From the Bishop’s Desk

I have just returned from spending three days and three nights at the Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska, on retreat with the clergy of our diocese. All told, forty folks came to this retreat, both active and retired clergy, from every corner of our state.

It’s a long established custom for your clergy to gather once a year for this meeting, though the shape and content of this time has grown and changed over the years. This time we tried a couple of new things. In particular, we extended our time together by almost 24 hours, and instead of meeting as two separate communities – deacons and priests – we met as one, single body of Nebraska clergy.

I cannot say whether these changes were the reason, but I can say that this was a powerful and meaningful gathering for your ministers. We worshiped together in the beautiful BC Chapel (shout out to Father Jeffrey Nelson who planned our worship and made that time very special for us all,) we met in small groups to talk and pray together about our experiences of serving Christ and the people of God in the Church and in the world, we read scripture together (including the entire book of First Corinthians out loud and in a single sitting!) and of course we played together too.

The principle thing I wish to share with you coming out of this retreat experience is my sincere admiration for the women and men who help lead our Episcopal parishes as deacons and priests here in the Diocese of Nebraska. While none of us is perfect (including certainly yours truly!) this is a group of folks who work hard and care deeply for the people they’ve been called to serve. I am so proud to be part of this family, and so thankful for the faithful ministries they offer.

When you see your deacon or priest later this week, I hope you will give them a hug, and let them know you appreciate what they do. We are blessed, one and all, by the clergy of this diocese!

Faithfully Yours in Christ –

The Right Rev. J. Scott Barker
Editor-in-Chief

2013: Year of the Bible Challenge!

The Bishop’s Bible Challenge continues! More than 200 Nebraska Episcopalians (and a few of our special friends from Colorado, New York and elsewhere) have joined together to read the entire Bible, one day at a time, over the course of this calendar year. As of this writing, we’ve read the first three books of both the Old and New Testaments. It is not too late to join in this surprisingly fun and life-giving discipline. Visit our diocesan website (www.episcopal-ne.org) and click on the "2013 Bible Challenge" tab to get started.

How to Subscribe

You can get the on-line version of this FOR FREE—click the “Nebraska Episcopalian” button on the diocesan website and enter your email address. You can receive a printed edition in the mail by sending your name, address, and an $8 annual subscription fee to the diocesan office.
Community

We can only find our own place in the context of life together. We cannot manufacture our own meaning. We need others to shine Jesus’ light and life and love into our own eyes to give us meaning, and we complete this meaning by reflecting this same light and life and love of Jesus into the countenance of others.

Br. Curtis Almquist
Society of St. John the Evangelist

Sign up for “Brother, Give Us a Word”, a very brief daily devotion from The Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopal Benedictine monastery in Boston, at http://www.ssje.org/

Living Out Our Call

On any given Sunday, many parishes around the Diocese of Nebraska gather to share a meal following worship in the parish hall or church undercroft. People come because they are hungry for lunch. They come to celebrate. They come because it is a tradition in their parish.

These meals are as varied as the people and churches of our diocese, and run the gamut from coffee and doughnuts to full fledged pot-luck dinners hosted by the whole church family.

After the meal, everyone usually takes home what they brought to share, and with the help of many hands the parish hall is put back in order.

A visitor to one parish this past weekend observed something special happening during clean-up time. As the dishes were being cleaned and the tables straightened, the leftover food from brunch was carefully packed into care packages and sent home with some visitors to the church.

These care packages will provide them with the next few meals and they represent more than just a parish lunch. They represent a full belly, unselfish giving and love.

In this parish, and in many all across our diocese, people work every day to make a difference and be the firm foundation that is our church.

- Kate Baxley
Director of Administration and Communications

Ashes On The Go

From 8:00 until 9:30 AM, and from 11:30 AM until 1:00 PM, Fr. Jason Emerson from Church of the Resurrection and Sr. Warden Keith Winton distributed Ashes-On-The-Go in Omaha’s Elmwood park to more than 60 people—students, mothers on the way to daycare, construction workers, joggers and others who otherwise would have been unable to worship on Ash Wednesday. They also handed out a flyer on “Why Ash Wednesday” to those who were unfamiliar with the practice, inviting them to explore the Episcopal Church.

Favorite Bible Verse

1 John 4:8

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is Love.

Nicole Cloudt,
St. Mary’s, Blair

Send us your favorite Bible verse and we’ll use it in a future edition of the NE Episcopalian!
While the church is observing Lent and Easter in early spring, signs of new life are showing up in Nebraska’s fields, wetlands, and skies. Our Lenten disciplines and our Easter celebrations in the church are meant to prepare us for and then deepen our experience of the Resurrection story and our relationship with the Living Christ. Careful attention to the special liturgies of these seasons and to the lectionary readings coupled with intentional practices of prayer and charity can help us live more deeply into the Resurrection story each year. Meanwhile, outside our church walls, the ice is thawing, green shoots are poking up through brown stubble, buds are swelling on trees, hibernating animals are reappearing, and an incredible number of birds are following the central flyway northward through the Great Plains.

In communities near the Platte River in central Nebraska, the return of the Sandhill cranes and the rarer whooping cranes that stop to rest and feed before continuing their northward journey is a big event. For four years now, St. Stephen’s in Grand Island has designated one Sunday during Lent as Crane Sunday, a day when we highlight the wonder we experience when we hear and see the cranes coming to the river to roost at sunset or taking off for the fields at sunrise. We delight in hearing the calls of the cranes as they first arrive in our area, and we smile when we see cranes dancing in the fields. When they are migrating, these birds typically fly 200-300 miles in a day; sometimes, with a good tail wind, they go as far as 500 miles. We marvel at the very fact of the length of their journey and the regularity through thousands and thousands of years of their flight through our part of the world.

At first glance, a celebration of something birds have been doing since long before the birth of Christ or the founding of the Church might seem far removed from what we are doing in the Church this time of year. Such a celebration may even seem like a distraction from our journey through Lent. Instead, we have found that getting outside and reconnecting with some of the ancient rhythms of life on this planet and then bringing some of what we find outside into our Sunday morning worship intensifies our spiritual experience. If nothing else, the number of birds traveling through our state, the awareness of the history of this flyway, and even the reminder of the size of our prairie skies and the wide views of sunrises and sunsets call us back to the bigger picture of God’s creation and our place in it. It serves as a check to ensure that our religious practices don’t slip into self-absorption but instead deepen our relationship with the Christ who asked us to follow him by serving in the world.

Environmental stewardship is about protecting and conserving the resources that sustain our lives and the lives of all our brothers and sisters and the plants and animals with whom we share this planet. Certainly protecting and conserving our land and water is critical for our economic well-being and our physical health, especially in a major agricultural state, but the spiritual nourishment we receive from our land and water and the living things with which we share them is equally important if we are to thrive as full children of God in our environment. Springtime in Nebraska offers a great opportunity to connect with God by connecting with God’s creation.

- The Ven. Betsy Blake, Archdeacon

A tip of the mitre to Mother Catherine Scott, who after serving for nineteen years as a priest in the Diocese of Nebraska, was recently seated (on Feb 24th) as the Dean of St Mark's Pro-Cathedral in Hastings. Father Charles Peek preached the sermon at her seating and installation, and Catherine's husband – Father Bob Scott – beautifully chanted the litany at this once-in-a-lifetime celebration. Thanks be to God!
Youth Ministry Notes

“So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners… You are members of God’s family.” Ephesians 2:19

As an over-involved teenager, I have a lot of people outside of my actual kin that I can call family: my show choir, my competitive dance team, my school newspaper’s staff, everyone in my school’s theater department, and (most importantly) my church.

I am, as I mentioned the last column, a cradle Episcopalian: I was baptized at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Grand Island at nine weeks old. My family has been sitting in the third pew from the back on the left side since I was born; some of my earliest memories are of the countless Agape meals, pancake feeds, coffee hours, Altar Guild trainings, Vacation Bible Schools, Godly Play sessions, children’s choir practices, and Christmas Eve services I attended in my little home-away-from-home on Second Street. The parishioners there can remember the time I broke my leg, the Christmas I put Crisco in my hair, and my Confirmation. They watched me grow up. They are my family.

That sense of openness and love extends far beyond St. Stephen’s, though. When I went to Happening my freshman year, I became part of a whole new church family, made up of kids that understood me and my background and let me know that I had a future with God, our father. A few months after that event, when I came down with a nasty case of mono, I constantly had sisters and brothers in Christ texting me to make sure I was okay, and that compassion left a major impression on me. The same feeling extended into the youth event that we created last year, Novo. The kids involved in that events are truly amazing, and the light of Christ simply beams out of all of them.

I was reminded of the power of this family’s love just a few weeks ago when I was in a minor car accident, which left me with a concussion and a skittish demeanor. I was also very upset, because the concussion meant that I couldn’t compete in the first show choir competition of the season, which was just the next day. One member of the Novo family knew of the accident, though, and within hours, teenagers across the state were praying for my healing. Miraculously, I woke up the next day with almost no symptoms…this was surely the work of God through the love, prayers, and support from my loved ones.

We don’t see each other often, but I feel closer to this family than I do to any of the other families I see every day. They drive me to work for this diocese’s youth program, because every kid deserves to have the kind of encouragement I have. In fact, that support has always been the striking thing about the Episcopal Church to me: everyone is welcome. As soon as I could read, I understood that our Sunday bulletins proclaimed, “The red doors of St. Stephen’s are always open!” and when I was straying away from the church in middle school, the community is what brought me back. I am truly blessed to have grown up Episcopalian, and I will carry the welcoming, loving attitude I learned from my church family for the rest of my life.

- Abbey Kutlas
Abbey attends Grand Island Senior High – Ed

FREEDOM

One of the ways we can be held captive and in prison is by memories: things which are in the past which can keep us tied to the past, like prisoners. Jesus comes to us to save us from the past, give us freedom in the present, and hope for the future.

Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE

In Memoriam—Diane Marie Krull Carlson

Diane Marie Krull Carlson was born in Hastings, Nebraska on March 28, 1945 and died December 18, 2012. She and her husband, the Rev. Wayne Harold Carlson, were married at St. Mark’s Pro-Cathedral in Hastings on June 10, 1967.

As a nurse married to an Episcopal priest, Diane was blessed to spend time in many different places and serve in many parishes while raising her family, both in Nebraska and beyond. When her husband was called to serve at Christ Church in Central City, Diane served that congregation with love and joy. She was a beloved member of her community, always striving to help where needed.

Whether at a hospital or a congregation, her heart for service knew no bounds. Diane will be greatly missed, but her amazing spirit will live on in the hearts of all those whose lives she touched.

- Diane Marie Krull Carlson

In Memoriam—Diane Marie Krull Carlson
How are you doing with your stewardship dance this year? You know, where you want to look and feel like you’re Waltzing, but sometimes it just feels like the Shrug (or, even worse, the Hustle!).

As a parish, we often struggle to think of a theme or program that will inspire people to give, and usually just end up hounding people for their pledge card. And on a personal level, all of us are at different stages of how our spiritual life is connected to our gifts of treasure and time.

I find that parishes and people, myself included, do this thing called stewardship in different ways and we’re all at different stages in that journey. Some have practiced and can dance the stewardship dance so smoothly; I marvel at how they can be so intentional and creative.

But most of us are like Elaine Benes, the Seinfeld character whose quirky, jerky dance pretty much reflects our own fits and starts with giving, gratitude, etc. If you haven’t a clue what I’m talking about, begin Googling “Elaine Benes” and you won’t even have to type more because “Elaine Benes dancing” pops up!

So when Bishop Barker asked me to write a column on stewardship, I immediately accepted. I’ve been there as a stewardship leader in a parish, and as the stewardship director for a diocese. The things that I wanted to know and learn as a parish volunteer, were the things that I sought to share around the diocese. And it is those ideas that I would like to share with you. I’ve had the rare opportunity to learn from those who have good ideas and new approaches, and I have had opportunity to create and share my own.

Bishop Barker and I talked about his goal for a long-term focus on stewardship. And so, I offer to you the following set of thoughts-- the 12 Disciple Steps to Year-Round Stewardship-- that would help shape the structural stewardship needs, and the spiritual aspects that often only appear once a year during the annual campaign.

My goal is to give you thoughts to reflect upon, best practices ideas that you can share with others and discuss, and a way for you to share your own ideas.

For this reflection, let’s cover the first three steps.

Pray
Bishop Barker has challenged each of us to read the bible in a year. In fact, he’s provided a very helpful guide that provides an Old Testament, Psalm, and New Testament reading each day. I have never done this exercise before and it is proving to be a worthy one. Doing this means I have new thoughts to ponder each day as I drive to work.

Where does a simple bible verse each day lead us when we’ve got budgets to balance, pews to fill, and problems to solve?

I’m pretty sure you know where I’m headed with this.

I worked with a parish that had an average Sunday attendance of around 45 or so. Like so many congregations, their average age was, and still is, increasing and they wondered in a very intentional way how long their parish would be around.

Part of their concern was that they didn’t really feel that they had a clear sense of their mission. So, the priest and several members of the congregation got together every Sunday, and prior to the service, they held a prayer session. They asked God to reveal his call to them.

They prayed for a solid year. And at the end of that year, they still didn’t have a sense of what they could, or should, be doing. So they prayed for another year. How the priest said it to me, “We prayed for another looookkyyyy year.”

Then one day, a couple of parishioners had a conversation with a woman who was manager of the city pool. She talked to them about how kids went to the pool each day during the summer without a lunch, or with only a little bit of money to buy snacks. And how working families relied on the pool to be caregiver during the day. Even in this town of around 5000 people, many families struggle to get enough food on the table. The church members thought, “Well, we can maybe cook a lunch for them.” And so, they provided a lunch once a month for the three months the pool was open.

Three meals that changed this entire parish. The priest said, “Things began to organically happen!” They cooked even more meals the next summer; they began to provide backpacks of food to kids every week during the school year; they formed a Kids Café—a neighborhood targeted feeding program; they began to provide boxes of food to area Senior Citizens; and lastly, they became the partner for Harvesters—a food distribution program. Being a Harvesters partner meant that this small group of people singlehandedly hands out a semi-tractor trailer of food once a month to needy people.

I was there one day to help them unload the truck. It was a freezing cold day and cars were lined up two abreast around a large parking lot. The truck was late that day because the cold hindered its loading. A couple of people had to get out of line because they only had a few gallons of gas to last for the week, and it was too cold to turn off the car engine.

This is a church that the local paper described as “the church that feeds people.”

The priest says, “God has a plan for us.” This is now a parish whose ministry would be greatly missed if they were not there. This is a parish that used prayer to lead them towards their call and who accepted God’s timeframe for discernment of that call.

This is now a parish where everyone has a role in the ministry. Folks who can’t unload a semi of food are making calls for volunteers, filling backpacks with food, or writing thank you cards.

The most amazing part of all this is that I haven’t even mentioned money, or giving. That’s what happens when you focus first on the ministry you are called to do, rather than the money. In this parish, every person is committed to the mission plan and the money seems to work out. One couple, who had made provisions in their estate for the parish, decided that their call was important to fund now. So,
If you are struggling with your stewardship and ministry call, both at a parish level and at a personal level, pray about this. Take time to do NOTHING but pray. Pray and ask God to show you the way.

Celebrate the disciples:

If you’ve wanted to have year-round stewardship in your parish, you will have to move away from your old habits. As Miss Mannsers might say, “Gentle Reader, move away from the October-Beg-A-Thon.” (Actually, that phrase was coined by a dear friend, Terry Parsons. More about her in the next section.)

I’m now invoking my famous “permission slip” moment. Because it is in these moments that you are saying to yourself, “I’m not the person to do this. There are others that are better at asking for money, talking about stewardship, not me.”

And I’m here to say that if there was someone who really is better at doing this thing called Stewardship Leadership, then they would be doing it. I’m handing you a permission slip to go forth and lead others to a new way.

And that new way really needs to be a new way! Clergy and lay, old and young, rich and not rich all need to be part of a new way, And YOU might be the very person who can help articulate a message that will begin to link people’s spiritual life and their money life together.

You can see why I put the whole prayer thing first, can’t you?

There are so many wonderful ways to build a theological foundation to your stewardship program. I have found that having simple ideas work very well. So one of the thoughts I have is to bring forth the lives of the disciples (or whoever is a good fit for your parish). The disciples are just like us. In their ministry with Jesus, they were faced with tasks that were insurmountable. But we, just like the disciples, are changed when we see how abundant thinking changes the status quo.

Developing theological stewardship—as opposed to a secular fundraising model that most of our annual giving programs follow—takes time. But it will help you build a foundation towards discernment of your mission, your purpose, and God’s call to you and your ministry.

Look for biblical stories:

Here’s the best part, because this will get every man, woman, and child involved in the unfolding story that is your new stewardship plan.

I mentioned my friend, Terry Parsons previously. You may have known her—Terry was the Stewardship Officer (she would often say Stewardship Do-Da) for the National Church. She became my friend and mentor. We created many things and she was my go-to for any creative slumps. She died suddenly this past October and I miss her terribly.

Terry’s go-to biblical story is the feeding of the 4000 in Mark’s Gospel. Here’s why: the disciples, like us, just wanted to send these folks on their way. But Jesus asks them to do the impossible—feed them!

There are so many themes of abundance, scarcity, fear, love, in this passage. It can be a way for you to build on its many themes and see the same passage from many angles.

Ultimately, our message should be that by giving faithfully what we have, we can multiply what is available. By finding passages that illustrate God’s abundant plan for us, you will begin to find ways to have those needed, but yes, uncomfortable discussions. Discussions about our money, our use of our time, our life and our response to God’s call.

Charlene DeWitt is the Gift Planning Officer with the American Red Cross. She serves the Nebraska and SW Iowa regional chapters, helping them and their donors with estate and life income gift planning. She comes back to Nebraska after six years with the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas. She also served as Gift Planning Field Manager with the Episcopal Church Foundation. Char will be a regular stewardship contributor to this publication, helping you build resources and motivation in your stewardship efforts.

12 Disciple Steps to Year-Round Stewardship

The Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska

1. Pray:
   - Begin praying for your vision/discernment; anticipate praying for many weeks, months, or yes, years.
   - Create a prayer for your stewardship discernment.
   - Assemble a prayer team that will pray for the overall success of the stewardship and ministry activities.
   - Ask everyone who gathers to pray and reflect on the prayer at each meeting.
   - Encourage personal daily prayers, including the vision/discernment of the parish.
   - Ask the vestry to pray for all newcomers.
   - Hold prayers for our daily life and work—and consider saying prayers in church or at home around our calendars, our checkbooks, our briefcases and backpacks.
2. Celebrate the disciples (as well as prophets and saints) as part of the biblical focus of your year-round stewardship:
   - Examine the ways in which the disciples were challenged by Jesus to think differently about their ministry.
   - Build themes around the times when the followers of Jesus were changed by his abundant thinking and his changing of the status quo.
   - Build upon a concept of how we worship and do ministry in community.
   - “In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:21-22 NIV
   - Consider using the dwell theme as a way to bring together physical space (however you define that!), spiritual desire, and Paul’s steadfast work to make Jesus known to us all.
   - Use the Lectionary to highlight your themes throughout the year. Build sermons and Christian education classes strategically around appropriate readings.

3. Look for biblical stories to help illustrate abundance in your plan:
   - Story of the feeding of the 4000 helps illustrate this—Mark 8
   - Jesus tells his disciples to feed the crowd even though none of them had experience doing that.
   - Instead of escaping to scarcity thinking because it seems safe and smart to them, Jesus asks the abundance claiming question – “how much do you have now? Go and see.”
   - This took courage on the disciples’ part: talking about new ways of doing ministry and stewardship will also take courage.
   - Disciples probably expected him to answer reasonably that there wasn’t enough. Instead he asks them to give them what they have.
   - You can say, “At our parish, by giving faithfully what we have, we can multiply what is available.”

4. Create your stewardship vision:
   - Invite the vestry, key leaders, past Senior/Junior Wardens
   - Begin with “why do this?” Read Henri J.M Nouwen’s “The Spirituality of Fundraising”
   - Hold a retreat and craft a stewardship statement.
   - Craft a one to two page theological case statement.
   - Articulate we are about resourcing the church’s mission vs. year-to-year financing of its immediate needs.
   - Create a narrative budget for your annual giving program; this will write the narrative of your mission plan for the coming year.
   - Hold a “Church Inspection.” Learn what a visitor encounters as they try to call you or look you up on a website, find you, park, enter, get kids to nursery/school, greeted, seated, find materials, get communion, leave, and then how they are approached the following day/week. Use this information to change your approach with everyone who enters your parish.
   - Have cottage meetings to build support for new ideas and for gaining input from parishioners.

5. Create ways to incorporate your theme year-round:
   - Easy approach is to divide the year into Liturgical Seasons.
   - Incorporate ministry opportunities, adult education programs, meals, sermons, fun events all around the vision and themes.
   - Use your social media to publicize and carry out your message.

6. Approach everyone uniquely in your annual giving campaign:
   - Everyone is at a different stage in their spiritual life; send them an annual giving letter that will more likely speak to them.
   - We tend to forget to give thanks for our own blessings---always use the annual giving campaign (if you haven’t been doing this faithfully year-round) as a time for parishioners to write out blessings and thanksgivings. Offer those in the offertory plate, post on bulletin boards, or other meaningful ways.
7. Include all the youth:
   - Create a commitment card for money and for effort.
   - Have your youth help plan, or hold, stewardship/ministry events—not just work them.
   - Engage teens and young adults with education and discussion forums throughout the year.
   - We expect them to be part of the church family, but do we expect them to be stewards?

8. Ask for planned gifts:
   - About 10% of your parish is ready for, or has already prepared for, a planned gift.
   - Use your enhanced vision preparation to ask people for bequests and life income gifts.
   - Ask people to witness to their gift—even if anonymous.
   - Hold an “Endowment Sunday,” where extra gifts can be dedicated to your endowment or trust fund.
   - Every time you receive an estate gift, lift up the life of the donor and give public thanks for the gift.
     If this is giving more attention to someone who died and left money than to those who give faithfully every year, then you might need to re-examine how you thank people!

9. When you receive an estate gift, give 10% away:
   - Articulate a message of a tithe of offerings.
   - It takes as much discipline to give away a percentage of each gift you receive as it did for the person who made the gift.

10. Celebrate:
    - Use St. Paul’s letters (or passages in Exodus) to show the great faith of people who brought forth all that they had to build up the Church.
    - End every annual giving campaign, and any capital campaign, with a celebration; have a meal to show appreciation and gratitude.
    - Celebrate your stewardship of the funds and your ministry.
    - Celebrate your feast day.
    - Celebrate your youth by having, and keeping current, a bulletin board dedicated to their accomplishments.
    - Hold a service out on the lawn to welcome in the neighbors and passersby.

11. Thank you:
    - Have someone in your parish in charge of this.
    - Have a thank you policy.
    - Ask shut-ins to help write notes of thanks.
    - The priest should write a thank you note to every parishioner who pledges after an annual campaign and capital campaign.
    - In addition, a letter from the treasurer should go out acknowledging the contents of the pledge card.

12. “You can’t sell soap if we don’t take baths!”
[Terry Parsons (deceased), former Stewardship Officer at the Episcopal Church Center]
    - Every person on vestry and leadership team must make their pledges first—do so in church prior to your ingathering Sunday.
    - Every vestry person should be praying for the success of the annual giving campaign, for any new member, and for every time a person is asked for a gift.
    - Ask leaders to witness, in whatever way is comfortable, to their own stewardship journey.
    - Every vestry person (and then encouraging the congregation) write a thank you throughout the year—referring to the book by John Kralik 365 Thank You’s—The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life
Have you been feeling blue, unhappy, and irritable? Just not yourself lately? If you feel hopeless losing interest in work or other activities, lack concentration and anxious or oversleeping, you may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a kind of depression that occurs at a certain time of year, usually in the winter, and is more often diagnosed in women than men. Symptoms usually build up slowly in the late autumn and winter and are not unlike other forms of depression. Although SAD is more common in fall and winter, some people suffer an opposite pattern of symptoms that begin in spring or summer. This is known as Reverse Seasonal Affective Disorder. Individuals who are particularly vulnerable are those with bi-polar disease. They may experience intense forms of mania, as a result of RSAD. In either case, symptoms may start out mild and become more severe as the season progresses.

The specific cause of SAD remains unknown and there is no test to confirm the diagnosis. Your health care provider can make a diagnosis by asking about your history of symptoms. Genetics, age and perhaps more importantly, your body’s chemical makeup all play a role in developing the condition. A few specific factors can include:

1. Your biological clock (circadian rhythm). The reduced level of sunlight in fall and winter may disrupt your internal clock.
2. Serotonin levels. A drop in serotonin, a brain chemical (neurotransmitter), affects mood. Reduced sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin that may trigger depression.
3. Melatonin levels. The change in season can disrupt the balance of this natural hormone which plays a role in sleep patterns and mood. Individual risk factors include history of clinical depression or bi-polar disease.

If your seasonal depression symptoms are severe you may need medications, light therapy or other treatments to manage SAD. However there are some measures you can take on your own that may help:

1. Make your environment sunnier and brighter. Open those blinds, sit closer to the window in your office or home, add skylights to your home, and trim branches that block sunlight.
2. Get outside. Take a long walk or eat a healthy lunch in a nearby park and soak up the sun. Even on cold and cloudy days, outdoor light can help especially if you spend some time within two hours of getting up in the morning.
3. Exercise regularly. Physical exercise relieves stress and anxiety, both of which can increase symptoms of SAD. Being more fit can make you feel better and lift your mood.
4. Eat a healthy diet.

5. Get enough sleep and practice good sleep habits. Go to bed and awake at the same time daily. Avoid watching TV in bed before you retire.
6. Avoid alcohols or illegal drugs. These can make depression worse over time. They may also affect your judgment about suicide.
7. Talk therapy. Seek out someone you trust to talk about your feelings and try to be around people who are caring and positive.
8. Volunteer or get involved in group activities.
9. Take a vacation with family or friends.
10. Go to church.
11. Learn a new language
12. Start a new project or learn a new skill you have never done before.

The good news is!…symptoms usually get better on their own as the season changes again. If they persist, see your physician.

- The Rev. Dn. Stephanie Ulrich, RN, SD
Minister of Health, All Saints Omaha
Kudwal! ("Greetings!") As many of you know, Jim Yeates and I just returned from a month-long mission trip to Africa. We experienced many amazing things: lines of majestic cattle stretching as far as the eye could see, elegant giraffes in a nature preserve, and the sun setting over the Nile, turning the water golden.

But the most incredible thing was meeting the people of Twic East. When we arrived in Maar we were greeted with songs and dancing and beautiful smiles. Despite extremely difficult living conditions, the people there were so joyful! They eagerly shared their stories and hopes and dreams with us.

What did we do? We visited clinics, schools (including the girls' secondary school we helped build in Wangulei), churches, and cattle camps. We spoke with the Mothers Union, teenagers, and clergy from around the diocese. We worshiped, ate, played, and sang together. We handed out supplies and gifts (including bicycles and motorcycles from a UTO grant and feminine supplies that the women of Nebraska had worked on and donated).

We met with the Archbishop of South Sudan, the agriculture minister in Bor, and the governor of Jonglei State. In short, we had the privilege of really getting to know our brothers and sisters in Christ.

My friends, the situation in South Sudan is dire. There is much need there, from education to health care to food to agriculture. The people really want to become self-sufficient; they are eager to improve their situation, they just need some help. The people in the Diocese of Nebraska have been building momentum in their support, and I pray that this continues. With your help, we can get them back on their feet!

As one man told us, "South Sudan is a very new country. Right now we are like a toddler; we need help walking. But one day we will be able to walk on our own."

Yet even in the midst of harsh living conditions, there are already signs of improvement, blossoms of hope. A new clinic was built in Maar since last year, staffed by a dedicated, hard-working team. A grant from Trinity Wall Street funded the building of an Internet cafe, an income generator for the village. And the school in Wangulei has a new well, thanks to the efforts of people in our own diocese. We truly are making a difference!

I wanted to thank each and every one of you for your support, prayers, and encouragement. Without your help, our trip would not have been possible! If you have any questions about our experience or want to know how you can help the people of Twic East, please contact me at lshine@allsaintsomaha.com or Jim at jimyeatesomaha@gmail.com.

Nhialic abi weh thiei (God be with you),
Lara Shine

The Rev. Lara Shine is Assistant for Mission and Youth All Saints, Omaha

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May we take just a minute to introduce ourselves? We are the Nebraska Episcopal Recovery Commission, lay and clergy members of the Episcopal Church from all across the Diocese of Nebraska.

Some of us are in recovery ourselves and some not, but all of us are committed to helping members of our congregations become aware of, not only the signs and dangers of alcoholism, but also the many, many other faces of addiction. ...become aware also of the possibilities of recovery and the programs available to help achieve it. According to recent statistics, there are more than 23 million people in recovery today. Treatment works!

Our Church has long supported the desire for recovery. As far back as the 1930's, the Oxford Group and the then fledgling group that would become Alcoholics Anonymous, met at Calvary Episcopal Church in New York, at the invitation of its Rector, Fr. Sam Shoemaker. 12 Step meetings have been welcomed at Episcopal churches for decades. We encourage, support and lift up in prayer all those searching for the serenity of recovery.

We invite you to visit our website, www.ne-episcopalrecovery.org, where you will find contact information, articles, suggestions for recovery worship services, treatment facilities near you and other resource material. The National Episcopal Church website also offers a wealth of information: free downloads of brochures, help in starting a recovery ministry, links to other recovery organizations and more. You will find them at www.episcopalrecovery.org.

Nebraska Recovery Commission is seeking new members, particularly in the East and Northeast areas. You need not have suffered addiction to serve and may express your interest to any member of the Commission. Please prayerfully consider helping us help others.

"Living One Day At A Time"

Nancy Brown, Co-Chair
Sr. Elizabeth-Sojourner (Sandra Raney), Co-Chair
Nebraska Episcopal Recovery Commission

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**Favorite Bible Verse**

*Numbers 6:24-26*

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Lisa Winton
Church of the Resurrection, Omaha

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**Ask a Priest**

Q: It seems that light plays a very important role in our liturgy (the altar candles, the Paschal candle, the memorial candle, etc.). What is the significance of light in our worship?

You are right—light does play a very important role in our worship! Since ancient times, light and fire have served to remind us of God's presence in the world. Moses encountered God in a burning bush, and the people of Israel followed “a pillar of fire” through the nighttime desert as they journeyed toward the Promised Land. In our worship, lit candles have a variety of interpretations, but ultimately everything goes back to the Easter Vigil (the evening before Easter Sunday).

In this service, we light the “new fire” of Easter, bringing it into our darkened sanctuary in the form of the Paschal Candle. Smaller candles are lit from the larger one, and eventually the “new fire” fills the whole sanctuary with light. After the darkness of Good Friday, when Jesus dies on the cross, the light of Easter reminds of how Jesus triumphed over death in the Resurrection. The light of Christ does not reside solely in our worship spaces.

You may notice that acolytes bring lit torches into the sanctuary at the beginning of the service, and then process out with them at the end. God is present in our church as well as in the world, and it is up to us to help bring the light of Christ out of the church doors and into our community!

Q: What is the white garment that priests, deacons, and chalice bearers wear when they are serving at the altar?

The garment that you are referring to is called an alb. In the early church, when adult baptisms were more common, a baptismal candidate would change into a white robe after being immersed in water to symbolize his or her new life in Christ.

Today, all orders of ministry (lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons) wear an alb while serving at the altar to symbolize that we are all equal by virtue of our baptisms and that we all come to the altar having been reborn in Christ.

- The Rev. Liz Easton
I visited beautiful Grace Church Columbus in January. It was a delight to be with Mother Ellie Thober and the people of Grace. One striking feature of the building’s interior is a splendid stained glass window donated by the local Masonic lodge. Take delight, DaVinci Code fans!