

Greetings Vestry People,

The discernment process we embarked upon several months ago is bearing excellent fruit. The hours invested by our team of twelve Visioneers have been smartly spent in thoughtful, creative planning and execution. We posed discerning questions to ourselves internally and reached out broadly to community stakeholders to get a fresh, accurate, encouraging handle on what we value, what we offer, and how we can move forward with renewed vision, purpose, and joy.

Two big takeaways from the recent Community Stakeholders Breakfast beautifully planned and hosted by our team of Visioneers and coordinated with professional grace by Chase Delano and Frank Corbin are these: 1) the urgent need for housing in our community, especially short-term housing for refugees from Afghanistan and from elsewhere around the world; and 2) the urgent need for middle school students in our town to have available after-school "drop-in" venues to benefit from an unstructured environment, even while supervised and supported by kid-friendly adults and older teens.

Our parish happens to be positioned to address these two pressing concerns. Doing so would certainly represent a noteworthy step by our parish toward greater community service and engagement. Boone Hall is becoming, once again, a valuable community resource as circumstances change and evolve all around us. Despite being energy inefficient and thus expensive to operate, despite lacking up-to-date amenities, there is an ongoing role in our community to be played by Boone Hall, one we can further forge for the future by making the best use of Boone Hall today.

Another moment of discernment for our parish, I dare say, came by way of planning for Holy Week. Members of the Worship Committee met to discuss how we could plan for Holy Week in a way that better connects with our parishioners, e.g. by finding a theme that focusses less on sin, guilt, and death, and more on love, compassion, and life. The welcoming, festive spirit of the upcoming Palm Sunday Brunch--something new, fun and special--is oddly at odds with the solemnity that characterizes The Sunday of the Passion. So why not return to that earlier time in liturgical church history when Palm Sunday was observed as a celebration unto itself, without including the Good Friday reading of the Passion Narrative? Presumably, the reading of the Passion Narrative on Palm Sunday was instituted by the church for fear that worshippers attending services on Sundays only would hop, skip, and jump from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday without passing through the salvific trials, tribulations, and harsh realities of Holy Week.

For the Worship Committee to make this move it made sense to step back, consider anew the thematic meaning of the entire week, and discern what we appreciate most about Holy Week. Drawing from a recent sermon on the meaning of the Gospel of John 3:16, we asked whether Holy Week encourages us to be Christians by adhering to a system of belief or by committing ourselves to a way of life? These two ways of being a Christian are available to all. Which one, however, best characterizes and supports the spirit of our parish? Which one resonates with us most strongly? Which one will likely enhance our sustainability as a community of faith well into the future? This helpful product of our parish-wide discernment--namely, what makes us a Christian--is key to what drives us forward and thus needs to be clearly named and shared as an enduring, guiding, defining, highly valuable resource sprung from our work of discernment.

Tomorrow night, Ralph Johnson, hosts a social gathering for those outgoing and incoming members of what has been known as the Missions-Outreach Committee, but shall henceforth be called the Community Outreach Committee. Jane Good and Suzanne Nolan agreed to share leadership of this new chapter of community service ministry with its greater emphasis on community engagement and parish-wide hands-on participation.

Katie Finch and Rosemary Attridge, longtime co-chairs of the Hospitality Committee felt the time had come to resign from their roles, though each desires to continue assisting the committee. Deborah Couture has been kindly and dutifully filling in the gaps and keeping Sunday Coffee Hours organized but is unable to take over a leadership role. I am hopeful we will find a way forward for this ministry that brings so many grateful smiles to those among us and to those whose life circumstances cause them to fall into our loving care.

The Stewardship Committee met recently, again for the first time. Meaning that the already existing committee has a few new members and now properly sees itself as the umbrella ministry of the parish. That is, by which all we are and all we do is rightly regarded as the purview of stewardship. The committee is already creatively finding ways to

make more of what we already have and by conceiving of ways gently and smartly to teach us that being generous in service to others in every way we can is not only good stewardship but also how best to practice good living.

Finally, I am grateful to be afforded a three-month sabbatical every five years. That time has come around again, but instead of taking a full sabbatical this year, I would like to arrange with the parish to be away for one month, the month of July. Erica, my spouse, has succeeded in taking time away from her work for the same month of July, so we plan to spend the time together as a shared mini-sabbatical. Furthermore, my gratefulness for such restorative time away leaves me mindful of my dear colleague, Dr. Frank Corbin whose part-time status, though full-time work ethic, does not offer him the same benefit. On his behalf, I ask you, the vestry, if a way can be found to offer Frank several additional Sundays to be away this summer, either in June and August, over and above his allotted time off per his letter of agreement with the parish.

God's peace,
Brad+