



24 January 2010

Greetings, St. Stephen's Family...

This packet of information will prepare you for our annual Budget Review Meeting today, and the Annual Parish Meeting on January 31<sup>st</sup>. I encourage you to attend and participate in both meetings. Along with the proposed budget for 2010, you'll also find enclosed several summary reports from our ministry teams, along with the minutes from the 2009 Annual Meeting.

Looking back on my fourth year as Sr. Warden, this past year has been a relatively calm, but certainly eventful year at St. Stephen's, most notable for our hugely successful fund-raising season, the proceeds from which are critical to our continuing inreach and outreach efforts.

As the "Rector's Warden", perhaps my favorite milestone of the year occurred on Christmas Eve, when Fr. Curtis celebrated his third anniversary with St. Stephen's. I'm grateful for his leadership, friendship, and pastoral care of us all.

I'm also reminded of how well we manage St. Stephen's financial needs, year in and year out, not to mention the needs of the Diocese, which we faithfully support by committing to providing 100% of our fare share. Our annual stewardship season was fruitful, despite the fiscally challenging times we are living in.

Membership on the Vestry is largely unchanged for this coming year, with the notable exception of Katie Jones, who has agreed to step into the role of Jr. Warden for 2010.

We're all grateful for Virginia Pearson's continuing dedication to the Clerk position, and many thanks to Barbara Barr for agreeing to carry on as our Treasurer, and for always making the budgeting process seem so effortless. Sabra Welch has graciously accepted another one-year appointment to the Vestry as an at-large member. As I noted last year, Sabra (and Daniel's) dedication to the needs of the building and grounds, as well as our many fundraisers, is simply extraordinary. Continuing on the Vestry, in addition to yours truly, is at-large member Martha Booth who has agreed to extend her tour of duty for an additional year.

Thanks also to our continuing Diocesan Convention Delegates and Alternate: Margaret Porter (and her husband), Connie Mitchell, and Sue Gilmore. Double thanks go to Sue for her superior service as our Pledge Secretary.

Thanks to all of you for everything you do for St. Stephen's, and for your support of me, as we head into 2010.

Cheers and Peace,

Chris Porter  
Sr. Warden

### **Rector's Report for 2009**

In my third year as your pastor we celebrated a wonderful life together that is truly reflected in the other reports for our annual report. There has been the weekly worship, choir, fundraising meetings and events, vestry meetings, worship team meetings, and important improvements to our church and property.

One of the hardest things for me is to constantly balance the demands of my life as your rector, my day job in Emergency Management, my home life with Doug, and the care of my parents. I must say that I am driven to prayer out of pure necessity! But in all the busyness I still experience such great joy in our little fellowship! I see how each of you care for one another, care for the parish, reach out in the community, spend hours of service in worship and chores and meetings and rehearsals! Each little offering in itself seems, I'm sure, not too much, but the end result is truly more than the sum of its parts.

We also weathered the first intense year of the economic recession. We have held our breath as President Obama came into his position with so many challenges. It has not been an easy year for the country on many fronts. St. Stephen's has had a more difficult year financially, but we have weathered the storm so far. I and the Vestry deeply appreciate everyone's commitment to their pledge and their faithful pledging for the current year. The Parish Guild, under the able coordination of Connie Mitchell, did an amazing job at raising money for the parish and our outreach efforts in 4 fundraisers that were wildly successful in a year for which we had modest expectations.

Once again we had some happy and sad occasions. The very first service of the new year was a Morning Prayer service presided over by our Lay Eucharistic Minister, George Booth, when I was ill. George, Lucinda, Grace and Yvonne have been such a tremendous strength of this congregation and we don't appreciate them nearly enough. Grace Holden moved out of the parish this year and we miss her special presence at the altar. We were pleased to host the bishop with us on Easter Sunday and felt honored by his presence. We have had some wonderful celebratory gatherings with fabulous food as usual! And just before Christmas we had a wonderful and humorous pageant of the Christmas story that involved both young and old.

We lost our dear parishioners Bill Johnson and Eva Pollard this year and miss them dearly. In the theme of the circle of life, we also had 2 baptisms: Damien Salvi and Landon Laurent, which gave us a chance to celebrate new life. We also celebrated the blessing of the union of Pat Kelly and her newly beloved Wilbur Signuer.

Thanks to George and Chris and Fayth Noyes we also installed the new wooden cross on top of the church, with a smaller one for the top of the vestibule entry just installed this month. Dan Welch, Wes Jones, and Ben Jones all did a great job at refurbishing the vestry room under the able direction and shopping skill of Sabra Welch. I am truly grateful for the new room!

My special thanks go the Vestry for all their work over the year that helps sustain the parish in our life and ministry. I am grateful too for Keith and Katie Belanger and for their wonderful ministry of music in our parish. I also want to express my thanks to the Reverends John Allen, Karen Maleri, Cheryl Moore, and Mary Beale who have been gracious in providing leadership in worship when I have taken time off.

Finally, I want to remind us all that when our lives seem tough, I hope we remember how lonely and difficult are the lives of our men and women in the armed services serving in Iraq and Afghanistan—and to remember to pray for them and their families.

Fr. Curtis  
January 2010

### **PARISH LIFE GUILD REPORT St. Stephen's Annual Meeting 2009**

Once again St. Stephen's has pulled together to raise money for our church and our community in these hard times. I can't say it too often: what a great bunch of talented people make up our church family! Your creativity and dedication serve us well.

We had a busy and successful fund-raising season, adding and expanding new attractions that were great hits like the bigger-than-ever Silent Auction, and the addition of George's pulled pork sandwiches to our café menu. The results were as follows:

- June – Town-wide Yard Sale \$2065
- July – Old Home Day summer fair \$3250
- August – Balloon Rally catered dinner \$1035
- November – Holiday fair \$3260

After deducting expenses, we had net proceeds of \$8760 to disburse, \$2400 of which has been distributed thus far by the Outreach Team for organizations serving the needy. The rest of the funds are not as yet designated. St. Stephen's is facing a challenging year financially, so we may need to use some of our proceeds for IN-reaching to support our own church needs, in addition to contributing to outreach projects through the Diocese and national church.

What would parish life be without social occasions where we can just enjoy each other? Besides our monthly parish family coffee hours, we threw a reception for the Bishop when he visited in the spring; we worshiped and picnicked together at the Argue

Recreation Area to celebrate the end of summer; and we celebrated the Christmas season with a potluck brunch in December. We also came together to honor the important life events of church members, hosting collations in support of family and friends

Thanks to you all for contributing your gifts to our church life, whether with your time, talents, or contributions in cash or kind. Know that all those gifts, in whatever form they take, are the threads that weave together our parish life as we reach out to each other and our community to share the joy of walking with our Lord.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Mitchell

Team Leader

### **OUTREACH COMMITTEE REPORT St. Stephen's Annual Meeting 2009**

The members of St. Stephen's continue to be active at many levels in reaching out to the community in the spirit of Christ, sharing our time, talent and treasure with those in need.

Our fund raising efforts included the Town Wide Yard Sale, Old Home Day, and the St. Stephen's Holiday fair, resulting in the contribution of \$2400 (thus far) in aid to local food pantries and other agencies, as follows:

Pittsfield food pantry	\$300 (up from \$200)
Northwood food pantry	\$300 (up from \$200)
Strafford food pantry	\$300 (up from \$200)
Chichester food pantry	\$300 (new this year)
Brock Children's Home	\$100
Heifer Project	\$50 (up from \$40)
ERD Micro Credit for Women	\$150
Pittsfield Youth Group	\$100
Pittsfield Police Dept.	\$100
Pittsfield Fire Dept.	\$100
CATCH Neighborhood Housing	\$100
Lutheran Social Services	\$100

Fr. Curtis' Discretionary Fund will be reimbursed \$100 for a contribution in that amount made to the CHIPS program. Total contributions: \$2400.

Agencies mentioned for future consideration were: New England Teen Challenge, the Share program, and NH Disaster Assistance Fund. George Booth will follow up on these.

The members of the St. Stephen's community reached out to help a local family struck by tragedy by providing a base for emergency operations. Others have volunteered to help out at the cold-weather emergency shelter in Concord, or are assisting individuals in the community who have come on hard times.

We have been supplying home-cooked meals for a family coping with the challenges of living with illness. We collected toys for children of inmates of the NH Prison, and lots of winter outerwear in our annual Sox Box for distribution to those in need of warm clothes. And, of course, we contributed monthly to the local food pantries.

Respectfully submitted,

George Booth

### **SUNDAY SCHOOL REPORT St. Stephen's Annual Meeting 2009**

After the 2008 holiday season, Sunday School was challenged by very low participation. It was difficult to plan and execute a program as we moved into late spring with so few children participating in the offerings.

In the fall, Fr. Curtis expressed his concern that the needs of the young members of our community were not being addressed, and asked that the program be restructured to be more accessible to the children. A new child-sized table was purchased and another child-sized table and chairs donated. The program space was moved into the back part of the undercroft to use the existing facilities for instruction.

A program was quickly developed that considered the fluctuation in attendance experienced in a small parish. The content was designed to help the children to participate in the service upstairs as well as teach them about our religious beliefs. Everyday examples from the children's experience with friends, family, teammates and classmates are used to help them understand how to put our Christian principals into practice.

To keep interest up a wide variety of craft projects were presented at which most ages could be successful. Older children were given more complex projects or asked to help a younger child. As a result, the crèche has some handmade pieces created by members of the Sunday School. All families received an Advent Calendar and a storybook based on a trip to Bethlehem to prepare for Christmas. All the children had fun participating in the pageant. We hope to continue this type of activity throughout the church year.

Special thanks go to Charlotte Berry and Fayth Noyes for helping with the new program this fall on rather short notice. Very special thanks go to Katie Belanger for her efforts last year balancing both Sunday School and the music program.

We are ready for the ongoing challenge to provide a good program through the Winter and Spring, and to providing resources for families during the summer to continue our appreciation of God's World.

Respectfully submitted,

Sabra Ann Welch

### **2009 Adult Book Study Group**

We began in the spring with another of Barbara Brown Taylor's books – *Altar in the World*. This book was about the everyday human experience and finding the divine in all things. It provided lots of good discussion. During the summer, we read a very different type of book, the bestselling novel, *The Shack* by William Young. There were very mixed feelings in our group about this book. Some found it riveting and inspirational; others found it simplistic and shallow. Finally, we ended the year with Caren Goldman and William Dols' *Finding Jesus, Discovering Self*. Despite some initial hesitation, many in the group were pleasantly surprised with how well it worked for discussion. The two authors offered diverse perspectives and the chapter formats, especially the *Mirrors* sections, provided something for everyone to reflect on and enjoy.

Bernie Cameron

### **BUILDING AND GROUNDS REPORT St. Stephen's Annual Meeting 2009**

St. Stephen's has again accomplished several important upgrades to our building and surrounding area in the past year. The primary interior project for 2009 was the renovation of the robing room or vestry. Wes Jones and Daniel Welch accomplished this task in the destruction/construction phase. Virginia Pearson was in charge of the painting. Sabra Welch, in her Ministry of Shopping role, was the project manager. The re-fit cost less than \$350. Daniel also re-fitted the missing piece of chestnut in the altar area, completing the space. The vestry room door was removed and saved to provide additional pieces of chestnut should another repair be needed.

George Booth found a way to safely and securely install the large cross to the roof. He had a friend come with a heavy bucket truck and on one non-rainy Saturday morning placed the cross on the peak. He had many spectators as he worked high above the ground and photos of his work were included in the *Suncook Sun* the following week. Great work, George, and thank you!

With the walkway to the undercroft completed in September 2008, we discovered during our Town-wide Yard Sale fundraiser that the lawn in the lower portion of the property

needed to be graded and re-seeded. The disruption of the construction and years of driving over the area made the lawn just off the walkway a walking hazard. Since we planned to use the space for many summer activities, we needed to fix the problem. The rainy June and early July delayed the project, but Daniel Welch, with expert advice from Frank Volpini, managed to complete the project in time for Old Home Day.

Ben Jones came home after graduating from university with a degree in Forest Engineering to help us with the trees in the back of the property. He, along with his dad, Wes, and Daniel Welch, trimmed all the storm damage, identified potential problem branches, and trimmed out all the trees in front and back. Our back-door neighbor was very grateful. A big thank you to Ben and Wes for their work and for hauling away all the debris.

There were several smaller tasks that needed to be completed. George Booth volunteered his time and expertise to refinish the railing along the front ramp. He also managed to find several dry hours to get this task done. The undercroft doors were repainted by Virginia Pearson. The doors now look new. Daniel Welch found that, due to a design flaw, many of the kneelers were in need of repair. He repaired those that had become loose or where screws had dislodged themselves. After our fall clean-up day, lots of leaves fell and collected by the undercroft doors. Thanks to Rob Welch, who cleared that area more than once, especially before our Holiday fund raiser.

We had two successful Blue Jean Sunday clean-up days. The yard was cleared of debris, new plants added to the gardens and pruning of the cherry tree was accomplished. We also cleared and cleaned closets in the undercroft and sorted the treasures we had saved from previous 'sales'.

A big thank you to all our cleaning volunteers who work throughout the year to keep us clean and bright. We had one small problem with water overflow from the sink in the sacristy. The drain is disconnected during the winter to prevent the outflow pipe from freezing. Christmas Eve it was discovered that someone had used the sink and did not pay attention to or empty the bucket under the outflow drain. This caused a minor flood in the Sacristy that was caught early, and did not apparently damage the ceiling tiles in the undercroft. All cleaners and altar guild members who work in the Sacristy should check the bucket and empty it if there is water in it.

We have one on-going project started this year, which needs to be completed—the re-sealing of the front ramp. We were hampered by the very wet spring and early summer and then overtaken by scheduled events. I hope that we will get this task completed this summer.

On January 12, 2010, George Booth installed the small cross over the front entrance. George carved the smaller cross and it was painted to match the large one. It was a cold windy afternoon but George was determined to get the project completed. Thanks, again, George!

There are two new projects (that I am aware of) to consider for 2010. One of these is a "do-it-yourself" project to clear and re-fit the sacristy, and the other is to increase the

usable storage in the walk-in closet under the stairs. In the sacristy, the ceiling tiles need to be refreshed, a new light fixture with appropriate hardware installed, a new step into the room made, the walls need to be refurbished (washing with oil soap and the evaluated for further care), and an evaluation made of the storage use in the room. The under-stairs storage area needs a clearing out of the materials stored there, the addition of a light fixture to the back part of the closet, and the construction or placement of strong storage shelves.

In the past, we had a Buildings & Grounds committee who would help to make repairs or act to get repairs made. There has not been an active group for a few years. It would be helpful to have a reactivated committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Sabra Ann Welch

Vestry member, Building and Grounds