

Annual Meeting Address  
The Rev. Bollin M. Millner, Jr.  
Grace and Holy Trinity Church  
Richmond, Virginia  
February 5, 2017

Thank you to the Vestry and especially Leslie Winn and Mike Joyce, our Junior and Senior Wardens. Thank you to the staff of this church. Thanks to all of you for being part of this congregation and supporting the mission with your time, talent and treasure. It is my privilege to talk for a bit this morning about that mission as it relates to the strategic plan.

But before I get into the specifics of the plan, let me talk just a bit about current events and the tumultuous times we find ourselves in. Because our mission is important here, of course. We live in a polarized nation and it is increasingly difficult to have civil conversations and reasonable debates. And Christians too, are falling into bad habits, succumbing the cultural trends, often times. I watch on social media –first some good conversations- but more often than not, people talking past each other, calling each other names, venting their spleens...and Christians are doing this to each other. It is not right and it is not helpful. “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” We as Christians need to be the little bit of leaven that raises the whole dialogue to a higher level. Our primary affiliation needs to be “follower of Jesus Christ” and everything else must follow that.

At GHTC we are blessed. I can point you to episcopal congregations that are predominantly the left wing of the democratic party at prayer. I can point you to congregations that are the right wing of the republican party at prayer. But at GHTC we have democrats, libertarians, and republicans all together and it is a blessing. In fact in a world that has separated out into warring camps, it is unique and uniquely important. And all together, it is important for us to talk civilly to one another and show others how it can be done.

And that is why we have been intentional in our programming. We are having a series of Adult Forums on Abrahamic faiths. We have been able to

have personal conversations with Dr. Damaj, a Muslim. We have been able to enjoy the Baptist, Dr. Biddle. We have and will shortly again enjoy, a conversation on Judaism with Rabbi Friedman.

And in March we will have another very special Adult Forum. Last year, the Diocese of Virginia began a ministry to focus solely on helping our ethnic-specific and multicultural congregations thrive and not just survive. Since then, many things have changed in our nation forcing us to think about creative new ways to do ministry and to think through the role we must play in meeting the needs of the marginalized, including refugees and immigrants. Aisha Huertas, GHTC member and staff member of the Diocese of Virginia in charge of Intercultural Ministries will lead a discussion at the Adult Forum on March 12 at 10:00 a.m.

And, for three different Wednesday evenings in Lent, we will offer a program. "One Nation Under God: Religion's influence on U.S. Foreign Policy ." This three-part series examines the historical role of religion and religious ideas on the development and implementation of American foreign policy. Included will be considerations of "American exceptionalism", "American Zionism", immigration, and war. Our presenter will be Dr. Cary Blankenship. New to GHTC, Cary Blankenship is a retired history professor. In addition to his academic career, he served the state of Kentucky for 20 years promoting the state's economic development.

So, we live in polarized times, but at GHTC we love each other and we are very intentionally creating opportunities to talk civilly with one another. It is a profoundly important witness.

Now...onto other aspects of our mission. And to do that, I want to place our mission in context. I want to talk about our mission in relation to the over-all story that we find in Holy Scripture. Some call it the greatest story every told.

The Biblical narrative has five basic parts. It starts with God's good creation. It moves on to own the reality, that things are not right. There was

a Fall from grace, which is the second part of the story. Sin and death enter the narrative. God at that point had a decision to make. Walk away or keep working. God decided to redeem his creation, and to do so he raised up the Children of Israel, and their story is the third part of the story. Of course, the children of Israel were infected with sin just as all of us were and are. They were able to bring truth and justice to light but not to realize it fully. So, God sent Jesus...who is the fourth part of the story...Jesus perfectly embodied all the best that Israel was called to be, in his humanity the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, the door was opened to the new age, a time of resurrection and renewal. The fifth act of the story begins with the New Testament, where followers of Jesus accept his Lordship and share that with others, with the whole world. We too are part of that fifth act, straining forward toward the recreation, where death is no more and this world becomes what God created it to be.

That is the big story. Each of our individual stories intersect with it. For me, I discovered a new intersection of my personal story with the larger story in my call to ordained ministry. But ordained ministry is a very small part of the picture. The bigger picture is painted for us in the baptism where every follower of Jesus renounces evil and embraces the Lord Christ...where we affirm God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, where we pledge to share the good news and work for dignity and justice for all people.

The story of Grace and Holy Trinity Church, as a community, also intersects the big story of Scripture. This intersection can take a variety of directions, but right now for us, we find the intersection in the three areas of the Strategic Plan...we do our part for the larger narrative, by empowering the Spiritual Journey with a special focus on our older members; by supporting children youth and young adults in their faith and living; and by working to break the cycle of poverty in Richmond.

We are making progress with our part of that story and there is still work to be done. You can read about where we are in the annual report and I commend it to you and Leslie will talk about some of our accomplishments as well. And, there is a place for you in the plan, if you are not already involved. For instance, great progress has been made with breaking the cycle

of poverty as we are working with an ecumenical group to implement Circles in Richmond.

Grace and Holy Trinity Church joined with neighborhood leaders, government representatives, faith organizations<sup>1</sup> and other nonprofits to research volunteer-centered models that help people move out of poverty. We researched relationship-based program models in urban settings that have achieved measurable success in breaking the cycle of poverty. This ecumenical group decided that Circles USA met those requirements.

Circles USA offers a unique strategy that works on both the individual and community level to: (1) empower motivated low-income participants to permanently move out of poverty and into stability, AND (2) to persuade community leaders and major sectors of the community to take collective action to resolve systemic barriers to economic stability. Circles USA has over 70 chapters in the United States. Circles RVA seeks to become a chapter serving the city of Richmond. You can read more in the report. And, learn more at the Adult Forum on Feb 26.

But it is now time to volunteer. I have forms right here...so sign up let's help write Richmond's Future story even as we support the spiritual journey and people of all ages. (The online form is at this link: [http://ghtc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CirclesRVASignUp\\_v3.pdf](http://ghtc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CirclesRVASignUp_v3.pdf))

Thank you for 14 great years at GHTC. I think this church is in a great place and we have great things to accomplish. Onward and upward!

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<sup>1</sup> As of this writing, St. Paul's Church, St. Andrew's Church, St. Mark's Church, St. Peter's Church, Temple Beth Ahabah, Grace and Holy Trinity Church, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, Grace Presbyterian and Boulevard Methodist have committed or pledged time, talent and treasure