

Fr. Robin Dodge's Charge to the Parish
The Church of the Holy Faith Annual Meeting
29 January 2023

A year ago, I stood before you at the Annual Meeting and thought it would be the last annual meeting I would have to talk about COVID. But three years on, we are still dealing with COVID and its effects. Last Saturday, to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the annual Pastors' Panel of the three downtown Santa Fe churches – the Cathedral Basilica, First Presbyterian, and Holy Faith – addressed the “Blessings of the Pandemic.” While not minimizing the immense tragedy and loss of life due to COVID, there have been blessings that have come from the pandemic.

Things that we used to take for granted have now become more precious to us. We have been reminded of the importance of human contact, especially after months of isolation for some of us. We realize our dependence on one another – the need to check in on each another and to see to each other's needs. The challenge for Holy Faith during the pandemic was how to maintain community when the church was shut down. We resurrected the tried and true phone trees to maintain connection with parishioners. Ministry participants checked in with other ministry participants. The clergy contacted those less connected with parish activities. And, of course, we developed capabilities for live streaming services – from one camera on a tripod in the back of the church to six remote-controlled cameras operated from a broadcast booth. This advancement has continued, and will continue to connect our beautiful liturgies with those in our parish who are homebound, those who cannot attend because of some illness or who are traveling, those who live in Santa Fe only part-time, and those

Holy Faith alumni who live around the world. But have we made it too easy for people to stay home and participate remotely? Have we given people a crutch to stay in their pajamas and watch the service on their computer screen?

Ours is a liturgy that praises God while at the same time delights our senses. The music is not as glorious unless you're hearing it in person. The light streaming through the stained glass is not as brilliant as it is when you're in our sacred space. You can't smell the fragrant incense when you're staying at home. (Okay, I know that's why some of you do stay home – because you don't like incense!) But you can't taste the Body and Blood of Christ unless you present yourself before the Sacrament borne by the priest.

Your Vestry has done a remarkable job this past year of increasing the desirability of attending worship in person. For those who disliked wearing masks, your Vestry made masks optional regardless of the COVID level in Santa Fe County. For those who missed receiving the Blood of Christ and the Cup of Salvation, your Vestry reinstated the Common Cup.

But we are still missing in the pews many people who previously were active at Holy Faith. It's easy to get out of the habit. It's not so easy to resume the habit once it's been broken. As Stewardship Chair Charles Rountree wrote in this year's pledge brochure: "These past few years have been tough and the worst of it was losing the opportunity to worship together. Holy Faith made remarkable (and quick!) progress streaming worship and prayer services and I'm deeply grateful for that effort. But I missed sitting next to my church family on Sundays, I missed catching up with friends over coffee, I missed kneeling next to you for Communion. Returning to in-person

worship was far more joyful than I even imagined it would be. But it seems the ties we wove that bound us to each other frayed when we had to step away and we haven't quite returned to where we were. We need you: we need you here, at worship, in Bible study, in Taize, at coffee hour, in Adult Forum, in Children's Chapel. I believe our lives (certainly, my life) have been enriched beyond measure because of the marvelous folks who attend Holy Faith. So, come back!"

That's why the theme for this year's Stewardship Campaign is "Renewal & Recommitment for 2023." We want people to renew their faith by coming back to Holy Faith to participate in the worship, the Christian formation, and the various ministries the parish offers. We want people to recommit to Holy Faith by giving of their time, talent, and treasure. We want people to reconnect with their Holy Faith community and friends to strengthen the Body of Christ.

The theme for this year's Stewardship Campaign was inspired by my own renewal and recommitment that I experienced on my three-month sabbatical this past year. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity of being gone from Holy Faith during July, August, and September to recharge as I neared the start of my seventh year of ministry alongside you. During the sabbatical, I was able to renew my faith by making three long retreats at three different Benedictine monasteries. I was able to recommit myself and my gifts to ministering at Holy Faith, and I looked forward to my return among you. And upon my return, I was able to reconnect with so many of you among whom I love to minister.

My thanks especially go to Holy Faith's wonderful staff that kept the parish humming in my absence: Fr. Jim for his steady hand and wise counsel who, along with

Mother Lynn whose ordination to the priesthood we celebrated in June and is now full time with us, were responsible for the spiritual affairs of the parish; Mother Madelynn who guides the Women's Spirituality group and assists at Sunday and weekday services; Mark Childers, as the hard-working organist and choirmaster, director of music and liturgy, and parish administrator; Parish Secretary Donna Lukacs who keeps us all on task and Office Assistant Ann MacVicar while Donna was working remotely in New Jersey caring for her mother; and Marcos Castillo and Rocio Salazar for maintaining and cleaning our beautiful facilities!

My thanks also go to the Vestry who tended to the temporal affairs of the parish especially during my sabbatical: Senior Warden Van Swift who chaired Vestry meetings in my absence and for her commitment to building community; Junior Warden Vann Bynum for his tireless efforts overseeing the building projects during the past year; Treasurer Steven Berkshire for carefully tracking the parish's finances; Secretary Charles Rountree who miraculously captures the minutes of the Vestry meetings; Investment Chair Peter Lockyer for keeping careful eye on the parish's endowment funds; Mark Everett; Chris Frenk; Ruth Rael; and Walter Sterling. While we are sad to see the terms of Van Swift, Charles Rountree, and Walter Sterling come to an end, I am confident we will continue to have a stellar Vestry with the addition of those elected today.

The Vestry at its retreat last March began to consider the charge I put before the parish at last year's Annual Meeting of looking at our endowment draws and considering how much we spend on ourselves and how much we spend on those outside the parish. We are stewards of a beautiful and aging campus, and there will always be capital

projects that need to be addressed, especially for the health and safety of all those who use our buildings. This year we are looking at the completion of heat pumps and air conditioning in the church, a new HVAC system for Conkey House, and the repaving of the parking lot with the installation of heaters to prevent the buildup of ice on the north side of the church.

While there is more work to be done on this charge, we have had helpful discussions about the definition of outreach and what constitutes outreach. This has generated the Mission & Outreach Grants Committee to review its mission statement for further review by the Vestry. I am grateful for the hands-on outreach that so many of you do on behalf of Holy Faith, such as packing “Homeless Kits” during the Sunday forums and distributing them to those on our streets who are experiencing the lack of housing, the “Feed the Hungry” volunteers who are busy cooking in the Palen Hall kitchen on the fourth Sundays of the month to provide lunch at the Interfaith Community Shelter, and to all the volunteers and cooks who help with Holy Faith’s turns at the Interfaith Community Shelter – our next turn is February 28 through March 4.

The Vestry has also had to wrestle to present a balanced budget for 2023. Compared to prior years, the return of pledges of financial support for the coming year has been slower. We realize that concerns about the economy may play a part in this, but stewardship is more than a financial issue; it’s a spiritual issue. In fact, it’s a spiritual discipline of returning to God in thanksgiving a portion of all that God has entrusted to us. This year’s budget is predicated on the receipt of additional pledges from parishioners who pledged last year, who continue to affiliate with Holy Faith, and who are expected to pledge again this year. Holy Faith also benefits from generous

parishioners who donate more than they pledge and from new parishioners who pledge after joining the church during the course of the year.

In the 2023 budget, we are able to make a financial commitment to strengthen our growing Christian formation program for children and youth and their families. The Vestry has endorsed a paid family minister position, and I am pleased to announce that Lisa Emory will be Holy Faith's new Coordinator of Family & Children's Ministries, a ministry that she has planned, shaped, and executed as a volunteer over the last few months. Lisa in her new role will provide expanded opportunities for Christian formation, not only for Holy Faith's growing children and youth population, but also assisting parents in providing Christian formation in their homes. One of the tangible results already of Lisa's efforts will begin next Sunday when a Children's Chapel will be offered during the 11:00 liturgy as well as the 8:30 liturgy. And just wait for the Family & Children's Ministry hosting of the Shrove Sunday Pancakes and Mardi Gras party in three weeks on February 19!

In the 2023 budget, we also are able to provide staff members an 8% cost of living adjustment, just slightly less than Social Security's adjustment for this year. While we were not able to give any merit increases, we at least wanted the staff more or less to keep even with inflation in order to retain them because good staff members are hard to find these days.

What the 2023 budget does not include is funding for a third clergy position after Fr. Jim retires at the end of May. We will have many opportunities to fete Fr. Jim and Andi his wife for their many dedicated years of service and ministry to Holy Faith as his retirement draws near. But when June comes, we will revert to having two full-time

priests on staff, a situation that we have experienced before. It means that we will call more on Faith Family for parishioner support, and pastoral care will rely more heavily on Lay Eucharistic Visitors rather than the clergy.

The Vestry also noted that if parishioners really wanted three full-time clergy, then parishioners could provide the funding for the third position through increased pledging. Because there is a shortage of Episcopal clergy in the country, my hope for this year was to call someone who is just finishing seminary in May, who would be trainable in accordance with the way we do things here at Holy Faith, and who would be amenable to moving to Santa Fe. The cost of such a person in terms of salary and benefits, including required pension contributions, would be \$47,000 for six months, realizing that would be at least an additional \$94,000 commitment in next year's 2024 budget to maintain three clergy. If current pledgers would like to make an additional commitment to bring a new clergy person on board, you may let me know and I will keep track of those pledges until we have a pledge of sufficient funding for this purpose. I am reluctant to accept pledges for a third clergy person from parishioners who have not yet pledged for this year or from new parishioners because, as I said earlier, the budget adopted for 2023 is predicated on that income.

So my charge to the parish is this, as I said at the outset:

I. That we each renew our faith by coming back to Holy Faith to participate in the worship, the Christian formation, and the various ministries the parish offers;

II. That we each recommit ourselves to Holy Faith by giving of our time, talent, and treasure; and

III. That we each reconnect with our Holy Faith community and friends to strengthen this Body of Christ.

Thank you. It is a privilege and pleasure to serve you at Holy Faith. God bless you all!