

**Fourth Sunday of Epiphany
Annual Congregational Meeting
February 2, 2014**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

Just last week at the Annual Convention of the Diocese of Florida, I, along with the endorsement of the Mission Board, presented a resolution “Commemorating the Rev. Peter Williams Cassey,” the first Vicar of St. Cyprian’s. The full resolution can be found on the table by the door and tells of Rev. Cassey’s profound ministry to the underserved in California before moving to North Carolina, then Florida. He was the first person of color to be ordained in the Episcopal Church west of the Mississippi, and the first African American called to be a rector of a parish in the Diocese of North Carolina. When he came to the Diocese of Florida he served the Church of the Good Shepherd in Fernandina, and St. Phillip’s in Jacksonville. As early as 1895 Rev. Cassey would travel from Jacksonville to St. Augustine to officiate at service for a budding congregation that would become St. Cyprian’s.

The late 19th century was a flourishing time for St. Augustine. In the 1880’s the Ponce de Leon Hotel, the Hotel Alcazar, and the Casa Monica Hotel had been built attracting the socially elite of the Northeast and Midwest, and the tycoons of the industrial revolution to this part of Florida. They say that “a rising tide floats all boats” and although the African Americans living in Lincolnville may have been at the bottom of the economic strata they also benefited from the city’s prosperity. It would have been an invigorating time in Lincolnville ... less than 40 years after the end of the Civil War and slavery, employment opportunities in construction and the service sectors, and a new Episcopal Church built as a cornerstone for the community.

The Rev. Peter Williams Cassey began his fulltime ministry at St. Cyprian’s in 1901, right after the church was built by some of the same craftsmen who constructed the Ponce de Leon Hotel, the Hotel Alcazar, and the Casa Monica Hotel.

Well, St. Cyprian’s is regaining its stature as a cornerstone of this neighborhood of Lincolnville ... a neighborhood that is experiencing a new life. And I feel like I am standing on the shoulders of a faithful spiritual ancestor. As I mentioned last week, I literally walk in his footsteps as I come down M L King Avenue ... what used to be known as Central Avenue. We would not be here today were it not for Rev. Cassey and the many others who followed him.

Today is the occasion of our Annual Congregational Meeting. We elect ... or in our case today, re-elect ... Mission Board members and Delegates and Alternates to Diocesan Convention. We will also hear a presentation of the 2014 Operating Budget. And it is the occasion for the Vicar’s report to the congregation which I am making from the pulpit this morning.

This will be rather straightforward and short report. St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church in St. Augustine, Florida is in EXCELLENT shape! By every measurable factor we are strong and growing.

- Our membership, the total number of pledging units, and our average Sunday attendance has increased once again this past year.
- Participation in our outreach ministries to those in need in our community continues to grow.
- In 2013 we budgeted \$96,000 to be received through annual pledges for the Operating Budget, and we received almost \$105,000 ... \$9,000 more than expected.
- Then, on top of our Operating Budget, we launched a \$75,000 capital fundraising campaign for the Commons at St. Cyprian's, and in just three month we raised almost \$110,000 in pledges and gifts.

The strength of these measurable factors points to the depth of spirit, confidence, and faithful commitment of the people of St. Cyprian's. This isn't just about "being" faithful; it is about "living" faithfully. It isn't just about coming to church; it is about incarnating a community of faith.

Perhaps the most significant and visible aspect of our life together this past year is right outside these windows. The first phase of The Commons at St. Cyprian's is completed ... and it has transformed our campus. It is much more than just an attractive courtyard between the church and Mission House. It is a very evident spiritual contribution to our neighborhood ... and people have taken notice and offered high compliments.

And we have also put a fresh coat of paint on all our buildings, replaced some 114 year-old shingles of the church, and even refreshed the finish on the pews you are sitting. These were all possible with the gifts and pledges that you have made for this project.

The second phase of the project will be the building of the outdoor chapel and the trellis gate which we plan to finish this spring. The final phase will be constructing the prayer wall and finishing the landscaping.

The Mission Board is committed to paying-as-we-go on these projects so none of them will be initiated until we have the cash-in-hand to cover the costs. Those of you who have made three year pledges and have the means to pay your second year pledge early are encouraged to do so to enable us to begin work on the Dr. Dorothy Headley Israel Outdoor Chapel as soon as possible.

And about the landscaping: Mimi Vreeland, our landscape architect, is committed to using low maintenance native plant materials whenever possible. Many of you have plants in your yards that could find a home at The Commons, and we encourage you to talk to us about donating them to our cause and arranging transplanting.

Last year was filled with a long list of events: Confirmation with Bishop Howard; the Women's Respite Day; Friends & Family Sunday with the ceremonial Groundbreaking for the Chapel; Vespers that went well beyond just Jazz; Bible Workbench on Sunday mornings; Dining with Dignity every month; and much more. And all this didn't happen without a lot of help.

So I want to end my report this morning with some tributes to those around us who have contributed faithfully to our life together, and continue to make a difference in who we are.

I began this report with some comments about the Rev. Peter Williams Cassey. He was 69 when he began his ministry at St. Cyprian's. I was a little bit younger when I began my ministry here, but I'm 69 years old now. Rev. Cassey served until his death at 86. I just want you to know that I don't plan to walk in his footsteps until I'm 86, but I am planning to be around at least a little bit longer. I was ordained in the Episcopal Church almost 40 years ago and of all the places I have served I can honestly say that this is the most rewarding of all. I think our Mission Statement says it all:

St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church proclaims its faith as a community that:

- *Is progressive, welcoming, diverse and inclusive;*
- *Is respectful of differing spiritual paths;*
- *Is a source of healing for the body, mind and spirit;*
- *Is committed to responding to the needs of others;*
- *And honors its past as it moves into the future.*

People to thank:

- Judy Padgett – for serving as St. Cyprian’s Treasurer for over 7 years.
- Debbie Combest – For serving on the Mission Board since the split in 2006
- John Miller – for being one of those original Mission Board members following the split
- Deeh Israel – for being our matriarch and for standing up for the rights of those who were being marginalized, and for those who wanted to stay with the Episcopal Church when so many wanted to leave
- Deena Galatowicz – for faithfully stepping in as priest and leader and managing the crisis immediately following the split, and for being a colleague and friend on this journey

- Mission Board – Joe Finnegan (Sr. Warden), Sue Ann Weber (Jr. Warden), Debbie Combest, Barbara Mitchell, John Miller, Richard Taylor, and Nell Toensmann.
- Chris Smith Mason – Altar Guild
- Mary Lou Woods – Kitchen & St. John’s Ecumenical Food Pantry
- Michelle Park and Jody Stowers – Dining with Dignity
- Richard Taylor – Fundraising guru
- Kathy Vande Berg – Director of Music
- Jerry Gilmer

- Caren – St. Augustine Initiative for Compassion

The Commons Report

Pledges & Gifts total \$108,000+

Total giving in 2013 - \$48,600

Expenses

- Painting approx \$12,000
- Repairs to Church - \$15,000
- Courtyard w Labyrinth - \$23,000

