

Reflection on My Experience of my Field Parish  
Donald Burt  
July 29, 2009

### **Vestry Experience**

I have had considerable experience with vestries prior to moving to St. Aidan's. I was the Peoples Warden, later Junior Warden, at St. Ambrose from 1991 to 1994. In that role I supervised a major remodel and drafted the bylaws as we moved from mission to parish status. I was a member of the Search Committee that selected Fr. Munson, and worked closely with the Vestry in that capacity. I was also the Clerk of the Vestry in 2001 and 2002, was elected to the Vestry in 2003, and had to resign from that role when granted postulancy late in 2004.

At St. Aidan's I have attended almost all Vestry meetings over the last twelve months. I believe that I have participated in a manner appropriate for a non-voting member. I also attended the annual Vestry retreat and participated in Rev. Lou Blanchard's Vestry empowerment course. I have been impressed by the energy visible in Vestry meetings, and also by their openness to activities that will feed the spiritual growth of the parish. I find the internal processes of the St. Aidan's Vestry to be significantly different from those at St. Ambrose. Perhaps more formal is an adequate generalization, but the differences are not significant given the normal variations in organizational culture.

### **Educational Roles**

Over the last fifteen months I have attended many of the classes offered to get a feel for the interests and learning dynamics of the parish. I have also taught two Adult Ed classes, and have organized an Adult Ed series for this fall titled "Being the Church, which is comprised of six classes. Due to the demographics of the congregation there is only one Sunday School class, which I have not observed thus far. I also have led one Safeguarding God's Children class, and am scheduled for another.

At the time I joined there was an existing structure that provided for the training and scheduling of lay assistants for the service, and since my time in field work is short, it was M. Mary Kate's preference that I not intrude in that process; a position which I support. However, early in my time at St. Aidan's I trained a corps of five Vergers that have been serving for very nearly a year now. St. Aidan's had no previous experience with Vergers, so this included some congregational teaching as well.

### **Differences with Prior Ecclesial Experience**

There have been many differences between my prior experiences and St. Aidan's. I will reference those differences to St. Ambrose, since I was there for about twenty four years before coming here.

One difference is in the style of worship, which is both slightly more "high" church than St. Ambrose, although not strongly, and also somewhat more formal. By the latter I suppose I mean more serious in tone and less spontaneous in word and action. I don't read anything in particular into those differences. I am certainly comfortable with both styles and have not been aware of any difficulty in fitting in. Aside from the style, St. Aidan's is a worship-oriented place. There were an even 200 services between January 1 and June 6 of this year. I would guess that St. Ambrose had between 70 and 80 in that same interval.

Another difference is the activity of the Canterbury Club at St. Aidan's. The presence of the students and their participation in the worship services is delightful. Just one example is the monthly Taizé service offered entirely by and through students who desire to have this style of worship. They also organize and predominately serve in the lay roles and music ministry at the Sunday 5:00 PM service.

The financial resources of the parish are also quite different. Although the total includes Canterbury as well as St. Aidan's, the annual budget is close to double that of St. Ambrose for roughly the same size congregation. One result is that outreach, exclusive of the Diocesan asking, is roughly ten times as large. Although St. Ambrose was rarely in serious need, there is a different attitude toward expenditures at St. Aidan's because of this abundance.

The demographics of the parishes are also substantially different. Youth of K-12 age made up almost 40% of the St. Ambrose congregation. The same number at St. Aidan's is probably less than 7%. A similar ratio probably applies with respect to adults between 25 and 45, with the difference largely made up in the upper brackets. This has some consequences in the level of openness to new things. I mean no criticism, as this is a wonderful set of people and they are more flexible and engaged than one should expect. There is a corresponding effect visible with respect to active and engaging lay leadership, which again is less visible than one might expect, but still visible.

It is probably this demographic that affects the ministries present at St. Aidan's as well. Although worship does well, the total ministry participation across adult education, bible study, lenten programs, community programs, and even the campus ministry, is substantially less than at St. Ambrose.

### **Working in the Team**

I arrived at St. Aidan's a year ago just at the beginning of summer. M. Mary Kate recommended I spend the summer in the pews getting to know the parish and its members. Starting last September she introduced me into the active life of the parish, both introducing me and treating as a "clergy apprentice". This attitude was adopted by the then three existing clergy, and also accepted by the congregation. In that light I have participated regularly in staff meetings, liturgy committee meetings, and clergy meetings. When I attend vestry, classes, and even coffee hour, I am treated with the respect given the other clergy. The contrast between that and my senior lay role at St. Ambrose is striking. While I can attribute some of the difference to the fact that I actually am more knowledgeable by virtue of my studies, and hopefully the influence of spiritual formation shows as well, clearly there is still a large effect from the fact that the congregation has already ordained me, even if the Bishop has not.

Since September I have been present at the Altar for both of the Sunday AM services, and often at the Sunday 5:00 PM service as well. I am generally supernumerary, nominally the table attendant during the Eucharist, but able and occasionally called to fill in for a variety of roles. I have become largely familiar with organization of the Sacristy and have assisted supply clergy.

I find my working relationship with the existing clergy, M. Mary Kate and M. Kay, to be very good. The same was true of Fr. Dustin prior to his departure at the end of June. We are able to collaborate on quite a number of issues, such as classes, liturgical practice, and ministry strategy. We are also expecting that in Fr. Dustin's absence I will contribute in part to the Canterbury clergy activities after ordination.

M. Mary Kate and I have held supervisory meetings each 6-8 weeks over this time. I have kept her informed of the progress of my candidacy and of my preferences with respect to activities in the parish. She has been consistently supportive, and offered me every opportunity to succeed in both my training and ministry. I am fortunate to be serving here, and hope to continue for quite some time.

Signed:

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Donald Burt, Candidate

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Date

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Rev. Mary Kate Schroder, Supervising Priest

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Date