

A Map for a Sabbath Year Grace Episcopal Church: 2017

Fr. Stuart Higginbotham
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I believe much holy work can be shared by focusing on these three key areas of our community's life. There is much logistical, detailed, managerial work to be done in each of these areas, and there are many projects or tasks that can be explored. Yet, these three, key areas can frame the way we see ourselves in this vital time of discernment and reflection. By focusing on these core areas of Prayer, Compassion, and Belonging, we can continue to lean into this rich time of growth and exploration as the community of Grace Church.

We have truly stepped into a time and space of discernment and reflection, with our combined Campus Vision and Development Committee, Bicentennial Discernment Committee, and Vestry's work for the entire community of Grace Episcopal Church. These past three years have been a time of renewal, refreshment, orientation, and grounding. We find ourselves with strong financial health, with an empowered community who seeks to participate with God's mission in our individual lives and in the life of the community as a whole, and with an amazing amount of excitement and curiosity. Given the position we find ourselves in, this document lays out a plan for a Sabbath Year at Grace Church, a time of focused reflection and spiritual growth that will help us become more spiritually grounded and sustainable for the future.

Here are a few notes on what I see as an enormous potential we will share in 2017.

Prayer:

Those central spaces in our faith. Moments of clarity, focus, and silence. The worship we share. The music we make. The spaces we help shape and which we inhabit.

Our groundedness in God, revealing glimpses of our true identity as the Beloved Children of God—and the identity we share with all other people and with all of creation.

The liturgy that gives shape to our faith—shaping our beliefs, challenging our complacency, opening our eyes, nudging our minds to rest more and more in our spiritual heart.

The contemplative dimension of our existence. Our willingness to remain in silence, holding our curiosity as we lean more into an awareness of our deepest yearning for God—and God’s for us.

In these spaces of prayer, our spiritual imagination is awakened and we can see a wider perspective of how God is at work in the world around us. We are given new vision for how we are invited to live and move in the world.

How we seek union with God through Christ—our greatest desire and deepest meaning—by the sapiential guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Practice:

Our embodiment of Christ’s love in the world around us. The action that is empowered by and through our contemplation.

The acts of service, of mercy, of compassion that we are called to bear—and be—in a suffering world.

In our practice of faith, prayer becomes food for those who are hungry. Clothes and warmth for those who are cold. Presence for those who are lonely. Encouragement for those who are sad and lonely. We realize the truth that St. Teresa of Avila pointed to: “Christ has no hands but ours.”

Christ’s radical love—all embracing—grips us and orients us outward and onward. Forward, toward the eschatological promise of our existence: our purpose to share in the Kingdom of

Aware of our call to share in the reconciling mission of God in our world, Grace Episcopal Church desires to be a community of faith that both honors our tradition and the Spirit’s invitation to share in new, imaginative expressions of Christ’s love. We live this vision out in three core areas:

Prayer: We will ground ourselves in God’s presence, recognizing the many ways to pray through liturgy, silence, music, art, language, study, and conversation (BCP, 856).

Compassion: We will embody Christ’s love in the world around us, living into our Baptismal Covenant’s call for respect, dignity, and justice for all people and all of creation (BCP, 305).

Belonging: We will look for the charisms, the spiritual gifts, within every person in our community, remaining curious about how God is at work in our lives as we support one another and encourage a deeper maturity in our Christian faith (BCP, 845, 854).

A: The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q: How does the Church pursue its mission?

A: The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Q: Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A: The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members (BCP, 855).

It's important to see that every person in the church community has a vital role in pursuing this mission of reconciliation—the hallmark of our participation with God's dream in the world. This is why we are stressing a heightened element of participation in prayer and practice during this Sabbath Year.

In the past few months, the Bicentennial Committee has gone out into the entire community to gather images, dreams, concerns, hopes, ideas, and questions. We have met with every standing committee, working group, gathering, and ministry at Grace in an effort to get the widest and deepest perspective possible. We have prayed at the beginning of every meeting that our eyes may be opened to where the Spirit is at work. Recognizing our call to participate in the mission of reconciliation outlined above (BCP, 855), I want to offer the following as a working Vision Statement on which we can build as a parish community.

Proposed Vision Statement for Sabbath Reflection

Throughout all our conversations and notes, there have been three key components of our common life at Grace—three areas which hold enormous energy and potential for growth. Each of these areas has myriad expressions within the community as a whole, and each of them is supported and nurtured by the five existing Ministry Clusters (our administrative structure that organizes our life): Administration, Participation, Formation, Compassion, and Liturgy & Creative Expression. I believe the following might be a helpful guideline for our Sabbath Year as we discern the work we are being called to do—especially the element of spiritual evaluation with existing ministries.

God and the reconciliation of God. Our compassion is the exhale to our prayerful inhale.

Put another way: The space of music, candles, incense, and chant soaks into us—saturates us. And our hands reach out to express Christ's love to all we meet.

Sins are named: xenophobia, racism, bigotry, sexism. . . the "isms" that seep under our door like smoke, cutting off our air supply. We are empowered by and through the Holy Spirit. We are inspired.

There is a beautiful dance between our prayer and our practice. We are embraced so that we can embrace. When we embrace, we realize that we are embraced.

The Spirit breathes through us, giving us the words to speak to those who are suffering—even as we hear whispers of hope in our own ears. Our lives are filled with times of inhalation and exhalation.

We realize more and more how often we act—and live—out of fear. Fear of not having enough. Fear of not being enough. Fear of not doing enough. Fear of not being worth enough. Fear is like a gravitational force, drawing us toward a planet whose surface is always dry, dusty, dark, and depressed. No wonder the angels always begin there when they appear: "Do not be afraid." We are always called to be vigilant and watchful (*nepsis*) in order that we can truly live lives of graceful embodiment (*diakrisis*).

We look around and see so much need in the world. And we wonder what we can do. We begin to doubt that we can help in any way, and we become numb. This numbness weighs us down in resignation to "the ways things are and the way things have always been."

Yet in our hearts we still yearn for more. We yearn for more because we know it's possible. And we know we're meant for it.

What would it be like to dedicate an entire year to such a reflection on our life as a community? To give ourselves time to stretch our branches out wide and our roots down deep? To reconnect with those sources of refreshment and peace? To rest

and be renewed in our lives of faith? To cultivate a space of watchfulness and transfigured awareness so that we can more fully share in God's fierce compassion in the world around us? What would it be like to share such a Sabbath Year?

With our spaces and times of prayer:

Hold morning prayer in the chapel Monday to Thursday, 8:30 am, and Evening Prayer at 5:00 pm. Fridays and Saturdays we will commit to saying the Office at home or at work. Who would be interested in leading this?

Commit to regular participation on Sundays at the Holy Eucharist. This time is the beating heart of our entire community, and it nourishes us as we support each other. More than a mere "filling station," the Eucharist holds our hearts and helps frame the way we see the entire world.

Commit to beginning every meeting with a short prayer or a time of silence. By doing this, we will be able to see how prayer shapes the way we believe and act in the world.

Realize that the pressure of busyness will always be present. What would it be like to name this pressure when it arises and support one another in resisting it? In this way, we hold these spaces of prayer and anchor ourselves in the presence of God.

Commit to participating in opportunities for Christian Education and Spiritual Growth. As a community of faith, how can we encourage one another to become more proficient in our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, mindful of the richness of our Anglican Tradition within the broader Christian community.

With our shared practice:

Commit NOT to add any other large-scale ministry during 2017. What would it be like to give ourselves time to intentionally reflect on what we already do—what we already participate in? A spiritual evaluation of our expressions of compassion is a faithful exercise.

In this space of spiritual evaluation, how can we see the Spirit moving? Where do we feel energy? Where do we feel lethargy? Fatigue? What are we being invited to nurture? What might we be invited to bless, honor, and place on a shelf to rest for a while? How do we feel resistance to letting things go?

How can we identify the trap of seeing program maintenance as the bellwether of our faithfulness? How can we step

outside of such a space and yield more to the Spirit's guidance? How can we find a way simultaneously to give honor and gratitude to what has been done, recognize how our own egos and pride may be pinched, and yield to the Spirit's direction in our lives? What do we need to release? We remember the Wisdom Literature within the Hebrew texts: "To everything there is a season."

How can we see faithful risk and vulnerability as spiritual gifts, as marks of the Spirit's call on our lives? How do we hold one another accountable in our tendency to be complacent and self-oriented?

How can we continue to empower one another to identify pastoral needs, offer responsible care and support, and encourage a holy accountability as a spiritual community?

How might this year be an opportunity for us all to delve further into a holy participation with God: as individual people, as families, as a parish community?

How can we reorient ourselves away from being passive participants in the life of the community to being active and engaged disciples seeking to support one another as we continue to grow in our practice of faith (again, the holy interplay between *nepsis* and *diakrisis*, what our ancient Christian tradition calls a transfigured awareness and an discerned judgment)?

Prayerful Connections to the Bicentennial Discernment Work:

With the continued work of the Bicentennial Discernment Committee, we have reached a point where we are narrowing down to the core vision points of our community—those ideas, spaces, thoughts, dreams, hopes, and challenges that we are being invited to explore more deeply. From a contemplative point of view, these areas are where the Spirit might be at work. They are spaces where our energy is heightened, our attention is hooked. They are areas of growth. We are always discerning those parts of ourselves that want to see these things "accomplished," versus participating with the Spirit's call on the life of this community.

Since 1979 at least, with the arrival of the revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*, the mission of the Church has been outlined in the Catechism as follows:

Q: What is the mission of the Church?