

**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Annual Parish Meeting
January 17, 2010**

Report from the Head of School

Dear Friends and Parishioners of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church:

I want to thank the entire St. Andrew's community for helping to welcome Megan, Patrick, Carter, and me to the School and Church community. We have truly been blessed with a most sincere and warm reception. Now over seven months into our St. Andrew's and New Orleans experience, we feel that we are beginning to put the term "transition" behind us. Thank you.

As you likely know, these are both exciting and challenging times for St. Andrew's Episcopal School. Words such as "new", "different", and "buzz" seem to be circulating within our community. There is indeed a spirit of optimism, creativity, and excitement over the direction of the School and some of the initiatives that have begun this fall and winter.

However, there also exists a certain informed soberness, shaped by the financial and enrollment realities of our institution. All businesses, both for-profit and not-for-profit, have been rattled by the economic downturn of the past several years, and St. Andrew's is no exception. Add to that the catastrophe of Katrina, from which all New Orleans schools are still recovering, and a two-year transition in leadership, and it is understandable why the School's enrollment and corresponding revenue streams are less than ideal.

More on that later...Let's begin with the optimism:

2009 Initiatives

I assumed duties as head of school on June 15, 2009. Thanks to the excellent work of Betsy Sterkx, the School's Search and then Transition Committee Chair, as well as Interim Head Merrill Hall, I was able to hit the ground running.

Aside from finding my way around campus and getting to know the administrative staff on hand, my first priority this summer was fulfilling the School's staffing requirements for 2009-2010.

From June 15 to July 31, we recruited, screened, and eventually hired for the following positions: Pre-Kindergarten Teaching Assistant, Second Grade Teaching Assistant, First and Third Grade Teaching Assistant, Seventh Grade Teacher, Second Grade Teacher, Athletic Director, and Business Manager.

One of the few benefits of this economic recession is the strength of talent available for employers looking to hire. We were able to select and hire from an impressive pool of candidates; we received over ten applications for each position.

Other summer initiatives included the following:

- Launching the School's new website (www.standrewsepiscopalschool.org) and e-mail system
- Reconfiguring the campus by moving the Head's Office from Kimball Hall to the Old Rectory, improving the visibility and centrality of the Head's Office; relocating the art studio from the Old

Rectory to improved teaching space in De La Vega Hall; refurbishing Parish Hall with new carpeting and a fresh coat of paint; moving the Admissions and Development Office to the former Head's Office in Kimball Hall; moving the Business Office to the former Admissions and Development Office in Parish Hall; creating a new Fourth Grade classroom in Kimball Hall; and assisting the St. Andrew's Cottage in occupying the entirety of the first floor of Kimball Hall

- Forming a new lunch program and partnership with Lakeview Deli and Catering; first-year results are good, with over 100 of our 144 students participating in the plan (more than double last year's number of participants)
- Laying the foundation, literally and figuratively, for the School's new Community Garden in the Satimore Lot, which was launched early in the fall thanks to more than thirty volunteers; each grade currently boasts its own raised bed, with herbs, plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables making their way through the soil

Other high points of the year have included the first-ever St. Andrew's Middle School Dance, hosted by our students in November with great success.

Around that same time, St. Andrew's received an incredibly generous donation of \$16,000 from the Harang Trust to furnish the School with three Smart Boards, projectors, and dedicated laptops, allowing St. Andrew's to boast a one-to-one laptop and Smart Board program for all students in grades 2-8.

I have worked closely with our 8th graders and their parents to execute a thoughtful and deliberate outplacement process that will result in successful placement at a high school of each student's choice. Six different high schools, public, parochial, and independent, visited our 8th graders this fall to walk them through the application process and encourage them to consider their school. In December, we learned that the three students who sat for the admission test to Benjamin Franklin High School scored well enough to ensure acceptance; I expect each to matriculate at Ben Franklin this fall. I am working with the other two students and their families to secure acceptance at one or more competitive high schools for the fall.

Just before the Christmas holiday, we received a wonderful donation of \$5,000 from Peggy Sewell to renovate De La Vega Hall. Over the Christmas vacation, we conducted wall repairs and applied a fresh coat of paint to the hallways, Pre-K classroom, and bathrooms. With remaining funds, over the Mardi Gras holiday, we will replace badly cracked floor tiles in the girls' bathroom.

Also before the Christmas holiday, we received a commitment from the Peja Stojakovic Children's Foundation to resurface our basketball court and replace our existing basketball hoops and equipment. I have been working with the Foundation, various contractors, and our architects to secure competitive bids for the work, which we hope to commence by the end of February.

On January 7, I announced a partnership with the New Orleans Sports School (www.neworleanssportsschool.org) to offer after school baseball and softball instruction to our students, grades PK-8. This instruction will be part of a broader expansion of our current after school programming, which will include courses in karate, art, robotics, yoga, and cooking, largely taught by St. Andrew's faculty. These offerings respond to an overwhelming desire, expressed directly to me from our parents, that we offer a variety of after school programming, as a complement to our existing After School Care program, ably led by Mrs. Venessa Jones.

On January 10, nearly 120 St. Andrew's supporters gathered at Rock 'N' Bowl to raise funds for the Parents' Club and for the School's Athletic Department. I am pleased to report that we raised over \$16,000 for those causes.

Finally, the Building and Property Committee, as well as the full Board, are in the process of reviewing a Campus Planning Document and schematic designs for the potential renovation of both Kimball and Parish Halls. Earlier this fall, the School contracted with WDG Architects and Engineers to conduct these studies and produce these documents, in order to allow St. Andrew's to contemplate the future of its physical plant. As the campus now contains students as young as 18 months and as old as 14 years, as opposed to its former PK-Grade 6 identity, some form of renovation and perhaps new construction will be necessary to accommodate what we hope and expect will be growing numbers of students on campus.

2010 and Beyond

Like most independent schools in this time of economic uncertainty, St. Andrew's faces both short- and long-term financial challenges. Most pressing for our school is the current imbalance in our budget, which will shortly necessitate a significant draw from the unrestricted portion of our endowment. According to the School's audited financial statements, beginning in 2004 and likely continuing until at least 2012, St. Andrew's has not been and will not be in a position to submit a balanced budget without the assistance of a loan or a withdrawal from the School's endowment.

As I have expressed to our School Board, I do not believe the School's imbalance is attributable to errors on the expense side of the budget equation. To the contrary, the School is very disciplined with regard to expenses. Rather, the School is simply not enrolling enough students at present to account for the real costs of a PK-8 program.

Our enrollment projections suggest we are experiencing a temporary enrollment anomaly, brought about by a still-diminished post-Katrina population, local and national economic recession, and perhaps most significantly, a major transition in leadership, which historically adversely affects even the most stable and well-enrolled independent schools.

Simply put, the School must focus its efforts on the joint acts of admission and retention, keeping our families here at the School through the course of our ten-year program. By replacing the relatively small graduating classes of the next two to three years with Pre-K classes of 20-24, the School can reach a significantly higher enrollment number in just a few years, thereby balancing the budget and beginning to re-establish and grow the endowment.

Mother Gaumer and I share the "glass-half-full" view of life, so while I am not blind to the challenges facing St. Andrew's, I am focused on creating a positive vision and direction for the School, one that I believe is imminently attainable through cooperation and contribution from the entire St. Andrew's community.

Thank you for welcoming me to the St. Andrew's family, and I look forward to working with you in the years to come.

Yours,

Mason Lecky
Head of School