

Annual Vestry Meeting 12 February 2012

Homily for the AVM

This is a set of directions for the Annual Vestry Meeting.

Every Church I have worked in has had its own way of doing the AVM. All close enough to be recognizably Anglican, but each different enough to be distinct.

Many of my clergy colleagues fear the AVM as a field in which mines might be hidden. Shocking stories abound of angry exchanges, an ultimatum issued or an attack upon someone or other. I have never, myself, had to deal with these things. I think I have been fortunate!

Grace Church has never had an AVM before, so I want to outline to you what I have had in mind for the way this one will run.

Firstly we will have an agenda with a timeline attached. This will not be legalistically enforced but should keep us on track so that we don't lose ourselves in small details, and miss the bigger and more necessary items. An agenda also lets everyone know what is going to happen and when. I like knowing what is going on, and I assume that everyone else should be accorded that courtesy.

Secondly the AVM is our AGM. Any public organization worth its salt uses this time to review the goals set at the previous year's meeting, and then set goals for the next year as it unfolds.

How do we do this?

Some of the meeting will follow ordinary meeting procedures as we work through the agenda. There will be a time for questions about anything that struck you in your reading of the AVM Report which you looked through in the week. We will not go through this item by item, but move to accept all the reports in one go. We will need to spend time focused on the finances. It is obvious from the report that we need to be funding our ministry here very differently and very quickly if we are to continue on track with the same resources people on payroll.

Then we need to move to the Visioning part of the meeting. What were the aims of the last 2011? How did we do in achieving them? What has been learned? Following that we need to look ahead. By this time next year we should be short months away from moving into 700 Kennedy Road. In order to be ready to arrive as we mean to carry on, what do we need to do in preparation?

For both of the Review and the Preview I will be asking you to form into groups to consider some questions and to share your thoughts. Each group will appoint a recorder to catch the gist of what was said and report it back to the whole group in plenary sessions.

Lots of flip chart paper will be used! It will then be my work, along with the wardens, to form this collection of your holy wisdom into a plan. Alongside your

thoughts, I must hold the vision of the Bishop and the sense of call I hold for Grace Church.

The Anglican Church is not a democracy, as my old Bishop, Ralph Spence, used to point out to his clergy. At the end of the day, clergy in parishes, and Bishops in dioceses, have to make, and be responsible for decisions of leadership.

However I think that the Holy Spirit is present when we gather in faith, in the name of Jesus, and with the intention of strengthening the Body of Christ in this place. That Spirit only gets a voice when we, in mindfulness of the sacred place we are in, speak from our minds and our hearts on the issues we will address. Decision making in the Church is never about winning or losing. It is about serving one another and about making sure that each one's voice, or silence is respected.

AVMs are sacred times. Jesus said that whenever two or three gather in his name he will be there, in the midst of them. Jesus also said that we, who are disciples of his, will know that he is with us, even to the end of the age. This is both weighty and light. Weighty in that we have to edit our speech, knowing that each of us speaks before the Lord today. Light in that we will be trusting that it will not, be just up to us to come up with a plan, but that the Holy Spirit of God is working through us guiding us in thought and word.