

**This will be the oral presentation at the Ministry Fairs and not in the brochure**

### **The Financial Challenges of Our Continued Ministry Together**

While we are looking with new eyes and hearts at our life together **as a diocese** and our service to the world, we also think seriously about particular concrete and challenging conditions in which we find ourselves organizationally, especially the financial challenges. Financial resources are a critical part of our ministry to the world and a critical part of our life together. We cannot move forward in our work without a critical examination of the financial resources we bring to this work, both in the short term and the long term.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century presents us with newer and unsettling financial challenges. There are new vulnerabilities from being a part of a world economy, disturbing injustices and uncertainties stemming from the economic recession, naked and rampant greed and fear, growing gaps between rich and poor and white and non-white, and public discourse characterized by ideological polarization. The idea of being “One Body, One Spirit—One Body, Many Members” stands in stark contrast to the world. There is in our midst a great dis-ease, about the future, about economic security, about safety in a world that glorifies violence both through war and the media.

It is into this reality that the Church speaks, acts, and finds its voice about truth, justice, mercy, the Church’s mission, and how the Church is organized and utilizes its many assets for God’s on-going work. Making decision about how to allocate and use resources as a response to God’s call to faithfulness and righteousness is an important spiritual task and challenge.

Today’s mission fields require constant reexamination of both our theology and practice. Theology and practice are not two polarized opposites (like Republicans and Democrats). Theology guides practice; experience deepens understanding of theology. Today we take nothing for granted but examine everything with prayerful eyes, ears, and hearts in a diligent effort to discern where God is leading us. There are many pushes and pulls, disappointments and disagreements to be confronted and negotiated. We welcome this task, not because it is easy but because we trust that we will learn more about God, about where God is leading us, and what it means to be faithful at this time in our life together.

More than ever, the world needs a witness to the power of God working in the world, taking what is offered by human hands and labor, blessing it, and returning it to the world. We can count on God’s grace and faithfulness, and we know that God gives to us all that we need to be faithful—if we can only pray and act our work into a deeper understanding of what Christian faithfulness looks like in the world around us.

### ***The spiritual truths out of which we operate***

There are certain truths that can easily be affirmed, because they have met the test of time throughout massive changes in the past:

1. Christians are people of hope and not of fear. God redeems out of the darkest situations, and we live in the hope and promise of new life.
2. We trust in the power of God to lead us to where God wants us to be, and we take the first step in faith even when we don't know where the journey will take us.
3. We are not in this struggle alone. Our voices and prayers are joined with **Christians** around the world who also seek to serve God in equally challenging times and often with fewer resources and under much more repressive and dangerous situations.
4. God is with us. We do not travel alone.
- 5.

***The call to operate out of an awareness of God's generosity, faithfulness, and a theology of abundance***

The conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge us to re-evaluate how we serve the world. This re-evaluation begins with a thankful awareness of the abundance with which we have been blessed:

1. We are part of the worldwide Anglican Communion that connects us to struggles in lands far away and that enjoys the prayers and supports of those whom we never meet.
2. We have 47 altars throughout Vermont where faithful people of God gather to be nourished in the body of Christ and sent out to serve God in hundreds of towns and villages across the state as the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion in Vermont.
3. Buildings and grounds which anchor local communities, house food pantries, provide gathering places and serve in many more ways, are offered as gifts to our communities. While they are not without their challenges, they are opportunities for ministry, and we must think more creatively about how to partner with our communities to preserve and care for them.
4. Rock Point, which has enormous value in its own right, is a place of peace and sanctuary in the midst of a city, a spiritual home for many, an asset far underutilized and understood in its potential for ministry to the world.
5. Thankfully, due to the generosity of many saints who have passed on and others who are still among us, the Diocese has endowment funds that are set aside for the benefit of local congregations. Some of the funds preserve and update our buildings, some expand our ministries, some enhance our spiritual formation. They are major assets for ministry that require good stewardship.
6. And certainly not the least of our assets is the commitment of so many talented people to the work of the church. We are One in the Spirit. We are One Body with many parts, with many gifts. Together we will continue to deepen our appreciation for and stewardship of our assets, thinking ever more creatively about new partners, new ministries, new ways of being and doing.