

THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME THIS MORNING.

Today, I am calling all of you to join my plan for Trinity's future. Our Church community is very blessed to be in excellent condition. We have inspiring liturgies, thriving programs, numerous volunteers, and we are blessed with many new members. I would like to take advantage of our position of strength, though, to address some challenges that will soon come our way. "Prepare the way of the Lord" is the fitting reading for today. I believe God's call to be proactive is the better course of action and is possible with God's help. As we envision change, the proactive approach allows for more clarity, prevents anxiety, and strengthens our community cohesion.

So why are we here and what is the problem we are facing? Let me not 'flower' (gild) the issue, because I believe that our strength as a community allows us to face our problems with trust and valour. As we prepare our budget for 2015 it has become clearer that our deficit has grown to a worrisome level and that this deficit is structural.¹ The seriousness of our budget deficit undisputedly needs our attention.

Why do we have this deficit? There are four main causes:

1. Increased costs of health care, which has doubled in the past year/two years. Besides an increase in the cost of benefits in general, we now provide health care for all Church staff, as has been mandated by the Episcopal Church since 2013.
2. Decrease in number and amount of pledges.
3. Extra staff hours, meaning sextons, for extra programs.
4. Increase in the cost of living.

These expenses will not change, have been part of the budget for many years, and need a specific response. It is important to note that the causes of our deficit are also a reflection of a shifting context:

1. Pledging as a habitual, annual practice is in decline. The pledging issue is not only a question of the number of pledging units. The concept of pledging simply does not appeal to younger generations. We are blessed with a very high average pledge, for which I am deeply grateful. But this also illustrates the point that fewer people give higher numbers. Will this practice be sustainable?
2. Giving time is also becoming more difficult because many Church members have to work more, either at their jobs or at home with the

¹ The term "structural" refers here to the fact that both revenue and expenses are set up in a pattern (or structure), whereby a balanced budget has become a very unlikely goal.

children. As a result, more staff hours are covering what used to be volunteer hours, given the increasingly busy schedule.

What is the plan that I propose today? I have been working on an Action Plan that addresses both the financial deficit and the shifting context, together with the Wardens, the Vestry, the Treasurer, the Finance Committee, with our Program Leaders, including the Investment Committee, the Home Board, and the Stewardship Committee.

Action Plan:

A. To decrease our spending

As announced in 2011, my goal is to decrease spending over the next three years and thereby reach a balanced budget by the end of 2017. I will ensure that all is planned in prayer and with the utmost care for the future of all people of our community and at a pace that is healthy:

1. In 2015, for the budget of this upcoming year, I envision a \$70,000 to \$100,000 decrease in the cost of personnel, with additional savings next year;
2. A change of endowment portfolio manager will save us an estimated \$70,000 in annual portfolio expenses;
3. Exploring a decrease of our annual Diocesan pledge, from 12.5% to 10.5%, which might save us almost \$10,000, to be allocated to outreach expenses;
4. During this upcoming year, we will also explore alternative options for health care plans;
5. Right size some of our programs and events: I will increase attention to our main events throughout the year and decrease a certain number of events, allowing us to save related costs, up to \$15,000.

B. To increase our revenue

Facing a deficit is never a story of cost cutting only. This is why, together with the Vestry, the Finance Committee and the Treasurer, with our Program Leaders, the Investment Committee, the Home Board, the Stewardship Committee, and our new Fundraising Committee, we already have been listing possible ways of increasing revenue:

1. In 2013 I called for the option of partnerships in our giving campaign. There is potential of increasing our revenue by encouraging people to partner with some concrete initiatives. In recent past, thanks to the generosity of several parishioners, we received special gifts: A fund was donated to support cost of instrumentalists and a recent anonymous donation has been dedicated to support the efforts of choir recruitment.
2. Wish lists of programs have helped to create additional revenue. The

Sunday School has been the recipient of considerable generosity, as has the History Ministry for its archives, and the Properties Committee for the new children's section in the church.

3. Grants. I have encouraged the Vestry and our building leaders, in both the Property and History Ministries to engage in the art of grant applications. A very promising grant was allocated to our stenciling project, paving the way for more grant monies, possibly to help fund our front steps project.

Today, I am calling you to support my Plan with confidence, because I know how strong Trinity is; with the focus on action, because this is what is needed right now, and with profound faith, so that we can prepare the way for our future. I am sharing this Plan with you now to make sure that we are all informed in the same way before our Annual General Meeting, so that we all can be on the same page and stand together to build our Church for the future.

And I am calling you personally right now to join my Plan. As you know, church ministry is fueled not only by treasure, but also by time and talent. The Time and Talent sheet that you received at the beginning of our meeting includes the basic numbers of the deficit that we are tackling.

The Time and Talent sheet also lists a number of ways in which you can help me work on finding more members, more money, new ways to access financial resources and new means to connect with more people in our community. Most of you already give generously on all fronts. Sometimes a simple moment of advice, sharing ideas, or an hour of volunteer help can make a huge difference.

At this moment, please feel free to ask questions if you like, but also consider joining me directly, even if it only is with some brief yet targeted consulting through your talents, and sign up through this Time and Talent Sheet.

The readings of today beautifully describe the path of our proactive approach ahead. *"Comfort, O comfort, my people," says the Lord. "A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* (Isaiah 40:1.3)

Trinity is a blessed, joyful, and dedicated church community, with exceptional love and care present in the way we live and work and serve. As a community we stand united and do prepare the way. Christ will definitely be our guide and his Holy Spirit our inspiration. Let us do this together, prepare the path of our community's future, and strengthen our church.

For the Time and Talent sign up sheet. see the flyer.