

## Resist Conformity

The 2<sup>nd</sup> line of our parish mission statement proclaims “Grace Church is a school for discipleship and stewardship.” This follows “Grace Church is a center for worship and fellowship.” And it comes before the last line “Grace Church is a community for healing and outreach.”

Today, we celebrate our ministry as a school: first, in knowing that to be a Christian, to live a Christian life, is a life-long commitment to new understanding, new learnings, new truths. And second, every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in October, as the entire Episcopal Church celebrates it’s more than 1100 Church schools, we celebrate the ministry of our school – Grace Episcopal – at our nine a.m. service.

Our parish leaders decided to leave the original property on South Patrick street after World War II because Alexandria was growing to the north; many homes had been built and were being built in the neighborhoods in this area and our leaders thought with a larger piece of property, it might be possible to have a parish day school.

This dream became a reality in 1959, just two years after the debt on the new Church had been paid off and the large school building, we call Merrow Hall, had been built.

Grace Church’s commitment to education, to be a parish as a school, includes our Sunday Christian Education classes and our traditional, yet ever innovative school classes for 3-year-olds through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. We share our space, we share this commitment to education, we share our worship, and we share Jesus at the heart of all we do.

Before Jesus was known as Lord, as the Son of God, he was known as a very wise teacher, a rabbi. He taught lessons about the love of God and the reality of human life. At the beginning of his ministry, we see Jesus teaching through his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). At the end of his ministry, after the Resurrection and before the Ascension, Jesus gives his last teaching “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them ...”

Education is the process of transformation, growing, discovering, learning. Some of our 5<sup>th</sup> graders have spent their entire childhood in our school, since they started in our 3-year-old class. Some children come to us from other schools, but for all, Grace is a place of transformation, preparing our students for middle school, high school, and the rest of their lives.

The theme for this year’s Episcopal Schools’ week is “Be transformed.” It is taken from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed...” Paul had gone through his own transformation from one who persecuted Christians to one of the great saints of the Church. Paul saw the growth of the Christian faith for decades in the 1<sup>st</sup> century spreading from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond, thousands upon thousands resisting the culture and worldly opposition to be transformed by their lives in Christ and their lives in the Church. Paul knew that those following Jesus, the teacher, the Lord, were being changed “from one degree of glory to another...”

We share this wonderful ministry of transformation with those who teach and with those who learn in our school. Paul helps us to know that this lifelong process of transformation begins very early on as we discover our gifts, our unique God-given talents and we start to use these gifts and talents.

Jesus wanted Martha to focus in today’s Gospel reading. There is so much that can distract us in our modern world. Our students learn to focus on what is important to learn. They leave the 5<sup>th</sup> grade here

knowing the difference between distractions and focus, the difference between conformity and transformation.

Our school helps us all to remember that all of us at Grace Church attend and live in a school for discipleship and stewardship. This is our mission. This is our lifelong journey. And we are blessed to share it as a school and as a parish.

Do not be conformed to this world. Be transformed...

Romans 12:1-20

Luke 10:38-42