

The Rector's Reflections

The Rev. Poulson Reed

2015

December 30, 2015 Looking Back and Looking Forward With Gratitude and Hope

As we leave behind 2015 and the new year begins, I want to take a moment to look back in gratitude, and another to look forward in hope.

Looking back, I want to thank all of our staff and volunteers for a marvelous and impactful year of ministry at and through All Saints', including our celebrations of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day (which were extraordinary). We just never know how God will use us to touch someone's life at Christmas time or any other time. What a joy and honor it is to be part of this wonderful, committed All Saints' family.

Looking forward, it is the time for New Year's resolutions. I don't put a great deal of trust in resolutions for myself (I know myself too well!), but I do usually try a few things, in a spirit of hopefulness. My advice to myself and to others is to keep resolutions small. Build a modest, successful habit, and then add on to it. Lately, I've been using my calendar as a reminder for things I need to prioritize (and not just for appointments), which I find helpful. If I see it in my calendar every day, I am more likely to do it.

If you are thinking about a resolution around prayer, you might remember the classic Anglican pattern of prayer: weekly Eucharist, daily prayer (especially Morning and Evening Prayer, called the Daily Office), and some third form of personal prayer that can vary (walking prayer, rosary, Christian meditation, icon prayer, or something else).

You might commit at first to weekly Eucharist (unless prevented by illness or something else significant and unavoidable), and some form of daily prayer. I always recommend starting with the brief Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (BCP p 136 and following), then building in time to full Morning and/or Evening Prayer. Any of the clergy can teach you how to pray the full form, which you can do on your own, or with friends or family.

There are also great apps for smartphones and tablets that make Morning and Evening Prayer much easier ("Day by Day" from Forward Movement is my favorite, and Mission St. Clare has a good one also, and both are available as well on their respective websites). If the Prayer Book forms of daily prayer are not your preference, identify some other way to pray daily, even if it is only 5 minutes. You'll be amazed at the difference it will make in your relationship with God and other people.

I can hardly believe this year is over. May God bless us individually and collectively in the new one, as we move forward together with hopeful expectation.

December 22, 2015 Christmas: Looking for Christ

"Look for Christ and you will find Him. And with Him, everything else."
C.S. Lewis "Mere Christianity" (1952)

As, at last, we enter the Christmas season in all its fullness, let us focus on the heart of it all: we are looking for Christ. Like the shepherds in the fields, like the three Wise Men, we are meant to look for Christ.

This is part of the wonder and purpose of celebrating Christmas for 12 days, all the way to the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th: while others will leave Christmas behind for another year on December 26th, we Christians will keep searching for the Holy Child. And we will find Him.

We will find Him in the manglers of our creches, at church and at home. We will find Him in the Saint John's Bible picture of the nativity. We will find Him in the Word of God, and in the Holy Sacrament. We will find Him in families, lovingly gathered around dinner tables and Christmas trees. We will find Him in the laughter of children.

We will find Him in our moments of sorrow and loss, in the empty space of a loved one who is no longer here. We will find Him in the faces of the Maryland Gardens residents and the children who receive the gifts we are providing for ICM and San Pablo. We will find Him on the streets, and the places we usually do not like to look.

May we diligently look for Christ, this Christmas season, knowing that, by God's guiding, if our hearts are true, we will surely find Him. And having found Him, we will have found all that we need to have or know.

Merry Christmas!

December 17, 2015 The Importance of Lifelong Learning, and Some Good News

At the University of Virginia, where I studied as an undergraduate, founder Thomas Jefferson established the tradition of calling students not “Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors” but “First Years, Second Years, Third Years, and Fourth Years.” He did this to counteract the notion that one was ever truly “senior” in learning, let alone finished with it. Instead, he favored the ideal of lifelong learning, continuing well past one’s fourth year of college.

One of the essential tasks of leadership (and I would suggest, of a purposeful life in general) is to continue to grow through learning. At almost every Vestry meeting at All Saints’, we begin with a brief time of formation, learning together about a variety of things that inform our decisions. I hope every adult member of our congregation has at least one book (or other educational resource) on our Christmas list as a symbol of a continued commitment to developing these amazing brains that God has given us.

I had some good news recently about my own learning. This week, it was announced that I will be one of six nonprofit leaders receiving transformational fellowships from Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. You can find the details [here](#), but the short version is that, as a Piper Fellow, I will receive \$30,000 for my own leadership development, and an additional \$10,000 for Vestry and staff development.

I have designed my Piper Fellowship to include formal study of nonprofit leadership, site visits to some innovative ministries around the country, a week of research and independent study, and a week of spiritual retreat. I will of course continue to serve as Rector of All Saints’, but will be gone for a total of about six weeks, split up over 2016.

This Piper Fellowship is a wonderful opportunity, and should make me a more educated and effective Rector, not least because of the time I will spend with the five other new fellows, a diverse group of remarkable nonprofit leaders. Being selected through this competitive application process is an honor not only for me, but for All Saints’. It is good for us — church and school — to be recognized yet again as the valuable, dynamic nonprofit that we are. Please feel free to be in touch with me if you have any questions.

And don’t forget to keep learning!

December 10, 2015 Rejoice Anyway

This Sunday we light the rose-colored candle on our Advent wreath, indicating that our Advent season is more than halfway completed. This day is sometimes called “Gaudete Sunday” from the proper introit from Philippians 4:4-7 (our Epistle this weekend):

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Gaudete” means “rejoice” in Latin, but if I am honest, I don’t feel much like rejoicing right now. The news has been so unsettling of late, with terrorism and other senseless violence, and then the predictable, fearful, disheartening reactions to the news.

As essentially a centrist, both religiously and politically, I have spent a lot of time recently being disappointed by responses from both the Left and Right to our national challenges. If I see one more Facebook “meme” that reduces a complex issue to an insulting, partisan image, I just might throw my computer out the window.

Add to that the relatively minor bruises and inconveniences of life: I’ve been a little under the weather in this busy season, and frustrated that it takes so long for our pledges to come in every year (they do always come in, and those we have received have been wonderfully generous, but many have not yet been returned, which gives the Rector gray hairs!).

And yet, Saint Paul does not say “rejoice when things are going well” but rather “rejoice...always.” When things are difficult, rejoice anyway. Why? Because even when things seem awful in our world, or we are facing personal challenges, **especially** then, we know that our God is near.

God will not take away our difficulties, but will be close to us in love to comfort us. And we believe that we know how the stories of our individual lives and human history will end: with love and light victorious over hate and darkness.

Contrary to the opinions of some in our secular world, prayer is powerful. Prayer benefits the one being prayed for, and the one who prays. When we pray about something, our perspective shifts, which (along with the power of the Holy Spirit) is why prayer so often leads us to meaningful action.

Let us offer our hearts to God in prayer, both in supplication for ourselves and others, and in thanksgiving. Let us pray for good, wise leaders and thoughtful, compassionate

responses to complex problems. Let us rejoice always. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

December 3, 2015 Pay Attention!

Most of us experienced at some point in our childhood education the stern words of a teacher: “Pay attention!”

They are equally fitting as the words of the prophets, who are our theme in the second week of Advent. Advent is such a brief season, only four weeks, that if we do not pay attention, it will have rushed past us.

The prophets caution us rather abruptly that we need to see our lives and our world differently, more clearly, **right now**, if we are to prepare our hearts and those around us for the coming of the Savior. But there are so many distractions.

We cannot fight or ignore the secular, commercial wave of Christmas that engulfs everything this time of year. Indeed, there are many aspects of it that I enjoy, and you probably do, too (I have a soft spot especially for the sentimental: the Christmas specials on TV and the sappy songs on the radio). But we can go along with much of what constitutes the “holiday season,” and still, as Christians, seek out moments to go deeper in what is still, for us, the Advent season.

To go deeper in Advent means to pay attention, to see things in a new way. We can do this by carving out time and space amidst the chaotic jubilation, stress, and excess with a few simple practices: **prayer, silence, moderation, repentance, and generosity**. Strive to focus on any one of these during the rest of Advent, and see what a difference it makes when Christmas comes.

Last Sunday, we welcomed with great excitement the Saint John’s Bible into our All Saints’ community. One of the things this Bible will do over the next year is urge us to pay more attention to the Scriptures. The beautiful illustrations and even the calligraphy itself will inspire us to see both familiar and unfamiliar passages differently.

There is no better time to have started our year with the Saint John’s Bible than Advent, at the beginning of a new Church year. May the Word of God illumine our feet on the path through this year that God has set before us.

November 19, 2015 Is Commitment Good?

Modern secular culture in America is often anti-commitment. I don't mean solely in terms of romantic attachments, though the average age of Americans getting married is higher than ever, and the percentage of the married versus unmarried lower than historic norms.

In most areas of life, secular moderns are the fad generation: shunning commitments, and flitting from trend to trend. They are individualists, less committed to religion, to the workplace, to meaningful relationships, and to community involvement than prior generations.

Of course, not all commitment is good. We see in the hateful ideology of the terrorists who attacked Paris (and Beirut and Nigeria, and so many other places) a barbaric commitment of the most sinful kind: a coordinated effort to kill, and sow fear and anger.

But commitment for a noble purpose is humanity at its best. "Commitment" means to be "sent out together," and the essence of faith is to be formed, nourished, then sent out together by God to do good in the world in Jesus' name. Commitment and mission share the same root.

It is a powerful (though unintentional) statement that the morning after the attacks in Paris, a group of All Saints' parishioners were sent out together in faith, hope and love to serve the needy in our community, as part of our Day of Service.

How do Christians respond to hatred and violence in the world? With a commitment to pray fervently, to serve others sacrificially, to give generously, to defend the weak, to respect the dignity of every human being, to be peacemakers, and to share abundantly God's reconciling love.

This Sunday, Christ the King Sunday and Commitment Sunday, we celebrate not only the financial pledges we have committed to support our shared ministry and mission at All Saints' Church, but also our larger commitment to follow our King and Savior, together, wherever he may lead us.

November 12, 2015

Mean Children, Human Weakness, and the Amazing Trustworthiness of God

It was the kind of headline that gives Christians heartburn: "Religious Children are Meaner than Their Secular Counterparts, Study Finds." This was The Guardian's take on a study by scholars from seven universities across the world that claimed to show that children from religious families are "less kind and more punitive than those from non-religious households."

Dig a little deeper, and not surprisingly, the situation is more complicated than the headline would indicate. For one thing, Christian and Muslim children were lumped together for the study, confusing things; and for another, as is usual with this kind of research, there was little distinction made between those who are devout, and those who practice the faith only sporadically.

A similar study a few years ago purported to show that Christian adults behaved just as badly in moral decision-making as non-Christians. It bundled serious Christians in with lukewarm ones, with predictable results. But if we step beyond debates about statistical methodology and anti-Christian bias in parts of academia and the media, there is something important for Christians to learn from this type of data.

There is no guarantee that attending church will make us, or our children, more kind or generous or good. As the old adage puts it, sitting in church doesn't make one a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car. Christians are just as prone to sin as anyone else; more so, even, if our faith is thin and self-righteous.

The Christian call is not just to church attendance or membership, but to discipleship (truly giving up our lives to following Jesus, every day). The challenge to the individual Christian is to pursue our faith with daily dedication and discipline (praying, learning, serving, and connecting). The challenge to the Church is to offer meaningful pathways to follow Jesus together, and not just interesting programming and enjoyable worship.

Fortunately, we have a powerful and trustworthy God who is always there for us, especially when our resolve is weak. We have a God willing to go to any creative length to help us, from sending a priest all the way to Scotland to be consecrated as our first American Episcopal bishop, to the most extravagant gesture of love imaginable: sending God's own son to be born for us.

November 5, 2015 All Saints' Church: Part of the Jesus Movement

Last Sunday was an amazing day. We joyfully celebrated 14 baptisms on All Saints' Sunday, our patronal feast.

It was one of many signs of vitality at All Saints'. A recent bowling event for families had 45 in attendance, and both our upcoming day of service and music dinner and auction are gathering strong registration numbers (with a few slots still remaining, if you haven't signed up yet!).

At this time of year, seemingly every week is some special liturgical celebration, and we offer them with great devotion. This week, it's the Solemn Requiem on Sunday evening, which has become a much-loved time of remembrance for our loved ones who have died.

On the 15th, Seabury Sunday will be here, with stirring bagpipes and tartans. And on the 29th, the first Sunday of Advent, the Saint John's Bible will arrive. This week, we received the beautiful case (made locally by a craftsman) that will display it in our library.

But it's not just the grand celebrations that make All Saints' Church special. It's the funeral that gives comfort through ancient Scripture and traditional prayers. It's the late night visit to the hospital, communion brought to the homebound, the class that prompts you to think, or the friends you make while serving together.

It's an optimistic time not only for All Saints'. A new chapter is beginning in our wider Episcopal Church, with the installation last Sunday at National Cathedral of our new Presiding Bishop, The Most Reverend Michael Curry (formerly bishop of North Carolina).

Bishop Curry is a dynamic preacher with a strong message about the Church's role in what he calls the "Jesus Movement." There is hope that his nine years of leadership will help move our national Church from internal disputes and decline to outward-focused and Jesus-inspired mission and evangelism.

Our All Saints' pledge campaign is also moving forward. A large number of members and friends have already made pledges to support the ministries of All Saints' in 2016. Many have increased their pledges from last year, confident in the direction that God is leading us. We are ahead of last year for this point in the campaign in dollars pledged. Thank you!

For those who haven't yet pledged: to make a pledge, or estimate of giving, based on a percentage of our income is called proportional giving. It is an important and often profound spiritual exercise. What percentage of income reflects the gratitude we feel for God's many blessings in our lives this year? 3%? 5%? 10%? More?

Here's something to think about: if every member and friend of All Saints' pledged between 5 and 10% of our income to the church each year, we would never have to hold another fundraiser or special appeal for ministry. We could fund all our current ministries, and more.

Or, better yet, we could hold just one big fundraising event each year, and give all the money away. How great would that be? We are not there yet. But if everyone worked towards 5% and then 10% giving (the tithe), with modest increases each year, what a difference it would make for the church AND the giver. I ask you to pray about it.

All Saints' is a wonderful, big tent, inclusive, warm-hearted place, with amazing worship and music, a fabulous day school, and dozens of meaningful ministries that impact thousands. I love this place, and I know many of us do.

Let's finish this pledge campaign, "Of One Heart and Soul," with energy. It's a great time to be at All Saints' and a great time to be Episcopalian. The world needs us. Let's give our time, talent, treasure and our hearts and souls to be part of the Jesus Movement.

October 29, 2015 May The Force Be With You (And Also With You)

Perhaps because of the new Star Wars movie coming soon, I have found myself thinking of All Saints' Day this year in terms of those iconic stories.

You may recall that, at various points in the Star Wars movies, deceased Jedi masters appear to instruct and encourage their pupils. This is a useful image as we think of our understanding of the saints in the Episcopal tradition.

For us, the saints are not just faithful, courageous disciples of the past whom we admire as historical figures. They are present to us, even now, in "one communion and fellowship in the mystical body" of Jesus Christ (as we hear in the Collect for All Saints' Day).

The saints do not appear to us as obviously as the spirit of Obi-Wan Kenobi appeared to Luke Skywalker. But they are surely here, not only as examples of godly living, but as a "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) that surrounds us in our life of faith.

We use the word saint in two ways: to indicate both those heroic exemplars of faith who preceded us as followers of Jesus, and also the gathered community of the baptized (as when Saint Paul writes to "all the saints" in a particular place).

The saints depicted in our church windows at pew level remind us that the saints are with us always, in church and in the world, inspiring and encouraging us as we seek to live out our baptismal calling as saints in our own day.

This present-ness of the saints stirs up in me a range of emotions: inspiration and awe, and some discomfort. Why discomfort? Because I know they (and God) are watching me, and their great faith is a lot to live up to. But then I remember that God has placed the saints among us not to judge us, but to cheer us on.

In the race that is set before us, they are the voices on the roadside lending us their energy when our legs are about to fail. There is a power that flows in them and in us from God, so that we can do what would be impossible on our own. Connecting us, the living and the dead, there is, (dare I say it!), a force.

October 22, 2015 The Future Is in Partnerships

There is a famous line in the 1960's movie "The Graduate": "There's a great future in plastics." When it comes to the Church, I think the future is to be found elsewhere, in "partnerships." The **core** of our future will be, of course, the core of our past and present: following Jesus Christ. But partnerships offer a strategy for how we follow Jesus, especially in mission, in the 21st century.

In an era of increased financial and cultural pressure on churches, we are at our best when we avoid the temptation to look inward only, and instead turn our focus outward to the mission fields around us, in cooperation with those who share common values.

Even a large and healthy church like All Saints' lacks the resources to do some of the most critical work in our communities alone, but if we forge partnerships around projects where we can find common ground, we can amplify our impact.

Two areas of partnership for us are obvious, essential, and ongoing: our school and our diocese. All Saints' Episcopal Church and All Saints' Episcopal Day School support one another in a host of ways in the many areas where our missions overlap. Indeed, our cooperation is perhaps as strong and positive as it has ever been, as we celebrated so gloriously at Day School Sunday last week.

We are also in partnership with our Episcopal Diocese of Arizona, of which we are a member. The annual diocesan convention took place last weekend, and provided many opportunities to learn about ministries taking place across our diocese which we support, including college chaplaincies, church plants, and programs at Chapel Rock, our camp and conference center.

This Sunday afternoon, many of us will be attending the annual fundraiser for ICM Food

and Clothing Bank, one of our closest community partners in assisting the poor in our area. We have many other mission partners both locally (André House, Habitat for Humanity, Central Village, Saint Mary's Food Bank and others) and internationally (Saint Paul's Church and School in Haiti, Episcopal Relief and Development).

We are constantly on the lookout for additional partnerships. Recently, we have begun conversations with Refugee Focus (a local agency affiliated with the Lutheran Church) about how All Saints' can help with refugee resettlement in Phoenix.

The movement of mission in the Church, going back to the earliest Christians, has always been outward and interconnected. The future of the Church will involve, in some respects, hearkening back to those early models: going out in the name of Christ to whoever is hurting, wherever they may be, and joining in specific efforts with others who share our priorities. As Jesus said, "whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:38).

October 15, 2015 Will Our Children Be Generous?

So much has been written in recent years about the damage of "helicopter" parenting on children. We all love and wish the best for our children and grandchildren; we want to protect and nurture them. But when we overprotect, spoil, or do their work for them, we impair their development and hinder their long-term success.

Children need to fail, be disappointed from time to time, and face consequences (in a safe and loving environment) in order to grow. They also need to learn to be generous. One significant downside of over-nurturing can be selfishness.

Generosity is a learned behavior. When we model generous giving of our time, talents, and finances, our children are watching. This pledge season in the church and the upcoming holidays are great times to demonstrate and discuss generosity as families.

If you make a family pledge to support All Saints' Church in our mission and ministry, do your children know this, and do they feel included in the pledge? Have you cultivated gratitude by talking about the many ways God has blessed your family?

Thanksgiving and Christmas, which are just around the corner, are wonderful opportunities to do something kind for someone else as a family. Providing food to the hungry around Thanksgiving or shopping together for presents for the senior residents of Maryland Gardens are experiences that will shape our children's development.

Modeling generosity is not just something we can do seasonally. One of the best tools for teaching responsible use of money to children all the time is the Share Save Spend

model, pioneered by Nathan Dungan. You can set up three piggy banks (or spreadsheets), marked Share Save Spend. Each week, some allowance goes into each one.

The Spend money is for the child to use as they wish. The Save money is for college, or some other long term goal. The Share money is to be used for the benefit of others, as the child wishes. In our household, our children often use that money for Buck A Jeans days at school, which benefit our All Saints' Haiti partnership.

Our world needs future leaders who are not only talented and diligent, but generous with what God has graciously given them. Fortunately, both our church and school at All Saints' are supporting parents and grandparents in teaching this essential life lesson.

October 8, 2015 The Three Scariest Words (For Episcopalians)

October, especially towards its end, is a month about scary things. But in my experience, the three scariest words for Episcopalians aren't vampire, ghost, and werewolf. They are **evangelism, sin, and tithe.**

Perhaps we have a vague sense that Episcopalians are different from some other Christians, taking a gentler approach to the challenging topics that are front and center in more evangelical denominations and megachurches.

We may fear evangelism because we don't wish to feel awkward or encroach upon someone's personal beliefs by inviting them to a church event or even mentioning how our faith in Christ carried us through a tough time. We may fear thinking about sin because it can be unpleasant to look at ourselves in the mirror and identify the ways we are selfish and falling short of God's plan for us.

And especially at this time of year, as we enter into our annual pledge campaign, we may fear the word tithe. But it's actually not nearly as scary as we think. A Forward Movement brochure that we have in our narthex entitled "A Tip or a Tithe?" describes the concept well.

A tip comes at the end of a meal or some other service, out of what we have left over. That is our secular way of giving. If I leave a tip at a restaurant, or give to my university or public radio or the symphony, I do so out of what I have left, what I think I can comfortably spare from my resources.

The Church has taught a different kind of giving for two-thousand years (and Judaism before that for several thousand more): **giving to God first, not last.** It began with giving

the “first fruits” of one’s crop (see Deuteronomy 14), ten percent of the harvest, and then became money as the agricultural economy became more specialized.

Giving ten percent of one’s income back to God in gratitude for all that God has given us is the traditional Biblical standard of the tithe. But most people start much more modestly, with one or two or three percent.

Many people find this “first fruits” approach to giving to be refreshing and even transformative in their spiritual lives. As a 10% tither for almost ten years, my experience has been that it is liberating to know that our family finances line up with our values. We may not be able to have everything we want, but God always provides us with what we need.

The point is **not so much the percentage as the intentionality**: pledging some specific percentage in advance, to thank God for being blessed with resources, friends and family, and a church that makes a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. A pledge is a spiritual commitment, not a contract, and can always be adjusted during the year if circumstances change, like a job loss, move, or unexpected expense.

I urge us not to be afraid of these three traditional words, but to embrace them joyfully. Evangelism is nothing more than sharing with others how excited we are about our faith and our church. Sin is just a shortcoming that we can work on, with God’s help, to become happier and more fulfilled. And a tithe is simply our freewill gift to God from our hearts, grateful for God’s many gifts to us, and trusting in God’s abundance towards us in the future.

October 1, 2015 The Most Spiritual of Animals

The Blessing of the Animals, this Sunday at 9am, gives us an annual opportunity to reflect on the importance of animals in our lives, and to give God thanks for the many ways in which they bless us. It is no exaggeration to say that our bonds with pets are some of the strongest connections we feel.

It is also true that to explore the natural world is to explore the very nature of God. As the psalmist says, “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19). God’s creation is a kind of living theology, and to understand it through evolution and other scientific theories and data in no way diminishes our sense of wonder as we gaze upon it.

One thing that humans find endlessly fascinating is the intelligence of other animals. We love to learn how animals compare to one another, and to imagine what might be going on inside an animal’s head. The most recent data I could find ranked the intelligence of

non-human animals thusly: 5) whales, 4) parrots, 3) dolphins, 2) pigs, and 1) chimpanzees.

The pigs were the biggest surprise to me, but apparently a middle-aged pig is as smart as a three year old human, and has significant problem-solving ability. I will try to put that out of my mind the next time I am enjoying some crispy bacon.

We may also wish to consider another question: which animals are the most spiritual? I am not aware of any data on this (how could you measure it, anyway?), but I suspect many among us will have strong opinions.

Christopher Hitchens once joked that, "Owners of dogs will have noticed that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they will think you are god. Whereas owners of cats are compelled to realize that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they draw the conclusion that they are gods."

Many would make the case for dogs being the most spiritual, others cats (the poet Christopher Smart wrote a poem about how his cat, Jeoffrey, worshipped God), still others horses, dolphins or other animals. I think I might say that all animals are equally spiritual, each in their remarkable diversity reflecting their Creator, and praising God by being utterly themselves.

We humans, who are both blessed with greater ability and cursed with selfishness in using it, could learn much from our fellow creatures.

September 24, 2015 Pope Francis' Visit: A Blessing for All Christians?

This week, it is easy to identify the biggest religion story: Pope Francis' visit to the United States. The presence of the Pope is always news, but all the more so with this particular Pope, whose charisma is so captivating.

I am delighted that Pope Francis is here, and believe that his visit is a blessing not only for the Roman Catholic Church in our country, but for all Christian churches. Why? Because Christianity in the United States suffers from a publicity problem.

Most of the time, the Church doesn't make the news at all. And when it does, it is usually (surprise, surprise) because of something negative or controversial. The media is largely uninterested in the countless acts of compassion and love that Christians and Christian churches do every day.

Now, I am sure that Pope Francis' visit will have moments of controversy, and that the media will focus on them, since that is what sells newspapers and boosts TV ratings and

internet clicks. But the good news is that the foremost leader of Christianity will be near the center of attention for six days, projecting a positive image of our faith.

I particularly appreciate Pope Francis' simplicity and humility, his deep concern for the poor, and the joy he exudes through his faith. Those are traits that all Christians can seek to emulate, for they are traits of Christ himself.

Not every Christian will agree with everything the Pope has to say. There are some significant differences, for example, between our Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church. But our similarities are far greater than our differences.

The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and Anglican (Episcopal) churches share particular kinship in our worship and theology, and there is much that Pope Francis has to say which we can support, and more still that can be food for thought.

Finally, something about Pope Francis' trip that I appreciate is the way in which it lays bare our cultural assumptions. One of the ways that the secular media is especially ill-equipped to understand Pope Francis (and Christianity in general) is its insistence on seeing everything through a political lens.

Is Pope Francis a liberal or a conservative? He is both, and neither. He is a Catholic Christian, and as such, has certain views we might consider "liberal" and others that are "conservative." He is a helpful reminder that the teachings of Jesus do not line up perfectly with any particular political ideology (something we ought to keep in mind in the upcoming election cycle). Jesus' kingdom, as he said, is "not of this world."

May Pope Francis' time in the United States spark lively debate on matters of faith, strengthen the hearts of believers, and inspire non-Christians with curiosity about the ways of Jesus.

September 17, 2015 What Can the Church Learn from Independent Bookstores?

I read an interesting article recently, entitled "Four Reasons Why Independent Bookstores Are Thriving." For the last decade, experts have predicted the demise of independent bookstores, as they have faced competition from large chains like Barnes & Noble, and even more so from online sellers like Amazon.

Many independent bookstores **have** closed, unable to compete with the low prices their competitors can offer. But recently, independent bookstores are making a comeback. We see this in our own neighborhood, with the new Changing Hands bookstore down on Camelback (if you haven't visited it yet, it is fantastic).

The article's four reasons why independent book stores are thriving are these: they offer an experience, they curate and recommend in a human way, they are diversifying their offerings, and they foster community.

In an era of declining religious practices and increased competition on Sunday mornings, there are some lessons here for the Church. At All Saints', we too offer an experience. Nothing can replicate the sense of prayerful worship one feels when entering this sacred space, praying these ancient prayers together, and hearing this beautiful music.

Second, like a good independent bookstore, we curate and recommend in a human way. Our classes and groups are designed with our All Saints' community in mind. You could take an online class on Christianity, but it would not be tailored to our unique membership. The experience goes even deeper, to the individual level. Our clergy are available for conversation with anyone about a pastoral need, a pressing theological question, or an important life decision.

Third, we too are diversifying our offerings. All Saints' is centered on our worship of God. That is at the heart of who we are. But we worship in an extraordinarily diverse assortment of ways: large and small Eucharists, special days, Evening Prayer, Evensong, Compline, Contemplative prayer, the Rosary, day school chapel, and more. And our opportunities to learn, serve and connect with each other are many and varied, at any given time.

And fourth, we foster community. The Christian life is impossible to live in isolation. To be Christian is to be bound together with fellow Christians in baptism, as the Body of Christ. That is who we are created to be. In our world of isolation and loneliness, the Church stands boldly as an alternative, a better way: meaningful, generous life in community, following Christ.

The Church is, of course, also very different from a bookstore. But we can learn from them, and from other businesses and nonprofits. And we share some common goals, including a more humane, engaged, and connected sense of community.

September 10, 2015 Let Us Break Bread Together

This Sunday is Kick-Off Sunday, when we begin a new program year at the church. Our world-class choirs return along with weekly Christian Education for all ages. And, with those last summer vacations completed and our winter residents arriving over the next several months, we move into the fullest manifestation of our All Saints' community.

We also begin again our full rota of worship services. Our warm and prayerful Saturday 5pm, and quiet and contemplative Sunday 7:30am services continue, along with our two Wednesday morning Eucharists. Simple, spoken Evening Prayer is added on Tuesday through Thursday evenings, along with magnificent Choral Evensong in the English Cathedral style with an organ recital on second Sunday evenings, beginning in October.

We also have every Sunday the 9am service, which is particularly family-friendly, a little shorter and a little more relaxed. It has Children's Chapel, a less formal sermon, and a rich variety of worship resources, while still offering beautiful choir and organ music. 11am Sunday is our most traditional Eucharist, with the full Senior and Chamber choirs. On 4th Sundays at 11am we worship in an especially solemn and beautiful way, with gorgeous choral mass settings and incense.

A range of educational, outreach and fellowship opportunities will take place this fall, from JustFaith to our music dinner, from small groups to a service day. We also have a very special item coming to us for a year, beginning on the first Sunday in Advent (November 29), which will be formally announced in my sermons this Sunday.

Last of all, I want to encourage us to make time to break bread together outside of our worship, especially on Third Thursdays. We have many programs to offer, but in so many ways, the most meaningful time is spent simply being together in conversation over food, as Jesus did so often with his disciples.

You are welcome to come on Third Thursdays just for the meal, which is family-friendly and from 6-6:45pm. We would love to see a large, intergenerational meal on Third Thursdays, with those who are able to stay for the program and Compline doing so, and those who need to get home after supper feeling free to do that.

For those who can stay, the Third Thursday programs are going to be quite varied this year, and our sung Compline (led beautifully by the Women's Chant Choir) is the perfect way to end the day in prayer.

It's going to be a fantastic 2015-16 program year at All Saints'. Off we go!

September 3, 2015 Come, Labor On

Come, labor on.

Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain,

While all around us waves the golden grain?

And to each servant does the Master say,

“Go work today.” Hymn 541

A friend of mine from a long time ago recently lost his job at a non-profit in another state. His position was eliminated for budgetary reasons – nothing related to his performance – but still it was difficult, and not just because of the increased financial burden on his family. It was a psychological blow and a spiritual one. He had loved this job, and had come to it after a number of years of trying to find the right position. And now it was gone. Getting the job had felt like the work of the Holy Spirit. Where was the Spirit now?

There is a lot to reflect on, this Labor Day. But one aspect worth reflection is the theology of labor. The Bible is filled with useful teaching about the importance of work. Although many of us complain from time to time about our work and how busy we are, to have work to do is a blessing.

One constant Biblical theme is the virtue of working hard for the common good. The creation story in Genesis sets the bar high right from the start: six days of work and one day of rest. The Bible reserves some of its harshest condemnation for the lazy, such as this: “whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense” (Proverbs 12:11). The theme continues in the New Testament, as in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”

To be sure, there are also divine prohibitions against employers taking advantage of their workers, as in Deuteronomy 24:14: “you shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy.” And there is the Biblical mandate to feed and clothe the sick and needy, widows and orphans—anyone who is not able to look after themselves.

But the clear expectation is that everyone who can work, should (inside or outside of the home) and that all labor should be considered work for God, in some sense. We all have a role to play in the divine economy: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for humans, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward” (Colossians 3:23-24).

In the divine ideal, which Jesus calls the Kingdom of God, everyone who is able to, has meaningful and rewarding work, according to the talents given them by God, renewed by regular rest and refreshment. That is one Christian goal for our society, a goal that is still far off.

This Labor Day, if you have a good job that offers purpose and pays fairly for hard work, give God thanks. If you find your sabbath time of rest shrinking smaller and smaller, whether from being tethered to the smartphone or from working unpredictable shifts or two jobs, share with God your desire for more balance and wholeness.

And let us particularly keep in prayer those who are unemployed, despite their best efforts. Unemployment breaks down our human sense of worth, leading to a range of other problems. In contrast, being employed in a good job builds up dignity, and inspires us to be better family members, church members, and citizens.

As Christians, much of our work is in addition to our formal employment, as we strive to build God's kingdom of justice and love. Our most important labor is for the Gospel. Wherever we are, and whatever we are doing, we have God's work to do. Let us do it with energy and with joy. Come, labor on!

August 27, 2015 Welcomed as Christ

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, who said, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." (The Rule of Saint Benedict)

If you have never spent time on retreat at a monastery or convent, I hope someday you will. One of the remarkable aspects of such a retreat, even for a day, is the sense of hospitality.

This summer, I was able to spend a few days at a Benedictine Abbey in Minnesota, and hospitality towards guests was everywhere: from the delicious food to the intuitive, clear directions for everything, from the invitation to go deeper (without being pushy) to the ubiquitous friendly smiles.

Saint Benedict grounded the hospitality of his religious communities in the theology of the incarnation and of baptism (especially as described by Jesus in Matthew 25): the idea that, since Christ became human in Jesus, and since we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, anyone we encounter ought to be treated as if they were Christ.

In a church setting, there are several behaviors that tell you a lot about that faith community. The number of people who give and serve generously says a lot about the commitment to real discipleship. And the hospitality of a church to guests says a lot about its heart.

We've been blessed this summer at All Saints' with a lot of guests, many of whom have started attending regularly. I am happy to report that a good number of them have shared, without prompting, how welcome they have felt here.

That is great news, because hospitality is not only important for our health and growth; it is central to the Gospel. In our isolating, corrosive, exhausting world, the practice of real hospitality is revolutionary and life-giving. It is to see the Other, every other person, as a child of God with intrinsic worth and dignity.

The practice of hospitality means much more than an efficient process for sharing information about our church. It means everything that makes a first, second and third impression on a first or second or third visit and beyond: good coffee and tasty food, clear directions inside and outside of worship, pathways to connection without pushing too hard or demanding too much, opportunities to make friends and get involved, and help for the hurting.

And most of all, hospitality means a community in which everyone, not just staff or designated hospitality volunteers, looks out for guests and shows kindness. Kindness takes many forms: helping someone find a page in the prayerbook, extending a kind word to a parent juggling three children, or engaging someone we don't know in conversation.

We will always have a lot to learn about hospitality (for it has many different facets), but the key is to have everyone practicing it, every week, to the best of our ability. This isn't just for the benefit of our guests, but for our own. You never know when we might encounter the presence of Christ, right in front of us.

August 20, 2015 Blessed Jonathan Daniels, Pray for Us

Given our name, it is particularly fitting that we at All Saints' draw inspiration from all the saints who have gone before us, imitating Christ, often at great cost. This past week, our calendar commemorated a relatively recent saint, with a significant anniversary.

Jonathan Myrick Daniels was born in 1939, and after a profound religious conversion on Easter day 1962, entered seminary at the Episcopal Theological School in Massachusetts. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Daniels, who was white, became involved in the civil rights movement of the 1960's, increasingly taking time from seminary to advocate for racial justice, especially in Alabama.

On August 14th, 1965, Daniels was one of a group of protestors (both white and black) arrested for picketing whites-only stores. He was released on August 20, and as he and some others waited for a ride, they attempted to buy a cold drink from one of the local stores that served non-whites. At the entrance, an unpaid special deputy threatened the group, pointing a gun at 17 year old African-American Ruby Sales. Daniels pushed Sales out of the way, and took a shotgun blast at close range. He was killed instantly.

The Episcopal Church commemorates Daniels every year on August 14, the day of his arrest. We remember also this week the 50th anniversary of his death, giving his life to save another at the tender age of 26. The words of John 15:13 come to mind: "greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Part of the mission of the Church through the ages has been to advocate for justice. Sometimes, it is easy to know what is just (though often difficult to accomplish it). Other times, justice is harder to see, and the path to it unclear. We can give thanks for the saints and martyrs, like Jonathan Daniels, who inspire us to seek justice in our own time, in ways large and small.

For those interested in exploring complex questions of justice in a non-partisan, theological way, I invite you to consider our new JustFaith initiative that Pastor Ellsworth is leading. There will be a class on JustFaith this Sunday, or Pastor Ellsworth can be contacted for more information.

Blessed Jonathan Daniels, pray for us, and show us Christ, the source of all justice.

August 13, 2015 The 4/14 Window

Studies of religious behavior have indicated that most Christians (probably around 70%) have their faith significantly formed between the ages of 4 and 14.

This doesn't mean that there aren't many adult converts to the faith, or that our spiritual life doesn't continue to evolve significantly after the age of 14. What it does suggest is that this "4/14 Window," as it is called, is a key time for faith formation in our families and our churches.

When I think of my own spiritual path, this theory holds true. I grew up in The Episcopal Church, with fairly regular involvement, especially in choirs. I was baptized as a child and confirmed as a teen. I attended an Episcopal school. I had a solid and quite positive experience of faith between the ages of 4 and 14.

When I went to college, like many young people I was only sporadically involved in a church. I was enjoying my freedom and exploring new things. But after college, when I found myself (to my surprise) yearning for spiritual community, it was The Episcopal Church to which I returned, by my own choice.

Had I not been formed in my 4/14 window (even though I complained about it!) and exposed to this rich tradition, I don't know where I would have turned as a young adult. I am grateful to have been in religious settings which didn't just seek to entertain me, but took me seriously, even at a young age, invited me to use my gifts in service, and taught me about my life as a child of God.

This magic decade of 4-14 is so important in so many ways. So much of our character, attitudes, study habits, and sense of self take root in these critical years. Our children are like sponges, soaking up every experience in their families, schools and churches.

As we bless our backpacks this Sunday, with the school year beginning at All Saints' and at other schools, and a new church program year just a few weeks away, let us pray for our children at this wonderful time of their lives, and commit to teach them in God's ways.

August 6, 2015 Don't Look Away: The Persecution of Christians in the Middle East

The July 22nd New York Times magazine featured an article by Eliza Griswold entitled ["Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?"](#) It is a long piece, and searingly difficult to read, but is well worth the attention of Christians everywhere, especially in the United States.

Eliza Griswold, a journalist and poet, is well-versed in the complexities of the region, having written several books and numerous articles on the Middle East, and on both Christianity and Islam there. Of particular interest to Episcopalians, she is also the daughter of The Right Reverend Frank Griswold, our Presiding Bishop from 1997 to 2006.

Reading the article, I was impressed with her knowledge of history, combined with a gift for storytelling, reminding us in vivid portrayals that the extremists' brutal persecution of Christians is happening to real people, every day. For the most part, Griswold stays out of partisan politics, placing some blame on each of the last two American administrations, capturing the unfolding tragedy without resorting to easy judgments.

To me, there are significant moral lessons to be learned from this disaster, especially about unanticipated consequences, and the tendency of violence (like any sin) to produce more of itself, like a cancer.

The ironies are everywhere; for example, the dictators in many Middle Eastern countries protected Christians to some degree, and as the dictatorships have fallen, either through the Arab Spring, armed revolutions, or military interventions, chaos has erupted. In that chaos, Christians are more vulnerable than ever, especially to extremists like ISIS.

In a decade, there is a very real possibility that there will be no meaningful number of Christians left in the region that birthed our faith, apart from Israel.

The persecution and slaughter of Christians in the Middle East over the last few years has been quite under-reported in the mainstream media, perhaps in part out of a

reluctance to depict the conflict in the region as a religious war. This is why I was so gratified to see such a detailed and compelling story written and published.

Some Christian leaders, though, have been speaking out for some time. Pope Francis has said of the crisis: "We are dismayed to see how in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world many of our brothers and sisters are persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus." He continued: "In this third world war, waged piecemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide is taking place, and it must end."

What can we, as American Episcopalians, do to help?

Honestly, it is hard to see what we can do in such a difficult situation, taking place half way around the world. As always, we can pray, for the Christians and those of other faiths being persecuted by ISIS and other extremists. Some may choose to write our governmental representatives, urging awareness and action.

But to me, one of the most important things we can do is simply this: not to look away, not to ignore the suffering or pretend it does not exist. We can read about it, educate ourselves, and remember in our thoughts and prayers that the suffering Christians there are not disconnected from us, but are, in baptism, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

May Christ comfort and protect them, and may God's peace prevail, in time, over all the earth.

July 29, 2015 The Four R's of Vacation

I have recently returned from vacation, mostly in Virginia, where we visited family and friends, as we do every summer. Megan and I are blessed to have our extended families just a few hours apart from each other, allowing us and our children to spend time with many of the people who are closest to us in one, long trip.

I was thinking this week about what makes for a good vacation, for we all have experienced vacations that were satisfying and others that were less so. I reflected on four "R's" that I find make a vacation (or even a brief time off) more meaningful. They are derived from the rich Biblical concept of sabbath rest that God modeled for us on the 7th day of creation: patterns of time away from daily work that restore and bless us.

Rest is essential, whether in the form of a vacation, a weekend, or just a good night's sleep. Our bodies, minds and spirits are made by God to require rest after activity. When we rest, our muscles are strengthened, our brains store what we have learned, and our imaginations wander.

Refreshment is a little different from rest. It might include rest, but might also involve activity that renews us, like reading a new book, taking a brief class, or trying out a different experience.

Reconnection with those who are important to us is often one of the most meaningful aspects of time away, whether we are visiting relatives or friends, reconnecting with our spouse, children or grandchildren, or even finding ourselves again.

Reorientation is an aspect of sabbath time that is easy to overlook. Human beings drift spiritually. In our busy lives and daily patterns, we can easily lose touch with the most essential things: who we are, what we value, and what God's purpose is for our life. Time away offers the gift of stepping back, looking at our lives with fresh perspective, and reorienting ourselves towards our North Star. Interestingly, this is one area in which vacation and Lent share a similar focus – probably the only one!

One of the things that helps me reorient is God's creation. When we go to Virginia, we always take at least a couple of days at the beach. There is something about being on the edge of the continent, gazing over the immensity of ocean, that pulls me back, in awe, into a better, more humble relationship with God, and a clearer sense of self.

I used to feel the same way when we lived in Denver: a westward gaze at the Rocky Mountains always reset my spirit. Our beautiful desert landscape here in Arizona does the same for me.

For all of these reasons, I actually prefer the term “holiday” to “vacation.” A holiday is a “holy day,” and whether short or long, it can remind us that God always wants to refresh and sustain us more deeply even than we wish for ourselves.

Too often in life we are tired, bored, lonely, or lost. The four R’s are the antidotes to these four spiritual maladies. Whether on holiday, or over the weekend, or even over the course of a quiet evening, may we not forget to rest, refresh, reconnect and reorient to what matters most.

July 23, 2015 Know Thyself

(Reflection from The Rev. Anne Ellsworth)

There is a book I inevitably return to once a year—usually in the summertime—when there is a little more time and space for reading and thinking and self-reflection.

It is a book I first encountered in my last year of seminary during a time of deep discernment: I was about to graduate with an MA in theology, Matt and I knew a move was on the horizon (we couldn’t afford to stay in the Bay Area, no matter how much we desired to), our first child was eighteen-months-old, and we were feeling the pull to move home to Arizona after six years away for our respective graduate programs. We were considering finances, family relationships, friendships, vocation, employment, and the kind of life we wanted to knit together as a new family of three.

In the swirl of all that transition, I ended up with a copy of “Becoming Who You Are: Insights On The True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints,” written by James Martin, SJ. This short book illuminates the writing of Thomas Merton on the true and false self, and is also part spiritual autobiography of the author, James Martin, who left a high-powered corporate career to pursue a vocation as a Jesuit priest.

The opening words of the book were then, and remain now, a balm for my searching, seeking soul. It is a quote from Thomas Merton’s “New Seeds of Contemplation”: “For me to be a saint means to be myself.”

Holiness, then, and our call to it, hinges on our ability to discern our true self from our false self—from our ego. To discern how we are uniquely created and called by God to live fully, abundantly, and with purpose.

This idea is the crux of Merton’s writing and it is, I believe, ultimately, the crux of our spiritual lives, too. We are tasked with reflecting—deeply and intentionally—on the question of how God created us to live and move and dwell in this world as ourselves. Because, to discern how to authentically live as ourselves is to be set free for service and love in God’s world.

I pulled the book from my shelf this week and began to read it again. Summertime is a good season for me to engage in some self-reflection, perhaps it is for you, too.

If you are in the mood to explore more deeply ideas about the true-self/false-self, identity, and how God is calling you to move through this world, you might consider some of the following resources to aid you in your faith journey:

“Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God,” by Sybil MacBeth. If you need a break from words, screens, and the left side of your brain, try doodling your prayers!

“The Velveteen Principles: A Guide to Becoming Real,” by Toni Raiten-D’Antonio. Wisdom for adults from the children’s classic, “The Velveteen Rabbit.”

“Becoming Who You Are: Insights On The True Self From Thomas Merton and Other Saints,” by James Martin, SJ.

“Sleeping With Bread: Holding What Gives you Life,” by Dennis Linn. A presentation of the Jesuit spiritual practice of The Daily Examine, a way to discern day-to-day between the things that give us life, and those things which do not.

Spiritual Direction: Working with a spiritual director can be a tremendous help when discerning major life decisions and transitions, and for developing spiritual practices that are life-giving. The Franciscan Renewal Center (www.thecasa.org) is a good resource to find trained and experienced spiritual directors.

Direct Service: Encountering God and neighbor through direct service can often serve as a catalyst for self-reflection and discernment. Consider volunteering at Andre House, ICM, St. Mary’s Food Bank, or contact me if you’d like additional ideas about service opportunities.

The Enneagram: More than a personality assessment, the Enneagram is an ancient spiritual symbol of nine personality types that can be a useful tool in deepening self-awareness. A good resource to begin with is: www.enneagraminstitute.com.

If any of this piques your interest and you’d like to talk more together, I hope you’ll reach out. I’d love to hear how God is calling you.

In the meantime, my prayers are with you.

July 15, 2015 Bravery: A Test of Faith
(Reflection from The Rev. Holly Davis)

In 1910 Theodore Roosevelt's wrote, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming..."

These words, for me, express both the joy and also the angst-filled test of faith. For many of us, receiving the unmitigated love of God and to work towards actualizing God's love day in and day out is a prevailing demonstration of bravery.

Bravery is to dare abundantly, to let God delight in us; to step into the arena of faith and to wear the dust and sweat and blood that make for unwavering Christian living. My favorite parts of so many of the Psalms are those when the author accepts and characterizes God as One who knows everything: "You have searched me and known me. You are acquainted with all my ways. You number every hair on my head."

Acknowledging that God knows all, sees all, and still loves me are words of bravery. The writer of the Psalms, even in the face of confrontation, threat, despair, and feelings of doubt stops to pray and acknowledge God's supremacy. Before making any decisions the psalmist stops to pray. God, you know me and you know my story. God, you created me and I am fully yours. I am your blessed and cherished. I am acceptable and sufficient, just as you have created.

The foundation for all bravery is God's unfailing and complete love. It would be easy (and arrogant) to think we are the ones who 'muster' the bravery—the boldness; but true bravery comes from God. Do you feel brave? During my average day, I sometimes find it difficult to stand firm and fearless.

Being brave might be possible for everyone else, but your situation could feel incomparable. It's easy to be bold when everything is wrapped tight, but not when everything is unraveling. When faced with adversity, maybe, "Am I brave enough?" isn't the right question. Maybe the question should be, "Will I let God enter?" God assures God's presence. God is in control and knows the way. Ask for direction. Expect to be prodded. Watch for the signs. Be mindful. Be observant. Trust God. Follow your heart.

This Sunday our Mission Team of 27 youth and adults from All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School will be joining 13 from St. Alban's in Tucson, and then again groups from all over the country. We will meet up in Tsaile, AZ. This group of youth, young adults and adults are daring to let God enter into our lives. We don't have everything ready—we're getting close. Some of us are excited, and some are unsure. Still—we go! We follow the great commission- to go out into the world and preach the Gospel.

We don't have to wait for everything to fall into line. We don't have to wait to be comfortable. God is with us, in our conflicts, as we labor, in our strife, and for the long haul. Be courageous. Step into the arena. Take a chance. True bravery is knowing that because God created us, we are beloved. We are cherished and hallowed. God is God and we are not. As we come to the end, God is with us, and we are never alone.

We ask your prayers from the time of our lock-in at 3:00PM Saturday, July 18, through our return on Thursday evening.

July 8, 2015 Summer: Cultivating Connection

What are your best, most vivid summer memories? One image that comes to mind for me is churning ice cream as a child. My grandmother would prepare the sweet mixture (usually fresh peach, strawberry or lemon), and then our family and friends would churn the ice cream outside in an ice bucket, using an old fashioned hand crank.

The ice cream was delicious, but the process was just as enjoyable: standing around, talking and joking, with everyone taking turns on the crank while it got more and more challenging, as the mixture froze. It was a memorable time of connection.

In most parts of the world today, there is little need to consider the perils of isolation. Most human beings on the planet spend much of their time with others: family and members of their community. This has been the case for almost all of human history. But in parts of America, social isolation is an epidemic.

We may be surrounded by people, but do we have deep friendships? A recent study showed that 25 percent of American adults don't know someone with whom they can share their deepest thoughts and feelings, triumphs and tragedies. If you remove family members from the equation, that percentage doubles.

Our constant use of technology, long work hours and commutes, and social fragmentation all contribute to a pervasive sense of loneliness. School is an ideal social environment, and most of us make strong friendships there. But after graduation from college or graduate school, as we move away for work, and as many of us marry and start our own families, old friendships can be hard to sustain, and new friendships hard to initiate.

God makes us to be in relationship with God and with one another. We are social creatures, and God blesses us with romantic love, familial love and friendship. Summer is an ideal time to cultivate our connections with those who are most important to us, whether we are children or adults.

Let's be sure our children have lots of opportunities to play with other children, limiting their alone time in front of televisions, computers, phones and tablets. As parents and grandparents, it is all too easy to give in, especially when it is hot outside, and let our children isolate themselves with technology all day.

In contrast to the busy school year, summer is often an easier time to schedule play between our children and their friends.

As adults, too, it is important to nurture our relationships with our spouse, family and friends. May the summer months give us opportunities for rest and refreshment, play, renewing of friendships and making new ones. Try something old fashioned, like inviting friends over to churn ice cream, grill burgers, or play a board game. Let's cultivate connection, in all its forms, and make some memories.

July 2, 2015 General Convention: An Update

At our worship over the past week, we have been praying for the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, the every three year gathering of bishops and elected deputies (clergy and lay) that sets policy for the whole Church.

I am not at General Convention, which is being held this time in Salt Lake City, but have been following it fairly closely. As I write this, there are just a couple of days remaining (by Sunday, it will be completed), but here is the news so far as I see it, with some of my reflections.

One big story is the election of a **new Presiding Bishop** for a nine year term. The Right Reverend Michael Curry, Bishop of North Carolina, will be the first African-American Presiding Bishop in our history. On November 1, Bishop Curry will succeed the Most Reverend Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, the first woman to hold the position (you may recall that Bishop Jefferts Schori visited All Saints' briefly in 2009, as part of the House of Bishops meeting in Phoenix).

Bishop Curry is a dynamic preacher and committed disciple of Jesus, and should be an effective spokesperson for The Episcopal Church in the public square at a time in which our cultural influence is fading.

Another significant event was the continued push towards **marriage equality** in the Church. In the days after the Supreme Court's recent decision on marriage, General Convention passed legislation authorizing same-sex marriage liturgies and permitting them in our canons (church laws). In Arizona, this does not represent a large change. Last fall, same-sex marriage became legal in Arizona, and was authorized in our Episcopal Diocese of Arizona by Bishop Smith and the Diocesan Convention.

These national resolutions mostly solidify and clarify the current marriage practice in many dioceses, including ours. As was announced in the fall, according to the policy of

our bishop and diocese, All Saints' offers the ceremony of marriage equally to same-sex and different-sex couples, following the exact same requirements. The details are on our website. At the same time, as a big tent, centrist parish with a wide variety of political and theological views, we continue to make gracious space for each other at All Saints' on this and other controversial issues, knowing that our unity in Christ does not require uniformity in all things.

Another significant issue at General Convention has been **organizational restructuring**. Our Episcopal bureaucracy is bloated and cumbersome, with far too much money and human energy going to antiquated structures that do not serve our (or God's) mission well. As our denomination faces a significant membership crisis, we need to be more agile, streamlined and especially more parish-focused and funded.

If The Episcopal Church is to survive, let alone thrive, it will be because of healthy, energetic parishes (like ours!), not numerous national committees, lobbyists, too long and too large conventions, and excessive church-wide structures and staff. Sadly, much of the energy around restructuring has been thwarted by those entrenched in the current structures.

The financial asking of dioceses to fund our denomination will decrease a few percentage points, some committees have been eliminated, and a few key growth initiatives will be funded, but the drastic restructuring we need (in my view) has mostly not happened.

There are dozens of other resolutions that will be passed by General Convention's end. For more information go to <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/>. And as always, I am glad to meet for conversation about any issues that are important to you. I will be away some on vacation in July, but will be back by the end of the month.

June 25, 2015 How to Change the World: Follow the Children

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." (Margaret Mead)

This week, two important events have been occurring in The Episcopal Church, one local and one national. Here at All Saints', we have been offering our annual version of Vacation Bible School, which we call "All Saints' Kids for the Community." Meanwhile, in Salt Lake City, the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church is gathering for its every third year meeting from June 25 – July 3.

General Convention is a massive event, with bishops and elected deputies (clergy and lay) from every diocese of The Episcopal Church meeting as a bicameral legislature to

pass resolutions that set policy for our Church. “All Saints’ Kids for the Community” is small by comparison, though impressive in its own right, with 49 children and youth and 18 adult mentors participating this year (a record number for us).

And yet, I will confess that I am more excited about All Saints’ Kids for the Community than I am about General Convention. General Convention will elect a new Presiding Bishop, and debate dozens of resolutions on matters both significant (restructuring church bureaucracy, marriage rites, funds for new church plants) and trivial (telling our government what we think they should do about all kinds of things).

Frankly, rather little of what happens at General Convention affects the local church much, apart from Prayer Book revision. (I will follow the news out of Convention, and will share the highlights and my reflections in a future column.) But what our kids have been doing this week has a tremendous, tangible impact in our community.

Every day this week, our children, youth and adults have been serving those in need, in cooperation with some of our closest mission partners: ICM, Saint Mary’s Food Bank, Phoenix Rescue Mission, and Feed My Starving Children. On behalf of All Saints’, they have helped hundreds of people. And in so doing, our young people have learned important lessons about their sacramental faith, and our call to compassion for the poor.

Local, hands-on faith in action is where so much true transformation happens, for those serving and those being served. There is enormous pain and suffering in our world, and the Church is called to go where the hurt is, and bring God’s healing and hope.

I am glad to be part of a national and international body of faith, The Episcopal Church, for all of its challenges. One of the most significant things we can do to support the wider Church is to be the hands and feet of Christ in our own community. In their own way, our thoughtful, committed kids are showing us how to change the world.

June 18, 2015 Celebrating Father’s Day (with Burritos!)

The official celebration of Father’s Day in the United States is a relatively recent occurrence, although its roots go back a century. In 1908, Anna Jarvis celebrated the first Mother’s Day at Saint Andrew’s Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia. By 1914 the Mother’s Day movement had spread nationwide, and President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation that year establishing Mother’s Day as a national holiday.

Taking inspiration from the success of Mother’s Day, local celebrations of Father’s Day soon began in many parts of the country, but attempts to designate a national holiday were unsuccessful for decades. In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson issued a presidential

proclamation designating the third Sunday in June as a day to honor fathers, and in 1972, President Richard Nixon finally signed the national holiday of Father's Day into law.

This Sunday at All Saints', we will honor fathers with prayer and will celebrate with breakfast burritos (with the proceeds benefiting our youth mission trip to Navajoland this summer). Speaking for myself, I prefer a delicious breakfast burrito to a necktie or a greeting card any day!

I am glad that Father's Day is now celebrated across our nation, even if it does get commercialized like everything else. It is good for us to take a day to give thanks for fathers, for at least two reasons.

First, fathers play a very important role in family life, health and faith. Science has explored the impact of fathers, and found that children who have a healthy relationship with their father are half as likely to get into trouble, struggle in school or suffer from depression as children who are raised without a father or with one who is emotionally distant. We also know that when two parents attend church regularly with their children, those children are more likely to practice their faith as adults.

None of this is to deny the heroic efforts of single mothers, or other family configurations, many of whom raise wonderful children, but simply to affirm the obvious: mothers and fathers each have unique gifts to offer children, and when a child is raised by a loving and involved mother and father, their success, health and fulfillment are supported.

Second, the Bible and holy tradition teach that one important way (among many) to think of God is as a father. As we celebrate earthly fathers, we also celebrate that God loves us like a father. Both the Old and New Testaments depict a God who, fatherlike, protects, teaches and provides for God's children. Jesus' affectionate term for God the Father was *abba* ("papa"), and we, too, can find comfort in a God who genuinely loves and cares for us. Like the father in the prodigal son story (Luke 15:11-32), God embraces us with open arms whenever we come to Him, even if sometimes we have wandered far away.

June 11, 2015 Missionaries Wherever We Go

Some pastors like to jettison any traditional Christian words that are thought to have "baggage" or be unpopular, like *sin*, *evangelism*, or *atonement*. The problem is, once we start abandoning the timeless Christian vocabulary, how do we describe who we are and what we believe, except in the slippery, ever-changing clichés of the culture? *Weakness* is not the same as *sin*, and *evangelism* is more than *marketing*. All language has its

baggage, its connotations (both positive and negative), and I'd rather try to teach the rich meaning of old words to successive generations than invent or re-purpose new ones. *Missionaries* is just such a word.

Usually when we hear the word missionaries, we think of those Christians in former times who went to other countries to spread the Gospel. Often our internal reaction to this missionary work is complex: Christianity's evangelism did a lot of good throughout history, spreading a faith that, at its best, promotes human dignity, justice and flourishing. But it was also marred by human sin: there are too many stories of Christian missionaries who denigrated and exploited the humanity and cultures of those they came to save. Whatever our feeling about it, though, mission work was (and is) never optional: Jesus left his disciples with marching orders, the Great Commission: "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28). The spread of the Gospel is at the core of our faith.

One of the ironies of Anglicanism in the 21st century is that the largest and fastest growing Anglican dioceses are in those parts of the world that were evangelized a few centuries ago, especially in Africa, Latin America and Asia, while the Anglican churches in Europe and the United States (The Episcopal Church) that sent the missionaries are in decline. The causes of both the growth and withering are many, but one positive step in our situation is clear: to embrace our baptismal calling as missionaries.

In our case, we are missionaries not to foreign countries, for the most part, but to our own secular, American culture. Lest we forget, we made **this** promise at our baptism (and renew it at every baptism): with God's help, to "proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ" (BCP p 305). Indeed, the official, corporate name of The Episcopal Church is the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society. And so, for us, it is not a question of whether or not we are missionaries (for we are, by virtue of our baptism and membership in The Episcopal Church), but rather: are we going to be effective or ineffective missionaries?

Like it or not, we are missionaries wherever we go. We are sent out from our churches every Sunday with a mission for the rest of the week (in the words of our most popular dismissal: to *go in peace to love and serve the Lord*). I'd like to suggest a few tips for how we might think about being missionaries in a broken, divided world that is indifferent, suspicious, and sometimes even hostile to our faith.

Listen more than we speak. The most tempting sin in evangelism is arrogance: assuming we know what someone else needs. We have news (something new and unknown) to share, and it is **good**, even **saving** news! But something pushed on another will never truly be accepted. Wherever we are, it is good to listen. Often our compassionate listening does more good than 1,000 words. If we truly listen, the time to speak will come, if it is meant to. The world craves more listening. Go where the hurt is and listen.

Understand the culture. Any missionary being sent abroad would be instructed first to learn the language and the culture. So it is for us. What is the culture in our office, family, gym, or group of friends? We must respect the culture if we wish to be heard. As Episcopalians, this comes naturally to us. We aren't likely to strike up a conversation about faith out of nowhere in the locker room. When we do share about our faith, we are more likely to be respectful, sharing appropriately.

Live the faith joyfully. The very best way to be an effective missionary is to live an authentic, joyful Christian life. To follow Jesus, to prioritize prayer and study, service and fellowship, to be kind and helpful, to comfort the suffering, to live generously and with love is to be a light shining in the darkness.

This past week, the church calendar celebrated the great 6th century missionary Saint Columba. Columba suffered from a violent temper, but in sharing the Gospel with Scotland by knowing and loving the people there, he became a wiser and more contented person. His mission to save others was the way that Christ saved him. So it is often with those who bear witness.

June 4, 2015 Equipping the Saints

This past Tuesday, the church staff (our clergy and lay employees) met for our annual retreat to pray, strategize, and plan for the upcoming program year.

I was struck, as I always am when the staff are together, by just how blessed we are to have such a talented, dedicated, and faithful group of servant leaders. The work load is sometimes heavy, the hours long, and the treasure more likely to be found in heaven than on earth, but our staff goes about its ministry with purpose, good humor, and gratitude. In a fairly large church such as All Saints', it is essential to have a strong vestry and staff if the church is to be healthy and growing. We have both, which is one reason why we are doing well amidst a cultural climate that is quite unfavorable for mainline churches.

One thing that gives me joy is that our wonderful staff, in its entirety, is present most Sundays. This means that every member of staff, including our administrative team of Nick, Lindsay and Nanette, is known to our members (and vice versa). It is a powerful symbol for us that we are united, as staff and volunteers, clergy and laity, as fellow members of the Body of Christ. We worship together on Sunday, the Lord's day, resurrection day, the most important day of the week for Christians. There is no more important work than this, and from our common prayer flows our ministry in the church and in the world.

I am rather lukewarm when it comes to mission statements. To have a shared sense of direction, values, and vision is useful, to be sure, but far too often mission statements are either hopelessly vague, or too long to be remembered (which defeats the purpose). I like the ancient simplicity of our Pray, Learn, Serve, Connect, which seems to get to the heart of the matter, that is, what it looks like to follow Jesus. But if I had to choose a mission statement for our church staff, I would probably pick that marvelous, evocative quote from Saint Paul: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

That is the purpose of the staff: not to do most of the ministry ourselves, except for those few areas of specialization designated by virtue of ordination or particular training, but to equip the saints (that is, all the baptized) for the work of ministry both inside and outside the church's walls. If we are to have the maximum impact, the staff ought always to spend the majority of our time training, facilitating, encouraging, guiding, and collaborating with our members.

All Saints' is a blessing to us all, and we are here to be a blessing to the world. In a wider culture that too often focuses on tearing others down, our call, as staff and members, is to build up the Body of Christ, the Church, in our little corner of God's creation.

May 28, 2015 Not a Lonely God: the Holy Trinity and our Youth Mission to Navajoland

"Because the Christian God is not a lonely God, but rather a communion of three persons, faith leads human beings into the divine communion." (Dr. Miroslav Volf)

The Sunday after Pentecost is always Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate the mystery that God is one, and God is three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word "Trinity" is not actually in the Bible, but was coined by the theologian Tertullian in the 3rd century to describe a concept that is embedded throughout the Scriptures.

Despite its ancient origins, the Trinity is not some musty, antiquated doctrine, irrelevant to the modern Church. It is the living, driving force behind our desire to connect with God and each other. From the beginning, God was not alone, but a communion of three "persons," and this primal need for connection is coded within us, since we are made in God's image. We are made to be united with God, and with one other in the divinely given loves of spouse, family and friends.

The Trinity is also the spiritual origin of our call to mission: God sends us out to join with others in proclaiming God's kingdom. And so, mission work, in its deepest sense, is not doing something "for" someone in need, but with them, as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our partnership with Saint Paul's Church and School in Haiti has been marked by just such mutuality and sharing in God's mission.

All Saints' next mission work will be later this summer, when 20 youth and seven adults from The Challenge Foundation and All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School will be traveling to the Navajo Nation in Arizona, as a team under the leadership of the Rev. Holly Davis. They will join local residents, the Sierra Service Project, and other youth from around the country in working toward community, neighborhood development and the building of relationships.

This is our first youth mission trip in a number of years, and represents an important step in the growth of our youth ministries at All Saints'. I hope you will consider supporting this youth effort with your prayers and financial assistance. We don't want any of our youth to be unable to attend for financial reasons. The details on how to give are below.

Our God is not a lonely God, and we are not meant to be isolated either, but connected with God, each other, and those in other places, both near and far. Let us reach out, inspired by the three-fold love that was present from the foundation of the universe.

May 21, 2015 Pentecost: The Disciples' Graduation

The feast of Pentecost, marking the end of the 50 day season of Eastertide, often coincides with graduation season. As I was thinking about our Day School graduates, and those high school and college members of the class of 2015 who are close to us, the similarities to Pentecost occurred to me. Our recent graduates are in a challenging, but fruitful "in between time," having left an important phase of their lives behind, with new adventures ahead. I remember well the mixed emotions of graduation: the joy of accomplishment and eagerness to move forward, mixed with nostalgia and even some sadness for what must remain in the past.

The early Church must have felt something similar. The resurrected Jesus had ascended into heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended, giving the disciples power to build the Church on the example of Jesus Christ. Although Jesus promised he would be with them always to comfort, teach and strengthen them, the disciples had to graduate, taking responsibility as leaders of this new Church. The Acts of the Apostles is about how the disciples grew up, finding courage to take the Jesus movement out into an uncertain world.

For many of us, there is a moment in our spiritual lives when we are called to leave behind simplistic, Sunday only, self-serving notions of faith that ask little of us, and enter into the fuller, more complex, more demanding and more joyful faith that has been passed down through the ages. For some, this happens in the Confirmation process, but for others, it takes longer. I am not suggesting that we outgrow the beliefs of the Church; much the opposite: to mature in faith is to wrestle with the rich teachings of the centuries in all their mystery and complexity, and strive to embody those teachings in our daily lives. Some Christians never grow in faith but become stuck in place and remain there. Pentecost calls us to continued spiritual development through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Congratulations to our graduates: the All Saints' Episcopal Day School class of 2015, and all other graduates we know and love. May they, and we, continue to grow in faith, hope and love.

May 14, 2015 AOL Survived. Will the Church?

This week the big business story was the sale of AOL to Verizon. I hadn't thought of AOL for years, but the news took my thoughts back to the 1990's: my first email account, the screech of the dial-up modem, and the iconic notification of new messages that even inspired a movie ("You've Got Mail!"). AOL has had its ups and downs, the very symbol of boom and bust in the tech sector: from success in the early email and web browsing market to its merger with Time Warner, to its decline among subscribers and spin off

from Time Warner in 2009. You can say this about AOL: it has been resilient. It made several huge mistakes, from underestimating broadband's appeal, to its disastrous (in retrospect) Time Warner merger. But it survived, added new brands to its portfolio, and in the end AOL had enough assets, especially in mobile technology, to be worth \$4.4 billion to Verizon.

At the same time, the religion news of the week was about the continued decline of the mainline denominations, a trend that has been unfolding for decades. An extensive new survey by the Pew Research Center (www.pewresearch.org) found that the percentage of American adults who identify as Christian fell 8% in the last 7 years, especially among young adults. Meanwhile, the percentage of atheists, agnostics and those who are unaffiliated rose 6% over the same period. Mainline denominations (Episcopalians, Methodists, ELCA Lutherans, UCC) fared the worst, and the Roman Catholics also declined, while the conservative Evangelical churches, non-denominational churches, historically black churches, and Mormons were basically flat. Non-Christian religions showed some growth, especially Islam. In this post-Christendom era, almost no Christian denominations are experiencing much growth, but denominations like ours are being particularly hard hit.

All of this brings me, oddly enough, to a place of hope. Given these strong cultural headwinds, All Saints' church is doing remarkably well. As we come to the end of our program year, and enter into the slightly slower summer months, All Saints' is in a position of strength. We have had three straight years of modest surpluses, while investing in key initiatives like technology (video of sermons, our Realm database, upgrades to our e-news and website), small groups and hospitality, and more diverse events to engage the wider community (like our recent North Central Family 5K). 2014 showed a small increase in worship attendance from the year before at All Saints', and a healthy number of baptisms, confirmations, and families with children. And the new campus expansion for our church and school looks great.

I think our single biggest strength is this: we know who we are, what we believe, and what we do well. We focus on offering traditional worship and excellent music, a range of meaningful education for all ages (including our fantastic day school), connection with each other, and caring outreach to those in need both locally and internationally. We don't do everything, but what we do, we do with quality. And we take our faith seriously. Our inclusive, non-partisan, centrist community finds our unity as disciples of Jesus, not in the fads of the moment.

As astute analysts have noted, what the Pew survey shows is not the coming death of Christianity, but the departure of those who were Christians in name only. The Mainline churches and Catholic church have traditionally had many lukewarm Christians, who were only loosely affiliated for reasons of culture, politics, family or habit. Many of these part-time Christians are no longer feeling the social pressure to attend. This pruning of

the branches (John 15) within congregations and among denominations is not necessarily a bad thing.

The future of the Church will be in committed communities of faith that know who they are, what they believe, and what they do well. The future of the Church will be like the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles: faithful followers of Jesus who find purpose in loving God and their neighbor in contrast to a secular culture that is often shallow, self-serving, greedy and divisive. The Church will survive because it offers transformation and real hope. Like AOL, it may take a number of different forms in the changing marketplace, but it will survive and even thrive in communities that take the Gospel seriously and make new disciples.

April 30, 2015 The North Central Family 5K: One of the Highlights of Spring

This Saturday is our 3rd annual North Central Family 5K, and it has quickly become one of the highlights of our program year in the spring. The NCF5K is a great thing for a number of reasons:

- It gets All Saints' into the community, and brings the community to us. Churches can tend to be insular, but the majority of our ministry is beyond our walls. We are nourished by word, sacrament, learning and fellowship to go out into the world to love and serve the Lord. Anything that increases our interaction with the community around us is a positive step towards mission.
- It gets us out into God's creation. God has blessed us with this abundant creation, and it is good to be together, giving thanks for the beautiful morning and for this place where we live.
- It builds our sense of fellowship with one another. Church members see each other every week at worship, and many of us are together for learning or serving, but it is fun to be together in a different environment.
- It is a low-key tool for evangelism. It is so easy to spread the word about All Saints' by talking about the race. Who knows? The race may bring someone closer to All Saints' at a time when they need the love of God in their life.
- It reminds us that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19). Our human bodies are given to us by God, and we are meant to be good stewards of them. When we exercise, whether in a timed 5K or a leisurely walk, we are promoting good health, and honoring God's gift to us.
- It raises money for two great causes. Proceeds will be split between our children, youth and family ministries at church and our partnership with Saint Paul's church and school in Haiti.
- Last but not least, running a race is an important metaphor for the Christian life, especially in the writings of Saint Paul. As we run and walk, we can remember that our faith is also a journey that requires training and effort, but is rewarding at the finish line.

Congratulations to the participants, and hearty thanks to the staff and volunteers who make the race such a wonderful event every year.

April 23, 2015 New Coke: Lessons for the Church

This spring marks the 30th anniversary of the failed New Coke experiment. In 1985, the Coca-Cola Company, in response to a loss of market share to Pepsi, launched a new, sweeter version of its signature soft drink. Their market research and taste testing had suggested that customers would prefer the New Coke, but instead there was a furious backlash. In less than three months, the traditional recipe returned, now rebranded as "Coca-Cola Classic." The whole episode became a cautionary tale about the perils of straying too far from one's identity.

The Church is not a business like Coca-Cola, but some of the same lessons apply. The Church is in competition with other activities for the time and commitment of our members and guests, and a wise church community thinks strategically about how to share our "product" (the Gospel) with more people (evangelism), while building brand loyalty (discipleship).

At All Saints', we try to maintain a clear sense of who we are and what we value, while leaving some room for creative exploration. We would be foolish to throw out the sacred traditions that have been passed down to us in favor of the church equivalent of "New Coke," but we would also be foolish never to consider new ways to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ that are consistent with that tradition. In other words, we want to keep Coke Classic the same, but also experiment with Cherry Coke and Coke Zero.

When we think of our liturgies, for example, this is our approach. Our worship, from the simple, mid-week services to our grand, Sunday liturgies is classic: prayerful, reverent, and according to the *Book of Common Prayer*. You might think this is a given in every Episcopal church, but it is not (that's a column for another day!). We put a great deal of human and financial resource into our worship and music to offer the very best of this classic approach in our praise of God, which is our primary Christian responsibility.

On fourth Sundays during the program year (of which this is the last for this year), we offer an even more classic experience: an ancient, sung Eucharist with incense. This includes our Choral Scholars, high school and college age musicians, who are learning this glorious tradition, and who, we hope, will keep it alive and vibrant for the next generation.

Meanwhile, at 9am on Sundays, we use throughout the year some prayers from *Enriching Our Worship*, the experimental liturgies approved for trial use by The

Episcopal Church. As a large parish, we are an ideal environment in which to workshop (taste test) these prayers, to help the wider Church discern if they will pass the test of time. What a blessing it is to be able to offer the variety of these new resources in addition to the *Book of Common Prayer*.

In areas outside of the liturgy as well our staff and Vestry talk regularly about how to safeguard and pass on our wonderful traditions, while at the same time being open to creative exploration of how to share those traditions more widely. Part of my role as Rector is to encourage an atmosphere of appropriate innovation. Realm (our new database), car magnets, Christmas and Easter devotional cards, and Facebook ads are just a few of the new techniques we have used this year to help spread the word about this remarkable community of faith.

Of course, the most effective marketing for our church is the oldest one: word of mouth. Hopefully we are at least as eager to share about our church as we are about our favorite products and possessions. May we never forsake the classic essentials of our faith for some new fad, even as we use every tool and technique to bring others to Jesus Christ, the living water that truly satisfies.

April 16, 2015 God's Incomprehensibility and The Place of Theology in the Church

“Theological formation is the gradual and often painful discovery of God's incomprehensibility. You can be competent in many things, but you cannot be competent in God.” (Henri Nouwen)

As we prepare to bid farewell in May to the Reverend Doctor James Merrick, our Theologian in Residence, and to his wonderful family, it is a good time to reflect on the role of theology (the study of God and faith) in the Church. We don't question the importance of theology in our seminaries, where our clergy are trained, or in our Anglican publications (journals and books) and lectures. But when it comes to parish life, our communities of faith, the place of theology can be a bit unclear.

To be sure, the life of the local church is soaked in theology. Our Book of Common Prayer is a marvelous theological resource, and our classes and sermons are (at their best) grounded in the Anglican theology that has been passed down to The Episcopal Church. And yet, I fear that we sometimes fall into the trap of thinking of theology as something good, but not essential, something outside the life of the everyday Christian. The analogy might be our philosophy classes in college: many of us considered them interesting, but esoteric. We might take one to fulfill a humanities requirement, but there were many more “practical” courses to take.

On the contrary, I believe strongly that theology has an essential and yes, even practical, role in parish communities. The ancient Christian pattern of faith that we embrace at All Saints' (Pray, Learn, Serve, Connect) assumes the importance of life-long learning about our faith by all, not just by our children and youth. Saint Anselm famously described theology as "faith seeking understanding." To follow Jesus as a disciple is the core of our faith, but without understanding, we will have no idea what that faith means or looks like. The Bible and the great theological writers through the centuries help us grasp in our minds what we feel in our hearts. The head without the heart is a cold and lifeless faith, but the heart without the head is vague and without direction.

Theological understanding also arms us against an increasingly hostile, secular world. If someone at a dinner party says to us that Christianity has been the greatest source of violence in human history, do we know enough theology and history to counter their erroneous argument? If someone, having lost a loved one, asks us what we believe happens after death, what would we say? If a televangelist preaches that God wants us to have all the success and wealth we can imagine, would we know enough theology to agree or disagree?

There are plenty of churches that teach a watered down theology, or virtually no theology at all to adults. Sadly, these low expectation churches often draw big crowds, in part because they ask so little. The best of our Anglican tradition has always embraced our God-given intelligence, and nurtured it with challenging and stimulating preaching and teaching. Most Episcopal clergy attend a minimum of three years of rigorous, postgraduate academic study, making us among the best educated clergy in Christianity.

For centuries, our tradition has also included priest/scholars, who exercised their ministries in seminaries and universities and parishes at the same time, or in alternation. The Reverend Doctor Merrick is a living example of this great heritage. Although his full-time work was teaching theology at Grand Canyon University, he was our part-time Theologian in Residence, using his expertise to help us explore theology in our parish. In this next phase of his ministry, he will serve as Rector of Saint Mary's in Aberdeen, Scotland, but he will also find opportunities to teach both inside and outside Saint Mary's.

I am so grateful that at All Saints', we take our Christian education for all ages seriously. Our adult classes and groups are well attended and enthusiastic, and many parishioners engage with our sermons by preparing in advance with the readings and watching the sermon videos through our weekly e-news. Although we are losing our Theologian in Residence, our committed study of theology will continue. The more we study the faith, the more we understand the truth that Henri Nouwen speaks, that God is incomprehensible. But God kindles our curiosity; the desire to explore God's unfathomable mystery grows greater in the exploration.

April 8, 2015 Eastertide: A Joyful and Unsettling Season

Holy Week and Easter Day were wonderful at All Saints' again this year. More than one-hundred volunteers joined with the staff to offer memorable and moving worship experiences every day of Holy Week, including our three large services on Easter Day. Although many of us are tired this week, it was well worth it, for our highest calling is to follow Jesus, and there is no better time or way to do so than Holy Week. In following Jesus, we never know how God may use the moment to bless us, or someone else around us, perhaps one of our many guests. I am so grateful to our volunteers, who are the hands and feet and hearts of our ministries both now, and throughout the year. Thank you!

What's next? We have begun the 50 day season of Eastertide, which extends all the way to Pentecost in May. It is, for me, always a rather unsettling season. At Christmas, we get the cute baby Jesus, his loving family, the animals, the shepherds, intrepid wise men, and rejoicing angels. For all of its theological depth in the incarnation, Christmas is largely a comforting and comfortable holiday (apart from the tragedy of the Holy Innocents). Easter is quite different: like Christmas, it is joyful, but it is also strange, and disconcerting, because it is about death and resurrection. None of us much likes to think about death, especially our own. And yet, Jesus' resurrection is not just for him, but for us.

If our idea of what happens after death is a disembodied soul with angel wings, we are startled at what the Bible actually teaches: a risen Christ who is not a ghost, but has some kind of physical presence (he eats, and can be touched), though not exactly the same body he had before (he can be hard to recognize). We, too, are promised at the end of history, a physical resurrection (what the Apostles Creed calls "the resurrection of the body"), some kind of new body, both similar to and different from our earthly frame. What an odd plan God had in mind, how surprising and yet how fitting for the Creator who chose to make a physical universe and call it good.

It is no wonder the Church gives us 50 days to meditate upon this mystery: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. And when he comes again, we will be raised, too. Alleluia!

April 1, 2015 The Triduum Sacrum (The Three Holy Days)

The Reverend Scott Gunn, the Executive Director of Forward Movement, and a seminary classmate of mine, writes this about Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday (the Triduum Sacrum): "I've made a promise every year I was a parish priest. *Come to the entire Triduum Sacrum. I promise you, these liturgies – the very heart of our faith – will change your life.* I often added a joke that I wished we charged admission so I could

offer a money-back guarantee. No one has ever said they regretted coming to the Three Holy Days.”

Father Gunn gets at something important, as Holy Week reaches its culmination. These three days are the core commemoration of our shared discipleship, the dramatic epicenter of the entire Christian year. Our liturgies on these three days are really one long liturgy in three parts that takes us into the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. The intent of Father Gunn’s words (and mine) is not a guilt trip; some are simply not able to attend worship during the week. But if you are on the fence, I urge you to make the effort. You won’t regret spending this time walking with your fellow Christians as we walk with Christ. If we open ourselves to God in this way, it really does have the potential to change our lives.

The celebration does not end Saturday night, of course. On Easter Day, we will welcome more than 1,500 people, many of them guests, to the great feast of the Resurrection throughout the morning. And as we did at Christmas, we will provide to all who attend an Easter service (including Saturday night) a packet of devotional cards, to help us extend our Easter joy through the following week.

Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection give us new life both now and after our earthly death. Let us never forget God’s sacrifice, made in love to save us. It changed and changes everything.

March 26, 2015 Holy Week: Entering the Deep Mystery

“So it is ourselves that we must spread under Christ’s feet, not coats or lifeless branches or shoots of trees.” (Saint Andrew of Crete, 8th Century)

It is difficult to be indifferent to Holy Week if we participate in it. We can show our indifference by skipping it largely or entirely, but the more we engage with it, the more challenging and enticing it becomes. It is like a difficult hike in beautiful surroundings: the first steps are the hardest, committing to the endeavor, and then we get drawn into the experience, which gives us energy to continue the sometimes arduous journey. Even if we know what to expect, we want to see what is at the path’s end, because it is a little different every time.

The worship in Holy Week, beginning this Palm Sunday, and culminating in Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, takes us into a very deep mystery. We explore, in awful detail, the very worst that human beings can do to each other (Jesus is betrayed, falsely accused, abandoned, tortured, mocked, and killed). And, in equal measure, we explore the loyalty, truth, steadfastness, healing, encouragement, and

resurrection power of God. There is nothing sinful we can do to each other that cannot be overcome by God's love, no darkness that cannot be filled with God's light.

I urge us all to participate in Holy Week as much as we can. There is nothing like it, with many liturgical elements that take place only once each year. We do not merely commemorate Jesus' last days; we walk with him, all the way to the Cross. The pilgrimage begins dramatically on Palm Sunday as we recall Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and witness the crowd cheering, then turning on him (in the reading of the Passion).

The heart of the Christian year is here. May God give us grace to lay ourselves at Christ's feet, as those palms were spread two-thousand years ago, hailing him as our king, and trusting in his never-failing love.

March 19, 2015 The Foolishness of the Cross: Faith in the Workplace

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (I Corinthians 1:18)

Recently, the liberal political columnist Ana Marie Cox wrote an article professing her Christian faith. Entitled "Why I'm Coming Out as a Christian," it became a surprising internet sensation with its heartfelt honesty and vulnerability. (If you choose to find the article online, be warned that it has both adult language and political content!) Cox admitted that, although she has been a Christian for a long time, she has been reluctant to identify as such, for fear of being criticized either by liberal atheists in her field or by conservative Christians, who might consider her not Christian enough. Although I certainly don't agree with Cox on everything, I found the parts of this article about her own faith life insightful and quite moving. She writes,

The only place where my spirituality feels volatile is in my professional life; the only time I've ever felt uncomfortable talking about my faith is when it comes up in conversation with colleagues. It does come up: Since leaving Washington, I have made my life over and I am happier, freer, and healthier in body and spirit and apparently it shows. When people ask me, "What changed?" or, "How did you do it?" or, sometimes, with nervous humor, "Tell me your secret!" I have a litany of concrete lifestyle changes I can give them—simply leaving Washington is near the top of the list—but the honest answer would be this: I try, every day, to give my will and my life over to God. I try to be like Christ. I get down on my knees and pray.

To me, that last part is about as good a summary of Christian discipleship as I have heard: *I try, every day, to give my will and my life over to God. I try to be like Christ. I get down on my knees and pray.*

I've read a number of articles similar to Cox's in recent years: stories of professionals (journalists, academics, entrepreneurs) who chose to reveal their faith in professional environments in which such a revelation was at best odd, and at worst costly. As secularism rises, Christians will more and more be faced with this choice: to keep our faith secret to most people we know, or risk being honest about it.

Now as a general rule, Episcopalians tend to be more private about our faith than most other Christians. This is partly a good thing. As we "respect the dignity of every human being" (BCP p. 305), we are quite rightly reluctant to push our faith on others, or appear judgmental or insensitive. And yet, my suspicion is that we often hide behind our politeness, missing opportunities to share appropriately to willing ears about our faith, and how it shapes our decisions, both personally and (I hope) professionally.

Please don't misunderstand me: I am not urging our members to preach from atop their office desks! But are we truly open to the Holy Spirit's prompting? Do we set a good Christian example with our behavior? Are we ethical and kind, humble and forgiving at work? Do we try to give our will and life to God, every day, wherever we are?

In this season of Lent, we ask God's grace to help us pick up our cross and follow Jesus. To many in our world, that cross will seem foolish, but to us, it is the power of God.

March 12, 2015 All Saints' Episcopal Day School, Moral Formation, and Indexed Tuition

The moral formation of children is a 24/7 endeavor. Children are keen observers of others' behavior, whether in real life, in television and movies, or online. Every experience our children have **shapes** their character, for good or ill, and their role models are everywhere.

When it comes to positive influences on children, family members are the most influential moral role models. Our church community (clergy, Sunday school teachers, adults and other children) on Sundays and other days is vitally important. But in addition to those influences, our children are greatly impacted by their school environments. We are incredibly blessed to have at All Saints' a day school community of faculty, staff, students and families that nurtures the character of almost 500 young people Monday through Friday, alongside their academic, athletic, artistic, and social development.

My wife and I appreciate enormously the well rounded, Episcopal education that our oldest son is receiving at All Saints' Episcopal Day School, and we are excited that our middle child will be entering the Pre-K program in the fall. Having both the church and school communities aligned with our values as parents makes us more confident that

our children will become the compassionate, generous, fulfilled people God created them to be.

There are many good schools, both public and private, in the Phoenix area, and selecting a school is a multifaceted, personal decision for a family. All Saints' Church is enriched greatly by children who attend a wide variety of schools; indeed, having young people from many different schools in our children and youth programs at church is one of our strengths. At the same time, I am so grateful that All Saints' Episcopal Day School offers a wonderful combination of excellent academics, small classes, arts, and athletics, within a strong Episcopal identity of chapel, religion classes, and service to those in need.

One perceived obstacle for some families considering All Saints' Episcopal Day School for their children has been cost. Recently, our day school leadership announced an exciting new tuition model that we hope will encourage more families to explore All Saints'. "Indexed tuition" sets each student's tuition based on their family's unique circumstances and financial resources. In the words of our admissions materials, we are "committed to creating a school community that is truly inclusive, diverse, and accessible to a wide range of families." For more information, click on this link on www.aseds.org to read **Affording All Saints'** under the Admission header. I hope more of our church families will consider our day school for their children in the year and years to come.

All Saints' Episcopal Day School is the largest outreach ministry of All Saints' Episcopal Church, and has made a positive impact in Phoenix and beyond for more than 50 years. By God's grace, it will continue to thrive, educating children head to soul, for many more years.

[You may also click on this link to see a brief information sheet about Indexed Tuition at All Saints' Episcopal Day School](#)

March 5, 2015 Evensong: a Rare Gift

This Sunday evening is our last choral Evensong of this program year (Evensong will resume in October). We are one of very few churches in Arizona to offer it, and we do so at a very high level of musicianship, thanks to the passion and skill of our professional and volunteer musicians.

Our reputation for fine music and worship to the glory of God is spreading, and our Evensongs have begun to attract some who are not available on Sunday mornings, either due to work schedules, or because they are part of another church community. Across the country, the churches that offer Evensong often draw from those who attend

other churches as well, but who appreciate this unique and beautiful tradition of our Anglican heritage.

This trend extends to the internet, where a handful of Episcopal churches offer webcasts of Evensong (my personal favorite to listen to is Saint Thomas Fifth Avenue in New York, which webcasts Evensong four times a week at www.saintthomaschurch.org).

There are many things I love about Evensong, not least that it is a living tradition. The format dates back to Thomas Cranmer, the writer of our first Book of Common Prayer (1549), who artfully combined the medieval offices of Vespers and Compline. At All Saints', as in most churches that offer Evensong, we use the 1662 version.

It is worship that is almost entirely sung, led by the choir and clergy officiant. As such, it invites the congregation into a rather unfamiliar spiritual state: active listening. Evensong is not a concert, but a kind of Christian meditation, giving us the rare chance to pray in our hearts the words that are sung by others on our behalf.

As a living tradition, Evensong continues to inspire composers to set the traditional texts to new music. All this year, we have enjoyed at Evensong musical settings by living composers, and this Sunday, we feature a composer from our own congregation, Pat Castle. By continuing to keep lit the torch of this tradition, we encourage living composers to join their musical gifts to these age-old prayers that have inspired generations.

If you know someone who appreciates music, invite them to Evensong this Sunday, or in the fall. From the organ recitals beforehand to the reception afterwards, they are a rare gift.

February 26, 2015 Confirmation: A Vital Milestone

There are some clergy in The Episcopal Church who would like to get rid of the rite of Confirmation. Their position is that the strong emphasis in our current Prayer Book on baptism as full initiation in the Body of Christ makes confirmation unnecessary. (As an historical aside, the writers of the 1979 Prayer Book almost **did** kill off confirmation for this reason, but the bishops refused.) The phrase that is often used by critics is that confirmation is a "rite in search of a theology." I would beg to differ.

In fact, I am a huge fan of confirmation, both for youth and adults, for a number of reasons:

- **Confirmation is a liturgical opportunity to “make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism” (BCP p 412).**

Baptism does offer full membership in God’s Church, including the invitation to receive Holy Communion even as a child, when that child is emotionally and spiritually prepared to do so (at All Saints’, our Sunday school program teaches children about the Eucharist to prepare them for their first communion, when they and their parents are ready). But confirmation is an important rite of passage to understand and embrace the Christian faith, confirming one’s willing participation in The Episcopal Church and its mission.

- **Confirmation teaches youth and adults the basics of the Christian faith, and of our Anglican tradition.** Bible stories, Church history, and elementary theology that used to be common knowledge a few generations ago are no longer known by many. It is vital, in our aggressively secular culture, to be grounded in the essentials of who we are, what we believe, and why it matters to us. Some adults who were confirmed long ago enjoy taking part in the adult confirmation class again, as a refresher course (which leads not to being confirmed a second time, but to reaffirming one’s baptismal vows before the Bishop).

- **Confirmation is a safe environment for questions.** Both in our youth confirmation program for grades 7 and 8, and in our adult class, we explore the faith, asking hard questions of our tradition and of ourselves. The Episcopal Church has a long history of openness to theological questions. There is not an assumption that every member of the class will be confirmed. Some decide that they are not ready to make so important a commitment. This, too, is part of the deep grappling with faith and doubt that confirmation represents, at its best.

- **Confirmation is a serious decision.** It is good for us to stand in front of the Bishop, our family, friends, and fellow parishioners and state aloud our intent to follow Christ as disciples. Confirmation allows us to take responsibility for our faith, and commit to some form of Christian service.

- **Confirmation connects us to the Bishop, and to the Church’s rich history.** Since confirmation requires the laying on of hands by a bishop, every confirmand is forever linked to the bishops of the Church, whose ancient, apostolic ministry can be traced back to Saint Peter himself.

- **Confirmation is a sacrament that gives power.** Confirmation is not chiefly something we do, but something God does for us. Sacraments have power, through the Holy Spirit, to affect change. Confirmation gives the following graces to its recipient: “Strengthen, O Lord, your servant *N.* with your Holy Spirit; empower *him* for your service; and sustain *him* all the days of *his* life. Amen.” One Biblical parallel is the feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit dramatically enlivened the disciples, inspiring them to witness boldly. Living a mature, Christian life is hard work. Having the strength of the Holy Spirit to empower and sustain us, with the support of our church family, helps a great deal.

The one criticism of confirmation for which I have some sympathy is on the question of those who are baptized as adults. In that instance, there is a mature faith commitment being made, after instruction on the faith, and therefore confirmation can seem somewhat redundant. But even in this case, the power of the sacrament and connection to the apostolic ministry of the Bishop remain meaningful. I like the timing we use at All Saints' for baptism and confirmation. Adults are usually baptized at the Easter Vigil (the night before Easter Day), and confirmation occurs only a month or so later, at Bishop Smith's annual visitation in May. The swift movement from baptism to confirmation for adults feels graceful and unified.

I am pleased that at All Saints', confirmation for youth and adults is alive and well, as a vital milestone on our pilgrimage of faith. It offers a profound sense of belonging, especially for those joining our church family from other religious traditions. Our youth confirmation classes are underway already for this year, but it is not too late for adults to join **The Path of Discipleship: Adult Confirmation Class**. We are receiving registrations **until March 15** for adults who wish to be baptized, confirmed, or received into The Episcopal Church (for those already confirmed in other denominations), or those who wish to reaffirm their baptismal vows. See the details below.

February 19, 2015 Beyond the Horizon

I am so grateful for the many kind words, emails, notes, cards, thoughts and prayers from the All Saints' community at the news of my brother Wilson's death from brain cancer. I am also thankful for the staff, especially Mother Davis and Bishop Burrill, who scrambled to cover my duties while I was away. I had a sad, but meaningful visit to Virginia. Hundreds of people came to my brother's funeral service on a snowy and cold day, and to the reception afterwards. It was a blessing to renew many connections, and to meet for the first time many others who were touched by his life.

I was also struck again by the comfort of the words in our Book of Common Prayer. As the clergy led us in the prayers of burial, I was reminded why these words have brought solace to many generations. At a time of grief in which fitting language is hard to come by, our Prayer Book fills the void with beauty and with Scripture-based hope.

Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent bring us face to face with two uncomfortable truths: our mortality and our sinfulness. But they do so with a purpose, and with an end in mind. The purpose is to get our attention, and urge us to repent, to take some concrete steps to mend our relationships with God and those around us. The end



we have in mind is Holy Week and Easter. Lent prepares us for the re-living of the heart of the Christian faith: Christ's passion, death and resurrection. We are reminded that Jesus' resurrection paves the way for our own, and that of those we love.

One of my favorite pictures of my brother shows him looking out into the great expanse of the Atlantic ocean, with one of his daughters at his side, doing the same. In this life, whenever we gaze across long distances, we are reminded both of the majesty of God's creation, and of our human limitations. We can only see so far. There are distant shores beyond the horizon of our sight. But in death, our eyes are fully opened, and we see God face to face, and so much more.

Friends, let us make good use of this precious, mortal life that God has given us. But let us do so not overly fearing what is to come, but looking towards it with awe.

February 12, 2015 Change 101

The core of the Gospel is transformation, positive change, both of ourselves and of our world, through Jesus Christ. Every year, Lent gives us a marvelous opportunity to focus on that change in tangible ways. Of course, it is God who changes us in what matters most, and not we ourselves; but our sincere efforts signal to God our **hope** to change, without which no real transformation is possible.

Truth be told, I am rather pessimistic about our human ability to repent and change, individually or systemically (this is the nature of sin, after all). But I believe, following Merton, that our desire to please God, to really do better this time, does in fact please God (even if we are like my 3 year old, who in trying to clean up his room, inevitably makes more mess instead). Although we may try the same Lenten disciplines, year after year, with little obvious, permanent effect, perhaps it is good that we are still trying.

If we do commit to a Lenten discipline, desiring change, as I hope most of us will, there are some wise ways to go about it. Being wise in the approach does not guarantee a positive change, but it does make it more likely. Here are some basic steps to consider.

+ **Recognize what needs changing.** Look in the mirror, and try honestly to identify your shortcomings. Don't do it with the false modesty of the job seeker, who at his interview, shares that his greatest weakness is that he just works too hard. Be real. What gets in the way of healthy relationships with God, yourself, and those around you?

+ **Make a plan.** What modest, reasonable, daily practice might draw you closer to God, to others, and to your true, God-made self? The traditional Lenten practices are prayer,

fasting, and helping the poor. But there is room to adapt them. For example, a fast from the internet or from gossip instead of (or in addition to) a fast from food.

+ **Execute the plan over a length of time.** Really try to keep the practice going over the whole 40 days. Sundays are days off. Don't give up if you get behind. Forgive yourself, and get back on the path.

+ **Don't do it alone.** Any new discipline benefits from accountability and encouragement. Share what you are doing with others. If possible, do it together. Read the Bible. Pray. Go for a walk. Volunteer at ICM. Write letters of gratitude. Be kind to the lonely person at work.

I would also suggest that All Saints' is providing a great support for our Lenten disciplines: our Living Compass groups on Thursdays (starting the 26th). They are well aligned with the four steps above, and are adaptable to different goals. Bring a friend! We will also offer a Lenten Quiet Morning (provided by the Prayer Team), our annual ICM food collection, and a number of other Lenten ministries and programs.

Lent is almost here. Let's make the most of it.

February 5, 2015 A Sure and Certain Hope

One of the best qualities of Christianity is that we look unflinchingly at death.

The culture around us evades death most of the time, because it has no cure for it, and no answer to it. Most people simply don't think about death, and our media and entertainment don't usually depict it realistically (if we judge by the movies, we are more likely to die by a space alien's ray gun than by cancer). Our society spends billions to delay or cover up aging, and billions more on treatment in the last stage of life to extend our time on earth a few extra days or weeks (more than half of Medicare dollars are spent on patients with less than two months to live). Most Americans live in such denial of death that they don't even plan for their loved ones: half of Americans with children don't leave behind a will at their death.

As Christians, though, we acknowledge openly our own mortality and that of those around us. Funerals are a regular part of our common life at All Saints', and we often hear that we do them exceptionally well, bringing great comfort to those who mourn. We regularly celebrate the saints, the faithful departed, and ask them to pray for us and help us.

Every year, on Ash Wednesday, we are reminded "you are dust, and to dust you shall return." And yet, the ashes on our heads are in the sign of the Cross. We face death, but

we do so with faith and hope: faith that Jesus has conquered death on the Cross and in his resurrection, and sure and certain hope that we, too, will be raised as he was. In all of my years of ministry, there is nothing more inspiring than visiting, in their last days, a Christian who is spiritually prepared for their death, and ready to be with God.

I share these observations for two reasons. **First**, as we begin to think about our Lenten disciplines, with Lent less than two weeks away, it is important to see the season as, in a sense, a matter of life and death. Let us not trivialize Lent by giving up chocolate if what we really need to give up is toxic gossip, or neglecting our family. Lent reminds us that we are mortal, and that we have a limited time to set things right with God and with those around us.

Not that Lent is all gloom and doom (for example, we enjoy Lent Madness). But it is a serious time, and a generous gift from God: 40 days to work on something important that we hope God can help us do better. In this pre-Lenten period, I urge us all to reflect seriously on those aspects of our life that are dark, difficult, and spiritually deadly. What habits can we take on to repent of those behaviors, and put something positive in their place, as we embrace forgiveness and new life in preparation for Holy Week and Easter?

Second, it is good for us to think of the legacy we will leave behind at death. Part of this is our legacy left to the Church. This Sunday is our annual Evensong in celebration of our All Saints' Legacy Circle. We will remember especially those who have died in the past year, leaving a bequest to All Saints'. I urge all our members to join the Circle by remembering All Saints' in our wills, after we have provided for our loved ones. We never ask the amount of the planned gift; our Legacy Circle form (available from Lindsay Wood in the church office) simply indicates that we have remembered All Saints' in our planning.

The names of our Legacy Circle members go on our beautiful monument in the Narthex. By a Vestry policy from 2010, the first \$10,000 of an undesignated bequest can go to the current year's ministries, if needed, but any amount over that goes automatically to our new endowment, to fund our future ministries in perpetuity. A bequest becomes, in effect, a pledge that continues after death. Please consider remembering All Saints' in your will the next time you meet with your lawyer or financial adviser. If every pledging member were also a member of our Legacy Circle, it would make a huge difference in sustaining our fiscal health and the ability to resource our ministries in the years to come.

Thanks be to God for those who have left us a great legacy, in so many respects. May we have grace to do the same, in preparation for that day when we see God face to face.

January 29, 2015 Mourning Marcus

Last week, the progressive Christian scholar Marcus Borg died at the age of 72, after a prolonged illness. The author of more than 20 books, and a prolific speaker on the lecture circuit, Dr. Borg is probably the one scholar and author best known to members of The Episcopal Church. Ask any room of Episcopalians if they have ever read a book about Jesus, and more than half who **have** will mention Borg, especially his landmark book “Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time.”

My own interaction with Borg and his work was varied, and over many years. I first heard of him from, of all people, my grandmother. A lifelong Episcopalian, she had an intellectual, progressive streak in matters of religion, and regularly read Bishop Spong and others who were pushing back against traditional theology. She gave me “Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time” when I was 18 (I still have it, with her inscription), and I was enthralled. It was one of the first times I realized that there was such a thing as contemporary Jesus scholarship, and that different views on Jesus not only existed, but could be discussed freely in The Episcopal Church.

Over the years, I read a number of Borg’s books, and I heard him speak in person on at least three occasions that I recall: twice to large lecture halls, and once in a smaller seminar over several days with his longtime collaborator, John Dominic Crossan. In addition to his intellect and wit, I appreciated his kindness and gracious spirit, even to those with whom he disagreed. His debates, in person and in print, with N.T. Wright, an Anglican scholar who holds a more traditional view, were a model of respectful and friendly dialogue. Their joint book, “The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions” is available in our Urbano Library, and is a fascinating read.

As I think about Borg’s professional life, I am grateful in particular that he was able to be a door for many into The Episcopal Church: both those from fundamentalist backgrounds, and those seekers and skeptics who found entry through traditional theology daunting or difficult. At the same time, if I am honest, I must admit that Borg’s theology became much less compelling to me over the years. I rejoice that ours is a Church open and curious enough that Borg, Crossan, Spong and others who push theological boundaries can be read, studied and discussed. And yet, for me, Borg’s Jesus, while interesting, is not a savior I can follow. Indeed, he is not a savior at all, in any traditional sense.

We must be careful not to lump all liberal theologians together (or conservative ones, for that matter). There are significant differences between, say, Borg and Spong, or Crossan and Ehrman. But much of the work of a particular type of modern scholarship, exemplified by the “Jesus Seminar” (and often aimed as much to popular audiences as to academic ones) has focused on dismantling the **Jesus of faith**, and discrediting or redefining anything miraculous in the New Testament, including the resurrection.

In **that** Jesus' place, they have promoted Jesus the teacher, Jesus the mystic, and Jesus the political revolutionary. There is an element of truth to these depictions, of course. Jesus **was** a teacher, mystic, and political revolutionary. But if he was not **also** the Son of God, healer of the sick, feeder of the five thousand, and the resurrected and ascended Christ, then, to me, everything that faith **means** starts to fall apart.

If Jesus was not uniquely divine and did not do what the Bible says he did, the gospels are just interesting pieces of world literature, the sacraments mere theatrical props, and this earthly life is all there is. I don't know about you, but if that's the case, I'm not at all sure being Christian is worth my time.

There are not just two ways for Christians to read the Bible: literally or politically/metaphorically. There is another way. Over the years, my own faith has returned, not to the simplistic faith of my childhood, but in large measure to the creedal faith of the Church (especially classical Anglicanism) throughout the best parts of its history: neither rigid and literal, nor merely metaphorical or political, but richly poetic, mystical, applicable and absolutely true, at the same time. For example, I believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus at Easter, and I also believe it has symbolic, personal, and political resonance.

I know others in our church have different beliefs, and our Episcopal big tent allows plenty of room for a variety of opinions. Whatever your view, I hope you will broaden your perspective. If you have read Borg, I encourage you to read Wright as well, and vice versa. Faith need not fear diverse viewpoints; indeed, it is strengthened by them.

I give thanks to God for Marcus Borg and others who have challenged me and so many to think differently about this Jesus, whom we follow, and worship, and seek to understand. May Marcus rest in peace and rise in glory.

Our Urbano Library Committee has created a display featuring books by Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright that we have in our collection. Many titles by both authors are available to be checked out.

January 22, 2015 Christian Unity: Hope and Realism

The ecumenical Week of Prayer for Christian Unity takes place every year between the feast of the Confession of Saint Peter (January 18) and the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul (January 25). During this week, we pray for unity and cooperation among Christians, remembering Jesus' prayer that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). I certainly share the basic sentiment that it is good for Christians to work together across denominational lines, and I hold the view (not universally shared among Christians, especially on the hard right or left) that most Christian churches have more in common than not, and ought to support and encourage each other, whatever our disagreements (which are often quite large). Some of my most significant Christian role models have been people from other denominations, with whom I have had major differences of theological opinion.

Moreover, I have the eschatological belief that, when the kingdom of God is fully realized at the end of all things, that kingdom will not be divided, but will be one in Christ. And yet, we must not be naïve. There is no realistic chance for one unified, worldwide Church before the end times, any more than we are likely to see world peace before Jesus returns. When I last looked it up, there were some 40,000 different Christian denominations across the globe. In our broken, market driven world, churches compete for members, like it or not, and the "religious marketplace" incentivizes varieties of belief and practice. What then are we to do, if we are to be both realistic and hopeful about being unified in Christ?

First, we can pray for other Christians both here and around the world, and actively seek out ways to work together. As one example, the slaughter of Christians in the Middle East and Africa ought to concern us all, and should provoke earnest prayer, efforts at awareness, and appropriate action. As another example, in areas of common commitment, like the movement to eliminate hunger, initiatives across denominations, like the Souper Bowl of Caring, are practical ways to promote the common good.

Second, we at All Saints' can strive to be a faithful, committed and inclusive church, following the ancient teachings of Jesus, and structured around the essentials. The more we focus on core, creedal, sacramental Christianity, and the traditional practices of pray, learn, serve and connect, the more we are getting back to the DNA of the Church that Jesus founded. Where there is hope for greater unity among churches, it is surely to be found around Jesus himself: who he was, what he did, and what he taught.

As you will hear in my "State of the Parish" address in the sermon times on Saturday and Sunday, All Saints' is in a very healthy state, both financially and in the range of essential ministries, both new and old, that we offer. The spiritual danger in such good circumstances is complacency. But ours is not a complacent God. We are called, like Simon and Andrew in our gospel reading on Sunday, to leave our comfortable ways

behind and follow the restless one who leads us where we need to go, for our own sakes, and for the sake of the world.

January 8, 2015 Following the Star

January 6th was the feast of the Epiphany, and as we do with all major feast days that occur on a weekday during a given week, we kept the feast at our Wednesday morning Eucharists. The Epiphany includes the wonderful and familiar gospel reading from Matthew 2, the fitting end to the 12 days of Christmas: the wise men travel from the East, following the star, seeking the newborn king of the Jews. After an encounter with Herod, who wishes to kill the baby Messiah, the wise men continue their journey. The star leads them to the Holy Family, with whom they share their gifts, kneeling before Jesus. Then they go home by another road, outwitting Herod's treachery.

So begins our season after Epiphany, in which we celebrate the light of Christ shining in and through us, and across the whole world. For each and every one of us, at various times in our lives, God provides a holy star that will guide us where we need to go. But it is up to us to follow that star, knowing the journey may be long and difficult. The end of every such divine pilgrimage involves our giving up what seems precious to us, with love and not fear, to God. And in so doing, we receive the greatest gift of all: the peace of Jesus.

The wise men knew that it is best to travel with companions on such a pilgrimage. And so it is in our own life of faith. I am pleased that so many of our members have joined faith groups already in this new year, as we travel together, following the holy light. Our new Bible in a Year group is over 20 (not including the clergy), the new Men's Breakfast is gathering a dozen each month for conversation, the Transitions group is at 9 and counting, and Walking the Mourner's Path is adding participants. New connection opportunities are coming in Lent.

Ours can be a dark world, as we saw again this week in the violence in Paris. May the light of Christ lead us ever nearer to him, and may we in this Epiphany season gather others with us on our sacred path of love and deep peace.

The Rector's Reflections

The Rev. Poulson Reed

2014

December 31, 2014 Need a New Year's Resolution? How about Reading the Bible?

It is the time of year for New Year's resolutions. The behavioral scientists confirm my own experience that it is very difficult to keep a new pattern for a year. I think the Church actually has a better idea with Lent: 40 days is much more manageable for a new practice. But if you are considering a New Year's resolution, allow me to suggest reading the Bible.

Even for those who attend church every week, we only dip into portions of the Bible in our 3 year Sunday lectionary. We hear many of the essential stories of faith, but large sections, especially of the Old Testament, remain unread. All of the Bible contains valuable insight into the nature of God, and how to live a more Godly and compassionate life.

If you are interested in reading more of the Bible, take my advice and please don't try to read it cover to cover, like a novel. 95% of the time, you will get bogged down somewhere around Leviticus, and never make it out! Instead, I suggest one of two ways to read more of the Bible in the new year:

- If you are really committed, read the whole Bible in a year. We have a group starting in January to do this together (with individual daily reading and twice monthly group meetings), and we are still open to participants for one more week. Or you can follow the reading plan we are using on your own, without joining the group. It can be found here: www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Read-the-Bible-in-a-Year-Revised-1.pdf. This plan provides a balanced approach of one Old Testament reading, one New Testament reading, and one psalm each day.
- If the whole Bible in a year is too ambitious, try keeping up with some or all of the brief Daily Office readings from Morning and Evening Prayer. They can be found listed in the back of the Book of Common Prayer (pages 934 and following). We are in Office Year One. They can also be found online in several places, including daily prayer from Forward Movement: www.prayer.forwardmovement.org/daily_prayer_anytime.php and on Forward Movement's excellent "Day by Day" app for smart phones.

Of course, you can develop your own plan for reading that suits you. Any additional time spent in the Bible will enrich your faith.

Whatever New Year's resolution you choose, if you choose one, I hope it doesn't drag you down, but lifts your spirit, and encourages you to be more the person God created you to be. Happy New Year!

December 22, 2014 The Growing Light

As we now enter Christmastide after four weeks of Advent preparation, let us not abbreviate our celebration. While the secular world moves on from Christmas on December 26th, the Church keeps the 12 days of Christmas: from Christmas Day up to the day before the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. Just as the light of dawn grows continually until the blaze of midday, so too the light of Christ shines ever brighter from the revealing of the Savior until it enlightens the whole world at Epiphany.

As a Christmas gift from All Saints', and to assist our cumulative joy over Christmastide, we have prepared small, devotional cards for each of the 12 days. Parishioner Allison Merrick designed the beautiful graphics, using images from our All Saints' stained glass windows, and the church staff wrote the brief meditations. You can receive your packet of cards at any of our liturgies on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, and they will also be shared daily on our Facebook page.

Thank you to all who have supported the mission and ministry of All Saints' during 2014 through your generous offerings of time, talent and financial resources, including the many volunteers and donors who have made our grand Christmas services possible again this year.

May this Christmas season be a time of joy for you and your loved ones, and may the light of Christ grow in our hearts and in this world for which he was born.

December 18, 2014 Nowell Sing We

*Nowell sing we, both all and some
Now Rex pacificus is come.*

(15th Century Christmas Carol)

This is the time of year for singing, and I don't just mean for our wonderful All Saints' choirs, but for all of us. From Carols and Cocoa to Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and on through the Sunday after Christmas, we will sing together the Christmas carols of our tradition, as faithful Christians have done for many centuries.

In our current American culture, the number of songs most people know well enough to sing is shrinking. A generation or two ago, our shared "American Songbook" was much larger: camp songs, folk songs, hymns, show tunes, popular and dinner table songs. Today, other than "Happy Birthday," and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," it's hard to identify many universally known songs. Instead, in this YouTube generation, there are pop songs that trend briefly into awareness, only to fade away as the next one rises (my

young kids are singing the Taylor Swift song “Shake it Off” recently, with great gusto. Before that, it was “Let it Go” from the “Frozen” movie). The fad reigns supreme.

But at Christmas time, we tap into the deep reservoir of cultural memory, singing traditional Christmas carols that are still known by many of us. It is the one season in the Church year in which most of our members and guests know most of the hymns. And that is such a joyful thing, because it is good for us to sing together. Young children sing without inhibition, but as we grow older, many of us become more reserved about our singing (and about other kinds of creative expression, as well). And that’s a shame, because singing together can be one of the most meaningful experiences we can have.

Singing together is ancient, and it is embodied: to sing requires nothing but the human body, and everyone can do it (to at least some degree). Singing is linked to our emotion centers in the brain: it expresses and amplifies what we are feeling. And it is Biblical. One reason we sing so much at this time of the Church year is that singing is ever-present in the Christmas story: from Mary bursting into song with the Magnificat on her visit to Elizabeth, to the angel chorus at Jesus’ birth.

As we finish Advent prayerfully and prepare to tell again the Christmas story, may our hearts become ready to sing with joy the Good News: the Messiah, the *Rex Pacificus* (“King of peace”) has come, and is coming, and will come again to save us. Nowell!

December 11, 2014 Why Priests?

This Saturday, December 13th, is a special day: the ordination to the priesthood of our Curate, Anne Ellsworth. It is a day of celebration for Anne, for her family and friends, and for All Saints¹. Anne has served faithfully as a transitional deacon for six months, as is the current practice in The Episcopal Church, and now she adds to her diaconal ministry the ministry of priesthood. I urge you to attend, if you are able. Ordination is the result of many years of discernment and training, and it will be meaningful both for Anne and for those who are there. If you are not able to attend, please hold her especially in your prayers on Saturday.

Ordination is a unique and ancient ceremony. Its roots can be found in the apostolic era that we read about in the Epistles and Acts of the Apostles. On Saturday, Anne will be presented to Bishop Smith, dressed simply in her alb, the garment of baptism. She will answer questions, and make vows. The Bishop will lay his hands on her head, and all the priests present will lay on hands as well. We will sing a traditional hymn to the Holy Spirit, and then that Spirit, through the Bishop, will make Anne a priest forever in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. After, she will be vested in a stole and chasuble, the Eucharistic vestments of the priest, and given a Bible, representing her call to preach and teach the Word of God.

Why does the Church need priests? In our tradition, priests are the stewards of the sacraments, the sacred mysteries of our faith. Any trained lay person can give pastoral care, or teach, or even preach. But priests alone are given the grace by God, through the Church, to baptize, to celebrate the Eucharist, to bless in marriage, to anoint the sick and dying, and to absolve sins. I can tell you from my own experience: to be a priest is both a joy and, at times, a burden. The joy comes in sharing these powerful signs of the love and mercy of God in the most intimate and sacred moments of human life. The burden lies in the certainty that we will sometimes let people down: parishioners, friends, family and ourselves. As followers of Jesus, we will fall short of his selfless example, because we are human.

The image of priesthood has been somewhat tarnished in recent years, by scandal, by hypocrisy, and by disinterest. In some circles, priests are not respected as they once were. Maybe that's a good thing. But we need priests as much as ever, maybe more. We need faithful priests, like Anne, to share the sacraments, to proclaim the Gospel, and to model what it means to follow Jesus. We need priests to comfort and to challenge us. We need priests to point to the sacred path that leads to the kingdom of God.

December 4, 2014 Role Models

One of the poignant things about growing older is that we lose to death more and more people who have been important to us. This causes sadness, to be sure, but also gives us opportunity to reflect on and give thanks for the influences that have made us who we are. Over the last month, three adult role models of mine have died. I am grateful to God for their example, each in different ways.

Dr. James Erb, who died on November 11th, was a choral conductor and musicologist in my hometown of Richmond, Virginia, and the grandfather of one of my classmates in school. He was a gifted and passionate musician, whose energetic love of music inspired all who knew him. His arrangement of "Shenandoah" remains a beloved classic to this day. A recording can be found here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dd1bX-FFGHA

Mark Strand, who died on November 29th, was an accomplished poet, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize and former Poet Laureate of the United States. I was blessed to study poetry with him, and appreciated his wisdom, his wit, and his remarkable work. Often when I am writing sermons or other pieces, I think of his advice, especially his urging to say things in fresh and imaginative language.

Dr. William Boshier, who died on November 30th, was the father of one of my college classmates. He was a teacher, professor of education, and well-respected superintendent of public schools in Virginia. He was also a man of great faith, and one of

the kindest and most generous people I have known. He was able to integrate faith, family, and public service in a remarkably authentic and compelling way.

A key factor in the healthy development of children and young adults is the presence of several non-family mentors. Some mentors inspire us in our professions, others in our passions, and others show us how to be good Christians, parents, citizens or friends. We all need people to follow and to emulate, and not just celebrities, but everyday people that we see and know. It is important for us to give thanks for those mentors who have inspired us, and to be mindful of our responsibility to be role models for the next generation.

As Christians, part of our calling, too, is to be mentored by Jesus. That's what it means to be a disciple: we learn from Jesus, as we pray, learn, serve and connect. A faith group is one excellent way to do this. I hope some of our men will consider joining Deacon Bade and myself for our men's breakfast of food and conversation on second Thursday mornings at 7am, beginning December 11th. And we are now collecting interest for a group of men and women to read the whole Bible in a year, starting in January. This is a substantial undertaking, but gives remarkable depth to our understanding of faith, especially if we have only ever experienced the Bible in part.

As Advent continues, we praise God for the prophets and for John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus. And we praise God for those people who have prepared the way for us, in various ways, in our lives.

November 26, 2014 The Gift of Advent

Every year, it seems that the Christmas decorations in stores, and advertisements on television and online begin a little earlier. We were just a few weeks past Labor Day when I saw my first Christmas-themed ad this year. This tells us something about our contemporary culture. We are not very good with patience. My sense is that this is at least partly connected to our use of technology. Our living and working environments are so saturated with technology, with screens and images and sounds, that we are conditioned to crave immediate gratification, and constant stimulation. Don't get me wrong: I love my iPad and smart phone as much as anyone, both for fun and for efficiency. But I need to remind myself of the importance of unplugging for regular intervals to listen more deeply to God, to God's creation all around us, and to the important people in my life.

At its best, the Church is countercultural, teaching ancient practices that turn us away from unhealthy and selfish behaviors, and towards love of God and our fellow human beings. At this time of year, I am particularly grateful for the season of Advent, that runs from November 30th through Christmas Eve. Advent is a truly old-fashioned notion.

While the consumer culture begins the Christmas season ever earlier each year, the Church, perhaps stubbornly, teaches that it is good for us to wait a little for Christmas, and to prepare for it in our hearts and lives. This is not an overly rigid thing. Like almost everyone else, our family will have our Christmas tree up by early December. We will enjoy our favorite Christmas movies, songs and stories well before December 25th. But we will also try to prepare, with patience, for the deepest meaning of the holiday, the gift of the Savior.

Whatever your religious practices in your family, I encourage you, in this season before Christmas, to pay attention to those things that rejuvenate your spirit. In the midst of gift giving, take time to give to those who have little. In the midst of noise and lights, unplug, and take time for quiet, and for meaningful conversation with loved ones, near and far. In the midst of rushing around, take time for patience, for watching and waiting. And above all, may we have grace to experience genuine gratitude: gratefulness for our many, many blessings so lovingly given us by God, and especially for the greatest gift of all, a tiny child, sent to bring us peace.

November 20, 2014 A King Like No Other

This weekend, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the Christian liturgical year. As Americans, we may find this day thought-provoking, on several levels. Our nation's history has taught us to be rightly skeptical of monarchies; our very founding was based on throwing off the oppression of the British Crown, in favor of representative, shared governance. True, we follow with some interest the British royal family, but we do so chiefly as we observe **all** celebrities; no one suggests we'd like our own American kings and queens, much less to rule.

Our political system of rights, checks and balances given us by our Founders has served us well over the centuries, largely by keeping too much power out of the hands of too few. There is something in our American culture that is fiercely independent, not only nationally, but on the individual level. We pride ourselves, perhaps especially in the West, on being free and in control of our own destiny. We resist any sense of someone else exercising power over us.

On this feast day, though, we recognize that we do have a king: Jesus Christ. Christ is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. But he is a king like no other. Since power corrupts, most leaders seek to accumulate it. Christ willingly **gave up** his throne in heaven to come among us as a poor, vulnerable child, to teach and heal us, and ultimately to die for us. As Saint Paul writes so beautifully, Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled

himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).

After his resurrection, Jesus ascended back to his home in heaven, where he lives and reigns in glory. As Christians, part of our journey of faith is to recognize Christ’s kingship in our lives. At our baptisms, we “promise to follow and obey him” as our Lord. This is not easy for modern, independent people. And yet, the great irony of discipleship is that the more we follow Jesus, the more we find our true selves, and the more we obey him, the more real freedom we gain. The saints, those who followed Jesus most closely, were the most authentic, joyful, most free people ever to walk the earth.

Finally, allow me a few words about Commitment Sunday, which is also this weekend. One of the most important ways that we follow Jesus is in how we use the resources God has entrusted to us. Jesus talks so much about money in the Gospels because he realized how enslaved we can be to its influence. If you have not yet pledged to the ministries of All Saints’ in 2015, I ask you, please, to do so in this last week of the pledge campaign. Your estimate of giving will help the Vestry, Finance Committee and Staff prudently plan our 2015 budget. We need a pledge from every member and friend of All Saints’ to fulfill God’s mission here. But even more importantly, your generosity is a spiritual sign of your trust in the one who is King of heaven and earth.

November 13, 2014 Mars Hill, Samuel Seabury, and God’s Gift of Order

In non-denominational, evangelical church circles, the big story of 2014 has been the rapid demise of Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. Driscoll founded Mars Hill in 1996, and due in part to his charismatic, conservative Calvinist preaching, it grew rapidly into one of the largest megachurches in the country, with satellite campuses in 15 locations across 5 states. Driscoll was a best-selling author and media superstar, on every list of the most influential pastors in America, until it all came crashing down this year. He was accused of bullying, misogyny, and plagiarism, and resigned in October.

It was a classic case of a big ego causing a tragic downfall, an all too common scenario in pastors. But what happened next was truly surprising: Mars Hill decided almost immediately to close its network of churches, giving each of the 15 campuses the choice to shut down or continue as an independent church. Mars Hill was built on one leader, one large personality, and when he resigned, the whole enterprise crumbled.

The rise and fall of Mars Hill holds many lessons for other churches, but one is the value of order in ministry. There is an old joke: one person says to another, “I don’t believe in organized religion.” And the second person responds, “neither do I; I’m an Episcopalian.” But despite the impression that The Episcopal Church can be rather

scattered, especially in our theology, we are actually remarkably ordered. Look at our Episcopal Church canons (our documents of governance) online sometime: we have a process for almost everything, especially as it relates to ordained ministry. When an influential rector resigns or retires, the transition may not be easy, but we can assume that the church will continue in an orderly fashion.

This sense of order can hold us back sometimes, stifling innovation. But as a whole, I think it is a strength. It keeps us from changing too quickly, giving sacred tradition a strong voice in our decision making. And it guarantees certain basics in parish ministry. In our “franchise” model, we can for the most part be assured that any Episcopal church we attend, anywhere in the country, will have the essential things in place: a licensed, trained priest to celebrate the Eucharist and offer the other sacraments, worship according to the Book of Common Prayer, and some kind of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.

Which brings me to Samuel Seabury, the first bishop of The Episcopal Church, whom we commemorate this Sunday. Part of our theology of Holy Orders is that ordinations require bishops (“ordination” means to incorporate into an order). Deacons and priests must be ordained by a bishop, and bishops must be consecrated by other bishops. We can trace this order of bishops with some confidence back to the Apostle Peter, the first bishop (which is why we call it Apostolic Succession).

Seabury, unable to give allegiance to the British crown in the period just after the American Revolution, had to go to Scotland to find bishops who were willing to consecrate him a bishop. It was a long wait, but well worth it, for it maintained The Episcopal Church in Apostolic Succession, as part of what would become the worldwide Anglican Communion.

At our best, clergy point not to ourselves, but to the communion of saints, and most importantly, to Jesus Christ. This weekend, we give thanks for Samuel Seabury, for The Episcopal Church of Scotland, and for the Holy Orders of ministry that, however imperfectly, imitate Christ and share his sacraments among us.

November 6, 2014 Who Needs the Church?

I don't worry much about aggressive atheists, those who write nasty books and blog posts and comedy routines about religion, or the groups that sue to remove century-old monuments of the Ten Commandments from courthouses. They've been around for a long time, and their biased vitriol turns most people off. I worry much more about the pervasive secularism, materialism and selfishness that cover our culture like a blanket, putting us to sleep. Before we know it, we've fallen into a dream, thinking it is reality: *if I get that promotion/car/smartphone/vacation, if I lose those 20 pounds, if I get a new*

wife, I'll be happy . . . I'm nothing like him/her/them . . . I've got what's mine, and don't you try to take it from me . . . Someone else will help them . . . Go to church? Maybe next week, when I'm less busy.

Christianity in America has not been decimated by one, big crisis of faith. Rather, each successive generation is drifting further from God. Meanwhile, the Church has done a dreadful job of communicating why we exist, why following Jesus Christ together **matters**, for ourselves and for the world. The Church has fallen asleep, too, distracted from the call of the Gospel. In contrast, our Gospel reading this Sunday, anticipating one of the themes of Advent in just a few weeks, says to us: keep awake! Advent will invite us to wake from our self-centered slumber, and see ourselves and those around us as God intended, loving God and our neighbor.

Who needs the Church? I can't speak for you, but I know I need the Church. I need it desperately.

I need a church that's there with prayer and practical support when our baby goes into the hospital for emergency abdominal surgery (as happened last week). The prayers for Matthew, the help with our other boys, the offers of food and other kind gestures were so comforting, and we didn't even announce publicly what was going on. It just spread through the grapevine. He's fine now, thanks be to God, but it is so meaningful to know that All Saints' offers powerful prayer for anyone that needs it, and is there in an instant when one of our members is in crisis.

I need a church that holds me accountable, and inspires me to be a kinder, more generous person. If I were on my own, I would not pray often. I would spend my money more selfishly, and help others more sporadically. As members of this church, Megan and I give more than 10% of my salary back to All Saints'. It feels good to give generously. Being here encourages me to use my money, time and energy for the sake of others, and to stay connected to God and to others through regular prayer.

I need a church of life-long learners and talented teachers, who remind me to keep educating myself about this rich tradition that we have inherited.

I need a church that will joyfully baptize a relative of mine from out of town, warmly welcoming little Ella into the communion of saints, as her parents explore what the faith means to them.

I need a church that offers the ancient liturgy of our tradition, with music that is lovingly and beautifully offered, nourishing my soul.

I need a church and school that build a school in Haiti, reminding me of my blessings, and connecting me to Christians across the globe.

I need a church that walks with parents, giving us resources and support as we try to raise children in a confusing world.

I need a church with gifted preachers, who have different voices, and different ways of proclaiming the same Gospel of Jesus Christ, to challenge and comfort me.

I need a church dedicated to all the saints, whose joyful faith shone brightly with the light of Christ, and who urge me to do likewise.

I need the Church. Do you?

October 23, 2014 A Message From the Rector and Senior Warden on Same-Sex Marriage

Dear Members of All Saints' Episcopal Church,

As you have likely heard, on Friday, October 17th, same-sex marriage (or marriage equality) became legal in Arizona. On that same day, Bishop Kirk Smith of The Episcopal Diocese of Arizona released a statement authorizing congregations to offer same-sex marriage to their members, using rites of blessing approved for trial use by The Episcopal Church's General Convention of 2012 (not the marriage ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer). His decision was affirmed by a vote of the Diocesan Convention at its annual meeting on October 18th. The question of same-sex marriage has now been decided in our state and in our diocese.

What does this mean for All Saints' Church? We rejoice with our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ, some of whom are long-time members of this church, who will be able to have their relationships blessed in their community of faith, and legally recognized. This is a sign that all are truly welcome into the sacramental life of our church. At the same time, we continue to welcome, respect, and care for those who hold to the traditional understanding of marriage, who will find these decisions by our legal system and diocese difficult to accept.

What are the next steps in this process? Bishop Smith has urged that same-sex marriages be offered only with the support of a church's Vestry. On October 15th, even before this recent ruling, the Vestry began preliminary conversations as to how to proceed, when this time came. We will continue those conversations at our November meeting, as we prayerfully discern whether the Vestry is prepared to offer its support at that point, or needs more time to reach a consensus.

All Saints', as we say so often, is a centrist, big tent church, with a variety of theological and political views. Being a diverse community is not always easy. And yet, we are

convinced that All Saints' has a precious gift to offer our polarized world: an inclusive, Anglican model of how to welcome all, without having to agree on everything, and of walking together as we seek to follow Jesus Christ.

As always, feel free to be in touch with either one of us with your thoughts, questions and concerns. We give thanks to God for each and every member of our All Saints' family.

Blessings,

The Rev. Poulson Reed, Rector
Travys Harvey, Senior Warden

October 16, 2014 "Built Together Spiritually": Celebrating Day School Sunday and Our Phase 1 Project

When the New Testament speaks of "the Church," it does not mean a building. The Greek word "ekklesia," which we translate as "Church" refers to a group of people gathered for a religious purpose. Indeed, for the first couple of centuries after Jesus, there were no church buildings per se; the assembled faithful usually met in homes. And so, as Christians, we are wise not to overemphasize our buildings and grounds. The Church is primarily a spiritual, not a physical structure, built on Christ himself.

As the Scripture says: "you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are ***built together spiritually*** into a dwelling-place for God" (Ephesians 2).

And yet, while it is important not to make too much of buildings and property, it is also important not to make too little of them. Physical structures and grounds matter: they give glory to God, and they give meaning to our human experience. We are embodied creatures, and it is more fulfilling to worship or to sing or to learn in some spaces than in others. We are blessed at All Saints' with buildings and places that serve and enhance our mission: a beautiful church that inspires worship and music; offices and meeting rooms for learning, rehearsing, planning ministry, and fellowship; and school classrooms, a gym, and outdoor spaces for educating our students in mind, body and spirit.

On October 22nd, we will officially celebrate the completion of our Phase 1 project, thanks to the hard work and financial gifts of many. With our property acquisitions and improvements, we have increased our church and school campus by more than one-third, adding larger athletic fields, more parking, fencing and signage, landscaping and

gardens, and a walkway called "All Saints' Way." We also have space for additional buildings in future phases.

All of this work will further the mission of our church and school by giving us new places in which to gather, whether to soak in the beauty of God's creation or to learn life lessons on the athletic field, to welcome guests to events, or to stroll down a scenic, pedestrian walkway.

But first, we will celebrate Day School Sunday at 11am this Sunday. The day has particular joy, as we anticipate unveiling our Phase 1 improvements, and as we welcome as our preacher (and 10am class guest) the Reverend Paulsson Rajarigam, our new Middle School head. A festive reception, hosted by our school's Admissions department, will follow the service. Come join us as we gather to give thanks to God for our Day School, All Saints' Church's largest outreach ministry, with whom we are built together spiritually in Christ.

October 9, 2014 Momentum

If you remember high school physics, you may recall that momentum equals mass times velocity ($p=mv$). A large object moving quickly has more momentum than a large object moving slowly, or a small object moving quickly. A related factor is direction. Not all momentum is helpful. A cruise ship can be sailing quickly away from a storm and towards calm seas, or drifting towards an iceberg.

As I look at All Saints' Church, I see strong momentum in the right direction. Thanks to God, and to the faith and hard work of the generations that preceded us, we have been entrusted with a large church. When we move forward together in the direction that God gives us, we are able to make an enormous difference. Look at just a few statistics from our last Annual Report: 469 Holy Eucharists, 284 participants in our North Central Family 5K, 35 funerals and 34 baptisms, 26 confirmations, 9 Arizona premieres by our choirs, hundreds of people at Third Thursdays, 323 hours of service by our children at Vacation Bible School, 918 pastoral care hours by our trained volunteers, thousands of volunteer hours at ICM, Andre House and Habitat for Humanity, 107,241 meals given to Saint Mary's Food bank from our church and school, a school built and dedicated in Haiti, and so much more.

All Saints' plays a unique role in our area. No other church offers exactly what we do: top-level traditional worship and music (including Evensong and Compline), fine Christian education for all ages throughout the week, dozens of ministries and groups for serving and connection, and faith in action that helps thousands of people in need both here and around the world. We do all of this as a centrist, big tent, diverse

community of friends that welcomes everyone, without exception, as we follow Jesus Christ in the Episcopal tradition.

But here's the thing about momentum: it needs constant energy in order to keep up its velocity. One essential form of energy for ministry is money. It takes about \$1.4 million every year to proclaim and live out the Gospel at All Saints' church as we do. Since the Great Recession, we have gotten very good at stretching every dollar for maximum results. 2014 is on track to be our third year in a row with a small surplus, while our ministry impact has continued to grow. But we need every member and friend of All Saints' church to give generously in our pledge campaign for 2015 if we are to maintain (and hopefully even increase) our momentum. **Look for our annual pledge campaign letter to arrive in the mail next week. Please prayerfully consider your estimated giving for 2015, and return the form in the coming weeks.**

The teaching of the Church for 2,000 years has been: we give at least 10% of our income (the tithe) back to God through the Church and other charitable causes simply out of gratitude for what God has given us. This was a hard teaching when it was grain in ancient Israel, and it is hard now. But Jesus, who speaks more about money than about almost any other topic in the Gospels, has it right: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." As someone who gives more than 10% of my salary back to our church, I will tell you that it is not easy. And I will also tell you that it is the best financial and spiritual decision my family makes, because it reminds us, every month, that all we have is a blessing from God. We have been greatly blessed, and God asks us to bless others in return.

Is 10% too difficult this year? Start with a lower percentage and try to increase next year. Proportional giving (a percentage) is like a blood pressure check for our gratitude. It doesn't tell us everything about our spiritual health, but it tells us something important. And if the teaching of the Church doesn't move you, try this: All Saints' needs every pledge of financial support to maintain the momentum of God's life-changing ministry in this place. Let's keep it going, for the sake of those who depend on us, and to the glory of God.

October 2, 2014 General Theological Seminary and My Cat, Jeffry

This has been a challenging week for many in The Episcopal Church, as our oldest seminary, General Theological Seminary in New York, has been shaken by an intense conflict between most of the faculty on one side and the Dean and Board of Trustees on the other. I won't rehearse the details, but for those who are interested, a summary can be found here <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2014/09/30/education-remains-priority-amid-general-seminary-faculty-departures/>.

I did not attend GTS, and I have no special information, nor do I have a “side” in the dispute. But my heart is saddened to see an important institution in the Church failing to practice Christian reconciliation. In particular, I feel for the current students, caught in the middle of this ugly situation. I pray for a just and quick resolution. When Christians fight each other, which we do far too often, we give evidence to those who believe we are all hypocrites, which diminishes our crucial witness to the world.

There are many traits in healthy organizations. Among them are: clear pathways for honest communication to and from the leadership, a willingness to adjust as new information emerges, a culture of respect, and a shared sense of mission and values. We do our best to practice these at All Saints’. But one underappreciated trait, I believe, is a sense of play. When things are unhealthy, a grim heaviness hangs over everything. In a healthy community, whether it be a family, a workplace, or a church, there is a shared sense of play, of joy, a certain lightness of being that emerges from time to time.

Don’t get me wrong: the mission of the Church is a serious business. Our goals are ambitious: to follow Jesus Christ as disciples, and to make the world a better and more loving place, as God gives us the ability, as we proclaim God’s kingdom. But as we follow Jesus in this sacred work, we will have more spring in our step if we are able to find delight together in the small things.

Which brings me to our annual Blessing of the Animals this Sunday at 9am. It is good for us to gather to give thanks to God for Saint Francis, for God’s creation, and for the animals that enrich our lives. When we fill our Memorial Garden with all of these wonderful and varied pets, we will hear, in addition to the barks and meows, much laughter. And as we laugh, we will celebrate God’s immense, created diversity. It reminds me of the 18th century poem “Jubilate Agno” by Christopher Smart, set to music by Benjamin Britten in one of the great pieces of sacred music, “Rejoice in the Lamb.” Smart sees his cat, and delightfully imagines that the cat is worshipping God:

*For I will consider my cat Jeoffry.
For he is the servant of the living God.
Duly and daily serving him.*

*For at the first glance
Of the glory of God in the East
He worships in his way.
For this is done by wreathing his body
Seven times round with elegant quickness.
For he knows that God is his saviour.
For God has bless’d him
In the variety of his movements.
For there is nothing sweeter
Than his peace when at rest.*

*For I am possessed of a cat,
Surpassing in beauty,
From whom I take occasion
To bless Almighty God.*

See you Sunday, as we rejoice, as we welcome guests (both human and animal), and as we share the solemn mysteries of our faith.

September 25, 2014 A Season of Invitation

Last weekend, a group of our staff and hospitality volunteers attended a training that we co-sponsored at a local church called “Invite, Welcome, Connect.” It provided some useful tools to help churches more effectively reach out to new members and integrate them into our faith communities. My sense is that many Episcopal churches are pretty good at the “welcome” piece: being hospitable to guests at church both formally (in our official greetings, website, newcomer materials, ministry information and so on) and informally (having a friendly culture in which everyone, not just the ushers and greeters, looks out for guests and greets them). I hear often from newcomers to All Saints’ that they felt warmly welcomed, which is a critical aspect of church health.

I believe the “connect” and “invite” pieces are far more difficult. As I indicated in my sermon on Kick-Off Sunday, we are emphasizing “connect” a great deal this year at All Saints’. In a large church, it can be difficult to make friends and find a meaningful ministry. We want to do all we can to provide pathways to deeper connection for those who choose to follow them. Our task is to develop a thoughtful and intentional process for connection, and then leave room for the Holy Spirit to do the rest!

Of all three areas, “invite” is both the most challenging, and the most essential. Every member of this faith community is given in our baptism the mission of invitation: inviting others into relationship with Jesus Christ through the Church. As we say in our Baptismal Covenant: “Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? *I will, with God’s help*” (BCP p 305). Invitation is essentially evangelism, the task Jesus gives to all his disciples in the Great Commission in Matthew 28: “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Episcopalians are notoriously shy about inviting others to church or sharing our faith. Some of this is to our credit: we are sensitive about offending or seeming judgmental. But if The Episcopal Church is ever to grow out of our 45 year decline, it will happen because Episcopalians get excited enough about our church to spread the Word with boldness. This is not the job only of the clergy or staff; it is the sacred duty of all the

baptized. All Saints' is healthy and vibrant, but we have plenty of room for more people from among the 80% in the area who don't regularly attend a house of worship.

Fortunately, we are entering an exciting season at All Saints' with many events that might be meaningful for a guest. Have you considered inviting a music lover to our fourth Sundays at 11am or Evensong (October 12), a pet owner to the Blessing of the Animals (October 5 at 9am), a bagpipe fan to Seabury Sunday (November 16), or a friend to Third Thursday? How about an invitation to serve together on a Habitat for Humanity project, or attend the upcoming ICM fundraiser? Have you mentioned to a colleague in crisis that your church has clergy who would be glad to talk and pray with them, even if they aren't church members?

May this time between now and Christmas be for us a season of invitation, in which we find inspiration to share with others the wonderful things God has done for us through our faith.

September 18, 2014 Can You Receive Communion On the Internet?

Since the beginning of the internet, there have been discussions and debates about the "reality" of what takes place online. Think of the movie "The Matrix," which depicted a future in which what seemed real was actually a sophisticated simulation. In our age of Google Glass, the boundary between virtual reality and conventional reality is continually narrowing. Technology has connected us in ways we could never have imagined even a decade ago. And yet, technology has its limits. Facebook is excellent at helping us maintain a frequent, but limited connection with a large number of friends. It is less useful for cultivating deep friendships, which require old fashioned conversation.

As a sacramental church, All Saints' will always be rooted in the tangible, incarnational reality of the Body of Christ. We must come together, in person, to celebrate the Eucharist. Real bread and wine are taken, blessed, shared and consumed, as Jesus asked us to do. And when we finish, we send out the Sacrament to those who, for reason of illness and infirmity, are not able to be physically present in church that day. Much of what we do at and through the Church is largely unchanged from two thousand years ago. We pray and worship, comfort the sick and dying, baptize and confirm, marry and bury, teach and preach the faith, help the poor and needy. But we also try to be open to spreading and living the traditional ways of Jesus using new tools.

One such new tool is Realm, our new database software. Realm is going to help us connect with each other more deeply and effectively, in several ways. It will give our members access to their own church records, so that we can all update contact information or check the status of our pledge payments on our own, without having to contact the church office. Every member will have complete control over what data is

shared with whom, but for those who choose, Realm will serve as a constantly updated, online photo directory (we encourage those who are willing to do so to share at least their name and photo with fellow church members, while other information can be kept private). And in time, we will use Realm to share information in ministry groups. Imagine a class with in person and online components.

Realm is actually a new update of our former database software, so much of our data is already current. But we encourage everyone to learn about Realm, log on, review your information, and add a picture. Lindsay Wood, our Ministry Support Coordinator, will be available on Sundays and throughout the week to help with questions and take your picture if needed. In this digital age, all of us are rightly concerned about privacy and data security. Fortunately, Realm is a secure tool using industry standard SSL-encryption that allows us all to share and connect with each other online, as we choose to do so.

To sign-up go to, www.onrealm.org/AllSaintsPhoenix and click "Register Now"

See you on Sunday, and online!

The Rector's Reflections

September 11, 2014 "Suitable to the Occasion:" Our New Prayers of the People at 9am

Our Eucharistic liturgy is filled with wonderful transitions and juxtapositions. For example, it has often been said (mostly in jest) that the Creed follows the Sermon to counteract any heresy from the preacher! Like a sacred drama, the liturgy moves seamlessly through our ritual actions to challenge and inspire us, and open our hearts to God's presence. One of my very favorite transitions is the Creed into the Prayers of the People. Here we move from our ancient, magisterial statement of faith into those things that trouble us right now, the turbulent waters of our lives.

Because the Prayers of the People are meant to articulate the joys and sorrows of the present moment, they are given extraordinary flexibility in the Prayer Book. While Eucharistic prayers, for example, are spelled out in precise language, as sacred mysteries passed down, the Prayers of the People, our freshest concerns, are given only a rough outline (BCP p. 383). We are to pray every week for:

The Universal Church, its members and its mission
The Nation and all in authority
The welfare of the world
The concerns of the local community

Those who suffer and those in any trouble
The departed (with commemoration of a saint, when appropriate)

Although we are provided with six forms to use, we are given express permission for “adaptations or insertions suitable to the occasion.” One of the benefits of being a large church with many liturgies is that we can offer more variety. And so, for the duration of this season after Pentecost (through the end of November) we will offer on **Sundays at 9am** Prayers of the People written by our Prayer Team. I want to thank them for offering their time and talent doing something quite difficult: crafting prayers for our use from within our own church. It is my hope that these new prayers will draw greater focus to the needs of those in our community and the world around us.

Remember, too, that all settings of the prayers leave room for us to include, silently or aloud, those who are particularly in our hearts. It can be powerful to share with a friend or co-worker not only that you are praying for them, but specifically that you prayed for them on Sunday in your church. A visit to the Prayer Team at the back of the church during communion at 9 or 11am may also be helpful. Let us not neglect our prayers for others. Only the prayer that is never offered is sure not to be answered.

September 4, 2014 All Saints’: Your Place to Belong

Kick Off Sunday marks the beginning of our program year, as we return to our fall schedule with its greater variety of liturgies, Sunday school for all ages, and marvelous choirs. On Sunday, we will commission our Sunday school teachers and youth mentors (at 9am) and senior choir (at 11am), and renew our baptismal commitment to shared ministry. It will be a grand beginning to an exciting year. But let us remember that our program year is not only a time of “doing” but of belonging. When we feel that we belong in a community, we are inspired to be more active. And when we are more active, we experience a greater sense of belonging.

Patrice Al-Shatti wrote eloquently last week in her Health Ministries column about the dangers of loneliness. However busy our life, however many people we may encounter every day, we may lack that deep sense of belonging. My hope is that this year will offer more opportunities for connection for those who seek it, both with God and with each other. I’ll have more to say about this in my sermon at all our weekend services.

A key aspect of connection is how we welcome and integrate newcomers. One of our projects this summer was to remake our newcomer materials. It was an interesting exercise to think about All Saints’ from the perspective of someone visiting for the first time. How would we describe who we are, our mission, what we believe, and how to get involved? I’m proud of what we came up with, and I think it captures the essence of

what makes All Saints' special. We've put the materials up on our web site. Have a look, see what you think, and keep them in mind as a resource as you invite others to join us.

See you on Sunday, as we remember who we are, and where and to whom we belong.

August 28, 2014 The Importance of Kneelers

This Sunday at our 10am Eucharist, we will bless our main church's sanctuary kneelers (one that is brand new and 17 that have been carefully refurbished). I am grateful to Robin Wright for heading up this effort over the past year. By patiently repairing and cleaning the kneelers a few at a time, we were never without most of them throughout this period. Now that they are all back, they look glorious. A couple of years ago, a generous parishioner enabled us to replace our kneeling cushion at the chapel rail, so now all our kneelers are comfortable, and ready for prayer!

If you think about it, we catch but a glance of our kneelers as we approach the Altar rail for Holy Communion. To appreciate them fully requires taking time outside of worship to look at them closely. Why give such effort to renewing something that we don't really see, when we use them?

First, we have refurbished the kneelers to honor those in our community who made them, and as a reminder of our sacred legacy. Margie Delph and nine other church members lovingly stitched these canvases over 18 months in the 1980's. To renew their handiwork and bless it reminds us of the communion of saints, living and dead, who have given their time and talents to the glory of God. The many efforts of prior generations have made All Saints' what it is today, and we have a sacred duty to be good stewards of what has been entrusted to us, for the sake of the generations to come.

Second, the intricacy of these kneelers teaches us important lessons about how we experience God. When you have the opportunity, look at the kneelers up close, and you will see beautiful and mystical symbols: the flowering Cross (the Resurrection), the chalice and wheat (the Eucharist), the Alpha and Omega (Christ is the beginning and the end), the Chi Rho (the first two letters of "Christ" in Greek), and a dove descending (the Holy Spirit). These symbols tell the story of our faith, and remind us that when we kneel at the rail (for those who are able), we are on holy ground, encountering Christ Himself in the sacrament. The presence of the living God drops us to our knees in awe and gratitude.

In some of the oldest cathedrals in the world, there are carved decorations way up high, in obscure places where no one could see them. These were humble acts of artistry, made not for human eyes, but to delight God. Our own church building is filled with

beautiful, semi-hidden details that we often overlook. When we notice them, we recall that our worship space is a thin place between this world and the next.

But, we are tempted to say, if we sold all of this, how many poor people could we feed? Recall that Judas made the same argument about the costly oil Mary of Bethany poured on Jesus' feet (John 12). For Christians, our worship is not just an end to itself, nor merely an experience for the worshipper, or it would indeed be vanity and self-indulgence. No, our worship, offering our very best to God, is meant to nourish and energize us from God's blessing to go out and serve a world in desperate need. As we experience Christ in the beauty of holiness, foreshadowing God's kingdom, we are inspired to witness to that kingdom in word and deed beyond our doors. We kneel in faith to remember who and whose we are.

Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our Maker (Psalm 95:6).

August 21, 2014 Why We Welcome

The comedian Groucho Marx famously said: "I wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have me as a member." Like the best humor, his remark captures something true about human nature: we all want to be included, but sometimes we feel unworthy of inclusion. And worse yet, at times we enjoy the sinful power that comes from excluding others. Even children learn to hurt each other with these or similar words, "you can't play with us." As adults, we too often continue to puff ourselves up by excluding or belittling others. So many of the challenges we face in our nation and around the world arise from dehumanizing another person or group and failing to see them as fellow children of God.

The Gospel calls us to welcome and include all into our faith community. It's simple: we do this because Jesus did. He welcomed everyone, no matter their class or gender or race or background or even their sinfulness. In fact, Jesus made a point of seeking out notorious sinners so that they could be set free of their sin. What a scandal this caused among the judgmental excluders! But let us also remember that Jesus does not welcome all and permit us to stay in our sins; all are welcomed to be forgiven and transformed into his likeness.

I've been thinking often this week about Debra, a much loved member of our church who died recently. Debra suffered from significant mental illness, and was also a deeply prayerful person. At times it was difficult to understand what she was saying, and at other times, her spiritual wisdom was profound. Whatever her condition at the moment, Debra usually found a warm welcome at All Saints'. What place other than a church would be so kind to Debra or someone like her? I can't think of many. And that is

part of our mission: like Christ, to welcome with love all who come to us, and to respect the dignity of every human being. This we do not out of pity, but because Christ teaches us that everyone has a gift to share.

Secondly, I've been thinking this week about the beginning of the school year. All Saints' Episcopal Day School began classes on Wednesday. I believe that our school does a particularly good job of genuinely welcoming a diverse group of students into our community. All children can occasionally be cruel, and bullying can happen at any school. But I see our All Saints' Way molding our students into young people who are far more compassionate than most towards each other, and those beyond our walls. Our church programs for children and youth are, I believe, similarly effective on this point.

When I think of the divisions, tensions and conflicts that plague our world, whether in Missouri or Gaza or Iraq or anywhere else, my hope is with the children, who will have the opportunity to build a more compassionate, just and peaceful world. May our All Saints' community, church and school, seek always to welcome with warmth and true openness those whom God brings to our campus. May we live out here the values of the kingdom of God. And may we support our children as they grow into Godly leaders for tomorrow.

August 14, 2014 The Top Ten Reasons to be an Episcopalian

Like so many, I was shocked and saddened at the death of Robin Williams this week. Williams was an enormously gifted performer, able to move seamlessly from comedy to drama. I have appreciated him in many roles over the years, but the one that sticks out most for me was his performance as unorthodox English teacher John Keating in "Dead Poets Society." I saw the movie as a freshman in college, and as a pre-English major, I resonated with the importance of poetry in the movie. Williams recited poetry and spoke about the written word as if it had the power to change lives. You could tell that he believed what he was saying.

As a denomination that has at its heart three books (the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and the hymnal), we Episcopalians also appreciate language, and its ability to convey both truth and beauty. It is no surprise, then, that Robin Williams was an Episcopalian for some of his life. He is known among Episcopal circles for producing for a comedy routine "The Top Ten Reasons to be an Episcopalian." They are as follows:

10. No snake handling.

9. You can believe in dinosaurs.

8. Male and female God created them; male and female we ordain them.

7. You don't have to check your brains at the door.
6. Pew aerobics.
5. The Church year is color-coded.
4. Free wine on Sunday.
3. All of the pageantry – none of the guilt.
2. You don't have to know how to swim to get baptized.
1. No matter what you believe, there's bound to be at least one other Episcopalian who agrees with you.

In his list, Williams reminds us that it is ok to have a sense of humor about our faith, as long as it does not interfere with our reverence. We need that reminder from time to time in the Church, when we take ourselves too seriously.

We give thanks to God for Robin Williams: for his talent, and for his generosity in sharing it. We mourn his death, that came too soon. And we pray for all who struggle with addiction or depression. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

August 7, 2014 Reflections from the Rev. Holly Davis

When I was a child I was blessed to be raised by many adults who surrounded me with a great deal of attention, wisdom, love, and the frequent and necessary swat to the backside. I was richly blessed with adults in my life who served as teachers and mentors, some of whom continue to this day in the same role. Now that I am an adult I recognize them as my friends—and as a single, adopted adult—my family. Each took upon themselves the responsibility suggested in the Book of Proverbs, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” (*Proverbs 22:6 NRSV*)

I spoke with one of them—a favorite high school math teacher—in April. I asked him what made him such an excellent teacher. It may sound cliché, but he responded that he considered all the children he taught to be his own children. Some of them provided a sense of pride and accomplishment. Some of them provided a lifelong sense of failure and heartbreak. He considered it his responsibility to do his part in raising each of his students to be responsible, adjusted, productive and loving people. He adopted them as his own and loved them.

We are adopted children as well—each of us, regardless of age. Our Lord has made us His adopted sons and daughters through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. We vow to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves; to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. We are called to a life of discipleship—walkers of The Way.

At her most basic level, our church community is intended to be a safe, sacred and healthy place that guarantees our youngest Christians that there are adults (other than their own parents, family, and guardians) who care about them. Communal Christian living gives adults the opportunities and resources to let a child know that (s)he is not alone in dealing with day to day challenges; that there are other experienced Christians who are there to help in any number of situations. Providing an exemplary Christian presence in the life of a child cannot be underestimated.

The ways in which adults at All Saints' can provide ministries to our children and youth are as varied as the adults who are called by God to serve. All Saints' provides opportunities for adults to be ministry leaders who assist our children and youth in developing spiritual gifts, leading worship, developing a healthy prayer life, and providing Christian outreach in their communities. Raising healthy, loving, faithful children and youth is the responsibility of every member of the family—especially the ministry of prayer for success and God's presence in our programs and the lives of our families.

Education has historically been considered the one thing that will make a difference in the lives of children—between those who will be incarcerated and those who will attend college, those who succeed and those who fail, sometimes even those who will live to adulthood and those who will die young. A recent study of 800 children observed during a period of 30 years suggests that what really makes the difference are family and money.

We believe in a God of abundance, not a God of scarcity. Our community has been richly blessed with Christian disciples who reach out to God's people in an effort to provide the Good News of Jesus Christ to all of God's creation. For that I am exceedingly grateful. As we prepare for this program year, during our 'Back to School Drive' to benefit ICM Food and Clothing Bank, and as we support our own programming through the "Family Ministry Support Drive," I pray that we will give. Give of our time, our talent and our treasure.

July 31, 2014 What Do You Call a Priest?

One of the most common questions clergy receive from newcomers to All Saints' is "what should we call you?" Our formal, written titles are different from how we are addressed. As priests, our written titles are "The Reverend full name". The same is true for deacons. A Bishop is: "The Right Reverend full name." This is fairly consistent across The Episcopal Church. But when it comes to how we are addressed in conversation, there is great variety across the Church at large.

I always tell those who ask me that I am glad to be called Poulson, my first name, or if they prefer something more formal, Father Reed. The spoken title "Father last name" was the traditional practice of the Church for many centuries, and not just in the Roman Catholic Church. Several hundred years ago, it was common for Protestant ministers in a number of denominations to be called "Father." What changed? In part, it was the great Irish migration of the 19th century. Scholars tell us that the influx of Irish Roman Catholics inflamed tensions with American Protestants, causing Protestants to seek more ways to differentiate themselves. By the early 20th century, many Protestant clergy began to use "Mister" or "Doctor," although Episcopalians in some dioceses continued to use "Father." Anti-Catholic Protestants started adhering to a more literalist interpretation of Matthew 23:9 ("And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven") as a critique of the Roman Church.

Why do I prefer "Father," when I am not being called by my first name? The ancient tradition appeals to me, and also the symbolism: because of my ordination, I see myself as a spiritual father to this community. This is a matter not of authority (for we are all brothers and sisters in Christ) but of spiritual care. Although God is the Heavenly Father of all of us, I consider it my sacred duty to protect and guide All Saints' with love, as I do my own family, as God gives me the grace to do so. I prefer "Father Reed" to "Father Poulson," both because of the tradition ("Father first name" is a relatively recent development) and because of parallels in other professions of respect (Doctor Last Name, Governor, Judge etc.) including our Day School faculty and administration.

40 years ago this week, The Episcopal Church began to be blessed with female priests. Ever since, there have been a variety of practices regarding what to call our women in ordained ministry, since "father" doesn't exactly fit! In the 1980's, The Reverend Julia Gatta, a former spiritual director of mine, wrote an influential article arguing in favor of "Mother" as the logical equivalent in title to "Father." She drew on the tradition of the Church, especially among religious communities of women (nuns) who often used maternal language to describe their leader (Abbess). Practices of title have varied among our clergy at All Saints'. Among our current clergy, The Reverend Holly Davis prefers "Holly" or "Mother Davis," while The Reverend Anne Ellsworth prefers "Anne" or "Pastor Ellsworth" ("pastor" is another good, traditional, Biblical option, with its shepherd imagery).

Needless to say, none of this is a matter of great urgency, but words do have meaning. Over time, they teach; they shape our sense of things. In the end, Father Reed, Mother Davis, Pastor Ellsworth, Bishop Burrill, Deacon Bade and Deacon Sowinski will gladly answer, however we are addressed. We are here to serve. As the old adage goes, it doesn't matter what you call us, as long as you call!

Reflections from Dr. James Merrick, Theologian-in-Residence July 23, 2014 Doctor's Deliberations

I've just returned from Minnesota where the meeting of the Society for Values in Higher Education was held. This year's theme was inequality, and I was invited to participate in a panel exploring Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation "Joy of the Gospel." I thought I might share with you some of what I shared at the conference.

As we might expect, Francis' essay examines inequality in moral and spiritual terms. He thinks inequality is the result of an economics that prioritizes self-interest. Of course we don't talk about it that way. We prefer the language of "free-market competition" and "consumer choice." But he may be right. And if you think about it, self-interest can only pit humans against each other and make inequality inevitable.

Francis knows that changing the spirit behind our policies requires conversion. We need a spiritual transformation, a reimagining of a meaningful life and our relationship to others. He urges us to recover the joy of life. Now, genuine joy is not spontaneous pleasure or a burst of excitement, though we might become particularly aware of it that way. In the scriptures, joy is portrayed as deep and durable, being associated with hardship and sacrifice (e.g. James 1:2).

Joy can survive and sustain us in difficulty because it is a profound confidence in our own identity. We know who we are. This inner security moves us naturally to look upon the insecurity of others around us and to see their needs in their full severity and urgency. Joy, therefore, is not merely the antithesis of self-interest; it is the antidote as well.

So how might we grow in joy?

Pray - Prayer nourishes inner contentment, for we know ourselves most truly when we know the one who created us, we feel most confident when we are conscious of God's love. Prayer is like physical exercise: it takes discipline and feels awkward. But our tradition offers simple, effective ways to develop a discipline of prayer. For example: Allison just made me a set of stunning prayer beads, and I've found them a very helpful means for establishing a daily diet of prayer.

Practice vulnerability – One of the most challenging moments of the exhortation is when Francis calls upon the fortunate to relinquish certain rights so that the poor can pursue a life of dignity. Giving ourselves to others goes against our most basic impulse of self-preservation. Yet Episcopalian author and researcher Brené Brown has demonstrated the deep link between vulnerability and joy. Her book *Daring Greatly* or TED talks on YouTube are great avenues to begin considering how vulnerability can put you on a path of self-knowledge and service to others.

Learn - Learning can give us great joy as we are drawn out of our narrow worlds by the discovery of something new and profound. Learning about our faith can be especially gratifying. Gaining understanding can give us confidence and open up new ways of experiencing our worship. Read good books about Christian history or faith (I'm happy to make recommendations!), attend adult education in St. Barbara, or start or join a study group.

Permit me, then, to end with another shameful plug: I encourage you to drop me questions or offer thoughts about how we might develop the educational dimension of our mission at All Saints'.

**Reflections from the Rev. Holly Davis,
Associate for Children, Youth, and Family Ministries
July 17, 2014 "What If"**

As my head hit the pillow last night the words of Shel Silverstein's famous poem, "What-if" got me. "Last night, while I lay thinking here, some What-ifs crawled inside my ear and pranced and partied all night long and sang their same old What-if song." Being in our own beds-in our own homes-late at night-can be scary.

These "what-ifs" of which Silverstein wrote are the products of fear; fear of the unknown, fear of the dark, fear of change, fear of loss, fear of fear. He continues, "What-if I get beat up? What-if there's poison in my cup? What-if I start to cry? What-if I get sick and die?" Fear drives folk to be less than who they are to be; less of a parent, a lover, a friend. "Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration," writes Frank Herbert in *Dune*. He is so very right. How then do we alleviate fears-fears that are so very real?

I find most of my fears are wrapped up neatly in my not addressing them-in the light, and out loud. Identifying them in the dark and in silence are quite enough for me at times, thank you. However, my faith and hope lead me to believe if I ask God to show me my fears in the bright light of the sun and to whisper in my ear what I need and who I am to be, then I will see everything I fear in a completely different way. I will be transformed, changed, different-and in a good way.

It takes courage to realize God knows who we are and what we need. It takes even more courage to hear that. A brilliant man-actually a frightened teenage servant-once said, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." He spent his nights asleep in the temple at the foot of the Ark of the Covenant. It would seem we can't expect to find all the answers we seek in a church. Samuel certainly didn't.

When I listen for that still small voice of God, I am so afraid sometimes of what I will hear, and other times I am terrified that I will hear nothing. But all of the evidence points to eventually hearing something. God has always spoken to us and is speaking to us still, and will certainly speak to you. But God never forces us to listen. God's message may be different to each of us, but I believe the voice of God always speaks to us, not just in words and not just in the middle of the night.

We have to summon up all our courage and say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Bold talk-it takes nerve to open our mouths and say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Even now, I wonder, "What-if nobody else feels this way? What-if they don't like what I write? What if I don't fit in?" "Speak Lord, for I am listening

July 10, 2014 Why Music?

One of our most important ministry priorities at All Saints' is music, under the direction of Scott Youngs and James Gerber. We have one of the finest traditional music programs in the western United States, with highly regarded choirs and organists. Even in the summer, music at All Saints' gets a lot of emphasis. Although the Senior Choir is on their well-deserved summer break, we continue to be blessed by wonderful organ music, soloists and instrumentalists at Sunday worship. Additionally, our music department is offering an engaging children's music program this July, and several excellent classes and workshops for adults.

Why is music so important to our faith community? These are just a few of the many reasons.

Praising God with music is Biblical. The Scriptures are filled with God's people making music. They sing God's praises continually in worship (the psalms are essentially an ancient hymnal) and break into song often when God does something remarkable, as in Exodus 15: "Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea." The praise of God is not just vocal; the Bible contains multiple passages about instrumental music as well, as in Psalm 150: "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!" When we incorporate music in our worship, we are joining with the faithful of every generation, and with the angels who sing to God eternally in heaven.

Praising God with music takes us out of our everyday world. To celebrate the Eucharist is to take part in a sacred and ancient mystery. Many churches have contemporary rock music in their worship in an effort to be accessible and familiar, and there is nothing wrong with that. But our niche at All Saints' is traditional music, crafted by the very best composers, past and present. When we enter our church building, with all its rich symbolism, and hear the poetic language of our Prayer Book and the timeless wisdom of Scripture, and experience extraordinary music written for God, we know we are on holy ground, in the presence of the Almighty. We set our daily cares and anxieties aside, and are reminded of the awesome God who created, guides and nourishes us.

Praising God with music heals us and moves the heart. One of the Church Fathers, Saint Basil, once said that music is like honey that makes our spiritual medicine more palatable (think of Mary Poppins: "a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down"). Hopefully our worship does not seem bitter, but it is surely good for us. Through it, God heals us. We have plenty of prayer and worship on our own and collectively without music, and we connect with God perfectly well. But in our grand, Sunday worship especially, on the Lord's day, the day of resurrection (for every Sunday recalls the Resurrection), it is good to offer our finest gifts, and to let the God-given blessing of music lift our hearts.

Praising God with music, done with excellence, takes resources. If we don't do it, who will? As the mainline denominations shrink, many churches are scrapping traditional music programs. Some have tried a more contemporary, praise band approach. Others have simplified, taking resources from music to prioritize other ministries. Every faith community is different, and there is no single, correct approach to worship or mission. But All Saints' has decided to keep our worship of God at the center of our common life, with everything else flowing from it. It is expensive to offer music at the high level we do, but we believe the investment pays off in lives that are drawn more closely to God. We offer God our very best, and trust that God will continue to bless us at All Saints', and in our service in the world. There is some evidence that many young adults, the Millennial Generation, are being drawn to churches that practice traditional worship, while also compassionately serving those in need. That is encouraging, for that is who we strive to be. May we never forget that our worship, in all its majesty, is meant not to entertain us, nor even solely to comfort us, but also to inspire us to "love and serve the Lord" after we "go in peace."

July 3, 2014 Introducing Eucharistic Prayer D

A relatively recent trend in some churches is to call Christian education “formation.” I tend not to use the term that way, because I believe formation is much more than education. Ideally, we are formed as disciples not only by our learning, but also by our prayer and worship, and by our service to others, especially as we do these things together with our fellow Christians.

Our liturgy is a powerful tool for formation, if we engage with it. If we are intentional and focused in our worship, and don’t just zone out, these ancient patterns of prayer articulate what we believe, and shape us, by God’s grace, more into the likeness of Christ. But there is a fine line between useful repetition and tedium, which is why our Book of Common Prayer gives us choices within the basic framework of the Eucharist. At All Saints’, we shift prayers seasonally, selecting prayers that fit well with particular themes. For example, with the Eucharistic prayers, we use Prayer B in Advent and Christmas (because of its strong incarnational themes), and Prayer C in Lent (because it is penitential and more responsive). We use Prayer A most often, because it is a well-crafted, more general prayer that accommodates prefaces specific to any feast day.

The one prayer of the set we haven’t used is Eucharistic Prayer D. Since we are in this long season of Ordinary Time, it seems a good time to introduce Prayer D for a while. Prayer D is ancient, adapted from the Liturgy of Saint Basil that dates back to the 4th century. It is used to this day in many Greek and Slavic churches, by Coptic Christians in Egypt, and by Roman Catholics. As such, it is the most ecumenical Eucharistic prayer in our book. If this prayer is unfamiliar to you, notice which parts of the prayer seem similar to other prayers, and which seem different. What parts move you, or teach you something new? How does it feel to pray words that are more than 1600 years old?

May this ancient, beautiful prayer, that has been spoken and sung by so many through the ages and across the globe, form us in faith as we pray, comfort us in our sorrows, and prepare us reverently to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

June 26, 2014 Growing Faith in Ordinary Time: Preparing for Sunday

We have now entered the liturgical season after Pentecost, that will extend all the way to the first Sunday in Advent: November 30th 2014. This season is called in several traditions “Ordinary Time,” not because it is plain or average, but because it is orderly and numbered. We proceed in orderly fashion through this extensive, green season. The season can, admittedly, feel like a bit of a letdown, because the other half of our liturgical year is filled with “special” seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and

Easter. (As a side note: there is a bit of Ordinary Time at the end of the Epiphany season, as well, but it quickly vanishes into Lent.) But even if this season after Pentecost feels a little less exciting, it is essential.

It is the time in which we integrate the saving events we have commemorated into our life of faith. In this green period, we grow. We grow as disciples. We take the Christ experiences of the last six months, Christ's birth and baptism, his testing in the wilderness, his suffering, death and glorious resurrection and ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit, and we reflect on what they all mean for our own daily lives as Christians.

One of the ways we can nurture our spiritual growth in this season is to be prepared for Sunday worship. You may have noticed that our weekly e-newsletter and Friday Facebook post are inviting you to open a new link on our website, under Worship, called "[Preparing for Sunday](#)." I urge you to find a few minutes each week to click on this new resource, and read the readings for Sunday (we are following the first, not alternate track) and the brief commentaries and reflections. We will be much more prepared to hear and understand the Word of God in the readings and sermon, if we are familiar with the content in advance. Even 10 minutes of preparation a week with the Sunday readings will deepen your faith.

May this Ordinary Time be a fruitful season in which we reflect gratefully on what Christ has done for us, and respond with holy habits that form us in his likeness.

June 19, 2014 Hope for the Future

This week is one of the most important weeks in our All Saints' year: our annual Vacation Bible School that we call "All Saints' Kids for the Community." Why is it so important? First, our kids (and their adult and youth mentors) do an incredible amount of good on our behalf and for the sake of the Gospel. How many of our adult members serve the needy the equivalent of five days in a year? Our young people really make a difference this week through their faith, and that ought to inspire us all.

Second, this week will impact not only those whom they serve, but our kids themselves. The theme of this week has been "Fruits of the Spirit." It comes from Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians 5:22-3: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." When we live as God intends us

to, we experience these fruits of the Spirit. One of the Devil's greatest lies is to convince the world that to be a Christian is to be dour and unhappy, grimly following antiquated rules. The opposite is true: to follow Christ may be challenging, but it gives us real love, joy, and peace that the world cannot give.

Our kids are learning this week that it feels satisfying to serve others, following the example of Jesus. That gives me hope for the future. For it is through such selfless service that the light of God's kingdom will shine in our selfish and hurting world.

June 11, 2014 Godly Fatherhood

This Sunday is an interesting intersection of holidays. The secular calendar celebrates Father's Day, and the sacred calendar commemorates Trinity Sunday, which always falls the Sunday after Pentecost. This coincidence gives us the opportunity to reflect briefly on Godly fatherhood, in both its meanings: the image of God as father, and the example of God to earthly fathers and father figures.

It is a very ancient Christian teaching that one way we understand God is as a heavenly father. In some churches and denominations, it has become common to minimize this, especially in liturgical language. But there is no getting around it if we are to take both Scripture and tradition seriously. The early Christians inherited this fatherly imagery from the Jewish tradition, and Jesus reinforced it with his many references to God as his Father. As early as the writings of Paul, "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" became a common phrase of the faith. As the Church sought to clarify its teachings, it developed over time the doctrine of the Trinity that we hear each week in the Nicene Creed, that there is one God in three "persons": Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the heart of our understanding of the Trinity is this relationship between God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, which we see depicted so richly in the Gospels.

Our Episcopal common prayer is saturated with Biblical language, so it is not surprising that references to God the Father, as part of the Holy Trinity, are frequent, beginning with the opening acclamation of the Eucharist: "Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Of course, when we use this ancient language, we are not saying that God is male in any limited, human sense. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, at the same time. This triune God is a mystery that defies easy description, and it is the nature of God to encompass the very best attributes that we can imagine, male and female, human and non-human. The whole creation sings the praises of God's infinite variety. But Scripture teaches us that to envision God as a loving father is a powerful and useful thing.

At the same time, as we celebrate earthly fathers this week, it is good to remember God's example. Like God, those of us who are fathers, grandfathers, and father figures are meant to be strong but kind, protective but playful with our children. We ought to exercise discipline, but encourage positive risk-taking that leads to growth. We are meant to be there with our loved ones when they need us, as God is. Multiple studies over decades have shown how beneficial good fathers are to healthy, happy children. Thank you to all the Godly men who nurture children, including the family members,

friends and partners who have stepped in when biological fathers were not able or willing to parent.

May we not forget to thank those who have guided, protected, and provided for us, and to thank God, who has placed them in our lives.

June 5, 2014 The Holy Spirit: God's Energy in the World

Most of us take electricity for granted. We go through our day surrounded by devices powered with electricity, and yet we rarely think of it until it is absent: a storm knocks out the power at home, or our car battery dies. The Holy Spirit is like electricity in some respects. The Holy Spirit is all around us, enlivening the Church, energizing our faith, and empowering us for service, and yet we don't often think about it. Fortunately, every year on the feast of Pentecost we celebrate the gift of Holy Spirit, reminding ourselves of the importance of this third person of the Trinity.

Look at the remarkable ways the Holy Spirit is evident just this weekend in and through our All Saints' community. On Saturday, Chuck Sowinski and Anne Ellsworth will be ordained deacons at the Cathedral. At the moment of consecration, Bishop Smith will lay hands on each ordinand, and ask that God give the Holy Spirit to them, making them a deacon in God's Church. In all of our Eucharists this weekend, as always, the Celebrant will ask God the Holy Spirit to sanctify the bread and wine, making them the very Body and Blood of Christ. And at the 10am Eucharist on Sunday, by the Holy Spirit we will bless water, and baptize three new Christians in the sacred name of the Trinity. In all three instances, the Holy Spirit is the catalyst for change into Christ's likeness.

The Holy Spirit is also an integral part of the ministry of Episcopal Relief and Development. All Christians are united through baptism as children of God. Christians in need across the globe are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and Episcopal Relief and Development gives us tangible ways to heal a hurting world. Through grace, we see our connection to the Christians rebuilding from an earthquake in Haiti, fighting malaria in Burundi, or receiving agricultural training in the Philippines. The Holy Spirit both unites us and gives us eyes to see and ears to hear that unity.

Episcopal Relief and Development is one of All Saints' closest mission partners. Whenever there is a natural disaster, many of our members donate to their relief efforts. We supported NetsforLife and give quarterly through Roberto Paredes' chair massages. A number of us give animals at Christmas through Gifts for Life and in other ways. As Dr. Radtke visits us, we give thanks for the lifesaving ministry of Episcopal Relief and Development over the past 75 years.

May we not take for granted the Holy Spirit, the energetic presence of God in the world, that leads us into truth, and brings us into harmony with God and our neighbors.

May 29, 2014 Staff News

The gift of the Holy Spirit that we will celebrate soon at Pentecost is a reminder that God is constantly renewing the Church, even as the Gospel remains unchanged. One of the ways that All Saints' is being renewed right now is through new staff, who will bring fresh ideas, unique gifts and energy to our community. We have already recently welcomed **Patrice Al-Shatti**, our part-time Health Ministries Coordinator, and **the Reverend Holly Davis**, who has hit the ground running as our Associate for Children, Youth and Family Ministries. Now we can announce three other appointments.

Beginning August 1, **the Reverend Anne Ellsworth** will be our new Curate. Anne lives in Tempe with her husband, Matt, and their two young children. Anne has a B.A. in Journalism with an emphasis in Public Relations from the Cronkite School of Journalism at ASU, an M.A. (with Honors) in Theology from the GTU and the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, CA, and will complete in December her Certificate in Anglican Studies from Church Divinity School of the Pacific. In addition to her academic qualifications, Anne has a deep faith, a warm personality, and strong commitment to Christian education and service to those in need. First as a Roman Catholic and now as an Episcopalian, Anne has served in a variety of significant roles and ministries in Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Arizona. She will be ordained a transitional deacon in June, and ordained to the priesthood most likely in December.

Following his ordination as a permanent deacon on June 7, **the Reverend Deacon Chuck Sowinski** will serve at All Saints'. Deacons are not paid, but serve in an important and ancient ministry. Chuck will continue to teach at-risk youth and as his schedule allows, will assist All Saints' in our outreach ministries and pastoral care. Chuck is immersed in his profession as an educator of Title1, "at-risk", ELD and special education students. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy (Philosophy of Language) from Quincy University and the School of Theology at Our Lady of Angels Franciscan Seminary. He is currently working on a masters degree in special education. At All Saints', Chuck joins Deacon Bade in the liturgical role that a deacon plays: setting the Altar for the Eucharist, introducing the confession, serving the chalice, sending out Eucharistic Visitors, and giving the dismissal. Many of us know and value Chuck from his years as a parishioner here, and look forward to welcoming him back in his new ordained ministry.

Someone else familiar to us is **Dr. James Merrick**. James, his wife Allison, and their two young children joined All Saints' almost a year ago, and have been deeply involved ever since. We have appreciated several classes taught by James, and now he is joining our staff in a more formal, though part-time role, as Theologian-in-Residence. James will

share his gift of teaching more often, and will also preach from time to time. James has a Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, as well as masters degrees in Christian Thought and Church History. He currently teaches theology as an Assistant Professor at Grand Canyon University.

As I look at our new staff team, both full and part-time, I see an enormously gifted and varied group. What they share is a vibrant faith, a creative imagination, and a commitment both to living the Gospel and to helping others to do the same, for the sake of God's kingdom. I know you will join me in welcoming them to their new roles when you see them.

May 21, 2014 Sabbath Rest and the Cycle of Renewal

Part of the wonder of God's creation is that we notice patterns all around, if we pay attention. There is an orderly beauty to things, including in our learning, and lessons learned in one area often apply similarly to others. And so, for example, science tells us that interval training (alternating high activity with a slower pace) is more effective exercise than walking or running always at the same pace. We are meant to move back and forth between activity and rejuvenation, and to find variety in that activity. It is true with our human bodies, and it is true in our day school and church years, as well. All Saints' is abuzz with activity every year from the third week of August through the third week in May. And then things slow down considerably. The summer months are certainly not devoid of activity. Our day school offers summer school, and our church continues to worship multiple times each week, and to provide opportunities for adult learning, Vacation Bible School and other programs for children and youth, and a number of other activities. But things do slow down in June, July, and early August, and that is a good thing. For the Bible teaches us the importance of Sabbath rest and refreshment in all its forms: on Sundays, and in larger portions of time.

One of many things that I love about All Saints' is how different things feel here in our different church seasons. In the summer, a significant percentage of our members are away: either living elsewhere for the summer months, or on vacation. It seems like an entirely different community in some respects, as if we were a medium-sized church instead of a large one. That affords more opportunity for personal connection amid our simpler set of offerings. My hope for all of us is that we will find time for refreshment this summer, both collectively and individually, here and elsewhere. I joke with my wife that summer is my season of self-improvement. Because my ministry schedule is easier, I have time to exercise more, read more for fun, uncover the grill (even if it is 110 degrees), swim with my children, and take some vacation. This summer, take time to rest, or to learn something new, or to get in shape, or to invite a church family over for dinner, or whatever else will nourish your body and spirit. Try something new at church: attend a different Eucharist, or experiment with a prayer group or class, or volunteer.

Check out a spiritual book from our church library. And don't forget to bring me a bulletin from wherever you go to church while out of town on vacation (I always learn things from other churches, large or small). Enjoy the cycle of renewal, whatever that looks like for you. After all, the fall will be here before we know it.

May 15, 2014 Signs of Commitment

Much of the impact of the Christian life is mysterious and beyond our comprehension. It takes place in the interaction of the Holy Spirit with the human heart, and in the loving gestures extended to others as a result of that faith. We open ourselves to God's presence and are inspired to help someone generously for reasons we don't understand. Most of the time, almost no one even knows what has happened in those moments. To God alone, as we say each week, "no secrets are hid" (BCP p 355). Only at death, when we are judged by God, will the full measurement of our life be rendered, the good and the bad, things done and left undone.

If it is difficult to judge the impact of an individual Christian, how much more so is it challenging to quantify the ministry of an entire congregation. But whatever the incompleteness of our earthly comprehension, we do strive to assess things in the Church. As a professional non-profit organization, we at All Saints' church track a range of things, from our budgeting and expenditures to our attendance and membership. But some data are more important than others. When I try to measure the health of an organization, one thing I look for is commitment. Jesus was often surrounded by a crowd, but it is the disciples who, after his resurrection, were committed enough to spread the Gospel, even to the point of death. Look for those who are committed to the faith, and you will find those who are truly making a difference.

That is why I was so moved last Sunday by the 33 youth and adults who were confirmed, received in The Episcopal Church, or who reaffirmed their faith. Bishop Smith told us that we were the largest group of confirmands in the Diocese of Arizona so far this year. To be sure, not everyone who is confirmed in the Church is equally committed. I remember well my own confirmation experience as a youth, which was more about obligation than discipleship. Nonetheless, the sacrament of Confirmation planted seeds that bore fruit later in my life. But many of our confirmands, and those being received and reaffirming their faith, were expressing a real commitment to following Jesus in a new, more intentional way. That is a sign of health in our community.

I want to recognize, as well, the extraordinary commitment of our volunteers. Hundreds of volunteers give sacrificially of their time in dozens of ministries, both inside and outside All Saints'. Many ministries continue year round, but at this end of the program year, it is fitting to thank all our volunteers for their efforts on behalf of all of us. This, too, is encouraging.

We are also blessed with the commitment of our fine staff. In particular, it is a rare gift to have long-serving staff members, sharing their wisdom and perspective. At our church, we have three staff who have served here for more than 25 years each: Andy Andersen, Abel Maldonado, and Scott Youngs. Their commitment over many years is an inspiration.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the commitment of all those in our church and school who have envisioned the future of All Saints' through our capital campaign. It is not too late to give to support our Phase I project or church improvements; we will continue gratefully to receive pledges throughout the summer. On Friday, May 23rd, most of Stella Lane will be closed, and construction on the Phase I project will take on more noticeable urgency. Around the time our students return for school in late August, we will see a church and school campus that is wonderfully transformed.

May the refreshment of the summer months renew and strengthen our zeal to follow Christ and share the Gospel in both word and deed.

May 8, 2014 The Plague of Isolation and the Church's Antidote

One of the plagues of modern life is isolation. For all of our digital networks, more people feel isolated in our American culture than ever before. I was talking with a friend recently who wondered aloud whatever happened to cocktail parties. He's right. My generation is less likely than that of our parents and grandparents to invite friends over for drinks or dinner, to go out in groups, or to know our neighbors. As much as I enjoy Facebook, it is no substitute for face to face conversation, and has, in some respects, detracted from other means of interaction that are more life giving. This is not just a philosophical question; isolation is costly in measurable ways. The medical community tells us that loneliness is becoming a health crisis. Studies show that being lonely puts one at increased risk for illness, depression, and dementia. Now, we should remember that there is a difference between isolation and solitude. For millennia, Christians have appreciated the value of listening for God in silent solitude while in prayer, on retreat or in nature. But solitude is a planned, and generally temporary discipline; we return to our relationships and find them renewed. Isolation is pervasive and detrimental.

Fortunately, the Church can offer a potent antidote to isolation. We gather, week after week, for worship. Many of us come together even more frequently, for mid-week worship, prayer, study or fellowship groups, or to serve at ICM, Andre House, Habitat for Humanity, in pastoral care, Daughters of the King or another ministry. One of the core values of the Church in general and All Saints' in particular is connection: we strive to connect with God, each other, and those in need. In Eastertide, as we read from the Acts of the Apostles, we are struck by the powerful sense of community in the early Church in the years immediately following Jesus' resurrection. It is no wonder the early

Church grew so rapidly: it offered a compelling vision of intentional community, united, as our reading this Sunday reminds us, in “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship...the breaking of bread and the prayers.” That united community of faith was often together, and many Christians even lived together, holding possessions in common, and sharing what they had “as any had need.” And they did so not begrudgingly, but “with glad and generous hearts.”

As we welcome Bishop Smith for his annual visitation, may we give thanks for the connection that he represents. We are The Episcopal Church, and recognize our connection to each other, in part, through our bishops (“Episcopal” is derived from the Greek word for bishop). As we worship with Bishop Smith and his wife, Laura, we recall our connection to the Episcopal churches in Arizona, in The Episcopal Church, and across the Anglican Communion. When a tragedy takes place, like the kidnapping of the more than 200 girls by terrorists in Nigeria, we remember our connection to Anglican Christians and others across the globe. And when we confirm youth and adults, we strengthen and encourage them to live as faithful people who make a difference in the lives of others, as followers of Jesus Christ.

April 24, 2014

A Thank you from the Rector

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped with Holy Week. It was a remarkable week, and I have heard from so many who were deeply moved as we walked in worship with Jesus through his suffering, death and resurrection. But we couldn’t have done it all without the help of more than 100 volunteers, working alongside our staff. Altar Guild, ushers and hospitality helpers, vergers, acolytes, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, intercessors, choirs and other musicians, Easter egg hunt helpers, and so many others did a fantastic job. And when we asked our members to help with a few extras, the response was incredible: every time slot for the Maundy Thursday prayer vigil was filled, the flowering crosses were gorgeous, and we had more cookies and Easter eggs than we needed. Thank you! May the joy of the Risen Christ overflow our hearts in this holiest of seasons.

Staff News

We are pleased to announce two staff appointments this week.

The Reverend Holly Davis has been called as our Associate for Children, Youth and Family Ministries. Holly graduated from Transylvania University in Kentucky in 1989 with a degree in Business Administration, and received her M.Div. from Virginia Theological Seminary in 2008. She has served as Rector of Saint John's Episcopal Church in Franklin,

Pennsylvania since October 2008. Holly has been involved in a range of ministries at Saint John's, in her diocese, and in the community. Among her passions is ministry with children and youth. She is a licensed instructor for "Safeguarding God's Children," a leader of an ecumenical youth group, and she has served at the diocesan youth summer camp for four summers. Holly brings extensive experience in parish ministry, organizational skills, a grounded and lively faith, and a warm personality. She also has deep affection for Arizona. Her mother and brother live in Fountain Hills, and Holly spent the summer of 2006 as an intern chaplain at Banner Desert Medical Center in Mesa as part of her ordination training. Holly will begin in late May.

Patrice Al-Shatti begins in early May as our part-time Health Ministries Coordinator, taking over from Marta Smith, who is retiring after leading this ministry so splendidly for the past four years. Patrice is a member of All Saints', a graduate of the University of Arizona and Arizona State University and a Licensed Master Social Worker and Certified Oncology Social Worker. Patrice has worked in medical and geriatric health care environments for twenty five years, most recently with the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center. She is on the board of directors of the Association of Oncology Social Work, and has been a member of the Arizona Cancer Leadership Team, and a field instructor with the Arizona State University social work program. She ran pre-hospice transition programs for Hospice of the Valley and Sun Health Hospice and provided significant training to health professionals and families in the loving and honest ways we can communicate about end of life issues. She has also supported elders to finding meaning and community in many environments, including independent, assisted living, and skilled nursing facilities. Patrice says, "Working with families experiencing the stresses of illness and aging has been my life's work, and I look forward to serving the wellness needs of the All Saints' community."

With the addition of Holly and Patrice to our staff, we strengthen two important aspects of our ministry: our support for families with young children and youth, and our support for seniors and their families coping with illness and aging. Come this Sunday at 10am to learn more about Patrice and our health ministries, and May 25th to meet Holly.

April 16, 2014 Welcoming Others as Christ Welcomed Us

We come now to the fulfillment of Holy Week, and one grand liturgy over three days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. We are transported, with Jesus, into the heart of his suffering, death and resurrection. And then, we celebrate the Risen Christ with the exuberant joy of Easter day.

Through the rest of this week, I hope we can keep focused on two people: first, of course, on Jesus, whose presence among us gives this week its meaning; and second, on the stranger, the guest among us. The liturgies of the rest of this week, especially Easter

day, bring many guests to All Saints'. Some are family and friends of our members, and others are visitors we don't know, coming to us for a myriad of reasons. Some will feel drawn here by the Holy Spirit. Some will come here hurting from a loss. We may see a family here, for the first time, simply because they feel like they should be in church on Easter. It is so important that we welcome all our guests, as Saint Paul says, as Christ has welcomed us (Romans 15:7). We do this not just because we hope they will have a warm experience and come back. We do it because Christ welcomes us into salvation through his death and resurrection, and commands us to welcome others into his fellowship, as well. Welcoming the stranger isn't optional; it's a gospel imperative. Keep an eye out for those who are visiting us, and see in them the face of Christ.

May God bless our All Saints' family as we walk this sacred path with our Savior, and may we invite and welcome others to join us on the way which leads to eternal life.

April 9, 2014 In Memory of Me

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, "do this in memory of me." Christians have kept his command for more than 2,000 years. For all of the Church's faults and shortcomings, despite the many ways we have failed to heed Jesus' teachings, we have faithfully done this very important thing. Every week, at All Saints', and around the world, we celebrate the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, as Jesus told us to do. That alone should give us encouragement about the future of the Church. For as Jesus taught us, to those who are faithful in some things, more will be given (Luke 16:10).

The Greek word for doing something in memory of someone or something is "anamnesis," and it applies not only to Communion but also to the liturgies of Holy Week. We believe that when we celebrate the Eucharist, the bread and wine are not merely symbols, but become the Body and Blood of Christ. Likewise, when we celebrate the solemn liturgies of Holy Week, we believe that we are not just imitating the events of Jesus' last week. Our worship is more than a play, though it has many dramatic aspects. In our worship, Christ is made present to us in his saving acts. As we remember them, the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ, by grace. Phoenix and Jerusalem become one; 33 A.D. and 2014 A.D. are brought together. That is why, on Maundy Thursday, in the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest says, "on the night he was handed over to suffering and death, **that is, tonight**, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread." And on Saturday night of Holy Week, at the Great Vigil of Easter, the most important service of the Christian year, we hear sung in the Exultet: "**this is the night**, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave."

As we begin Holy Week this Sunday, with Palm Sunday, I encourage us all to attend as many liturgies as we are able in the week leading up to Easter, especially Maundy

Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil on Saturday. And then come again on Easter day for our grand celebrations. Yes, it's a lot of church. But the more we give of ourselves to Jesus, the more we walk with him, the more we are likely to be transported to that place beyond place, and that time beyond time, where our salvation is.

April 1, 2014 Not Too Late

I love this time of year. I don't just mean the beautiful Arizona spring, but also this time in the Church year. Our Lenten pilgrimage is drawing closer to its end, and Holy Week is not far off. We have been preparing ourselves through our individual and collective Lenten practices, to the best of our abilities, for the great paschal (Easter) mystery to come. If you have stuck with your Lenten discipline up to this point, congratulations, and keep at it. And if your Lenten rule fell apart a few weeks ago, or never really got going at all, take heart. Jesus talks repeatedly about the blessings given to the sincere person who repents at the end. Remember the prodigal son, who came slinking home in shame after blowing his inheritance, only to find his father's open arms (Luke 15)? Remember the parable of the worker, who arrived late at the vineyard, at the last hour in fact, and still got paid for the full day (Matthew 20)? God accepts a genuine penitent who comes to Him at the last minute just as readily as God accepts the righteous person who has been trying hard the whole time. Why? Because God is so much more than just; God is loving. God is as loving and forgiving as the most loving parent on Earth. More so, even.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us not be lukewarm Christians, sitting on the sidelines as these holy days come and go. Let us engage, let us commit to follow Jesus, beginning with sincere repentance. And may we do so not merely out of obligation, but because we are drawn to Him. These wonderful, long readings from John's gospel over the past several weeks are all invitations to discipleship. And there is no better place to renew our discipleship than with Jesus on the path of his passion. It is not too late for some concrete steps as Lent concludes. Give generously to the poor by bringing in canned and dry foods for our ICM collection. Put the Holy Week schedule on your calendar, as much of it as you can. Pray, at any time and in any way. And if a pattern of sin is troubling you, make an appointment with a priest for spiritual conversation and/or confession.

The holiest days of the year are coming, the deepest sorrows and the greatest joys. Our salvation is at hand. Let us make all things ready, for the time is short.

March 27, 2014 But Now I See

One of the interesting things about growing older is how perspective shapes us. When we are young, we lack the perspective of experience, and important events have more visceral impacts on us. Do you remember your first love? The first death of a family member? Our initial encounters with love and loss overwhelm us with their intensity and newness. As we age, we experience things differently. Our emotions can still be strong, but they are often more complex, more nuanced.

It's been a week of reflection for me. In the category of joy, the men's basketball of my alma mater, the University of Virginia, is coming to the end of an historic season. This Virginia team won the regular season ACC title, and the conference tournament. They secured a number one seed in the NCAA tournament, and as I write this, they are preparing for a Sweet Sixteen game versus Michigan State. I grew up as a huge Virginia basketball fan, and remember vividly the last time our team was this good: 30 years ago in the Ralph Sampson era. Seeing this team play so well, doing things the right way (they win with team effort, especially defense), has given me joy, and caused me to remember the intensity of childhood, when it felt like every basket was life or death.

At the same time, this week has seen an actual death, the death of one of my favorite professors in seminary, the Reverend Doctor Rowan Greer. Father Greer was one of the great scholar/priests of his generation, merging seamlessly the love of learning with the love of Jesus. His priesthood and life of prayer enriched his teaching, and vice versa. I remember the funny moments in class with him, which often involved his dog, who followed him everywhere and lay on the classroom floor while he taught. I remember, too, his dedication to his students. He was kind and encouraging to me on numerous occasions. His lengthy notes on our papers, written out on yellow, legal paper and attached to the back, showed how seriously he considered our every word. Even as I am sad at his passing, I rejoice in the impact he had on so many of us across the Church. And I remember with fondness how vivid and lifegiving were those seminary days, and how much they influence me, even now, in my ministry.

In this season of Lent, may we remember that Jesus Christ came that we might have **life**, and have it abundantly. Our sins build up on us, they cover us, blinding us, dulling our experience of life as God intends it. To repent of our sins and follow Jesus is not restriction, but freedom. When we are forgiven, we are free to see life with clearer eyes, to feel life, both the joy and the sadness, more fully in all its complexity. We begin to see the wonders of God all around us: in the startling newness of Spring in Arizona, in the unfolding of our Church year towards Holy Week and Easter, in the passion of a basketball team doing what they love, and even in the loss of a beloved mentor.

Lent is a gift. God's gift. Let us not lose the opportunity to be healed, cleansed, forgiven, and given grace to see life in its fullness.

March 20, 2014 Care for the Earth: A Case Study in Reading Scripture in the Anglican Tradition

In our Lenten evening class on Thursday, March 13th, we reflected on a number of Scriptural passages related to our care for the Earth. It was a good reminder of how we, as centrist Episcopalians, understand the Bible. We are neither Biblical literalists in the narrow sense (God actually created the world in six days) nor Biblical relativists (the Bible is just one of many useful, symbolic stories). We believe the Bible is “the Word of the Lord,” as we say each week, with authority over our lives. But we also understand that God’s Word is given to us in different genres, even within the same books. Every word of the Bible is true, but we needn’t read Biblical poetry as science, or satire as prophecy. When we understand what genre we are reading, we can anticipate what type of instruction we are to receive. The tradition of the Church across the centuries, shared by clergy and scholars in sermons and classes, ideally acts as a useful commentary in our Biblical studies when topics get confusing.

One of the basic principles of effective Anglican Biblical interpretation is to read individual passages through the lens of the Bible as a whole. This can be hard work, because it requires a fairly comprehensive grasp of the Scriptures. To pull one quote out of context is rarely helpful; it must be measured against the overall thematic flow of the Scriptures. That requires, in the words of one of our prayers, that we “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them” (BCP p 236). Put another way, God is an effective teacher, and things that are important tend to be repeated in the Bible in different places and ways. To take an example from the March 13th class, the description from Genesis 1 that human beings are to have “dominion” over the creation must be understood in the context of the whole canon of Scripture. Numerous passages depict the importance of being good stewards of the creation. And so we properly understand our dominion to involve not plundering but caretaking, not destroying but preserving this bounteous Earth that God has given us. At the same time, we must balance our stewardship of the Earth with Jesus’ call to care for our fellow human beings. There are no simple answers when considering environmental versus economic concerns, but our reading of the Bible gives us valuable perspective.

One encouraging trend I see at All Saints’ is that more and more members are committing to go deeper in their understanding of the Bible. Our Bible-based classes for adults, like our summer Bible studies, or our current class on Job and suffering, have received a great deal of interest. In addition, a number of people have committed to reading more Scripture as a Lenten practice. I have even discovered, quite by accident, that several of us are following the same reading plan that takes us through the whole Bible in a year. (Side note: I am curious if we have enough interested individuals to form a group in the fall to read the Bible through together. That would be fantastic.)

The Bible is not always clear on everything, leaving room for differing interpretations on some matters. But when it is clear, we are called to follow its teachings. And so,

whenever possible without conflicting with other Biblical principles, we are meant to take good care of God's creation. That has practical implications for our shared life at All Saints'. I mentioned last week our school's Eco Tigers, who are teaching us how to be more aware about recycling plastic bottles and bags. And in the improvements being funded by the Capital Campaign, we are choosing the most environmentally friendly ways to enhance our church and school, within our budget.

All of which brings me to an important announcement: **we have received anonymous matching funds of \$10,000 to the Campaign to be used for energy efficient lighting inside and outside the church.** New pledges earmarked for church improvements/lighting will get us closer to one of our key priorities for the campaign. Thank you to our donor and to the many others who have given so far. We are making good progress towards our goals, both with the project north of Stella, and with the church improvements, but we need everyone to jump on board, as we go where God is leading us.

March 13, 2014 Reverence for the Earth

The Prayers of the People, Form Four, which we are using for Lent, include the following petition: "Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory" (BCP p 388). More and more, Christians across denominations are growing in our understanding of the importance of environmental stewardship to the living out of the Gospel. To be sure, there are robust debates about how best to balance environmental and economic concerns. But there is remarkable agreement among people of faith that we are entrusted with the care of God's creation, for the sake of our children, and their children after them.

Indeed, it is impressive the degree to which our children and youth are themselves taking the lead in our appreciation for and stewardship of the environment. It is often our children who remind adults what can be recycled, or how important sustainability is to global health and prosperity. Recently, the Eco Tigers, a group of 7th and 8th graders at our day school, demonstrated particular leadership in this regard. They developed an initiative to recycle plastic bags in Phoenix for the benefit of people in Haiti, then documented their project and submitted it to a national competition, the Lexus Eco Challenge. They won one of eight first place awards in the Challenge, for a prize of \$15,000, to be used to enhance environmental sustainability on our All Saints' campus. [To learn more, watch their inspiring video here](#)

Our Lenten series this year on Thursday nights, which we are calling "This Fragile Earth, Our Island Home," will explore how our faith and the stewardship of the environment intersect. Lent is a perfect time to consider new behaviors. Some of those behaviors

may include being more aware of our impact on our own little corner of God's creation. To do so can be, in its own way, a kind of reverence, and even prayer.

March 6, 2014 EGOT

When I was in seminary, I sang in a choir with a very nice and very talented Yale undergraduate named Bobby Lopez. It was clear early on that Bobby had a gift for music, but no one could have predicted his great success. He became a composer, worked hard on his craft, and last Sunday, became only the 12th (and youngest ever) member of an exclusive club: the EGOTs. Bobby has won an Emmy award (for the children's show "The Wonder Pets"), a Grammy (for the musical "The Book of Mormon"), a Tony (for "Avenue Q") and now an Oscar (for "Let it Go," from the movie "Frozen"). Bobby and I are not close friends, but we are friends on Facebook, and it has been a joy to observe his success from afar, not least because he is a good person, husband and father in addition to being an exceptional talent.

When we Christians see someone being the person they were meant to be, making the most of their God-given talents, and doing so with humility and grace, we rejoice. There is that wonderful moment in the movie "Chariots of Fire," when Eric Liddell says to his sister, Jenny, "I believe God made me for a purpose. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure." Part of the journey of our life is discovering who we are and what we are meant to do, and another part is deciding how to use our gifts. As Christians, we are meant to use our gifts for the good of others, and to God's honor and glory. When we do so, or see others doing so, there is nothing wrong with experiencing vicariously what we imagine to be God's pleasure.

This Sunday, we say farewell to Licia Affer, and thank her for her ministry at All Saints' over four years. We feel sadness, because we will miss her (and Maurizio and Cecilia when they leave us at the end of the school year). But I hope we also feel joy, knowing that Licia's experiences here have prepared her for a new ministry of such significance as Rector of Saint Anne's in Atlanta. To see her fulfilling her God-given potential for the sake of the Gospel is a blessing to us. Coincidentally, we also heard this week that Marian Fortner, another of our former associate priests, is one of five nominees for Bishop of Mississippi. All Saints' should take pride that our associate clergy are going on to exercise such important leadership in the wider Church.

And what about Lent? Saint Irenaeus once said: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." In Lent, we strive, with God's help, to strip away those aspects of ourselves that are dead or deadening. We remove the weeds around us, that we may grow, and bear fruit. When we repent, forsaking our sins and embracing the way of Christ, we become more alive, and give glory to God. Ironically, we will never be more alive than we will be after death, when in the resurrection we who believe are raised to eternal life. But even

now, when we turn from selfishness, and use the best of our humanity for God's purposes, we feel moments of holy joy. This is the purpose of Lent: in our prayers and in our practices to ask God to make us more ready to be our truest and best selves, when Easter comes.

February 27, 2014 Preparing for Preparing for Easter

My title might seem like a typo, but it's not. Lent is the season in which we prepare ourselves for Holy Week and Easter, the crux (literally) of the Christian year. But it takes preparation to prepare ourselves well. What do I mean?

There are certain aspects of Lent that are universal: prayer, repentance, self-denial, studying God's Word, and almsgiving (giving to the poor). But there is also room to tailor some of our Lenten practices to those aspects of ourselves that need attention. And so, in these last days of Pre-Lent, I urge you to consider the following, as you develop your rule of life (your spiritual plan) for the 40 days of Lent. To explore these in more depth, come to my class on Sunday at 10am.

Be Reflective. We are all sinners, focused too much on ourselves, and not enough on God and our neighbors. But our sins are different. Reflect on what behaviors get in the way of being the person God made you to be. Consider a "fast" from those behaviors in Lent. Some of us need to fast from some kinds of food, not because we want to fit into our swimsuits for summer, but because we have become addicted to foods that are bad for us, and we wish both to be healthier, and to consider the hungry poor all around us. For others, a fast from TV or Facebook several days a week, or a fast from gossip or from complaining might be helpful. In these days before Lent, look honestly in the spiritual mirror.

Be Specific. A vague Lenten rule is not likely to work. For example, instead of resolving to pray more, commit to praying 10 minutes every morning. Instead of resolving to read the Bible more, commit to reading one chapter from the Old Testament and one from the New every evening after dinner. Set a specific goal. Consider fasting from something negative or excessive, and replacing it with something better. So, fast from watching TV at dinner, and replace the time with conversation.

Be Realistic. Don't bite off more than you can chew. Start small, and if you are successful, by God's grace, add on. Take one small corner of your life, and improve upon it. 10 extra minutes of exercise every day, or prayer. Being intentionally kind to one person at work who drives you crazy. Start small, and build.

Be Prayerful. Whatever Lenten practices or goals you choose, lift them up to God. The point is not "self-improvement" but repenting of our sins, and turning our life towards

love of God and those around us. Prayer keeps us focused on Jesus, and guards against selfish pride.

Whether you are fasting from something, taking something on, or both, make the most of these 40 days, beginning Ash Wednesday. They are a gift: the chance to draw closer to God, and to prepare our hearts to experience again with gratitude the sacrifice of Jesus for us on the Cross, and his glorious resurrection, which gives us eternal life. With God's help, our Lenten practices may live on, in some form, long after the days of penitence have passed.

February 20, 2014 Envisioning the Future

I have some exciting news to share about our buildings and grounds. For some time now, All Saints' has been involved in a capital campaign, called Envisioning the Future. The main purpose of this joint campaign of church and school is to pay off the debt from the property we acquired a couple of years ago north of Stella Lane, and to make significant improvements upon it. I am part of a joint church and school group that has been meeting weekly since September to plan these improvements, and we can now share pictures of what they will look like. Beginning in April, the dirt lot and most of Stella Lane will be incorporated into our existing property to make a middle school regulation sized baseball/football/soccer field, prayer garden, landscaping and parking. Some of these are of particular interest to our school, but all of us will benefit from this project. We are calling these the Phase I improvements, because in the future there may be additional projects, now that we have more space.

In addition, our church buildings and grounds committee and Andy Andersen, Director of Plant and Property, have identified some critical needs in and around our church building. As we have known for years, our outdated sound system and church lighting need replacing. Our church roof needs to be redone in the next couple of years. And our church's outside lighting needs to be enhanced (as you will notice if you are at church at night, it is very dark around our buildings and in the parking lot). All of these projects will be done taking into consideration not only cost and quality, but environmental impact.

A number of church members and joint church/school families have given already to the campaign. Now we invite all our members to join in this effort, as you are able, over and above your annual pledge. How your money is directed is up to you: you can give to support the loan payment and improvements north of Stella, or to the church facility improvement priorities. Our church has made great progress in balancing our annual budget for the funding of our current ministries. Now we are called to look ahead, renewing our beloved church building, and enhancing our campus, for this generation, and the generations to come.

February 13, 2014 From the Rector: Clergy News

It is with genuinely mixed emotions that I share the news that our Associate Rector, Licia Affer, has been called to be the rector of Saint Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia. There is sadness, because Licia and her family have meant so much to me and to All Saints' over the past four years. I will miss them greatly, as will many of us. But there is also joy that she has been called to serve at one of the most significant parishes in the Diocese of Atlanta. All Saints' and Saint Anne's have a lot in common. Saint Anne's was founded around the same time All Saints' was. They are a strong and healthy parish, with a school and a senior center.

All Saints' can take pride that we have been an environment where Licia has grown so much. Indeed, part of our mission as a large parish is to form promising clergy for leadership in the wider Church. Licia was the first staff member I hired, just five months after I started as rector, and she has been a dedicated clergy colleague and friend as All Saints' has strengthened in so many ways over the past four and a half years. For all of her many gifts, she is, above all, a compassionate priest. Friday, February 7th at 2:30 am, when our little baby Matthew decided he wanted to enter this world ten days early, my mother in law was not yet here. Our hospital plans had to be revised on the spot. And so, without hesitation, it was Licia that I called. She came right over to be with our older boys as they slept, while Megan and I rushed to the hospital. Fortunately, the birth was so quick that I was home by 6:15 am to get the boys to school! That's the kind of priest and person Licia is, and it will serve her well as the shepherd of her new flock.

Sunday, March 9th will be Licia's last Sunday with us. We will thank her at both our 9 and 11am services that day, and send her away with our blessing and love. Fortunately, we will continue to see Maurizio and Cecilia for a while longer. They will stay in Phoenix through the end of the school year. Meanwhile, the search begins immediately to find a new priest to join our staff. We have known for some time that our curate, Lauren Lenoski, will be leaving us on May 4, to get married and move with her fiance, Rob, to Massachusetts, where he will serve as a priest. Now, our search will expand as we seek two new priests to join the staff at All Saints' in the late spring or early summer.

As my wife will tell you, I am not fond of change. But I also recognize both in my ministry and in the rest of my life, that God often works in wonderful and mysterious ways in the midst of change. My encouragement to myself and to all of us in this time of clergy transition is not to be anxious, but to trust in God, who always provides for us, and who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

From the Associate Rector: Licia's Side of the Story

It's all Bill Verdini's fault! He is the one who got me here in the first place. We bumped into each other at Diocesan Convention 2009, and when he asked me how I was doing at Trinity, I answered "Doing fine but not for long, because my contract is expiring soon." To which he replied with that characteristic twinkle in his eye "You should think about us, you know?" And so it began.

Loving All Saints' and her people has been incredibly easy . . . which makes leaving you incredibly hard. You are such a warm, welcoming community: not only you have accepted and loved me, but also my entire family for the past four years. You have helped me grow as a person and as a priest, and you have challenged, supported, and partnered with me in doing the work that Jesus is calling us all to do.

Empowered by your love and your prayers I feel ready to lead a community of faith in a completely different environment (they have snow . . . imagine that!) bringing to them the knowledge and experience that you have shared with me. I know that Fr. Reed will have no difficulty in finding new, great clergy for this community: who wouldn't want to be in such an exciting, Spirit-filled congregation? Who wouldn't want to serve beside such a caring leader?

In order to be ready for Holy Week and Easter, I will have to leave you soon, but Maurizio and Cecilia are staying behind until the end of the school year; they will serve this community in their usual roles until the end of May.

Please continue to pray for all of us at this time of transition and beyond and know that, in the words of Paul to the community in Philippi, *I thank my God every time I think of you and whenever I pray for you, I pray with joy.*

February 6, 2014 How is Faith Passed Down?

Clergy and religious parents share a common anxiety: will the children of today continue to be in the Church as adults? And so, being both a priest and parent, I recently read with great interest [a fascinating article in the New York Times](#). (Click on the link to connect to it directly) It describes a new book by Professor Vern Bengtson called "Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations." Over more than 35 years, Bengtson has studied what factors help faith to be passed on to children. In many ways, his conclusions are what one might expect. If parents share common religious values, and are active with their faith, their children are more likely to do the same. But it is not enough to claim faith, without actually practicing it (children are experts in sensing hypocrisy!). If we parents claim to be Christian, but rarely attend worship, or do not demonstrate kindness to others or concern for the poor, our children

notice and their faith dwindles. Parent-youth similarity in religiosity has actually not changed in 35 years. In other words, if parents are genuinely religious, children are more likely to be. The stark decline in mainline churches over the past 35 years is not chiefly because parents are religious but their children have rejected the faith. Rather, it is that parents have become less devout, and the children have followed them out of the Church.

Over the years, many parents whose children are young adults have confessed to me their dismay that their college student or young professional son or daughter doesn't go to church. Encouragingly, Bengtson's study shows that many children who drift from the faith come back eventually, if their spiritual foundation is solid. If, after regular instruction in Sunday school and youth group, a young adult wishes to explore other traditions for a while, common sense says not to fear it. If they do come back to the Church, it will be out of their own commitment, which is more likely to stick. That was certainly my story. I was brought up in The Episcopal Church, then drifted a bit in college, then came back to the faith by my own choice in my mid twenties. However, we ought not to expect weddings and babies to bring young adults back, as in former times. Increasingly, weddings are outside the Church and couples are interfaith, both of which, statistically, are negative influences on Church involvement. If a young family does come to Church these days, it is because they feel drawn to do so, not because they feel a social or ancestral obligation. Part of our responsibility as respectful evangelists is to be willing to share about our faith with young adults, as appropriate, so that they understand how beneficial a spiritual community can be in this complex world, for themselves and for their children.

Here is another critical take away from his book: the importance of the whole family to faith, and especially fathers. There is a strong correlation between fathers who are faithful Christians, and children who are the same. Fathers and father figures are key components to raising Christian children who practice the faith as adults. Grandparents are also quite important in the faith lives of children, according to Bengtson. None of this is to diminish the critical role of mothers, of course, but rather to say that ideally it takes a whole family to raise a committed, Christian child. Needless to say, the Church also plays a role in all of this. Many studies have shown that the **kind** of faith we teach our children matters. A narrow, judgmental, fundamentalist faith is off-putting to children as they grow up, but so too is a fuzzy, new age, non-challenging, Christianity "lite." At All Saints' church, we do our best to support families in faith, by forming the whole family in a welcoming and tolerant community that practices a vigorous, ancient faith in Jesus according to the Anglican tradition.

This Sunday morning, we will **all** be learning something essential: what it means to celebrate the Eucharist together. We will worship as usual, but it will be an instructed Eucharist. Instead of the sermon, at several points in our liturgy, we will pause for a brief reflection on what we are doing and why. This week, we focus on the first half of the Eucharist: the Word of God. Next week, we will explore the second half, the Holy

Communion. Children's chapel will do the same. The more we understand why we worship in this ancient way, the more likely it is to shape us as lifelong disciples of Jesus. Come join us this weekend at any of our liturgies for instructed Eucharists. And if you are a parent, grandparent, godparent, or mother or father figure in a young person's life, **thank you** for setting a good example by being a spiritual role model and teacher for your child. We are all in this together!

January 30, 2014 Haiti and the Gift of Perspective

Having just returned from a week in Haiti with our All Saints' team, visiting our partner church and school, Saint Paul's, I have been thinking about perspective. This was All Saints' fourth visit to Saint Paul's, and my second. I was amazed how different the experience was for me, compared to two years ago. Last time, I was struck particularly by the enormous challenges Haitians face, every day: the crushing poverty, and the scarcity of many necessities of life. I was also acutely aware of the contrast between the deep faith and resilience of the Haitian people, and the inadequacy of the institutions that were meant to assist them. The government was disorganized and corrupt, the UN had made things worse after the earthquake by bringing cholera, and the hospital system struggled to give people the care they needed.

This time, I noticed instead how much things have improved. The government and UN still aren't particularly effective in Haiti, but there is progress. Most of the rubble from the earthquake of 2010 has been removed, and the tent cities largely cleared. Construction is everywhere. Partners in Health has opened a new teaching hospital in Mirebalais, which we visited, and it is among the best in the Caribbean. And many local partnerships, like ours, are making a huge difference in communities. Thanks to our efforts together over four years, our partner, Saint Paul's, now has a safe and hygienic latrine. They have goats and wedding rings. We met one of the couples who received a ring; they were married last Saturday. The teachers are being paid, which enables them to concentrate more on lesson planning and on their students. And the school building! Instead of a small, leaky shack with a dirt floor, the 200 students now have a beautiful, solid building with four large classrooms, a storage room, and an administrative office. With great joy, our All Saints' team helped paint the school, before blessing and dedicating it in a grand celebration. Haiti still has a long way to go, with many systemic problems. But from my perspective, I know that there is more hope for our Haitian friends now than there was two years ago.

And then there is the perspective of the students, both ours and theirs. I could not be more proud of the six All Saints' student ambassadors on our team. They were brave, mature and compassionate in an environment that is not easy. I know that the new experiences and friendships they have gained will change their perspectives and open their hearts in amazing ways. The students of Saint Paul's have also had their

perspectives broadened and their spirits lifted, as they see greater possibilities for themselves through education. Having watched American and Haitian students playing and communicating together gives me more confidence in the future of our human family on this fragile earth.

In our country, in our world, and even in the Church, it is easy to be cynical, and to be skeptical about change. But God is the source of lasting change. God brings light to darkness, and resurrection life out of death. And God uses God's people to bring that light and resurrection to the world. Our partnership in Haiti is doing just that, for them, and for us.

To learn more about our 2014 mission trip to Haiti, come this Sunday at 10am to hear from members of the team. To watch a video about our trip, [click here](#).

January 22, 2014 From the Associate Rector, The Rev. Licia Affer

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people . . .

Do you remember the fun little game many of us used to play with our hands (maybe during boring sermons)? If you have never heard of it, you can find it here

<http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Church-With-Your-Fingers>

It is a very easy way to show children the difference between "church" and "Church".

The first, with a lowercase "c", is the building in which we gather on Sunday mornings and at other times of grief or celebration. It's where we can find the baptismal font, the altar, and the sacristy. It's where the clergy wear beautiful clothes and where we share the consecrated bread and wine.

The second, Church with a big "C", is the community of the faithful, the Body of Christ, the people of God, whether they are gathered together in a building or scattered all over the place.

Since time immemorial, the Church has gathered in churches all over the world on Sunday mornings, to worship God, to give thanks, to pray with and on behalf of one another, and to apologize, individually and collectively for the many times when we have missed the mark and hurt one another.

We love our Sunday mornings, we love our collective liturgies when we share prayer and evocative, uplifting music, and when we have the opportunity to connect and reconnect with fellow parishioners. But we are still the community of the faithful during the week. Even when we are “the Church scattered”, we are still the Body of Christ.

This is easy to forget if our faith is only grounded in our Sunday morning liturgies. It becomes less difficult to forget, if we find strength and balance through regular prayer and devotional readings, if we keep up the work of ministry in a variety of settings away from church campus, and if we continue to discuss and even struggle on our own with the texts we read together during the Sunday services. We must never forget that church, the holy place, is not the only locus where God is found. We are called to carry God and God-in-Christ in our hearts always and show the Holy Presence in our words and actions every day of the week. God empowers us for faithful living constantly, if we are open to receive the gift that God so willingly offers. This coming Sunday, for example, we won't only gather to worship, we will also gather for our Annual Meeting. It is an opportunity to garner deeper awareness of who we are as a community, to take stock of what is going on, and to plan for the future. It is also an opportunity to have our voices heard as we elect new members of our leadership team, the Vestry, and delegates to Convention. It is another way in which we can share our identity as the Body of Christ, just in a different fashion.

I like our church, our building; I like the light that filters through the stained-glass windows, I like our solid (and very heavy) baptismal font in the traditional octagonal shape, I like the little chapel devoted to Mary, the Mother of God, a lovely place for quiet and meditation. But I LOVE our Church, our community, bonded by our love for each other and for God, filled with men and women of goodwill.

So keep up the good work, everyone, and make sure that you are always easily recognizable as members of the Body of Christ: in the sanctuary and at the grocery store, at home and at the office. Don't just go to church, be the Church!

January 15, 2014 Our Haiti Partnership: Four Years In

This year's visit to our partner church and school, Saint Paul's in Gascogne, Haiti (from January 17-24) will commemorate a new level of our cooperative ministry. With the funds we have raised at All Saints' church and school, our Haitian friends have been constructing a school building that our All Saints' team of 16 adults and students will paint, bless and formally open while we are there. Previously, the school “building” has been little more than a large tent. Gradually, and always in close communication with our partners, we have made a substantial difference in the lives of the people of Saint Paul's. In only a little over four years' time, this partnership has built latrines, provided goats and wedding rings, and paid teacher salaries. But the completion of the school

building is our largest project, by far. It will make a dramatic improvement in the lives of the students, teachers, and parishioners of Saint Paul's. Imagine the difference, for a child, between learning under a leaky roof in a torrential rain, and learning, dry, under a solid roof. Every opportunity to learn more effectively is a step towards a brighter future for these Haitian students and their families.

It is easy to be skeptical of our ability to make permanent change in the lives of those who are in need. Human beings and human systems get easily stuck in unhealthy patterns, in any culture. This past week, in our country, there were a number of somber reflections on the modest accomplishments of the "War on Poverty," which began 50 years ago. For all our enormous resources, the United States has not won the war on economic scarcity in our own nation. Progress out of poverty is immensely difficult, for reasons we don't fully understand. In Haiti, the 4th anniversary of the devastating earthquake has just passed. A great deal of rebuilding has taken place, but much remains to be done. The work is slow, and the dynamics of recovery are complex. The region where our partner is located was not seriously affected by the earthquake, but they have had their own challenges with poverty over many years, like most of Haiti. The caution for those of us who want to help is always to avoid things that make us feel good, while not really improving the situation, and even more, to avoid acting in ways that encourage dependency. Four years in, I am confident that partnerships like ours in Haiti really can be of use in the long term. Why? For several reasons. This is not a large, bureaucratic, top down effort, but a medium-sized, ground up initiative. Nor is this your typical international mission trip where a group of church youth shows up in a community and lays a tile floor that wasn't really asked for, taking a job away from a local. We prioritize what our partners need, and they have a lot of investment in what takes place. Almost all the labor is local, as are the materials. That stimulates the local economy and affirms the dignity of workers in the community. Because this partnership is ongoing, we get to communicate regularly, and to check on our progress. And perhaps most importantly, this is a genuine partnership. We have done a lot for our friends in Haiti, and they have done a lot for us. The members of our All Saints' teams benefit tremendously from the relationships we build and experiences we have in Haiti. Our young people especially have their hearts opened in ways that will shape their lives, and our world, for the better.

Please pray for the Haiti team as we are gone this week, and pray for our partners at Saint Paul's. Pray that God may grant us wisdom as this partnership grows. In this week of Prayer for Christian Unity, there is no greater sign of our unity than when we recognize our kinship in Christ across the whole world. In God's perfect kingdom, no one will be in need, in Phoenix or in Haiti, and we will be one in love. Ministries like our church and school's partnership in Haiti are a sign for all who would see it that God's kingdom will come.

January 8, 2014 A New Year's Resolution: More Prayer

Last week in his New Year's message, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, confessed that he doesn't much like New Year's resolutions. He said that it's not that he opposes them, but that he finds them so difficult to keep that he wonders if they are of much use. I appreciated his honesty, and tend to agree. I put much more of my energy into Lenten practices than into New Year's resolutions. But if you are still looking for a goal or habit for 2014, I'd like to suggest prayer.

The great Anglican spiritual writer Martin Thornton wrote that the ideal framework of prayer in our tradition is in three parts: the Eucharist, the Daily Office, and private prayer. The Eucharist is our weekly (and for some, more frequent) gathering to be nourished by Word and Sacrament. This is our most important spiritual resource as fellow members of the Body of Christ, the Church. In addition, there is the Daily Office, the daily set of prayers and readings for the morning and evening. I talk and write about the Daily Office often, and I do so with clear recognition that not many of our members pray the offices or are likely to do so. And that is ok. We are a community of exceptionally busy people. A small number of us gather on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings in the chapel for Evening Prayer. Some in our community pray the Daily Office on their own. But I like to mention it regularly, because daily morning and evening prayer are more convenient to pray than they have ever been. We have the full services in the Prayer Book (p. 75 and 115), the brief versions (p. 136) and wonderful online resources (www.prayer.forwardmovement.org) and smart phone apps from Forward Movement and Mission St. Clare. Thornton's third form of prayer is what he calls private prayer. This is the most flexible of the three, and leaves room for a variety of options, according to the needs of the individual. It could be anything from the Rosary to Christian Meditation to running prayer to journal writing to walking the labyrinth.

My personality likes order, and so Thornton's rule works well for me. I find the habit of Eucharist and the Daily Office to be enormously grounding and helpful. My private prayer varies a great deal. On January 1, I began a schedule to read the whole Bible in a year. We'll see if it lasts to Valentine's Day! But here's my recommendation: find some way to pray every day that fits your personality and schedule. If you're interested in the Daily Office, talk to me and I can teach you how to do it. But maybe the more meaningful prayer for you is during a walk at lunch, or silence first thing in the morning, or reading a daily devotion. If you are interested in exploring different ways to pray, remember that at All Saints', we have groups that pray not only Evening Prayer, but also the Rosary (Sundays at 10:15am in the chapel), and Christian Meditation (Sundays at 9am in the Day School library). If you are reading this in the e-newsletter, know as well that this Saturday, the Prayer Team is offering a retreat on different practices of prayer, which I heartily recommend.

God is always near to us. But in prayer, we remind ourselves that this is so. Prayer is how we tune our hearts to hear God all around. And when we hear God, everything else

around us sounds and looks different. When we are tuned to God in prayer, the wind and rain sing God's praises, and the person in need has the voice of Christ. Make no mistake: prayer has the power to change the world, starting with ourselves. If you do choose a resolution this year, spiritual or otherwise, remember not to be too hard on yourself. It is better to make a small change and stick to it than to undertake a large one, and give up. Thanks be to God, we are a faith of forgiveness, of love, and of continual fresh starts. And besides, Lent is just a couple of months away!

January 2, 2014 Epiphany and the Modern Christian Martyrs

This Sunday, we keep the feast of the Epiphany, commemorating the visit of the three wise men (or magi) to the Christ child. Since the magi were gentiles from far away, one of the themes of this feast is the spreading of the Gospel to the whole world. As such, it is a proper time for reflecting on the Church across the globe.

Although it gets very little media attention, one of the most significant issues facing many Christians is violence, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The Vatican estimates that between 250 and 300 Christians are killed daily around the world because of their faith. That adds up to around 100,000 modern day Christian martyrs per year. In the Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, the very existence of the Christian faith is under threat. This Christmas Day in Iraq, 37 Christians were killed in bombings. Coptic churches in Egypt are being burned down at alarming rates, and Syrian Christians are fleeing their country by the thousands.

One of the dark sides of our contemporary culture is that we tend to major in the minors: we give our attention to rather insignificant things, while ignoring what matters most. The Church is by no means immune to this tendency. And so we debate whether or not there is a "war on Christmas" in the United States, when there is most certainly a war on Christmas and on Christians in the Middle East. This is not to diminish the real issues embedded in debates about Christmas in our culture, or Duck Dynasty or other religious controversies of the moment. But let's not forget to major in the majors: in this case, by remembering that there are brave Christians around the world, for whom practicing their faith today is a matter of life and death. One of the great strengths of our Anglican tradition is our ability to focus on the core of things, on what matters most, instead of getting distracted by peripherals. In fact, an Anglican, Prince Charles, has been one of the strongest advocates for persecuted Christians around the world. He is to be commended for drawing attention to this crisis.

What can we do about international violence towards Christians? Not much, unfortunately. But we can do at least three things:

* We can pray and advocate for peace and for the protection of Christians in dangerous places. This is a non-partisan issue. Every little bit of prayer and attention helps.

* We can nourish our relationships with Christians across the globe. Our Haiti partnership reminds us regularly that we are part of a worldwide communion, with brothers and sisters in Christ not just in Phoenix but everywhere.

* We can remember not to take our faith for granted. Whatever pressures American Christians may be under (and there are some), we are blessed with a remarkable freedom to exercise our religion. May we never cease to thank God and our Founding Fathers for giving us this freedom.

As we begin this New Year, may we do so with renewed gratitude for our faith, and determination to live it more fully, for our sakes, and the sake of others.

The Rector's Reflections

The Rev. Poulson Reed

2013

December 24, 2013 Different Kinds of Joy

In Advent, the Church calendar is somewhat out of synch with the secular one. While the culture around us is in the midst of the “Holiday Season,” starting earlier and earlier each year, the Church suggests that something as important as the coming of the Savior deserves some spiritual preparation. And so we keep an expectant and intentional Advent. At Christmas, there is a similar juxtaposition. For the secular world, Christmas largely ends on December 26th. But for Christians, Christmas is 12 days long, ending with the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. The song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” dates back to the 18th century, and depicts the traditional custom of giving presents on every day of the season. I’m not suggesting we give presents for all 12 days - though my children would, I’m sure, endorse the idea! But I do think the 12 days give us a gift from God.

Those of us who are parents remember well the different kinds of joy we experience when a child is born. There is the rush of excitement as the newborn enters the world, and takes his or her first breaths. But after a few days, if the baby is able to come home from the hospital, we experience something different but equally precious: the exhausted, wonderful settling into a new pattern of family life. Let’s not forget to celebrate all 12 days of Christmastide: the exuberant joy of Christmas Eve and day, with presents and loved ones and inspiring worship, and then the quieter, but differently joyful remaining days, giving thanks for Jesus Christ and all our blessings. For those who keep in prayer the full calendar of holy days, the 12 days provide a rich assortment of major feasts, both uplifting and reflective: Saint Stephen (Dec 26), Saint John (Dec 27), the Holy Innocents (Dec 28), and the Holy Name (Jan 1). But all of us can remember to make the most of this Christmastide. I wish every member of our All Saints’ community and those who are near to you a very merry Christmas – all 12 days of it.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come!

December 19, 2013 Mary: A Role Model in Faith

The fourth and final Sunday of Advent, this weekend, draws our attention to Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the Old Testament reading, we hear Isaiah's prophecy of the birth of the Savior: "look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Our gospel is the story of Jesus' birth from Matthew, a simpler and less familiar version than we get from Luke on Christmas Eve, with more of a role for Joseph. Much of our music this Sunday has a Marian (Mary focused) theme, and our education for adults at 10am explores the Rosary, an ancient form of patterned prayer that draws our attention to Christ through the example of Mary. Among Episcopalians, one finds a range of views and practices related to Mary. In some Episcopal churches, one would hear little of Mary apart from the Christmas story. At others, Marian prayers like the Rosary and Angelus are prayed daily, and Marian antiphons like the "Salve Regina" sung at the end of Evening Prayer. All Saints' has a small but dedicated group that prays the Rosary on Sundays at 10:15am in the chapel, and that gathers for the Eucharist and fellowship on three major Marian feast days each year. Anyone is welcome to join them.

When it comes to Mary, I believe that our Anglican tradition finds, as usual, a sensible and fruitful middle ground. We take no official position on the more controversial Roman Catholic doctrines of Mary, the Assumption (that she was bodily taken up into heaven), and the Immaculate Conception (that Mary herself - and not just Jesus - was conceived without sin). We give wide latitude because these are not core, creedal doctrines. We are similarly flexible with practice: Episcopalians may pray the Rosary (which is largely derived from the Bible) or a simplified version called the Anglican Rosary, or may choose other forms of prayer entirely. What I hope we can all agree on is that Mary is a wonderful role model for us in our faith, and as such, ought to be given proper respect and attention. Mary did not have to say "yes" to God's invitation through the angel Gabriel. But she did, and her assent changed the course of human history. Mary did three difficult things that are essential for genuine faith: she listened for God's will, and had courage both to agree to it, and to follow through. Mary was no passive wallflower. From Jesus' birth to his death on the Cross, Mary loved him and stayed by his side, as both mother and disciple. Our collect for this weekend asks God to help us prepare within our hearts a place for Christ. In that effort, Mary is our first and best example. She humbled herself and put her own wishes and plans aside to make room for Jesus in her life. For her faithfulness, she received happiness, as she watched her son grow, then pain, as he faced death, then immeasurable joy, as he was raised from the dead. Christmas is almost here! May we, like Mary, have the strength to be open to God's presence within us.

December 12, 2013 Blue, Purple, and Pink

If you were to attend multiple churches this Sunday, you would find a range of liturgical colors in use: some churches would feature purple, others blue, and others pink. The traditional color of Advent was purple, matching the penitential color of Lent. Many churches, especially Roman Catholic ones, still keep this practice. Relatively recently, though, some churches began using blue for Advent, including many Episcopal churches. The given reasons are usually three-fold: first, to give Advent a slightly different character from Lent; second, because blue is associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary; and third, as an homage to the Sarum tradition, the ancient custom of the much-loved English diocese of Salisbury.

At All Saints', we have a lovely set of royal blue vestments that we use in Advent. I like the vision of Advent that they represent. Our blue vestments are close enough in color to purple that they remind us that Advent and Lent are liturgical cousins. Both are seasons of preparation for the remembrance of God's saving acts, Jesus' birth and resurrection, respectively. As such, both are penitential. In the case of Advent, John the Baptist and the other prophets call on us to repent as we await the coming of the Savior. We cannot prepare the way of the Lord in our world and in ourselves without assessing what needs changing. And yet, there is an undercurrent of joyful expectation in this season that differs in tone from the sustained rigor of Lent. The best liturgical historians conclude that we actually don't know much about the "Sarum" colors of a thousand years ago, but it hardly matters. We use blue not merely to recall our English past, but because it represents our Anglican spirituality of Advent in the present: simultaneously penitential and joyful.

What about pink, you ask? This really is an ancient practice. Before the 9th century, Advent was 40 days long, like Lent. It began not after the feast of Saint Andrew (November 30) as we do now, but after the feast of Saint Martin (November 12). On the fourth Sunday of Advent and Lent, the penitential character was eased somewhat, and the color pink or rose was used, pointing toward the season's end in a few weeks. Advent is now just four weeks long, but many churches still use a pink candle in their Advent wreath or even rose vestments on the third Sunday in Advent on this "Gaedete Sunday" (so named for the proper introit of the day, from Philippians 4:4-6, which begins "Gaudete in Domino semper..." meaning "rejoice in the Lord always..."). As we light the pink candle this Sunday, we rejoice that our celebration of Christmas is not far off.

Why should we care about the colors we use? Because our worship is like a great tapestry or painting. Every aspect means something. Our blue vestments remind us to prepare our hearts seriously but with gladness for the coming Christ, and our pink candle tells us that the remaining time is short. The symbols of our worship are never just for show. Our sincere hope as liturgical Christians is that our outward worship, over

time, forms our hearts, and that our transformed hearts, by grace, inspire us to lead Godly lives. May it be so in this holy season.

December 5, 2013 Waiting Expectantly and Not Just Passing Time

Our son David loves playing with Legos, and so it was with great excitement that we noticed the Lego Advent calendar in Target a few weeks ago. Each day of Advent, David has eagerly awaited permission to open the next perforated, cardboard door, and extract the little Lego toy of the day. Given the choice, he would tear open all the doors in a frenzy, but he is learning the slower and more subtle joys of patience. Each day, his assortment grows. By the end of the season, he will have a whole Christmas scene to add to his Lego collection. I love Advent calendars. They are fun, useful tools for all ages, because they focus us, if only briefly, on the daily progression as we prepare for Christmas. They encourage us to wait not haphazardly but with intention, to notice each day and give it purpose, and to enjoy the passage of time. We need that reminder. If we don't pay attention to every day of this brief and precious season, Advent will rush by before we know it.

One of the spiritual poisons of modern life is wasted time. I don't mean just laziness or procrastination, but rather how we choose to use the time God has given us. We are busier than ever, but are we using our time wisely and well? We rush from activity to activity in our bodies and minds, losing touch with the sacredness of each day. When we have a few minutes free between appointments, how many of us instinctively pull out our smart phones to fill the time? We are creatures of habit. And so, every day, we are either building good habits or bad ones. As C.S. Lewis wisely pointed out, it is not just that our character shapes our actions, but also vice versa. Every single good decision that we are able to make, by God's grace, makes us more good. It is another foothold or handhold up towards the person we were meant to be. Conversely, every time we sin, even in a small way, it affects who we are, and we slip further away from our divine purpose. Advent is a great season in which to think about how we use our time. Are we productive? Are we purposeful? And especially: do we carve out enough time for others and for God? A random act of kindness, or some daily prayer, however brief, is an important choice we can make as we seek to grow into our true, best selves. The next time you have 5 minutes before your next appointment, instead of checking your phone, how about asking someone how they are doing? How about praying in your mind or closing your eyes and resting with God in silence, or reading one of the short forms of the Daily Office (BCP p. 136)?

This Sunday evening, we will observe another wonderful tradition of marking time: the O Antiphons. At Advent Lessons and Carols, the choir will offer the Arizona premiere of a setting of the O Antiphons, ancient texts which count down the last seven days before Christmas. Each antiphon describes a different prophetic attribute of the messiah (we know the antiphons best as the text of the Advent hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel). Traditionally, each antiphon is read or sung at Evening Prayer, beginning December

17th, but we will be able to hear them all in one night. Come and join us, if you are able, for this beautiful and peaceful service. May the remaining weeks of Advent be filled with moments of holy and expectant waiting, not just passing time, as we make room in our hearts for the Christ child to be born anew.

November 27, 2013 Advent: An Invitation to Simpler Living

Christians are not against having or enjoying possessions. One of the inescapable conclusions to be drawn from the incarnation, God being made flesh in Christ Jesus, is that God can be known to us through our material world. Jesus lived a human life. He enjoyed good food and drink with his friends, and appreciated the fine oil Mary of Bethany put on his weary feet. And in the sacraments, Jesus has given us the gift of ordinary things becoming vessels of divine grace. Simple bread and wine are transformed through the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ. In baptism, plain water is made holy and becomes the gate into new life. God provides us with what we need, but asks us in return to hold our possessions lightly and to use them wisely. We are stewards, entrusted with the care and sharing of God's gifts. Jesus taught his disciples to live simply, because to do so was of assistance both to themselves and to others. Living simply benefited them by freeing them from unhealthy attachments to money and things. Living simply benefited others, because if everyone shared, there was enough for all. The Book of Acts tells us that many early Christians lived together, humbly sharing their things in common and helping the poor, widows and orphans. This pattern is followed in Episcopal and Roman Catholic monasteries and convents to this day.

One trend that interests me in the wider culture right now is the simplicity movement. Some of the members of the simple living philosophy are Christians, and some are not. They have a variety of approaches. There are "100 thing" advocates, who try to live with no more than 100 possessions. "Tiny House" practitioners have taken downsizing to a remarkable degree, living in homes or cabins that are sometimes smaller than 100 square feet. Some people are limiting their use of technology, or reducing their impact on the environment by eating simply and growing some of their own food. Not many of us are likely to go quite as far as some of this, but at this time of year especially, it is good to remember how liberating simplicity can be. We make for ourselves lots of unnecessary stress, doing things we don't actually have to do, giving gifts to people who do not need or perhaps even want them. Here are just a few practical steps we can take to add some simplicity to our lives, give Advent more meaning, and benefit others.

+ Give one present instead of five or ten to each of our loved ones, and give to the poor gifts with some of the money we would have spent on each other. Again at All Saints' this year, we will give Christmas presents to the needy seniors at Maryland Gardens, and

the children of San Pablo Episcopal Church in Phoenix, and we will have an effort to finish the school building at Saint Paul's in Haiti.

- + Get the whole family to pitch in to make simple, nutritious meals, like soup, and to share some with our neighbors.
- + Schedule technology fasts and focus on more meaningful conversations and activities.
- + Make your confession. Advent is a season in which the Church has traditionally urged private confession for those who feel spiritually burdened. Part of simple living is being in right relationship with God and people. Making an individual confession with a priest a couple of times a year (Advent and Lent) is a great opportunity to reflect and cleanse. Contact one of the priests to make an appointment. If this is your first confession, we can teach you what to do.
- + Go to www.adventconspiracy.org for more ideas about how to keep focused on the most important things in the coming four weeks.

What seasonal expectations wear you down, and can they be simplified or even eliminated? There is nothing wrong with enjoying all that the holiday season has to offer: parties, trees and decorations, time with loved ones, and presents. But let us be mindful both of our spiritual health and of the needs of others as we begin this holy time of preparation for the birth of our Savior.

November 21, 2013 What Do You Say?

Children are used to hearing the prompt from their parents when we want them to thank someone for something: "What do you say?" Parents expect that over time our children will learn that it is polite to say thank you. But it is one thing to thank because we know we ought to, and quite another to thank out of genuine gratitude. Our deeper hope for our children is that they will grow truly to appreciate the many blessings in their lives. Gratitude is, for Christians, an essential spiritual practice. Our Prayer Book calls the Eucharistic Prayer "the Great Thanksgiving." Our worship **culminates** in our gratitude to God for making us, sustaining us, and saving us in Jesus Christ. And so, in a sense, every week for us is a Thanksgiving feast. One of the spiritual benefits of the annual Thanksgiving holiday is that it reminds us of the importance of giving thanks, ideally not just once a year but every day. The 13th century spiritual writer Meister Eckhart once said that if your only prayers to God were "thank you," that would be enough. One of the ways we can detect if our prayers of gratitude are perfunctory and out of habit or genuine and from the heart is by noticing what actions result in our lives. For those who see every day as overflowing with God's blessing, generosity and compassion are inevitable byproducts. To give God thanks for my health makes me more aware of those challenged by sickness or injury; to appreciate the food on my table and clothes on my back inspires me to share with those in need; to live in peace

and safety urges me to pray for and help those suffering from natural disaster or violence. Hopefully the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday sparks family conversations and prayers that enliven our sense of gratitude for God's blessings on us as individuals, families, Christians and citizens.

This Sunday we celebrate in gratitude with two specific themes: the Feast of Christ the King (the last Sunday of the liturgical year) and Commitment Sunday. As we bring our annual pledge campaign formally to an end this Commitment Sunday (though we welcome pledges at any time!), we still have some work to do. As I mentioned in my sermon last Sunday at 11am, the good news is that those who have pledged have increased by an average of 6%, which is fantastic. Thank you! The not-as-good news is that, at this point, many people have still not pledged. **We need a pledge from every single member** to offer the incredible ministries that make such a difference in the lives of so many both inside and outside of All Saints'. If the practical is as compelling to you as the spiritual, know this: pledges by our members make up by far the largest source of funding for our budget, and some costs (health insurance for staff, property and liability insurance, utilities, and maintenance on an aging building) go up every year no matter what. If everyone pledged the same amount every year, we would be able to do less and less, simply because of inflation. We need everyone to pledge, and to increase your pledge if at all possible, so that the Finance Committee and Vestry can plan for a vibrant 2014.

It's an exciting time at All Saints'. Here are just a few highlights of our recent success:

- + Our financial health remains much improved, and we are living within our means, with balanced budgets and sound financial practices. We are good stewards of every dollar given us.
- + Our worship and music are second to none. Fourth Sundays with incense and special music are drawing new people, and the recent Requiem, an American premiere, was enthusiastically received.
- + We are getting more comfortable praying with each other in our times of need through our prayer team and pastoral ministries.
- + Our children and youth programs are rejuvenated, and many new families have joined All Saints' over the last couple of years.
- + Our adult education offerings are lively, substantive and well attended. Our C.S. Lewis sessions have had more than 40 adults in each of the classes.
- + Third Thursdays have been a big hit, with around 80 people coming for intergenerational food, fellowship, learning and Compline.
- + At a recent fundraiser for ICM Food and Clothing Bank, All Saints' was singled out for praise by ICM's Executive Director for our consistent and dedicated support with money, clothing, food and volunteer hours.
- + Our newest local outreach initiative, Central Village, launches December 1st.
- + When our Haiti team returns to our partner, Saint Paul's, in January, we will complete a new school building, built with local labor and All Saints' church and school donations.

Your pledge makes all this, and dozens of other ministries possible. I give thanks to God, with genuine gratitude, for all we have been given at All Saints' and in our lives. And I thank God for all of you, and for our ministry together. Jesus Christ is King and Lord of all, and all that we do in his name is a sign that his kingdom is coming.

November 14, 2013 Seen and Unseen

We live our lives in the material world, among ordinary things that are seen. But our faith teaches us that many important things are unseen. Indeed, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, the essence of faith is to believe in what we cannot see: "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11). God is the maker of all that is, "seen and unseen" (Nicene Creed). When it comes to the importance of unseen things, science and faith overlap in interesting ways. Science is devoted to discovering things, many of which are invisible to the naked eye. At their best and most inspiring, science and faith speak a common language of wonder. When a physicist discovers a new particle or astronomers learn that there are some 40 billion earth-like planets in our Milky Way galaxy (as we learned last week from the Kepler Space Telescope), I find myself in awe at the unseen wonders of God's creation. The more we learn about our universe, the more we learn about our amazing, loving and creative God. As Psalm 19 says, "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork."

There is much in the realm of faith that we do not usually see; that does not make it any less real. In the Church, we believe in the communion of saints. We see some of the living saints around us on earth, but receive by faith that we are joined, through baptism in Christ, with the saints around the world and in heaven. At All Saints', we love our annual celebration of Seabury Sunday, this Sunday, for the stirring sound of bagpipes and drums, and the wearing of tartans. But as we give thanks for Samuel Seabury, the first bishop of The Episcopal Church, we also recall our connection with the wider Church, in all times and places. Why did Samuel Seabury have to go all the way to Scotland to be consecrated a bishop? Because he would not, in that time just after the Revolutionary War, swear allegiance to the British Crown. But why did he have to be consecrated at all? Because every bishop has been ordained by other bishops in the whole history of the Church, going back to Saint Peter. The unseen line of succession goes back to the Apostles. In a real sense, Seabury Sunday is a continuation of our celebration of All Saints and All Souls, marking the permeable barrier between the seen and unseen Church.

At the level of the individual parish church, there is also much seen and unseen. One of the signs of a healthy church is an abundance of ministries, both "official" and informal, those seen by many and those behind the scenes. Some of our most important ministries flourish in relative anonymity. This is particularly true of our outreach and pastoral care ministries. When a dedicated group of All Saints' members feeds the homeless at André House or helps the needy at ICM or builds a home with Habitat for

Humanity, most of us don't see their work, but it has enormous impact on those who are blessed by its benefit. The clergy discretionary funds, which receive their funds from clergy wedding and funeral honoraria and donations, give many thousands of dollars each year in discreet aid to needy parishioners and to worthy organizations. Similarly, our pastoral care team of clergy and lay people offers comfort on behalf of all us to the sick, dying, and to those in life transitions, though most of that care is private and often confidential. Some of our most meaningful pastoral ministries are our funerals. Some weeks we have no funerals, and others are like last week, when we had five. As we enter the final official week of our pledge campaign, I ask you to consider the crucial ministries of All Saints', and to support them generously through a pledge, if you have not done so. Your gifts make God's love visible to those who need it most.

November 7, 2013 A Glorious Difference

"How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been; how gloriously different are the saints." (C.S. Lewis)

Part of what I think Lewis is getting at in this quote is the essential difference between good and evil, in all their forms. Evil has no life in itself; it can only corrupt what is good. Therefore, all human sin looks alike. The child who grabs his crying brother's toy and the bully on the playground and the unethical businessman who breaks the law are all but variations on a theme. All sin at its root is selfishness: taking for ourselves what rightly ought to be shared with God and other people. In contrast, good is endless in its variety, because its source is the abundance of God. Remember Jesus' parable about the gifts? For those who use their God-given gifts generously, more and more gifts will come their way. The saints share in common their love of God and their neighbors, following the example of Christ Jesus. But beyond that, Lewis is right: they are gloriously different. The variety of good done by God through the communion of saints over the centuries is almost infinite. For every saint the Devil has struck down, ten more have sprung up, inspired by their Christ-like sacrifice. What is godly grows and is fruitful.

This is a very holy time of year. Last week for All Saints' Sunday, we celebrated the heroes of faith, the great crowd of saints who inspire us with their faithfulness and courage. And we welcomed into the communion of saints five new Christians through baptism. This Sunday, in the evening, we offer a Requiem Eucharist for the faithful departed who were near and dear to us. As we read their names, and worship together with this stunningly beautiful, contemporary setting of the Requiem, we will give thanks for the varieties of good they, too, have done by God's grace while they lived. These everyday saints live on as we remember and emulate them, even as they are at rest in God ("requiem" means "rest"). If there is someone in your life who has died that you recall with particular affection, I urge you to attend the Requiem. If you appreciate music you will hear nowhere else, please come. It is a rather long service, in part because of the reading of names, and in part because to celebrate a full musical setting of a Requiem in its liturgical context takes time. But it will be well worth your

commitment. I would also add that it is only through the generous pledges of our members and friends that we are able to offer meaningful worship like this rare Requiem, as well as the nearly 100 funerals we provide every year, and our many other ministries of prayer, education, pastoral care, outreach and fellowship.

Thanks be to God for All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School, and for all those who have gone before, both known and unknown to us. How gloriously different are the saints, and how glorious is the difference they have made in our lives, and in the world.

October 31, 2013 Ghosts, Zombies and Saints

Christians are not in full agreement about Halloween. Some evangelical churches teach that Halloween is an evil holiday, urge their parishioners to avoid it, and try to offer Christian alternatives. I understand where they are coming from, and I would agree with them on at least one aspect: evil is real, and we ought to be careful how we engage with it, even in jest. I think some costumes are inappropriate, and some activities, like Ouija boards, put us in spiritually unhealthy or even dangerous positions. But I think most Halloween traditions are fun and not harmful to Christian life. My family will be trick or treating as usual this year: the boys will be Luke Skywalker and Yoda, respectively.

Whether trashing Harry Potter books or "The Da Vinci Code," or decrying too much Santa Claus and not enough Jesus at Christmas, it is easy for churches to spend a lot of energy battling the culture. In some cases, I think these cultural scuffles are misguided. The Harry Potter books, for instance, are not only great fun, but teach many values I would describe as Christian. I don't believe J.K. Rowling is advocating black magic. In others matters of faith vs culture, the forces are so one-sided that a battle is pointless. Santa Claus is going to out-market our Savior every time, no matter what I wish were so. If your church has a reputation for being bitterly against everything, especially relatively minor things that most people enjoy, I think that church is not a place many unchurched people will want to go. My hope for All Saints' is that we will be known chiefly for what we are **for**, rather than what we are **against**. And what we are for is a diverse community, united in our strong faith in Jesus Christ, understood and lived through the Anglican tradition.

This weekend, we celebrate All Saints, our feast of title. All Saints' Sunday is an important day not only for us, but for the whole Church. It is one of only four major feasts specifically recommended for Holy Baptism by the prayer book, and we will baptize five new Christians this Sunday. All Saints' day is a wonderful example of what we are for. On All Saints', we remember the faithful who have died, especially those who have sacrificed greatly for the cause of Christ. This "great cloud of witnesses" urges us to live as committed disciples of Jesus as we strive, like them, to fulfill our baptismal calling to be saints. Halloween, or All Hallow's Eve, is fun, but is nowhere near as compelling as the true faith we recall on All Saints' day (All Hallow's Day). For us, the

dead are alive, not as ghosts or zombies, but in the communion of saints. We believe that the souls of the righteous are with God and His holy angels as we all await the final resurrection of the dead of which Jesus' resurrection is the precursor and sign. Our own All Saints' Church is hallowed with the prayers of 60 years' worth of faithful people in this place, joined with those of all the saints, past, present and yet to come with whom we worship God. The stained glass saints that surround us in our church represent the saints who surround us when we worship, and as we seek to be faithful Christians every day. We, the Church on earth, draw strength from the witness of those who have gone before, the Church Triumphant. They live on in Christ, and in holy places especially, we sometimes feel their presence.

A final thought, related to our pledge campaign. This week, a Christian research group released a report on financial giving to churches. The news was grim. Giving to mainline churches has dropped to an average of 2.3% of parishioners' income, the lowest level since the Great Depression. To me, the news was not surprising. There are far too many of what my clergy friend Scott Gunn has called "Zombie Churches." Zombie churches are not quite dead, but not living either. Faced with dwindling and aging membership and diminished giving, they focus more and more on cautious self-preservation, griping, and remembering the golden days, instead of boldly living and proclaiming the Gospel and trying new things. All Saints', thanks be to God, is a healthy and multigenerational church, drawing strength from a living tradition. But our present and future depend on knowing our values, practicing a vigorous faith, giving generously, and sharing the Gospel with others. Every pledge helps us be a vibrant, hopeful, positive church that makes a difference. In that rewarding ministry, we are urged on by all the saints, who now from their labors rest.

October 24, 2013 Bearing Fruit

Our first Easter in Phoenix, Megan and I planted a small lime tree in our yard. That little tree has been a wonderful teacher, and mostly it has taught me humility. I am no gardener, and so it was news to me that a lot of things have to go right to end up with good limes. You need plenty of sunshine (easy enough) and just the right amount of water and fertilizer. You need to prune the branches, and watch out for freezes in the winter (those have been our main challenge). And when the fruit is ripe, you have to notice, or it will drop to the ground before you pick it. The few times we have ended up with good limes, they have tasted more delicious for the modest work we have put into them.

I think there is a little bit of farmer in each of us. We delight to see something grow, and bear fruit. Although we sometimes forget it in our modern, urban, technologically advanced world, human culture is only a few hundred years removed from a mostly agricultural economy. That is why agricultural language is so pervasive in the Bible. The Old Testament is largely the story of a people seeking a place to plant and, spiritually, to be planted. The very first psalm in the psalter uses agricultural imagery to describe

those who follow God: “they are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper.” In the New Testament, Jesus’ parables are filled with seeds being scattered and sown, and vines growing. He spoke in terms the people of his day could understand. Saint Paul talks about planting churches and watering them. And when the Bible speaks of success by God’s definition, it uses the language of fruitfulness. As Jesus says in John 15: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.” And again, Saint Paul describes as “fruits of the Spirit” the Christian qualities of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

I have the privilege as your rector of seeing All Saints’ from a wide view. I try to be as aware as possible of the range of ministries we offer, and it is a sign of the breadth of that range that even I don’t know all the good that is happening at and through All Saints’ at any given time. From my vantage point, I see an enormous amount of fruit growing here by God’s good grace. Our traditional worship and music on Sunday mornings, and monthly at Evensong and now at Compline, are compelling in their excellence and devotion. Our new Third Thursdays have been a big hit, and members are bringing friends and family to share in the experience. Our renewed children, youth and family programs are helping families grow in faith. We have more adult education classes and groups available this year. Our offerings of money and volunteer time outside our church make a huge difference, whether at ICM or André House or with Habitat for Humanity or our partner church and school in Haiti. And when Central Village launches in December, it will provide a number of new ways to support and empower the seniors in our area. The fruitfulness of All Saints’ is God’s doing. It is God who blesses us with the abundant seeds of the Gospel. But it is our calling in baptism to do our best to scatter those seeds, and to tend their growth. Thanks be to God, All Saints’ is a healthy and fruitful church that nourishes our own members and many others in faith.

When the Church speaks of financial giving, we still use the language of harvest. The offerings of faithful Jews in the Bible were the fruits of the field: grain and livestock. The traditional, Biblical standard of giving, the tithe, was a measurement of 10% of one’s crop given back to God in thanksgiving for the abundant harvest. As you prayerfully consider your annual pledge to All Saints’ church, I ask you to keep in mind this sense of harvest giving. The Bible does not envision giving back to God from what is left over, but rather a proportion of the first fruits. All Saints’ will continue to be a faith community that is abundant with the fruits of the Spirit if we, its members, give generously of our first fruits of time, talent and treasure that we have graciously been given. Let us never assume that fruitfulness is automatic; it takes effort. But when we are blessed with it, and when we do our part to be a blessing through it to others, the fruit is sweet indeed.

October 16, 2013 Pumpkin Lattes and Pledges

Did you know that pumpkin flavor is a multi-million dollar industry? From cupcakes to coffee drinks to hand soaps, pumpkin is everywhere, celebrating that fall is here. Why is it so popular? The combination of smells and tastes we associate with pumpkin is nostalgic and comforting. It reminds us of watching our grandmother baking, a warm sweater on a crisp morning, and holiday meals with loved ones. In our uncertain times, comfort sells. Jesus Christ has given us the Church both to comfort and to challenge us. There are periods in our life when we need our church to comfort us. In tragedy, whether personal and familial or national and civic, the Church's pastoral support can soothe the pain and seek out God's greater purpose. In this, we follow the example of Jesus, who healed the sick and brought hope to the needy. But there are other times when we need the Church to challenge us to grow in faith, as Jesus challenged the Pharisees and even his own disciples. The annual pledge campaign is in this latter category. Every year at this time, we ask every member and friend of All Saints' to make a pledge, an estimate of financial giving for the coming year. A pledge is not a contract; it can always be adjusted. But it is a prayerful commitment to support God's mission and ministries which we share in this place.

Why is pledging a challenge? Because it is a revealing measurement of our relationship with God. So much of our spiritual life is not measurable. There are few metrics for kindness or integrity, for instance, which is why self-deception in these areas is so easy. When it comes to our financial giving, though, the Bible has given us a clear and lofty goal: the tithe, 10% of our income. We either tithe, or we do not. We are either working steadily and intentionally toward tithing, or we are not. Now, let us understand: there are exceptions to every rule. If someone is unemployed or in the midst of divorce or caring at home for an aging parent, for example, tithing now may not be possible. We might speculate about whether the 10% is entirely for the Church, as tradition has taught, or could be shared among several worthy charities (I am fine with the latter). But let us not permit the proper exceptions of the few to negate God's hopes for the many.

In general, I find that one's view of tithing tends to be determined by whether one tithes or not. For many who do not do it, it seems onerous and unrealistic. But for those who do, it is a liberating gift. I have never known an unhappy tither, because the tither sees God's blessings all around them. From their point of view, God has given them ten precious jewels. Ten! It seems so little to give one of the ten back, in gratitude and for the benefit of others. I have seen the change in myself. Before I tithed, I thought it was too hard. Since Megan and I started tithing to All Saints' 4 years ago, it has become a spiritual habit, one small gesture of gratitude to God for blessing our family and for bringing us to this church and school that we love. Every person's financial circumstance is different; only you can determine what you feel God is calling you to pledge this year. Every pledge of any size helps, and time and talent are important parts of the equation, too. Pledging grows our trust in God's goodness. 10% or something close to it feels like a

stretch for anyone. To tithe is to trust that, as we are providing for others, so too will God continue to provide for us, as Jesus promised.

I encourage everyone to make a pledge to All Saints' for 2014 before the end of our campaign on Commitment Sunday, November 24th. Each and every one of you truly is the heart and soul of All Saints', and I thank God for you. It gives me joy to serve with you as your rector.

Ten Good Reasons to Tithe

or to make a pledge that is an intentional percentage of income, working towards a tithe.

Pledging grows our trust in God's goodness. 10% or something close to it feels like a stretch for anyone. To tithe is to trust that, as we are providing for others, so too will God continue to provide for us, as Jesus promised.

Pledging helps us live more simply. One of the plagues of modern life is our endless accumulation and consuming of possessions. Pledging trains us, as the slogan goes, to "live more simply, that others may simply live."

Pledging deepens our service. Those who pledge are more likely to share their time and talent in service, and vice versa.

Pledging encourages sound financial planning. Megan and I use the automatic bank withdrawal for our pledge. We don't have to remember every week or month, and it has become part of our regular, prudent planning.

Pledging shares the financial burden equally. The beauty of tithing is that everyone who does it gives their fair share. Those who have more, give more, and those who have less, give less.

Pledging makes a huge difference in the lives of others. Our ministries at and through All Saints' make a difference in literally thousands of lives in our church, our area, and around the world. That's amazing!

Pledging shows our parishioners' confidence in our fiscal management. Over the past three years, through the hard work of our leaders, All Saints' has become more and more fiscally healthy. We had an essentially balanced budget in 2011, and a small surplus in 2012, the first in many years. The staff and vestry are wise stewards of the resources entrusted to us by our members. Pledges help us budget more effectively.

Pledging could give All Saints' all we need and more. Our members have far more money than All Saints' needs to fund our ministries. But some give 10% of their income while others give 1% or even less. We have non-pledge appeals throughout the year

because our pledge income does not fully fund our ministries. Imagine if we held a single, big fundraiser every year, and gave all the money away. If most of us gave close to a tithe, we could do that, with plenty left for our ministries.

Pledging helps us offer our unique ministries. No place in the Valley offers the combination of values and excellence in ministries that All Saints' does: a big tent where all are warmly welcomed, traditional worship and music, learning and programs for all ages, and a focus on serving others.

Pledging practices our ethical decision making. Life is full of choices. Why not start with one or two fewer pumpkin lattes per week, giving the money you would have spent to a worthy cause? See how you feel, and consider next steps.

October 10, 2013 Pass It On!

This Sunday we welcome the Reverend Sam Portaro as our guest preacher and teacher. Sam has been an enormously influential figure in The Episcopal Church in a host of ways. He is the author of many important books, including *Brightest and Best: A Companion to Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, the essential devotional resource for those who follow the daily calendar of saints. And he was the architect of perhaps the most vibrant Episcopal college ministry in our Church: Brent House at the University of Chicago, where Sam served as Director from 1982 until his retirement in 2004. In his retirement, Sam continues to share his gifts with the Church as a guest preacher and teacher, author, and retreat leader. Still, for me, Sam's most influential role was as mentor. For the 2001-02 academic year, I served as an intern at Brent House under Sam's guidance (at the same time I also interned at a fine parish, Grace Church in Oak Park, IL). I was preparing to be ordained in June 2002, and was testing a variety of vocational possibilities. Although in the end I felt called to parish ministry, I have always felt drawn to the intersection of education and faith (which is part of what led me to All Saints'). The sense of community that Sam created at Brent House has lingered in my mind as a model for the Church. The combination of meaningful worship, intellectual rigor, and generous welcome I found there is, I believe, the very best of our Episcopal tradition.

Sam was a wise and kind mentor in an important time in my life as my priestly identity was forming. Part of what I remember of that year is that he always found time for me, and for the students at Brent House. We recall in the gospels (including our gospel for this Sunday) that much of Jesus' most significant ministry happens when he is on his way to something or someone else. Jesus is always pausing to answer questions or to heal. The best mentors share Jesus' gift of being present to someone, even if the timing isn't convenient. Sam helped pass on wisdom and faith to a young, almost-priest, and I will always be grateful. In addition to Sam's visit, this Sunday we also begin our annual pledge campaign. There will be much more to say about this between Sunday and the end of the campaign on November 24th. But suffice it to say, for now, that our annual pledge is all about passing it on. God abundantly blesses us with more than we need. In

return, God asks us to pass it on, to share from what we have with others. When we do that, everyone has what they need, and the giver is spiritually blessed in giving. God is doing amazing things at and through All Saints', and more and more people are starting to notice. Pass it on!

October 3, 2013 The Real Saint Francis

Francis of Assisi is arguably the most popular of all the saints, equaled only by Saint Mary, the mother of Christ. His popularity is not a modern development. Saint Francis was revered as a holy man in his own lifetime. Crowds gathered to hear his compelling sermons; his fierce eloquence was such that, it was said, it was as if his whole body was a tongue. Christ-like miracles were associated with him: even the dirty water from his washed feet was purported to have healing properties. In the eight centuries since his death, his renown has only grown. Millions of Franciscans and others have modeled their Christian lives after his example, including the current Pope, who pointedly took the name Francis.

In our own Episcopal Church, Francis is chiefly acknowledged in two ways: first, as the author of the Prayer of Saint Francis, and second, as the inspiration of the annual Blessing of the Animals services that take place around his feast day of October 4th. It is not likely that Francis himself wrote the prayer associated with him, but that hardly matters. It is a beautiful and inspiring prayer, consistent with his theology and life. Only good can come when we pray to be instruments of God's peace, sowing love in place of hatred, bringing pardon to injury and joy to sadness. It is a prayer about the power of God's resurrection life, which gives us courage to bring light to the dark places of the world. As for the Blessing of Animals, I doubt Francis would object. He did have a deep love for God's creation, especially for animals. Whether or not the birds actually listened to his sermons or the wolf agreed to stop killing the village livestock at Francis' request, there is no doubt these legends arose out of a genuine connection to the natural world. Francis was also known for his sense of humor; surely he would have enjoyed the mingling of barking, laughter and holy water in the Memorial Garden this Sunday.

But as we remember Saint Francis, let us also take care not to soften him. Francis was radically committed to following Jesus. Those teachings of Christ which we consider too hard, too unrealistic, Francis followed to the letter. He grew up in a wealthy family, and was a playboy as a young man. He went to war on a lark, seeking adventure. But he was captured and wounded, imprisoned for a year, and then nearly died of illness. In these crises, God turned his heart. Francis gave up all his wealth, even the clothes on his back, and vowed a life of Christ-like poverty and humble service. He wore a dirty tunic, no shoes, slept on the ground, and kept no money or even food beyond his "daily bread." He literally embraced lepers, the most reviled people of his day, and served those most in need. Humility, simplicity and compassion were at the core of his life.

We need his example. We are tempted to cynicism, when people and human institutions like our government let us down. We are tempted to lukewarm Christianity that comforts but does not challenge us, that asks of us no sacrifice, no transformation. Francis shows us that to follow Christ is difficult, but not impossible. As individual Christians, and as the Church, we need his reminder to be bold disciples, living and spreading the gospel with vigor. To do so, even imperfectly, is to be an instrument of God's peace.

September 26, 2013 All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School: Serving Together for Good

One of the themes that runs through the Bible is the importance of relationship. In the Genesis stories, God establishes the essential value of human companionship and families. In forging a covenant with God's people, God is bound to humanity to lead us into holiness and purpose. The prophets recall those who go astray to repentance and right relationship with God. In Jesus Christ, God makes the ultimate gesture of connection, becoming human to be united with us forever. And the writings of Saint Paul teach that Christians are not solitary beings, but are linked to one another through Christ. In the Biblical worldview, we are always better when we join with God and each other for a noble purpose. We can do and can become much more together than we could on our own.

Last year, the day school celebrated our 50th anniversary, and the church our 60th. These anniversaries were a reminder that for all but the first decade, All Saints' has been a church **and** school. The school began small, a far cry from the more than 500 students we have now, but nonetheless it is important that we have been together almost from the beginning. As with any healthy relationship, we have been and remain a blessing to each other. All Saints' would not be who we are without this vital connection of church and school. One way we recognize this is at our annual Day School Sunday celebration, this Sunday. It will be a grand day, with a day school panel at 10am in Saint Barbara, a festive Eucharist at 11am with the Day School Choristers joining the Senior Choir, and a reception afterwards generously sponsored by the Day School Admissions Department.

In anticipation of this celebration of the church's largest outreach ministry, I've been thinking about how God blesses us in this partnership. The relationship of church and school shapes our collective identity in some significant ways, of which these are just a few.

Spirituality. Our relationship with a loving God is at the heart of who we are, and we acknowledge and deepen that relationship with prayer. All Saints' is soaked in prayer. We worship an average of 12 times per week during the school and program year, including 3 day school chapels weekly. Almost every single day, we are praising God and

remembering the needs of others. Our students come from a variety of religious traditions, but respect the broad, Episcopal ethos of our school as an important aspect of character formation.

Activity. For much of our year, between church and school, All Saints' is active 7 days a week. This is not just "busy-ness," but meaningful ministry and learning. The energy is a sign of the difference we make in our own All Saints' community and beyond. Our excellent facilities support this activity and will be even better with the development of our property across Stella Lane.

Learning. Obviously learning is the core of our school, and in part because of the inspiration of our fine school, All Saints' is a community that emphasizes learning for **all** ages. From the earliest days with Father Urbano, who was a gifted and compelling teacher, up to the present, we have appreciated learning as we all grow in faith and knowledge.

Children. The presence of children during the week continues on weekends. We have a vibrant children, youth and family program at the church made up of families both from the school and elsewhere. The lack of young people is a crisis in many congregations, but not here. Our many families are engaged in the life of the church and serve in leadership.

Impact. As a church and school, we can have much more impact for good together than we ever could on our own. One example is our Haiti partnership. All Saints' has made an enormous difference for the people of Saint Paul's, and they for us. So far, we have worked with them to build a latrine, provide goats and wedding rings, support teacher salaries, and build a school building. And there is more to come.

May God continue to bless All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School, one community in two parts, as we grow and serve together for good.

September 18, 2013 Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

Most of us have heard the children's prayer:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I shall die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.*

Some of us grew up praying that prayer before bed; perhaps some still do. My guess, though, is that it is falling out of use, because, let's face it, it's kind of morbid. For those

families with young children that pray before bed these days, most use some format that gives thanks for their blessings and asks God's help for those in need. Especially with very young children, the prayers can be quite imaginative. You know what I mean: *Thank you, God, for pizza, because it is so delicious, and for my best friend Suzy, even though she was mean to me today at recess, and please help our sick hamster Otis to get better soon. Amen.*

There is something very deep and natural about praying at the end of the day. The very first Christians, following ancient Jewish practice, prayed several times a day, with special emphasis on the morning and evening. In the 4th century, monks and nuns formalized the practice, and it was around that time that Compline was created. Compline is a brief service of psalms, readings and prayers at the end of the day. The word comes from the Latin meaning "to complete," and so these prayers give thanks to God for the day that has been completed. But they do something else, too: they ask for God's protection in the coming night, and remind those praying that God is with them always, even in death. And so, that odd, 18th century nursery rhyme prayer isn't so strange from an historical point of view. Like so many other night prayers, it is assuring us of God's love and protection when we sleep in life, and when we sleep in death. Our prayer book form of Compline expresses this poignantly in its opening words: "The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end."

Compline is one of the most beautiful forms of common prayer in our tradition, and we are pleased to offer it each Third Thursday through March, at 7:30pm in the main church. It will be a lovely way to end our Third Thursday evenings, before we go home to bed (if you can't make the whole Third Thursday program of supper and education/activities, you are welcome to come just for Compline). If you have never been to a Compline prayer service before, here is what you can expect. The atmosphere will be peaceful, with the lights slightly dimmed. Compline is mostly sung in simple chants, with help from our fabulous Women's Chant Choir. Its form doesn't change much, with set psalms and readings, because it was often sung by memory, in dim light, by tired people. Our Compline will include the opportunity to light a votive candle in prayer, and receive an individual blessing or share a prayer request with a priest. You will leave this 20 minute service with a sense of peace and refreshment. All are welcome, including our families with children.

I have had several meaningful experiences of Compline in my life. When I was a graduate student at Yale, I was part of a group that began Compline at an Episcopal parish on the campus. It continues to this day, at 9pm on Sundays, at Christ Church, New Haven. Much to our surprise, the quiet holiness of Compline caught on, and it became a popular "study break" for Yale students. Much the same thing happened at Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle, which began the Compline renewal in The Episcopal Church some 57 years ago. Hundreds of young adults come to Compline at Saint Mark's seeking a sense of mystery and healing. Our Prayer Book liturgies work remarkably well in varied contexts: I have been part of glorious, choral Complines, and

simple, spoken Compline services at hospital bedsides, late at night. Each was nourishing in its own way. Some vivid memories are from silent retreats in monasteries. If you ever go on retreat in a Benedictine community, you will discover that after Compline comes the Great Silence: no words are spoken until the early morning prayers of the next day.

We will be praying Compline together on Third Thursdays. But remember that anyone can pray these prayers alone, or with loved ones. Compline is on page 127 of the Book of Common Prayer, and unlike Morning and Evening Prayer, it can be read from start to finish without other resources. I also recommend the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (page 136 and following). These are very short forms of daily prayer. The last one, *At the Close of Day*, follows the basic pattern of Compline and is a great choice for families and others at bedtime.

September 12, 2013 A New Heaven and a New Earth

I suspect most of us remember where we were and what we were doing when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 took place. It was a defining moment in modern American history, and like many such moments, it becomes intertwined in our personal histories. I was in Connecticut on that fateful day, packing my car to drive that morning to Chicago, where I would be serving for the year as an intern in campus ministry at the University of Chicago. The route I had planned to drive was going to be around New York. I was about an hour from departing, when I heard the tragic news. It was a beautiful, sunny, seemingly ordinary fall day.

A lot changed on 9/11. One of the things that changed was how the Church as a whole thinks about war. For the more than 2,000 years of the Christian Church, our perspective on war has tended to move between two poles: Pacifism and Just War Theory. In every era, there are Christian pacifists who oppose all wars, almost without exception. For example, Paul Jones, the Episcopal Bishop of Utah, was a pacifist who opposed World War One, and lost his office because of his unpopular stance. But the more prominent position in Christian history, including in our Anglican tradition, has been Just War Theory. This stance, growing out of the writings of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, recognizes that there will be times when war is necessary, but argues that it ought to be carried out with certain ethical principles in mind. By these theories, a war may be just if it meets two sets of criteria, the *jus ad bellum* (the right to go to war) and the *jus in bello* (proper conduct in the war). For example, a nation may be justified in going to war as a last resort, in self defense, or because the cause is right and not to act militarily would cause more suffering than acting. And then, having decided to go to war, civilians should be protected as much as possible, and prisoners of war treated humanely.

As you can imagine, after 9/11, the Church's concepts of Just War became much more challenging to apply. How do Just War theories apply when terrorists, rather than a nation, attack? Who are the soldiers and who are the civilians, and how does one tell them apart when the battle lines are by no means clear? What is a proportional response, and what consequences of action and inaction can be calculated?

Right now, we are having a national debate about whether or not to intervene with military force in Syria. The situation is changing daily, and good options seem hard to come by. As in every aspect of life, it is helpful to think about these issues in the context of our faith. As Episcopalians, we hold essential doctrines of the faith in common, but have considerable latitude on other, non-creedal matters. We recognize that good people of faith will have differing views on matters of war and peace. When seemingly impossible situations like the civil war in Syria are before us, I appreciate our Anglican tradition, which is both humble and pragmatic. We are humble, because we recognize that we do not know all the answers to the world's challenges. And we are pragmatic, because we are not naïve, but understand that some actions are not ideal, but necessary. We have always had Episcopal chaplains and soldiers in the military, and even have an Episcopal Bishop for the Armed Services. General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff during World War Two and later Secretary of State and then Secretary of Defense, famously described himself as neither a Republican nor a Democrat but an Episcopalian.

And so, as the individual members of the community of All Saints' consider matters of war and peace, we can remember several things. We always pray weekly for our Armed Forces at home and abroad, and for their families. May we never forget the heroic sacrifice these men and women make on our behalf. As members of the All Saints' community, we will have different points of view on many matters. In keeping with the latitude and humility of our tradition outside of core matters of doctrine, we will respect those whose opinions differ from our own. That is one of the great gifts of our centrist approach, that we can disagree but remain friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. And finally, we will pray for peace. This is not naïve, but is grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. We just finished our summer study of the Book of Revelation. We remember especially this week that prophetic vision of the future, when Christ comes again in glory: a new heaven and a new earth, where God will wipe away all tears, and death and mourning and crying will be no more. May it be so, in God's good time.

September 5, 2013 Kickoff Sunday is Here!

It is only partially correct to think of this Sunday as Kickoff Sunday, because if we stick with the football analogy, it implies that the summer has been the “off season.” While things do slow down at All Saints’ in the summer, giving much needed opportunities for rest and refreshment for volunteers and staff, there is still a lot of ministry that happens in the summer months. Much of our ministry is year round. But at the same time, there is no denying the wonderful energy that comes with our fall schedule every year: the choirs return to add their remarkable gifts to our worship, our Christian education for all ages resumes, and the fuller schedule of liturgies offers more variety of worship times and styles as we welcome back over the coming months those many members and visitors who spend the summer elsewhere. The fall is also when we offer again a range of programs both returning and new on weekdays. Between church and school, we are a seven day a week community until mid-summer, and we love the constant and purposeful activity, making a difference here and beyond. This year is an exciting time in our common life, and more people are spreading and hearing the good news about what All Saints’ has to offer, as we seek to follow Christ together. Now in my fifth year as your Rector, I rejoice in how we are responding enthusiastically to God’s call.

The healthiest of congregations continually find fresh ways to draw inspiration from our living tradition. I like to think of All Saints’ as a place that is traditional without being stuffy, welcoming all to this ancient faith that we practice. One symbol of this is our traditional logo, which returns to our materials this fall, though slightly refreshed. It was designed during the era of Father Urbano, our first Rector, and can be found in wrought iron in five places on our church and school campus (can you find them all?). We are bringing it back this year in our printed and electronic materials, just slightly renewed for the sake of clarity (for example, what has looked like a simple rectangle is now clearly a book, the Bible). Our traditional logo is a striking symbolic representation of what we believe, as you will see below. I am delighted that we have brought back a distinctive and unique part of our history to inspire us again in our present day.

There are so many options for involvement this program year that it may feel a bit daunting at first. So I encourage you to read through the announcements, and then to reflect and pray about where you feel God calling you at this time in your life. We have an abundance of ways to pray, learn, serve and connect. Do you feel that your spiritual life is balanced? Are you finding the right ratio of comfort to challenge, of nourishment of self to service to others? What spiritual practices might help you become more Christ-like? Let us begin this season of discovery and celebration, together.



August 28, 2013 Bending Towards Justice

Wednesday, August 28th marked the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's famous "I have a dream" speech, delivered to over 250,000 people from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The speech is remembered not only as one of the most important speeches of the 20th century, but as a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. This anniversary is a fitting time to read or listen to the speech again ([click here for the YouTube video](#)) and to research its origins and circumstances. Did you know, for example, that the part of the speech that we remember best was not in the prepared text? The stirring "I have a dream" section was added spontaneously by Dr. King in response to the urging of African American gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who shouted to Dr. King from the crowd, "Tell them about the dream, Martin!" One of my other favorite moments in the speech comes earlier, when Dr. King talks about "the fierce urgency of Now." It's a powerful phrase. What he meant by it was the need to act both strongly and swiftly against great injustice, rather than giving in to the temptation to take things slowly, which he called "the tranquilizing drug of gradualism."

What are we to make of his words in our own day? In 2013, we can surely look back over the past 50 years and see much progress in our democracy in many areas. And it is undoubtedly also true that our work towards a more perfect union is never done. Dr. King was always first and foremost a preacher, and his speeches have not only the cadences of sermons but also, often, their theology. He approached civic matters from the perspective of faith. We are wise to do the same. As Christians, we are not cynical but realistic when we acknowledge that the only perfect society is the Kingdom of God, begun by Jesus Christ at his coming, and fulfilled only when he returns. Human beings are flawed and so even the best societies and systems of governance fall short, at times, of our dreams. Our Christian duty is to do our best to embody the Kingdom of God here and now, in our lives, churches, and communities. What does that look like? It is no less

than looking at our communities, nation and world and asking ourselves: what seems to be working as God intends, and what is not? What is just, and what is not? Often, these are not easy questions to answer, and not all people of faith always come up with the same answers. But we trust in the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth. Some change does take time and discernment, but where injustice seems particularly clear and pronounced, we may find Dr. King's words and example echoing in our hearts and minds.

Whenever we lose hope, because we do not know the way, or because it seems far off, we can take comfort in our faith that God's Kingdom is coming. As Dr. King said some nine months after his speech in Washington, this time at the commencement exercises for Wesleyan University: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

August 22, 2013 Coming in September: Third Thursdays!

Starting in September, we are offering something new and exciting at All Saints': Third Thursdays. We've had requests for more intergenerational fellowship, and for more programs in addition to Sundays, and we've heard you! Every Third Thursday of the month, from September through March, we will gather for a tasty, simple meal from 6-6:30 pm in St. Barbara, provided by some of your favorite local restaurants. Appropriate for all ages, affordable and fun, these meals will give us the chance for nourishing food, conversation and good, old-fashioned fellowship. It's one night you don't need to worry about cooking dinner or cleaning up for you and your family. At 6:30pm, we'll have breakout groups with fun activities and education for all ages. And then at 7:30pm, we will pray Compline, the nighttime prayers from our Prayer Book. It will be a holy, peaceful, brief worship time for all ages with help from the Women's Chant Choir. (Our Third Thursday Compline takes the place of Taizé this year.) We will be done no later than 8pm.

What are the benefits of Third Thursdays? We'll have more opportunity to connect with each other. Nothing builds friendships like sitting down for a meal together. And our activities and education are designed to help us get to know each other better, while deepening our faith. For those who are unavailable for Sunday morning education, or who want more, this is another way to explore how spiritual learning gives our lives meaning. And Compline is one of the most beautiful, but little known worship services in our tradition.

Put it in your calendar and come join us. It's easy to remember: the Third Thursday of the month. Food and fellowship, fun activities and learning, and a new and moving form of prayer – all in one evening per month. Bring friends and family – all are welcome!

Come connect with God and each other. Spend time with familiar friends and make new ones. You'll be glad you did.

August 15, 2013 Why Bless a Backpack?

This Sunday during our 10am worship, we will bless the backpacks and other school supplies of our children and youth, and the supplies of those teachers and staff who serve at schools. It's become a fun tradition over the past couple of years. But why do we do it? It's not as if a blessed backpack is less likely to have its zipper break, or get lost on the playground. Episcopalians, you may have noticed, like to bless things. Last Sunday we blessed our new prayer books. Every October around the Feast of Saint Francis, we celebrate the blessing of the animals. Every time we gather for Eucharist, we bless bread and wine, are nourished by them, and then go out into the world with the priest's blessing and deacon's dismissal. To bless something is to remind ourselves of God's presence. In our most profound liturgical blessings, the sacraments, we believe that transformation occurs by God's power, creating outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace. And so the bread and wine are not merely symbols, but truly become in the Eucharist the Body and Blood of Christ.

When we bless things, we recall that God is both real and powerfully present. Blessing backpacks is not a sacrament, but it does assure us that God goes with us into our lives. For a young person, it is exciting but also stressful to begin a new school year. It can ease anxiety to know that in their moments of triumph and challenge, in the classroom, on stage or on the athletic field, God is there. We are never alone, or far away from the embrace of God's love. The blessing of the backpacks also gives us the opportunity to collect school supplies for students in need, in cooperation with our mission partner ICM. School is hard enough on a student without having to bring their books in a plastic bag when others have new backpacks, or write with a leaky pen instead of a working one.

To our children: have a great school year, and remember that God loves you and is with you always. To their parents and grandparents: thank you for the support, care and encouragement you give the students in your families. And to the teachers and staff of schools, including our own day school and Sunday school: know of our prayers and deep gratitude for the work you do. There is very little that is more important than the teaching and formation of children, who are both the present and the future of our world. Thank you!

August 1, 2013 The Rev. Licia Affer -- Associate Rector's Reflections

It's the beginning of August, my soon to be sixth-grader comes back from her very long vacation with her grandparents, and it's time to make sure that all homework is taken care of, all supplies are purchased, uniforms still fit, and extracurricular activities are lined up nicely in the family calendar.

It's the beginning of August. It's time to start thinking about going back to school. Not just "school" school, but also Sunday School.

Family Ministries at All Saints' doesn't go on vacation over the summer. We have been plotting and planning, scheduling and recruiting, choosing new curricula and training volunteers and (if I may say so myself) we've done a pretty good job.

We are very excited about working with a fantastic team of volunteers: some of them have great experience with supporting our children in their spiritual growth; others are bringing new ideas and great enthusiasm to the task. We are bringing back most of the Youth gatherings to Sunday morning, with an emphasis on celebrating the individuality of our young parishioners and their creative potential as we help them develop critical thinking and other skills they will need in adulthood. And we are adding more service projects and fun gatherings on the "Third Thursday" of every month. Moreover, with the addition of two dedicated mentors, we are creating opportunities for our High-schoolers to discern their call to service within the Church and the larger community.

Children's Sunday school is changing a bit too; not only there are new stories awaiting our Godly Play crowd, but we have a brand new and very engaging curriculum for 2nd to 4th graders! Weaving God's Promises stated "mission" is to support younger children in their development as Christ's ambassadors in the Church and in the world and we are sure that it will find fertile ground among our little ones. And to add an extra opportunity for shared growth, our monthly Family Sunday School will now begin with a short lesson, which will allow our families to dive deeper into the activities and devotions.

One of the most important goals we have at All Saints' is to keep learning together. In my almost four years here it's been a pleasure to see how responsive you all are in caring for all our younger learners. The time and passion provided by the volunteers, the financial support demonstrated by the whole community, the warm welcome always offered to families give me hope and renewed energy for my ministry. Please continue to support us, with ideas, donations, and always, always with your prayers.

July 25, 2013 Hospitality is a Comfortable Chair, a New Prayer Book (and Much More)

Summer is a season during which our church welcomes many guests. Some live in other parts of the country, and are in Phoenix visiting friends or family. Others live in this area and are exploring membership with us. Despite the temperature, summer is a popular time for people to look for a new church home. There are more than 100 churches in the Phoenix area. How do newcomers choose where to become members? It helps if they already know someone who attends a particular church (most newcomers are invited by someone else). Certainly they will look for worship and ministries that match up with what they are seeking. But much of what determines whether or not a newcomer will come again is experienced internally, on the level of emotion. How do they feel when they enter our doors? Studies show that most visitors to churches decide within the first 10 minutes whether this might be a good fit for them or not. In other words, the sermon and music and education and programs, as important as they are, are just pieces of the puzzle as someone new discerns whether or not All Saints' might be their spiritual home.

What are the other factors? What kind of impression can we really give in 10 minutes? It boils down to the spiritual practice of hospitality. We show our guests hospitality in (at least) four ways. Many aspects of these come across almost immediately.

* Warmth. Does our spiritual community give a warm greeting to those visiting us? This includes not just our "official" hospitality, the greeting extended by our ushers, clergy, greeters, coffee hour team, and welcome table, but also the impression we make as a whole congregation. Do we make a point of smiling and greeting those whom we do not know? If someone looks lost trying to find a room or their place in the hymnal, do we help them? Many newcomers have told us that they have felt a warm welcome at All Saints', which is wonderful. But we should not rest on our laurels. It takes continual effort to look out for those who may be new, even as we connect with our friends. A sense of warmth is the most important indicator of who is likely to return to get to know us better. I loved the moment, last Sunday at the 10am Eucharist, when the rain started to pour. Lauren, who was in the middle of her sermon, handled the distraction perfectly, and the congregation burst into laughter, and at the sermon's end, applause. It was a spontaneous expression of warmth that showed that, although we take our worship seriously, we can also see the humor in God's creation.

* Communication. We may not think of communication as hospitality, but it is. These days, a person's first visit to All Saints' is likely to be to our website. Nanette is constantly updating our website, and our site does a good job of communicating who we are, what we value, and what we do well. Hopefully most potential members come to us already with some sense that we might be a good fit for them. One they arrive, our communications continue to share a clear message about us. This includes our prayer every week in the prayers of the people for those who are visiting us that day, that they

may find us a community of welcome and spiritual nourishment. We also share on the front of our announcements some next steps about how to learn more about us, and vice versa.

* Authenticity. Those who are new to a church are excellent at seeing how what is communicated compares to what they experience. Almost every church in the country claims to be warm and welcoming, but not all actually come across that way. A church may claim to be open to different views, but in practice clearly espouse a narrow doctrine. I feel confident that All Saints' seems authentic to most who get to know us. We welcome all to this big tent church, filled with people of differing views and backgrounds, united in our worship of God in the Episcopal tradition, and in our commitment to lifelong learning, and service to those in need. Our centrist approach appeals to many people in our divided world.

* Excellence. No church is equally good at all things. Healthy churches decide what things are essential to their particular common life, and strive for excellence in those things. If someone is looking for a praise band, All Saints' is probably not the best place for them. But if they seek traditional worship and music, we are one of the best places not only in the valley, but in the country. We give our best to the liturgy, which is at the center of our understanding of Christian faith and practice. Our other areas of excellence are Christian education for all ages in our broad Episcopal way, and service together to those in need in our church, the community, and the world.

Recently, we raised funds to replace our aging prayer books. Through the incredible generosity of our parishioners, we far exceeded our goals, purchasing 160 copies of the Book of Common Prayer for our church and chapel (with some extra funds set aside for future prayer book and hymnal needs). In addition, an anonymous donor bought new, comfortable folding chairs for our Barbara rooms. The chairs both look and feel great! **Thank you to our wonderful, generous donors for the books and chairs!** These new books and chairs are tangible signs of the excellence and hospitality we value as we give our best to God and to our community. Next to come will be new and refurbished kneelers. Robin Wright is working with a group to restore and, when necessary, replace our beautiful but aged kneeling cushions. Thank you, as well, to those workers and donors! In the early fall, we will have the opportunity to give to somewhat larger infrastructure needs: our roof, sound system, and lighting. Stay tuned.

All Saints' is a truly remarkable church, and I am gratified that many newcomers continue to find us. When they join us, they add their talents to the many talents already here. To the new and recent arrivals, welcome! To those who have been members for a long time, thank you for all that you have done and continue to do in faith! May we never forget that when we offer hospitality, we do so remembering the hospitality that Jesus has offered us in Baptism and in the Eucharistic feast.

July 18, 2013 Facebook and the Church

Many churches these days have Facebook pages. Why not? They provide yet another opportunity to communicate both with our parishioners and with others who may be interested. If you have not "liked" our All Saints' Church Facebook page, [you can do so here](#). I hope you will, and that you will share relevant messages with your other Facebook friends, as appropriate.

I don't know anyone opposed to official church Facebook pages, but things get murkier after that as we adapt to this relatively new technology of social media. For example, there are on-going debates among clergy about whether or not we should be Facebook friends with our parishioners. The arguments against it largely boil down to boundaries: do I want to evaluate everything I post in advance by asking myself how my parishioners would react? I respect those clergy who choose to keep their Facebook profiles private, but I do not share that view. I am glad to be Facebook friends with any adult parishioner who wishes to find me online and ask. If you would like to do so, please feel free. In fact, I believe Facebook to be a valuable tool in the life of the Church. Why? There are several reasons.

Most importantly, I welcome any opportunity to build relationship with members of our All Saints' community. We are a large church and school, and it is nearly impossible for me to know everyone personally. Face to face conversation is always best, of course. I keep my own calendar, and those who have asked to meet with me know that I gladly accept any invitation to sit down and talk in my office, or over coffee or lunch. But in a place of this size, I am always somewhat separated from the daily triumphs and tragedies of many of our members' lives. I find that Facebook assists with that sense of connection. Any tool that helps me get to know our church and school members better is something I appreciate.

In particular, I have been grateful for the pastoral help that Facebook can offer. As clergy, we usually hear directly when there is a major pastoral crisis, like a death or acute illness. We even have an emergency phone (found through the main church number) for after hours pastoral crises. But we are far less likely to hear about the smaller challenges of life, those disappointments and frustrations that occur more regularly. More times than I can count, I've found out about significant but not life-threatening pastoral situations on Facebook that I might not have known about otherwise, and been able to show support on behalf of the church.

Sometimes the pastoral concern is only tangentially related to a parishioner - for example, a work friend or child of a distant relative of a church member is seriously ill. In a case like that, Facebook is a powerful tool of prayer, extending the prayer network beyond the affected person's immediate loved ones. Last Sunday, in my sermon on the Good Samaritan, I said that one of the blessings of Christianity is that it urges us to care about those beyond our immediate circle of relationship. Facebook can help us do that.

Similarly, it is not just important to share our sorrows. With matters of celebration and joy, it is also good to be able to share. As your pastor, I love to hear about your good and entertaining news. I enjoy the pictures of the grandchildren and the funny tales of your dinner recipe that didn't go according to plan.

As to my having to censor my posts, I don't find that to be an issue. For one thing, I read Facebook far more often than I post to it. But when I do post, I think it's spiritually healthy to keep a wide audience in mind. Facebook is a value neutral technology; in other words, it is neither good nor bad in itself. It can be used, however, for good or bad. At its worst, it can give us a platform for cruelty, egocentrism, and narrow-mindedness. If I have to ask myself how a post would come across to a parishioner or my mother, I probably shouldn't post it anyway. One question we might ask ourselves is: am I demonstrating Christian virtues in my Facebook posts and my other online behavior?

Sometimes, the world around us can seem fairly bleak. Human beings, selfish creatures that we are, find it easy to be divided from and unkind to each other, and difficult to be united and considerate. The ultimate hope for humankind lies in Jesus Christ, who reigns in heaven and will reign on earth. But until the kingdom of God is fully realized on earth, Christians have been given the responsibility to look after each other and anyone in need. Facebook or any tool that makes us more aware of the needs of those around us gives us greater opportunity to live our faith in ways that make a difference.

An example of the power of Facebook: As of Thursday morning 07-18-13 at 9am, our Facebook post for a missing 13 year-old boy has been posted for 20 hours and has received 389 shares and 16,120 people saw the post.

July 10, 2013 Coming Home

Having just returned from 12 days in Virginia visiting with family, I've been thinking about the meaning of "home." Megan, the boys and I had a wonderful time connecting with loved ones. In particular, it means a lot to us that our children grow up knowing their grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins, and vice versa. I suspect many of us have experienced that interesting mixture of emotions that comes when we visit family in the place where we grew up. In some sense, Richmond always feels like home when I visit. How could it not? I spent my first 18 years there, and most of my immediate family still lives in the area. At the same time, this August I will have been in Phoenix for four years (how time flies!). Megan and I moved here in part because we sensed that we could feel at home here, both in the city and at All Saints', and that has certainly been the case. Phoenix is now our home, and we feel more settled with every passing year. We love living in this beautiful part of God's creation, and feel deeply connected especially to All Saints', both church and school. And so, in a real sense, I feel at home both in the city of my birth and in the city where I now live. I am blessed with two "homes."

There is within all of us the need to feel rooted somewhere. The poet Robert Frost famously said that “home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in.” Home is that one place to which you can always return. In our Scriptural tradition, one of the most powerful stories of home is that of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The lost son, having squandered his inheritance in far off lands, returns home out of desperation. There he finds not judgment or scorn, but the loving and forgiving embrace of his father. At its best, home is a place of unconditional love and welcome. Unfortunately, for some people their place of origin doesn’t feel like home. Not everyone grows up in an idyllic and loving environment. Some overcome this by making a warm home somewhere else. Some, tragically, never feel settled and experience always a sense of wandering.

This is where God comes in. Saint Augustine wrote of God: “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” Whatever our experiences of human homes, good or bad, we have a home in God. When we are grounded in faith, we are at home, at peace and secure in God’s arms, wherever we may be. Even in death, God promises us a dwelling place with God in heaven. When we search for language to describe the Church, the language of family doesn’t always fit exactly. But it does in one important way: church is meant to be like home. We are not just an affinity group; we are bound together in Christ. We are adopted in baptism as God’s children, and the Church is where we gather for nourishment and support. Here, we welcome everyone to a deep and life-giving relationship with God and each other.

When someone is new to All Saints’, when they are exploring life with us, they are a guest in our home. We’ve worked hard over recent years to enhance our sense of welcome and hospitality, which is the responsibility not just of our clergy and ushers and greeters, but of us all. But once the guest decides to commit to membership, through baptism or confirmation or reception, this becomes their church home as well. One of my deepest hopes is that those who join All Saints’ will, over time, come to feel in their hearts that this is their spiritual home. Not just a nice place to visit, or somewhere to drop in for worship, but home: a place to fall back on when they need help, or to share their greatest joys and innermost thoughts. The greatest compliment someone can give us is that, when they got to know us, they felt, at last, that they had come home. All Saints’ has become that place for me. May it be so, more and more, for all of us, as we live into this relationship that God has already given us.

June 27, 2013 Customization, Community and What We Learn When We Serve

One of the themes of contemporary culture is the customization of everything. That old slogan from Burger King “Have it your way” has become the norm in many aspects of life. So for example, I can set the Pandora app on my smart phone so that it only plays songs similar to other songs I like. I can go to the frozen yogurt shop and combine peach, chocolate and vanilla yogurt in one cup, with coconut and blueberries on top, if I want. There is even, I have read, a website through which I could submit my precise

shirt measurements, pick a cloth, and receive a dress shirt, handmade in Shanghai to my precise specifications, for under \$100 (fortunately, I wear a “uniform” and so don’t need to worry about such things!).

Like most trends in modernity, customization has its good and less good aspects. On the bright side, you are more likely to get exactly what you want, and if not, you have no one to blame but yourself! After all, you are the one who thought that cherry yogurt and peanut butter chips would taste good together. But there is a down side. As the wise saying goes, the perfect is often the enemy of the good. In particular, seeking after self-serving perfection gets in the way of the cultivation of the spiritual virtue of gratitude. When the Israelites were wandering in the desert and God gave them manna to eat, they undoubtedly would have preferred a lovely salmon fillet with a side of mashed potatoes and grilled asparagus. But God gave them not what they wanted, but what they needed. God was teaching them (and us) something. One of the markers of spiritual maturity is learning to be content with what God gives us, and sharing abundantly with others from our blessings.

And how do we cultivate this spiritual maturity? By living in Christian community, and by serving others. One of the most destructive aspects of modern life is the breakdown of community. As we become more and more individualized and isolated, we find it more difficult to connect into meaningful communities. As much as I love my iPhone, it is clear that our technology often isolates us further. This is but one of many reasons why I believe the Church to be not obsolete but essential. The Church is a community in which we gather a diverse group of people behind a common purpose: worshiping God. Our worship is not customized much at all; it is common. We accommodate ourselves to the liturgy, and not the other way around. In our common prayer, we join together as different members of one body, the Body of Christ. And when we leave our common worship, ideally we are formed more and more into giving and grateful people. It is no coincidence that we call our common communion prayer “The Great Thanksgiving.” For in it, we thank God continually for sustaining us with all we need in our souls and bodies.

This week, we are renewing an annual tradition: our vacation Bible school that we call “All Saints’ Kids for the Community.” It has been and continues to be a remarkable ministry. Children as young as 6 serve those in need in Phoenix, going to a different agency every day with their adult mentors. And then they pray and reflect on their experiences, and how these experiences relate to their faith. From an early age, these young people are learning the value of serving others with others. They are cultivating gratitude by focusing not on the perfect thing for themselves, but on the essential thing for someone else. As a group, they are changing lives for the better this week, including, with God’s help, their own.

June 20, 2013 Echoes of God's Song of Love

We live in an age weakened by cynicism, but Christ, through the Church serves as an antidote. Not that the Church is naïve; our faith understands well the selfishness and sin that draw us from the ways of life and peace. It is rather that our faith diagnoses our spiritual illnesses, and offers a cure. In Christ, through repentance, we are healed from self-centeredness and given the gift to humble ourselves and reach out to others. Like any group of human beings, the Church falls short and makes mistakes from time to time. But at our best, we embody, by God's grace, the most noble of human virtues: faith, hope and love.

There are moments in our community of faith when I simply watch in awe what God is doing through us. Sometimes it is an extraordinarily generous collection for the needy, or an outreach effort by a dedicated group, or a circle that supports someone with a grave illness. This Sunday, though, we give thanks to God for the gift of love. In particular, we celebrate God's bringing Bill Burrill and Marilyn Usher together. Their wedding will be a time of joy not only for them, but for all of us, as it will take place at one of our principal services. It is wonderful that they have chosen to share this occasion, and the reception to follow, in such a generous way.

Our faith, for all its realism, has an optimistic vision. We know that in Jesus' resurrection, good has triumphed over evil. At the end of all things, love will conquer hate. And even now, when love blossoms, it reminds us of God's amazing love for all people. Romantic love, familial love and friendship all are beautiful echoes of the song of love that brought all things into being, that sang in triumph at the Red Sea, and filled the heavens with jubilation at the savior's birth.

Congratulations, Marilyn and Bill, from all of us at All Saints' as you are married this Sunday. May your wedded life fill you with joy. And may your love be a sign of God's love in this world, wherever you go.

June 13, 2013 My CREDO Experience

On Monday night, I returned from a 6 day conference called CREDO, sponsored by The Episcopal Church's pension fund. This conference is made available at almost no cost to all Episcopal priests at some point during their ordained service, and offers the chance to reflect on one's ministry, spiritual life, personal finances, and health. The experience was beneficial in several respects. It was good to get away from the heat for a bit. This CREDO was at the Episcopal camp and conference center in western North Carolina called Lake Logan, which is a lovely setting of mountains, woods, and a large lake (though it did rain every day). The workshops were helpful, with a skilled group of

experts guiding us. And I enjoyed getting to know 29 other priests from across the Church, serving faithfully in a variety of different contexts.

But of all of the benefits of the conference, there are two that stick out for me. The first was the profound sense of appreciation I feel for being blessed to serve as the rector of All Saints'. As I spoke with my fellow priests, and as I thought about my ministry and life, and that of my family, I felt deep gratitude to God for calling me to serve where I do. The average Episcopal congregation has fewer than 100 people attending worship on a weekend. These small congregations and their clergy have a remarkable impact on the communities in which they serve. But what a gift it is to be a large parish, with a wonderful school. What an opportunity we have to do the work of the Gospel on a larger scale.

Here's one example. While I was gone, we sent our latest check to our partners in Haiti, Saint Paul's. Recently we held brief fund drives at both church and school to add to the significant funds we raised through our North Central Family 5K in April. We also received a \$5,000 matching grant from the Millennium Development Goals group in our diocese for our mission efforts. All told, we were able to send our partners in Haiti \$18,359 to enable them to finish the roof and other key structural elements on their new school building before the rainy season harms the work already done. Well done and thanks be to God! May we never forget the power God gives us to change lives for the better, when we serve together as the Body of Christ.

The second benefit of CREDO that is remaining with me is the simple process of reflection and change we practiced: Identity, Discernment, Practice and Transformation. I think this method will be particularly useful in Lent, but any one of us could use it at any time. Here's how it works: reflect on your identity, and notice those aspects of yourself you would like to improve. Then pray to God to help you discern how to make a positive change. Practice this new habit over a period of time, asking God to bless the endeavor. And then notice if any transformation has occurred. If summer is a quieter time in your life, you might want to consider a process like this to focus on an aspect of your current life that falls short of your best self as a child of God.

And don't forget, if you are away this summer for vacation, to attend church if at all possible, and to bring me back a bulletin. I'm always curious about other churches and your experiences of them. It doesn't matter if it's not Episcopal – go somewhere convenient. When you get back, let me know what struck you about it. It is good for us to worship, even when we are away. And to do so often reminds us, as it did for me, that we are truly blessed where God has planted us.

May 30, 2013 Pastoral Care: Seeing the Other Dimension

When Megan and I have the rare evening out together, with the boys at home with a babysitter, one of our favorite things to do is go to the movies. We enjoy a serious film from time to time, but usually we end up seeing a “popcorn movie” (anything with aliens, superheroes or spies). A couple of weeks ago, we saw Iron Man 3, and as it turned out, the only showing available in our time frame was in 3D. I’m not a huge fan of 3D movies, but I have to admit, the technology these days is impressive. Images take on a lifelike fullness, extending into the viewer’s space. After seeing a movie in 3D, a normal 2D movie seems rather flat and, well, two dimensional.

Pastoral Care is the Church’s ministry of supporting the sick, the dying, the suffering, and those around them. It is, in a sense, like a 3D movie. No, there are not superheroes or spaceships. But it does involve recognizing a dimension we usually don’t see: the spiritual. Consider, for example, someone who has a serious illness. Medical care will focus almost exclusively on the health of the body, and will do so with astonishing proficiency. For the person of faith, though, the body is just part of the equation. Our bodies have spirits, breathed into us by God, and the two aspects of our nature are intertwined. In fact, from the Christian perspective, this earthly life is but one part of our journey that continues, after death, to heaven and eventually to resurrection.

Pastoral Care enhances medical care by paying attention to the spirit of both the individual, and those connected to them. The two aspects of care, medical and spiritual, can go hand in hand. Indeed, scientific studies have shown that patients who receive both physical and spiritual care have better health outcomes. The power of prayer is real and statistically measurable. Pastoral Care is also helpful near death. A purely physical perspective sees death as the end and seeks to extend life to the maximum degree, no matter what. The spiritual perspective allows us to see that length of life is one but not the only value. The quality of life, and depth of relationships with loved ones and with God are also important.

I am proud of our Pastoral Care ministries at All Saints’. Our clergy, Community of Hope, Prayer Team, Prayer Shawl ministry, Front Line ministry, Health ministries, funeral and grief support ministries and Daughters of the King work together to offer a tremendous range of spiritual care to those who need it. Every Wednesday morning, all year long, our pastoral care team meets. Our clergy and key lay pastoral leaders go over the prayer list for the week, and discuss confidentially our “acute” list (those with serious illness or near death) and “ongoing” list (those with long term challenges, including grief). We do our best to support all those who need care. In a large community like ours, we depend on information from our congregation about who needs what we can offer. It is also helpful to remember that Pastoral Care is not just the ministry of our trained caregivers, clergy and lay. It is the ministry of all of us. The most effective support is a circle of care that includes clergy, trained laity, and parishioner friends.

This Sunday at 10am, we will recognize one of our most important Pastoral Care ministries with our annual commissioning of the Community of Hope. The COH is a highly trained, prayerful group that serves with remarkable dedication in our church community and in local care centers and hospitals. Since pastoral ministry is largely confidential, its impact often goes unseen, but it makes a huge difference in the lives of those who receive it. Did you know that through March 31, the Community of Hope made 148 visits to parishioners, 16 communion visits, and 412 non parishioner visits, for a total of more than 400 hours of service? When they visit, they see the spiritual dimension, bringing with them the love of God on behalf of all of us.

To learn more about our Pastoral Care ministries, read about them here on our website: <http://wp.allsaints-phoenix.org/index.php/ministries/pastoral-care/>.

May 22, 2013 When Tragedy Strikes: Prayer and the Practice of Empathy

Ordinarily, when any tragedy occurs, it is a natural human tendency to respond more to those people and circumstances that are closest to us. And so, if our next door neighbor's husband dies of cancer, or a close college friend is in a terrible car accident, we are more likely to be moved and to help than if the victim is someone we do not know. As Christians, though, one of our core spiritual practices is empathy. The terms "empathy" and "sympathy" are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference. Typically, empathy signifies a level of compassion beyond sympathy. Sympathy is to be aware of someone's suffering, while empathy is to imagine ourselves in the other person's experience, even if they have no clear connection to us. When we empathize, we put ourselves in someone else's shoes. We realize that "there but for the grace of God go I."

Empathy takes effort, because we would rather not think about the suffering of another, let alone imagine ourselves in their circumstance. But empathy is the spiritual gift that enables us to close the distance between ourselves and those who suffer. The letters of Paul remind us continually that there is no separation between us, but that we are united as the Body of Christ. Therefore, as Paul says, Christians are called to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). And Jesus takes the practice of empathy to an even higher level, teaching us that whatever we do for those who suffer, we do for Jesus himself (Matthew 25:31-46) since he is united with those who are in any kind of pain.

This week, our prayers are with those affected by the terrible tornadoes in the South and Midwest, and especially in Oklahoma. Prayer is one of the most significant things we can do in any tragedy, as we pray for God's comfort and healing for those who suffer. Make no mistake: prayer is powerful. We hear often from those on our prayer lists that they have felt a palpable sense of God's presence through our prayer. Prayer

not only helps its recipients; it affects those who are praying. The more we pray for those in need, the more we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit's gift of empathy within us.

If you wish to go beyond prayer, and give financial assistance to the tornado victims, there are many agencies that can put your donation to good use. If you are looking for a way to give specifically through The Episcopal Church, there are two excellent options. Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) does a fantastic job not only with immediate relief, but with the ongoing rebuilding efforts that come after the initial surge of emergency aid has come and gone. In addition, the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma is receiving donations directly, to be used in a variety of helpful ways in the affected communities. The Episcopal Bishop of Oklahoma, Ed Konieczny, was a clergy colleague of mine in Colorado before being elected bishop and is a fine pastor and leader, with a career in law enforcement before he entered the ordained ministry. I know that he will use the resources given to his diocese with great wisdom and compassion.

In this season of the Holy Spirit between Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, may we be given the spiritual grace to imagine ourselves in the experiences of those in need, in our own communities, in the nation, and in the world, and to reach out to them in prayer and service.

LINKS TO HELP WITH TORNADO RELIEF:

[Episcopal Relief and Development](#)

[Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma](#)

Via Mail to the Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma:

If you would like to make a financial contribution to help in the tornado relief efforts, please make your check payable to "The Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma." In the notation line write "Tornado relief." Send checks to:

Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma
924 North Robinson
Oklahoma City, OK 73102.

May 16, 2013 God's Gift of Love

On May 8th in our Episcopal calendar of saints, we recognized Julian of Norwich, a medieval mystic and writer. One of the prominent themes in her writing was God's love. Indeed, her most significant work was called "Revelations of Divine Love." Written in 1393, it is the earliest surviving book written in English by a woman. One memorable quote from the book reads: "God loved us before he made us; and his love has never diminished and never shall." Julian reminds us that God's love is neither limited nor conditional. God loved each and every one of us before we were born, and nothing we can do, absolutely nothing, can ever diminish that love.

The whole story of salvation that we read in the Bible is a love story: God's persistent love for us, and the lengths to which God was willing to go to save us. It is a story we tell over the course of our liturgical year. As the season of Easter draws to a close, we celebrate this Sunday the feast of Pentecost, which represents the sending of the Holy Spirit to comfort and inspire us and, through this divine gift of love, the founding of the Church. As is customary, we will baptize new Christians on Sunday, bringing 9 children into the sacramental representation of God's loving embrace.

Speaking of love, we have a special announcement to share with our All Saints' community. On Sunday, June 23rd at the 10am service, we will celebrate the wedding of Bishop Bill Burrill and Marilyn Usher. It is with great joy that we have seen love blossom between Bill and Marilyn. We care about both of them immensely, and they, in turn, have great affection for the people of All Saints'. For this reason, they have chosen to be married on a Sunday morning, with Eucharist. The entire All Saints' community is invited to the wedding, and the reception to follow in Manning Hall. In lieu of gifts, the happy couple requests donations be made to ICM food and clothing bank. To give, simply make a check to ICM, with "Burrill/Usher wedding" on the memo line. These can be put in the offering plate in the weeks before the wedding or sent to the church office.

God is the source of every kind of love, and it is by God's gracious gift that human beings find love with each other. And so, as we celebrate Bill and Marilyn's wedding on June 23rd, we will also be giving thanks to God, who has loved them, and us, since before we were made.

May 9, 2013 What's In a Name?

I saw a funny picture the other day on Facebook, posted in advance of this Mother's Day weekend. A baby is holding her hands to her face in shocked disbelief, and the text reads: "you mean your real name isn't Mommy??" As a parent of young children, this resonated with me. I remember when our oldest son, David, began to figure out that his mom and dad have other names to other people, and that other children also call their parents "mommy" and "daddy." It was one of those moments when I could see his little world expanding before my eyes.

Names are important, because they signify a range of meanings, both formal and suggested. On the negative side, ideological battles are often fought over what to call someone or something. On the positive side, the language we choose shapes our understanding of things that are significant. Words matter. They tell a story. For example, All Saints' is part of a denomination that calls ourself The Episcopal Church. The word "Episcopal" means "bishop," and our very name reminds us that we are not a congregation in isolation, but are part of the wider Church. We are members of the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona, under the pastoral leadership of Bishop Smith. Our

diocese is part of The Episcopal Church, and our denomination is affiliated with the worldwide Anglican Communion. Although our primary experience of faith in community is our own congregation, we remember in the name “Episcopal” that we are living members of a flock that is much larger. It is no coincidence that a bishop’s crozier, or staff, is modeled after the shepherd’s crook.

This Sunday, we welcome Bishop Smith and his wife Laura to All Saints’, and we thank both of them for their ministry in our diocese and on our behalf. Bishop Smith will preside and preach at the 9 and 11am services (he will also be teaching a class at 10am). Our diocesan bishop visits us once a year, and in so doing, reminds us that we are an “Episcopal” church, gathered into dioceses, and led by bishops. This message will be particularly evident at the 11am service, as we confirm, receive and reaffirm 35 youth and adults. The sacrament of confirmation requires the laying on of hands by a bishop, as the confirmand makes a mature commitment to Christ, and is strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Confirmation emphasizes anew that our baptism is not into All Saints’, but into the Body of Christ, the universal Church in all times and places. The confirmands are empowered for ministry not only in our congregation, but in the world. As this season of Eastertide winds down, we recall that Christ has ascended into heaven, to the right hand of God the Father, and the Holy Spirit has been sent to us. In the sacraments, the Holy Spirit imparts to us grace to fulfill God’s mission as fellow disciples of Jesus, crucified and risen.

May 2, 2013 Where is Your Ministry?

A recent quote by Pope Francis about lay ministry has been making its way across the Internet:

“We priests tend to clericalize the laity. [We] focus on things of the clergy, more specifically, the sanctuary, rather than bringing the Gospel to the world... A Church that limits herself to administering parish work experiences what someone in prison does: physical and mental atrophy. We infect lay people with our own disease. And some begin to believe the fundamental service God asks of them is to become greeters, lectors or extraordinary ministers of holy communion at Church. Rather, [the call is] to live and spread the faith in their families, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods and beyond.”

His language is strong, but I think he gets at a critical truth: most ministry by our lay members is, and is meant to be outside the church building. This does not mean that ministry in the church is not important. Take, for example, our Sunday morning worship, formation, and hospitality. It takes more than 100 volunteers to offer what we do on Sunday mornings, when you consider our choir, acolytes, Eucharistic ministers, vergers, readers, altar guild, children’s chapel helpers, ushers and greeters, Sunday school teachers and mentors, rosary and Christian meditation leaders, coffee hour volunteers,

van drivers and much more. We couldn't do what we do, to the glory of God, without the ministry of our volunteers. When we do it well and with love, we create an environment in which people can experience the transforming presence of God. That is no small thing. In fact, it is the most important thing. The first and most basic building block of Christian practice is gathering on Sundays for worship, learning and fellowship. This equips and nourishes us for everything else.

And yet, even the most dedicated volunteer spends far more time outside of church than at All Saints' (although some volunteers are here so much, I have wondered aloud if we should find them a cot to sleep on!). Here's the point: have you ever thought of your life as a ministry? As I have gotten to know this congregation better over the past few years, I have found our All Saints' parishioners to be a remarkably faithful and generous group. My suspicion is that many of our lay members are exercising ministry in the world without even realizing it. Do you try to live and spread the Christian faith in your family, workplace and neighborhood? Do you use your God-given gifts to help others? Are you the one who looks out for the dignity of someone in your workplace, when others are tearing them down? Are you a peacemaker? Do you buy the cup of coffee for the person in the drive through line behind you, for no reason at all? Do you instill in your family the importance of serving the needy? Do you strive to pray daily? Are you a good listener? Do you routinely give up something important to you for the sake of another? If you do any of these things as a result of your faith, you are engaging in ministry. When we minister to others, it stands out in our self-centered world. A little light shines brightly in dark times. Before long, someone will ask you why you do the compassionate things you do. And then you will be able to witness in words to the faith you have demonstrated in your actions.

One of the essential goals of the Christian life is to be a disciple of Jesus: striving to form our lives in imitation of our risen savior. The more we seek to follow Christ, the more ministry we will do. For we cannot follow Christ, and not do many of the things that he did. Just as he could not turn away from someone in need of help, however tired or busy he was, so too will we feel the call to minister when the need arises. We won't always heed that call. But the more we grow in discipleship, the more often we will heed it. We will do so, increasingly, not because we feel we should, but because that is who we are. It is who (and whose) we are becoming.

Sometimes, we beat ourselves up about not doing enough. Churches fall into this trap as well, on occasion, making their members feel guilty for not being involved enough in church ministries. Nothing good can come of this. You will know if you have more time and talent to give in a formal church ministry. If you do, be in touch with the clergy or with Pit Lucking, our volunteer coordinator (plucking@allsaints.org) and we will work with you to find a rewarding ministry opportunity. But for many, you have plenty of ministry opportunities around you, every day. Embrace your calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ, and change the world, one life-giving encounter at a time.

April 25, 2013 Our Spiritual Plate

When I was growing up, we were taught the food pyramid. Many of you will remember it: the sweets on the top of the pyramid, and then the milk products and meat, then fruits and vegetables, and finally the breads and grains. Not long ago, the pyramid was replaced with a plate, and the food groups re-prioritized to reflect a more modern understanding of a healthy diet. We know the importance of a balanced diet in our eating, but what about our spiritual life? One of the things I love about our Episcopal tradition, at its best, is the way in which it encourages spiritual balance. At All Saints', one theme linking the past several years has been: Pray, Learn, Serve, Connect. This is adapted from Benedictine spirituality, but it fits well with our Episcopal way. It articulates, in part, a model of balance. Imagine your spiritual life like a plate. To include, in some measure, all of these four categories on your spiritual plate is to keep a balanced diet. To pray through Sunday worship, the Daily Office, and other forms, to deepen our faith through regular learning, and to serve for the benefit of others is an effort to nourish our relationship with God and our neighbor. When we do these things not just individually, but with other people, we connect more powerfully with them, and with God. This kind of spiritual balance is good for us, as we strive to grow into the Christians God means us to be.

Now we need to be careful of how we think of these things. No spiritual practices, however devoted or sincere, can earn or guarantee a more blessed or rewarding life. Only God's grace can do that. But when we pray, learn, serve and connect with earnest intention, we open our hearts more fully to God's blessings and direction. Again the analogy of food is useful: a healthy diet on most days is good, even if we give in to the cheeseburger and fries every so often. But even a healthy diet is no guarantee of long life. Still, to eat healthy, over time, becomes a reward unto itself: it gives satisfaction in the doing, whatever the outcome. No one is forcing us to do it, but when we do so, it feels fulfilling.

As a faith community, All Saints' tries to offer a healthy and balanced spiritual diet, with lots of opportunities to pray, learn, serve and connect. Not everyone will take advantage of those offerings, but I believe it says something important when we offer them. Take Evening Prayer: the average number of participants on Tuesday and Thursday nights for Evening Prayer is two (me and the officiant for that night). When we have four or five, it feels like a religious revival! But it is important that All Saints' offers a variety of prayer from our Prayer Book throughout the week. When two or three pray in this way, they represent the whole of All Saints' in those prayers, joined with those who are praying in the same way throughout the Anglican Communion.

This Sunday is a special day. We will enjoy a particularly sumptuous spiritual feast, fitting for this joyful season of Eastertide. Our fourth Sunday experiment this year has been a great success, and will return next September. On this last fourth Sunday of this program year, the full Senior Choir will sing at 9am, and 11am will feature incense and

our Chamber Choir with Canto Vivo, singing a beautiful and rarely heard Mass setting by Jean Langlais. There are few places in the country where one could hear music like this in the context of worship. May we remember, though, that the point of this glorious worship and music is not just enjoyment, but nourishment, for a purpose: to give us inspiration and spiritual energy to serve as faithful followers of the Risen Christ in a hurting world.

April 18, 2013 The Light of Freedom

We have all been in shock over the senseless violence in Boston on Patriots' Day. Every time something like this happens, even as we struggle to understand it, we cling more tightly to our loved ones, and we turn to God in prayer. In our public worship all this week and as individuals we have been praying for those affected by Monday's attacks.

As people of faith, we often find that God brings comfort in the most unexpected of ways. This was powerfully true for me, this week. On Tuesday morning, less than 24 hours after the horrific attacks, our day school hosted a naturalization ceremony. The ceremony had been planned for months, but it could not have come at a more meaningful time. 48 immigrants, from 26 different countries, gathered in our gymnasium to take the solemn oath of citizenship. As young as 22, and as old as 85, these immigrants pursued the long path to legal citizenship that brought them to this moment of commitment and celebration. I dare say many of us take our citizenship for granted. But as we saw these individuals from across the globe becoming American citizens, with smiles and tears, it was impossible not to be moved. Their ceremony of citizenship was one they, and we, will never forget: our students led us all in the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem, our student musicians sang and played instruments, a huge American flag mural decorated the stage, and student and administration speakers reflected thoughtfully on the values that make our country great.

Ours is a free society, and there will always be some who attack that freedom, or use its latitude to perpetrate evil acts. But let us never forget that as Christians, we know the outcome of the eternal battle between good and evil. In Jesus' death and resurrection, life and light and love have defeated death and darkness and hatred. That victory will not become fully realized until Jesus comes again, but we know that it will surely come. In the meanwhile, we take comfort that the light of faith and the God-given light of freedom shine brightly. The powers of darkness will not and cannot overcome them.

[Click here to see a video clip from KNXV-TV \(ABC-15\) about the Naturalization Ceremony at All Saints'](#)

April 11, 2013 Better (and More Productive) to Give than to Receive

A recent article from the New York Times magazine has been getting a lot of attention. It's called: "Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?" and it explores the work of Adam Grant, a professor of organizational psychology at the Wharton School of business. Only 31 years old, Grant is the youngest tenured and most highly rated professor at Wharton, and his writings on productive workplaces are being read not just by academics, but by business leaders worldwide. Companies like Google hire him to consult on productivity and employee satisfaction.

Grant's big idea is that the greatest source of motivation for employees is not self-interest, but service to others. Focusing on how our work helps others makes us more productive. He first tested his theory in one of the least satisfying places to work in the modern economy: a call center. Call center work is monotonous and emotionally taxing; employees there often face rejection and verbal abuse. Most incentives in call centers are entirely self-centered: bonuses for a certain success rate, for example. But Grant brought in a speaker, who spoke to the employees about how their work had helped him. Doing their work with a new-found sense of purpose, productivity increased dramatically. A similar study at Borders bookstores showed increased productivity in stores that had voluntary employee collections for fellow employees in need.

As Christians, none of this should be surprising to us. One of the core teachings of our faith is that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For two thousand years, Jesus has taught us that when we focus on others more than on ourselves, we fulfill our divine purpose. Is it any surprise that when we do so, we are both happier and more productive?

In these 50 days of Eastertide, we reflect on the meaning of the resurrection in our lives. Our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection calls us to a radically different life. It is helpful to remember that this new life in Christ is not an obligation; it is a gift. When we receive it, thankfully, we discover the abundance and contentment we have been seeking. The more we give of ourselves, the more God fills us full.

Try this as an experiment: choose one day, and do your best, all day, to serve all whom you encounter. Let me know how it goes!

April 3, 2013 Love's Redeeming Work is Done

There are not many writers of hymn texts more significant than Charles Wesley. His creativity was prolific (he wrote some 10,000 hymns), but more than that, his work has stood the test of time. More than 300 years after his birth, his hymns continue to teach and to inspire (our hymnal contains 23 of his texts, among the most of any writer).

Wesley's hymns are poetic enough to move the heart, with a rich, Scriptural theology that is both accessible and memorable.

This Easter week, I find myself reflecting on one of Wesley's best Easter hymns: "Love's Redeeming Work is Done" (hymn #188, 189):

*Love's redeeming work is done,
Fought the fight, the battle won.
Death in vain forbids him rise;
Christ has opened paradise.*

*Lives again our glorious King;
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Once he died our souls to save,
Where thy victory, O grave?*

*Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head;
Made like him, like him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.*

As we at All Saints' catch our breath after a remarkable Holy Week and Easter Day, I want to thank the more than one-hundred staff and volunteers who made the liturgies, every day, so meaningful for so many. With this greatest of weeks behind us, we marvel not at our own work done, but Christ's. Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection, has won the battle, defeated death, and led us all into eternal life. Alleluia! Alleluia!

March 27, 2013 Just Showing Up

One of many interwoven themes in Holy Week is the story of the prodigal son. A post communion prayer that we use only this week begins like this: "Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off, you met us in your son, and brought us home." In Jesus' death and resurrection, God runs out to meet us, forgiving all our sins out of love. And yet, how often do we hide from God's love, thinking ourselves unworthy? It is as if the prodigal son felt too ashamed even to come home to his father to ask his forgiveness.

At this point, my advice for the rest of Holy Week is simple: just show up, as often as you can. It doesn't matter if your Lenten discipline fell apart weeks ago, or if you feel totally unfocused on spiritual things today, or are having a stressful week at work: just show up, as you are able. Come as you are, faults and insecurities and all. God is not waiting to see how devout we are before deciding whether or not to forgive us. God has

already forgiven us in Christ Jesus. It is not God that is deciding to forgive; it is only we who are deciding whether or not to accept God's forgiveness. God, the prodigal son's father, forgave us long ago. Now God is waiting at the window, gazing longingly into the distance, hoping to see each one of us from afar, coming closer.

My friends, our salvation is near. Love, reconciliation, and resurrection await...

March 21, 2013 Holy Week: A Story About Us, A Story About God

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, once said: "In all sorts of ways Holy Week really is the most important week in the Christian year because it's a week when we discover in a way we don't at any other time just who we are and just who God is." Holy Week, which begins this Sunday with Palm Sunday and culminates at Easter, tells a timeless story about us and about God. We see humanity at our best, welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem as king with joy and hopeful expectation. We see us at our worst: betraying Jesus and abandoning him, out of selfishness and fear. In this week, we also learn more deeply what God is like. We are reminded that God's love for us is so great that God, like the father of the prodigal son, runs out to embrace us, however grievous our failings.

The liturgies of Holy Week take us on a journey whose path has been worn down by the feet of pilgrims through the ages. By the 4th century, the basic elements of Holy Week were already in place, as Christians felt called to walk with Christ the way of his suffering, death and resurrection. At All Saints', we will have liturgies every day of Holy Week, and there are always some in our midst who choose to make their Holy Week devotions a daily practice. Come as often as you can. But I urge especially to you the three holiest days of the Christian calendar: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil of Holy Saturday. They have ancient elements that we experience only once a year.

We have all known in our lives how fluid our sense of time can be. Some experiences seem to go more quickly than the clock says; others more slowly. When we are students, spring break goes by like a flash, while exam week seems endless. In our life of faith, one of the characteristics of an encounter with God is that we may feel outside of time, in some sense. In the intense focus of a divine encounter, it often seems as if time, as we know it, has stopped, or is proceeding at an unusual pace. One of the important aspects of the Holy Week liturgies is that, in them, we take our time. This makes room for mystical encounters with Christ, crucified and risen. We become not just observers, but participants in the saving events we commemorate. Look inside your heart. What do you long for? Do you sense Christ calling you to walk with him?

March 6, 2013 50 Years of All Saints' Episcopal Day School

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.” (Matthew 7:24-26)

This is a very special year, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of All Saints' Episcopal Day School (and the 60th anniversary of All Saints' Episcopal Church). Anniversaries are occasions to celebrate, to remember, and to envision. We celebrate, because our school has made a huge difference in the lives of our students, our community, our nation and the world over these 50 years. Imagine the thousands of students who have been educated and spiritually formed at All Saints', and the good they have done, by God's grace, in their personal, professional and civic lives. We remember, because the current vitality of our school is the result of the hard work of those who have gone before us, who built All Saints' and entrusted it to our care. Finally, we envision. Anniversaries are not only for looking back; they are for looking forward. We who are at All Saints' now can be inspired by our founders to leave a legacy of our own for the generations that come after. If All Saints' school has come this far in 50 years, what can we accomplish in 50 more?

It is also important, in this anniversary year, not to neglect to give thanks to God. All that we have is God's gracious gift, for it is God who planted a vision in our first leaders, clergy and lay. God nourished the plans and gave strength when it was needed. God is the foundation of our faith, and of all things we do in faith. When challenges come, we are able to weather them, if we are properly grounded. Thanks be to God for 50 years, and may God abundantly bless us in the years to come.

This Sunday at 11am, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of our school in worship. Afterwards, there will be a picnic, sponsored by the school, in the gym. All are welcome. Come join us as we give God thanks for this remarkable ministry.

February 28, 2013 An Annual Check-Up

When I turned 40 a couple of years ago, I resolved to have an annual physical at the doctor's office. Before that, as an adult I had usually only gone to the doctor when I was very sick. But several people whom I respect told me that I really ought to go for a check-up every year, and so I started to do it. I've actually found it rather reassuring, because it's good to have some measurements of how healthy you are, and a sense of what needs improvement. Knowing is always better than not knowing. And so, when I had my 2013 physical last week, it was helpful to find out that my health was about

what I expected (I could lose a few pounds, and I need to watch those spots we get from the Arizona sun, but my overall health is good).

Every year, every Episcopal church submits to the denominational headquarters our parochial report, which details some key measurements. Like a physical, the parochial report is nowhere near a complete assessment of church health, but it captures some useful data. I am one of those rectors who likes data. I would much rather measure something and know how it is doing than not know. We've begun to keep track of a lot of things at All Saints' over the past couple of years, as I hope you've noticed in the Annual Report, and we plan in the future to measure much more. Our parochial report which we just submitted, for 2012, is a healthy one, I'm glad to say. Our average weekend attendance has improved modestly over the past two years (up 19 in an average week since 2010). And our number of baptisms and confirmations surpasses the number of funerals (in other words, we are adding as many people to our church as we are losing in death). All of this lines up with our financial picture, which has also shown improvement.

I think it is important not to make too much or too little of statistics. We are blessed to be growing modestly at a time in which most mainline churches are shrinking, and to be adding new children and youth and new adult members, when many churches are failing to replenish their communities for the present and future. But in truth, I believe we are becoming more the church God calls us to be by focusing on a rather intangible goal: going deeper in faith. It is difficult to measure an increased commitment to following Jesus Christ, and yet this is our first priority. I believe that as more of us take up the cross and follow Christ, as more of us dedicate ourselves to the Christian practices of praying, learning, serving and connecting in addition to weekly worship, we open ourselves increasingly to God's transformation of our hearts. And there is nothing more spiritually attractive to others than a transformed heart. As we live our faith with passion, clearly loving God and our neighbors, others will ask us why we do what we do. And when we share why, and what we love about All Saints' specifically, our church is more likely to grow, in every sense.

Only God can bless a church with any kind of growth, measurable or not. Numerical growth is the result of an array of factors, many of which are beyond human influence. What we can do, each of us, is to give ourselves a spiritual check-up this Lent. How is my relationship with God and with those around me? Am I the person God intends me to be? Am I patterning my life after Jesus or after someone or something else? The more spiritually healthy each one of us becomes, the more we are open to God's grace. The more we are blessed with grace, the more healthy All Saints' will be, for we are all members of the One Body.

February 21, 2013 Watering Down the Bourbon

As someone born in the South, I appreciate a good bourbon. And so it was with interest that I read a couple of weeks ago the news that Maker's Mark had decided to water down their bourbon. Here's the background: good bourbon takes time; it typically ages for at least several years in charred-oak barrels. And so, as the popularity of premium bourbon has soared, Maker's Mark has found itself short of supply, with no quick way to make more. By watering down their whiskey from 90 to 84 proof, they figured they would have more available to sell. As you might expect, their plan backfired. Those who buy Maker's Mark do so because they are looking for quality. Watered down bourbon is much less appealing. And so, after heated criticism from bourbon drinkers, Maker's Mark retreated, deciding it was better to keep the high standards of their brand, even if it meant running short of supply.

In the wider Church, there are constant temptations to water down our "product." Unlike Maker's Mark, The Episcopal Church's challenge has not been too many "customers," but too few. As the mainline denominations have declined over the past 40 years, many churches have watered down what they believe and practice in an effort to draw in more people. The unstated implication has been that if churches expect less, more people will be interested. The problem is that watering down what is important doesn't draw more people. In reality, studies have demonstrated that the opposite is true: people are more drawn to a church that stands by its values and challenges its members to live out the Christian faith with commitment. The churches that grow, both liberal and conservative, are those with high expectations for their members.

Like all organizations, All Saints' has changed some over the years. But I am proud that All Saints' continues to stand firm in our beliefs and identity. How would I define that identity? We are a diverse congregation of different economic levels, political beliefs, sexual orientations, and backgrounds, united in following Christ as we pray, learn, serve and connect together. We practice a centrist, Prayer Book theology that welcomes all into a living tradition that sustains us, as it has sustained those who have gone before us. I believe All Saints' is and will continue to be an attractive community for those who value inclusion and tradition, without watering down either.

In this season of Lent in which Jesus asks us to take up our cross and follow him, we are reminded that the path of discipleship is not easy, but it is the way that leads to eternal life. May all the saints inspire us as we strive, with God's help, to live out this high calling.

February 14, 2013 On Prayer, Fasting, and Mercy

Often I find that someone else has written on a topic far more eloquently than I ever could. And so I commend to you this piece on the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and mercy (almsgiving) by one of the Church fathers. Saint Peter Chrysologus was the bishop of Ravenna, Italy in the middle of the 5th century. His sermons were so inspiring that he was given the title "Chrysologus" (greek for "Golden-worded"). I hope you find it helpful as we begin our Lenten journey together at All Saints'.

There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God's ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery.

Let this be the pattern for all when they practice mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you.

Therefore, let prayer, mercy and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defense, a threefold united prayer in our favor.

Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others. Let us offer our souls in sacrifice by means of fasting. There is nothing more pleasing that we can offer to God, as the psalmist said in prophecy: A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God does not despise a bruised and humbled heart.

Offer your soul to God, make him an oblation of your fasting, so that your soul may be a pure offering, a holy sacrifice, a living victim, remaining your own and at the same time made over to God. Whoever fails to give this to God will not be excused, for if you are to give him yourself you are never without the means of giving.

To make these acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to

earth. However much you may cultivate your heart, clear the soil of your nature, root out vices, sow virtues, if you do not release the springs of mercy, your fasting will bear no fruit.

When you fast, if your mercy is thin your harvest will be thin; when you fast, what you pour out in mercy overflows into your barn. Therefore, do not lose by saving, but gather in by scattering. Give to the poor, and you give to yourself. You will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others.

February 7, 2013 The Season of Love

It is hard not to notice that Valentine's Day is just around the corner. Grocery and drug stores have had their chocolates and cards on display since just after Christmas, and it seems that every other television commercial is from a jeweler. Valentine's Day is a billion dollar business. Not surprisingly, our Christian faith actually has a lot to say about love, and it has a rather different emphasis. In his famous passage on Christian love, so familiar from weddings, Saint Paul reminds us that the essence of true love is humility. How so? Because love is about caring for another more than we care about ourselves: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Human beings are selfish by nature. We can't help it, and so to be patient and kind, not arrogant or rude, and to bear difficult things for the sake of another is hard for us. But when we have grace to do so, we are following God's ways, for the nature of God is to be these things. The very epitome of humble love is God's willingness to sacrifice his own Son for you and me.

What motivates change in a person's life? It can be several things. It could be fear, like the doctor saying: "If you don't lose weight, you could have a heart attack." Many churches in the past and present have used fear, especially fear of Hell, as a tool to change lives. Some fear can be a good thing; as Psalm 111 says, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But one of the blessings of our Episcopal tradition is that it teaches love more than fear. God loves us totally and forever, no matter how many times, like the prodigal son, we reject that love. God will never decide not to love us anymore. That patient, hopeful love ought to inspire us to change, if we think about it. It makes us want to be worthy of such love. Lent is a season of love. In it, we are reminded of God's constant love and forgiveness. Through it, we become more loving of God and of our neighbor.

Last Sunday was an inspiring day. Our worship and classes were well attended, we had a number of newcomers with us for the first or second time, our youth did a great job helping us lead worship at 9am, and we reached out to those in need in two significant

ways. We raised over \$1100 to feed the hungry at André House, through the Souper Bowl of Caring, led by our youth. And we raised over \$800 to provide wedding rings for Haitian couples wanting to get married (thank you to our friends at Schmitt Jewelers for providing the rings at cost). We have great momentum as Lent approaches. May your Lenten disciplines, whatever they are, teach your heart to love more deeply the ways of the Lord.

January 31, 2013 Lent at All Saints' – Frequently Asked Questions

When does Lent start?

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is February 13th this year. The Ash Wednesday liturgy is at 7am, 8am (Day School Chapel), 12 noon, and 7pm (with the Senior Choir).

Do Episcopalians keep Lent?

We do. Every Lent, we are invited to prepare for Holy Week and Easter by a 40 day season of penitence and fasting. In particular, our Prayer Book urges us to keep a holy Lent “by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (BCP p. 265).

What are the traditional Lenten practices?

Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving (giving to the poor) have traditionally been the three pillars of Lenten practice. Within these guidelines, there is considerable flexibility. Traditionally, for example, fasting would mean eating less food, especially on certain days, and abstaining from meat (except fish) on Fridays. But one can “fast” from something else, especially something that distracts us from loving God and our neighbor. For some, an internet or television or Facebook fast one day a week (or more) might be beneficial, or a fast from gossip or grumbling. Some self-examination in advance of Lent is important, because each one of us needs to repent of different things, and each would benefit from a slightly different discipline. My recommendation is always to keep some traditional Lenten practices, while adding other practices that may also be of help for your spiritual health.

How do I keep a holy Lent if I don't have any spare time?

It is important to select a Lenten discipline that is sustainable for 40 days (and remember that Sundays are a break from your Lenten practice). It does no good to develop a rigorous pattern, only to fall flat on day 3. Start with something attainable, and you can always add more as Lent progresses.

I really want to use Lent to lose those extra pounds, and get ready for swimsuit season. Isn't Lent really about self-improvement?

Well, yes and no. But mostly no. The point is to focus not on ourselves (except for repentance) but on God, and on other people. To repent is to turn in a new direction. An effective discipline will turn our attention outward. For example, one reason why abstaining from meat on Fridays is a useful practice is that it reminds us that the poor seldom have much meat in their diets (this is why abstaining from meat but eating lobster on Fridays would miss the point!). As we feel deprivation, we are reminded of those who are hungry every day, and inspired to help them, while giving thanks for the blessings God gives us.

Do the clergy have Lenten disciplines?

Yes, but they vary. I fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, abstain from meat on Lenten Fridays, refrain from desserts except on Sundays, try to stay vigilant with daily prayer and Scripture reading, and make a private confession in Lent. I am not perfect, and I have days when I slip up (I believe the Devil is personally responsible for the selling of Girl Scout Cookies in Lent). The point is: set up for yourself a Lenten discipline that is achievable for 40 days, and that will help turn your attention from yourself towards God and other people. Even one thing, like praying or reading Scripture daily, can have a huge impact on your life over 40 days. Studies show that keeping a habit for 40 days is long enough to make a lasting change in one's perspective.

I have a question about what to do for my Lenten practice. What should I do?

Ask the clergy! We are glad to talk with you at any point about your spiritual development. We are also glad to hear confessions if there is something weighing heavily upon you (we can teach you how to make a confession, if it is your first time). Lent is a gift! Don't miss the opportunity to experience God's forgiveness and grace in this ancient way.

To assist with your Lenten practice, All Saints' has a number of offerings available this year. [Click here for a list.](#) Some are practices we offer year-round, and others are available only for Lent. Please consider these, and take advantage of them as you are able.

January 24, 2013 The Sound from the Balcony

I've never been a front row type of person; I prefer the balcony. Doubtless part of that is my personality. But part of it comes from being a lover of music. Often I find that music, especially classical music, is best appreciated not up close, but from some distance. From the front, certain instruments or sounds may stick out. From the balcony, the sounds have the chance to blend and balance. Often the balcony gives perspective: a better sense of the music as a whole.

Every year, the annual meeting and especially the annual report give us the sound of All Saints' from the balcony, to use a metaphor. Most of us interact with All Saints' up close most of the time: we tend to worship at the same service, and serve in the same ministries, and spend time with many of the same people, week after week. This is as it should be, for it is only through holy patterns that we are formed as Christians. But it is also beneficial, on occasion, to step back from our patterns. Sometimes it is good to be stretched through a new experience. And it is also good to find a place from which to observe the bigger picture. The annual meeting and annual report cannot nearly report all of the ministry that takes place at and through All Saints' in a given year. But they do give a meaningful summary of much of the Christian life of this community. It is truly inspiring to see how many of our members are living out the faith, in various ways as part of Christ's Body, the Church. We have a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, as Saint Paul teaches us.

Come to the annual meeting, if you are able. Come to church on Sunday to hear my annual state of the parish address as the sermon. And [please read the 2012 Annual Report](#) that Nanette has put together so effectively again this year. You will be amazed how much important ministry happens because of our staff, and especially because of our volunteers. The annual report tells a remarkable story of a faith community that prays, learns, serves and connects together in ways that make a huge difference in the lives of our members, those around us, and those across our city and around the world. Sure, we get a little out of tune every once in a while. We're not perfect. But from the balcony, you can hear a lot of beautiful music that All Saints' is making in our ministries. And for those who are listening, that holy music makes all the difference.

January 17, 2013 Warning! Reminder of Mortality Ahead!

In less than a month, Ash Wednesday will be here (Lent is very early this year), and we will again hear the challenging words as we receive the mark of ashes on our foreheads: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Every year, the Church reminds us that we are mortal creatures, given the gift of life for a limited time. On some level, we all know this. And yet, we are reluctant to acknowledge our mortality. We try not to think about death, but it enters into our lives from time to time

nonetheless. Nothing is more painful than the loss of a loved one, or the realization that our own life will soon come to an end. This is but one of many reasons why our faith is of such comfort. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian faith is that it enables us to face our mortality, head on, with confidence that this earthly life is not all there is. For us, and for those we love, there is another phase of life after death in which we are at peace in God's loving embrace. And there we await the final resurrection of the dead, won for us by Jesus Christ in his own resurrection. This is what we mean when we say that Christ has conquered death at Easter. It is not that we will not die, but that we will not die forever. Eternal life awaits. Our life on earth that seems so dynamic pales in comparison to the life to come. On Ash Wednesday, when we remember that we are dust, the purpose is two-fold: to remind us of our faith in eternal life, heaven and the resurrection, and second, to urge us to a life of purpose while we have these mortal bodies that God has given us.

One aspect of living a life of purpose is to face our mortality, and plan prayerfully for that time when we will die. None of us knows when we will die, and so, even if it is something we would rather not think about, it is good for us to plan in ways that reflect our faith and our values. A couple of Sundays ago, Marta Smith offered a class on the excellent Five Wishes program. For those who have not yet filled one out, Five Wishes is a legal document that makes provision for end of life decisions, including a living will, health care power of attorney, and funeral planning. Copies are available through the church office and from Marta. We also encourage everyone to join our All Saints' Legacy Circle. Our Legacy Committee has done a fine job reminding us of this. To join the circle, all you need to do is fill out a simple form indicating you have remembered All Saints' in your will. These forms are also at the church office. We never ask how much has been left to the church. All we need to know is that some amount has been designated for All Saints' in one's will.

We have worked hard here at All Saints' in the last 3 years to ensure that our legacy gifts are used wisely, both now and in the years to come. We have established a proper endowment fund, restricted in its use to a modest percentage of the fund's value, and invested with the Arizona Community Foundation. And with it we have made a vestry policy, designating all undesignated bequests over the threshold amount of \$10,000 for that endowment. Now parishioners can remember All Saints' in their wills, secure in the knowledge that their bequests over that threshold will support the mission and ministry at All Saints' forever. Each bequest becomes, in effect, a perpetual pledge to keep this church not just alive, but vibrant and life-changing, as our pledges have done while we were here. At our evensong on Sunday, February 10th, we will acknowledge those members of our congregation who have joined the Legacy Circle in the past year, as well as those members of the Circle who died in 2012. It is not too late to join the Circle by name or anonymously before that evensong. Please make time at some point to fill out both the Five Wishes documents and Legacy Circle form, and to give us copies for our files. It takes just a little commitment to get these provisions made, but you will feel

comforted once you have done them. And may we never forget that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

January 10, 2013 Spiritual AND Religious

We've all met people who say they are "spiritual, but not religious." That phrase means lots of different things to different people. But often, "spiritual but not religious" means they have an individualized, cafeteria spirituality: a bit of this and a bit of that. You know: a dash of prayer (but not actually going to church), a bit of yoga, a hike, and the occasional fasting or cleanse when one's weight gets too high. If that mix-and-match approach is effective for someone, that's fine. But for me, it would never work. I need to be spiritual AND religious. You see, if I simply designed my own set of spiritual practices, I would end up with only those things I like to do. It would be an entirely self-centered exercise, with nothing to stretch me, and nothing to push me to think of God and others before myself. I am weak and selfish enough that I need the whole of the Christian tradition, not just parts of it, and life in a disciplined community, and not just on my own. I am a Christian not because I am better or holier or more compassionate than anyone else, but because I need the Church in order to be better and holier and more compassionate than I would be without it.

There are so many reasons why it is good that we practice our faith and follow Jesus together in community as Christian Episcopalians, and not on our own. A shared faith commitment inspires us, and holds us accountable. We can share our joys and find support in our sorrows. And our common prayer reminds us that we are bound to one another, and to the communion of saints: those faithful ones who have gone before. Tradition is the voice of the saints, and they have a lot to teach us. There is also a practical benefit to community: when we work together, we can do much more good in the world than we could ever do alone. When we serve those in need as a whole church, we can impact hundreds of lives for the better.

We have just finished the Christmas season. This Advent and Christmas alone, All Saints' lived out our baptismal commitments in just some of the following ways:

- We bought 260 mosquito nets at \$12 each for Nets for Life. These will save hundreds of people in Africa from malaria in 2013. Think about that.
- 96 Maryland Gardens residents across the street received gifts for Christmas, and about the same number of children at San Pablo in Phoenix received gifts on Epiphany.
- Thanks to a generous gift, we sent \$3700 to El Hogar Ministries in Honduras, to help educate impoverished girls.
- And last but not least, 185 volunteers joined with our clergy and staff to offer hospitality and meaningful worship to almost 2,000 people on Christmas Eve and

Christmas day. We have no idea how God might have worked through us to touch lives.

In this season of Epiphany, in which we celebrate God's light spreading to all the world, may we remember that God's light is in each of us. Individually, that light is only so strong, but together, we can shine brightly in a city and world that need it more than we can know.

The Rector's Reflections

The Rev. Poulson Reed

2012

November 21, 2012 The Daily Office Challenge

This Sunday is the feast of Christ the King, the end of the liturgical year. December 2nd we begin a new church year with the season of Advent. While Advent is not as penitential a season as Lent, many find it to be a good time to take on a spiritual practice. The holidays are often hectic and stressful; it takes some effort to keep our attention on God. Just as in Lent we prepare our hearts for the death and resurrection of Christ in Holy Week and Easter, so too in Advent we are called to prepare spiritually for the coming of the Savior at Christmas. Like a new year's resolution, a new spiritual discipline can be begun in Advent, with the hope that it may continue.

In that spirit, I commend to all of us the Daily Office, the prayer book's services of morning and evening prayer (our book also offers prayers at noon, and at the end of day, called Compline). When Thomas Cranmer wrote the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549, he simplified the Roman Catholic monastic pattern of prayer by combining multiple daily services into two: morning and evening prayer. His hope was that daily prayer in the Anglican tradition would become accessible to all. Our current Book of Common Prayer continues to urge the combination of weekly Eucharist with daily prayer. I challenge all of us to pray daily throughout Advent, especially using the forms in our prayer book. This can be done alone, or with others (which is better).

You may be thinking: why should I pray the Daily Office, and even if I wanted to, how could I find the time?

There are several good reasons to pray in this ancient way.

+ Daily prayer to start and end the day reminds us that God is always with us, in good times and in bad. To hallow each day with prayer grounds our lives in our relationship with God, who loved us so much that he sent his son to be born for us. Many people find that daily prayer makes them more attuned to the presence of God all around them.

+ We can pray at any time, in any way, but these traditional forms align our prayers with those around the world and down the ages who are praying and have prayed in this same way. Do we always feel inspired to pray? No. But this pattern signals to God that our lives are open to God's direction for us.

+ The Daily Office has its own two year lectionary of Scripture readings, different from our Sunday readings. Every day features three readings and psalms. Ever heard of programs to read the Bible in a year? This daily lectionary takes you through almost all of the Bible in two years, but places the Scriptures in the context of prayer and the seasons of the year.

How do I pray the Daily Office? Here are some options, from the easiest to the most challenging (and most rewarding!):

+ Pray from the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (Book of Common Prayer pp. 137-140). To pray the abbreviated form of "In the Morning" and "At the Close of Day" takes under 5 minutes per day. Anyone can do it!

+ If you are technologically savvy, you can find the full Daily Office, including the proper readings and prayers for each day, at the Forward Movement website (forwardmovement.org then go to "Prayer Resources" and then "Daily Prayer"). Even better, if you have an iPhone, is the Forward Movement app. I have it, and it is fabulous. For \$6.99, you get daily prayer with all the readings, plus information about the saint of the day, and the Forward Day by Day devotions.

+ For anyone interested, I would be glad to teach you how to pray the full Daily Office using the prayer book. Simply be in touch, and I will train you. It takes about an hour to learn.

+ Please remember that we offer Evening Prayer on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 5:30 in the chapel. And anyone interested in getting together to pray the Daily Office in a group in addition to these times, let me know. I would love to identify a small group to support each other in this act of discipleship.

May God bless us this Advent as we await the coming of the Christ.

Poulson+

November 15, 2012 A New Archbishop of Canterbury

Recently the appointment of the new Archbishop of Canterbury was announced. The Right Reverend Justin Welby, Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, will succeed the Most Reverend Rowan Williams at the end of this year. This Sunday at 10am, during the education hour, I will share more information and offer some thoughts about Bishop Welby and the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury as it relates to our own Episcopal Church. But for now, it is important to hold him and his family in prayer. The ministry of the Archbishop of Canterbury is a uniquely challenging one. For even though he has no direct authority over the various provinces in the Anglican Communion, his leadership is a sign of the common bond and mission we share. Without centralized authority (as in the Roman Catholic Church) and with an enormous variety of cultures and theological positions, the Anglican Communion has struggled to find its identity in the 21st century. Bishop Welby brings to these challenges an intriguing combination of gifts and experiences. In his former career as an oil company executive, he traveled abroad extensively, and was often sent into areas of conflict and even war (indeed he was kidnapped on more than one occasion). His reputation as a humble and prayerful man, gifted at fostering reconciliation will serve him well.

It is fitting to reflect on the Archbishop-elect on this Seabury Sunday, at which we celebrate Samuel Seabury, the first bishop of The Episcopal Church. At both 9 and 11am, we will have splendid bagpipes, in recognition of the critical role that Scotland played by consecrating Seabury as bishop in 1784, when the English church would not do so. This is an excellent Sunday on which to bring any friend who loves the sound of bagpipes (and who doesn't?).

A week from Sunday, November 25th, is the feast of Christ the King, and our pledge commitment Sunday. We will symbolically gather our pledges at the altar, and bless them to God's use. If you have not yet returned your pledge card, please do so as soon as you can. If you need a new one, they are available at the back of the church or from the church office. All Saints' depends on financial pledges to offer our many ministries that make such a difference in the lives of those near and far. We do not have a large endowment to fund our programs. Almost all of our support comes from your generosity, year after year. Many of our expenses, such as employee health insurance and utilities, grow larger every year no matter what. We need new pledges and increased pledges just to stay even. Our financial health has improved greatly over the past three years, thanks to the hard work of our staff and Vestry. But we need your support to be sure that All Saints' is there for all who need it. No pledge, however small, is unimportant. I offer my deep thanks to all who have pledged, and my encouragement to those who have not. Please pledge, if you are able, before the 25th.

November 1, 2012 That Multitude That No One Can Count

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”
(Revelation 7:9)

One of the profound mysteries of the feast day of All Saints, which we celebrate this Sunday, is that every one of us is part of a far larger community than we can possibly imagine. In baptism, we are grafted into the Body of Christ, the Church that Jesus himself founded. That means we are united not only with our fellow parishioners at All Saints', Phoenix, but with all Christians in every place and at every time. Think about that: one communion of all races and nations and languages, all denominations, from the first fishermen whom Jesus called to follow him to those whom we will baptize on Sunday. The New Testament speaks of the “saints” almost always in the plural, and in the sense of all faithful Christians. And so "all saints" includes those heroic examples of the faith whom we emulate, but also those of us who strive, however imperfectly, to pattern our lives after Christ in our own day. We are all part of a great multitude, longing for the kingdom of God.

Sometimes, something happens that drives a point home with poignant effect. So it was with a message we received from the Episcopal Church in Haiti on Wednesday. It illustrates well the unity in Christ that we share. In the aftermath of hurricane Sandy, our Haitian friends wrote to assure us of their prayers, especially those in the Northeast. Those for whom we had prayed so often (even last week as Sandy affected them) were now praying for us. Here was their message for those Episcopal churches and schools with Haitian partners:

Dear brothers and sisters,

The partnership program diocese of Haiti wishes to express its deepest sympathy to the many victims of the storm Sandy to all our American friends, especially those in the Northeast as they face the hurricane. We have been praying and trusting in God to be with you during this difficult period. God is powerful and faithful, so we know that some good will come out of all of this. We are all in Christ, so with our combined prayers, things are to going to work out. Tomorrow, in church, we will celebrate All Saints Day. Even as we reflect about the great work of our late Saints, let us remember trials and problems are ever present. But as Saints, God is going to use us and we will be remembered and rewarded for our work. So keep the faith and be strong as you use this period to help and comfort yourselves and the wider community.

Come on Sunday as we draw inspiration from all the saints: past, present and yet to come.

October 25, 2012 David's Piggy Bank

When our son David turned four this summer, Megan and I decided it was time for him to have an allowance and a piggy bank. Advertising and commercialism target younger and younger children these days, and we felt it was important to begin to shape his values concerning money. David participates in our family chores, and in return, every Saturday he receives three dollars. We bought him a three-section bank, and a dollar goes in each section: one for sharing, one for saving, and one for spending. His spending money he can use however he wants, though it takes a number of weeks to accumulate enough for the toys he likes (his current obsession is Bey Blades – they're all the rage with the 4 year old boy population, apparently). His saved money is for college (never too early!). And his shared money is at his discretion, as long as he shares with someone in need. Often he puts it in the offering plate in children's chapel. Share, Save, Spend. We hope this will be his behavior with money as he gets older. Today, it's a rote practice. But perhaps in time he will understand that, while spending is necessary and even sometimes enjoyable, it is best balanced by saving for a future expense (known or unknown), and sharing with those who have less.

It's a lesson we all struggle to learn, and learn again. I suspect our challenge has a lot to do with how our brains are wired: the warm contentment of sharing and the virtuous satisfaction of saving are no match for the adrenaline rush of buying something we crave. This is why Jesus speaks so often about money in the gospels. Even more than gluttony and lust, greed has the power to corrupt and warp us. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," warns Jesus. The only antidotes to greed are simple living and extravagant generosity. One of the most challenging and counter-cultural traditions of our Christian faith is the practice of proportional giving (giving a percentage of income – ideally 10%, the tithe). Proportional giving is an exercise in generosity. When we donate to almost any other organization, we give from our leftovers and expect something in return. The Church teaches giving sacrificially from our first fruits, for the sake of others. It is hard. But when we have grace to do it, it is liberating.

By all means, pledge to All Saints' to support our ministries, which make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of people in our church and beyond. We need every dollar to do what we do in worship, Christian education, pastoral care and service to others. After 3 years of extremely lean budgets and doing more with less, it would be fantastic to have just a little more to do more. Give because together we can do great things as the Body of Christ. But equally, pledge as a sign to God and to yourself that you recognize your profound blessings, and want to share your blessings with others, while saving enough for a rainy day. When you look at your "piggy bank," what do you see?

October 18, 2012 Created for Community

Why are we drawn to being together in community? Scripture would say God has made us this way. We are not meant to be alone (Genesis 2:18), but are created to find companionship in families and in communities of faith, in which we are knit together into one Body (1 Corinthians 12). Whatever satisfaction we derive from individual pursuits, whatever rejuvenation we find in temporary solitude, eventually we long to be with other people. Committing to communal life is not easy; it takes work and humility to integrate our own needs and gifts with those of others. But through each other, God blesses and stretches us. Community--whether in families, churches, schools or other groups--supports us when we need help, encourages us to be our best selves, and joins our efforts with those of others for good.

In community we benefit chiefly in two ways: by belonging, and by making a difference. When we have a sense of belonging, we feel rooted and at home. We know someone is looking out for our well being, and that when challenges come, we will not face them alone. A community is there for us. But community also helps us be there for those in need in our community and beyond. By pooling our efforts and working together, we can do much more good than we could by ourselves. As we continue in the church's annual pledge campaign, I invite you to reflect on what the community of All Saints' means to you. More specifically, if there were no All Saints', what difference would it make in your life and those of others? How is All Saints' a community in which you belong, and with which you make a difference in the lives of those around us? Every dollar of pledged financial commitment enables us to be that community, in communion with God and each another.

This Sunday highlights the All Saints' community in an especially meaningful way, as we celebrate Day School Sunday at the 11am Eucharist. This year marks the 50th anniversary of our wonderful day school. For all but the first decade of the church's existence, the day school has been our most important outreach ministry. On this day, we celebrate the unity of our one All Saints' community, church and school. And we rejoice in our Episcopal identity, through which we embrace and serve all.

October 11, 2012 Pledge Now and Receive this Lovely Coffee Mug

Not really, but I hope I got your attention (though if a mug would encourage you, let me know and we can get a coffee together). In all seriousness: this Sunday, we begin our annual pledge campaign. For those new to All Saints', the pledge campaign is our annual drive during which we gather estimates of giving to All Saints' Church for the coming year. By knowing how much each individual or family intends to give to All Saints' in 2013, we can prudently plan our operating budget. A pledge is not written in stone; it can be changed, as needed. But making a giving commitment is good for the church, and

good for the giver. Once you receive your pledge packet in the mail next week, I hope you will prayerfully consider your pledge, and return the reply form no later than November 25th.

I suspect “exciting” is not the first word most would associate with the pledge season. But here are four reasons why I am excited about this year’s pledge campaign.

Our pledge campaign is a tangible sign of the meaningful ministry we will do, with God’s help, in 2013. We should feel proud of ourselves at All Saints’ Church. After some pretty challenging financial times and some tough decisions, our fiscal health has gotten better each of the last three years. At the same time, we continue to offer an enormous array of ministry that transforms lives, both our own and those of others. We have gotten very efficient at delivering more impact with less. All Saints’ is on the move! New people are joining our diverse church, and God is blessing us through our worship, prayer and amazing music, our varied learning and fellowship opportunities, and our serving others at All Saints’ and in the community. From programs for children, youth and families to more pastoral care to our members, from senior ministry to regular service to those in need from Phoenix to Haiti, from glorious choral Eucharists to simple Bible studies and prayer groups, God is doing great things through and with us in this holy place. Every pledged dollar means more ministry, touching more lives that need God’s love.

Testimonials. Episcopalians are sometimes shy about sharing our faith stories, but when we do, they are inspiring. Our testimonials, which will take place at most 9 and 11am Sunday Eucharists, and about half of the Saturday 5pm and Sunday 7:30am Eucharists during the pledge season, will feature parishioners sharing briefly about how God has touched them through All Saints’. I love to hear how faith makes a difference in someone’s life, and I hope you do, too.

Conversation and feedback. During the pledge campaign, we take the pulse of our membership. We try to call as many parishioners as we can, and we welcome your feedback via letter, email or an appointment. Let us know what you love about All Saints’. Let us know what we could do to be of more support for you in your effort to be a disciple. At any time, but especially now we invite your reflections on where the Holy Spirit is leading All Saints’.

And most importantly: **pledging is one of our most valuable spiritual practices.** Jesus teaches us that everything we have is a gift from God. And so, when we give to the church, we are giving back to God in thanksgiving for our blessings. Remember our words at the Offertory: all things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee. We pledge not just because the church needs our gift, but because we need to give. It is good for our spirits when we are generous. The Biblical teaching of the tithe, giving at least 10% of our income to the church (and I would include in that other charitable causes), comes from the tradition of first fruits. In ancient times, the first

fruits of a crop were given to help others. Whether or not you feel able to give a full 10% of your income, a proportional pledge (a percentage) is a way of reminding ourselves that we give not out of obligation but out of gratitude, not from the leftovers at the end but from the first fruits, to thank God for the amazing blessings we enjoy in our lives.

Inside your pledge packet is a spiritual exercise on gratitude that I hope you will find helpful. I encourage you to use it on your own, or as a family. May this pledge season be a time of reflection, as we look back on the blessings God has given us, and a time of anticipation, as we look forward to God's blessings to come in the new year. Thank you, in advance, for your generous support of this church that we love.

September 19, 2012 The Beauty of Holiness: About the Fourth Sunday of the Month

This year we are trying an experiment. On the fourth Sunday of every month, the full Senior Choir, which usually sings at 11am, will sing at 9:00am, while the Chamber Choir (our smaller group of paid section leaders and some volunteers), which usually sings at 9:00am, will sing at 11:00am.

Why are we trying this?

Over the past two years, our 9:00am congregation has grown to about the same size as our 11am congregation. Although the 9:00am has beautiful music, this gives an opportunity for the 9:00am congregation to experience the great gifts of our Senior Choir. Also, we will be able to enhance our 11:00am worship on those days, by using our Chamber Choir to sing music better suited to their group than to the Senior Choir.

On these fourth Sundays, what will the 11am Eucharist be like?

Much will be the same, with the same pattern of liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer. The main differences are that it will be a Sung Eucharist with Incense.

What is a Sung Eucharist?

Regular attendees of the 11:00am Eucharist know that the celebrant (a priest) sings the Eucharistic Prayer, and the congregation sings several other parts of the service. In a Sung Eucharist, several more parts are sung, by celebrant, choir, and congregation. Everyone has a little more to sing! The celebrant has some sung parts in the first half of the service (parts that are usually spoken), the Chamber Choir sings some composed settings of texts usually sung or said by the congregation, and the congregation sings some parts usually spoken (the Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer).

Why are there more sung parts of this service?

Saint Augustine famously said that those who sing, pray twice. From the Jewish roots of our tradition through the history of the Christian movement, song has been a special way to give praise to God. When we sing, we are reminded that our worship is different

from anything else we do in life. We are on holy ground, and our prayers join with those of the saints in every generation in the mystical Body of Christ which is the Church across the ages.

What if I am not a good singer? Should I skip this service?

No! The few new parts for the congregation to sing can be learned rather easily, and we will even offer a little practice for these parts 10 minutes before the service the first couple of times. Also, the Chamber Choir will support everyone in the congregational parts. Not everyone is gifted with a great voice, but anyone can be moved by music, and their faith strengthened.

What do I do during the parts that the Chamber Choir is singing?

Worship is not a concert, and the Chamber Choir is not performing for us. Rather, they are singing parts on our behalf. If we listen attentively and prayerfully, our prayers join with those of the choir as one. To pray through the sung words of another takes practice, but like any form of prayer, it becomes more natural over time. The choir will be singing some of the most beautiful and difficult music ever written for worship, and as they use their God-given gifts to praise the God who has blessed them, all of our spirits are lifted heavenward.

What about the incense?

Using incense in the liturgy is a tradition that dates back to ancient Hebrew worship. As Psalm 141:2 says: "Let my prayer be set forth in your sight as incense." Incense symbolizes the prayers of the faithful rising up to heaven. Incense also appears in the Bible in association with visions of the sacred, most notably in the book of Isaiah and the Revelation to John. Worshipping with incense is one way in which traditional worship engages our senses, opening our hearts to the mystery of God.

Will the incense make me cough?

Probably not! We actually use relatively little incense, and the incense we use is quite pure. For those who wish to avoid incense on these fourth Sundays, the Saturday 5:00pm, Sunday 7:30am and Sunday 9:00am will be incense free.

What if I love this experiment? What if I don't like it?

We hope everyone will enter this experiment with a spirit of openness and interest, and with a sense of common good. That said, as with anything, feel free to share any feedback with the Rector. You may also share with our Director of Music, Scott Youngs, and Head Verger, Lowell Atkins.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Let the whole earth stand in awe of him (Psalm 96).

September 13, 2012

On Small Groups and the Importance of Lifelong Learning

There is not a lot that I envy in non-denominational mega-churches. I appreciate what they do and the impact they have on many; they just don't much appeal to me. I am a cradle Episcopalian. I love our Church, and still believe that God can and does work powerfully through mainline denominations. We may not be the biggest trees in the forest, but our roots run deep. But I do envy one thing: their small groups. In most mega-churches, members commit to at least three things: attending worship, financial support of the church's ministry, and joining a small group. Why small groups? Because if a Sunday congregation is very large, people need a way to connect with others, make Christian friends and reflect on their faith. A group of 10-12 people that meets weekly to pray, read the Bible, and talk about how their faith impacts their life is an incredible support for the hard, but joyful work of following Jesus.

Most Episcopal churches don't have much of a small group ministry. Deeply ingrained in our Anglican culture is the notion of clergy as expert teacher. Therefore, most of our adult education takes the traditional format of teacher/student. There is some real benefit to this. Clergy have years of seminary training (typically 3 years) and we try to ground our ministry in continued study, as time permits. One of my commitments this program year is to do more teaching, especially on Sunday mornings at 10am. I enjoy it, and see part of my role as rector as a teaching one: passing on the life-giving traditions entrusted to us.

But I also hope that, in God's good time, All Saints' will have more small groups. A number of our ministries function, in effect, like small groups. But frankly, when we have offered more small group opportunities, there has been limited interest. I suspect some of this lack of interest comes from the sense that if it is not taught by "an expert," it won't be valuable. But one of the gifts of the Protestant half of our Anglican tradition is the realization that every person can benefit from praying and reading the Scriptures. William Tyndale, the first to translate the Bible into English, famously said that he believed even a ploughboy could understand the Bible. There is much we can learn ourselves, and from each other.

All Saints' is an incredibly active congregation, and most of our members lead very busy lives away from this place. But I urge you, as you are able, to find opportunities to learn about our faith. Come to a 10am Sunday class or a Wednesday 8am Bible study or Book Discussion Group or the Women's Circle of Learning. Read on your own, or with a friend (the clergy are glad to recommend books). And if you ever feel drawn to form a small group to meet, pray, learn and share together, let me know and I will see if others are interested, and get you started. Most groups commit to meet for 6 to 8 weeks, and are grouped by some kind of common interest.

We are off to a great start in our new program year. I can't wait to see where God leads us.

July 18, 2012

The Aftermath of General Convention: TEC in the Main Stream Media

Following the conclusion of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church (TEC) there have been several pieces about TEC in the main stream media. In particular, there were two editorials in the last week or so critical of TEC: one in the Wall Street Journal, and the other in the New York Times. Ordinarily I try not to wade into such topics in my writings to our congregation. Every day there are pieces written about TEC, both pro and con, on blogs, in smaller newspapers, and in other media. They often reflect the usual back-and-forth battling of so-called liberal vs conservative positions that we know all too well in our political discourse. As a centrist in the Church, I sometimes feel like I am being squeezed from both sides into an ever shrinking space. And so I try to focus on following Jesus as best I can, as a disciple and as your rector, leaving the fighting for someone else. To spend too much time reflecting on all the actual and perceived battles in the Church is a considerable distraction from the actual work of the Gospel; it is rather like a musician constantly reading and re-reading reviews of their last concert, instead of practicing their instrument. But in this case, we have two pieces in high profile newspapers, followed by the usual responses and counter-responses. And since you may either have read them, or engaged in conversation with those who have, I want to share a few thoughts.

It is not worth reading or reflecting on the Wall Street Journal editorial, because it is filled with factual errors. A number of Episcopalians on different sides of the theological spectrum have clearly identified the many errors, which undermine the credibility of the piece. As usual, Fr. Scott Gunn of Forward Movement has a helpful take on this on his blog (Seven Whole Days) if you are interested. The second, more reasonable critique is Ross Douthat's July 14th column in the New York Times entitled "Can Liberal Christianity Be Saved?" Douthat is a conservative and a Roman Catholic, so his perspective is that of an interested but critical observer. Not surprisingly, Douthat laments the liberal drift of TEC (and other mainline denominations), and sees as its consequences the watering down of its theology, the waning of its influence, and the collapse of its membership. You can judge his piece and his conclusions for yourself. I find it to be too simplistic in some areas, rather thought-provoking in others, and for the most part nothing new. TEC has certainly moved to the Left in some respects over time, especially at General Convention, but our congregations are by no means monolithic. There is considerable theological variety. Within and outside TEC, there are plenty of congregations that have, in my judgment, veered too far to the Left or Right, leaving solid theology behind. Sometimes bad theology leads to shrinking congregations, since over time anything less than the Gospel fails to sustain the human spirit. But other times, bad theology can be spectacularly successful, by certain secular measurements. Some of the largest churches in the country preach a prosperity theology that is entirely

un-Biblical (no, God does not want you to have all the money and possessions you desire; God wants you to live a life of purpose, to have what you need, and out of gratitude to share your blessings so that others may also have what they need).

But here is the point for our All Saints' community of faith: we have the opportunity to follow a middle path, neither solely liberal nor conservative, which I believe is actually the most authentic way to be disciples of Jesus in community in the Anglican tradition. We can be welcoming of all, respecting the dignity of every human being (as our Prayer Book puts it), while challenging ourselves truly to follow Christ in our daily lives, every day and not just on Sundays. We can strive to live as people of good morals and upright character, equally concerned about our own salvation and the well being of others. We can value the tradition of our Prayer Book, and the word of God revealed to us in the Bible, while still leaving room for the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, guide our hearts and lead our congregation. This is the Anglican way.

In an era of declining churches, both liberal and conservative, I believe All Saints' is well positioned for growth, both in membership and in faith. I think that in our partisan culture, there are those of all ages who hunger for a diverse community in which all are invited to transformation in Christ through spiritual practices we share in common. But let us not be complacent. As we move closer to our program year, expect to be challenged. There is much at All Saints' of which we can be justifiably proud. But we can do more, much more, to ground our lives in daily and weekly prayer, in regular study of our faith, and in loving service to those who are suffering. To challenge ourselves to live out our baptismal promises in these ways is truly to follow Christ. And when we do so, we are blessed with spiritual treasure, and God uses us to bless others in life changing ways. Now that would be a news story worth writing.

July 12, 2012 General Convention 2012 – A Summary and Reflection

The General Convention of The Episcopal Church has concluded in Indianapolis, and I want to share some information and some reflection with you. The General Convention (GC) meets every three years, passing legislation for The Episcopal Church (TEC). In order for a resolution to be adopted, it must pass both the House of Bishops, and the House of Deputies (made up of priests, deacons, and lay people elected by each diocese). As I said in my piece before GC, I always find myself agreeing with some of the resolutions and disagreeing with others – this is the way things are in any decision making based on the democratic process. As a church that sees itself as the middle way between protestant and catholic, TEC is continually challenged to find the right balance between the tradition handed down to us, and the reform to which God calls us through the Holy Spirit. There were many resolutions passed, and for those who wish to explore them in detail, www.generalconvention.org has them all. But these are the resolutions that are likely to have the most impact.

Same-Sex Blessings

This has been somewhat in the news. GC has authorized the trial use of a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex couples, as of the first Sunday in Advent 2012. This is provisional, which means the liturgy will be available for use during the next three years, but is not yet a part of our Book of Common Prayer. While this liturgy is tested, opinion will be gathered from The Episcopal Church and beyond. The next GC will decide whether to make the liturgy a permanent part of our liturgical offerings, or continue this provisional period of testing. This is typical of how TEC adopts liturgy: it authorizes it for trial use, and then evaluates it over time. This is not same-sex marriage, but it does offer the Church's blessing to committed same-sex couples. What does this mean for All Saints'? This resolution gives each diocesan Bishop discretion as to whether or not these blessings will be authorized for their diocese. If Bishop Smith authorizes their use in the Diocese of Arizona, which I expect he will, there is likely to be a process by which parishes can determine whether or not to offer such blessings. No parish will be required to offer them. Let me assure you: I treasure the diversity of All Saints'. Unlike many churches, All Saints' is politically and theologically diverse, with conservatives, liberals, and many moderates worshiping together. I myself am a centrist, and find wisdom on all sides, both politically and in the Church. I believe that if we worship from the Prayer Book, teach and learn the basics of the ancient faith revealed to us in the Bible, and give of ourselves in loving service, there is far more that unites us than divides us. We can commit to live as disciples of Jesus, focusing on the essentials of our faith, without agreeing on everything. I truly believe that part of the mission of All Saints' is to be a diverse congregation, united in Christ, and respecting each other as friends. Same-sex blessing is one of many issues, I believe, on which faithful Christians can disagree. Therefore, on this or any issue with potential to divide us, I will always proceed with great care, in order to maximize our unity. All Saints' has a number of gay and lesbian members, both single and in committed relationships. We are a congregation in which all are welcome, without exception, and our gay and lesbian members are valued

brothers and sisters in Christ in this faith community. At the same time, we have a number of members who, I suspect, would oppose same-sex blessings at All Saints'. Should we have the option to offer these blessings in our diocese, I have great confidence in our ability, together, through the Holy Spirit, prayerfully to discern the right path for All Saints'.

Restructuring

In my opinion, this is the most important resolution passed at GC. The structures of TEC have become too large, unwieldy, and far too expensive. TEC faces a critical challenge: how to stop our decline and begin to grow. Like most mainline churches, TEC has declined greatly (almost 25% over the last decade). If we are to turn this around, we will need vibrant congregations, following Jesus Christ and sharing the Good News with new generations. A more streamlined governance on the national level would leave more resources on the local level, and potentially keep our national structures more focused on mission. The resolution passed by GC will set up a task force, somewhat independent of current structures, to make a proposal for the restructuring both of GC and TEC in general.

Communion Without Baptism

GC did not change the traditional pattern of baptism before communion. I was pleased to see the traditional teaching upheld, as I consider this to be a core issue of faith. Our Prayer Book, canons (church laws), Scripture, and over 2000 years of tradition have taught that baptism is the point of entry into the Christian life, and Holy Communion is the sacrament that nourishes that life. TEC is actually very hospitable in our communion practice, welcoming anyone who is baptized (one does not have to be an Episcopalian to receive). In my opinion, our current practice is exactly the right balance of welcome and commitment. To receive the Body and Blood of Christ is an awesome and powerful thing, not to be taken lightly and without some measure of preparation.

Anglican Covenant

GC took a middle ground position on the Anglican Covenant. TEC is an independent church, affiliated with many other national churches in the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Covenant was proposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as a statement of what holds the Anglican Communion together, and a process for dealing with disagreements among affiliated churches. The covenant has found little support, even in the Church of England. GC declined to adopt it, essentially, but pledged our continued desire to remain in the Anglican Communion.

Transgender Rights

A GC resolution gave basic rights to transgendered persons in the Church. Much like civil law, this simply guarantees that transgendered people cannot be discriminated against solely because of their sexual identity.

Benefit Plans

GC has extended by several years the deadlines for churches and especially for church schools to bring all employees into the church's health insurance plan, and meet a standard with regard to insurance and pension. This extra flexibility will be helpful, since there will be some added expense potentially for churches and schools.

These are just a few of the resolutions passed by GC. As I said in my message prior to GC, please feel free to be in touch with me if you have any questions or concerns about General Convention, The Episcopal Church, or All Saints'. I keep my own calendar, so be in touch with me directly by email (which is best) or phone, and I will be glad to set up a time to talk.

I appreciate every single member of All Saints', and I thank God that I have been called to serve with you as your rector. I look forward to seeing you this and every Sunday, as we celebrate our unity with Christ, with each other, and with all the saints.