

Rector's Remarks

Dear Friends in Christ:

This past year, 2011, has been a good year for Grace Church. We have continued to grow steadily in our worship services, outreach ministries and education. Grace Church is bucking the trend of other congregations that are shrinking and on the verge of closing. This is due to the commitment of you, the parishioners, for supporting our efforts to be Christ's presence in the world. We have people that come to worship us and pass several other churches to be here with us. Grace Church is making a difference in our lives and the lives of others.

Most of this success can be attributed to the Vestry, volunteers and staff who help to make Grace Church the warm and friendly faith community that other people want to be part of today. I am amazed at the reception guests and visitors receive, the care and attention people give to each other, the number of small children in the pews week after week and more. Truly the Holy Spirit has given us many gifts to make Grace Church the unique and wonderful place it is now.

Our worship offers people a chance to come before God with our thanksgivings, our intercessions and petitions. The Saturday night 5:30 p.m. service continues to grow, but the largest increase in attendance has been at the 9:30 a.m. Sunday morning service which continues to fill the Church. We hosted 28 baptisms this past year, an indication that people with young families are one of our fastest growing areas. We said goodbye to Bill Lowden, who retired, and welcomed Matthew Robertson as our new director of music to keep a positive emphasis on music in our liturgy. I am grateful to the altar guild, the lay readers, the chalice bearers, the acolytes, the choir, the Eucharistic visitors, the ushers and all those who make worship at Grace Church a joy.

We can be proud of the commitment we have of reaching out to others. Taking our faith and living it outside of Grace Church continues to be a priority for us. Both young and old participate in our efforts that include: a free medical clinic in Camden; distribution of more than a hundred bags of groceries each week to the hungry in Camden; support of a child's program that provides after school care; and other opportunities to serve. Grace Church believes that living our baptismal vows out means caring for those in need.

Education for all ages is part of Grace Church. This past year we welcomed 22 adults and children for confirmation and reception. Their preparation included classes to understand what it means to be a Christian and Episcopalian. We have Bible study offered at least twice a week, church school for our young people, and several offerings throughout the year. We welcome the chance to learn more about our faith and how to practice it in today's world.

One of our greatest challenges is caring for the three properties on our campus. We have been caring for our Church, Parish House and Rectory, but will have to make some plans to address larger issues in the near future. The Property Committee has done an outstanding job in keeping ahead of many things. One of our resources here is our buildings and the space we have available. The Music Conservatory left in November and we need to plan some other use of the building to help us generate income. If you have an idea, please let us know.

Our stewardship this past year has been great. We ended the year with a surplus. It has been the Vestry's policy to send an additional amount of 50% of any year-end surplus to the Diocese. This will be the second time since I've been Rector that we will be able to do that at Grace. Our giving campaign in the fall has put us in a good place for the next year. The Vestry, Finance Committee and newly formed Investment Committee are making strides in managing the financial resources we have available. Jim Perrin has retired as our Treasure after many years, and we thank him for his great work. Bill Sweeney will take over responsibilities as our Parish Treasurer.

Pastoral care continues to be a great part of Grace Church. The way that we take care of each other matters. With only one priest on the staff, I am dependent on each of you letting me know what pastoral concerns need to be addressed. I have several parishioners who are Eucharistic visitors and will come with Holy Communion at any time. If you are hospitalized or have a pastoral emergency, please call! If you are a family member or friend, do not assume that I have heard about the matter. Please contact me. I will come and visit as soon as possible, but need to be informed. Please call the office, or call me at home. It's an important time in our lives to have a pastoral presence. We also will observe your privacy. If someone is hospitalized, we do not share the person's condition until we have permission from the patient. If you want to know more about a person's condition, please speak directly to the patient or a family member. Again, help us to provide good pastoral care by notifying us of hospitalizations, illness or deaths as soon as possible.

All in all, this has been a great year. I wish to thank those members of the Vestry who are retiring, Ben Maddison, Marty Rosica, Nevan Soumilas and Sara Sweeney and especially our Senior Warden, Brandon Hamilton. Many thanks to the staff for their help in making Grace Church the special place it is: Sue Getz; Matthew Robertson; Kate Myers, Fr. Nat Elliott; Gretchen Poliero. Many thanks to all the volunteers who help things work here. A special thanks also to my wife Diane, for her support and presence and help in my ministry at Grace Church.

We've had a good year, and we will be looking forward to 2012 with joy and expectation. The Vestry and I will begin preparing a new five-year plan this new year. We want to look ahead and prepare Grace Church for the life, mission and ministry that will take us forward to our 175th anniversary. Your comments, suggestions and dialogue will help us focus on what we need to do to continue to be Jesus Christ's Church in the 21st century. Watch for the discussion opportunities that will be held in the days ahead.

Thank you for permitting me to be your Rector these past 15 years. I love sharing in the ministry of this place and feel truly blessed. The Lord has blessed us in this place, and has also called us to greater and bigger things. Like the parable of the talents, we have been faithful in little, and we will be rewarded with being in charge of even more. God bless you and your loved ones!

With warmest regards, I remain, faithfully yours in Christ,

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