

January 28, 2018
COTT Congregational Annual Meeting

Rector's Report

"Rooted in Christ, Bound in Love, Called to Ministry". . . These are the words of our parish mission statement. They should never be just words, of course, but rather powerful and empowering calls to action. Everything we do or plan, everything we say and profess -- to each other and to those in the world around us -- should draw its inspiration, its energy, from that simple declaration. This is who and what we are as the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, in Braddock Heights, Maryland. This is our purpose, our reason for being here in this time and place. Christ-rooted love persistently and radically shared through the ministry that is our lives. It doesn't get any better -- or more demanding -- than this!!

Let me say, first of all, that I'm enormously grateful for the ministries, and the dedicated ministers, that have made, and continue to make, Transfiguration the welcoming, renewing family that it is. You will have read some of their reports in our meeting packet. I am grateful for their leadership and their faith. Yet rather than review what has been accomplished during the past year (and only replicate their reports) I want to focus more on the future, specifically on how we might build on these accomplishments, and how we might best face the challenges that confront us -- as a parish, as a church of our diocese, as a community of Christians, as citizens of this nation, and as citizens of the world. And there are many challenges ahead, as I think you know.

On the parish level, we face the challenges of an increasingly older population, with issues of retirement, illness, and quality of life (for ourselves and our loved ones) uppermost in our minds. Many of you currently are experiencing these very concerns. We will always welcome and seek to encourage our younger members (and we have some wonderful young families, their children growing up right before our eyes!); but we know that our attention also must be directed toward our seniors and their particular needs.

In addition to meeting these needs, I want to continue to develop our relationship with the deaf community, through well-publicized interpreted services that will enhance our worship and also will offer outreach to the wider region. Fr. Jay and our new friends have placed this extraordinary gift right in our laps! Let us nurture it!

At the diocesan level, we will do well more actively to engage with the ministries that our state-wide churches are doing. Through inter-communication, participation, and prayer -- and occasional hosting of diocesan events -- we will discover a deeper bond

and clarity of purpose between and among our sister congregations. Specifically, I want to encourage parishioners with internet access to sign up to receive the regular diocesan mailings. We need, at the very least, to keep abreast of news from our larger Episcopal "parish" known as the Diocese of Maryland! Our website -- and future Facebook page! -- also will assist us in staying informed.

I look forward as well to working more closely with the Episcopal churches in our Frederick region and ecumenically with the Christian congregations in both Frederick and Middletown. But I want our hand of friendship also to extend to faith communities not of our religious tradition, but which honor God and the things of God as devoutly as we do. Among these especially are our brothers and sisters in the Jewish and Muslim communities. Inheritors with us of the Abrahamic tradition, co-believers in the one almighty and merciful God, we have much to share with and much to learn from each other!

On the national and global level, the challenges are just as great. We are Christians, but we are also citizens; and our proclamation as followers of Christ extends to our political connections and decisions, for the welfare and success of this country and for the advancement of peoples around the globe. I encourage us during this year -- both individually and as a church -- to become politically aware and politically and socially active in areas and on issues in which we feel we can do the most good. In our worship and our fellowship, let us be specifically mindful of this commitment. Among our concerns are those over hunger and homelessness, the plight of refugees and immigrants, civil liberties and adherence to constitutional law, institutional ethics, voter rights, gender equity, sexual abuse, racial and economic justice, and protection of our environment.

This might seem a tall order; but even if we choose only one area in which to devote our time and gifts, we will be making a difference. This may be in helping to distribute food to the elderly on the first Fridays of each month or participating in meetings and marches advocating immigration reform and protection for the Dreamers. It may be in volunteering in a downtown homeless shelter or working to increase voter registration. Or it may be in joining local and state groups dedicated to preserving our natural resources or aiding the efforts of those seeking protection for victims of domestic violence. In whatever work we choose, in whatever cause we take up, we can be assured that we are doing God's work in the world and advancing the Gospel of peace, justice, and love. But we have to do it!

Yet while we reach out to the world, we also are called to "reach in" to the heart of our parish community -- to nourish friendships, to support, console, and encourage each other. We are invited to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who

weep." And we are expected to have fun!! I believe a strong commitment to a global vision begins with a personal joy-filled, loving commitment to the brothers and sisters of our church family.

And this is where our newly renovated parish hall becomes so important. My vision for Memorial Hall has always been two-fold: to serve as a community gathering place for restoration, protection, education, and cultural enrichment; and to be a well-used venue for any number of parish events, from pot-luck suppers to game nights, from wedding receptions to art classes. We are beginning to realize the first goal, with the anticipated use of the hall for continuing education classes from Frederick Community College. I have hopes as well for a community forum series on topics affecting our public lives. Yet the second goal is equally essential. Just as our AA friends have valued the presence of those "red doors" as a gateway to their healing and health, so we should look forward to finding, through those same doors, ever-renewing gifts of fellowship and caring.

Right now, it all may still appear just "too new," even a bit sterile. But after the introduction of warm, inviting and tasteful decorations (including, perhaps, artwork highlighting local talent or our community's history?) -- and with a few church suppers under our belts! -- I'm confident that Memorial Hall will look and feel like home, a place and a spirit that will draw us back again and again. Most importantly, it will be home, for we will have filled it with love for friend and stranger alike.

Well, I'd best close -- lest I add any more "chapters" to this already novel-size report!! As I enter my sixth year as your rector, I continue to be gratified and inspired by the faithfulness, perseverance, understanding, and mutual loving support of the parish I was called to lead and to serve. Disappointments have and will come. Conflicts have and will arise. I ask your forgiveness for any ways that I have hurt or failed you. We are all human, and we need God's constant help and direction. Still I rejoice in the hope that by his grace and with the strength of our common witness, we will remain the people Christ intends us to be, the disciples he has called to turn the world around.

Many Blessings,
Fr. Gordon +