

**Annual Meeting**  
**February 24, 2012**  
**Sheri Benninghoven, Senior Warden**

I have to tell you that I've been thinking about this moment for quite a long time. Last April, I visualized this moment and thought: how are we going to be able to look back on this. And as each month passed and we faced challenge after challenge, I kept wondering. And I have to say that to some degree I'm still not quite sure how to think about the year 2012 at All Saints.

As I was giving this some thought, I ran across the opening lines of a book we all know well and it seemed to be on point:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,  
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,  
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,  
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,  
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,  
we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,  
we were all going direct to Heaven,  
we were all going direct the other way--

I don't know how Charles Dickens looked ahead 150 years, but he seems to have put his finger on All Saints in 2012.

It does seem to me, now with a bit of time having passed, that it's become less about *what* happened to us last year, and a much more about *how we responded*.

You not only remained steadfast in your commitment to All Saints, in many respects we all realized that it's not the Rector that defines us. It's not the clergy who give us purpose and reason to come together. It's our love of God, of this beautiful place, of our appreciation for one another, and our resilience to gather, week after week, in this amazing church.

You gathered on Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and Thursdays, on Sundays to sit, shoulder-to-shoulder, despite the storms that battered us. And I think we should all be immensely proud of ourselves.

I had lunch with a friend of this parish a few weeks ago. Most of you know Gordon Hess – he's a retired psychotherapist in town, an ordained Presbyterian minister, and also a friend of the Diocese as he was the counselor to Episcopal clergy. He helped All Saints last Spring when we held a series of healing forums.

Gordon asked how we were doing, in that gentle and loving way he has. I began to list what was going on, programs and projects, and some of the other measures. He said, "You know, the very roots of All Saints could have come right out of the ground last year." He said he's seen it time and time again. And I've had many of you tell me stories from your previous parishes that some tragedy or conflict caused attendance and giving to dwindle to virtually zero. There was a visitor here last week who told a story very much like our story of last year. From 300 worshippers on Sunday their 100 year old church actually closed.

Well, we didn't close. And it's because so very many of you said "we're going to keep going because it's our home." Some of you didn't always like everything that transpired, but you continued to come home.

Many, many of you, in fact, stood up and helped carry all of us.

- **Syd**, our new head usher breathed life into that ministry and each usher became the face of God to every one of us

- **Daphne** stepped in to lead the Altar Guild after an amazing run by Alice Scott to head that team of women who are the heart and soul of our church
- **Outreach** continued to help those in need locally and around the world in life-changing ways
- We maintained a robust **formation** program for children and adults, including a highly popular adult class lead by a renowned profession of religion from **Westmont**
- The **Family Feast** continued as did our Sunday School, with up to 30 young Christians coming
- We heard the continuation of a world-class music effort that filled our sanctuary with glory every week
- Sundays saw **current and former Bishops**, as well as an array of clergy voices remind us that we were cared for by those outside our parish and which gave us strength during some difficult times
- Our **Parish School** has grown in programming and attendance
- Children's **pageant**
- **Megan**: acolyte
- **Eddie and Adrienne**
- **Tom Mack** led the Investment Committee; you kept your eye on the ball to provide excellent oversight of our funds
- **George Ittner** and the Budget and Finance Committee monitored every incoming and outgoing dollar and – incredibly – achieved 100 percent of the spending plan we put into place a year ago – even with all the unknowns of the year!
- The **Buchanans** led the Heritage Society and celebrated an increase in membership
- We rehabilitated the **Rectory**
- We maintained our **Friendship Center** ministry by upgrading the building we provide to them
- **Eventide** attendance remained strong with nearly 30-40 in attendance on a regular basis
- We launched a **new newsletter** in the service bulletin

- We regularly saw 100-plus attend our regular **Parish Socials**, at which we came together as a family, as families do
- We oversaw the development of plans by our own parishioners to remodel the interior of the **sanctuary** to provide access for all to Eucharist, to add a columbarium and made plans for a new organ;
- And on and on and on.

The roots of All Saints are indeed strong and deep.

As we move from a look back to a look ahead. We have a lot to focus on. One thing I'm absolutely sure of is that the best way to attract a new Rector who is skilled and vibrant and all we hope for is to continue the momentum begun over the past few months, including mission trips to New Jersey and Haiti and of the robust array of ways we change the world through our work at All Saints. So here's my challenge to us all while our search is under way:

- Be a welcoming church to children and families. This means we happily enjoy and invite children into the sanctuary and truly focus and embrace this vital aspect of our Christian calling.
- Warmly welcome newcomers and re-establish a culture of hospitality to everyone who visits us.
- We proceed with the remodeling plans so imaginatively laid out this past year by Jock Sewall and a team of parishioners to provide much better handicapped access, build a columbarium – what we're calling a Memorial Chapel -- inside the sanctuary, upgrade our lighting and sound systems and get our aging organ replaced.
- That we go off to other places, whether down the road or across the world to help others. In addition to the many Outreach projects we support financially, we are building a school in Haiti: you need to go on

these Outreach missions because they will change *your* life as well as help those in need.

- And finally, we all need to revisit our own personal checkbook as that is the clearest sign of our commitment to God and a spiritual journey. From personal experience, I can absolutely guarantee that as your giving to All Saints grows, so will your relationship with God.

I have some thanks to send to some very special people. Your vestry really did accomplish a great deal in the past year – they worked hard and they desert a tremendous amount of appreciation from us all for their dedication during some of the most challenging times that a parish can face.

I would like to send a very special thank you to our truly amazing All Saints staff. You would be amazed at the large and small steps they take each day, every day, in our service. It's the work of our staff that helped to keep us together this past year: Steve, Robbie, the Rev. Ann, Anne, Miguel, Cynthia, Padric, Leslie. Thanks to each of you from the bottom of our hearts.

We also offer a sincere and heartfelt thank you to Father Bob for joining us on this journey. In a very short span, you've touched us with your grace and given us the strength to carry forward. We are immensely grateful you accepted the call to be with us.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Junior Warden Chip Nichols for the countless hours and the thousands of emails and a huge heart he showed to us all this year. You'll never know how dedicated Chip is to our church and all the effort he put into stabilizing the ship. Finally, I have to thank my husband, Don, for being the patient and loving man he is.

Finally, I send to each of you my thanks for the opportunity to have been of service.

May God continue to bless us all.