

## **Rector's Report: January 2012 Annual Meeting**

*Given by The Rev. Dr. Robert "Odie" Odierna, Rector  
The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua, New Hampshire*

We have had two huge celebrations since our last Annual meeting. Last April we celebrated the end, and the success, of our 1.1 million Capital Fund Drive. And while we still have a few loose ends to finish up, paying for the last couple of outreach projects, and collecting the few last outstanding dollars – it remains a significant and wonderful achievement as well as a sign of our parishioner's deep love and commitment for this place. We recently encountered difficult news about our building – mold developed in the choir room, and when we went to get rid of the moldy wall, we discovered that a huge 100 year old drain pipe that goes from the roof to the ground had deteriorated and disintegrated in spots. It had to be leaking for years. The repairs are only partially covered by insurance and so it will cost us several thousand dollars to deal with this issue. But there's also Good News about our building. We were fortunate last fall to receive a "designated gift" the way I encourage a designated gift to be made. Someone approached us, said he wanted to make a contribution toward a church project in memory of his wife. We gave him a list of things that were on our current priority list – and he chose the restoring of the windows in the lounge. They will be completed and dedicated next month.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the founding of the Nashua Pastoral Care Center was Friday, attended by some 150 people from the community, including numerous people from CGS. As most of us already knew, they officially unveiled the new name of the Care Center: "The Front Door – Your Path to Self-sufficiency". As with any change, some will like it and some will not. But for me the most important thing is that the agency we started 25 years ago still has the same mission and is still serving the same clientele. I personally wouldn't care what we named it as long as what we were accomplishing stayed the same – and it is! And so this year we will be making a special effort to educate our parishioners about our history with this agency and our intention to have it continue to be the outreach arm of our parish as we significantly support it, not only financially, but with some 200 volunteers from our parish annually. CGS also received a plaque at the celebration in thanksgiving for our primary role in the founding and life of the Care Center.

Continuing on the Outreach theme: For the first time in their history, Lutheran Social Services of New England has decided to eliminate from their Board of Directors representatives from the Missouri Synod, and have intentionally made the decision to add in their place an Episcopalian. Knowing our reputation as a leader for outreach in the community, their CEO and Board President approached me and asked me if I would appoint someone from CGS to their Board. I am pleased to say that Lynn Healy has agreed to my request to be that person to represent all Episcopalians in N.E. on Lutheran Social Services. Yay us, and yay Lynn!

Tony Krutiak, as part of his Masters program, will be doing an internship here at CGS for 6 months, and he will be spear-heading a PR campaign to strengthen our connection with the Front Door. He will also be helping us re-organize our welcoming ministry to new people who join our parish, but primarily he will be working with Pastor Alanna organizing our Green Team educational program. Our Green Team Committee is made up of both youth and adults, and along with the Property Committee will be intensifying what we do in this place regarding recycling and energy conservation. Thank you to Pastor Alanna for pushing and leading us in these efforts.

And speaking of pushing us – Alanna, assisted by Missy Carnevale and several other members of the Web Team, did a phenomenal job in renovating and renewing our web site this past summer – the

results have been outstanding! Communicating to you and the world through our web page, Facebook, Twitter and email, along with the traditional paper communiqués, is already making an impact on potential newcomers as well as further keeping those already part of our parish up to date about CGS. Now, Alanna will think twice before adding such a huge project to her plate while I am away (as I was last year on my sabbatical), but nevertheless she pulled it off while juggling all that needs to be done to lead this busy parish. She deserves special kudos for an outstanding job while I was on sabbatical leave, especially since she had only been ordained a few months when I left. She also deserves special kudos for being outstanding even when I'm here!

For me, it is lots of fun to come to work, as it is a joy to work with Alanna - as well as with the other members of our great staff! Patrick, Laurie, Andria, Jill, Marcie, and Chaim are not only tops in their particular job skills – but all bring a positive attitude and contribute wonderfully to the good morale and milieu of our parish.

I am extremely pleased that this month we are implementing electronic giving as an option for you to use when making your contributions. Nashua Bank has agreed to provide these services at NO Charge to the church. What this means is that you can now have your pledge automatically withdrawn from your bank account either weekly or monthly and it will go directly into the church's account. We will all be receiving the necessary forms to make this happen next week and my hope is that many, if not most, of our people will take advantage of this method of payment. It will truly help pledge performance as well as help the church's cash flow so we can regularly pay our bills on time. Of course, another option, if you do online banking, is that you can always direct your bank to pay your pledge manually as you would pay other items in your budget.

CGS suffers from something that is common among churches – it is a condition called “it's easy to give extra to special projects and always hard to raise the level of giving for the annual budget.” Look at the evidence: We just raised 1.1 million dollars over the past 4 years for special capital projects. This year you spent some \$2,500 to buy necklaces to help young women in Kenya get an education. You spent another \$3,000 on special youth fundraisers for their mission trips – all of these special requests over and above people's regular pledges. Not to mention some \$30,000 of fundraisers that raise the money from the purchases and contributions of our own people! This is why the Vestry decided to do the “adopt a bill program” as a special project – people will support the special offerings! And yet we seem to always struggle – not only to pay 100% of our annual pledges, but to come up with enough pledges to balance our annual budget without making some minor cuts here and there.

So do this exercise for me. Write down what your pledge is for this new year. Divide that # by ten (or multiply it by .1). Now look at that smaller number. Ask yourself the question: How many ways do you waste that much money, in a year, or 6 months, or even perhaps in a month! My bet is that everyone in this room, as well as 95% of the rest of the parish – easily wastes the smaller of those two numbers, probably monthly, but no doubt in my mind, easily in a year!

Now, if everyone were to ADD that smaller # you came up with after dividing by 10, to your PLEDGE – we would have almost \$40,000 added to our budget! We could get our outreach contributions up to 10% and eliminate several of our extra fundraisers so that we are not nickel and diming ourselves to death and sapping energy that we could focus elsewhere in ministry. If we are coming up with the money anyway – why not just add it to our pledge and make it systematically easy on ourselves and the church's budget?! So I will be asking next years Stewardship Committee to emphasize this when we get around to pledging for 2013 next fall. I'm going to call it the “Divide by 10 and add it to your pledge program”.

As I promised at last years meeting, I have begun a campaign to approach the membership of our parish one by one to educate, encourage and inquire if people will add CGS to their will in some way. I am excited to tell you that the Shepherd's Legacy Society is now up to 8 people. In addition, Howard Gollihue, who is working with me on this campaign, and I have outlined a program to approach 10 parishioner's per month. While we may not always see the results of our efforts, we are planting seeds that we hope will benefit this church in generations to come. We will be putting a permanent plaque up in our building listing all people in the past who have given bequests to CGS from their will – to the extent we can resurrect our history. When people on the current Shepherd's Legacy Society list die, and their bequest goes to the church, their name will be moved from that list and placed on the permanent plaque. You don't have to wait for us to approach you – if you already have included CGS in your will just let us know and you will be added to the Shepherd's Legacy Society.

When our Bishop, Gene Robinson, comes to CGS on Palm Sunday, it will be his last official visit before his retirement January 1<sup>st</sup> – and we need to dream up some fun way to give him an appropriate joke gift when he comes – so if you come up with any neat ideas, share them with me over the next couple of months. The election of a new Bishop in May will no doubt bring exciting change to our Diocese.

My Sabbatical Refresher Leave seems like such a distant memory! I did successfully revise my book – and while it has been turned down by one publisher, it is about to go out to dozens more – and I will publish it myself this summer if it is not picked up. So expect to purchase your personally signed copy next fall! I do want to express my deep thanks and appreciation to this parish for allowing me the privilege and opportunity to have a sabbatical.

Despite what are relatively – especially compared to other churches - minor struggles with our annual budget – CGS is in excellent shape as our ministries, programs and finances are all thriving. Our numbers show that we have remained stable in size over the last 10 years. We are a Christian leader in so many ways in our community, Diocese and nation, the latest example being the PBS program featuring CGS. But most importantly – our impact on the faith of our own people: children, youth, and adults, continues to thrive. I thank you for your generosity that allows all this to happen – but most importantly I thank you for your presence, participation, and witness to our Lord Jesus Christ. The privilege of being part of that journey with you is what truly feeds and energizes me, and brings me joy and excitement as I enter my 27<sup>th</sup> year as your Rector. So thank you! Now go home and watch the games – Go Giants!