

Christian Education Co-Directors' Comments on the Christian Education Dinners Report of May 2010

The Christian Ed Co-Directors deeply appreciate the opinions and recommendations offered in the Christian Education Dinners Report, which we find to be both thoughtful and thorough in reporting parish views of Christian Education (CE) at St. Mark's. Many of the suggestions offered guided our selection of course content and format for our 2010-2011 program. We undertook our assignment sharing similar concerns.

As CE classes and events have been rolled out from September 2010 through January 2011, we have been encouraged by the response to our program within the parish, in terms of volunteer support and participation.

We have recruited 110 volunteer leaders and supervisors to teach 30 adult courses and five Sunday school classes involving over 400 students. Many of these leaders and class participants are within the 20 – 40 age range.

We consider it is our challenge to meet the ever-changing needs and desires within the parish for a responsive, affordable and dynamic Christian Ed program.

The CE Dinner Report states as a major concern:

"The costs of the current program are a growing problem that must be addressed".

We agree.

Our November budget submission to the Vestry was influenced by two factors; we anticipated that the Penniman Fund would be depleted at the end of this spring, and we estimated our budget based on historical costs and expenses.

There are two reasons to re-evaluate our financial situation now: the January 2011 generous renewal of the Penniman Fund with a donation of about \$54,000, and the success of our program to date in generating revenues at a higher rate than anticipated.

We are looking to reduce the cost to the parish of the CE program accordingly, keeping in mind that the Penniman Fund will only cover the second LCF weekend retreat and Sunday School teacher scholarships for the CE weekend retreat and will no longer cover any adult scholarships as it did in the past. As this CE year draws to a close in the Spring, we will be in a

better position to evaluate our costs and fee schedule as we plan our 2011-2012 program.

The CE Dinner Report concluded its review of parish wide feedback offering four major recommendations.

1. To establish a Christian Education Council

Promises: advice and counsel available to the CE Co-Directors from a committed group of parishioners; eyes and ears to explore and report on the needs and preferences of the parish; support in monitoring youth and adult CE programs to address issues as they arise; strengthening support to teaching teams and supervisors; and augmenting the recruiting, training, planning and marketing of the CE program.

Costs: the challenge of organizing a governing body; the time demands of building and managing a council; leaders finding that increased numbers cause direct action and implementation to be more cumbersome; individual councilors having a reluctance to take on responsibilities and carrying them through to completion; incumbent necessity for strong leaders who must be proactive in the definition of roles and clear objectives.

Co-Directors' position: We support this proposal and believe that with careful planning and thoughtful management of the composition and agenda, a CE Council will prove helpful to the CE Co-Directors, the clergy, vestry and parish at large.

We are moving forward with designing a council that is representative of vital constituencies in the parish which contribute to and benefit from a flourishing CE program, that will address the promises as stated, and that will meet the desire for greater transparency in CE operations.

The Co-Directors believe that the existing 1995 Charter and Bylaws, when updated to reflect current and proposed new tasks and practices, including a CE Council as proposed, should serve both the CE and vestry needs.

Christian Education Council (CE Council) Proposal

In order to give the co-directors the ability to appoint, engage and empower a larger group of leaders in Christian Education within the parish of St. Mark's Church, we propose a Christian Education Council whose mission would be to continue and to expand the creative implementation of the programs, classes, and retreats currently offered by Christian Education.

Charge

To support the work of the co-directors and provide for a continuing and sustained transition of leadership from year to year. To create an infrastructure of teacher training (within the parish and externally, within the diocese), teacher resources, and teacher support. To develop and enhance curriculum for Sunday School and Adult Programs based on the principles of the Penniman method, the Catechesis method, along with other valuable educational and spiritual practices. To expand the capabilities of the co-directors in marketing, recruitment, evaluation and training.

Roles and Responsibilities

- To serve as the 'eyes and ears' of the Christian Education Program.
- To further engage the parish in the many aspects of Christian Education.
- To develop and propose an evaluation system for all classes as they conclude.
- To develop curriculum from existing and highly successful programs.
- To create and design recognition for leaders in the program; including, a retreat and the gala.
- To organize an archive of Christian Ed, to include photos, curriculum and the history of St. Mark's unique program.
- To report on a monthly basis, as assigned by the co-directors, on specific areas of the program underway.

Meetings

This group meeting would replace our clergy meeting therefore no increase in meeting obligations to CE for clergy, co-directors and staff. This group would also have the opportunity for a day or weekend retreat.

Term

2 year commitment

Structure

A council made up of co-directors (chairs of the Council), clergy and director of youth ministries, and representation from key constituencies: Sunday School teachers, the Adult Program leaders, Elders, and a diverse sample of the parish who are interested in Christian Education programs.

Council structure:

- 4 Christian Ed Co-directors 2010-2012 to serve as co-chairs of the Council
- 2 Christian Ed Co-directors 2011-2013
- 2 Sunday School representatives: 1 teacher from Catechesis and 1 teacher from Functional classes
- 1 Adult Program leader or supervisor who has not been a co-director
- 1 recent LCF grad who has expressed an interest in Christian Ed (willingness to teach)
- 1 member at-large
- 2 elders (functionally trained) ex officio (1 year terms)
- 1 clergy
- 1 director of youth ministries
- 1 vestry liaison

2. To hire a Christian Education Director

Promises: a knowledgeable “expert” manager who would provide continuity and guidance to the CE program and lessen the burden on the CE Co-Directors and lay leadership.

Costs: budget constraints, and finding a CE Director with the depth of knowledge and commitment to Functional Education

Co-Directors’ position: We have been advised by the current Senior Warden that hiring a dedicated person would be unrealistic in light of current budget constraints.

3. To develop a plan for attracting new members and young families

Promises: fulfilling the CE function of building a new generation of leaders of St. Mark’s community

Costs: The realities that we, like our predecessors, encounter in recruiting younger parishioners as leaders and participants continue to be (in order of importance): family/job demands; logistics, the costs of CE programs; and (to a lesser extent) a lingering negative view of Christian Education.

Based on extensive conversations as we recruit for and market our classes, we find that interest in Christian Education is generally high. Parents, particularly of younger kids, often cannot make the commitment of the time required. Other reasons reported are: long commutes; competing evening commitments; job-related travel; and the demands of graduate problems.

Co-Directors’ position: Recruiting younger leaders has been a top priority, influencing course design, and recruitment of leaders and of class participants. We are encouraged that many newer and younger people are stepping forward to lead classes, and that the two LCF classes to date have been well attended by newer parishioners.

We recognize that the weekly planning and teaching demands on Sunday school leaders of Middle and High school classes are in need of greater help than we are able to provide at present. We are planning to create a Task Force to develop a Teachers’ Manual specifically focused at these levels to serve as a curriculum guide.

To sustain the growing level of interest and participation that we’ve seen to date, however, requires that we continue to provide incentives to assist

parents with childcare, extend scholarships to those needing financial aid, and more extensive and focused training for Sunday school leaders and supervisors.

4. To consider alternative times, locations, and means and methods of teaching, and a greater range of classes to minimize costs and facilitate greater participation in classes

Promises: wider outreach of CE programs, and meeting the needs of a more dispersed parish and those less mobile.

Including non-St. Mark's leaders and class participants enriches the variety and content of CE classes and programs (e.g. the Guild, Buddhist Meditation, Church of the Savior, Imago), and attracts potential members to St. Mark's.

Costs: Dispersed classes at parishioners' homes or other off-site locations risks fewer participants in relation to class leaders, depending on the nature of the class.

Welcoming "outside" participants while remaining faithful to functional principals would be a major challenge.

Arranging off-site classes will call for development of a policy to guide financial and other arrangements with non-St. Mark's partnering groups and organizations. (We see this as an opportunity as well as a "cost".)

Co-Directors' position: We have seen healthy class participation for both long and short classes, with and without weekend retreats, both functional and non-functional. (An exception may be the short "Temptation" class, which likely suffered from scheduling early in the year and competition from the Pillar weekend.)

After consideration, the CE Co-Directors and class leaders determined that off-site and weekend classes (other than one-day classes) would not be feasible given the short planning period. With a longer planning horizon, we can pursue possibilities for off-site courses, including smaller courses at parishioners' homes and partnering churches.

As the parish approaches the period of construction, which will likely reduce temporarily available space within St. Mark's, we will be giving serious consideration to alternative sites.

Another key concern expressed in the CE Dinners Report is that of transparency of CE operations and selection of the CE Co-Directors.

Addressing these concerns is a work in progress. This fall we initiated an experimental program, the Christian Ed Forum, open to all on Sunday mornings to discuss a variety of announced topics and to offer feedback on the CE program in general. After several months, low participation required that we discontinue this pilot project, given the time involved in planning and "being there".

We continue to work to make the CE website meet our needs. This, too is a work in progress, and largely dependent on the layers of the web savvy and web developers.

Most importantly, however, is the more visible and inclusive role and composition of the CE Council.