

# THE RECTOR'S ADDRESS

to the Parish of the Epiphany  
for the occasion of the Annual Meeting

*The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, 28 January 2018*

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*This address is  
a snapshot  
that looks back  
and ahead*

The Roman god Janus is depicted as having two faces, since he looks to the future and to the past, which is exactly what these annual addresses do—they look forward and backward, giving all of us a glimpse of what was, and what might be. No address can cover everything that we accomplished last year, nor can it be a roadmap for all that shall happen in 2018, because there'll be detours; that's how it is when we understand that God is in charge, not us. And so I speak in the name of Jesus Christ, who has died, who is risen, and who shall come again.

*Thank you  
for the sabbatical*

In looking back at 2017, I feel immeasurable thanks for the sabbatical you gave me, and also, for the time you gave yourself. I told you the Sunday I returned that you would hear me say over and over “thank you”—and so I repeat the mantra today. Rest and rejuvenation, quiet, adventure, prayer, and meditation have energized me, and as I step into the first few days of a third decade of priesthood, I do so drawing from the well of gratitude and joy.

*Annual  
commitment  
campaign 2017!*

You know, better than I do, that the sabbatical wasn't all about me. You carried on with God's ministry in every way, and that in itself energizes us for the future. You had one of the best-ever annual commitment campaigns. Darwin Keith-Lucas served as chair of the Neighbor to Neighbor campaign, and the vestry rolled up their sleeves to make it fun. It always takes a village, and in this case it was many villages coming together to support God's mission in and from this church. The fact that I wasn't around, and not at all involved, might well be the reason for the grand success, and to that I say, “here's to 2018's campaign!” Kidding aside your commitment isn't because of me or any other ordained leader's charisms; your commitment is to God, made known in Christ Jesus, and felt through the Holy Spirit. Your gifts of time and money, of prayer and praise are everything. They are everything!



*Celebration of all staff* You are cared for by a group of men and women who serve on the staff; they are devoted to you, and to one another. There were transitions in 2017 in staff positions, as there are most years.

*Sexton* We welcomed Dave Queen as our weekday sexton, and worked with Fred Benson, who has been here longer than many of us have been alive, to serve on Sunday mornings and for other events. It's not a picnic to keep this old building and our grounds clean and up-to-date, but each of them is clearly committed, and I'm thankful for their devotion.

*Director of music and organist* At the end of April we said goodbye to David Eaton, formerly director of music and organist, who is thriving in an interim post at a very large parish in Durham, North Carolina. The next Sunday Craig Benner joined us, and the Sunday after that Craig said to me, sitting right here in this front pew, "I'm not sure I'm the one to do this." Thanks be to the Spirit of the Risen Christ because by the time the Great 50 Days ended, Craig was all-in, so much so that both of us wondered if the most faithful response was for him to become the permanent director of music and organist. After several months of prayer and reflection, and your own experience with his lovely way, we unwrapped the Christmas gift announcing his appointment to the permanent post. Craig is equally comfortable leading children and adults to offer praise to God, and he brings a breadth of experience in suburban churches that are quite similar to us; we're the beneficiaries of a gifted musician and pastor. An advisory committee is already underway working with Craig and me to recruit an assistant director of music and organist, whom we hope to join us this summer.

*Group working to help recruit assistant director of music and organist*

*Director of Faith Formation and Youth Minister* Carolyn Hughes, director of faith formation, and Jacob Athyal, youth minister are, as they say in some business circles these days, "kicking it"—their faith and devotion to God, to scripture, and to worship means they're reaching out in arms of love to a community that hasn't always been well resourced. For much of the past decade we struggled to rejoice in our programs with children, youth, and families;

gosh it's nice to live now in a moment where there's vitality and growth, and I'm so thankful for the way each of them teaches me. Carolyn and Jacob: thank you.

*Administrators* Suzy Westcott is our financial administrator, and Sarah Twiss is our parish administrator. Each of them belongs to different Episcopal churches, but each loves you and honors your ministries. Suzy's work, largely behind the scenes, is critically important to our stewardship of your resources.

Sarah, on the other hand, is visible every day, lovingly and adeptly juggling all the balls in the air, and cheerfully greeting and supporting all of us. Suzy is in Chestnut Hill and Sarah is in Charlestown but our thanks echoes so loudly that I'm sure they can hear it.

*Seminarian and Intern* We said farewell in June to Jennifer Vath, our seminarian. Then, in the fall, we welcomed our intern, Paul Shoaf Kozak. I wrote to the bishop a couple of weeks ago, saying, basically, "they're the real deal."—and I don't know how else to describe it except that having them among us enriches our life and expands our sense of the Holy. But they wouldn't be here if it weren't for Miriam's willingness and skill to supervise them.

*Associate Rector* Now, let's talk about Miriam, and we can do that in a thousand ways by leaping to our feet and saying "thank you." Her tireless leadership during my absence, along with that contagious smile, make us sing almost as well as she does. You don't see me every weekday morning when I channel Tina Turner to sing, at the top of my lungs—but I do and you can ask the neighbors—she's "simply the best."

*Vestry is also committed to your ministry* The staff join me in saying it's not about us, but about you. Besides us, your elected vestry leaders are also very clear that it's your call to follow Jesus that matters most: we are here to equip you for your ministry—for your life within this church and throughout the world.

*Accessibility  
and elevator*

Let me shift gears a bit and talk about the fabric at the Parish of the Epiphany, the building and grounds. Last year I announced a change in the plan to make the building physically accessible. The elevator remains essential, but some people couldn't get through the doors. The vestry heard this, and a new accessibility team worked together to re-do the forecourt, and they're working now to bring electrical power to various interior and exterior doorways.

John McConnell is the chair of the accessibility team, and we're grateful to him and to the committee for their continued leadership. As soon as we have a realistic estimate of the cost of the elevator, we're going to ask those of you who haven't made a financial contribution to join in this liberating project. We have to make this happen, and I hope it can be sorted in 2018.

*Specific projects  
and gifts in 2017*

Generous gifts in 2017, targeted for specific projects, made it possible for the property committee to install the Advent wreath on a motorized lift, and here Charlie Price deserves special thanks. Lee Kaukas, Karen Fox, and John McConnell worked to create a comprehensive plan for landscaping and signage, thanks to Jay Olmsted, who is a parishioner and a landscape architect. Through gifts from Dr. Leo Cass's office staff we now have defibrillators in the nave and in Hadley Hall, given in honor of Leo at his retirement last month. All of these are given with love and affection, and a desire to continually care for our fabric, and for one another.

*Chapel of Praise*

Michael Schmidt and Mary Street have worked together to listen to you, and to the Spirit, to create a plan to refurbish the Chapel of Praise. With the vestry's support we expect this to happen in the weeks after Easter. New lighting, improved insulation and sound proofing, a refinished floor, and enhanced audio visual capabilities will make this a space for both worship and formation, dedicated for use by children and adults alike.



Memorial gifts and individual contributions are helping to make this possible, and each of you will have an opportunity to participate because once the



*Tabernacle and  
Sanctuary Lamp*

pews are removed we'll need to purchase 30 new chairs.

Last Christmas we blessed a new olive-wood creche set, given in thanksgiving by the Willing family, and with Cynthia Samoiloff's artistic eye it was beautifully installed right here in front of the pulpit, and also in front of the free-standing altar.

By the time you walk through these doors on Easter Day there will be in the niche near the high altar, an oak tabernacle, and a 24 hour-7 day a week candle symbolizing our reverence for and devotion to the reserved sacrament of our Lord's body and blood. This gift is made possible by the family of longtime parishioner and former warden, Joe Georgis.

During 2017, there were several ministers who retired from lay leadership, and others who stepped into new roles. Peggy Roll, after years of leading Epiphany Visitors, one of our many pastoral care programs, retired. She gave a lot of love.

*Leadership  
changes in  
Epiphany Visitors  
and Altar Guild*

Peggy suggested Barbara DeWolfe and Joan O'Connor to succeed her, and we see the fruits of both long-tenured guidance, and fresh-looking perspectives. Gabrielle Stott and Barbara Cade led the Altar Guild, and with their retirements, we welcome Jo Devlin and Kathy Kerr Hodges, as co-directors. There is thanks all around for faithfulness and devotion, on one hand, and willingness and initiative on the other.

Several years ago the vestry invited a priest—who is also the cartoonist who created School House Rock (GenXers at least will remember that PBS children's show)—to join us in conversations about how to deepen our spiritual core.

*Fr. Jay  
Sidebotham's  
Renewal Works*

Jay Sidebotham's work has been adopted by a larger, very established agency of the Episcopal Church, called Forward Movement. With Forward Movement's resources they sponsored a study of our church, and discovered—not surprisingly—that there is a great spiritual hunger among Episcopalians. They also discovered that four catalysts are essential to a

congregation's transformation. Again, this isn't so earth-shattering, but it's helpful to be reminded that the basics matter, and in these days, they may well matter the most, and they are as follows:

- Study says these four catalysts are essential*
- 1) engagement with scripture
  - 2) the transforming power of the Eucharist
  - 3) a deeper prayer life
  - 4) the heart of the congregation's leader

*Parish-wide event on February 24th*

There are some specific opportunities for us to live into these basics, including this one about having a deeper prayer life. Let me speak about an event that's happening later in February. You know for several years we've had Quiet Days during Advent and Lent, they're basically mini-retreats, half-days, usually led by a guest. On February 24th, a Saturday, we're changing it up a bit, and hosting more of a workshop than a retreat.

For almost nine years the vestry, and many of you, have said that learning how to speak about faith, telling our stories and figuring out how they intersect with THE person of Jesus Christ, is something with which we need help. It's not that we don't want to do this, but rather that many of us don't know how.

*Telling our faith stories so that we are connected spiritually*

Many of us have grown up categorizing religion and spirituality, if not church-going, as private, even intimate, and therefore we've been conditioned to share it only within the confines of very trusted relationships. We don't need a study from Forward Movement to tell us that what we hear most from newcomers and people who tip-toe their way into our parish is a desire to grow spiritually, and to be known and befriended by others. Most of us have an example of witnessing first-hand the hunger we experience in people who have checked out the Parish of the Epiphany, or expressed interest in what we're about. One way to meet that hunger is to learn how to tell our stories, whether it's over coffee, or in a brief chat after church.

I see you greeting others, and more and more the feedback is that we've gotten really good at welcoming newcomers and guests. But beyond saying "hello, welcome to Epiphany, my name is Thomas" it's hard to know what else to say or to do.

*A practical tool  
to share what  
makes you  
passionate for  
the Gospel*

That's where February 24th comes in. My friend, Porter Taylor, is coming to help us. Porter is the retired bishop of Western North Carolina; and he's now teaching at Wake Forest. His passion is helping people in faith communities tell their stories, and to discover the ways our stories are related and connected to THE story. Your story might have to do with standing in solidarity with refugees and immigrants. How do you tell that to people in this church who don't know you, or who may not know that we're headed to Boston on March 18th for a prayer vigil at an immigration detention center?

Your story might be centered on caring for others pastorally, visiting elders or loved ones who are ill. Can you speak about that, out of your own experience, and also connect it to the larger narrative of scripture and tradition?

You might get animated when you speak about how music and corporate worship, including the Eucharist, enliven your faith. How can that animation get expressed in the form of a story that might inspire another to know you more, or to feel invited to join you? Your desire to foster faith in your children and youth may be so strong that you're moving heaven and earth to get here as often as possible, but if you can't find people who will tell you a story about their own children, you might wonder whether this is the right church for you and your kids.

*I love what we  
offer, but don't  
always know  
how to share it.  
February 24th!*

I believe wholeheartedly that what we offer for faith formation reflects the very best of a God who loves us, and who desires more of us, but I don't always know how to tell that story. I believe that Porter will kick-start the conversation, get us practicing, and that we will use it for good and for God.

*The building for  
mission and  
outreach?*

Another opportunity exists with this building. For a long time we've rented our building for various community groups to use, usually for one-off events. In some years this has been a very lucrative enterprise. However, nowadays we get fewer and fewer of those requests. We don't know why. Some have said we're too expensive; others have said that we need to market ourselves, tell people what a great facility we have, and publicize our rates. Others have said our lack of parking makes us less desirable than some other facilities in Winchester. I don't know what the answer is, but I know that we don't use the entire building. What if we gave away our building, or charged very little, based upon God's mission and our ministry to people and agencies whose values align with ours? If we did so part of your pledge dollars that pay the salaries of our sextons and parish administrator would be justifiably and honestly defined as outreach. If we did so we would be engaging locally, not to grow our church, but to respond to Jesus's call to love our neighbor. Right now, there's a group of local Bangladeshi Muslims who volunteer to be a resource for other Bangladeshis, helping them navigate housing and employment. To do their work they need a room, a table, electricity, and an internet connection for Saturdays and Sundays. Couldn't we give them a room downstairs in the Myra Higgins Formation wing? In doing so we might make new friends, and discover a way to serve together within and beyond Winchester.



*Charging less  
or no rent for  
groups whose  
values align  
with ours?*

The Family Action Network of Winchester is a membership-based organization for families. Some of them are interested in using our building for a parent-toddler play group. They have financial resources, and like Alcoholics Anonymous does every week, they would pay some rent, but what if we proactively said, “we really value families, and we want you to be in our building. What can you afford to pay?”

The details matter, I don’t discount them, but at some basic level shouldn't we be giving ourselves away? This too is evangelism, friends, as well as mission and outreach.

*Re-establishing  
a connection  
with the Mystic  
Valley Deanery*

Finally, a specific word about our membership in the Episcopal Church, 1.7 million community of Anglicans. I love this church, and I think what we offer, and how we worship and serve, how we think and how we embrace others, is desperately needed in these days. I am not saying we have the truth; I am saying that we have a part of it, and that we could use help sharing it. Our Presiding Bishop calls us the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. I love that too; (even as I long for us to not lose the other persons of the Trinity, God the Creator and the Holy Spirit). Yet I sometimes worry that at the Parish of the Epiphany I’ve not adequately led us to partner with other Episcopalians.

We’re big enough and resourced enough that we can go it alone, much of the time. The other 12 churches in the Mystic Valley Deanery are smaller than we are, some very much smaller, but we have need for them. I confess that I don’t always know how to relate to sister churches, just a few miles away, who struggle to pay the electric bill, but that’s all the more reason to find a way! I’m heartened by a new energy in this deanery, and by a desire to act less like the big gorilla, and more like a partner who has both things to give, and things to receive. On June 23rd we’ll have the opportunity to host the deanery for the regional confirmation liturgy, and I’m looking forward to doing that in a way that respects ourselves, and each of those other congregations.

*This is not all there is!* There will be other missions and ministries, some smaller and less known, and others very organized and deliberate. We'll have some fun along the way, I hope, gathering to eat, to make music, to dance, and to celebrate with all the joy and enthusiasm God gives us.

*The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu* And with that joyous outlook on the horizon, I conclude this address with an excerpt from Doug Abrams's curated conversation between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in *The Book of Joy*. By the way, I highly recommend this to you—it's a very touching, accessible work, and includes some excellent practical tools for daily prayer.

Early in their meeting, in April of 2015, the Dalai Lama said, "personally I prefer the last five decades of refugee life. It's more useful, more opportunity to learn, to experience life. There's a Tibetan saying: 'Wherever you have friends, that's your country, and wherever you receive love, that's your home.'" Archbishop Tutu said, "that's very beautiful." Then the Archbishop said, "I hope we can convey, during this conversation between us, to God's children out there how deeply they are loved. How deeply, deeply precious they are to this God of ours. When I see pictures of people fleeing violence I say that God is crying, because that's not how God wants us to live. But then people come from other parts of the world to help, and through the tears, God begins to smile. God *smiles*." Evidently when he said "God smiles" Archbishop Tutu was beaming, then he whispered the word smile as if it were the holy name of God.

*Smile: a name for God* And you know what I say? *Smile* is indeed a holy name of God.

May God bless the work of our hands and hearts, in this season and every season, so that with the Spirit, we will be empowered for the work of ministry.



THE PARISH OF THE  
**EPIPHANY**

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