

## ***THE SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISTLE***

Dear Friends:

In my sermon for September 27<sup>th</sup> I pointed out that before you call your next rector you as a congregation need to consider what skills or characteristics you might want any candidate to possess. However, before you get to that point you will need to have some kind of vision for the future of St. Stephen's. What I am suggesting is that before you consider what kind of leadership you might be seeking, you need to have some idea of where you want such a person to lead you. So, how does a congregation figure out what kind of future it wants to move into?

One way to begin is by determining what the core values of St. Stephen's might be. Core values are those things that are truly important in the life of a parish, and they can include such things as spirituality, community, accountability, mission, growth, heritage, or any number of other qualities. The important thing is that the values are honestly determined and truthfully articulated because they reflect who you are as a congregation. A formula for disaster is the articulation of values you might like the congregation to have (but doesn't) and to then formulate a mission statement based on values that are more of hope than a reality.

Once the parish's core values have been determined, the next step is the formulation of a mission statement and the articulation of a vision (a clear understanding of why a parish is in business). St. Stephen's presently has a mission statement but I would encourage you to reexamine it. Many congregations come up with a mission statement believing that it is carved in stone never to be changed. However, as we all know congregations change. Its leadership changes. Its core values change. The community in which the parish is located changes. Mission statements are meant to have life spans with new statements evolving as circumstances warrant, and one of the best times for this to happen is when a congregation is preparing to search for a new rector.

One of the purposes for such things as the articulation of core values and a mission statement is that they provide an ongoing opportunity for congregations to discern why they are in business and to discover what really motivates them. The hope is that with this continuing process congregations will, eventually, become what God has called them to become. A second hope is that congregations will call effective leadership to work with them as they seek to become whatever it is that God has called them to become.

A few years ago the head of the Barna Research Group, George Barna spoke at a conference examining the future of the Episcopal Church. At that conference he listed a number of characteristics of healthy, effective churches. His research eventually made its way into his book – ***The Habits of Highly Effective Churches***. Number one on Barna's list was vision.

According to Barna the effective churches that his group studied had done the hard work of discerning what God was uniquely calling them to do and be. His research confirmed that each church is in some sense unique and has a distinct calling. The concisely stated vision of these churches became the central reference point for whatever the congregation did or planned to do. All programs in the parish were judged in light of their vision of mission. Revisions in program took place in light of the vision, and nothing was ever etched in stone. *There were no sacred cows*. It was recognized that stale programs existing for the sake of tradition formed “the cholesterol of the Body.” To avoid these traps, all policies and decisions were subsumed under the mandate of the vision. And the mission became the rallying point for the congregation. The effect of this was the galvanizing of people, the laity as well as the clergy. Barna made the point that a vision can be such a transforming influence because *it was understood and bought into by*

*the people, not just the leadership.* Barna goes on to say that a parish's vision has to be articulated in a number of ways: through preaching, newsletters, small group interaction, and vestry meetings. In those parishes where this did not happen vitality and focus was lost.

In addition Barna went on to point out that in effective churches, as the vision was implemented, what was important was not how many people participated in a given program, but how many lives were touched and changed by it. The evidence of an effective parish program is the growing "Christ-likeness" of the people involved. If a program did not facilitate such growth, it was canned.

As Barna discovered, any parish seeking to discern its values and vision always needs to be moved to prayer. Barna's research found that there were two basic styles of prayer in churches. In one prayer was a "leftover ministry". It was found on the periphery of parish life. It was prayer said before meetings because it was supposed to be done. It was an addendum to the gathering. It was prayer in which God was implored to help the parish as it made *its* plans and *its* decisions.

However, in effective parishes there was an underlying attitude of *prayerfulness*. In vital parishes, prayer drove and directed and enthused all dimensions of the parish's life. It was the center of the community's life, and its leadership modeled its centrality. Barna said, "It was a prayerfulness that interceded for the parish and the world, prayer that discerned, prayer that praised, prayer that petitioned God's will to be done among them on earth as in heaven.

In the Gospel according to Mathew there is the story of the disciples struggling with a difficult sea. They were afraid especially to see Jesus walking on the water toward them. In that setting the disciples knew no peace and could not get to where they were going *until Jesus got into the boat with them*. Prayerfulness is the primary way of calling Jesus into the boat that is our process of discernment.

Many congregations view the calling a new priest as a relatively simple process – you get a list of candidates; you pick one; and you hope that the new priest can pull everything together while keeping everyone happy. That doesn't happen. The calling of a new priest requires lots of ground work, lots of discussion, and lots of prayer. I would encourage you to do them all.

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**OFFICIAL NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING OF ST. STEPHEN'S, RIDGEWAY - November 22, 2009, 1:00p.m., Parish Hall**

In compliance with Article III, Section 2 of the Bylaws of St. Stephen's, this is the final official notice of the date and time of the Annual Congregational Meeting, the date previously having been published in successive Sunday service bulletins. The purpose of the meeting is to *hear reports from (the Vicar and from) the officers of the congregation, elect members of the Mission Committee, elect Senior and Junior Wardens for the ensuing calendar year, elect two Delegates and two Alternate Delegates to represent St. Stephen's at the Annual Diocesan Convention and at the Midlands Convocation of the Diocese, and attend to such other business as may be brought to the attention of the congregation.* All members are welcome to attend; Qualified Voting Members are urged to attend. A 'Qualified Voting Member' of St. Stephen's is an individual who has been confirmed or received, is at least eighteen years of age, and has received Holy Communion at least three times during the preceding year. Members identified as 'Qualified

Voting Members' will receive a letter to that effect, as well as a voting proxy form for their use if they cannot attend the meeting.

**OFFICIAL NOTICE OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS OF ST. STEPHEN'S, RIDGEWAY**

In compliance with Article VII, Section 2 the membership must be informed of proposed changes or additions to the Bylaws at least thirty (30) before the Annual Congregational Meeting. The following changes and additions (in bold italics) have been proposed and will be presented for a vote at the meeting.

**ARTICLE V, OFFICERS - Additions**

*SECTION 5: The Mission Committee shall elect a TREASURER of St. Stephen's, who shall receive all monies due and belonging to St. Stephens', shall have custody of the same, and shall pay all bills when due as ordered by the Mission Committee. The Treasurer may be a member of the Mission Committee, shall serve for a term of one calendar year, and may succeed him or herself. **Should an accounting firm perform the day to day and periodic financial functions, the role of the Treasurer shall be one of oversight and assurance that these functions are carried out appropriately and in accordance with the Canons of the Diocese, and the laws of the State of South Carolina and the United States of America. In any event, the Treasurer will continue to be responsible for presenting all financial statements at Mission Committee meetings, the Annual Congregational Meeting, and at any special meeting.***

*SECTION 6: The DELEGATES AND ALTERNATES elected under Article III, Section 1, of these by-laws shall be Qualified Voting Members and shall serve for a term of one calendar year, and may succeed themselves. **If a Delegate is unable to complete her or his term or resigns before the term has expired, the Mission Committee shall appoint one of the Alternate Delegates to complete the UNEXPIRED TERM, elect another Qualified Voting Member to replace the Alternate Delegate, and ensure that appropriate certification requirements are met.***

**ARTICLE VI: STANDING COMMITTEES – Additions**

*SECTION 6: **THE INVESTMENT COMMITTEE** was formed in 2003 to assure the continued relevance and suitability of guidelines, objectives, financial status and capital markets expectations to the benefit of St. Stephen's, its mission and purpose. (Note: The establishment of this Committee was approved by resolution of the Mission Committee in 2003 but was not presented at the 2003 Annual Congregational Meeting as an addition to the Bylaws.)*

*SECTION 7: **THE ALTAR GUILD** has continuously served God and the people of St. Stephen's by preparing and tending the church and the other such places where his people worship him. It receives direction and guidance in its duties from the VICAR in all matters related to the worship and spiritual life of the congregation in compliance with the Canons of the Diocese. It acts for the Mission Committee in the best interest of St. Stephen's by maintaining and preserving those furnishings of the church used in its worship and spiritual life. (Note: The rationale for adding the Altar Guild as a Standing Committee is based on its meeting the "overlying Purpose" defined in SECTION 1: The Mission Committee may with the consent of the Vicar establish Standing Committees. The overlying PURPOSE of said committees is to act for the Mission Committee in the best interest of St. Stephen's for specified temporal matters of the church.)*

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Your presence is requested and necessary for the health and wellbeing of St. Stephen's, Ridgeway. Your vote is needed to successfully conduct the "business" of the church. The reports from the officers will inform you of activities, events, and concerns that occurred or have arisen since the last Annual Congregational Meeting. A potluck meal will be served immediately prior to the meeting. Please make every effort to attend.

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**Qualified Voting Members:** If you are a Qualified Voting Member you are eligible to serve as a member of the Mission Committee and as Delegates and Alternate Delegates to Diocesan Convention. Nominations for two new members of the Mission Committee and for Delegates and Alternates to Convention are still open. If you are interested, or know someone who is or might be, contact the Junior or Senior Warden. Here's what you need to know about these offices. *The Mission Committee:* Consists of six members; the official representative of St. Stephen's; maintain and manage the temporal affairs of the church; three year terms, two members rotating off each year; members who serve a full term cannot be elected to succeed themselves; meet at least nine (9) times a year; the Junior and Senior Wardens for the next calendar year are elected from the newly constituted Mission Committee. *Delegates and Alternate Delegates:* Two Delegates and two Alternate Delegates; the Delegates have voice and vote for St. Stephen's at Diocesan Convention and at the Midlands Convocation; the Alternate Delegates serve as substitutes for Delegates if one or both cannot attend; one year terms and may succeed themselves. Please give serious consideration to serving St. Stephen's as a Mission Committee member or a Delegate, or in any other church ministry for that matter. The tendency to allow those who have served continue to serve because they have experience is perfectly understandable, and experience can be useful at times, but it doesn't increase the number of people with experience. There are some with years of experience who would appreciate the opportunity to step back for a time to pursue other interests in the church and their personal lives. And, yes, serving requires your time and attention for a while, but not forever. Will you serve?

✘ **October Dates** *Don't forget to add JABER to your weekly shopping list*

- 4 Sunday Service - Commemoration of St. Francis and blessing of the animals
- 7 Healing Service
- 8-11 Cursillo #14
- 15 Mission Congregations Quarterly Reports due
- 16-17 87<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention – Celebrating Changed Lives, Greenville
- 21 Healing Service
- 28 Mission Committee Meeting, 7:00p.m., Parish Hall

✘ **November Dates**

- 1 All Saints Sunday – Give the Senior Warden the names of those who have died this past year, to be read during the service
- 4 Healing Service
- 6-7 Pig on the Ridge
- 22 Annual Congregational Meeting

✘ **December Dates**

- 6 (?) Ridgeway Christmas Parade
- 20 Greening of the Church
- 27 Observance of the feast of St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

✘**October Birthdays:** *O God, our times are in your hand: look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives. BCP*

Don Babb	10/1	Jason Upchurch	10/16	Bob Moore	10/23
Jason Branham	10/3	Betty Branham	10/19	John Davis	10/24
Herman Harris	10/1	Robert Ellison, Sr.	10/22	Robert King	10/29
Carole Mullis	10/14	Jared Upchurch	10/22		
Sieglinde Thomas	10/15	Kayla Branham	10/23		

✂ **NEWS:**

***ERD - Children Helping Children***

Once again the Sunday school children will be selling holiday items and accepting donations to raise the necessary money to purchase a cow for a family in need. This program is sponsored through Episcopal Relief & Development. In the past we have purchased pigs, geese, goats, bee hives and mosquito nets. **2009 is the Year of the Cow!** We will be setting up our sale table in the hospitality room the end of October. Gift tags of all varieties will be available for sale as well as a new puzzle decoration and surprise boxes. Thank you for your support. *Carolyn*

***Celebrating Upper South Carolina - Celebrating Bishop Henderson***

Members of the Diocesan Council and the Bishop Transition Committee are offering all Episcopalians in the Diocese of Upper SC the opportunity to contribute to a three-fold gift for Bishop Henderson: a legacy fund in his name for the Healthy Church Initiative; a gift in support of the Millennium Development Goals; a personal gift for the Bishop to keep with him as he continues his calling to serve God in retirement. Contributions can be made by check, payable to EDUSC, noted on the memo line "For Bishop Gift", and mailed to Canon Julie Price, 1115 Marion St., Columbia, SC 29201. Indicate in a cover note whether you want your name included in the list of contributors, or not. You can also contribute by going to the diocesan website: [www.edusc.org](http://www.edusc.org). On the home page you'll find a link to the proper place.

✂ **REMINDERS:**

***Adult Study:*** There is interest in reconvening an Adult Study Group (see August Epistle for possible topics). The plan is to begin with an Advent Study. If you would like to join the group, please let the Senior Warden know. Information on the first study will be announced in church and in the November Epistle.

***Pledges:*** During the summer things always seem to slow down; there are vacations, reunions, visits to relatives, weeds to pull... Attendance at services also slows down, and so does pledge income. If you've been slowing down too, remember, summer is over.

***The Ridgeway Christmas Parade:*** Believe it or not, it's time to begin planning for the St. Stephen's parade float. We need volunteers for various tasks: theme development, materials, labor. Please join us; many hands, and minds, are needed; you can contact the Senior Warden with your offer to help. And, after all, who wants to have it known that they had "idle hands" at that time of year?

✂ **A ST. STEPHEN'S MILESTONE:** At the last Potluck Meal, Don Babb spoke of a milestone in the life of St. Stephen's – the movement of the altar away from the east wall. In his account, Don describes a trend followed by a number of Episcopal Churches in the year 2000 - moving altars away from walls, allowing the celebrant to face the congregation. The Rev. C. Christopher Clements, Vicar at the time, had expressed just such a desire and, after a time of consideration and discussion, planning began. In October 2000, feasibility studies were done and measurements taken and it was determined that the surface and sides of the existing altar would have to be reduced by approximately 12" over the altar's full length, and that a free standing support for the retable (the cross, candles and vases sit on the retable) would have to be constructed. Before this work could begin, a functioning temporary altar had to be built. Wisely, the planners decided to make it the same size as the proposed modified altar, making it possible to determine whether or not the change was workable. And so, a temporary altar was made out of pine, padded, and upholstered in burlap. It served as the altar of St. Stephen's for approximately two months.

The work was done by Jim Watson of West Columbia, who volunteered his service without charge. Great care was taken in moving the altar from the church to Jim's wood shop, the move being made on a day when no rain was in the forecast to keep the moisture content of the altar consistent with that found in the church, to guard against shrinkage and joint opening. Don described the trip as nerve wracking...they wrapped the altar with layer upon layer of blankets to protect it from scratches and dents. When Jim was ready to start, he called Don to let him know and to tell him that he wouldn't start an irreversible cut without Don being present. In Don's words, "I can tell you that the day we resized the altar with power saws was tense indeed. Jim began with a prayer and we proceeded to cut." With dimensions from the set of plans drawn by Jim for the retable support, a rare wood supplier was located and wood as close in appearance as possible to that of the retable – a fine piece of walnut - was selected. Wood removed from the altar was also used in the construction of the retable. When the work on altar and retable was finished, several pieces of the original altar were left over. At Fr. Clements' suggestion, they were used to add two additional tiers to the piece of wood supporting the altar cross to create a classic stepped base.

"The reinstallation of the altar, retable and pedestals completed, the "New Look" envisioned by Fr. Clements. As for the temporary altar, it saw service on many of the St. Stephen's Christmas Parade floats. Jim Watson continued to refuse compensation for his work but did accept a fine new saw he had been admiring for over a year. All of the materials and tools necessary for this project were donated by St. Stephen's members."