

September 15, 2006

Dear Members of The Redeemer:

Last spring I wrote you to discuss some early stages in planning for the future of this parish. A lot of progress has taken place over the past six months, and I write now to update you on it and to anticipate the next half-year which promises to be even more productive and rewarding. Many of you have committed yourselves to making it so, and I thank God for your devotion to this church, its mission and ministries.

At the center of our spiritual and community life is our **common worship**; it gives us reason for being. As we stand before the altar of God, joining in hymns, psalms and prayers, we rediscover in our hearts the beauty of holiness and we leave that table renewed and refreshed. Our church inspires us with its remarkable qualities. And yet, it is unfinished, its altar a plywood box, its chancel unused and ungainly. A group of you worked diligently for nearly two years to help find a way to move beyond this transitional stage by providing a design that could serve us better. That group's chair, Betsy Crowell, addressed six all-parish meetings in May and June to outline the recommendations made to the Vestry. Many of you attended those sessions, and, based on the written comments returned afterwards, most found the plans well-conceived and were prepared to support our moving ahead.

The Vestry has approved the parish's retaining an architectural planner to work with us to determine where our physical plant most needs attention. Our Building Committee, chaired by Richard Halloran, will interview firms in future weeks to select one to guide us. One of the architect's charges will be to provide us with a more precise cost estimate of the space proposal, but that's only one task; the consultant will look thoroughly at each of our buildings with an eye to long-term maintenance, along with present and potential future uses. We'll be conducting a thorough analysis of space use and viability, and the result will be a master plan for our campus.

Some of you have asked for my view on the liturgical space proposal. Though the decision to or not to undertake it will be the Vestry's, I strongly support the proposed redesign of the chancel and the location of a new altar. I, too, have grown to love the interior of our church; but we have outgrown it. We cannot gather around the altar table as a family of worshippers together. We have placed a wonderfully large choir in the midst of our worship space where the altar belongs because there's nowhere else for them to go. The center of our worship is remote from those who come seeking it; clergy and people are separated. Yet our theology and church polity invite us to be one, united around the table of Christ. We have a chance to make something fully useful as well as beautiful. Will we be able to afford it? We think so, but we need to find out for sure.

Refurbishing and possibly redesigning interior spaces will become goals alongside others in a new **strategic plan**. A Planning Committee under the leadership of Leslie Boris began its work this past spring and used the summer months profitably, conducting interviews with members of the parish. Four years ago, Gary Hall called for the creation of a new plan, and many of you participated in discussions that ultimately led to *Energetic Spirits, Generous Hearts*, the document gratefully received by the Vestry in January 2003. This time the Planning Committee will build on the earlier document and the work many of you took part in, retaining some goals, giving greater specificity to others, and framing new ones. Wherever possible, the committee intends to recommend and establish priorities for the action steps needed to achieve each goal. The Vestry should receive the new plan next spring, and it will play a central role in determining how the parish moves forward during the years 2007-10.

Developing a new strategic plan is a key step in putting together a **capital campaign**. Clearly we must determine the parish's top priorities before seeking significant financial support. We must maintain our facilities, grounds and churchyard over the long term; a commitment to future generations calls for growing our endowment; we may want to renovate spaces within the church; it may even be that we should consider new construction. But what will each of these projects cost? Do we try to achieve them all in one campaign or postpone some? And what are our donors most interested in helping to achieve? These and other pressing questions will confront the members of the Campaign Steering Committee, led by Jacques Vauclain. By next spring, this group will have developed a case statement that will address these questions, and many of you will help give direction to the case for The Redeemer before it can provide the rationale for a capital drive.

None of this work is easy, but it's all important if we as a parish are to continue to develop our mission and ministries and respond to God's call to be all we can be. These next few months will be full of meetings, conversations, some hard thinking, some "knocking heads." I for one am charged up and ready to stay in the midst of it, and I hope you are too. This is a wonderful church with a great history and a fantastic group of people supporting it. Please take part; express your views, and, above all, keep praying that we'll be led by God's vision as we respond to our call to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Yours faithfully,

The Rev. Peter W. Sipple
Rector