

24 March 2005
Pastoral Letter

Dear Saints,

During this Lenten season, I have been asked on several occasions to explain issues related to the leadership of the parish and I believe it necessary to address these issues with the entire parish via this pastoral letter as we approach Easter.

We are a church of people who have primarily come from other churches and therefore we have opinions and experience based on our past whether we believe we have seen the way not to do leadership or whether we believe we have seen the perfect way of doing leadership.

I have my most recent experience in a church that uses a system based on business leadership principles and is a very "top-down" approach to leadership and vision. I have seen how that system can work in such a way as to bring life and blessing to the church but it presumes that Chuck Murphy is the leader of the parish in order for the model to succeed. I am not Chuck Murphy and people who know us both would say "Amen." Some people would be happy about that fact and others would wish I were more like Chuck. I have also been part of a parish that was a "bottom-up" approach and experienced it as a completely negative experience of leadership by consensus which meant that there was leadership by the loudest, crankiest and most persistent complainers.

When we came to Asheville more than a year ago we had been taught that in a new church plant there was no need for a vestry or any other governing body for the first three years, that leadership was closely held by the priest who was the person who had the vision. That would be a workable model if the parish had grown by assimilation of the "unchurched" who had neither prior experience of nor expectation for church leadership and governance. We had hardly arrived when we adopted by-laws and a vestry. At the time, I knew very few of you and the by-laws required that the initial vestry be appointed by the senior clergy, so I appointed those I knew.

We tried early in our history to adopt a vestry leadership model based on a successful church I was familiar with that is more participatory than my previous experience and for various reasons **that model was abandoned** before implementation.

This model would have placed vestry members in roles of responsibility for various aspects of church life. In many ways it was an unworkable proposal for a church plant as it stifled both new leadership development and innovation. God has sent us many folks who have wonderful talents, gifts and passion in a measure that most young church plants can only dream about. In response to that reality, we discarded the original model of vestry leadership of ministries and activities.

As we have continued this journey, it has become apparent that we needed to create a parish leadership model that takes advantage of the blessings we have received in terms of people. On several occasions the question has been posed to me that we need to comply with the by-laws and I am thankful for those questions as the by-laws themselves have been an excellent guide for the future. The by-laws enumerate those duties and responsibilities of the vestry and the senior clergy in such a way as to provide a way forward to expand leadership rather than concentrate it yet without unnecessary dilution.

The duties of the vestry are as follows:

- (a) the financial affairs of the Church are to be duly administered;
- (b) the property of the church is to be maintained;
- (c) the salary of the Senior Clergy, other clergy and lay staff is to be paid regularly;
- (d) provision is to be made for payment of the current expenses of the church;

- (e) they will seek to comply with the foundational principle of 10% giving to the Anglican Mission in America; and
- (f) such duties as may be assigned to members of the vestry from time to time as are appropriate.

It is also deemed “desirable that the Vestry be involved in the spiritual direction and leadership of the Church under the guidance of the Senior Clergy.”

Provision is also made for “the appointment by the Senior Clergy of such other leadership organizations or committees as may be warranted to fulfill the mission and purpose of the Church. It is recommended but not required, that a member of the Vestry be a member of such Committees.”

The perception has been expressed to me by various people in the parish that the Church is run by a small group of people and that decision making is in the hands of the few. In reality, we are moving away from such a system to a system that includes more members in leadership and decision-making roles. I believe our by-laws provide for a flexible model of leadership and governance which will allow us to best utilize the gifts, talents and passions of our members.

We will not become a parish that requires layers of permission for decision-making or for ministry initiation. Those who lead have the freedom to lead but are accountable for their leadership in the same way that I am accountable for my leadership. We have freedom to lead but we cannot exceed our authority or biblical principles for leadership.

The Senior Clergy is “responsible for and have charge and care of the spiritual concerns, music and ritual observances of the Church, and the performance of their duties by all employees of the Church.”

I have learned by experience that these are properly the responsibility of the Senior Clergy and I take my responsibility to God and to all the people of St. Paul’s seriously in these matters. I am aware that all people do not like all liturgy or all music. We have, from the beginning, attempted to balance the styles of liturgy and music as to season and other considerations.

I will covenant with the parish to maintain an open-door policy with respect to matters of the parish. It is my desire that we be transparent with respect to our decision-making and leadership. If you have questions regarding anything with respect to these matters, my phone number and email address are both printed in the leaflet each week and I encourage you to contact me with your questions and concerns. At the parish meeting we will have more information available but as a short-term measure, I would invite you to consider the following attachment as helpful in understanding the way we are utilizing leadership, gifts, talents and passions of our members.

We have a long journey ahead of us and we are building the bridge to tomorrow as we cross over it. That process guarantees a certain messiness but is a by-product of the way in which we have grown as a parish. I am thankful for the opportunity to lead this parish together in partnership with so many gifted, Spirit-filled Christian brothers and sisters. We will succeed at this endeavor if we all work together in the ways Paul envisioned when he spoke of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 but only if we also remember that the following chapter is required reading in order for the body to work together in harmony. It is love that binds it all together and allows us to use our gifts to build the kingdom of God.

Under the mercy,

John