FROM THE SOUTH

The south area of our diocese has been somewhat neglected this year owing to the health of the president. I apologize for the inconvenience this may have caused and would particularly note that the Deanery Directoresses Mary Vernon, Barbara Smith and Marcia Symington, have been most helpful. However, I wasn't even able to be in touch with them for about three months and this has led to a delayed communication with reference to our Meeting on March 31st at St. Wilfred's.

Last year, we had a very successful meeting in Venice and wondrous assistance from St. Marks in Venice. They were also most helpful when the diocese held their convention there and hopefully, it will again be held in Venice this year. At the time of writing we are arranging for the consecration of our new bishop, who will be with us at our meeting this year. We are very happy about this although we will surely miss Bishop Lipscomb, who is on a leave of absence.

I cannot report too much detail on the convention etc. as I was not there, but I know Ann will share that information with you. At times like this it is good to have two of us although Ann too has had back surgery and was out of commission for some time. Now we are both back and looking forward to the coming year and hopefully announcing successors in our responsibilities. We were extremely saddened at the loss of "Mac" when she had just been installed as president for the National Altar Guild Association. She was such a pillar of strength and knowledge and a dear friend. She had been our president since 1996 when she was installed as President at All Soul's Church in North Ft. Myers. We miss her.

Now we look forward to a new year with altar guild and hope that as many as possible will make a real effort to be at our meeting. The numbers have really dropped in the last few years. When a previous meeting was held at St. Wilfred's in 1994, there were 117 in attendance and 202 at Mac's installation. So let's show our new bishop how important Altar Guild is to us!

FROM THE NORTH

First, I apologize for failing to visit any altar guilds this year. Between family pressures, elevating fuel costs and a very disabling physical condition I was unable to be an active leader.

The year has had some uplifting experiences. Once again I attended the Province IV Altar Guild meeting at Kanuga. This year our two workshops were making baptismal banners and rosaries. There will be samples of the work with instructions plus prayers to use with the rosary at the North Branch Diocesan Meeting. The planning for the diocesan convention was a challenge because again it was a new venue. With the walk about on Friday for potential bishop candidates we were very late in preparing the convention center for the eucharist. Thank God for the women of St. Mark's altar guild. The church is only two blocks from the convention center. They loaned us wheeled carts and eucharist vessels. My dear co-hort, Thelma Wallis, was recuperating from a fractured hip and leg, and me on two canes made their help plus volunteers from other parishes a most gratifying experience. Thank you to all.

Now, I am part of the many committees planning and preparing for the consecration and ordination of the new bishop coadjutor. St. Jude's has been so gracious to everyone, but the altar guild responsibilities have been greatly eased by using their vessels, linens and wafers. Our only responsibility is to wash the vessels following the service! As you know I am still searching for one person who feels called to replace me. It is open to anyone dedicated to keeping the altar guilds united although each parish may be a fair distance away and do things differently than you are accustomed to doing. As a diocesan leader you have the opportunity to share in promoting true fellowship among your sisters and brothers in this diocese. Working with people from other parishes to prepare for diocesan events is a wonderful learning and very exciting experience. May your year be filled with peace.
By tradition each new incoming bishop is given new vestments. Two weeks before the ordination and consecration of Bishop Smith the two diocesan altar guild leaders were asked if the diocesan altar guilds would like to give the green vestments to the Bishop. These were the only articles not given. So it was agreed that the diocesan altar guild would give this gift to Bishop Smith. Therefore, the offering from the two diocesan altar guild meetings this month will go towards the green vestments. The total cost is $1035.00.

HISTORY OF NATIONAL ALTAR GUILD PUBLISHED

The National Altar Guild of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A.
Its First Seventy-Three Years
1927-2000

Barbara Gent

Barbara Gent, winter resident of our diocese, visitor to our meetings former managing editor of the EPISTLE and honorary member of the NAGA Board has written a history of the National Altar Guild Association. It would be a valuable addition to an altar guild library. These new to the ministry will find it a rich source of information, while those more experienced will enjoy the ins and outs of trying to bring a body of strong-minded Episcopal women into a cohesive, loving body of servants for God’s altar.

Excerpt from the Autumn 2006 issue of the NAGA Magazine, EPISTLE

EXPERIENCING PRAYER WITH A LABYRINTH

One of the workshops at national convention was conducted by Sister Suzanne Elizabeth of the Community of St. John Baptist, Mendham, N.J. She explained that we need tools for prayer. “We need to get focused on God, listening – truly listening to ourselves by praying in a quiet setting. We breathe in silently to ourselves, ‘I am;’ as we breathe out, we say to ourselves, ‘Thou art,’” She mentioned a prayer stone or an icon as good for centering and focusing. The third wonderful tool is the labyrinth. Think of it as a maze, but as a path that brings the sojourner to the center. The action of walking helps calm the mind and relax the body. The journey becomes an act of faith – a belief the God calls the pilgrim to the center. Pausing at the center, pilgrims may ask God for courage, peace and healing, and give thanks for the journey given by God. The journey back to the edge of the labyrinth ends by pausing with bowed head in thanksgiving before going forth to build God’s kingdom.

Excerpt from the Autumn 2006 issue of the NAGA magazine, EPISTLE

ORDINATION FOOTNOTE

There are no words to express the gratitude of the Diocesan Altar Guild for Paula Purvis, the head sacristan at St. Jude’s Roman Catholic Cathedral. She was always available for our questions and our needs. Her manner was always sunny and uplifting even when a full vessel of blessed wine was spilled on the carpet. Thanks also go to Nancy Knuckey from St. Bart’s, Sarah Hill and Fran Parsons from St. Peter’s. St. Peter’s loaned all the altar linens, wafers and wine, but otherwise St. Jude’s supplied us with their vessels and purificators. Truly ecumenical!