

Report to the Congregation on Growth and Discipleship

Second Sunday after Pentecost 2019

“Our mission is to know Christ as we serve others, proclaim God’s love and grow in the Spirit.”

So spoke some 50 people gathered on June 20, 2019 for an evening with the Rev. Cn. Rob Droste, Canon for Congregational Development in the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey. The initial impetus for meeting was to generate a calendar of events for the coming 18 months. Fr. Droste wisely suggested we would do better plumbing deeper for renewed purpose and developing a shared understanding of discipleship. We would then come back, at a future meeting, to populate a calendar. Through an animated and engaging process of sharing our understanding of discipleship, we reflected on what we understood God was doing in our midst and learned about discipleship as our Diocese teaches:

The purpose of the Church
is to form disciples of Jesus Christ
who participate in God’s mission of reconciliation.

Preface: A Couple Things

Before reporting on the six areas of unique focus discerned from among us during our time together, let’s highlight two special moments that happened during our meeting that demonstrated the Spirit’s work among us - two very profound moments which will help shape outcomes going forward.

The first happened earlier in the evening when it came time to identify our mission. As mentioned above, all 50 attendees were confidently reciting our mission as if it was a well-known prayer we say on Sunday. Fr. Rob paused for a long, long moment thinking about what just happened. For most parishes, mission statements are wordy paragraphs long, arduously crafted and then left to reside on a rarely visited webpage. That most of us here at Church of the Holy Spirit know our mission *by heart* is indicative of something real and powerful. When queried about how we live it, the list of well-known ministries tumbles out from all the gathered; the many projects and programs to which we devote ourselves weekly, if not daily. So, our mission is a real thing, a known thing, a lived thing. Of course, it is always a thing to be more fully engaged and by more people. Yet there it was. Hard to describe this well-meaning priest’s complete joy and admiration for his community at a fine demonstration of our ability to name our purpose and meaning. It is a meaning very similar if not identical to the one taught by our Diocese and worth repeating: The purpose of the Church is to form disciples of Jesus Christ who participate in God’s mission of reconciliation.

Rob+ then offered insightful perspectives on church growth and development. Our development cannot be measurable only in numbers but in depth of mission and in lives

transformed through participation in God's mission of reconciliation. Our focus shifts once our purpose becomes more demonstrably that of a discipleship-deepening community.

It was during this part of the presentation that a second moment stood out as deeply moving and meaningful. A participant offered a courageous confession about not feeling able to offer anything valuable in the way of deepening anyone else's discipleship. They just didn't feel they were adequately prepared or had anything important to share. Immediately, all those gathered (and from just about every table - there were eight) shouted up rejoinders, describing how indeed this person had, in fact, helped them, and told the where and when of it. It was marvelous. But it showed an important learning. As Fr. Droste then followed up, we don't need to know more Bible, or more theological sophistication, or more knowledge about Church history to be helpful and have a role in making disciples or deepening the discipleship of others. Everyone plays an important role. Everyone has a story to tell that can help. What is needed is simple confidence and a calm courage. This comes from the knowledge that your story might be just the right one at the right time to help someone else. If you are following Jesus, then by definition, you have something to share that is valuable, meaningful, and vital.

So, two things. One, we know and understand our mission and, two, we can feel confident that we are called and have everything we need to help others in their faith. So, let me humbly suggest to the congregation that it is time to reconsider the framework of our purpose. Our mission is to not merely to "know" Christ. Our mission is to *follow* Christ, with all our minds, hearts and lives. I think this gets to the heart of active discipleship. It's a simple change, just a single word, but it can have important effects as we move together in discipleship for years to come. This is especially so given how clear we are about our missional identity and how central a role it plays among us.

How We Move Forward

The specific aspects of how God is moving among us uniquely at CHS were finely drawn over the course of the evening. It became evident that there were six distinct areas for aligning our planning and activities as a community of faith.

(alphabetically)

Intentionally developing personal spirituality

Recklessly fostering heartfelt connection

Remembering to fully listen with compassion

Serving generously and being courageously inclusive

Sharing faith creatively, telling our story

Worshiping boldly, joyfully and with purpose

And there were important initiatives associated with each of the six:

**Intentionally
developing personal
spirituality**

FOCUSED PRAYER TIME
MORE BIBLE TIME
INCREASE KNOWLEDGE OF
SCRIPTURE
DAILY QUIET TIME WITH
GOD
FOCUS ON JESUS
USE "WAY OF LOVE"
PROGRAM
READ MORE
INSPIRATIONAL
LITERATURE
PRAY ABOUT IT
BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT
MEDITATION
SMALL GROUP TOPIC
SPECIFIC BIBLE STUDY
BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF SCRIPTURE

**Recklessly fostering
heartfelt connection**

CONNECTION
VISITORS CONNECTED TO
SPECIFIC MEMBERS FOR A
YEAR
BUILD RELATIONSHIP
WITH A PERSON WE
DON'T KNOW
DEEPEN RELATIONSHIPS
WITH OTHER
CONGREGATIONS
MORE ATTENTION TO
LAPSED MEMBERS

**Remembering to fully
listen with compassion**

LISTENING
BE AN OBSERVER
COMMUNICATE BETTER
WITH OTHERS
LISTEN WITH
COMPASSION
HOST COMMUNITY
CONVERSATIONS
GUN VIOLENCE
DRUG USE
RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE
LISTEN - MEDITATE
BE A BETTER LISTENER
LISTEN FULLY, NO
INTERRUPTING

Serving generously
and being
courageously inclusive

SERVE

HELP THE YOUTH
PARTICIPATE IN THE
COMMUNITY

BE A SERVANT

LEARN TO BE A LEV
FOR/TO MOM & DAD

GUIDE OTHERS IN FAITH

SET A BETTER EXAMPLE

ALWAYS ROOM TO
IMPROVE OUR MINISTRIES

Sharing faith creatively
telling our story

TALK DISCIPLES FREELY –
GET USED TO IT

MOVE OUT OF MY
COMFORT ZONE

CARRY THE STORY OUT OF
THE OPEN DOOR

TELLING OUR STORIES OF
MEETING JESUS DURING
WORSHIP

COMMIT TO EXPLAINING
OUR MISSION TO OTHERS

WEAR A CROSS (OR
TATTOO)

PRACTICE SHARING MY
STORY WITH SOMEONE

SUPPORT CHILDREN IN
THEIR FAITH JOURNEY

SPREAD THE MESSAGE OF
CHS BETTER

BECOME MORE
COMFORTABLE BRINGING
FAITH INTO DISCUSSION

SHARE WHAT FAITH
MEANS, INCLUDING
DOUBT

SHARE TALENTS

Worshiping boldly,
joyfully and with
purpose

SING JOYOUS MUSIC

USE TALENTS –
ART/WRITE/SONG

ENCOURAGE YOUNG
CHOIR

WELCOME NEW MUSICAN

An Few Ongoing Thoughts

Each of us has a story to tell. Whether we feel confident about it or not, we have a role to play in the faith and discipleship of others. Claiming that self-understanding together, practicing it as part of our mission is an organic and authentic means of having faith. It is easy to create a false choice, to point to the arrogance of other supposedly religious folks and use their bad example as a justification for being quiet, for abandoning our central identity. But when you think opening openly on it, all we do as followers of Christ is simple:

We are simply hungry people telling other hungry people where the food is.

I am one hungry person telling another hungry person where food is found.

There is before us a new start, a chance to re-engage, to renew. And not merely because of a change in musical direction. It is more foundational, even with music as important as it is to us.

So, we have some more work to do.

Schedule a session on transferring these initiatives into dates and events.

Figure out a way of updating our database and communications with all members.

. . . And a long etcetera . . .

In short, making real the intentions of our hearts.

Thank you to Rob+ and the participants and all those engaged in the work of the Spirit moving forward.

Stay tuned!

Philip+