

Fr. Robin Dodge's Charge to the Parish
The Church of the Holy Faith Annual Meeting
29 January 2017

Wow, what a year The Church of the Holy Faith has had! Few faith communities have gone through as much as you have in the last year, and have thrived!

At last year's annual meeting, you were preparing for the retirement of your beloved rector, Fr. Ken Semon, who was to retire in the fall. You also were preparing for the retirement of your beloved assisting priest, Dean Peggy Patterson, who was planning to retire in May. With so much planned change, your Vestry leadership, thinking ahead, sought and obtained the bishop's permission to conduct a search for a new rector while the current rector was in place, rather than going through an interim transition period with different leadership. And so the search committee gave a report at last year's annual meeting that it was gathering information from the various parish ministries, staff members, clergy, and parishioners to construct a Parish Rector Profile, with the ambitious intent of enticing candidates to apply, shortlisting the candidates by early August, extending a call by early October, and instituting the new rector in November.

Then the unthinkable happened. Fr. Ken suffered a tragic bicycle accident and died on July 28, six months ago yesterday. While in deep mourning, this faith community rallied together – first, to bid a proper farewell to a good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ, the glorious music for which you can still hear on the parish website; and second, to support Fr. Ken's wife and one another in your grief. I would like to recognize Caroline Semon for her grace under pressure, her faith under stress, and her continuing presence here as a beloved member of this parish. [Recognize Caroline.]

This faith community also rallied because of the strength and dedication of its fine clergy and staff. Following Dean Peggy's retirement and Fr. Ken's death, Fr. Jim Gordon was the sole priest of this large and active parish for more than three months. During that time, he celebrated and preached countless times, ensured that the pastoral care from this place would continue, kept the office running for the arrival of the new rector, and prepared the parish for hosting the diocesan convention. Fr. Jim was ably assisted by Fr. Richard Murphy who came on board to help during the transition, and has stayed on as an assisting priest to celebrate weekday masses until a third priest is called.

At the same time, the high quality of worship at The Church of the Holy Faith was preserved under the leadership of Mark Childers, Director of Music and Liturgy and Parish Administrator. Mark not only prepared the beautiful Requiem Mass for Fr. Ken that included 52 voices in the choir, but also designed all the liturgies for the diocesan convention, including a kick-off choral evensong and the convention opening Eucharist with more bishops in attendance, including the Presiding Bishop of the United States, than you could shake a crozier at.

Meanwhile, Donna Lukacs presided over the office to make sure everything got done on time and efficiently, with never a worry. Ann MacVicar, taking over from Dean Peggy, continues to oversee our children's ministry with Sunday chapel and seasonal adventures, and supports the women's spirituality ministry. After yet another transition, our facilities are well maintained by Marcos Castillo, and our buildings sparkle because of his wife, Rocio. I am told that the property has never looked better!

I would like to recognize the assisting clergy and parish staff. [Recognize Fr. Jim, Fr. Richard, Mark, Donna, Ann, Marcos, and Rocio.] I also would like to pay tribute to a couple of others at this time who offer wonderful ministries of their own, and who are often not fully

appreciated for their ministries of supporting their husbands – Andi Shapiro and Carol Murphy.
[Recognize Andi and Carol.]

In the meantime, the Rector Search Committee was on schedule with its task of identifying candidates. After compiling the results of a parish-wide survey, an excellent Parish Profile was prepared, resumes were read, phone interviews were conducted, and a shortlist was arrived at in early August. The Search Committee visited Therese and me in Washington in August, and then hosted us here in Santa Fe in late August with more opportunities for interviews, tours, and social occasions to get to know one another, and then they handed over the search to the Vestry. I would like to recognize all the members of the Search Committee for their dedication to their task and their commitment to this parish. [Recognize Search Committee.] While you are still standing, I also would like to recognize your spouses who endured your many absences from home because of meetings and travel, and supported you in this long endeavor. [Recognize Search Committee spouses.]

Your Vestry, charged with calling the rector, interviewed me, and then extended a call to me in early September – a month ahead of the timetable – to become your next rector. I did not hesitate in accepting the call because I found the Vestry of The Church of the Holy Faith to be a stellar group, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, striving to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord, committed to the well-being of this parish, and representative of all the good people of The Church of the Holy Faith. I would like to recognize all the members of the outgoing Vestry for their leadership this past year. [Recognize Vestry members.] And while you're still standing – you know what's coming – I also would like to recognize your spouses who endured your many absences from home because of meetings, and supported you in your ministry. [Recognize Vestry spouses.]

I visited The Church of the Holy Faith in early October to preach for the parish's patronal festival of St. Francis of Assisi. It was supposed to be Fr. Ken's farewell Sunday; instead, it was the day we dedicated the memorial garden in his memory. Fr. Ken had hoped that the new rector would preach that day, and I wanted to honor his wish. By the end of the month, I arrived in Santa Fe in time to welcome people to the diocesan convention, host the Presiding Bishop and our Diocesan Bishop, and all the other bishops whom you could hardly shake a crozier at, in my first service as Rector of The Church of the Holy Faith, attend my first deanery meeting, preside at my first Eucharist here, and be instituted as your rector – also a month ahead of schedule – all in the first five days. And the pace has barely slowed – and I love it!

With such upheavals, tragedies, transitions, and challenges, most parish churches wouldn't survive. But you, The Church of the Holy Faith, not only survived; you thrived! From the Parish Records, average Sunday attendance has risen over 15% (don't get too excited because remember Christmas fell on a Sunday this year!), but attendance on Christmas was the highest in five years reaching almost 900; an additional 60 Sunday Eucharists were celebrated and nearly an additional 150 Daily Offices were offered; and the number of total baptized members increased to over 900. This fall's stewardship campaign exceeded all expectations. As of last week, a record 228 Holy Faith households had pledged a record amount just shy of \$1 million to support the mission and ministry of this parish church this year! I would like to recognize the co-chairs of the Stewardship Committee, Mary Dudley and Lynne Rauch, for spearheading this effort. [Recognize Mary and Lynne.] While you are still standing, I would like to recognize all the members of the Stewardship Committee and all those who gave a "stewardship minute" talk during the November Sunday Eucharists. [Recognize all Stewardship

helpers.] In addition, I'm told that participation in the Bible studies and book groups are at an unprecedented level.

That's because the Holy Spirit is moving in, and through, and from this place. You have been faithful in your prayers, and God has heard you and stirred you into action. God has given us a sure foundation on which to build, and to dive more deeply into our relationship with Jesus Christ. As I wrote in my January Faithway article, after getting to know you, my next focus is supporting and strengthening the ministries of The Church of the Holy Faith. As your Parish Rector Profile stated, "There are more than fifty ministry groups [in the parish] seeking to meet the needs of parishioners and others, all made possible by robust lay participation throughout the parish." My job as your Rector in getting to know you is to discern your individual gifts for ministry and connect you with various expressions for those gifts so that you are inspired to ever-greater faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and ever-greater service to God through the Holy Spirit.

You may remember that in my sermon for the Feast of our Lord's Baptism, I stressed that baptism empowers us for ministry. Just as Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin his public ministry when he came up out of the water of the Jordan River at his baptism, so we are ordained by the Holy Spirit for ministry through the water of our baptism. According to the Catechism, an Outline of the Faith in the back of the Prayer Book, the ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

You always have opportunities to take your place in the life, worship, and governance of The Church of the Holy Faith, and many of you have been doing so! Just look at the number of people who have stood to be recognized! My charge to you is find your place in ministry to

Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit in this parish church, and go out from here and spread the Good News of our Lord to everyone you meet. Get involved! Read through the Annual Report, and see where God is stirring you into action. If you need help figuring out your calling, come see me. My goal for next year is that we will all be standing at the annual meeting as a testament to our witnessing to Jesus Christ. In this season of Epiphany, when we hear stories of the manifestation of Christ to the whole world and celebrate the “green season” of growth in the Church, may we all grow in the knowledge and likeness of Christ and radiate his love to the world. May the Peace of the Lord be always with you.