
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Rector's Address

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CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES
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By God's grace, the litigation is all but behind us, apart from the appeals process. We've seen God gloriously fulfill the promise He gave me in April about Judge Bellows—a modern-day Cyrus. The word comes from Isaiah 44, 45 and 46:

[The Lord] says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron...For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me... I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me...I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty....Yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission.'

God has been utterly faithful in fulfilling that promise. We have every reason to be confident in His ability also to fulfill his other promises to us, promises you've heard me preach about recently.

I want to set out four key ways that we can position ourselves to receive them.

We're preparing to receive God's promises through Prayer

Several small prayer groups have been formed to call down God's promises. These ones are on the front lines. Moves of God always begin in small groups, where dedicated intercessors determine to "pray in" God's promises. They know that prayer changes history.

We're preparing to receive God's promises by implementing new growth strategies

We're not just starting now to think about growth strategies! Our focus this year on evangelism and mission has been a key part of what we believe God will use to grow us. But in 2009, we want to add further strategies.

The vestry has agreed to create a new clergy staff position in 2009. This position will have two priorities:

The **first** priority will be our Student ministry. It has been three years since we last had a full-time student ministry leader. Since that time, Gary Fitzgerald, Janet Kirby, and a small team of volunteers and interns, have stewarded this ministry—built around the Sunday evening Altared! service—with dedication and skill.

Gary and Janet have tried hard to fill the vacant position, but have found it difficult. We'd assumed that the successful candidate would be a lay person. Making it a clergy position will bring all kinds of benefits that I and our youth team are excited about.

The second priority will be our Young Adult ministry. We formed this ministry in 2004, as one of the key ways to accomplish one of our four strategic objectives—to “reach the next generation” I formed a Task Force to develop a Ministry Plan and lead this new initiative. Here’s what they wrote in the introduction:

“Church of the Apostles established a Next Generation Task Force as part of its strategic goal for 2005-2006 to “reach the Next Generation.” As the Next Generation Project Plan explains, “[o]ur church’s third Strategic Goal is intended to address the challenge of reaching out to [the] multi-faceted Next Generation. Our desire is to bring them into a living relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, help our church reflect the diversity of those God is bringing into [Fairfax] County, expand our membership base, and raise up a new pool of mature disciples of Jesus to minister and lead within our congregation.”

That’s a tall order—but they’ve accomplished much even though they’ve had no dedicated staff support. Now I want to give them that support to increase their capability for fulfilling the dream they have set out in their Ministry Plan.

Quite apart from these two areas of focus—Student Ministry and Young Adult Ministry—I and we need an additional clergy person on staff. I am looking for someone with the heart and skills to help me implement and carry out the vision God has given us for this church.

We’ve already begun a search for a young priest to fill these roles, and applications are already coming in.

My preference is for a male—not because of any prejudice against women priests, but for a more fundamental reason.

Ours is a fatherless society. David Blankehorn has written:

Fatherlessness is the most harmful social trend of our generation. It is damaging the well-being of millions of our children....It represents a radical departure from virtually all of human history and experience. It is also the engine driving our worst social problems, from crime to teen pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence against women. A society with fewer and fewer fathers means a society with more and more prison cells, orphanages, social workers, truancy officers, court-appointed child psychologists and child support enforcement officers. In short, a society that is losing fathers is a society in decline.

Children need healthy male role models. I want our student ministry to be able to offer that. God wants to grow COA—and so do I! That’s the responsibility of all of us. But creating this position is a key part of our strategy for attracting young families to the church. That should happen, in part, as a byproduct of this position’s focus on student and young adult ministries, and growing them.

But by virtue of his age, and by his having visibility, he’ll put a younger face on the church.

We're preparing to receive God's promises through Evangelism and mission.

We're living in a time of extreme economic uncertainty. The Economist carried a story in July, titled: "Unhappy America." The article began:

"Nations, like people, occasionally get the blues; and right now the United States, normally the world's most self-confident place, is glum."

But we're also living in a time of great opportunity for the Gospel!

We've spent this year focusing on mission. Quoting Emil Brunner, Alister McGrath wrote: "The church lives by mission as a fire lives by burning." McGrath goes on: "Evangelism is something intrinsic to the identity of the church-not an optional extra, but something that is part and parcel of its very being."

We're taking hold of the call to reach out to others in the name of Jesus. Here are two testimonies. The first is an email I received recently:

On the flight back [from Florida], I had the wonderful opportunity to pray for someone with an arthritic back. Totally a God appointment. I was up just stretching my legs, tired of sitting and was in the back of the plane with the stewardesses when this elderly lady started to talk to me about her back. Right away, I thought "Cool! I want to pray with her". It turns out she was a Christian and familiar with healing prayer, so I told her "God can heal you at 35,000 feet up in the air like He can right on the ground! I'd like to pray for you", and she agreed. After praying, I asked her to bend over or do something she couldn't do before... She started jumping up and down right in the plane and said she was feeling better. Praise the Lord!

The second is from Jennifer Flint:

This is a walk-across-the-room story, and I love it because it shows God weaving together people's gifts and circumstances into a total that adds up to more than the pieces. For the last year or so, I've been consciously but gently pursuing relationships with my co-workers. I was surprised to learn, when I used a COA drama production last year as an opportunity to invite one of my co-workers, that she was eager to visit a church, finding something missing in her life. In the process of trying to find a venue to help her investigate God more fully, I thought of a meal-based discussion group with some other people we knew, including another co-worker of mine and one of Rick's. As time went on, however, I started thinking of my other co-worker, Mike, along with his "significant other." I kept imagining them having dinner with us and the Frenches from our home group. Finally, we invited them, and everyone was available!

I warned Terry and Gary French that these folks had never expressed any interest whatsoever in spiritual matters, so this would be a preliminary, seed-planting "walk across the room." No religious or political talk, unless it came from the guests. We chose to invite Terry and Gary because, like my co-worker Mike, they were from Texas and had experience teaching at a university.

Our guests arrived, and the gentlemen sat down in the living room to visit while I got dinner on the table. Terry started getting to know Mike's partner, a psychologist. It

was amazing. Within five minutes, Terry's conversation about our new puppy had somehow led to our guest expressing her unexpected desire to experience the religious background of her Ukrainian grandparents. She said she figured Mike was going to have to call someone to get her locked up, because it seemed so out of character for her. Only days before, she had come to the realization that she wanted something more out of life, saying she saw that even the people who shared her viewpoints were angry and unkind. Terry indicated, as I joined them, that this desire sounded like a search for God. "Do you really think so?" She asked about what Terry knew about God, and how she came to believe those things. Then she asked whether I agreed, and how I came to that point. (Those pre-considered spiritual life stories really come in handy at times like that!)

Terry and I were very excited about the timing of this get-together, and the amazing opportunity to talk to someone so thirsty for things that really matter. We were awed by the way God knew what this person needed and when, and that all we had to do was walk across the room. This is an unfinished story, but one in which we really saw the hand of God. I can't wait for the next installment!

On December 6, we'll be participating in Fairfax City's Festival of Lights. It will provide us with a fantastic opportunity to reach out to our neighbors in this city and county. We want you to be involved.

Next weekend we're launching Friends for Life. You have received a brochure setting out our plans for maintaining our focus on mission into next year. (Tyler Aberle will explain what it contains).

We're preparing to receive God's promises by launching the Hope and a Future Fund. A few weeks ago we launched the Hope and a Future Fund. God's work requires resources given willingly and generously by His people. This fund will give us the capabilities we need to be able to embrace the future with confidence. Mark Robbins will elaborate on this in a few minutes.

I have a dream for our church.

It's not a *new* dream; it has burned in me since I first arrived set foot here. It's the Holy Spirit who gives visions and dreams: Joel 2:28

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

Let me tell you about the church I have seen:

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE.....

The Great Commission is our greatest passion, so that through our witness we have the joy of seeing nations entering the Kingdom, and our baptismal pool rippling with laughter.

I have a dream of seeing Muslims coming to Christ through signs and wonders.

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE.....

Each one of us commits to trying to lead one person to Christ every year, where the majority of our members are in a home group, and where it's rare to find any of those groups that are not discipling new believers.

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE.....

We are raising up and passing the baton to the next generation.

"Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come." Psalm 71:18

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE....

We are placing increasing emphasis on the historic spiritual disciplines: Prayer, fasting, Bible study, meditation, and journaling—and applying ourselves to growing in Christ so that we can disciple others.

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE....

Our life and worship increasingly reflects the diversity of heaven—with Asians, Latinos and African Americans worshiping and serving alongside us as one family in Christ—and where our worship is increasingly enhanced with new styles and the release of dance and the visual arts.

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE.....

People come because the power of the Lord is present to heal the sick, the broken, the fearful, and the hopeless—and where we are developing new pastoral capabilities for touching and restoring the lives of those not yet in the Kingdom. That has already begun to happen. Here are two recent testimonies:

In 2003 I went for my yearly mammogram. I was told that is showed malignancy in my right breast. I was referred to Doctor Paulo Franco, who unfortunately was not able to operate on me because of [his] health issues. He referred me to Dr. Stephanie Akbari, in McLean. I was very worried about my new health problem, so I went to The Father's Blessing for prayer. Margie, Father David's wife, and another lady prayed for me. I cannot forget that experience. Margie was so intense when she was praying that I felt as though an "electrifying power" had entered my body.

I underwent surgery around May 20th, 2003. After I came out of the anesthesia, Dr Akbari came to see me and said, "Luz, you had a miracle!! When I opened you to remove the cancerous tissues from your right breast, I was not able to find any. I took some out anyway to have it tested, even though it doesn't look cancerous." Later, the results came out negative.

This year marks the "five years" when the cancer can appear again, but my recent mammogram was negative.

And the second:

I received the blessing of the Lord through David's prophecy regarding a very deep shame that the Lord is providing release from. I have the understanding that, at this time in my life, and forever more, God is working miracles, and blessing me and walking with me and encouraging me to release the old me and to come into fellowship with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. God is blessing me and working through this church to use me according to His perfect will for my life.

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE.....

Our local and world missions' involvement is growing, so that beginning in Jerusalem, moving out to Judea, and then extending to the ends of the earth, people will give thanks for their new birth because of what we gave them.

I SEE A CHURCH WHERE.....

We encounter God in such a way that the power of the Gospel flows out from this sanctuary and touches every home and street, every school and university, every business and boardroom, and every court and governmental structure, in this metropolitan area.

I SEE A CHURCH SETTLED IN ITS NEW CAMPUS.

I see the building, with its soaring tower, as a city set on a hill for all to see.

I see it as a gathering place for all generations, bursting with the sound of young voices blended with the quiet wisdom of their elders.

I see it as a center for learning, a center for worship and worship arts, a retreat center for spiritual development, and a conference center to refresh and equip the wider Body of Christ..

I see it as a two-way bridge into the community, where people "*will come in and go out, and find pasture.*" *John 10:9*

I have a dream for this Church of the Apostles. I intend to pray and believe and labor and toil to see it fulfilled—however long that takes.

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