees and their operations on the one hand and their staff liaisons on the other. It is a tricky business sometimes. Vestry members bring energy and fresh ideas, but an occasional propensity to want to micro-manage and over-impose their own notions of how things should be done. Staff members have the tough jobs of seeing their committee membership change from year to year, working out those relationships and seeing the leadership change. But somehow here it all works. It is the cooperative process at work. The staff learns how to call on leadership for

detailed work, and Vestry members learn how to be helpful and provide guidance and wisdom when necessary without getting in the way. The working relationship between the Vestry and staff of this Parish – though it does get rocky from time to time, and that is a good thing – is overall as strong and respectful as you would find anywhere.

3. I think the Strategic Plan is an inspired document. I know you hear the term “strategic plan” and your eyes glaze over, but in this case that shouldn’t happen. This may be the biggest headline of the activities of the Vestry for 2005:

### **Strategic Plan Drives Work of Vestry**

Through the leadership of Greg Adams, Gerti Reagan and others working closely with the staff and the entire Parish, the Vestry in 2004 adopted a Strategic Plan designed to focus our efforts and channel our resources to achieve some very specific and challenging goals all the way through 2007. I am really convinced that it is a truly God-inspired endeavor. When we adopted it, we promised ourselves it wasn’t just going to be another piece of paper. It does nothing for us unless we are willing to be accountable to it. So, with the efforts of many, the staff and the Vestry committee developed detailed work plans to achieve those goals, committed themselves to that work, and have allowed themselves to be measured in that work.

The result of all this is that, while we haven’t accomplished all of those goals yet, we are making significant progress on each and every one of them. I can declare flat out that our staff and our Vestry committees have worked harder, longer, and with more focus and resolve than I have ever seen before. It is not the time and place to give you all of the output, but I can tell you it has been substantial and more is on the way. I would encourage you, 1) to go to the Website and take a look at that Strategic Plan, because it really does chart our course, and 2) next year we are going to be starting a process of revising that Strategic Plan, and I think you all will want to be a part of that process.

4. I think growth and incorporation, and our new Growth and Incorporation Committee, is absolutely one of the most essential things for our Parish. The Strategic Plan has within it a whole new area for attention, called “Growth and Incorporation,” and a whole new committee has been created to support that area. I still hear from time to time people in the Parish challenging the need for us to grow and to be better at incorporating our new members, but I think there are very compelling reasons to put our focus there.

The Gospel message as we understand it is not ours alone. The Good News of God’s inclusive love should be spread as far and wide as we can spread it. As the demographics of Pasadena change, so should our own, not simply to keep pace with the changes around us, but because we can find expanded horizons and deeper commitments with increased diversity in our Parish, and increased numbers of young families, youth and children.

Also, from an institutional standpoint, I think it is absolutely essential that we grow. If we are not on a path of growing, we will be on a path of constricting. As I look

around this community and see the tall steeples that tower over sanctuaries with pews that are mostly empty, I don't pretend to know what the stories were in each of those churches, but I suspect one element was a sense of complacency, the sense that they didn't need to grow any more, a sense that they didn't need to make the church programs attractive to new people, and to make the church's message one that would change people in the world around them.

So I ask you to get behind the amazing efforts of our Growth and Incorporation Committee, which, under the strong leadership of Cathy Keig and Anne Peterson, has in one year created this committee from whole cloth, spent many months in planning and analysis for the launch of a Spanish/English service, and in November launched that service. They have spent many months in study – this study actually goes back several years – for a Saturday evening celebration Eucharist especially attuned to the needs of families, and they have launched that service in January. And they have many additional initiatives on the way.

If you really want to support this, I encourage you: the One O'clock Eucharist is a really wonderful thing to attend. We are not only attempting to grow that part of our Parish, but we want to make sure that we incorporate them as well. We are not creating a separate church within a church; we are creating a part of that inclusiveness of All Saints Church. I encourage each of you, maybe once a month, to come to that service. Come and participate in it because it is a wonderful service, but also to get to know the people who are regularly there and help all of us to embrace them to be a bigger part of our overall Parish.

There are many things on my agenda that I'd like to talk about, but we have limited time, so I am going to wrap this up with these comments.

It has hit me very strongly that All Saints Church is such a strong beacon – a beacon of hope and courage and compassion to many people in many places, to those who come through our doors, to our communities of Pasadena, Southern California, the state, the country and even the world, and to our Diocese and our denomination. People look to us and they count on us to be God's people in this time and place. I have seen this manifested in many ways this year:

- The priest at the Diocesan Convention who, in a sidebar conversation, said to me – and this is almost word for word – “We all look to All Saints Church for so many things. I wish we could be the courageous witness in our community that you are in yours. It is extremely difficult to do, but we are working to be like you.”
- A new parishioner that I encountered just a couple of weeks ago told me, “We've been looking for so long and so hard for a community of spirituality and peace and justice like All Saints Church. All Saints Church is changing my life, and it has given me a place where my children can learn about a different set of values.”
- Then of course there have been the many cards, calls, letters and promises of support that have come our way in regards to the IRS story. True, maybe some

of these are just directed against the IRS, but most are really undergirded by the strong support of the prophetic message by All Saints Church and the importance that our voice not be stilled. There are many things that drive the work of the Parish, but in my view this one must always be near the top. We must continue to stand strongly for Peace and Justice, and be the Peace and Justice cathedral of Southern California, a national leader for inclusiveness, and an advocate for peaceful and affirming relationships with all of our brothers and sisters in other faith traditions.

So let us continue to do all we can to help Ed, our clergy staff and each other to make All Saints Church the bright beacon that it is.

Thank you very much!