

## Rector's Report 2009 Parish Meeting

The times that we are living through are unique. Our world is changing at a rapid pace through the forces of globalization and urbanization which has led to a financial shift of cosmic proportions. In the fall of 2008 we elected a new president, Barack Obama, with the expectation of a change in our country's direction from one organized out of fear and anxiety to a new direction filled with hope and possibility. We saw in the presidential campaign as well as this past week on the president's visit to Africa, Asia and Europe that the world sees the United States from a very different perspective from the way we often know ourselves. The peoples of the world are seeking hope in the form of liberation, healing and love. The leaders of our country, in both media and politics, have been encouraging fear, anxiety and a destructive response. Some people argue convincingly that we have lost our moral compass and our founding principles. The banking practice of eliminating all usury laws or raising them to 34% is a prime example of this loss. So it is time for a change.

Similarly we have a change in our local administration with the election of a new mayor. The previous administration ended in paralysis and cynicism, and we hope the new administration will embrace a broader understanding of our city. We need to stop the partisan politics that have closed agendas and operate to reward the few and realize that Hoboken is a broad and diverse city that needs to confront the forces that seek only their own self-interest and profit. It is time for a Mayor and City Council that demonstrate a concern and a compassion for all the peoples of Hoboken and not just the upwardly mobile, or those making a livelihood off of the employment opportunities or those who are making a significant profit from our community's development. Hoboken is not a "golden calf" or a "cash cow," but an urban community that should remain balanced and attentive to its peoples and its neighborhoods. Unfortunately because of Hoboken's transitional nature many have taken advantage of the opportunities without reinvesting in the community itself. Less than half the people who vote in our national elections come out to vote in our local elections. What does this say about the vitality and vibrancy of our city? It says we are a bedroom community of transitional people who are wandering through and not grounded in our city. This loss of a sense of place and space is another negative force of globalization that destroys local neighborhoods and McDonaldizes everything.

All Saints is called to ministry with people who find themselves on the margins of our community. We proclaim hope based upon God's good news of healing, liberation and love. Where love, healing and liberation are taking place in the lives of people is where God is at work around us. We seek to lift up this work of God to proclaim it for others to experience and know the Holy One. The dominant issues that were the focus of our city's recent political campaign -- property taxes, transparency in government, responsible development, and open space issues -- are somewhat different from the people concerns we seek to redress. Our commitment as people of faith is to stand in the breach of our community among the disenfranchised, the marginalized, and the anxious -- those seeking healing, liberation and love. Jesus, in his home synagogue, announces his mission is to join in God's efforts to create a society that practices equality, justice and right relations in a neighborly fashion. This past Monday I joined in a celebration with residents of a new affordable housing project to bless and dedicate their new home. Once residents of our homeless shelter, they are now transitioning from the street into permanent housing. On Friday I joined with the children of Jackson Street and the work of the Jubilee Center as we hosted a Children's Community Fair. All Saints is known for bringing people together to work with people on the margins of our community because of the strength and witness of the people of this congregation. Whether they are issues of health care, immigration rights, children's welfare, gay and lesbian civil rights, homelessness or feeding and clothing the poor, the people of All Saints have created an institution of faith that is willing to stand in the breach seeking to repair the deep brokenness and divisions in our society with a willingness to give sacrificially to the marginalized and to repair the breach. We are a local institution that has demonstrated the ability to follow through as a result of a combination of happenstance, timing, ingenuity, ambition and tenacity. The very practical question we bring is "how can Hoboken steadily increase its equity, justice and sustainability for all people and the creation itself?" Therefore we are a people who seek the welfare and peace of the city as the prophet Jeremiah calls people of faith to be for the city in which they dwell.

But in the midst of this our parish is growing and becoming even more dynamic. This year we have new staff: Linda Simpson joined us in September 2008 as our new parish administrator. Vinny Blasco joined our staff for two days a week to do our Parish and CDSC finances. They have both brought a sense of stability to our parish administration and enabled us to grow as a congregation in our work. In fact when we filled out the parochial report this year, we realized that we are the fastest growing congregation in our Diocese. I thank both Linda Simpson and Vinny for their work to undergird our ministry and mission.

The Jubilee Center continues to be a source of great joy and a wonderful outreach by our parish into the larger community of Hoboken. Craig Mainor, our Program Director, is doing an outstanding job of connecting with the kids and their parents, and this summer we expect to be serving 100 children in our summer day camp program. Larry Henriques as chair of the Jubilee Board gives a great deal of personal effort towards maintaining and securing the funding of The Center. Linda Curtiss has served as a volunteer interim manager this year. She has been able to give her gifts of administration and finance and help the center through these transitions. I am grateful for both of them. The Jubilee Center is a wonderful community organization that enables us to bring together a variety of people from the fragments of our city to work together. The Jubilee Center is a bottom-up rather than a top down organization and program. Its strength is from the people in the community who come asking if this might be possible to do, it responds to local need and serves in a local setting. The true health of a community is measured by how many organizations such as this can be found in the community.

Our parish day school is another very important part of our mission to serve the children in our community. Under Jill Singleton's leadership we have successfully started our middle school. As a result of the growth in our School the parish is renovating the "Queen building" on the corner of 6th and Clinton. In September the Queen will house our Nursery and Pre-K classes. We are rapidly approaching a school that will be serving more than 200 children. I encourage you to read Ms. Singleton's report and celebrate this aspect of our parish's mission with children. It is Jill's passion, persistence and patient leadership along with her vision that has been instrumental in moving us forward to expand to middle school. I also wish to acknowledge John Niles' leadership as Chair of the Day School Board. John is a former warden of the parish and is very active in the life of our parish, our day school and our Diocese. I also thank the members of the school's administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the board of the Day School for their efforts this year.

The lay leadership of the Parish is quite remarkable. Cindy Cray and Lisa Vickery are completing their terms as a member of the Vestry. They have both served this parish well. Cindy will continue in her role as treasurer and member of the Jubilee Center Board, and Lisa is moving onto the Day School Board. Both bring a wealth of wisdom and experience to the work of this parish. I also thank my two wardens, Erik Aarts and Meryl Longval, who give me tremendous support and encouragement in the difficult and challenging work we face.

There is one major goal I have for this congregation. It is to deepen our relationships with one another in the fabric of this congregation. We need to deepen our presence of greeting and welcoming at the 9:15 and 11:15 services and in connecting and following up with people. We are way too shy and reserved for what we need to become. The most exciting and interesting part of our congregational life are the people God is sending us each and every Sunday. They cannot be incorporated into our common life by just the Rector. It has to be something that we all work on together. We need to wear our name tags, we need to learn each other's names, interests and common life concerns, we need to follow up with visitors and welcome them with a phone call or better yet a visit. We have to create a team of people at each service who understand that this ministry is so important to the health and vitality of this congregation that we go out of our way to do it. We need to be standing at the front doors of our church 15 minutes before the service to start welcoming people, introducing ourselves, talking with one another. We need to be present at the back of the Church after the service is completed and greet and converse with new people, people we do not yet know, people who are seeking a connection, people who are looking to be incorporated into our common life. We need a team of people who will take it upon themselves to walk with and nurture people into this congregation and to follow up with them and one another to create the fabric of community and family so that we truly are the household of God. This is not for us to

expect someone else to do, it is for each of us to join in and become involved in bringing our own unique and wonderful ways of inviting people to join with us in this household of God.

This is my 30<sup>th</sup> annual report as missionary to Hoboken and Rector of All Saints Parish.

I continue to marvel at the challenge of urban mission, and All Saints Hoboken is a wonderful congregation where we engage the challenge. What will the local parish be like in the years to come? How different are we from even 30 years ago? Hoboken is no longer an old industrial city but a modern cosmopolitan city within the new global context. People are working to reinvent the city as urbanization marches across the face of the earth. The cities' lands are polluted, the cities' people are segregated, the cities' politics are too parochial, the cities economics are not sustainable, the cities' spirituality is far too secular. In the midst of this context we seek to announce that the reign of God is possible and present and that it will transform people and our environment. We can be changed from the culture of greed and consumerism to our God's alternative of neighborly justice, peace and love. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

This ministry that God has called us to bear is indeed easy and light. Not because the work is not difficult, nor that the hours aren't long, nor even that the problems and challenges appear insurmountable. Rather it is that I am learning how to be gentle and to be lowly and to recognize that justice, peace and love are gifts of the heart acquired through personal sacrifice and deep spirituality. It is about being a steward of what has been given, to become like the farmer who watches the natural processes of organizations as well as the creation and to see that seeds thrown become harvest in the most mysterious and glorified ways. The stories we tell of God's work in Hoboken give me great hope upon which I can rest for it is, after all, in God's hands that this is happening not mine.