

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION, HILTON

REPORT OF THE RECTOR TO THE ANNUAL VESTRY MEETING 2 MARCH 2008

STATEMENT OF NEEDS AND VISION FOR THE PARISH

Introduction

I address you as friends in Christ, in the Name of God: Father Son & Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Anglican Church in Southern Africa requires each Parish to hold a formal annual business meeting, open to the whole congregation, to deal publicly with matters of parish leadership, finances and care of property, giving account for the year past and setting out vision for the year ahead. Like many parishes, we do this in a Sunday service, emphasising that we want to root our private and public lives in relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

The meeting takes place as the service ends, and in recent years has been neither long nor tedious thanks to preparatory work done by the leadership team and especially our Honorary Treasurer regarding finances.

It is required that the Rector presents a "Statement of Needs and Vision" to sum up where we presently are and to look to the future.

Thank you to Leadership

There are several people who have offered leadership to the parish, whom we need to acknowledge with thanks: This includes all who have served on our Parish Council, offering wisdom and leadership on critical issues, and representing the broad spectrum of the people of our congregation.

The same applies to those who have served on the Property & Finance Committee of Parish Council. Two members of that committee, **Mike McDonald and Bronwyn Mackenzie**, stepped down from the committee but remain willing to offer assistance as and where needed. It is exciting that several new people have agreed to serve on that committee, and Richard Heathcote has offered to oversee our property repairs and maintenance.

Three people are leaving our Parish Council: **Jo-Anne Stevens O'Connor** has faithfully represented the Sunday School for many years, and remains involved in that ministry, which will now be represented on Council by Nicolette Hohls. **Penny Niven** and **Karen Weaver** have served for a season of 2 years and 3 years respectively, and have made significant contributions; both have extended commitments in their professional work in 2008. At Council's request, Karen will facilitate a process of re-looking at the overall Vision of our parish, which she so ably did for us nearly three years ago and which helped to shape and focus the ministry that takes place here. **Nick Rivers-Moore** also joined our Council for about a year as a co-opted member, but sadly will be leaving Hilton in a few months' time to work in White River.

Several new people have agreed to serve Parish Council with a wide range of ages, covering all services, offering us their perspectives, experience and expertise.

It must also be said that **Julia Lloyd**, our Administrator for the past three years, and **Jennifer Howlett** her assistant and our parish Receptionist, have also served us extremely well, and always work with a sense of purpose and offering ministry in what they do. We are immensely grateful to them both.

Sadly, we offer not only our thanks, but will also soon say farewell to **Neil and Shelagh Carter** who will return to live amongst family in the UK during the month of May. The Church Wardens are critical members of the parish leadership team, and Neil has served us wonderfully and ably as Warden. I will miss his enthusiasm and energy, his "we-can-do-this" attitude, and his supportive friendship to Gavin Bulman and me. As the new priest here just over five years ago, I got to know Neil when we were part of an Alpha Course together, and the rest is history...

I have invited Neil's fellow Warden, Gavin Bulman, to say thanks on our behalf:

Thanks to Neil upon retiring as a Church Warden

There will, no doubt, be other opportunities to bid farewell to Neil and Shelagh before they relocate to the UK – But today, I wish to thank Neil for his contribution to the Parish whilst a Church Warden and Chairman of the Property and Finance Committee.

He has been an enthusiastic, innovative and imaginative Warden whose leadership has played a significant role in the positive change within the parish over the past 4 plus years in which we have worked together. Some projects, when first considered, were rather daunting, but Neil was never put off by problems, he looked for solutions. And together, Council, Priest, P&F Committee, Parishioners and importantly, generous donors, have all shared the common vision, which resulted in successful accomplishment of projects. It was fun working with someone who can see the "Big Picture" and has a "Can Do" attitude. There have been some wonderful things that have happened in the parish, and are still happening, and Neil has been part of the team that has made them happen. He has contributed in no small way to the successes that we all as parishioners have enjoyed or have played a part.

The parish have committed itself to being a "Vibrant Parish". I pray that the legacy that Neil leaves, being his visionary ability, his optimism, his generosity of offering his time, talents and even money, and above all, his vibrancy, will continue to underpin that commitment.

On behalf of the Parish, I also wish to thank Shelagh for her supportive role, which made it easier for Neil to be "on-duty" as a Church Warden. Your part in Neil's achievements as a Warden is not underestimated Shelagh, and is much appreciated. We, as a community, thank God for the way their lives have touched ours.

Thank you Neil for sharing your God given talents with us,
 Thank you for your leadership,
 Thank you for stimulating good ideas into action,
 Thank you for supporting seemingly hopeless cases until they bore fruit,
 Thank you for your contribution to the life of the parish so unselfishly given,
 Thank you Neil for being "such a good and faithful servant".

Nic continued...

I wish to single out **my supportive wife, Julia**. She also gave us, and me in particular, great pleasure when she was ordained Priest last December, furthering a vocational calling begun many years earlier when we still lived in Johannesburg. She has deeply felt the presence of God in that experience. Her form of publicly exercising that ministry is known in our church as “self-supporting” in that it is occasional rather than full-time and it is not financially remunerated, but it is deeply fulfilling to her and adds to the ministry of our parish.

Speaking very personally, I also want to tell you that every week I experience some **tension between family life and the ministry** to which I am called. It means that every week there are some things left undone, carried over into the following week, although thankfully I do not think anything critical or urgent has ever been left undone!

In this, I am not alone – not only is it the experience of all clergy who also have family, but it is the experience of most working and family people in our community. It remains my determination to keep a balance between my personal and family needs and the rightful demands of a busy and slowly growing church, because my calling as a husband and a father is integral to my life as a Christian and to fulfilling my vocation as a parish priest. I am very grateful that most people seem to recognise and even encourage that.

Needs and Vision: Inspirational Giving

In the presentation of accounts later this morning, we will see that we are **in the best financial position** since I arrived here in June 2002. I do not wish to repeat the “Good News” information sent out with the Parish magazine last December, suffice to say that past debt and financial difficulties are truly in the past, where the Wardens, Treasurer and I wish to leave them!

More than that, in recent years we have been enabled to extend our church buildings, to modify and beautify our grounds, and to do essential and expensive maintenance, all with a little sweat... and no remaining debt. The inauguration of our organ last year was also a spectacular event, made possible by two large and specific donations for that purpose.

Increased financial giving, and occasional extra appeals, and the stunning additional generosity of people, has made this all possible. I thank God, the Giver of all things, who has enabled this and blessed us in these ways. I mention just three of many **inspirational examples of giving**:

1. Extra gifts large and small to our building fund and special appeal last year for upgrading our electrical supply. A private loan was repaid 4 months early! I was informed that in addition to quite big amounts, some people on modest pensions brought in amounts of R50 and R25 every now and then – they remain anonymous to me, but it seems to represent a high level of sacrificial giving.
2. A retired parishioner who could not manage a direct financial contribution brought a piece of jewellery for auction. She thought it could raise a couple of hundred Rand – it brought in over R2,500 Rand.

3. As reported in our January 2008 parish magazine, a parishioner enquired how much money would be needed for the urgent repairs and re-roofing that was mentioned late last year. A few days later, he brought in a cheque for 5,000 Pounds Sterling, which fully covers the cost. Some of those repairs will begin this week.

Needs and Vision: Rectory Alterations

Over the next couple of years, the Church Wardens and I believe it will be necessary to focus **attention on the Rectory** next door. Apart from a few repairs from time to time, almost no work has been done on the house since it was built in about 1962. The domestic worker quarters are a disgrace, and although Julia and I long felt some improvements to our home would be in order, we decided that we would not permit those to take place until the domestic quarters were upgraded.

None of that was financially feasible years ago, so much so that when we arrived here we were told there was no money even for some simple requirements, such was the poor state of finances then, and we spent considerable resources of our own together with money anonymously spent by two parishioners, to ensure the house was pleasantly liveable for our family. In a healthy parish, that should not be the case!

The house is a lovely one with a very large garden area, and we love living in it. With the support of Parish Council, Bronwyn Mackenzie has recently done an analysis with us and will be costing some suggested alterations and additions, and will present those to the Council for consideration. Some of it is probably immediately do-able, some of it will be dependant on extra funds being raised.

Needs and Vision: Youth Pastor and Accommodation

Very excitingly, last year we fulfilled a long-held aspect of our parish vision in appointing **Andy Kruger as our part-time youth pastor**. It took a couple of years, and some were unconvinced of the need, but it has proved to be God-directed.

Firstly in principle: Most thriving urban and suburban parishes have dedicated youth leadership, and having a youth worker is not just a fad, it is critical to the life of the church. It is usually supported not just by those with children and teenagers, but also by older members of the church; after all, who wants selfishly only to have one's adult needs taken care of, without also making provision for the current and future growth of the church which has sustained and nourished us?

We also made clear in our Parish Vision that we sought vibrancy for our parish, rather than any sense of slowly drifting off into the sunset, and that we wished to draw people of all ages and demographic sectors of our community so that our parish was a worshipping community full and rich with the variety of God's people. Having a youth pastor is integral to that in Hilton.

Moving from principle, to the person of Andy: It has been a pleasure to have you join us. You are quiet – well, not at Footsteps youth meetings or on weekend camps, but generally ☺ – and you are unassuming. You have a mature faith, are fun to be around, and in the process of enriching our spiritual lives you have blessed our congregation with your considerable God-given gifts.

Full time in 2009

When Andy joined us last August, part-time, it was made clear that he would be available for 2½ to 3 years. His plans to travel, including visiting family in Taiwan, remain unchanged. That leaves us considering the future, both for Andy and beyond.

When he finishes his Theology Honours Thesis in the middle of this year, he will make himself available to us for more hours each week, and is willing to be employed full-time in 2009, offering ministry in the wider context of the parish and not only to young people. I believe that this would bless us enormously, and be of great assistance to my ministry, but it will require the parish to find suitable accommodation for Andy and to pay the equivalent of a stipend. If the parish supports my belief that that is the right way to go, we should have no problem in achieving that.

In the longer term, I believe it is essential to make provision for those who will follow Andy. When he joined us, he was part-time and did not need accommodation because his job at Cordwalles School provided him with that. In 2009, that will no longer be the case. And the logical extension of our thinking is to say that, to ensure good continuity of this ministry, the parish needs to think creatively about that.

Needs and Vision: Being Bold

I am going to be very bold. Given the high price of land and homes generally and in Hilton, barring the permanent gift of a suitable home or cottage somewhere, I believe we need to consider building a dwelling on our existing church land that will suitably house current and future youth pastors. It will not only be a sign of commitment to the families and people of our parish, and a commitment to our growth and spiritual health, but it will also be essential if we are to attract someone of the considerable talent and gifts already experienced in Andy. Who knows? Perhaps there is even someone out there, at present unidentified, who has the wherewithal to leave this parish with such a legacy, or at least to enable us to initiate the project. Now that would be “talking vision”!

Parish Vision and Friendship:

- Comments on the Gospel passage chosen for today, John 20:24-31 states the purpose for which he wrote his Gospel, and which largely sums up our purpose as Christians and for the Church.
- Similarly, our Parish Vision includes the statement that our purpose is to encourage and nurture friendship with God and one another.[Ex tempore comments including what “friendship with God” implies...]
- We will also have opportunities in some planned sermon series, occasional presentations and public forums, to consider “burning issues” of relevance to our lives and faith.

To close...

I close by saying:

We need to keep asking:

- What are the things we are good at? Let us continue to do well in them, and not be complacent.
- What are the things we do “OK”? How do we improve on those?
- What are the things we don't do well? How can we improve them – OR – should we be doing them at all?

The purpose of establishing our vision is to answer and evaluate these questions, and to help us say: “What do we need to do, to get from where we are now, to where we believe God wants us to be?”

Within the next few months, our Parish Council will again consider these things, and we ask God to help us to apply our minds and skills and energy to this task.

Our OT Reading chosen for today, 1 Chronicles 29: 10 – 13, is a prayer of King David, of praise to God and acknowledgement of God as the Creator, Provider and Giver of all things. I end with verse 13:

“Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name.”

**NIC DENNY-DIMITRIOU
RECTOR
2 MARCH 2008**