

Fr. Robin Dodge's Charge to the Parish
The Church of the Holy Faith Annual Meeting
28 January 2024

The past year has been one of challenge for our parish, for our country, and for our world. Nevertheless, it is still a privilege for me to serve as Rector of The Church of the Holy Faith and to work with so many wonderful parishioners who commit themselves as followers of Jesus in this particular community of the Body of Christ.

As mentioned in the Treasurer's Report, by the middle of last year it was clear that there would be a sizeable deficit at the end of the year if no action were taken. The Vestry made cuts to the budget where it could among variable expenses like music, flowers, and printing; and the Wardens presented the challenges the parish was facing to the congregation and asked for additional support to close the gap. Parishioners responded generously and, while we still ended the year with a deficit, it was much less than expected earlier in the year. I want to thank personally all the parishioners who responded by increasing their commitment to Holy Faith and those who made a pledge of support who had not done so previously. Last year's increase in commitment has already produced fruit this year, as the amount pledged for this year is \$120,000 ahead of last year at this time. But we are still short of our pledge goal of \$1 million from 100% of those who look to Holy Faith as their spiritual home in Santa Fe.

I also want to thank the Vestry for their prayerful consideration of how best to address the challenges at hand. Listening sessions were held. Phone calls were made to parishioners. A parish survey was distributed. I thank Mike Morrissey for his wise counsel and leadership as Senior Warden, Junior Warden Vann Bynum for his tireless

efforts overseeing the building projects during the past year, Treasurer Steven Berkshire for 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, and our other faithful Vestry members: Mark Everett, Chris Frenk, Kaki Grubbs, and Ruth Rael. While we are sad to see the terms of Steven Berkshire, Vann Bynum, and Chris Frenk come to an end, I am confident we will continue to have a stellar Vestry with the addition of those elected today.

And my thanks especially go to my wonderful colleagues, Holy Faith's dedicated staff that rose to the challenge of keeping the parish humming this past year. As you know, Father Jim Gordon reached mandatory retirement age this past May and needed to step away from pastoral duties with the parish, but Mother Lynn has filled big shoes by assuming her share of pastoral care, celebrating and preaching, and the Sunday forums, while also serving as liaison to Faith Family, the Mission & Outreach Committee, and Family & Children's Ministries. Mother Madelynn guides the Women's Spirituality group and assists at Sunday and weekday services. Mark Childers is our hard-working organist and choirmaster, director of music and liturgy, and parish administrator who keeps all our worship services flowing smoothly and beautifully. Parish Secretary Donna Lukacs keeps us all on task and has the answer to almost any question at her fingertips or knows where to find it! Lisa Emory came on board as coordinator of Family & Children's Ministries, the growth in which we have seen by the number of children at the 8:30 and 11:00 services, and the expanded offerings of Children's Chapel, summer Children's Pilgrimages, Trunk or Treat and the Families'

Offrenda, and the “Shrove Sunday” Pancake Breakfast that will make its awaited return in two weeks. Regrettably, Lisa has had to step down because of health issues, but I am happy to announce that Sarah Stone, who has been helping Lisa lately, has agreed to be the new coordinator. Thank you, Sarah! And we give thanks to Marcos Castillo and Rocio Salazar for maintaining and cleaning our beautiful facilities!

As I mentioned earlier, the Vestry commissioned a parish survey that was distributed to parishioners in the fall. Thank you to all who took time to complete the survey – all 127 of you, a very good response indeed! As Peter Lockyer mentioned in his presentation, the survey’s topics centered on service length and structure, communications, and the mission and ministries of the parish; and I thank Peter for his insightful analysis.

The individual responses to the open-ended questions were most gratifying to read. As stated in the parish profile prepared eight years ago for the search that resulted in my call as your Rector, this survey confirmed that it’s Holy Faith’s engaging liturgy, beautiful music, and inspired preaching that attracts parishioners and newcomers alike. In the past year, there have been so many people attracted to Holy Faith, that Therese and I have hosted two receptions for newcomers at our home. And attendance at Holy Faith has blossomed! Total attendance at worship in 2023 was 17,804 people, up from 14,437 the prior year; total communions rose from 11,621 to 14,161; and average Sunday attendance increased by 40 from a year ago to 232.

I was pleased to see that several responses stated that the worship services should last as long as they have to last, and sermons should be as long as they need to be. I was especially pleased to see that parishioners’ preferred sermon length at the

various services are matched regularly by the length of the preacher's sermon. But there is a slight majority that believes the services are too long. Some things are out of our control. With greater attendance, Communion is going to take longer. And certain portions of the liturgy cannot be omitted, according to the rubrics. But we are looking at ways to reduce unnecessary pauses in the liturgy and to keep the action moving forward. What we will not do is sacrifice the dignity and integrity of the liturgy.

While we offer Rite II services for weekday Morning Prayer and the Tuesday evening Healing Eucharists with Taize chant, some respondents commented that they didn't feel there was a place for them at Holy Faith because there was no Sunday Rite II Eucharist. We are considering exploring the fullness of the Prayer Book by offering, on an experimental and experiential basis, a Rite II Eucharist, most likely at the Sunday 8:30 service where the majority of our children attend and which can most easily be adapted by omitting allowable portions of the Rite II service.

With respect to communications, the Vestry is committed to improving the means of information going to parishioners. The new format for presenting the budget and financial statements that Charles Rountree is working on is a step toward greater transparency surrounding the parish's finances. In the coming month, the Sunday bulletins will be reformatted so that weekly announcements, the prayer list, and the birthday and anniversary lists can be included, as well as the weekly calendar. Work also will commence on making the parish website more user-friendly, with up-to-date information posted as quickly as possible. We already have a volunteer to look into this.

What the survey results reveal is that Holy Faith is not broken, but needs some tweaking around the edges to improve on what already is a solid, vital, and great parish.

Bret Stephens, in an Opinion piece in the Sunday New York Times a couple of weeks ago noted that: “*brokenness* has become the defining feature of much of American life: broken families, broken public schools, broken small towns and inner cities, broken universities, broken health care, broken media, broken churches, broken borders, broken government. At best, they are shells of their former selves.” While there may be broken churches, Holy Faith is not one of them, and Holy Faith is not a shell of its former self. Holy Faith is vibrant, committed to the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ, and dedicated to the in-breaking of God’s reign in this city, in this country, and in this world.

At the outset of this address, I noted that this past year was a challenge not only for the parish, but also for our nation, and for the world. The political climate in this country is poisonous and, in this election year, I fear will only grow worse. The world was shocked on October 7 by Hamas’ savage and evil attack on Israel. Since then we have prayed for peace in the region, for all the innocent victims of war, and the release of the hostages held by Hamas. We also have added to our liturgy the prayer attributed to our patron St. Francis of Assisi, “Lord, make us instruments of your peace.” For, you see, peace in this world begins with us. We cannot leave it to someone else and expect them to do it. We can start with ourselves and in the contexts, communities, and confines in which we find ourselves.

Jesus came down to a broken world that he might save the world from itself. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be instruments of healing and peace in this broken world. Because we are not a broken church, we have something to offer this broken world. The Catechism (*Book of Common Prayer* p. 855), an outline of our faith,

states that “[t]he mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ...The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love...The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.”

So my charge to the parish is this, as followers of Jesus Christ and parishioners of Holy Faith, we commit ourselves to being instruments of healing and peace in this broken world:

- I. By coming together regularly to pray and worship;
- II. By proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in and with our lives; and
- III. By promoting Christ’s justice, peace, and love.

It is my privilege and pleasure to serve you at Holy Faith as your Rector. God bless you all!