

OUR INTENTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE GREAT COMMISSION And A VISION FOR GROWTH

St. John's Episcopal Church, Carlisle
Fall 2008

“(The disciples) went to the mountain to which (the Risen Lord) directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:16-20

PREAMBLE-

“JESUS CAME AND SAID TO THEM...”- *We are a family in Christ characterized by circles of relationship which bind us together*

We affirm that the Risen Lord comes to each of us and is known in Scripture, the Breaking of Bread, in Community, and in Ministry. Our primary task as individuals is to discern his Presence in our lives and to share that Good News. Indeed, Jesus comes to each of us, walks with us, challenges us, and bids us to follow him. We will be intentional in telling the story and witnessing to his Presence. We will gather together week by week, reflecting on Scripture and celebrating His Holy Presence in the Eucharist. We will be good and faithful stewards, sharing our blessings in thanksgiving. Our common life as a congregation is lived out in relationship with one another and with Christ Jesus our Lord. “Wherever two or three of you are gathered, there I am in the midst of you”.

“GO THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS..” *We are a congregation deeply connected to and engaged with our community*

Having been filled with the Holy Spirit, we are sent out in witness to Christ and as agents of his grace, justice and peace. We pray that God will enable us to grow in numbers and in service. We seek to be a church for the community, opening our doors, extending hospitality, and binding up wounds. We will be intentional in outreach, sharing our resources and advocating for those who can't always speak or stand for themselves. We will remember that “in as much as you did it for one of the least of these, you did it for me” (Matthew 25:40)

“BAPTIZING THEM AND TEACHING THEM ..EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU” *We are a church dedicated to nurturing a new generation in the Christian faith.*

We recognize the importance of passing on the faith to new generations and we commit ourselves to this ministry. We will be intentional and allocate resources to the support of ministries, with and among, our children and teens. We will endeavor to develop ministries with young adults. And we will continue to understand this mandate as it calls us to mentor both the children of our congregation and the children of our community. We will remember that “he took them in his arms and said, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...’” Mark 9:36-37

“I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS” *Fed by Word and Sacrament, Celebrating the Risen Christ, Sharing God’s love in Community*

In this age of dramatic cultural change, we know that we have been called to witness to our faith in a time of great ambiguity. With change and ambiguity comes anxiety. We will be intentional about seeking Christ in our individual prayer and our common sacramental life. In so doing, we will celebrate the heritage and traditions which have been handed down to us. But, we will not fear innovation or new challenges. We will celebrate diversity of background, situation, and political belief in our midst, honoring all voices with respectful listening. We will seek to be a healthy congregation, promoting integrity and transparency while fasting from whispering and blaming. We will be mindful of our baptismal covenant, “respecting the dignity of each person”. We will not be self confident, but “Christ confident”, always taking heart that his final words to his disciples were, “I am with you always”.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Arriving at St. John’s on Sunday morning is like walking into a celebration of 12th Night. Persons of many cultures, ages and interests are united in the worship of the incarnated Christ. The church is packed with people gathered in fellowship, joined in prayer, singing with joy. The Lloyd Center overflows with children eagerly seeking knowledge of their Christian heritage. The undercroft bursts at its seams with young people planning their next mission project. The table is crowded yet everyone is welcome . . . and they made room for me.

IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR HEALTH, VITALITY AND GROWTH

Having declared our intentional response, as a congregation, to the Great Commission, we list the following as possible ways in which Christ might bless us with congregational health, integrity, ministry and growth in the coming years. As resources and opportunities are made available, we ought to

1) Be intentional in telling the story of salvation and witnessing to the gracious presence of the Risen Lord in our midst. This story and witness needs to be preached by the clergy. We need to seek ways for lay persons to likewise share their stories of faith. Our publications also must tell the story, and not merely promote our programs.

- 2) Be intentional in praying, publicly and privately, for growth in mission and growth in numbers. The Prayers of the People should always include these petitions.
- 3) Deepen a congregational culture of hospitality, welcoming all who visit our church, not as potential members, but as fellow sojourners on the road. We must try and try again to provide our members with encouragement and example that they might take on the crucial ministry of welcome and hospitality. We need to be intentional about placing our welcoming sign on the front walkway, and using our web site as vehicles for welcome. The clergy must make calling on new comers a priority in their schedules.
- 4) Consider innovative ways to tell our story: through print, internet, radio and television media. We especially note an immediate need to develop and implement consistent publicity for the congregation, our worship, parish life, ministries, and mission. Likewise, on going attention to our web site and its continuing development must remain a priority. It might be time for us to seriously explore the development of television spots and radio announcements.
- 5) Recognizing the important of fellowship as we walk together on the road and knowing that our congregational “circles of relationship” are crucial to living out our mission, we ought to seek to include everyone in at least one significant “circle of relationship”. In particular, we see an immediate need to explore and develop groups which relate to young families and young adults. We can do better in developing our Men’s Prayer Breakfast, Women at the Well, and youth fellowship groups.
- 6) Having carefully and prayerfully developed a parish mission vision in our Strategic Mission Plan, we need to continue to work on the plan and understand that it is likewise a plan for congregation growth. In affirming our children, youth, music, and outreach ministries we trust that as we grow in these ministries, we will grow in numbers.
- 7) Reexamine our systems of incorporation: Inquirer’s Classes, photos of new members, welcome gathering, etc. One Sunday of the month ought to be designated as a welcome Sunday for those new, with recognition and attention in the liturgy and gatherings of those new with clergy and parish leaders in between services. Alternatives for the Saturday congregation should also be arranged.
- 8) It is critical that we discern in each other God’s gifts and then raise up, train, and empower leaders and all engaged in ministry. To that end, we should consider developing a parish School of Christian Studies which will offer regular short courses in the basic issues of the faith and equip people for ministry.
- 9) We understand that the primary means of widening our circle is through active engagement in ministry and mission. As we pursue our ministries, we will seek to witness to our faith and to invite people to join us.

10) As disciples we joyfully praise and thank God through giving part of what we have to further the work of His son, Jesus Christ. Regular giving, as we are able, is a privilege and an opportunity to share our abundance.