

Address by the Rev. Bollin M. Millner, Jr.
Annual Meeting of Grace and Holy Trinity Church
Richmond, Virginia
February 3, 2012

1) PERSONAL UPDATE

Today I celebrate ten years as your Rector! On a personal note:

When I came I was 48 and now....I am looking at 60!

When I came I was the father of two high school students and now my sons are college graduates and out and on their own. One is married!

When I came I had no grandchildren and now I have a grand-puppy and a grand-cat.

When I moved here I lived in a fantastic, new house near Pony Pasture Park and now I live in the Museum District in a home that is 100 years old. I have enjoyed both locations.

2) WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING AT GRACE AND HOLY TRINITY CHURCH OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS? LOTS OF GREAT THINGS THANKS TO YOU!

I want to highlight just a few of them. I hesitate to do this, because I may not mention your favorite thing, but my purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive list. I simply want to give you a sense of the amazing things you have done.

- ❖ Our music program has continued to thrive and to grow.



We have a wonderful children's choir.



Our adult choir supports our worship and also provides music for special events like the Martin Luther King, Jr. *Celebration of Unity* concert.



Our 8:45 Music Team supports worship at that service and provides a place where musicians of all ages can offer their talents.

We are also the proud home of the Greater Richmond Children's Choir. You can read all about them at [this link](#). But if you are looking for a great program that provides serious vocal training for your child, look no further.

- ❖ Pastoral Care Ministries have continued to grow. In addition to the care offered by the clergy, we have a prayer group, Random Acts of Kindness, Lay Pastoral Visitors, a Prayer Shawl Ministry, a Baby Blanket Ministry and more. Most especially there is the tender loving care you offer each other in both planned and in spontaneous ways.



- ❖ We began international mission efforts, especially in Belize, building on the talents of our people.



You can see by the size of this crowd of children that the Summer Camp we provide in Belize has been met with great enthusiasm.

- ❖ We have worked in the USA with Katrina recovery efforts, in Petersburg and in other locales.



- ❖ We have worked in Richmond with things like Summer Camp on the Hill, our soup kitchen and the Mayor's Youth Academy work initiative. This is not to mention other efforts such as tutoring in schools, our grant programs (we will make grants of \$87,000 in 2013 in Richmond), periodic work with Habitat for Humanity and support of the World Pediatric Project.



With efforts like our soup kitchen, we not only provide a nourishing meal but we also provide gracious hospitality and we treat people with dignity and respect.

❖ We began and have sustained now for 9 years a vital campus ministry to Virginia Commonwealth University.



❖ We have built our youth program, which includes things like a pilgrimage to Liverpool and London last summer. The British are coming here this summer for the second half of this pilgrimage.



❖ We have had wonderful adult education on Sunday mornings. Most recently we welcomed Dr. Mark Biddle who talked to us about slavery and the interpretation of Scripture. These sessions with Dr. Biddle are some of the best educational events I have seen at any time and at any church. In addition, we have many more small groups, such as the one which started just this January. This group is discussing Ben Campbell's book, "Richmond's Unhealed History".

And then, of course there is Parish Life! Things like...



Foyer Group picnics



Sunday breakfasts

- ❖ We have great parish life events, for instance, today our fabulous Hospitality Team will serve a fried chicken lunch (the gospel bird!) after services. This is in addition to weekly breakfast, monthly Foyer Groups and many other fellowship activities.

All of this activity is not busy work...activity for activity's sake. It is in the service of our mission: To build strong disciples, build a strong church community and to serve God and the world God has made. We bring this mission to life through the SWEPPS ministries –Service, Worship, Education, Evangelism, Pastoral Care, Parish Life and Stewardship.

The purpose of all of our work
is, with God's grace and in accordance with God's will....
TRANSFORMATION!

Along these lines, let me share with you two letters I have received recently.

One is from a woman following the baptism of her child at GHTC. She started here as a member of the VCU Campus ministry, graduated, got a graduate degree and now works at the VCU medical center. She has gotten married and has had a wonderful baby girl who was recently baptized. She writes:

“Thank you for such a beautiful service ...to mark the baptism of our sweet (baby girl). As I think about (my daughter’s) future at GHTC, I am incredibly excited about all that she will do and see. Our youth programs, services, outreach...she will truly know that it means to go and do the work ‘she has been given to do.’ We don’t know what her gifts are going to be, but we’re thrilled that she can develop them at Grace and Holy Trinity.”

And then...there is this letter. It came to me but it was addressed –

To My Church Family,

No matter how blown off course I have been, there has always remained one constant, my church home. Here I have found a belonging that is steadfast and unchanging....I cannot number the many expressions of hospitality that I have been offered. Often, I have felt unworthy of such kindness and yet, I am reminded of God’s faithfulness and His everlasting arms. Signed...with deep gratitude.



All of our efforts are supported by your stewardship of time, talent and treasure.

You are going to hear about the budget in just a bit. I’ll say now that one of the great accomplishments of the last ten years, is the 2013 operating budget. We have worked for greater and greater transparency and today we take a quantum leap forward. We have always told you about things like Endowment Fund grants. But now, you will see all sources of income and expenditures in one place – the Operating Budget. For instance you will see that campus ministry is supported with \$52,000. \$1000 of this comes from your pledge. \$36,000 of this comes from Region X and the Diocese and \$15,000 comes from the GHTC endowment fund.

WHILE WE ARE ON THE SUBJECT OF THE BUDGET... We had adopted a deficit budget of nearly \$15,000 for 2012 and we ended the year with a zero balance. This was accomplished partially because we utilized staff transitions to reconfigure things. And to do this we hired Mary Cay Kollmansperger, for 25 hours a week, to focus exclusively on children, youth and families.

But here is the amazing thing...we had budgeted pledge income for 2012 at \$829,000...and we received from you \$852,802....\$23,000 more. And then, at the beginning of this year, an anonymous donor contributed an addition \$2000...so we ended the year even!

Thank you for your stewardship and I challenge you to continue to grow in grace and generosity. You know I have told you before that for me, the challenge of the tithe was a helpful one. It is easy to figure out. You have to just move the decimal point one place to the left. If you earn \$30,000 then you would give \$3000 away.

The question is often asked, "Is that before taxes or after?" Answer that one in your own heart. The question is also asked, "Should I give all my charitable dollars to the church." Now...as much as I'd like to answer that one, "Yes", I know that there are lots of great organizations that further God's work and it is a faithful thing to support them.

A good rule of thumb might be that Christians give at least half of their charitable dollars to the Church which baptizes them and cares throughout life... to the Church which is eternal and gives to us the promise of new life. Katherine and I give right at 8% of my pretax income to GHTC and are privileged to do so. And this leaves us another 2% to give outside of this congregation.

Regardless, I hope that you will do this exercise. Add up your charitable giving. See what proportion of your income it is and see where it is you are giving it. See if you are happy with where you are or if you feel God calling you to something new. Be proactive and don't simply respond to solicitations. Think proportionately...whether or not you embrace the tithe. And let the portion that you offer be fragrant sacrifice to God and represent the whole. Let it remind you of the truth that all that we have, indeed life itself, we have received at God's hand.

Thanks be to God for all of God's blessing!

Let me turn the page now and talk about the future. Lovett Weems of the United Methodist Church introduced me to the concept of the “Death Tsunami”. I told you about this last year.



“The U.S. death rate is currently in a stable period that began in 2003 and will continue until 2018. But what follows this plateau is a... wave in which there will be more deaths and a higher death rate than at any time since the widespread introduction of antibiotics and other medical advances. The total number of deaths each year will increase from 2018 until 2050, and the majority of these deaths will be older non-Hispanic whites and African Americans, the two largest constituencies of mainline churches.”

(<http://www.churchleadership.com/Updates/110504Update.asp>)

Since the end of the Second World War main line churches have sailed by very well because the demographics were in their favor. Put up the sail and regardless of its size or whether it had holes in it, you could catch a breeze. It doesn't necessarily mean you were doing anything right or wrong...but your numbers looked good. That is no longer the case.

Add to this tremendous societal changes...people just don't go to church because that is simply what people do...there is lots of competition on a Sunday morning. I am old enough to remember blue laws...and I remember when they fell. So, Sunday is like any other day, with sports, work, shopping etc.

So...how do we meet the challenge?

First of all, let's celebrate and use our assets. That is a big part of the solution.

- Your Stewardship...of time, talent and treasure is a great blessing.
- Size. We are not a mega church, but we are larger than 90% of Episcopal churches in the USA . We shouldn't anxiously look at churches larger than us, or for that matter, at congregations smaller than us. We would simply look to ourselves and count our blessings. We shouldn't do everything, but for a Church our size and with our resources we are amazing. We are large enough to offer a great variety but not so large that you feel like a number. That is a blessing.
- Culture: People are here to serve not to be seen. We are a welcoming congregation, great for individuals, for families and children, for older folk and younger folk.
- Facilities: The fact that we are considering potential renovations is a good thing. Personally I think this is exactly the right time and the plans are exactly the right plans and that if we go forward it will serve this congregation well for the next two decades.

Bottom line...GHTC has got it going on!

Well, we can't count on simple demographics any more. We are swimming against cultural currents. So...building on these assets...what must we do? What are we called to do, after all? We are called to go into all the world and make disciples for Jesus Christ. To witness in deed and also in word...we can be mute no longer.

I am talking of course about the dreaded word...evangelism.

It comes from a Greek word...simply meaning "good news."

The old English for it is "Godspell" So think about it that way if you will... you are called to spell out, to tell, to show God and the good news...to be a Godspeller.

The problem is...



for too long the Episcopal idea of evangelism is "fishbowl evangelism"....put the bowl by the sea shore and hope some fish jump in. But Jesus said to his disciples...**go** fishing!

Now I understand that some people have the gift of evangelism and can articulate their faith very well. They have internalized a summary of the faith and can share it. By the way, the faith story is summarized for us in the Eucharistic Prayer so we hear it every time we have communion.

Still, most of us are shy and find that hard. I want to suggest three things that everyone can do to share the faith.

1. **LEARN** everything you can about GHTC...go to the web site, click through the SWEEPPS links...again...we can't and shouldn't do everything...we should be ourselves...but if you will thoroughly familiarize yourself with what we do...you will see...we've got it going on! And you will see the gospel in action.
2. **TELL**, once a week at least one other person, who is not a member of GHTC, what you love about your Church.
3. **INVITE** someone, at least once a month, to come here and participate in worship or in some other activity.

In these three simple ways we can all be “Godspellers.”

We don't need to be anxious (and besides as Jesus taught us, worry gets us nowhere). The fact is, the foundations are in place.

Be mute no longer. Rather, **LEARN, TELL and INVITE**. These are the things that will carry us forward in faithfulness to the gospel, regardless of the winds.

Thank you for your presence and for your work. I look forward to the next chapter in our life together.

Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21