

It's my privilege to be with you at this my first Town Hall meeting. I want to start by giving you one of my first impressions in the short time I've been with you. On most Sundays we sing, at the Offertory, the Doxology, a great hymn all of us know well. But I get a different view than you. From my vantage point, which is standing behind the altar, I not only get to sing that with you but I get to see your face as well. And it's a great, alive face that I see. I wish that you could see what I see. I get to see my new family praising God. Praising God because you and I have realized that it's only from God that we receive blessings and it's from that place that you and I become generous.

You'll soon realize that my theology can be summed up in five words. Those 5 words begin with God and quickly moves to the second, Gift. You and I live differently when we see each and every day as a Gift...our life as Gift...our relationships as a Gift...this place as a Gift...from God. Yes, we pay for it, but we pay for it with God's money. How different our life would be if we woke up every day and said "Thank you, God, today my life is a Gift." We would live differently. We would live closer to Christ. The 3rd word is Grace. We realize that life is a Gift in redeemed Grace, in that Christ offers himself in love for all of us. The 4th word is Gratitude. You and I would live our life in deep Gratitude for all that has been given to us. The fifth word in my theology is Generosity. It feels good to give. People have asked me, "Bob, how do you know when someone's converted?" I know a person is converted, it's at that moment he or she becomes Generous. When you and I have been changed – converted – we become Generous and it makes us joyful.

I want you to know that those 5 words have been in my life since I arrived in Dallas. I have had a great sense of God, starting with the first call from the Search Committee. Since I got here, people have said to me, "You know, we prayed you here." That feels great, because Valerie, the girls and I feel that we were prayed here by all of you, that God led us in this mission. Secondly, we believe that our calling here is a Gift. You and this place – Saint Michael – is a Gift to us. Thirdly, we feel that it's by Grace that you've been given as a Gift to us. We didn't earn or deserve your love...we didn't earn or deserve this calling...we didn't earn or deserve the chance to move to Dallas and live our lives with you. It was by Grace that we are here. We feel so much Gratitude in the way we've been welcomed and included in your lives that it prompts Valerie and me to be Generous, and I hope it prompts you to be generous as well. This is the way that Henry Malin wrote it. "Everything is Grace. When our Gratitude for the past is only partial, our Hope for our new future is never full. If we are to be truly ready for a new task in the service of God, truly joyful at the prospect of a new vocation, truly free to be sent into a new mission, our entire past, gathered into the seriousness of a converted heart, must become the source of energy that moves us toward the future. "

Let's talk for a few minutes about our future. Since arriving at Saint Michael, I have met on Thursdays with many of you. You've informed me, asked me questions, given me your opinion, asked me if I would do certain things, not do certain things, change things, not change things. Most especially, you've been talking about the Strategic Plan that the Vestry put together with a lot of help of the Strategic Planning Committee. Many of you were part of those focus groups. I want you to know that it's an outstandingly good plan. During the next few months, we are going to bring it up to date and then we are going to begin to live by it.

Let me say what the Strategic Plan means in REAL offerings...REAL Generosity. If we are to accomplish our Strategic Plan for the next 3-5 years it will require about a 7-10% increase from all of us in annual giving. I told the Vestry that begins with the Rector and his family. I

also told them it applies to the Vestry as well, and to the Stewardship Committee, to the Strategic Planning Committee and, guess what, to all of y'all. All of us! Each of us is called to give generously (at the 7-10% increase level) if we're to fulfill the Strategic Plan.

Let me mention some pieces of the Strategic Plan that we are going to be working on in the next 3-5 years, beginning with our Youth. Our children and youth are not only the future of our church, they ARE our church. They're not just the future, they are part of us now. We need to do the very best we can by our youngest children, beginning in our pre-school and our nursery. We have to pay our nursery workers a fair wage. Erickson says most of a person's character is developed between the ages of 0 and 5. If that's true, then we need to do the very best we can for our youngest children. Ann Mills and the staff are working hard in that area. We have several on the staff concentrating on strengthening our elementary school age programs, as well. For our Youth, that is 6th grade and beyond, our Youth Ministers and our parents, are working hard to create the lively community that Stewart Thomas addressed a minute ago.

Now I want us to focus on the next age bracket. Saint Michael and All Angels can do a lot more in the area of college and young adult ministries. This is a lively city for young adults. Many people who are 22 and older are moving to Dallas. That is great news for Dallas. It should be great news for Saint Michael and All Angels. We should be attracting young adults in droves, because this is an exciting place. We need someone to work in the area of college students and young adults.

As we move into the middle ages and older, there's a 50+ committee that is working on that program. Now we need someone on our staff that is going begin to address those of us who are 50 and older, especially our senior adult ministries. They need to know that their Parish has not left them behind. This is still their Parish. They have a lot to offer to this congregation.

Additionally, we have hundreds – maybe thousands – of people, who are looking for greater engagement in our congregation. I dare say that we have as many as 2,000 or 3,000 people who are on the edge of our congregation. They come to worship once in a while, but aren't engaged in the life mission and ministry of our church. We need someone to begin addressing how we get those people involved, because we know as their participation grows, their faith will grow and their generosity will grow.

We need to work in communication. Kelly Doyle is working her fingers to the bone on the communications of this church. She also does all of our worship booklets. I've never known someone who puts as many hours into communication and our worship, as Kelly Doyle. We need to give her some help. Our Communications Officer should not be doing all of our worship booklets. Someone else needs to be doing that so she can advance her good skills into doing pure communication. And on that note, I place a high value on providing this congregation with crisp, timely, transparent communications that builds trust in your Rector, your Wardens, your Vestry, your staff, and the clergy. And we want to receive meaningful input from you so that we are all going together into the same place.

We need to work on our Stewardship, so that we approach our giving programs in a consistent manner. In addition to our annual giving we have capital drives and the Endowment Foundation, and many others. All of those areas need to grow and we need

someone on our staff to focus on stewardship and what colleges call “development.” If we are committed to our mission, we can not be afraid to talk about what it means in terms of money. Jesus is absolutely right, where our hearts are is where our money will go. If our heart is committed to this mission, then we need to invest in it. I will not be shy about my own giving nor in asking you into larger giving, because I am VERY, VERY committed to what we are doing here.

We need some help in the area of business administration. That might sound cold and hard, but we need to make sure that you know Saint Michael and All Angels is accountable and is run on sound business principles. You need to feel comfortable that we are spending the funds that you give us effectively and efficiently.

Lastly, I will be calling two new clergy in the coming months. First, in Mission and Outreach, we need someone who has a lot of horsepower who can work local, national and international levels. The other priest is going to be called Associate for Discipleship and will be responsible for a broad array of ministries ranging from adult education and information, to evangelism, to small groups, and all of our renewal ministries – anything that will speak to the word discipleship, growing in the faith, and then reaching out.

In conclusion, let me mention again that there are two campaigns before us. If you have already pledged to Annual Giving, I offer my thanks. If you haven't, we really need to hear from you. Please, please tend to that before the end of the year. By the way, if you are 70 and older you have until the end of the year to make an extra gift from your IRA that will be tax free. This is a great opportunity. If you have an IRA and have no idea what you are going to do with it, I have a good suggestion – Saint Michael and All Angels.

The second campaign is our Capital Drive. What Valerie and I are doing in terms of increasing that pledge is simply add another year or two. I invite you to think that way, too. Whatever you are giving to the Capital Drive – let's say it's \$10,000 over a 5 year period. Just add a year or two. If you haven't made a pledge to the Capital Drive, make your annual pledge first, and then go to the Capital Campaign. I realize this is a stretch for some of us, but the stretch is worth it, because at Saint Michael peoples' lives are changed by Grace, personally and forever.

It's a great thrill for Valerie, Mary Blair and I to join you in this great adventure we are on. It's a great privilege to be your new Rector. Thank you for your prayers. We look forward to the great journey ahead. God Bless You All.