

ADDRESS BY THE REV. BOLLIN M. MILLNER, JR.
Annual Meeting of Grace and Holy Trinity Church
Richmond, Virginia
February 5, 2012

On February 3, I marked my ninth anniversary as the rector of GHTC. I am beginning my tenth year. In just two months I will observe the 28th anniversary of my ordination in the Episcopal Church. So those are milestones.

There have also been some family milestones. When I came here I was the father of two high school aged students. Now I am the father of two college graduates and also recently became a father in law when my youngest son Thomas was married. May I say, it is a tremendous blessing having a daughter in the family.

My wife Katherine and I will celebrate our 36th wedding anniversary this summer and I remain profoundly grateful to her for her love and friendship. Whatever good there is in me is largely attributable to her and though most people never see it, she is my greatest support in my vocation as a priest. She is in Austin, Texas this morning at the invitation of her brother and to see her niece play the lead in the school production ...so I can get away with saying these things without embarrassing her.

So time marches on and I am grateful for it all.

I am in an inquisitive and reflective state of mind. I've been thinking about what we've been working together to build here at GHTC over the past 9 years and I've been thinking about where we are headed. I've been thinking about our mission: "To build strong disciples, a strong church community and to serve God and the world God has made." And I've been thinking about how we've organized ourselves for this mission through SWEEPPS – Service, Worship, Education, Evangelism, Parish Life, Pastoral Care and Stewardship.

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I have, I think, an important message. The eNews in recent weeks has been announcing this, and it is an important message about and for the church.

Let me begin by sharing some of my experiences. I have served as rector of three different churches. I served as rector of a church with 100 adult confirmed communicants while at St. John's in West Point, Virginia and about 2/3rds would show up on Sunday; I have served as a rector of a church with about 450 members and Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) was about 220, this was right before I came here, the Church of the Good Shepherd in Rocky Mount, NC; and I have served at GHTC with between 700 – 800 members and an average Sunday attendance of around 300.

During my time ASA at GHTC has been as high as 320 and in a year when it snowed every Sunday for a month and services were cancelled, Average Sunday Attendance has been as low as 269. That was in 2010. Last year ASA was 287 so that is a positive thing. It is moving in the right direction and I have beseeched the Lord mightily, that if He must, to inflict bad weather on a Wednesday rather than on Saturday night.

But I digress...my point is that in all of those churches, with a variety of sizes, it was always possible to see the glass as half empty. One could wish for more people in the pews and more money in the plate. It doesn't matter about the size of the congregation, I have seen anxiety and scarcity thinking in all those situations...I have given into that myself at times. But, it is also possible to see the glass as half full...actually much more than half full... especially at GHTC.

It is always possible to see the glass as half empty and to give in to fear and anxiety....

But...at GHTC the glass is actually much more than half-full.

We have tremendous assets!

- *Our size...we are larger than 90% of Episcopal Churches*
- *Your annual giving*
- *The amazing success of "Mind the Gap"*
- *Our Endowment Fund*

Let me share some numbers with you. A bit more than 90% of Episcopal Churches in the United States, using average Sunday attendance as a measure, are smaller than GHTC. Another way to say that is, we are in the top ten percent in terms of size.

I say this not to brag but so that we can claim our size as an asset. Our size makes a lot of things possible and empowers us to do not one thing only, but many things with a common purpose.

We are also blessed with financial support. The average pledge at GHTC for 2012 is: \$3,189. The national average pledge is approximately \$2400 so we are \$789 above the national average. And, may I just talk about Mind the Gap for just a moment.

Here's the back story. In December of 2010 the members of this congregation were most generous, way above and beyond pledges for that year. Our treasurer Bill Shumadine said it was the best December on record. On the basis of that outpouring at the end of 2010, the Vestry adopted a deficit budget of \$43,000 for 2011. The

thought was that in the Fall of 2010 as people were making pledges they needed to be cautious. But it was known to be true that when things turn out better than expected, you share that with your church. So the Vestry stepped out with faith and hope.

And you know what? You, the wonderful members of this congregation, not only closed that gap, we ended 2011 \$4600 in the black. So our actual budget last year did not have a deficit but a surplus of \$4600! Amazing!

For 2012 the Vestry has adopted a deficit budget of a bit under \$15,000. This is much less than last year and there are emergency funds that can be used but we hope that will not be necessary. We hope that those who have not yet pledged for 2012 will do so and help us close this gap. We also know that this is a generous congregation and that you will give beyond your pledges, as you are able and as you have done so wonderfully in recent years.

We are proud that the amount of our pledged income and the number of pledges increased for 2012. We are especially proud of the 30 new pledges for 2012. So we are on sound footing and Sandy Fitz-Hugh the convener of the Finance committee will speak more about the annual budget in a moment. Sandy is stepping down soon and he has served wisely and well, with great insight and diligence and I am grateful for his service.

So, we are blessed with your annual giving.

We are also blessed that we have an Endowment. The trustees of the GHTC Endowment Fund have roughly \$5.9 million invested and they do great things with it. In 2012, Endowed Funds - all invested by the Trustees of the Endowment Fund, most under their full control and some under Vestry control- will contribute over \$235,000 to our ministries and outreach.

Over \$180,000¹ of grants from Endowed Funds will go to support the building, our music program, Christian education and youth programs, our Campus Ministry and the staff position for Evangelism and Stewardship.

And the Endowment Fund, on top of the other grants I've already mentioned and in addition to the significant outreach you make possible through your pledge will give \$54,000 in grants which will flow straight through this church out to help the poor and needy in Richmond. This is something to celebrate.

Clearly, the lion's share of what we do is made possible by your generosity through your pledges. And the Endowment builds on this foundation. It is very much a "value added" situation. And it shows how those who have gone before, through their wills and bequests, continue to empower God's work through this church.

And all of this can be done by drawing about 3.2% from the Endowment which is at the lower end of the range for Endowments, where you would expect giving between 3% and 5%.

The Trustees are good stewards as are you. And I am pleased to say that we are starting a Legacy Society to give thanks for those who have remembered the church in their wills and to encourage everyone to consider this. So blessings abound and Kinloch Nelson will talk this morning more about the Endowment. He has done a wonderful and faithful job as president and I am so grateful for his leadership.

We have size, we have annual giving, we have an endowment and these are wonderful assets.

Now I know that there are challenges facing the Episcopal Church, indeed, all mainline churches.

There are challenges...

Mainline churches, including the Episcopal Church have been losing members for a generation.

You can see this played out in the membership and attendance numbers in the 19 churches in the Greater Richmond area.

The Episcopal Church, nationwide, has shown declining membership for a generation. You can see it in the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) numbers. Though this is not a completely accurate gauge of church membership, simply because active members don't come as often as they did traditionally, ASA is an important measure.

Let me share some numbers with you...Membership in the 19 churches in the greater Richmond area (east to St. John's, north to St. Thomas and all the way out to St. Mary's in Goochland, all north of the River) increased by 967 over the decade from 1999 to 2009, or about 96 people per year. That factors out to an additional 5 people per year per congregation. Of course it is not evenly divided and regardless it hasn't kept up with population growth. Those are the membership numbers

¹ \$11,800 for music; \$15,000 for our triennial youth pilgrimage; \$18,200 for Christian Education and youth; \$8,200 for Campus Ministry; \$48,000 general operating support; \$50,000 for staff position; \$30,000 for building insurance. An additional \$54,000 is given straight to outreach.

and it shows while some congregations may be larger, it comes at the expense of other congregations and there is no real growth over-all.

Interestingly, Average Sunday Attendance in the greater Richmond area among those 19 churches fell by 392 people for the decade. GHTC's ASA has been erratic. For instance in 1997 there was an ASA of 377, this dropped to a low of 178 in the interim period between rectors ten years ago. Fortunately it has come up significantly since then and we posted a gain on Average Sunday Attendance between 2010 and 2011. I hope we will continue moving in an upward direction and remind you that one of the most important gifts you give is your presence.

What is this all about? Why is there a decline in the mainline churches? I have read about this a fair amount over the years and there are a lot of pet theories. But the reasons that I have read which seem to have actual data behind them, suggest that there are two main issues.

One has to do with the reluctance of mainline folks to talk about faith, to instill faith in their children and to share faith with others. "Somehow, in the course of the past century, (mainline churches) lost the will or the ability to teach the Christian faith and what it requires to a succession of younger cohorts in such a way as to command their allegiance."²

We pride ourselves on being an open church and we are. We are willing to discuss a wide variety of things and we should. We are happy to have seekers in our midst. We are seekers ourselves.

But being open to dialogue, being non-judgmental of others with differing beliefs, does not mean we have no core beliefs. We do and we must claim them openly, generously and without embarrassment. Because guess what? If you don't tell other people about the good news of God in Christ, and invite them to join you, they won't.

The two main reasons for decline...

- *We've lost the "Words for Witness"... the ability to teach the faith and what it requires.*
- *Demographics...we've appealed to a very narrow portion of the population...and that portion is getting smaller*

If we don't welcome guests and new members into our midst, they won't stay. Do you speak with those you don't know on Sunday morning? Do you sit with people you don't know at breakfast? Do you wear a name tag? We must do these simple things to build our church, to enlarge our own circle of friends and to continue to be a warm and welcoming church.

Loosing the words for witness has hurt us. We must invest in our own spiritual growth so that we can do a better job of sharing the faith with family, friends and colleagues. There are plenty of ways to do that at GHTC and it all starts right here with worship on Sunday morning.

The other main thing, as I see it that has contributed to decline has to do with demographics. The Episcopal Church historically has appealed to the white, Anglo-Saxon protestant demographic in this country. And to a much lesser extent we have appealed to African Americans. Regardless, we appeal to people with college degrees. I think about 28% of adults in the US have college degrees...so we are appealing to about a quarter of the folks, and within that quarter, predominantly to white people and to a much lesser degree African Americans. So, the people to whom we have traditionally related most directly are a small part of the big picture, and their numbers are shrinking.

² <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9303/articles/johnson.html>

“Minorities, now about a third of the population, are expected to become the majority in 2042 and hit 54 percent in 2050.”³

These changes are fascinating. Go to your local Wal-Mart and just look at the check out lines. It is a wonderful and marvelous diversity of people you will see. For that matter, go stand out in Schaffer Court during class changes at VCU and you will see incredible diversity. Several years ago the then student chaplain of our Campus Ministry said at the 5:00 p.m. Sunday service, “I think we have someone here from every continent but Antarctica”...and we did. And that is because we serve VCU at that service, and VCU reflects the diversity of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

How should we respond to all of this? Well, for my money, Lovett Weems, a leader in the United Methodist Church, has analyzed it well and stated it brilliantly. I became aware of him because of my connection with the Methodist Church through the Duke University Divinity School where I did work in preparation for ordination.

Weems tells us that the United Methodist Church, which is a bellwether for mainline denominations like ours, came into being in 1968 through the merger of a number Methodist denominations. Like all mainline denominations, membership has decreased over the decades for the Methodists. At the same time, as membership decreased, giving continued to increase even after factoring in inflation. Every year, fewer people gave more money. That model worked for a long time says Lovett Weems...for some 30 years. But, for the first time in the memory of most, total giving declined in 2009.



The “death tsunami” is a coming reality and it recalls us to our basic mission – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

Weems asks: But won't denominations return to the previous performance when the economy improves? Not likely, he says. The practice of depending on fewer people to provide more money is unsustainable in the face of what Weems has termed the coming "death tsunami." <The U.S. death rate is currently in a stable period that began in 2003 and will continue until 2018. But what follows this plateau is a... wave in which there will be more deaths and a higher death rate than at any time since the widespread introduction of antibiotics and other medical advances. The total number of deaths each year will increase from 2018 until 2050, and the majority of these deaths will be older non-Hispanic whites and African Americans, the two largest constituencies of mainline churches.>⁴

The “death tsunami” is coming and that is certainly an important announcement! Weems says (If we don't pay attention) the result could be catastrophic. However, if we pay attention...if we recommit ourselves to the gospel of Jesus Christ and commit ourselves to being “a missional and spiritually alive instrument of God” great things can happen.⁵

³ http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26186087/ns/us_news-life/t/america-even-older-more-diverse/

⁴ <http://www.churchleadership.com/Updates/110504Update.asp> Section <...>mainly quoted with some paraphrase.

⁵ <http://www.churchleadership.com/Updates/110504Update.asp>

As Lovett Weems has it: We are called to reach more people, younger people, more diverse people for the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, he says, if you think you can do one of those without the others, you are wrong. First of all if we reach more people they will be younger, because we've got all the old people! If you reach younger people, they will be more diverse, because that is simply the way in which our country is growing.

So, the time is now. You remember Pharaoh's dream of the seven fat cows followed by the seven thin ones? Joseph interpreted the dream and told Pharaoh the cows represent seven good years followed by seven years of famine and told Pharaoh to stockpile the grain for the future. We are looking at six or seven fat cows and then several decades of cows which are losing weight at a fast rate! We must prepare.

The time is now! We must find the words for witness. Everyone one of us. We must become ever more inclusive and effective evangelists, in our families, in our neighborhood, in our lives. How? By following our mission to build strong disciples and a strong church community which serves God and the world God has made.

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Everyone of us!!*

We must recommit to the gospel, to mission, to service, to proclamation. That is our real business after all. Jesus did not say, "Go forth, build buildings and institutions, and preserve them at all costs whether or not they actually serve the kingdom." He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

As we respond to that call we must claim our assets. I have talked about annual giving, our endowment, our size, our generosity as tremendous assets.

Of course we must ask "What about the buildings?" The church doesn't exist for them, but they can be an asset to our mission. The parish planning group under the leadership of Pem Hall and Gregg Beck have been working to bring greater focus to our mission and to ascertain if the facilities of GHTC are adequate for the mission we are pursuing. And you'll hear more from them in a minute and how they are planning on having focus groups to get your input.

Our worship space is simply stunning by any measure. The Parish House less so though over the years we have put it to excellent and good use. The Parish House needs basic upkeep, things like carpet and paint and the heating and cooling systems for the entire facilities are ancient and need to be evaluated. I would really like for us to have these things called "thermostats"! The parish hall itself has poor traffic flow because of the pillars down the middle and the lighting is less than desirable. It holds less than half of what our average Sunday attendance is. So the question is, "Is there a way to reconfigure it so that it can serve our needs better or should we keep it as it is and simply do routine maintenance?"

Where facilities are concerned you should know that there have been some conversations with the Landmark theater about a possible parking deck they want to build. We'd like to participate in that in some way if it becomes reality because parking has long been an issue for this parish. The leadership has also been in conversation, as recently as last week, with VCU to see if we can buy or use the properties immediately adjacent to our building. Certainly no commitments are close to being made but your leaders are proactive and are to be commended for looking at all available possibilities.

As we look to the future...

- *We must evaluate our facilities. Do they serve our mission effectively or should we make changes?*
- *The time has also come for Episcopal congregations to stop competing and to start collaborating in mission – which we will do with St. Mark's on the Boulevard.*
- *We are blessed with a great staff and the positions themselves work well with our mission. "We have the right staff, in the right positions at the right time."*
- *We have wonderful volunteers who are more important than ever. We are creating a culture where we "Ask not what the church can do for us, but what we can do for the church."*

It is also true that the time has come for Episcopal Congregations to stop competing with each other and start cooperating in mission. To this end, the leadership of GHTC and of St. Mark's Church on the boulevard, just beside the Virginia Historical Society, has been talking with each other and we have identified some ways to collaborate. As a start, we are having our mid-week Lenten programs at St. Marks. We hope this will help with attendance because there is plenty of available parking. For their part, St. Mark's is joining with our missionary society to help with the work in Belize. This kind of cooperation is an asset. I ask you to support these efforts.

We have a great asset in the GHTC staff and we are where we need to be to face the challenges of the next few years. When I came here nine years ago there were 10 staff positions, including that of rector. We have not increased the number of positions. But we have reconfigured the staff in important and creative ways.

Beth Davis leads our Music Ministries and that position has remained constant. But we have brought the Rev. Lauren Kuratko on board to serve our youth and our campus ministry, in addition to pastoral care. We brought the Rev. Michael Cadaret on board to lead our service ministries, facilitate Christian education with children and adults and work with pastoral care. Then, without expanding the number of positions, we created a new position, with the support of the Endowment Fund, for Evangelism and Stewardship and hired Carolyn Chilton for this. We are one of the few churches with such a position, maybe the only one with that creative combination, but it is exactly what we need. Along with our fabulous administrative and support staff of Valérie Aussanaire, Judy Miller, Barbara Hobson-Simpson, Tina Roberts and James Fleming we have the right staff in the right positions at the right time. And one of their main efforts must be building the volunteer base of the parish. The way forward is going to lie with ever greater dependence on volunteers.

And that is another asset we have at Grace and Holy Trinity Church. Over the past decade we have especially emphasized that we are here not to be served but to serve, following the example of Jesus. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, we are creating a culture where our motto is, "Ask not what the church can do for you, but what you can do for the church." And just look at the Annual Report and the "GHTC from A to Z" section as evidence of this. This is the way of the future.

I must also add that it is a great asset that we take seriously two other things - where we are and who we are. These things also make us absolutely unique. There is no one else here, certainly no other Episcopal Church here, doing what we are doing. There is no other place with this wonderful combination of people. It is unique.

We take our location seriously. So, we have a soup kitchen, we are in intake site for CARITAS the overnight housing ministry for the homeless, we reach out to children and youth in the city through support of St. Andrews and other schools and by participating in the Mayor's Youth Academy Work Initiative. We have started and sustained a vibrant ministry to the Virginia Commonwealth University community and if you have never attended the 5:00 p.m. Sunday service with the

“Where we are” and “who we are” are tremendous assets as we look to the future.

We have a unique mission because of our location.

We also have a unique community of talented people and we prayerfully ask, “O Lord, these are the people that you have given us. What then should we do, given the talents you have given them?”

students you owe it to yourself to go. These things flow from where we are. There is an ease in suburban churches...they have parking, they are close by and convenient. But they don't have the opportunities on their doorstep that we do and these opportunities are unique.

Who we are is also a great asset. We come from all over and for many different reasons...you can read Julie Joyce's words in the Annual Report on this. But each one of us brings here unique talents. Rather than saying we must do all things, we must be like everyone else, we are prayerfully asking, “O Lord, these are the people that you have given us. What then should we do, given the

talents you have given them?” So, for instance, we don't try to go everywhere, but we have developed a significant relationship with Belize because we have the people here with the passion and connection to make that be a productive relationship for us. And that is just one example among countless others.

So part of my message this morning has been to tell you all these things, to show where we've been and talk about what is coming. But my most important announcement or message, concerns a vision and call for the future. I believe the vision for the future, the challenge, is this, we are called, individually and as the church, to reach more people...not with our fears or anxieties...but with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must find the words for witness. Not in arrogance, but with gentleness and in ways that are authentic to who we are, unique to us. To do this, it will take individual commitment to discipleship. It will also take every member of this community working together, in this strategic location, serving God and the world. We have everything that is necessary.

The time is now to put everything we've got, everything God has given us to work for the gospel. Rejoice and share the good news. The future is bright in the service of the gospel. Fear not and trust God.

The future is bright in the service of the Gospel!

Fear not!!