

Rector's Annual Report for 2009
The Rev. James V. Stockton
Annual Meeting January 17, 2010

Our community rediscovered our strength last year. ECR was blessed last year with the gift of stability in a larger social context of uncertainty while this community continued to look forward to our future. We enjoyed this blessed combination gifts, and we shared these with the wider community and world around us. Here at ECR, as the saying has it, 'life goes on.'

'In the sure and certain hope of the eternity of life, we bid loving farewell last year to James Baker, Evelyn Welborn, Tommy Stinson, Mike Stout, and Jim Webb. Each of these saints brought his or her gifts to the community of ECR over our collective history. Each will be appreciated into the future here. We grow from the nurture to our worship of God and fellowship in Christ that each entrusts to us all. We who were blessed to work with Tommy and with Mike over the many years of service that each provided will sense, I think, that their passing marks a particular era in our history. It will, of course, require more time for us to appreciate fully the impact that their lives had, and that their deaths in startlingly quick succession last year, had on our community. I invite you to browse by the video memorial that has been set up in the southeast corner of the hall today.

Life continued here last year also in our welcoming to the fellowship of Christ's body through the sacrament of Holy Baptism Jackson Austin, grandson of Dick Christ, Audrey Kraig, daughter of David and Carrel Kraig; and Braylon Jones, grandson of Charles and Holly Davis. We also helped God in the blessing of Paddy and Debbie Langford in the bonds of Holy Matrimony. And all of these are just some of the many outward signs of the inward and spiritual life of our community, and for these we give God thanks.

I want to recognize at this time the vital ministry of the Vestry over the last year. This group of saints served God and his community with grace, imagination, and inspiration. They supported one another and the congregation in tending God's call to us and God's blessings upon us through the year. The Vestry met many unexpected challenges through the year. Burglaries and vandalism last September loomed large among these. Yet, they remained attentive and committed to leading this community through tough times into better ones. We owe the Vestry our profound gratitude. Thank you, Vestry.

Having served wonderfully and well, four of last year's Vestry have completed their term and now move on to other ministries. Linda Bryant, Clarence Starkie, Sandy Sterzing, and Chris Summers, thank you all. Clarence stepped in to finish the term begun by Paddy Langford when Paddy's relocation to Houston prevented him from finishing. We thank you, too, Paddy for your service last year.

I want to thank especially my Senior Warden last year, Chris Summers. Chris served my ministry and me with vision, enthusiasm and faithfulness to God and to this community. He inspired me when I was discouraged. He inspired me when I was discouraged. He affirmed my reveling in the blessing of his community. It was my privilege to observe Chris's ministry with the Vestry last year as he led by serving and served by leading. Chris's ministry blessed me and blessed this community. Thank you, Chris.

I am happy to announce that my Senior Warden for 2010 will be Nadine Gordon. Nadine and I have worked together in previous years, and I know that her ministry this year will bless both ECR and me.

Sandy Sterzing was the Vestry's Junior Warden last year, and she deserves our thanks. Sandy led the effort to recover as quickly and effectively as possible from break-ins at the Church Office and the Church Building. These occurred in quick succession but almost as quickly Sandy made sure the facilities were secured and got an alarm system installed to help ensure that we need not worry about a worse occurrence in the future. For these repairs and the others you helped bring about last year, thank you, Sandy.

I want to thank those persons who offered themselves as nominees for election to the Vestry this year. It is a ministry in itself to be a nominee, and all of us are grateful to you, I'm sure. I look forward to working and praying with the new Vestry this year.

Along with the blessing of working with the Vestry, it has been my pleasure again last year to work with the many fine Ministry Leaders of ECR. Our community has many ministries, some with a comparatively larger footprint, some with a comparatively smaller one. Each serves the Good News of God's Love in Jesus Christ by embodying God's Love here in this community and by encouraging faith among us all. Our leaders of ministry are many in number, so I invite you to go to ECR's web site and, under the Ministries menu, open the Ministry Leaders link. You will find there a list of our many ministry leaders. You also find the ministries that they serve so you can better determine some to which you may want to add your efforts. Our Ministry Leaders guide and support the many people serving in our ministries. Ministry Leaders of ECR, thank you. And you who serve, thank you all.

This year the Vestry and Ministry Leaders attended their annual retreat and did good hard work and entered into some good serious prayer on behalf of ECR. The culmination of a rich weekend was the group's discernment of a new Mission Statement for ECR that represents this community well in our unique way of being who we are and doing what we do. 'ECR is an open Christian community, putting God's love into action, welcoming you as you are, on a journey of worship and service.' It is quite literally an inspired bit of work. I think all of us who were present will recall the sense that the Holy Spirit itself was moving among us in efforts. It was a fine example of ECR's two-fold appreciation for the blessing of stability in who we have always been and for the blessing of vision to pursue the future that God is creating for us to inhabit.

Thanks go also to our Parish Administrator Evelyn Griffin. Evelyn served last year as she does every year, with grace and dedication. In ways known and unknown, all of us rely on Evelyn carrying out her responsibilities, and she does so reliably and faithfully. Most often any mistakes in printed matter originate with me, so I may have to add to her duties and ask Evelyn to become my proof-reader.

Even with all that she accomplishes, Evelyn also provides a kind ear and welcoming smile to visitors at the Church Office and also parish members who happen by. Thank you, Evelyn for all you do.

Our Sexton likewise accomplishes much that goes unseen. This is because much of what he does is simply to keep things going around here without interruption. When the lights light up when we expect them to, when the faucets turn on and do not leak, and when something gets painted or a new handrail appears, this is our sexton working when few if any are present to appreciate it. Thank you Rick for all you do.

Last year saw the remodel of the Nursery and Toddlers' Room. This is another example of our community's building on the past and present to move forward into the future. The new arrangement came about with just a bit of difficulty, but it has already proven the right thing to do. Since the change last year ECR has experienced a marked increase in the number parents confident in leaving their infants and children in the care of our nursery. I want to acknowledge here our two trained and certified nursery care-givers, Ashlee Rogers and Valerie Stockton. These two, with a growing list of volunteers, also trained and certified, are doing a great job for the children and their families. Thank you, ladies.

Late last year, I had the sad responsibility for hiring an interim Director of Music. I needed to ensure that our community would continue to offer song and music as part of our worship of God. I also believed it was very important to support the community of our choir, to make sure that they knew that we all value greatly their ministry. I also wanted to demonstrate my confidence in their gifts and in their ability to continue to offer them in the face of our great loss. In response to my efforts and prayers, God blessed us with the ministry of our interim Director of Music, Sara Burden-McClure. Sara is the founder and director of Austin Girls' Choir and an accomplished organist, as well. Over the last four months of last year, she provided our community with wonderful and inspiring music. She has provided the choir with a direction that has been both gentle and firm, which has helped the choir to experience some significant healing. Happily, Sara has decided to seek the position of Director of Music here at ECR as a permanent job. Sara joins two other applicants interested in the position. We have experienced the try-out of one of these persons, and will meet another applicant next Sunday. I will make this decision on the hire by the end of this month and will inform each of the applicants and ECR. In the meantime, I am most certainly thankful to Sara for what she has brought to our community.

I also want to note that last year was the year that we dedicated the new stained-glass windows in the chapel and the etched glass windows in the doors entering the nave. Their beauty is a terrific addition to the narthex, the chapel, and the nave. Yet, we almost though not quite, find ourselves, I think, accustomed to them by now. Their presence is new, while they also continue the esthetic that ECR has had for many years. These windows are a kind of material expression of the way that ECR last year provided a blessed haven of stability, while also inspiring ourselves and, I pray, those around us, to anticipate a new and blessed future.

I want to thank, then, the group that has focused on exactly this, the Congregational Planning Process Committee. The Planning Committee is that group commissioned by the Vestry with addressing the nitty gritty of ECR's campus make-over as means for ECR to move forward into the future that God has planned for us. The Vestries and Ministry Leaders of ECR over the last several years, last year included, have understood the urgent need for ECR to increase our parking capacity. As I hope most of us recall, ECR currently has parking for exactly one half the number of people that our nave can accommodate. The original plans for the Church Building called for the number of parking spaces that would fit the seating in the nave, but that plan was modified, with the result that have today. In addition the Planning Committee has been paying very close attention to what they are hearing from our Ministry Leaders about their needs, aspirations, and inspirations regarding ECR's ministries. I appreciate the Planning Committee, their efforts last year were tireless. I anticipate the Committee bringing to the congregation soon some of the great fruits of their labor. Thank you, members of the Planning Committee.

Last year blessed us with the return of our now Senior Seminarian, now the Rev. Marie Butterbaugh. Marie completed her middler year of Field Education here in the spring, then returned in the fall for her senior and final year. Last month, you may recall, Marie was ordained a deacon in the Church, and will soon be serving a congregation in her home diocese, the Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. Marie has been back home for a few weeks and expects to back with us again next Sunday.

We were blessed also with the ministry last year of our new middler seminarian Susan Burnham. Though Susan has decided, and wisely so, to take a break from the Field Education component of her education, she continues to be with us enjoying the beatitudes of being a part of this community.

Last year offered us many blessings and some significant challenges. I am proud of the community of ECR, proud to represent you in the wider community as your priest, blessed to serve you as your rector. Our gift of welcoming people here to experience God's Love for them, and to be invited to help us to share with the world around us God's Love for all, is powerfully unique to us. I do not claim that other church community's fail to share God's Love. However, I do claim with conviction that it is our gift to share God's Love as no other church community is able. Last year this meant discovering that we could do this by offering to one another and to those around us a combination of blessed stability, reflective of the eternity of God's Love and God's faithfulness to God's people; along with an inspiring vision and description of the future to which God is calling us, a future that God is preparing for us, a future fit for this amazing community of ECR. Thank you to each of you for your prayers, your presence, for your support of and participation in the ministries and witness of this community. God bless us here at ECR.

The Rev. James V. Stockton - January 2010