

To: The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel, Bishop of Olympia and the Wardens and Vestry of St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle, Washington

From: The Rt. Rev. Herbert A. Donovan, Jr.

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Subj.: Report and recommendations resulting from Visit of January 27-31, 2008

## **Introduction**

Bishop Rickel called me on December 13, 2008 to describe circumstances resulting in a Vestry action of two days previous calling for him to "appoint an outside party to confer with all relevant persons to assess leadership and management issues at Saint Mark's Cathedral and make recommendations for improvement." He spoke of the mediation work of Bishop Cabel Tennis which immediately preceded this action. I was able to confer with Bishop Tennis two days later, and to learn of his efforts to have the key leaders (the three Wardens, the Dean and the lay Sub Dean) take responsibility for their actions in the previous months, especially following the "layoffs" of three staff members the previous spring, and come to some sense of accord, enabling them to work together in giving effective leadership at St. Mark's Cathedral.

The Dean's inability to take responsibility appeared to be one of the basic barriers to moving forward. One solution suggested by some Vestry members was to ask that the Dean take a leave of absence and seek be provided with professional help. Others felt it was time for the dissolution of the pastoral relation between the Dean and the Cathedral. The presenting question for me as the outside party, in the words of Bishop Tennis, was "can the pastoral relationship be saved, and can it be made viable?" I believe the answer is "yes" to both parts of that question, but it will take some thoughtful and dedicated work by both Dean and Vestry with others help.

## **Actions**

After accepting Bishop Rickel's invitation to address the situation and setting January 27-31 as a time to be in Seattle, I began a series of some forty telephone interviews. I was helped in this process by Bishops Rickel and Tennis, Dean Taylor and his staff. Names were suggested by many persons. The interviewees included present and former staff members, present and former Wardens and Vestry members, some neighbors and community leaders, as well as other bishops and clergy.

I came to Seattle late on January 26<sup>th</sup> and, with the Dean's blessing, I attended the 11:00 a.m. service on the 28<sup>th</sup> as a visitor. I was duly impressed with the size and seeming vitality of the congregation, the outstanding music and the pulpit presence of Ron Simms, the County Executive. I visited with Bishop and Mrs. Tennis that afternoon.

On Monday I began seeing individuals and couples in person, totaling over fifty visits, and I made an additional ten phone calls. For the most part, these contacts were requested by the individuals themselves. Time constraints held most visits to a maximum of twenty minutes each, and I understand there were about ten persons still on a waiting list.

I am grateful to those who took time to talk to me and especially to Liz Sloat in the Dean's office, who was so helpful in scheduling my visits and calls.

## **Findings**

Many persons point to the 2006 election of the Bishop of California as "the time when troubles started." The fact the Dean had agreed to put his name forward as a candidate and had not been elected generated various reactions about his tenure and about his salary. The salary controversy was further exacerbated in Spring '07 by the termination of two priests and a lay staff member "for budgetary reasons." More than one person referred to that incident as that which produced "the perfect storm." Some saw the Dean using the poor financial picture as an excuse for terminating three uncooperative staff members while at the same time negotiating a salary increase for himself.

The question of management skills or lack of same was referred to by many persons as something the Dean needed to address. Someone reported that twenty-two persons had left the staff, voluntarily or involuntarily, in the eight years he had been at St. Mark's. The roles of both COO's, Debbie Juntunen and Mary Coon, were seen for the most part as positive and regrets were expressed for their departures. Many persons described the Dean as a micromanager.

While many of those interviewed were critical of the Dean's style of relating to staff and others, many gave him high praise as a pastor, fund-raiser and community presence. More than one person reported his presence for them in time of need, and at least twice there was reference to the fact that he is "much more visible lately than in recent years." His skills as a fundraiser were praised by many and his commitment to the larger community beyond St. Mark's are deeply appreciated.

A constant refrain was the existence of "systemic underpinnings" of the present difficulties in the leadership and management issues at St. Mark's. Among concerns raised with me were the following:

- The nature of St. Mark's as both a cathedral and a parish needs to be more clearly defined.
- The role and authority of the Dean in relation to the Vestry needs careful examination. There have been frequent misunderstandings, and indeed conflict, about "who is finally responsible for what."

- The inclusion of three community representatives as voting Vestry members appointed by the Dean in an otherwise elected body seems awkward. Is there not a more appropriate method to build community ownership?
- Having the Bishop serve as a Vestry member is really for him a conflict of interest.
- Many see the issue of transparency as an ongoing problem as regards Vestry actions, particularly in the area of finances.

## **Recommendations**

1. I am mindful of someone at St. Mark's who quoted the late Rabbi Edwin Friedman, the noted family systems advocate, who said "Rarely does it fix things to change leaders." However, the lack of a genuine trust relationship between the Dean and many of the Vestry, staff and others in the congregation is an issue that must be addressed immediately. I recommend that the Vestry grant the Dean a period of at least six months away from his duties and from Seattle. During this period he must have professional counseling to enable him to address the matter of how to build effective trust relationships with staff and Vestry with whom he shares leadership roles at St. Mark's Cathedral. It is essential that Bishop Rickel be directly involved in the selection of the "professional counselor" and that, with the Dean's permission, he receives periodic reports on the Dean's progress. The Bishop should decide when it is appropriate for the Dean to return to his duties. It is essential that the implementation of this recommendation not be seen as punitive, or, when successfully completed, a solution to all the present leadership and management issues at St. Mark's. The Vestry must also take responsibility for its recent actions and attitudes. Therefore, I move to the second recommendation.
2. The conclusion of my findings above lists a number of issues and concerns that must be addressed, most importantly that of the role and authority of the Dean and Vestry. Have expectations been appropriate? How can communication be improved? Is it time to review the Vestry's structure? As a way of addressing these and other related concerns about Vestry responsibility, I recommend that the Vestry, with the advice and guidance of the Bishop, engage a consultant to work with it for an extended period of time. I have suggested two persons to the Bishop, both of whom he knows, as having the experience and stature to be credible in rendering help in a much-needed look at the issues being faced at this time. While some work must, of course, involve the role of Dean, I believe that this work can begin while the Dean is away, as the Vestry needs to take a hard look at itself, and do what it can to address concerns such as staff morale. Obviously, the Bishop should be asked to recommend an experienced priest as an acting Dean.

## **Concluding thoughts**

Some people will see this report as bad news, as if to say, "The Cathedral is in real trouble." Quite to the contrary, while the issues of leadership and management are real and must be effectively addressed, the role of the Cathedral in both the Diocese and

the community is to be applauded and valued. Its program is rich, it has many faithful members involved in church and community, its past is noble and its future, in God's hands, is bright. I am grateful for my brief involvement at this important time, and I hold the Bishop, the Dean and Vestry, the staff and members in my prayers.