

**Annual Report of the Senior Warden  
Church of the Nativity  
Dec. 5, 2010**

Let me begin by saying what a pleasure and privilege it has been to serve on the Vestry and as your Senior Warden in 2010.

Things at Nativity are going great. In Mother Sara we have a full-time Rector who will minister with us for an indefinite period of time. Mother Sara loves God, loves the church, and loves us. I am delighted that she is here. Among other things, Mother Sara brings experience in running a parish of this size and excellent diagnostic skills about church processes that are working – or not working. We have some of both.

Let me review 2010. Our Search Committee, chaired by Jack Holmes, has done splendid work. They deserve our admiration and support. From the outset, our search strategy has been to wait patiently for the right person to be our permanent Rector. That's the correct strategy, and we're sticking to it. Our circumstances allow us to take our time. I am absolutely confident that in the fullness of time, God will provide us the Rector that God wants us to have. In the words of the Nativity angel over there, "fear not." Our search is not a failure; it is simply not yet finished.

The arrival of a permanent Rector is some months away. Next year's Vestry will keep the search progressing to a successful conclusion. In the meantime we can use these months to improve Nativity and prepare better for the arrival of a permanent Rector. One example of many: adding photographs of every parishioner to the church membership database, so that the permanent Rector can figure out who is who.

A major objective of 2010 for the Vestry has been to finance and erect the Education Building that we are dedicating today. We don't know exactly when the city will grant an occupancy permit for the building, but furniture is on order. When everything is ready, all classes for children and youth will move to the Education Building. Adult classes will move to the trailer on the right – and we'll have room for three simultaneous adult classes.

I want to thank RJ Antonelli, who has been the Vestry's project manager for the building; our Treasurer Dave McKinnon, who worked out a sweet deal with BB&T; and the Interior Task Force led by Janet Alford, who selected the interior of the education building and also wrote a usage plan for all our buildings.

The 1993 trailer on the left has been sold and will be removed from our campus later this month. Sometime next year, the playground will be relocated to the site of the left trailer – making it easier for parents to keep their eyes on their children, and freeing up space on the north side of Estill House.

Another major objective of the Vestry in 2010 was to improve our existing facilities. Jesus calls us to exercise radical hospitality. We can't do that when our welcome mat, so to speak, is dirty and tattered. Also it's just common sense that churches aspiring to grow – as we do – should make their facilities attractive. Today we are nearly finished with renovations inside and out. We are determined to keep our four million dollars campus in good shape next year and forever.

As the Education Building opens, we are enjoying some other improvements that it makes possible. We have reallocated a classroom in Estill House with the new dual purpose of a chapel and a meeting room. A chapel in Estill House is more accessible during the week than the worship building, and on Sunday

mornings we expect Estill House to become a little quieter so that the chapel can be used for personal prayer. Other rearrangements in Estill House will continue over the coming months.

Let me turn to some concerns that I have about Nativity. Although we perceive Nativity to be a highly successful parish – and in many respects, we are -- there were statistics as far back as 2002 that our attendance and our finances were slipping. This indicates to me that Nativity does have some issues. In a healthy way these issues are coming into the light, and with the help of Father George Clifford and Mother Sara we have begun to address them.

First, we must recover an awareness that the 800 lay persons in this community can do more ministry collectively than one priest possibly can. We must reestablish the proper balance of mutual ministry between Rector and congregation. The 800 of us don't do what Mother Sara does, but on the other hand Mother Sara alone cannot do what the 800 of us are supposed to do by virtue of our baptisms.

I must confess that I'm a little frustrated that we don't have more lay leadership coming forward. It's a struggle to recruit for the Vestry, and it shouldn't be. It's a struggle to recruit committee chairpersons, and it shouldn't be. And it's not just a question of lay leadership. It's also a question of lay followers. About 20% of our members do 80% of the work. Folks, that is unfair, it is unsustainable, and it's just not what Jesus had in mind for the church.

My purpose today is not to criticize but rather to put the spotlight on areas that need it. The only risk to Nativity's future – the **only** risk -- is this 20/80 problem. If we fix it – and we can -- then this parish will do wonderful things to hasten the kingdom of God. If we do not fix it, this parish will flounder no matter who sits in the Rector's office.

I also want to warn the parish about believing that Nativity cannot move forward without a permanent Rector. Not so! A congregation our size cannot thrive if it is Rector-centric, when everything is done through the Rector's office or only at the Rector's initiative. Nativity passed beyond that stage of congregational development a long time ago. Reestablishing a strong Outreach committee, for example, is something we can do right now. With Mother Sara's help, next year's Vestry will reestablish a committee system that works and engages a much broader portion of the parish.

On occasion I still hear that Nativity has been through a lot, as though our recent past is a constraint on what we can do. It's true that we've had our challenges. I don't want to minimize them or their impact on people we love. But let's start spending much more time and energy thinking about the next 10 years than about the last 10. That's a message that comes straight from the Gospel.

Let me move on to just a few of the many areas where things at Nativity are working well. Our youth programs are strong, with classes and events throughout the year and successful trips this summer to DC and Costa Rica. Our pastoral care programs are strong.

Sadly we've had some funerals at Nativity recently. We can expect to have more of them. The folks who founded Nativity are seniors now, or soon will be. The overall demographics of Nativity are not changing; but as we have grown in size, the number of our members in their senior years has grown in proportion. This kind of anticipation and planning – for example, how to expand our Memorial Garden – is what the Vestry should be doing, while parish committees do the month-to-month work.

Our worship programs are strong. Our choir, our altar guild, our ushers and acolytes and Eucharistic Ministers all do a fine job.

I'd like to spotlight two relatively new members of our staff. Dave Metzger, our first sexton, is a tornado of activity on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. I hope you've noticed that every single light bulb inside and outside of our three buildings is working – for the first time in many years. This is just one example of what Dave does. Adding a sexton to our payroll was a great move.

Timothy Owens is now playing the organ superbly. We are so appreciative of the time and effort he has devoted to being our instrumentalist.

Before I close, I want to thank Joel Kamyra for his service as Junior Warden. Joel is a level-headed counselor who helped steer the Vestry through some turbid waters. He also used his engineering expertise to solve a long-standing problem with electrical drop-outs in Estill House.

In a few minutes, Kevin Burke – who has done a phenomenal job with Stewardship this year -- will stand in for Dave McKinnon and give the Treasurer's report. Dave is out of town today. Dave spends more hours than I can count looking after our parish finances, which have improved from dismal to solid.

Our parish clerk, Gail McNally, keeps records of everything we do – not an easy task, given how much we've undertaken this year. Thanks, Gail.

I want to thank the outgoing members of our Vestry – Helen Armstrong, Richard Judson, Melanie DuPon, and Kari Marotta – for their contributions to our community life. Congratulations for a job well done.

And to our continuing Vestry members – Jane Heyward, Kevin, RJ, and Joel – let's keep having fun. Serving on the Vestry is fun. Really!

In closing, I realize that pride is one of the seven deadly sins. Sometimes I wonder if Nativity has too much pride in our history of 25 years and should balance that pride with a little humility. Therefore I'm not proud of what I have accomplished as your Senior Warden, but I will say that it gives me a deep sense of satisfaction.

The role of Senior Warden has been a half-time job for me for 24 months. During exceptional circumstances like we've had, it's the responsibility of a Senior Warden to lead the parish. I was happy to do that. With Mother Sara's arrival, however, the role of Senior Warden is returning to its proper level of three hours a week, on average. In the coming weeks you will see me referring more matters to Mother Sara. This is another step toward normalcy.

Thanks to all of you, and especially my wife Gail, for your assistance and your encouragement this year. God bless you, and God bless this parish.

Chuck Till