

Vestry Retreat February 2003

Cultivating and Guiding Growth At St. Peter's

The Rev. Thomas W. Simmons IV

In reviewing Ted's notes and my own, it occurred to me that our retreat didn't really have a title. I propose the one above, hoping that it adequately distills the issues we were exploring, discussing, debating and praying about.

The focus of our time together was growth and how to cultivate and guide it so that the organism that is St Peter's Church thrives in all phases of it's existence.

The Organic Church

As we saw in Jesus' image of the Vine and the Branches from John 15, growth is good. It is natural for healthy organisms. The Christian organism - whether it is people, ministries or churches - grows by abiding in Jesus, by obeying his commandments, by loving one another. It's really quite simple.

A healthy Church grows naturally, and careful cultivation accelerates and directs that growth. God cultivates his vine by pruning, watering, clearing away dead branches, elevating the vine and enriching its soil. As leaders of the Church we are called to join him in that work. We are gardeners. That's what Paul talked about in our Epistle lesson from I Corinthians 6.

Jesus and Paul offer an **organic model** of the church in which we "Grow into the full stature of Christ." We are growing. Life in Christ is a process of transformation, of *becoming what we will be in Christ*, as individual people, as the vestry, as St Peter's Church. That transformation brings growth across the full spectrum of life. We grow in love, faith, community, care for each other, giving, knowledge, hospitality, ministry, strength, resources and size. Life happens. Our job as leaders is to cultivate and guide it.

Things we want to achieve

When Ted asked what we want to achieve we named some very important goals and ideals. We want a church where everyone is interconnected and loved, where we know each other, where every ministry is under-girded with prayer. We want to create a culture where we develop lifelong relationships with Christ that breed such relationships in others, a culture that empowers laypeople to engage in spiritual growth and take risks to reach out and serve.

To achieve this one of you said **we need empowered leaders** to create opportunities for real growth in Christ. The leaders need to create a legacy that is reliable and sustainable and intergenerational, grooming people to be ready to serve in the future. Another person said the vestry needs to explicitly plan and

prioritize for growth in facilities and programs.

I believe that to achieve these goals and cultivate and direct the growth of St Peter's **we as the vestry need to learn a new mindset and modus operandi**. Here are some broad strokes of a shift in how we think of and do the work of the vestry that I think we are undergoing.

Old Vestry: managers of the church organization. Mission: "Keeping the Building Open for Services." Focus:

- Managing the maintenance of the church.
- Doing the detailed business of the church.
- Reacting to problems.

Ted asked us, "Is this the best use of the talent in this room?" The vestry consensus was a clear no. Then what *is* the best use? Diane said, create an environment where there are niches and opportunities to grow and be built and serve and be Christians; to take an idea and run with it; create lots of "little bubbles". Mark said, add support structure, resources, networking and counsel so other people can do things, serve and build. Rick wants to put the structure in place, to institutionalize it for the future so it can be passed down. "People support a world they helped to create." I think these ideas point very clearly to how the "new vestry" should work.

New Vestry: leaders of the church organism. Mission: "Building Christians for Service." Focus:

- Embody, promote and implement the vision, mission and goals of church.
- Bring people on board, organize, lead, mentor and equip teams.
- Look ahead to opportunities and challenges.

Ted asked us, How does a vestry live out and exercise LEADERSHIP? Trust each other. Become accountable. Hold others accountable in leadership relationships. Diane: setting expectations, learning goals, leading so that everything we do in the church is explicitly tied to the mission. Or to use the organic image of the church, implant the DNA in every cell of the body.

Yogi Berra said, "Ninety percent of the game is half mental." It seems to me that the vestry as a whole has already made the crucial shift in mindset from the old model to the new. That's 90% of the game. But now we face the challenge of the other half. We must actually change our behavior from a Vestry that primarily manages and maintains to a Vestry that primarily leads and ministers. This will require ongoing work on our part to develop our skills for leadership and ministry, and to change our organizational culture to support our leaders and ministries.

How do we do it?

That's a question people asked several times during the retreat. We have a pretty good sense of what we want to be and do, but we're not so clear on how to get there. I'm sure we will spend years answering the "how to" question and finding, often by trial and error, what works best at St Peter's. In the points below, I offer a basic outline what I think will be necessary. Rick Newby has done some finer grain thinking on these matters, has suggested several specific processes, norms and skills that will be important in making the vestry effective in this kind of leadership. I have included them in the indented paragraphs to fill in the points of my basic outline below.

- 1) **We need to strengthen our committees**, ministries and teams to take initiative and exercise some independence in taking care of the detailed business of the church and recommending courses of action for vestry discussion/ decision when necessary. Our management style needs to be "permission giving leadership." We need to define in very practical ways the relationship between the vestry and the various committees and ministries.

Rick sees the need to articulate a vision and/or mission for each ministry team, which fulfills our mission of "Building Christians for Service". Each ministry publishes a description of its vision/mission, goals for the year, roles and responsibilities of its members, meeting dates, and training opportunities for new and present members so they know where the team is headed and what is expected.

Each ministry team develops a written annual plan that establishes priorities, SMART goals and time line and methods to track, measure and assess the progress each ministry toward their goals and report progress to the vestry. Effective time management, focus and follow-up are vital operational components of this plan.

- 2) **We need to create a culture** where committees, groups and ministry teams are effectively built around people's spiritual gifts and where every committee, team, guild and ministry of the church becomes a small group ministry where people are learning, growing, serving, being mentored and cared for and sent out for mission. In the church organism, every cell is a microcosm of the whole.

Identify the talents (gifts) and skills that are needed in each ministry to accomplish their work. Leaders recruit and motivate a team based on the gifts and talents that will be needed to accomplish the mission. Build team depth so that others will feel comfortable about moving into leadership roles and we prevent burnout of existing leaders.

- 3) **We need to develop leaders, on and off the vestry**, imbued with the vision/mission/goals of the church, equipping them with ministry and

leadership skills, offering them the means to effectively build their teams and care for and grow their people. We need a growing number of disciples who make disciples. Our goal is for leaders to replace themselves after 3 years, having raised up and mentored their successors.

Rick believes we need to gain an understanding and appreciation of the spiritual gifts, talents and passions of each vestry member. Organize the vestry to capitalize on these things so we can play to each other's strengths when there is work to be done or opportunities to capture.

Learn and apply methods for managing and overcoming problems, conflict, obstacles, and barriers on our teams. While this might not be needed right now, it will become more necessary as our numbers grow.

- 4) **We need to develop the skills of clergy, wardens and staff** to support vestry leaders in tangible ways, to assist in their development as leaders, to work with them and be a resource as they build and lead their teams.

There are many pieces to this puzzle, some of which we are putting in place now. I think Network will give us several additional pieces in the months ahead. Overall, I believe it will take a couple of years to assemble them all. As we proceed we will need some ways of measuring our progress.

Measuring Success

As we cultivate and manage the growth of our church, and transform the organizational culture what we want to **MAINTAIN** those things that give our church it's particular character and charm, like it's unlocked doors, it's pastoral sense/environment, pleasant physical environment and spiritual grounding.

As we grow we want to **AVOID**: Becoming bureaucratic, burning out our people, forgetting the simple gestures of a pastoral parish, forgetting Who's driving the growth, losing our connectedness and history, growing for growth's sake. So as we grow and change, how will we know we are achieving these aims in the next year? You all listed several measures of success for the coming year, which I have organized under the following headings to give them some clarity and cohesion.

1) Growth – We will have achieved success this year when we establish baseline numbers (that reflect where we currently are) for each category below and achieve growth (desired amount as yet undetermined) in each:

- number of parishioners
- number of people involved in ministries
- number of people trained for ministry
- number of ministries lead by non-vestry lay people
- number of education programs

- number of people tithing

2) Transformation – We will have achieved success this year when we establish the new organizational culture defined above in FOUR core ministries (as yet to be determined but certainly including the vestry). This organizational transformation should include:

- Respond to everyone who used the Time and Talent survey and help them get on board the ministries they selected.
- Each person identifying his or her gifts, passions, styles. This will mean bringing 50 people through Network formation.
- People in each ministry will be in prayerful communication and care for each other.
- Expand the number of leaders in the church from roughly 30 to 50 and provide them with basic training for ministry.
- Establish SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Reasonable, Time constrained) for each ministry and publish a description of its vision/mission, goals for the year, roles and responsibilities of its members, meeting dates, and training opportunities for new and present members so they know where the team is headed and what is expected.

3) Planning – Develop vision and plan for future growth that deals issues related to our spiritual grounding, programs for ministry and our physical plant.

You will notice that these three areas correspond roughly (2 out of 3) to the focuses of the “new vestry”. This is, of course, a partial list and one that we will amend on the fly. But it gives us a good start, a trajectory that charts our course into the coming year. It will be interesting to see where we end up. It will be fun and challenging to discover the ways in which God will do “infinitely more than we can ask or imagine according to the power at work within us. AMEN

Cut out from organic church

That's a very different vision from the more common **organizational model (or bureaucratic model)** people often have of church. In this vision we work to maintain what we have, to keep the machine running. People join committees, go to meetings, sign-up to help with projects and activities to sustain the different functions of the church. The church maintains itself and things remain stable and relatively unchanged, including the people involved.

In the organizational model people are largely interchangeable in the work of the church. A person's spiritual life and growth are often of little practical importance to the work they do. It's a private matter between them and God - and maybe the rector. The focus on people and the stimulus to growth is largely missing from this model of church. It's been my experience that the organizational model doesn't adequately engage people in the life of Christ and Christian community or build Christians for service. It doesn't achieve the things we want to achieve at St Peter's.

To Do

Acknowledge that Network conversation derailed the momentum of the discussion

Need short list of initiatives and foci to push for the year.

Can't let these things eclipse October retreat results.

Have everyone write up a report on their impressions and action items?