

Fr. Robin Dodge's Charge to the Parish  
The Church of the Holy Faith Annual Meeting  
30 January 2022

A year ago, I stood before you at the Annual Meeting and exclaimed what a year 2020 had been. Actually, I was seated before you because last year's Annual Meeting was held via Zoom. But I can stand before you now and exclaim the same thing - what a year the past year has been!

A year ago, with the development of vaccines and the loosening of gathering restrictions, we thought we would be returning to a new sort of normal. But with the onset of first the delta variant and then the omicron variant, God had other plans for us. We know that God is making all things new, but perhaps not in ways we expect or even care for. Nevertheless, we must continue to trust God, who is infinitely wiser than we are, and we must continue to be faithful to where God is leading us.

I am pleased to say that The Church of the Holy Faith has, as a whole, remained faithful to where God is leading us. We have remained true to our core values of worshiping the Lord in the beauty of holiness, forming disciples of Jesus Christ, being the hands and feet of Christ in our city and beyond, and building Christian community among ourselves.

We were able to resume in-person Sunday worship just before Holy Week, extending to weekday Morning and Evening Prayer and Eucharists just after Easter. Before we reopened, we were constantly working on improving our streaming capabilities so people could view Holy Faith's worship at home. We wanted to ensure that people still feel connected with their parish church even if for whatever reason they

could not attend in person. We went from creating a sound stage to upgrading the sound and video quality to adapting to serving simultaneously an in-person congregation and a streaming congregation. During the shutdown, we picked up many new seekers who were introduced to Holy Faith online and who have become parishioners since being able to attend in person. During the shutdown with fewer people on campus, we also took advantage of the opportunity to install a new security system, upgrade our fire alarm system, and to revamp our streaming capability by adding several remote cameras around the church, as well as a separate broadcast booth, to enhance the immediacy of the viewing experience and eliminating the stationary camera and control table in the back of the church, thus improving the worship experience of those in attendance.

Since reopening in the spring, Holy Faith has been able to remain open, thanks to the commitment of parishioners in getting vaccinated and staying home when feeling unwell, and thanks to the leadership of your Vestry for implementing safe protocols and reviewing their effectiveness. We went from offering two Sunday services of different lengths to accommodate varying tolerances of regathering (one without singing and one with singing by a cantor, then duet, then quartet and then to section leaders) and with no acolytes, no processions, communion at the chancel steps – to the current state of three Sunday services with acolytes, processions, and communion again at the altar rail. Thank you all for your patience during these changes and for your feedback.

During this past year, Holy Faith was able to maintain its sense of Christian community. Adult Christian Formation opportunities, such as the Sunday forums, Bible Studies, and Spiritual Classics discussion went from meeting via Zoom to resuming

gathering in person. In fact, the Sunday forums resumed meeting in person at the beginning of January with an 8-week Inquirers' Class in response to the number of people new to Anglicanism, The Episcopal Church, and Holy Faith. The Women's Spirituality group, under the leadership of Assisting Priest Mother Madelynn, has been able to gather in person for book discussions. The Daughters of the King have resumed their monthly meetings for fellowship, prayer, and study. Children's Chapel meets once again, and the 8:30 congregation is enlivened again when the children process into the church at the Peace.

During the past year, Holy Faith has continued to be the face of Christ outside these walls. Feed the Hungry once again meets the fourth Sunday of the month to prepare and serve lunch for the guests of the Interfaith Community Shelter at Pete's Place. Holy Faith took its week's turn in November to prepare and serve dinner for the guests of the Interfaith Shelter. The Holy Faith Women's Guild, through online sales, innovative smaller events on campus, and the 139th Annual St. Nicholas Bazaar was able to raise as much money for distribution to charities in the community as in pre-Covid times. And the Holy Faith Mission & Outreach Granting Committee was able to meet via Zoom to make its grant awards to ministries both near and far.

Holy Faith was not without its opportunities for Christian fellowship this past year, despite the pandemic. After a year's absence, Holy Faith's annual picnic was held in September at Bishop's Ridge with more children than we had seen in a long time, resulting in the largest Children's Christmas Pageant in recent memory. The children also enjoyed a Trunk or Treat party in the Holy Faith parking lot at the end of October. The Free Spirits singles group has been able to gather again for fellowship, and will

host a parish breakfast the first Sunday in March. And yes, coffee hours have resumed after the Sunday services!

All this has been made possible by so many. Thanks to all the ministry heads and leadership for your commitment and steadfastness in the face of changing circumstances. My thanks go also to my wonderful colleagues on the staff – Fr. Jim for his steady hand and wise counsel, Deacon Lynn who has come on board and has helped revamp Faith Family, and Mother Madelynn who guides the Women’s Spirituality group and assists at Sunday and weekday services. Also thanks go to Mark Childers, who not only wears hats as organist and choirmaster, director of music and liturgy, and parish administrator, but now seems to have added the role of Holy Faith’s director of enhanced IT capabilities! Thank you, Mark, and to all the choir members, acolytes, and camera operators who make our liturgy truly an example of worshiping God in the beauty of holiness. Thanks go to Parish Secretary Donna Lukacs and Office Assistant Ann MacVicar for running the office so smoothly we wouldn’t even know that Donna is working remotely while in New Jersey caring for her mother. And, of course, huge thanks go to Marcos Castillo and Rocio Salazar for maintaining and cleaning our beautiful facilities!

I also want especially to thank Janet McCroskey for her constant attention to the ministries offered to the children of this parish, to Kathlene Ritch for maintaining Children’s Chapel on Zoom, and to all the Children’s Chaplains for their commitment to the children and youth of this parish. My thanks go to all the Vestry members for their wisdom and leadership in guiding the parish through these Covid times. I especially want to thank Senior Warden Van Swift for her commitment to building community

within the parish during these difficult times and to Junior Warden Dan Green for his tireless efforts overseeing the building projects during the past year. While we are sad to see Dan, Charles Rountree, and Leslea McCabe step down from Vestry at the end of their terms, I am confident we will continue to have a stellar Vestry with the addition of those elected this year. Most especially, I want to thank you, the parishioners of Holy Faith, for your generosity for giving more than was pledged last year, and already pledging \$100,000 more than pledged this year than last at this time. A special thank you goes to Leslea and Frank McCabe for chairing this year's stewardship campaign, and to Treasurer Steven Berkshire for carefully overseeing the parish's financial records, and to Investment Chair Peter Lockyer for keeping careful eye on the parish's endowment funds.

And now looking ahead to this year. Covid is still with us, although it's grip on us seems to be lessening. Of course, that's what we thought last year at this time. We will continue to trust God, and we will continue to be faithful to where God is leading us. We plan on resuming the Lenten Soup and Study Suppers in March and we intend to hold all our usual Holy Week observances, something we haven't been able to do for the past two years.

As we look ahead, I believe it's an appropriate time for Holy Faith to engage in some strategic planning. I had hoped to start this process before the pandemic began, but it didn't happen. I think we need to ask ourselves where is God calling us as a parish. What are our gifts that we can share with the larger community? What are our blind spots that may limit us in effectively proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ? For example, because of the generosity of Holy Faith parishioners and benefactors over

the years, the Holy Faith Endowment Fund has grown to around \$10 million. To preserve the fund and allow the endowment to grow, up to a prudent 4% of a rolling three-year-end average of the endowment's value can be drawn, according to the bylaws, for capital expenses or mission & outreach expenditures. In 2021, we spent around \$265,000 of a permissible \$271,000 draw, virtually all on capital expenses and many seen as necessary to meet the effects of the pandemic. This year in 2022, we will be able to draw up to \$305,000 from the endowment for capital expenses and mission & outreach expenditures. The questions I think we have to ask is how much should we spend on ourselves as a parish and how much should we spend on others. I don't have the answers, but I think we need to approach these questions from a theological as well as a practical perspective. I will be proposing to the new Vestry that these questions be part of a larger strategic planning discussion at the Vestry retreat this spring. After some preliminary discussions by the Vestry, I want a broader discussion as a parish to consider these questions.

Also coming up, as I'm in my sixth year as your Rector, according to diocesan policy and the terms of my Letter of Agreement, I am due a three-month sabbatical in addition to vacation time this year. The terms for my sabbatical for rest and study are beginning to take shape. I hope to be away a couple of weeks after Easter to attend our son's graduation from Cambridge University, depending on whether the graduation ceremony will be held and Covid travel restrictions. The bulk of my time away will be in July, August, and September. Using Maine as a base of operation for renewal, I plan to make retreats at three monasteries - the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge, MA, an Anglican modified Benedictine order also known as the Cowley

Fathers; Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, NY, an Episcopal Benedictine community; and St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN, a Roman Catholic Benedictine community - to compare and contrast religious practices that I can bring back to deepen the spiritual practices of this parish. Therese and I also hope to make a pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain in September, as I mentioned in my Christmas Eve sermon.

During my sabbatical, there are plans for clergy coverage. I am pleased to report that the 2022 balanced budget approved by the Vestry includes full-time funding for a third clergy position beginning in July. I have already been in touch with Bishop Hunn for a possible candidate for the position. It is expected that the clergy person would continue in that position into 2023 and beyond, providing continuity as we as a parish prepare as Fr. Jim reaches The Episcopal Church's mandatory retirement age in May 2023. And I look forward to returning to Holy Faith this fall after my sabbatical rested and renewed to serve this parish and its people whom I love.

So my charge to the parish is this:

- I. That we each trust in God and be faithful to where God is leading.
- II. That we each listen and respond to where and how God is calling us as a committed member of the Holy Faith community.
- III. That we listen and respond as a parish to where and how God is calling Holy Faith to proclaim effectively the Good News of Jesus Christ in this parish, in this city, in this country, and in this world.

Thank you and God bless you all!