

***The Challenge of Moving Forward***  
**The Rector's Annual Address 2011**  
The Rev. Donald F. Davidson, D.Min

If ours were a marriage, that is the relationship between priest and parish, we would be in our seventh year which is known for itches. Wedding anniversary gifts are interesting:

"For the seventh anniversary, traditional materials are *copper* and *wool* and the modern materials are *brass* and *desk sets*.

With copper and brass, ideas might include jewelry and home decorations such as sculptures, furniture, or appliances.

For wool, this might be a decorative rug or perhaps a wool blanket to cuddle under together when watching a movie. Or you could give clothing such as a warm shawl for her or a sweater for him."

Not sure how well that advice applies to a Rector, but it sounds nice. Going a little further back I found a bunch of advice from 1959 when the parish was in its seventh year, and some of these are really interesting:

"I'll tell you one thing, if things keep going the way they are it's going to be impossible to buy a week's groceries for \$10.00.

Did you hear that the post office is thinking about charging 7 cents just to mail a letter?

If they raise the minimum wage to \$1.00, nobody will be able to hire outside help at the store.

When I first started driving, who would have thought gas would someday cost 25 cents a gallon. Guess we'd be better off leaving the car in the garage.

I never thought I'd see the day all our kitchen appliances would be electric. They are even making electric typewriters now.

No one can afford to be sick anymore, at \$15.00 a day in the hospital, it's too rich for my blood.

Finally... If they think I'll pay 30 cents for a haircut. Forget it!"

Once a year the Rector reports to the congregation on what has happened, what is happening and what he hopes will happen in the future. I have every intention of doing just that with gallons of appreciation, a few tablespoons of criticism, a scoop of challenge folded gently with genuine intentionality and a generous sprinkle of humility.

In the midst of this is a significant announcement which may be as close to "shock and awe" as we can get.

So let's get going!

I am blessed with the gift of being married to my best friend. We have walked with you these last years together. Our marriage began with a baptism of fire and continues amid the heat of a community ready to move forward. Thank you Marcie, you are the best.

I am thankful for all the people who take on leadership roles including but not limited to my staff, vestry, committees, ministry groups, musicians, acolytes, lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, Vergers, Ushers... it takes everyone, and to everyone I say thank you!

Our retiring Vestry Members this year are Alan Fries, Alan Johnson and Heidi Wise. Thank you all for your service. Heidi has served for four years having served one year as the Clerk, Alan and Alan have both served as Senior Wardens.

Don Beymer will step down having served two years as the chair of community ministry, George Webb is stepping down after six years as a member of the Endowment Board, and Bill Newman is stepping down after six-years as a delegate representing our parish at the meetings of the Northwest Convocation and Diocesan Convention. My thanks to all.

I am extremely thankful for the clergy who give of their time to this parish. We are blessed with Fr. Frank, Fr. Herman, Mtr. Barbara and Deacons Harry and Annie. Thank you all so very much for all you do.

A little later this morning we will celebrate Christy McMullen's 15 years of service to this parish. We have some gifts to give but I want to pause and just say an honest thank you to this amazing lady and all she does for our parish.

I am thankful for a dynamic youth program, for the work that goes into the planning and execution of youth events. I am proud of our youth coordinator Kirsten Goodman. This has been a good first year and a tough first year for Kirsten.

I do remain dismayed concerning our youth ministry, and I will tell you why:

We do not have the adult support necessary to do what needs to be done. You cannot have safe youth events without a good ratio of adults to kids and we simply are not getting the adults to step up and assist us. Some of our kids have gone to other church youth programs, or to an after-school so called "non-denominational Bible Study" and have been indoctrinated with theologies which are quite different if not antithetical to the Episcopal way, and we wonder why they leave and never return. Some of our youth stop going to church early in their high school years and never darken the doors of our college ministry programs and we wonder why later they raise their children in traditions which brand Episcopalians as not being Christian.

It starts right here, and it starts with being able to have programs and activities which are educational, theological, relevant, and safe... and we cannot do that without adult support.

The Diocese of Kansas has one of the best youth programs in the Episcopal Church bar none yet we send very few of our kids to Camp, Happening, Miqra or any of the programs offered. Why?

We have the space, we have the programs, we have the budget, we have an amazing youth center, and we have the kids, let's not lose this program because we do not have the adult participation and support. The price is too high. Youth programs are life changing for our kids.

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We have an amazing Sunday school program. (Would all the teachers please stand...?) Connie Wold is nothing short of an angel when it comes to keeping this program on track and moving forward. We have 60 children in our program; I suspect that is one of the highest totals in our Diocese. We have a program for kids from pre-k through High School.

Having said this and my highest compliment to our teachers, we have a challenge. We have a Sunday morning schedule that only allows about 30-35 minutes of actual teaching time for our kids. In this case we need to find a way to go back in time when we had at least a 50 minute period of instruction for Sunday school, both for adults and kids.

So, we are going to work on this.

I am going to bring together people from the different services and from our Christian education programs along with members of our vestry and worship ministry group and together we will come up with consensus leading to a change. Some may say ...“doesn’t the Rector have the authority to just do this and make these changes?” and the answer is yes, but truthfully having every arrow point at my head is less than comfortable. This is a decision that we need to make together putting every option on the table and listening to every point of view and then coming up with something that works.

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The relationship between church and state is and has always been complex. Kansas is a state of strong personalities both currently and throughout its history, and their followers naturally bring their passions into their local congregations. The relationship of the church with the state is a moving target. Some churches try to live in almost total isolation, while others mix politics and theology so well that one might not know where one ends and the other begins. So let me attempt to say a couple of things on this topic:

- a) I do not believe that politics should be brought to the pulpit. I have not and I will not use my ecclesiastical authority to endorse or encourage how you vote. I believe that is a violation of the law as well as violation of your trust in me.
  
- b) I do believe that there are instances where the church needs to, in the words of the Bishop recently ‘pull on its big boy and big girl pants’ and clearly state where it stands on issues. This does not mean that the church should castigate its own members who disagree. Our members have every right to disagree, this is quite different than other denominations that will shun, expel or excommunicate members who express beliefs that are different than those of the church itself.

c) (and this is where this gets a little murkier) I do not believe that the state should use specific theological or doctrinal references in its legislative or executive duties. It is not the responsibility of the state to push a specific kind of religion on its people, or to force its people to pray, nor use its resources to support or encourage a specific religious expression. Telling people how and what to believe spiritually is not the responsibility of government. The government should be about the work of protecting the freedom of each individual to express their religious preferences. Further, people should not be hired or fired, promoted or demoted because of their faith or lack thereof.

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The year 2010 has been a learning year. I would like to share with you some of my own personal "lessons learned" for the year.

- \* Just because I have been here for six years and have served as a Rector for over two decades does not mean that I know it all or even think I do.
- \* It is potentially easier to build a multi-million dollar building than to make changes in liturgy.
- \* Following directions is much easier when the individual agrees with the directions.
- \* Trying to make everyone happy takes a lot of work and the results are often less than inspiring.
- \* Just because it is the way we have always done something does not make it automatically the best way of continuing to do something.
- \* Attempts to be humorous sometimes backfire.

This last year was my most difficult year at St. David's and in parish ministry, yet I truly believe we are coming out of it stronger and better. I wish to thank everyone who stood by me during some tough times, and for those who gave me good advice and counsel when I was receptive and when I was less than receptive.

Returning to the marriage metaphor for a moment, we had a "blink" that thankfully did not cause significant harm. I learned a great deal this year and more than ever, I am truly honored to serve as your Rector; I truly love this parish and all of you and I thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you.

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During the year we lost a member who might well have been the most well-known Episcopalian within our church family. At our Clergy retreat last November I was sitting at dinner with former presiding Bishop Frank Griswold who asked me where I was from. I responded St. David's Topeka and he said...oh yes, the famous St. David's home of Winnie Crapson.

Many of you did not know Winnie, but let me tell you her name and her influence is well known in this church. She had as much to do with the writing of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer as those who have their names connected to it. As editor of the Anglican Theological Review, Winnie knew the most significant Anglican theologians of our time. I knew Winnie Crapson long before I knew another living soul in Kansas because of her work in grading the General Ordination Examinations.

We will miss her, but she will never be forgotten.

Now I turn to some year-end announcements. I encourage you, if you are so disposed, to say an Amen if you find any of this news exciting and pleasing. Even applause would be appropriate if you feel it in your bones.

We grew in actual membership for the 6<sup>th</sup> year in a row.

We ended the year in the black significantly. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> year we have to keep our finances in due bounds; more about this when Jim Edwards gives our Treasurer's report.

Due to the efforts of an excellent Stewardship Committee and their chair Spencer Duncan and Senior Warden Alan Johnson, we are in good shape for 2011. Our total pledged income is just a little over what was pledged for 2010, and even more exciting we went from 144 pledges in 2010 to 160 for 2011. That is huge. That means that 65% of our households are pledging. Of course we would like to raise that to 100% and we will continue to work toward that... but what a fantastic increase.

Four years ago the Vestry established the Capital Campaign to raise the funds to build our new building after the fire. These funds were in addition to funding received through our insurance and gifts from the Diocese and other groups. A Vestry Capital Campaign Committee was appointed and given the job of securing the commitments and managing the campaign. Would all the members of that committee please stand. Thank you for your work.

The Campaign progress was also managed by a truly committed Vestry Finance Committee. Would all the members of the Finance Committee please stand. This committee has worked with the Treasurer and me in making monthly payments to Capital City Bank.

The Wardens have been a blessing through all of this work as well, Margaret Telthorst, Alan Fries, Wendy Bair-Loehr, Alan Johnson, Russ Branden, Jim Clowers and Earl Olson along with Ann Palmer the co-chair of the Vestry Architectural and Construction Committee and George Webb the chair of the Vestry Capital Campaign Committee.

A great deal of thanks is due to our Treasurer Jim Edwards who chairs the Vestry Finance Committee. Jim's advice and Christy's tenacity made it possible for us to keep up-to-date every step of the way.

So, here is the big announcement.... My brothers and sisters of St. David's, as of Tuesday, January 18, 2011... St. David's Church is totally and fully debt free. Our construction loan has been paid in full!

As important as getting rid of the debt is, so is continuing the campaign. The Campaign has not ended, I say again: The Campaign has not ended. Many of us, Marcie and I included, have not fulfilled our commitment to the building and a promise made is a promise kept. The Vestry has set aside all remaining funds including those still to be paid, for the continuing maintenance of our building. We hope that, if everyone completes the promises they have made, we will have a fund that will last for many many years.

Jim will have the details in his report.

I conclude this address with a little summary... a charting of vision for 2011.

I am deeply thankful to the leaders of St. David's for their commitment, time and ministry. We need more people to step-up and take part in the ministry of St. David's, and we need to expand our reach as we fill the chairs.

I am delighted with our youth program, but we have a problem and it is not the kids fault. We need adults willing to be trained and serve as sponsors for youth events and activities. The pay is really poor, the satisfaction is enormous. We need parents and kids to support the fantastic Diocesan programs including MEGA CAMP June 5-11 at Camp Wood (I am the

Chaplain for the Middle School Group by the way). We need our kids to unplug the Wii and the iPod and go to Miqra and Happening ... and get in touch with their own spiritual selves.

We need to figure out how to give our Sunday school at least one hour of instruction on Sunday morning, and we need to do that by finding a consensus among those who attend and support the three Sunday services and everything else going on each Sunday morning.

We will not allow politics in the pulpit, but we will also object if the government tells us how to pray or uses our tax dollars to support religion. God's love is unconditional and not confined to a given religious expression, skin color, birthplace, gender, sexual orientation or political party.

We will continue the good work in our Stewardship education and keeping the trust of our people by meticulously maintaining our financial records.

We give thanks that our parish is no longer in debt, but we must build up a fund where when the big things happen they will not stop us from the ministry God has given us to do.

I believe that 2011 will be a great year for St. David's. I believe it may well be a banner year as we greet new families and grow in many ways.

May God continue to bless and keep us.

Amen