

The following letter was distributed to the Bethesda (Palm Beach) congregation by the Interim during November, 2009. Even though a 1990s evaluation by an independent agency had been conducted at the request of the vestry and was highly critical of the rector's performance, no effective accountability/remediation was forthcoming. About ten years later, results of the vestry's negligence is evident in the letter below.

Dear Friends:

Given the Sunday morning schedule, the full calendar of events during the week, and the high costs of a postal mailing, it has been a challenge to keep everyone abreast of the progress of the Vestry Plan to restore financial stability to the parish. To review the plan, the main points are: 1) a balanced budget by 2013 with a budget cap of \$2.5 million dollars for 2010; 2) a reduction of spending through cost savings, staff reductions, and reconfiguring staff positions for greater productivity; 3) a substantial increase in giving from the members and friends of Bethesda; 4) an endowment policy which will place all future unrestricted bequests and legacies in an endowment fund. The final draft of the endowment policy is in the hands of the Vestry and will be voted on at the December 15, 2009 meeting.

Much has been done in the last eight months to reduce costs. However, given the reality of an annual million dollar deficit, these savings have not been enough. Hence, we have had to face the painful reality of reducing staff. Here, as in the business world, downsizing means the loss of valuable employees and an increase in the workload of those who remain. These decisions are particularly difficult in a church setting.

Some facts regarding staff reductions are: 1) The decisions were based entirely on the positions and not the value or performance of the people in those positions. 2) Many of the tasks performed by former staff are being assigned to volunteers, thus expanding the lay participation in the overall ministry of the parish. 3) Since May 2009, seven full time staff positions have been eliminated and one part time position, Youth Coordinator, will not be refilled.

With regard to the clergy staff positions, Fr. Van Culin has accepted a call to serve at St. John's Cathedral in Denver. The position of Associate for Christian Education will not be refilled.

· The clergy staff now consists of two year-round priests: the Interim Rector and Associate.

· There are two seasonal Assisting Priests whose stipends have been funded by special gifts outside of the regular budgeting process.

· There are two Deacons who serve Bethesda, one of whom receives a stipend.

Part of the Vestry Plan includes reorganizing and reconfiguring the staff. One part-time full charge bookkeeper has been added in the past two months. There are two other positions planned. Immediately, we will add a junior administrative position to provide administrative assistance to the senior associates. This person will have outstanding skills in computer systems and software management, a major need at this time. In addition, churches comparable to Bethesda have a development officer as part of their regular staff. This position will be in the budget for 2010. A timeline for hiring has not been set.

I realize there may be differing opinions, however, it is my standing policy not to hire members of the parish for full-time positions. I understand that church is not a business, but a church the size and scope of Bethesda must be managed in a business-like manner. I believe keeping membership and the workplace separate is good practice.

One of the recurring issues that has arisen since I began the Interim is the question of transparency. I am used to the fullest sort of transparency, including the terms of my own contract. My annual stipend at Bethesda is \$73,600, plus use of the Rectory. Health insurance is \$7,880 per year. I am not a member of the pension plan of the Episcopal Church, therefore, there are no pension payments made on my behalf. I receive the standard IRS allowance of \$.55 per mile for travel. Since my wife is a member in good standing of another Episcopal parish, we support two parishes. Our annual gift to Bethesda-by-the-Sea is \$6,000.00.

I will continue to use every reasonable means we have to communicate with the members of the parish. This letter will also be transmitted by email. I cannot underscore strongly enough that if you have concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email is fuller@bbts.org and my cell phone is 561-613-7064.

Grace and peace,

Berry T Fuller +