

July 17, 2005

Fears Subside: Bishop Brings No Bad News

His visit turned out to be pastoral, not fiscal.

Last Tuesday, when **Bishop John Lipscomb** spent 2.5 hours at our vestry's conference table, he asked gentle questions. "What are you looking forward to? What are you thinking about?"

He was pleased with the vestry members' reports and said, "I am so glad to hear what is going on here. Such good news.... This is exciting."

As elected leader of the Diocese of Southwest Florida, he brought advice and ideas, reminders and some wonderfully fresh direction. He encouraged development of a parish vision -- "far less distracting than a mission statement."

"Be aware," he said, "of how you present yourselves to the community." A parish this size cannot be all things, but it can specialize, capitalizing on its resources. "There's no future in bemoaning what you do not have."

Bishop Lipscomb reminded us that we have an educated parish, one that might specialize in adult education. We could reach farther out of this neighborhood, to the Bartlett Park area with alternative worship styles -- or even look at a campus ministry at USF-Bayboro.

"Don't be in competition with every church in your neighborhood," he said. If McCabe United Methodist has an excellent youth program, work with them to include St. Augustine's young people. There's no need to start another program."

Again and again the bishop urged the parish to envision its own future, plan how to get there, then get assistance from the diocese to make it happen.

Vestry members were delighted afterward. Everyone had participated. Ford Hall looked its very best. As the 11 elected members left the building, Senior Warden **Mary Clowers** said, "He came here with healing and new, possible solutions for our challenges."

What Did the Bishop Hear?

... About Our Finances

- * St. Augustine's Church is mortgage-free.
- * All regular bills are paid to date.
- * Diocesan apportionment is paid through 2004. \$2200 is paid on FY 2005; balance is \$6700.
- * National Church's pension fund is now current through FY2004. We do owe the pension fund for the first six months of FY2005.
- * We still owe \$17,000 for health insurance from years past.

... About Our Work

- * Parish Survey is completed, compiled and distributed to parish.
- * Mutual Ministry Review is finished with reports from all committees, Vestry and Rector identifying strengths, areas for improvement, goals and dates for completion. Summary of committee reports has been given to parish. Vestry and Rector summaries will be provided in August.
- * Improvements made to our parish buildings and property with details about work still to be done. Description of materials from Holy Cross Church and how they will be used at St. Augustine's.
- * Description of Your Place property and program.

Last Week's Sermon: What One Person Heard

Fr. Jack's homily was based on the parable of the sower and seed.

He reminded us that many generations here at St. Augustine's have sown seeds. Sometimes we saw a large share of that seed get trampled, squeezed out by hurtful pressures. We saw the seed die because it fell where there was little receptivity to it.

And yet there have been glorious times at St. Augustine's when the seed fell into open hearts and it produced wonderful acts of love.

Last Sunday, we were all worried about the bishop's coming, about his message to us, and about our church's future.

Fr. Jack Hyde reminded us that, like those disciples in Galilee, as we do God's work here in South St. Pete, the parable will continue to open more levels of understanding and we will discover that there are more "blessings to come."

Vestry on the Eve of the Visit: Here's What Happened

Treasurer **Greg Duckett's** finance report was quite hopeful, but it raised questions on how we will pay these older debts: 1. the national Church Pension Fund 2. past health insurance statements and 3. the Diocese for the current year's apportionments. "We now make insufficient headway on these three debts," he reported. An ad-hoc committee (**Mary Jones, Inez Ford, Joyce Corn, Judy Krug** and Greg) was formed to explore ways to erase these debts. That group met on Wednesday.

Monthly financial reports will now feature separate accounts for those discretionary funds intended for remodeling, landscaping and sanctuary improvements.

Continued on page 2