

January 7, 2010

Dear Fellow Members of St. Mary's,

Our Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 24, in the parish hall, immediately following the 10:00 AM service. The Vestry will again host a brunch prior to the Annual Meeting, and child care for babies and a crafts project for children in K-3 will be offered between 11:30 AM and 1:00 PM. On behalf of the Vestry, I am providing the Junior Warden's report in advance so that you may have time to read, reflect and pray on its contents prior to this very important Meeting.

***2009 Parish Financial Summary***

Although a final accounting has not been completed as of the date of this letter, it is safe to say this was another challenging year, reflecting the continuing economic stresses on virtually all of our parishioners. For the first time in my five years of service, the Vestry was forced to reduce our 2009 operating budget by \$16,000 to \$360,400. After careful and prayerful consideration, staff salaries were held flat and modest reductions were made in other ministries, including Outreach and Christian Education. Our expenses were supported through budgeted member pledges of \$245,000 (a 6% decrease from 2008), contributions from the endowment of \$73,200 (a 5% increase from 2008), and income from other sources, primarily from the rental of our facility to the Hills and Falls pre-school and other groups.

We hope that the remaining outstanding pledges for 2009 will be received prior to the closing of the books and the report to the Annual Meeting.

Under Jon Hayden's dedicated and able leadership, the Property Committee has exercised careful discretion and sound judgment in prioritizing the necessary maintenance of our historic property, including the unplanned renovations to the rectory during the interim period following Peter Chase's retirement at the end of May. Thanks to Jon's creative solutions, including many hours of volunteer help by parish members, and vigilant contract management, the impact of this unanticipated work to our budget has been modest. A goal for 2010 and beyond is to establish a reserve fund dedicated to the maintenance of our beloved historic properties.

The Vestry and Investment Committee continued a best-practice model to determine the contribution from the endowment as a percentage of the three-year rolling average of the market value of unrestricted assets. For 2009 this percentage was unchanged at 4.5%, or \$73,176. Notwithstanding the current market conditions, our endowment can support this level of disbursement while still allowing the principal to grow at a rate exceeding the projected inflation rate. This conservative contribution from the endowment enables St. Mary's to maintain our historic property and to support programs deemed important to the congregation, in particular our music and Christian Education programs, especially for the parish youth.

### *2009 Progress and Successes*

In hindsight, the "we" theme of my remarks to the 2009 Annual Meeting seem prescient in light of the unexpected timing of Peter Chase's decision to retire as our Rector effective May 31. Under Paul Pyzowski's exceptional leadership, St. Mary's has continued this crucial tradition of a "we" congregation as we adjusted our sails to meet the winds of change. Our priorities as a healthy spiritual community have focused on a wide range of activities to insure a smooth and successful transition. Following a special Vestry meeting on March 24 with The Reverend Cynthia Hubbard, Diocesan Canon for Transition Ministry and Clergy Deployment, the Wardens and Vestry began the important work of identifying and recruiting an Interim Priest as well as commissioning a Search Committee, headed by Vivian Brocard, a search professional and former Warden, and planning for an appropriate farewell to Peter and his family. Bishop Bud Cederholm's previously scheduled visit to St. Mary's followed on March 29 when he met with both the parish and the Vestry.

With the valuable guidance of Cynthia Hubbard, the Vestry hosted an all-parish Appreciative Interviews program on June 7 with members of all ages to identify "who we are at our best and help to clarify the direction in which God may be calling us to move." At a Vestry/Search Committee retreat on June 12 and 13, the results of the Appreciative Interviews were distilled as the basis for the final parish profile used in the search process. At its April meeting, your Vestry voted to call The Reverend Ms. Margaret Schwarzer to become our Interim Priest, starting on a part time basis on June 1 and becoming full time on September 1. The Reverend Gwen Buehrens provided pastoral continuity and led our worship services during the month of June while Margaret was completing her prior assignment as an Interim Priest at Christ Church, Andover.

Under the leadership of Lucille Rossignol, a festive and celebratory series of events was scheduled for the month of May, including a pizza and ice cream party for youth of all ages at the home of Sarah and Mark Williamson on May 17 following another impressive Junior Choir presentation at Babson Night. After Peter's final service on Pentecost Sunday, May 31, Peggy Scott and Kitty Smith coordinated a lovely champagne brunch during the coffee hour in addition to our usual Pentecost celebration of birthday cakes to commemorate the birth of the Church. That evening there was a cocktail reception at the home of Lucille Rossignol and Paul LaViolette with a special musical presentation by the Adult Choir, including creative lyrics composed by Rosemary Halloran and Dick

Heidlage. In keeping with Diocesan practice, the parish collected a generous free will offering (“purse”) to present to Peter and Abbie in appreciation for his 17 years of valued service as Rector of St. Mary’s. Lucille has begun presenting parishioners with a DVD chronicling Peter’s time with St. Mary’s and including messages from parish members.

As previously mentioned, the Property Committee has begun the necessary renovations to the Rectory in addition to other critical maintenance of the church. Notwithstanding the cost-saving solutions for the rectory improvements, the costs are far more than St. Mary’s can afford from normal annual income. In this context the Property Committee and Vestry have continued to assess in detail other major, long delayed property projects. As outlined in the Senior Warden’s letter of November 25, these projects include heating system renovations, a fire suppression (sprinkler) system and a sound system for the sanctuary. This assessment continues and will be addressed at a special Vestry meeting on January 12 in preparation for our very important Annual Meeting on January 24.

Margaret Schwarzer continues to do an outstanding job as our Interim Priest and has quickly become an integral part of our spiritual life and faith community. Her enthusiasm, support and experience have been invaluable as we address other important ministries at St. Mary’s. Kirsten Johnson and the Adult and Junior Choirs have offered varied and exceptional music throughout the liturgical year as well as Special Music events, including the annual visit of Peter Lea-Cox, an exquisite Taizé Evensong and joyful music during Advent and at two Christmas Eve services. As identified in the Appreciative Interviews, Isabel Phillips and Jeffrey Hughes have led the expansion and restructuring of our Christian Education and Formation to nurture all ages. Jeffrey provided valuable instruction to our group of six confirmands who participated in the Deanery confirmation on May 16 at Grace Church, Newton. Jeff continues to lead the Middle School Sunday School classes at 9 AM on Sundays. Working closely with Margaret, Isabel Phillips, Interim Director of Christian Education, has taught grades 4 and 5 in their 9 AM Sunday classes while also introducing the Godly Play curriculum to our K-3 classes who share their worship time with the 10 AM service and then leave the sanctuary for Sunday School. Isabel also led the children and youth in an inspiring and lovely Children’s service on November 8 and presented a spiritual and joyful Christmas pageant on a very snowy December 20 service. Our older youth have participated in Deanery Middle School outings this fall and under the leadership of Alicia Bowman and Maryjane Burgess in the Diocesan *B-Safe* program this summer as an extension of our active outreach ministry. Of course, none of our work would be accomplished without the invaluable behind-the-scenes support of Denise Flanagan, our Administrative Assistant.

Both the Women of St. Mary’s and the parish Outreach Committee have continued to allocate resources to charitable organizations and causes locally and abroad. In addition to the *B-Safe* participation, we have also provided in-kind support to *Cradles to Crayons* and to *Rosie’s Place*. Last month our Senior Warden, Paul Pyzowski, traveled again to El Salvador to mark the first anniversary

of the new church building for Santa Maria Virgen. His visit was especially important to carry St. Mary's support of our sister parish in the aftermath of tragedies from both gang violence and widespread flooding. St. Mary's parishioners also received priceless handmade Christmas cards from the children at Santa Maria Virgen.

Frequent communications with the parish have been essential during this transition period, and we are indebted to Paul Pyzowski for the numerous update letters as well as the attractive and always current website. This year we want to expand our communications to be more interactive and would welcome any suggestions from the parish on preferred methods.

Our Search Committee continues to work tirelessly and diligently to identify and attract our next Rector. The initial response of over 50 applications has now been narrowed to a group of 7 with confidential and consistent interviews and consideration. Please keep this group and their work in your daily prayers.

### ***Proposed Budget for 2010***

At this writing, the proposed budget for 2010 has not yet been finalized. As noted previously, we face significant financial and budget challenges as we deal with the effect of a "no jobs recovery" from a multi-year recession, the recurring expenses of supporting our ministries and maintaining our historic property. In addition, we must plan for search related expenses and relocation expenses for our new Rector. Committed pledge income for the year is currently approaching \$200,000, which is still only 75% of last year's reduced pledge income.

The importance of stewardship can never be underestimated, especially in light of the lingering recession and the one-time extraordinary expenses related to the Rector search and relocation. We are indebted to Julia de Peyster and Stewart Tucker who have provided creative, thoughtful and consistent leadership to our annual pledge campaign. To all who have responded in this difficult economic environment, we express our deepest gratitude.

*If you have not yet returned your pledge card, please give this your prayerful consideration as every pledge is especially critical to carry out the work of St. Mary's. Pledge income represents over 70% of our **normal** operating revenue, not including this year's extraordinary expenses. If you need a new pledge card, please contact the church office or Julia de Peyster, Stewardship Committee Chair, at (617) 905-8568.*

### ***A Look to 2010 and Beyond***

With the beginning of a new decade, St. Mary's continues its stewardship of a healthy and vibrant parish with caring, committed members. We are grateful for the exceptional talents, dedication and efforts of our Vestry, our Interim Priest, our Search Committee, our Property, Investment, Outreach and Stewardship Committees, our Treasurer and Financial Secretary, as well as the Women of St. Mary's, our exceptional music program and our burgeoning Christian Education and youth activities.

Given the amazing final year of the past decade and the recommitment to a “we” congregation, we have great expectations of successfully meeting the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We have long been a lay-led parish, and there are many needs and opportunities for service. In the near future we will be highlighting the various ministries that make St. Mary’s a wonderful faith community and inviting your participation and involvement. All of this paves the way for the next significant phase of our development – the preparation for our 200<sup>th</sup> celebration in 2013. I believe that our forebearers would approve of our progress to date and our commitment to moving forward with new members and relevant ministries while preserving the best of what they have provided us. This is the job of *all* of us, with God’s help and guidance.

***Other Highlights of 2009:***

The following events were also key in adjusting our sails in the face of change:

- A joyful summer ice cream social to close out the school year
- A successful “Welcome Back BBQ” for both old and new members on a beautiful September afternoon, complete with a magician for the young and young at heart
- Continuing enhancements to our website, including a frequently updated blog to keep all informed of recent and upcoming activities, current photographs of all parish activities and posting of the approved monthly Vestry minutes
- Another successful Foods ‘n’ Fancies bazaar which provides significant funds for outreach activities
- Acolyte training and additional support and involvement from valuable parent volunteers
- Frequent publication of our *Good News* to prompt us to think beyond the day to day and to enrich and challenge our spiritual thinking

The Junior Warden’s report is not intended to be comprehensive in its review of the many activities of St. Mary’s. Again, I encourage you to attend the Parish Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 24 following the 10:00 AM service where we will:

- Vote on critical business of the parish, including a resolution to delegate authority to the Vestry to elect the new Rector on behalf of the parish in accordance with Article VII of the By-Laws;
- Approve the 2010 budget;
- Elect Vestry and Committee members and other officers of the parish; and
- Thank the retiring Senior Warden and Vestry members.

Yours in Christ,

Mary Green  
Junior Warden