

As many of you know, I just arrived back from a quick trip to Ireland for my doctoral graduation and Maggie's baptism, which was held in my father-in-law's parish so Rose's family could participate.

I knew that that trip was the last thing I needed to do before I could really feel settled in here and get to the task of servicing God and you in this wonderful parish.

I've now been here about 3 ½ months, so I think I know where all the light switches are, we had a great Institution service with the bishop, my trip is out of the way, and Friday was the first time that I actually told Nancy, our parish administrator of 17 years, something she didn't know about the place, so now I really feel like I'm the Rector.

Whenever we take a trip in an airplane, that moment comes after we've boarded when the captain comes on the intercom, welcomes us to the flight and asks us to buckle our seat belts in preparation for takeoff.

That common experience serves as an analogy for where I think we are today as Rector and Congregation. As your captain I'm so glad that you've decided to take your spiritual journey on Christ Church airlines, and as your Captain I want you to know that I will do everything I can to ensure a smooth take off, a good flight and a safe landing.

I like this analogy of a flight because it reminds us of a few important points about parish life. First, parishes, like airplanes, are filled with a diverse collection of people who are otherwise not necessarily connected to one another. However, we know that a flight is much more enjoyable and goes faster if we overcome our inhibitions and talk to the other people around us. The same is true here.

Second, parishes, like airplanes, inevitably hit some turbulence along the way. And getting through the turbulence is essential to reaching our destination.

Third, parishes with new Rectors, like airplanes, always land in a different place than the one from which they took off. It might be in the same region, but while God always loves and accepts us as we are, he always intends to lead us somewhere new.

So I like this analogy of a plane ride for lots of reasons, but this analogy, like all analogies, breaks down eventually, and this one breaks down on a very important point, and it is this:

While a Rector may be like a captain, a congregation is not like a group of passengers who sit passively, being served by staff and occasionally told to get back in their seats.

An active and participating congregation is essential to the flight of a parish church, and so, as your Pastor/Captain, I want to share with you two initiatives being taken that will need your participation and which will help prepare us for takeoff and a smooth flight here at Christ Church.

The first is our fall stewardship campaign. Stewardship is really about all the ways we give thanks to God for the many blessings in our lives, involving what are called the 3 "T's": Time, talent and treasure.

However, in our bottom line culture, stewardship is often reduced down to a code word for fundraising. I don't mean to imply that our relationship to money is unimportant, Jesus certainly talked about it quite often, but I mean to say that understanding stewardship as fund raising is simply too narrow. So this year, your Vestry and I have attempted to organize a true Stewardship campaign by combing our pledge drive with an every member conversation about the future of our parish and the direction in which we feel God is calling us to fly this plane. In short, we need your input. By now you should have received a letter from our Stewardship Chair, Peter Hubbard, describing how each of you will be contacted by a vestry member or other volunteer and invited to have a conversation about what your hopes are for the future of Christ Church.

As your Pastor, I need your input so I have a true navigational chart of where you would like me to lead you, so I ask everyone to arrange a time from your busy schedules and sit down with your contact person and have that thoughtful conversation. And thank you for doing so.

Second, as your new pastor I need a true reading regarding the state of our current ministries. Even though we are not a large church, we have a full range of ongoing ministries; Sunday School, Choir, Outreach, Hospitality, Acolytes, Welcoming Hosts, Altar Guild, Ushers, Readers. It would take me all year to sit down with the coordinators of each ministry individually, so I have decided to initiate what I am calling a "Ministries Task Force," so I can get all the ministry leaders around a table, get to know them better, hear what's working and what's not, encourage them in their ministries, and talk about any changes we might want to try.

So if you are one of those ministry heads, you'll be getting an email from me this week with a few suggested dates, and I'll be looking to hold the first task force meeting sometime in mid-November. Thanks to all of you who will be participating in that initiative.

I already love being Pastor of this church, and I want to be a good one. I want to be the kind of Pastor who knows when to give love and comfort and knows when to challenge you and call you deeper into your commitment to Christ.

There will undoubtedly be come turbulence, but the higher the level of participation, the less likely that any turbulence we encounter will be the kind that has us clutching the arm rests and saying a quick "Our Father."

So welcome to Christ Church Airlines. I hope you enjoy your flight. Amen