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**From the Rector**

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart.  
Never rely on what you think you know.  
Remember the Lord in everything you do,  
and he will show you the right way.***

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

This tiny bit of the Word of God, of the Holy Scriptures, of the articulation of God's own mind and heart, has been at the center of my own heart since early July. That is when parishioners began urging me in ever growing numbers to change the way our Sunday mornings look. Their urgings were earnest and heartfelt after they experienced our combined summer worship service and its great spirit, warmth, and enthusiasm in the Holy Spirit.

Surprised by their requests, I sought the wisdom and thinking of our congregation at large. Many spoke to me or wrote to me, with both pro and con positions. I took the matter to God every day in prayer for the last 50 days, many times a day. I have sought the wisdom and counsel of many church leaders and faithful devoted praying souls. It is hard to lay out just how deeply, prayerfully, and soberly I have sweated over this vitally important part of our faith lives together. Come Holy Spirit, come.

God has blessed His All Saints Church with spiritual and physical growth in many wonderful ways, while other parts of our church life are still in need of much provision and care. Churches are never finished products. They are the living and ever new Body of Christ – living organisms of faith. In God's creation, every organism is either growing or declining. Ever aware of that, we are called to labor for the Lord to keep the mission at All Saints growing. The goodness, health, and strength of this body of faithful believers require constant prayer, sacrifice, nurture, and service in the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, the goodness, health, and strength of our individual people require the same devotion and care if they are to grow as followers of Jesus. The pastoral care of each soul is a precious and awe-inspiring charge upon the clergy and leadership. My pastor's heart fervently tells me that those who don't want change, or who are impacted negatively by it, must be tenderly and lovingly considered and provided for. With those concerns in mind and heart, it can be difficult or even conflicting to do what is best for the overall Body of Christ. Such complications can only be discerned in the Lord and not even the wisdom of Solomon would be equal to the challenge. The Holy Spirit is the divine and perfect source of the answers to our complex circumstances

In my seven years as Rector I have steadfastly resisted changing our worship schedule during the summertime, despite hearing about our tradition of relaxed summers offering only two services instead of three. My resistance to change was due to the general truth that attendance goes down when churches change their summer schedules.

Our attendance numbers for the last six years evidence the wisdom of sticking to three summer services and make me appear to be fairly smart!

So why then did we oppositely change our summer schedule this year? Because something of concern had arisen. Something that needed the benefit of the oneness, camaraderie, togetherness, love, family warmth, and powerful overflowing affections of our people living in the Holy Spirit. Something that needed room for the Holy Spirit to move among us.

For almost a decade, our beloved parish enjoyed what church management experts call the “sustained growth” position. That’s a sweet spot where a church advances in almost every measurable way. During this time, our people were receiving the fruit of ever growing discipleship, pastoral care, mission work, and worship. Over the last year or two however, despite our amazing bonds of love and Spirit, attendance at worship has flattened out, our new member growth fell from triple digits to double digits for the first time in seven years, and our people have become more separated in worship.

Here is a very honest truth: Attendance at our late service has declined substantially for a variety of reasons. Recognizing this fact, along with our care and love of the devoted and faithful parishioners who attend the late service, we needed to find a way forward. Simply, the demographic forces at play are beyond our control and bring us to doing something new.

As we prayed for direction, our clergy and staff were inspired by a workshop titled *“The Unstuck Church,”* authored by brilliant pastor and church leader Tony Morgan. We learned that All Saints had drifted off its peak “sustained growth” position into a lesser “maintenance mode.” Fortunately, God quickly opened our eyes to the problem before it became more serious. There is a need for us to much more powerfully GATHER our family, to GROW our family, so that we may as a family GO out in service, mission, and love in the holy Name of Jesus. The new Sunday morning vision is just one of several responses to those needs.

Many people told me that I will catch a lot of flak if we dare to change things. Tell me something I don’t know already! Bishop Salmon raised me up as a priest and told me over and over that a rector sits in the “Moses Seat.” That is, every rector or other church leader has to lead groups of people through hard changes while simultaneously trying first and foremost to please God. Just as Moses experienced, every such leader will have several people tell him or her that they are right or wrong. The one in the Moses Seat must be faithful and true to God alone and never afraid to take risks and to be obedient to what God directs for His mission and our good. That fact sends me to this powerful instruction: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way.” Proverbs 3:5-6*

Our new Sunday vision is absolutely held in my heart as the way God is instructing and leading us to go at this time in our life together. If you would like to know even more, take a look at the Q&A I’ve posted for you along with this message.

May God be glorified by the changes we are making together and may the All Saints Church family be prospered and enriched in our Gospel mission for Him.

*Faithfully, Ed+*