

Father Christian's 2011 Message

Growing Together

⁶ *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.*

⁷ *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.* ⁸ *The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.* ⁹ *For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. ~1 Corinthians 3:6-9 (NIV)*

As I reflect upon the past year and as I prayerfully seek guidance from the Holy Spirit for the message I deliver to you to begin our year, I realize that the year 2011 is the 10th year that I have been writing St. Chad's Annual Report. My message this year will summarize the past ten years. Beginning as your Supply Priest in 2001 to being your Full Time Priest in 2008 and your part time priest in-between, I have grown-up with you. I can say this too, on behalf of the members of my family – my wife Liw, and my children Earl (Aga), Kristoffer (Kris), and Kristian (Ian). We all have grown-up with you physically and spiritually. To put this in context, Ian was a playful ten years old when I was first called to serve you. He is now a responsible twenty year old young man serving as a Sunday School teacher.

1 Corinthians 3:7 reminds us that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but **only God, who makes things grow**. Through the last ten years, God has blessed us with positive growth. He also has blessed us with setbacks in our growth. We must remain faithful and thankful to God for EVERYTHING, whether His gifts represent positive growth or they represent setbacks in our growth. The setbacks in our growth are His reminders to us that we are dependent on His care and providence. Those setbacks are powerful forces that shake us to ask, seek, and knock. Matthew 7:7-8 tells us "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (NIV)

Our omnipotent God who makes things grow has blessed St. Chad's. His blessings are noticeable around us— the sacred spaces that make up our House of Worship. These sacred spaces are our spiritual refuge and shelter.

These sacred spaces are where we come to be spiritually nurtured, enriched, and recharged. These spaces are a gathering place where we center our mission activities; where we meet in fellowship with our neighbors and church family members. Because we are co-workers in God's service, we each have responsibilities to be good stewards of these sacred spaces. Having said this, I would like to revisit the themes of our Annual Meetings the past ten years. In doing so, my prayer is that all of you will be reminded of the commitment you made as members of this church; and that you will renew your commitment and continue to grow with us as well as to invite others in our community to grow with us.

2002 – First Annual Meeting I presided. My message was about “embracing the new” because in 2001, you embraced a new priest, new ministries (housing of the Toader Family who were Bosnian refugees in the vicarage; sharing our sacred spaces with a Korean congregation; and embracing the Seafarer Ministry), and new members (from St. Francis). Senior Warden was Mike Rivera.

2003 – Second Annual Meeting I presided. My message was about “upliftment” at St. Chad’s in 2002. Although I particularly mentioned this in relation to the new computer system for the church donated by the ECW, “upliftment” was evident in everything we were doing. It was in 2002 that I was commissioned by the Diocese as a part-time priest-in-charge of St. Chad’s.

2004 – Third Annual Meeting I presided. My message was about “celebrating the past”. We celebrated St. Chad’s 50th anniversary in November 2003 with the theme, “we’ve come this far by faith.” St. Chad’s was featured in a number of media articles: (1) A Closer Look One Hillsborough Church (St. Petersburg Times); (2) A Story About Our Stained Glass Windows (Southern Cross); and (3) A Story About the Seafarer Ministry (St. Petersburg Times).

2005 – Fourth Annual Meeting I presided. My message focused on “mission.” We revisited our mission statement at the Parish Retreat we held at DaySpring in May 2004. Prior to our retreat, we conducted a local Congregational Survey which showed that as a group we wanted to see the following projects: (1) implement ways to encourage membership (Come Home to St. Chad’s and Neighborhood Outreach); (2) implement ways to keep new and ongoing members (mid-week Bible Study; newcomer reception); and (3) implement ways to protect our future (enhanced stewardship campaign).

2006 – Fifth Annual meeting I presided. My message was about “living our mission.” To hold true to the reason for our existence as a church by living our mission, we implemented some of the projects that we planned in 2004 and 2005. As individual members, I further encouraged and urged you to use your individual spiritual gifts to contribute to the propagation of our mission. I reminded you to seek to serve Christ our Savior by bringing knowledge of Him to our community through the use of your unique spiritual gifts.

2007 – Sixth annual meeting I presided. My message was reminiscent of our 50th anniversary theme, “we’ve come this far by faith.” I reported that in 2006, the “3 Diamond Committee” was created as a strategy to understand the results of the Episcopal U.S. Congregational Life Survey as they relate to St. Chad’s and to make recommendations based on that understanding. Georgeanna Kiser led this committee. I also reported to you a list of NEW things that happened at St. Chad’s in 2006 which included: (1) new roof for the church building as well as for the vicarage; (2) new copula; (3) new stove/oven; (4) new church ceiling fans; (5) newly painted shed; (6) new riding mower; (7) new senior warden; (8) new music director; (9) new health emergency box;

(10) new 3-diamond committee; (11) new church membership directory; and (12) new podcast of our Sunday services.

In 2007, Martha Humbert had a message which I would like to quote:

"We are members of St. Chad's church, and we welcome everyone to come, and be a part of this unique congregation. We encourage everyone to be a part of the faith and belief that this church nurtures on a continuous basis. We as a congregation are still on a spiritual journey, so with this journey in mind, we come to the end of the year and ask for your prayers, support, and hopes for the coming year. We are now entering our 54th year as a congregation. How do we move our church forward into the future? This is the question, and now we must find the answer. The year 2006 continued with a plan to add space to our existing building. Let us pray that, with the leadership of Father C we will continue to stay on our journey to meet the spiritual and financial needs of this congregation. The year 2006 we lost several members, and we have not seen a lot of growth in our adult membership, but oh, what growth we see in our youth and Sunday School. This the church of the future that we must nurture. Pray that we can see some additional growth in our membership. We need this growth in order for St. Chad's to move into the future. We must also continue to grow in wisdom, grace, and love for one another. Along with the hope of new members, the dream to increase the size of the church proper and to add space to the Parish Hall, and to have additional room for our Sunday school is still the main part of the church's overall plan. This dream can become reality even though we are still small in number, if we continue to put God first in our lives, and continue to do what He has asked us to do, as long as we continue to pray, and support our church in every way, then, the dream remains alive. There are no limits to God's blessings."

2008 – Seventh annual meeting I presided. My message was about revitalizing our mission and setting targets for our future growth. I reported to you that in 2007, the 3 Diamond Committee made their recommendations. The committee derived its name from the 3-diamond jewelry with each piece representing the past, present, and future of a relationship. One of the recommendations of the committee was to create a focused plan to grow. In response to that recommendation, the Bishop's Committee held a retreat and drew up the 10-year plan "The Odyssey Towards Parish Status" which was submitted for the 2020 Grant of the Diocese of Southwest Florida. The most important part of the plan was to hire and sustain a full-time priest. This was highlighted in a feature article published in the South Tampa and Pasco sections of Tampa Tribune. Unfortunately, we were not awarded the grant.

2009 – Eighth annual meeting I presided. My message was based from the letter of Paul to the Philippians 1:25, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith..." 2008 was a year of transitions. In February 2008, although we were not awarded the 2020 Diocesan Grant, I began my status as full-time priest of St. Chad's. We applied for another grant and we were awarded funds for our new church sign. Our focus was improving our facilities and administrative structure. With the renovation of the vicarage, our administrative offices were moved there, subsequently increasing the usable footage in our Parish Hall.

2010 – Ninth annual meeting I presided. My message was based from 1 Corinthians 12:12, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." I reported that we had set ambitious goals in 2008, subsequently, in 2009, with a new set of Vestry members, we continued to work on those ambitious goals. Our new church sign was installed but plans to further

renovate the vicarage to provide for Sunday School classrooms and the work on our facilities expansion project was put on hold due to complex and costly issues related to building permits.

2011 – This is my tenth annual meeting with you. We will continue to grow together. You will see in my 2010 annual report our positive growth and the setbacks in our growth and about future plans to overcome those setbacks.

⁹ *For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*
~1 Corinthians 3:9 (NIV)

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Father Christian Villagomez". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned on the right side of the page, below the horizontal line.