

The Rector's Reflections

The Rev. Poulson Reed

2016

December 28, 2016 [What's in a Name?](#)

Now that the exuberant joy of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day has settled into the more restrained, quieter joy of the remaining days of the Christmas season, January 1st is upon us. Our culture celebrates January 1st as New Year's Day, but it is also a major feast day of the Church, the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus.

The Holy Name commemorates the moment in Luke 2:21 when Mary and Joseph, fulfilling the Jewish law, had Jesus circumcised on the eight day after his birth, and formally named him "Jesus". "Jesus" is a Hebrew form of the name "Joshua," which means "God will save."

We recall, especially on January 1st, the words of Philippians 2:9-11: God gave Jesus "the name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord."

And so, as we rightly celebrate the New Year with parties, champagne, football games, and New Year's resolutions, may we not forget the most important celebration of all: God saved us by sending Jesus Christ at Christmas to be born, live, die, and be raised for us.

Christmas continues until January 6th, and our best New Year's resolution might be to resolve to bend the knee of our hearts and lives in 2017 to the name and humble example of Jesus, our heavenly king.

Blessings,
Poulson+

December 22, 2016 The Saint John's Bible Coming Permanently to All Saints'

As the Christmas season of gift-giving approaches, I am delighted to share the news of a wonderful gift to All Saints'. A small group of anonymous donors, with one major donor, has gifted us with a full, seven volume Heritage Edition of the illuminated Saint John's Bible from Saint John's Abbey and University in Minnesota.

You will recall that we were blessed to have on loan one volume from the Saint John's Bible, the Book of Gospels and Acts, through November of this year. Many of our members, friends, students and community members were touched by this beautiful work of spiritual art.

Now we will have permanently all seven, museum-quality volumes to use in worship, and for education for children and adults. This Bible will inspire the creative imagination, delight art lovers and artists, and encourage all ages to explore the holy word of God made known to us in the Scriptures.

The books will arrive in February, and we will have more to share in the New Year about how we will benefit from these treasures. One volume will be on display in our church library at all times, and we will regularly use them for worship, classes and spiritual practices for our church and school. The Saint John's Bible will also be an attraction to the wider community, as we seek to invite more people to our campus.

As a special commemoration of this exciting addition, on Thursday, March 16th, Bishop Smith will be with us for one evening of our Lenten series to bless our illuminated volumes and talk about his own new book on Saint Augustine's Bible, the oldest book in England. Save the date!

I want to stress that no money for these volumes was from the operating budget, but came from the generosity of a small group of parishioners, with one particular lead gift, who had a vision of a marvelous legacy to leave to All Saints' for generations to come. Their gifts were specifically for this project, and this project alone.

As a church and school with deep love for both the Bible and the arts, we are grateful for the donors' kindness, initiative, and love for All Saints'.

[To learn more about the Heritage Edition of the Saint John's Bible, click here:](#)

For a lovely video about the institutions that became part of the Heritage Edition family in 2016, and for a touching Christmas story of how one of these volumes ignited the spiritual imagination one night on the South Side of Chicago, [click here:](#)

For questions about the Saint John's Bible and All Saints', feel free to be in touch with the Rector.

A final note: We are still in need of year end gifts to All Saints' for 2016 and pledges for 2017 to balance our budget, as our general budget is a totally different category from this special, one-time gift.

Year-End Giving: A Request December 15, 2016

cartoon by Jay Sidebotham



This Advent cartoon by Jay Sidebotham gets at an important contradiction within the season: even as we try to practice the quiet and slowing down that the season proclaims, the hectic stress of life at holiday time demands our attention. Most of us feel this tension between the spiritual and the worldly, at least to some degree.

One of the ways that the parish leadership of the Rector and Vestry experience some anxiety at this time of year is in our finances. Our annual (and budgeted-for) reality is that our largest “revenues” by far occur in December, with the fulfillment of pledges, and generous Christmas offerings. And so, every December, we wait in hope that our year-end giving will bring us to a positive position by December 31. Thanks be to God, the last four years that is exactly what has happened: strong December giving has given us a small surplus at year’s end.

This year, we are a little more anxious than usual, as our plate giving on Sundays has been down quite a bit (almost \$20,000 under budget) for reasons we do not fully understand. Our pledged dollars have been going up the last four years, so it may be that some of our “plate givers” have become “pledgers,” which is a good thing. Still, we are behind where we would like to be overall for this late in the year.

If you are able, please remember our church in these last two weeks of the year, in the following ways:

- * Please fulfill your pledge for 2016, if possible (to check on your balance, contact Lindsay or Barbara in the office, or look on Realm).

- * Please consider making a year-end donation, either through a Christmas memorial dedication (due December 19), or regular Christmas offering ([**Click on link here to do that online.**](#))

* Please make a pledge for 2017, if you have not already done so. Our pledged dollars are up again for 2017, for this point in the year, but we have not yet reached our goal of 400 pledges. **(Click here to do that online.)**

* And last of all, if you evaluate your estate plans at the end or beginning of the year, please remember All Saints' in your will as a legacy gift, in addition to providing for your family after death. Bequests are the most effective way to build our small endowment, since any amount over \$10,000 automatically goes into the endowment, by Vestry policy. One way to do this would be to leave a percentage of your estate, say 10%, to the church after everything is settled, as a perpetual pledge to support our ministries. We have a simple Legacy Circle form to fill out at the office that never asks the amount, but simply lets the church know we are included in your will.

God always graciously provides us what we need to support our ministries, through our members and friends. Thank you for your support this year, and in the year to come, in furthering God's mission to bring light into the dark places in our world.

December 8, 2016 The Gift of Deadlines

As we light the third candle on the Advent wreath this weekend, we see that the time is running short: only two weeks remain before Christmas. It will come, whether we are ready or not.

When I was younger, I hated deadlines and found them very stressful. These days, I am more likely to see them as a gift. What do I mean? I never really have enough time to do anything as well as I would like, in my ministry or away from it. As a perfectionist, this could drive me crazy. But I've been getting a little better at letting go, and saying to myself: it will be good enough.

"Good enough" are two liberating words. The sermon that I am writing, or the class I am preparing, my daily prayer, or dinner, or exercise will be as it will be, when the deadline comes. And then I need to let it go, say "good enough," and take on whatever is next.

And so, wherever you are in your Advent preparation for Christmas: it's all going to be fine. If all the presents aren't bought and the Christmas dinner is, as yet, unplanned, and, most importantly, if your heart is not exactly ready for the Savior to be born in it, it will all be fine, with God's help.

If God could make do with a feed trough in a stable for the newborn Lord of Heaven to be placed in on a cold winter's night, God can make do with whatever we have to offer. If we offer it with love.

Let us use the precious Advent time that remains, and use it well, for the sake of others, for ourselves, and for God. It will be good enough, when the deadline comes, and the waiting is over, and the son of God is born anew.

December 1, 2016 Diversity and Reconciliation: Beyond Clichés

At our October meeting, the Vestry completed a revision of our canons (our church bylaws), under the able leadership of our dedicated volunteer Chancellor of many years, Anne Kleindienst. Mostly, we were cleaning up a lot of small things, since the canons had not been updated in decades. Not exactly the most exciting project, ordinarily, but the Holy Spirit operates in mysterious ways.

In discussing our permanent committees, such as Buildings and Grounds, and Finance, the Vestry was noting our commitment, over many decades, to being a diverse, big-tent community. In that spirit, the Vestry created a new committee, on Diversity and Reconciliation. Little did we know that the turmoil of the election, a month later, and its aftermath would highlight dramatically the need for just such a ministry.

What will this Committee on Diversity and Reconciliation do?

Once formed, early in 2017, it will guide All Saints' as we consider what it means to be a truly diverse community (in many different aspects), and how we welcome and respect the dignity of all people. Additionally, the committee will help us consider how to be advocates for reconciliation in our church, city, nation, and world.

This ministry will move beyond clichés and narrow, partisan definitions, getting to the spiritual roots of what it means to be made in the image of God, to fall prey to the sin of division, and to strive, with God's help, to find deeper connection and common ground across our differences.

There are so many bitter divides in our nation. How can God use All Saints' to help bridge those divides, starting where we are?

This isn't a new idea. The Bible is clear that the Church is called to reconciliation (the restoring of healthy relationships), and that this ministry is a result of God's reconciling love towards us in Jesus Christ. God "through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18).

The Catechism in our Book of Common Prayer defines the very mission of the Church in terms of reconciliation: "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ" (p. 855). In an increasingly polarized culture, how might All Saints', with humility, work to bring diverse people together, and cultivate unity, understanding, and forgiveness?

Our Anglican heritage has examples of churches that have committed themselves to just such important efforts. On Christmas Day in 1940, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral in England spoke on national radio from the ruins of the cathedral, destroyed by German bombs. He called on those on both sides of World War Two, when the war was over, to join together “to build a kinder, more Christ-child-like world.” That vision led to Coventry’s Centre for Reconciliation that strives to heal conflict across the globe to this day.

Our vision at All Saints’ is much more modest, but we offer what we have to God’s use, for God’s healing of the world.

November 24, 2016 A Change in Seasons

It is always such a blessing when fall arrives for real in Phoenix, as it has the last week. The late evening and early mornings have become just a bit brisk, and the sweaters have been brought out of storage (even if they are taken off by lunchtime). Some people say that Phoenix has no seasons, but that's not so, and the longer one lives here, the more one comes to appreciate the subtle changes in our own, beloved corner of God's creation.

This weekend will mark another change in seasons, as our new church year begins with Advent. As with the weather, the differences may seem subtle at first, but they are significant. The color will be blue, the Advent wreath will appear, the Eucharistic Prayer and Prayers of the People and other prayers will change for the season, the lectionary will move to Year A with its emphasis on Matthew's gospel, and the readings will begin to prepare us for Christmas.

Advent is a wonderful and complex time: a mix of penitence and hopeful expectation, of remembering the prophecies that foretold the Savior's birth while looking for his coming again. It is both sentimental and bracing, and it is fulfilled with the arrival of Christmas before we know it.

Don't let God's Advent blessings pass you by. Pick out something small, some modest practice to mark this holy season of preparation: a few minutes of daily silence or prayer or Scripture reading, a way to be generous to the less fortunate, or reaching out to someone with whom you disagree or someone you suspect feels vulnerable right now because of the election, loneliness, grief or some other reason.

Advent is a gift. May the warm sanctuary of this season calm our minds and renew our spirits from the swirling stresses of the world.

November 17, 2016 Seabury Sunday and Christ the King: Just What We Need

This weekend is Seabury Sunday and the feast of Christ the King, the end of our liturgical year. I must admit, never have I been so eager for this Sunday, and not just because I love bagpipes. I am looking forward to Sunday for what it reminds us about earthly government and God's kingdom.

Our country was already politically polarized before the election, and it doesn't seem to have improved much since. Some are joyful with the election results, others sorrowful, and some angry or afraid. I was so proud of our All Saints' community last Sunday as we made gracious space for each other, in prayer and conversation, to feel however each of us needed to feel. When we closed our worship at 9 and 11am by singing "America," united as one in song, there were many tears shed.

This Sunday will have a different feel, as our commemoration reminds us of two important teachings of our faith as it relates to worldly power.

First, our primary allegiance as Christians is to God, and to Christ our king. And so, whatever our feelings about the recent election, we pray for wisdom for our earthly leaders, and for God's guidance of them, and we seek to follow Christ, whose kingdom is not of this world.

Second, the story of Samuel Seabury, the first bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, reminds us that God finds creative ways to bring good out of difficult and complex human beings and situations. Because of the Revolutionary War, Seabury could not be consecrated in England. But by God's providence, he was aided by the Episcopal Church in Scotland, forming a close connection between our churches that shaped our liturgies and that remains important to this day.

Join us on Sunday at 9 and 11am for Seabury Sunday, with the full bagpipes and drums, and don't forget to wear your tartans, if you have them. We will remember the creativity of God, who gave our Episcopal Church its first bishop in a rather roundabout way. And we will remember, too, the power of God, exercised with mercy and love by our eternal king.

November 13, 2016 Who From Their Labors Rest

This Sunday has a lot going on: Commitment Sunday (when we formally commit our pledges to God, officially ending our fall pledge campaign – please pledge if you haven't!), our recognition of our year with the Saint John's Illuminated Bible, and prayers for Veteran's Day. And it is also the day of our annual choral Requiem, on Sunday evening.

The list of submitted names of the departed that we will read at our Requiem Eucharist is the longest we have ever had. Although this will make this fairly long service a little bit longer, I am glad for it, because every name we read is dear to someone in our congregation. It is profound, every year, to hear this ocean of names wash over us. In holy moments such as these, our usual sense of time is suspended, and we feel strangely in God's timelessness.

How we honor the departed is an important aspect of our faith. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and, by extension, our "sure and certain hope" in our own resurrection and that of others, are core beliefs of our creed. If we believe that our loved ones are not gone forever, but that we will be reunited with them by the mysterious power of God's love, then that makes us more inclined to remember them now with a sadness that is leavened by hopeful expectation.

We will honor our departed loved ones on Sunday evening not only by the recitation of their names, but by including our prayers for them in this Requiem Eucharist, with a gorgeous musical setting by Faure, offered by our talented and dedicated choir. And then, having been comforted by God's presence in the Body and Blood of the Sacrament, we will conclude our service by candlelight in the Close, where so many of the faithful are committed to the earth.

That we are able to honor the dead in this special way is a blessing to their memory, and to us. And it is fitting in a place dedicated to all the saints, "who from their labors rest."

November 3, 2016 A Week in the Life (Of All Saints')

I often say that, when it comes to our ministries, I have the best seat in the house. I don't see all of our ministries or their impact (no one could), but I see more than most. I am continually amazed at and grateful for how much good God is doing through our staff, volunteers, and supporters. As a sample, here are just some of the ministries that took place over the last week or so.

- We sent \$22,000 to our partner church and school, Saint Paul's in Haiti. Having determined that Hurricane Matthew didn't do a great deal of damage to them (only heavy rain), we moved forward with support for a water cistern (to provide clean water in the dry season) and brick oven (for school lunches and bread to sell at their local market). The funds came from Day School and church fundraising, especially through our annual North Central Family 5K.
- We performed four funerals, including one with full choir for beloved choir member Jay Gould.
- We offered pastoral care to a number of our members experiencing severe illness, grief, major life changes, or spiritual crises. We gave financial help to a church member in need.
- We hosted a pet Adopt-a-thon that brought hundreds of people to our campus, collected pet food, blessed animals, and led to the adoption of 30 pets.
- We supported the upcoming ICM fundraiser.
- We began a food drive for Saint Mary's Food Bank at our church and Day School.
- We prepared families for baptism, and taught Sunday school classes for children and youth. The clergy taught religion in the Lower School of our Day School.
- Our youth landscaped around the church.
- We prayed for our country and the upcoming election, and held classes on bridging the polarization in our nation.
- JustFaith met, wrestling with some of the major issues of our society through faith and study.
- We offered Bible Study and other classes and groups on weekdays.
- We worshipped 11 times this past week, which included providing worship bulletins and materials for the four largest services--including Day School Sunday, a marvelous celebration of our church's largest outreach ministry.
- Our RenewalWorks group met, continuing our study of the data on spiritual practices gathered from our members, and beginning to imagine new ministry initiatives to deepen our faith at All Saints'.
- Newcomers to our community were welcomed.
- The choirs and organists practiced beautiful music for this busy time of year.
- The clergy prayed about, prepared, and wrote sermons, classes, and presentations.

- We created and produced “All Saints’ Go,” our own version of the game, Pokémon Go, for our children and youth on All Saints’ Day to learn about the saints.
- We blessed a couple in honor of their anniversary.
- Of course, there were lots of meetings at the church and Day School, planning ministries, and overseeing the work, finances, and governance of All Saints’.

All of that took place over the last week or so, and that’s not even close to all of it! And the wonder of it all, is that when our faith is deep, and we are disciples of Jesus every day, we do more ministry informally in our daily lives by bringing light where we are than we could ever do formally in “official” ministries.

If you haven’t done so, please make a pledge of financial support by November 13th to sustain our ministries and create new ones. Our goal is 400 pledges, approximately equaling the number of people who attend worship on an average weekend. Let’s all do our part, in gratitude for what God has done for and through us.

October 27, 2016 Can't Wait Until November 9? Me Too.

Fortunately, this election will soon be over. In the meanwhile, many of us have been praying daily for our country for the last several weeks using the Forward Movement booklets we have been providing at church.

Last Sunday, I taught the first of two classes on the topic "Bridging the Divide: Faithful Citizens in Tumultuous Times." My inspiration came from a place of gloom, and a place of hope: gloom because I am saddened by the bitter political polarization in our nation, and hope because I see in our wonderful church and school community of All Saints' the blueprint for a better way.

In my class, I first described the polarization: the tendency to view those with whom we disagree as enemies, the apocalyptic mindset ("if candidate X wins, it will be the end of our country"), the shrinking number of friends with different views, the proliferation of media leading to getting news and commentary only from outlets consistent with our pre-existing views, and the distrust by some people of institutions (not only government but also business, church, the press, law enforcement etc.).

In response, I made five Biblically-based suggestions for how we might see our political choices (whatever our party) through the lens of faith. Take or leave them, as they are helpful to you.

- Participation: we are called by God to participate in our political process, and the Bible teaches that government is to be respected, even when we disagree with its decisions.
- Perspective: we should never forget that, while government is important, our primary allegiance is to God's kingdom.
- People: we dare not, except in the most extreme of circumstances, think of those who disagree with us politically as enemies. They are people, fellow children of God, with different views.
- Philippians 2: we seek common ground and compromise. As Philippians 2 says: "let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."
- Prayer and Pondering: we ought to pray and think seriously about candidates and issues. The mail-in ballot makes this much easier to do, as well as the Forward Movement prayers for the election. Issues are complex, and translating religious teachings into candidates or policy is far more complicated than we like to admit. For example, Christian teaching is clear about our call to help the poor, but good Christians can disagree about which policies are best able to meet that objective.

I love All Saints', and one reason I do is our commitment to being a "big-tent," diverse, centrist community that encourages friendships across differences. In our church and school, may we model for our divided nation this respectful, curious, friendly stance toward one another.

October 20, 2016 The Ministry Iceberg

By ministry iceberg, I do not mean ministry in winter (such as it is in Phoenix!). Rather, I mean the ministry that takes place below the surface. Just as an iceberg is much larger under the water than over it, so too with ministry much more is typically unseen than seen.

For example, most of the pastoral ministry done by our clergy and volunteers (the Community of Hope, Daughters of the King, Prayer Team, and Health Ministries) is largely unseen by the average parishioner because it is confidential and personal. When we visit someone in the hospital, take communion to a shut-in, counsel someone in distress, provide a grief or AA group, deliver a prayer shawl, or help a member financially through the clergy discretionary funds, almost no one knows the specifics besides the person helped. And yet these are some of our most critical and time-intensive ministries.

Other aspects of ministry, like preaching and teaching, also are like an iceberg. A sermon preached or class taught are the tip of the iceberg. What goes unseen are the hours of preparation involved beforehand spent in prayer, research, and writing. The programs of the church are the same way, with much happening beneath the surface by staff and volunteers so that all can go smoothly. Indeed, the other metaphor that comes to mind is the duck, which appears to glide effortlessly across the water's surface, while its legs are vigorously paddling beneath.

As we think about pledging to support the ministries of All Saints', it is important to remember not only the ministries that are obvious to all, like our glorious worship, but also the ministries and ministry preparation taking place out of sight, that are equally essential to our mission: welcoming all to transformation in Jesus Christ through prayer, learning, service, and connection in the Episcopal tradition.

In our personal lives of faith, there is also an iceberg effect. Our most visible faith is seen in our attendance at worship on the weekend. But ideally, there is much more to our spiritual selves beneath the surface, and much more informal ministry taking place in our daily lives through our personal interactions than others will ever see.

Finally, our pledges are below the surface. Only the rector and financial staff ever see the amount of a pledge (not any other staff, or the Vestry). A pledge is a personal, holy decision between the giver and God, that says a great deal about that relationship. I conclude with a quote I read recently from the Reverend Gerald Keucher that speaks eloquently to that point:

"If you really want your heart to be with God - and I believe you do - then you might want to change how you give to your parish and to God's work accomplished by other charities. Make your gift a first fruits offering. Fix a percentage in your heart and in your head, and give that percentage off the top to God every time money goes into your bank. If you get money once a month, then give your percentage off the top once a month. If you get paid twice a month or every other week, then give at those times. Give weekly only if you received money weekly.

If you want to try putting your money where you want your heart to rest, I strongly suggest you try giving at least 5 percent off the top back to God whenever God gives you anything. Giving God off the top a percentage of what God has given you is good, strong medicine for the heart. Ten percent is the recommended dose. Five percent is a therapeutic dose, but giving back to God any percentage off the top - 2.5 percent or 3 percent or 4 percent - is better for your heart than giving any set amount that is not off the top and that has no relationship to your income.

This will change your life. You may think that paying your bills is the least religious thing you do. Percentage giving off the top begins to change all of that, because each time you sit down to deal with your money, the first thing you do is to make a thank offering to God that is in proportion to what God has just given you."

Wise words.

October 13, 2016 All Saints': Where the Heart Is

You may have noticed that our annual pledge campaign looks a little different this year. Last weekend, we participated in art stations for all ages. With this creative activity, we started our pledge campaign by reflecting on generosity, and on what we love about All Saints'. The art we made will be displayed in the narthex through the end of the campaign on November 13th (yes, it's a little bit shorter this year!).

By now, those who are on our mailing list will have received our pledge mailing, which also looks rather different (those who are not on the mailing list can pick one up on Sundays or at the church office). Over the next four weeks, you'll notice a few other changes to our usual pledge campaign, as we prayerfully reflect on how God has blessed us in our lives and at All Saints', and how our pledge can show our gratitude for those blessings.

A big part of our pledge campaign this year is encouraging more participation. Over the last four years, our pledged dollars have gone up every year (good news!), while the number of people pledging has gone down (not so good news!). In other words, fewer people are giving more to support our church. It is not that fewer people are attending church, but that, for whatever reason, fewer people are pledging.

Is this a cultural or generational shift in charitable giving? Are people continuing to feel strained in their family finances? Is there an assumption that, because All Saints' Church has had four years in a row of small budget surpluses, we don't need everyone's pledge? It may be all these factors, and others. But whatever the reason, our hope is to increase the number of people making pledges to around 400 (roughly the number attending worship on weekends). We hope all our members and friends will join together to support our ministries that mean so much.

I

If you are a long-time member and pledger, please consider how God has blessed your life and the lives of others through All Saints'. In prayer and conversation with your loved ones, set a percentage of income that reflects your gratitude. Since I began here seven years ago, Megan and I have tithed, giving at least 10% of my salary back to All Saints' every year. I share this not to brag, but because I think it's important that I not ask anyone to consider doing something I am not doing myself. Perhaps 10% isn't possible. Perhaps 3% or 5% are more realistic. But I urge you to consider a percentage, both because it is the traditional giving practice of the Church for centuries, and because this "first fruits" giving encourages deeper intentionality and spiritual reflection.

If you have never made a pledge to All Saints', either because you are new to our church, or because you've always given in the plate, please consider making a pledge this year. A pledge is simply an estimate of giving for the coming year, and can always be changed. It helps us budget responsibly, and often blesses the giver in surprising ways. Make a pledge, in any amount, and see what affect this act of gratitude has on your faith and life. Help us get to 400 pledges!

This is an amazing time at All Saints' Church. Our traditional areas of strength, like our worship, music, and education for all ages are as strong as ever. Our year with the Saint John's illuminated Bible has inspired us and touched the wider community through guest speakers, events, and displays. We have a beautiful new website as our virtual "front door," and a new emphasis on serving others through outreach (now called "Faith in Action"). And our partnership with RenewalWorks is giving us data about the spiritual lives of our members, with strategies for turning our congregation's feedback into new programs to deepen our faith and our connection to God and each other.

Jesus said that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). I know that for many of us, our heart is at All Saints', our spiritual home. May God give us grace to support with our time, talent, and treasure this place that we love, and through which God loves us.

October 13, 2016 Steps Worn Smooth: Holy Land Reflections (Part Three)

In this third and final reflection on my recent trip to Israel as part of my Piper Fellowship, I want to share some broader themes.

Jesus the Jew

It is so obvious, and yet so easily forgotten by Christians: Jesus was a Jew, and the faith that he founded is rooted in Judaism in profound and lasting ways. On multiple occasions, we visited the ruins of ancient synagogues, and whenever I saw a mikveh, a ritual bath, I thought of our rite of baptism. Similarly essential is the connection between the Eucharist and the Passover meal.



Jesus in the gospels is often called “rabbi,” and so much of his teaching is squarely within the rabbinic tradition. Visiting the Holy Land reinforces the Jewishness of Jesus.

Why does this matter? In two ways, among many. First, we Christians dare not forget the importance of our Jewish heritage, and especially what we call the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes we tend to emphasize the New Testament and deemphasize the Old Testament, but they are both inspired by God, and it is the Hebrew Bible that was the Bible for the earliest Church. When we neglect the Old Testament, we neglect an essential tradition of our faith.

Second, of all of our interfaith connections, the closest and most honored must always be with our Jewish brothers and sisters, whom God chose first, and without whom our Christian faith would not exist.

Jesus the Rebel

Also evident in a visit to the Holy Land is the inescapably political nature of Jesus in his day. Many Jews were expecting a political messiah, a military leader who would liberate them from the oppressive Roman empire. Much of what Jesus did, as depicted in the gospels, was an intentional provocation of the political authorities.

The closer Jesus got to Jerusalem, the more inevitable his death by the state became. Not long after Jesus’ death, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed because of the rebellion, and

only three years after that, around 73 A.D., the last Jewish rebels were killed at the desert fortress of Masada (an amazing place to visit, by the Dead Sea).

What can we take from this aspect of Jesus? That the church and state are often at odds, and that sometimes it is the responsibility of people of faith to pressure their government for justice (which does not often line up clearly with political parties).



Humanity Divided

To be in the Holy Land is to be face to face with human conflict. There is not enough space in this forum to reflect adequately on the tragedy that is the Israeli/Palestinian struggle. Often the Palestinian Christians in the area, small in number, find themselves in the middle. There is so much bad blood and complex history that I fear it will take a major change of heart by everyone for there to be peace. At the Western Wall (the Wailing Wall), my only prayer was for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6).

The Christians are not always a great example of reconciliation either. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (the site of Jesus' resurrection) is "shared" by three main Christian denominations (Roman Catholics, Armenians, and the Orthodox) who are always squabbling over control. The somewhat hopeful news when we were there is that they have finally agreed on a plan for repairs to the church, which are now underway (and desperately needed).

The Anglican Communion is Alive!

Some in The Episcopal Church dismiss the worldwide Anglican Communion of which we are a part as an antiquated entity, but on my trip, I experienced it as a vibrant and meaningful fellowship. In my group of pilgrims were Anglicans from Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Nepal. We worshipped most days at the Anglican cathedral in Jerusalem, and visited Anglicans throughout the country. It is still meaningful to have this shared faith tradition of common prayer that exists all around the world.



Going Forward/Going Back

An informal theme of my Piper Fellowship is “Envisioning the Future Church.” As I have been thinking about the Church of the future, it was amazing to go back to the Church’s origins, in Jesus, and to follow in his footsteps. It seems to me that the vibrant future Church will, in some respects, be built off the original blueprint of those earliest followers of Christ who, against all odds, outlasted the Roman Empire and changed the world.

October 6, 2016 Steps Worn Smooth: Holy Land Reflections (Part Two)

As I reflect some more on my recent trip to Israel, I am thinking about intersections. Pilgrims to the Holy Land often speak of the land itself as the “fifth gospel.” And it is true: having been there, this sense of place now intersects with my understanding of the gospels in much the same way that each of the four Biblical gospels informs the others. Many images from my imagination have been altered or replaced by something more accurate.

For example, we visited a *wadi* (a valley that is dry except in the rainy season) in the hilly desert of Samaria. These narrow paths were the routes from Galilee and Samaria in the north down to Jerusalem. Before, when I read the Good Samaritan story (Luke 10:25-37), I always imagined a wide, Roman road, on which it was relatively easy to ignore an injured traveler on the side.

Not so. These *wadi* roads, the more likely path, were so narrow, that one would have almost had to step over the injured person to get by, as the priest and Levite did (only the Samaritan, the outcast, stopped to help). How often do we ignore the person in need right in front of us, failing to see the humanity directly in our path?



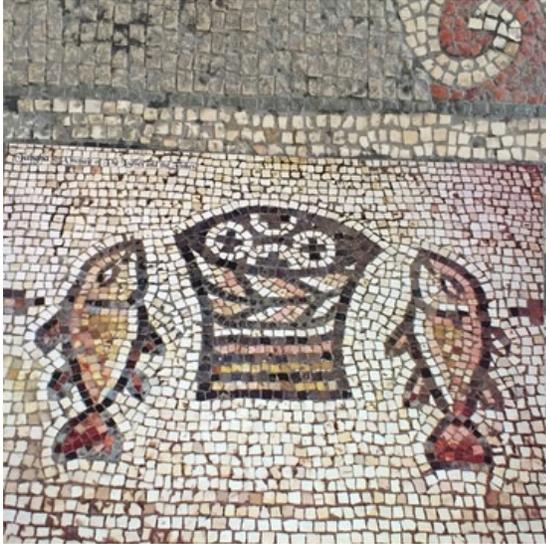
Sometimes on our pilgrimage, the historical and the spiritual intersected in marvelous and unexpected ways. One of our company revealed that he had not been baptized, and so we had the immense joy of baptizing him in the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.

Another interesting intersection was in Nazareth, in the northern part of Israel, where we stayed for three days. The region around Nazareth is a resonant area for followers of Jesus, offering the opportunity to visit multiple sites associated with his life, from the site of the annunciation at Mary’s

house (where the angel Gabriel gave her the good news that she would bear the Savior), to Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee (where Jesus called the disciples and walked on water), to Magdala (where Mary Magdalene came from).

But Nazareth is also a vibrant, medium-sized city, many times larger than the tiny village where Jesus grew up. Christians continue to live there (albeit as a minority), practicing their

faith on that holy ground. We worshipped on the Sunday with the small community at Christ Church Anglican in Nazareth, and heard from them about the unique challenges and joys of their ministry, especially their efforts at religious reconciliation.



Yet another meaningful intersection for me came at Bethsaida, where I was honored to celebrate the Eucharist outside for our group in the area where Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes for the crowd. In my third and final piece, next week, I will share about the end of my trip, in Jerusalem, and some concluding themes.

September 28, 2016 Steps Worn Smooth: Holy Land Reflections (Part One)



In early September, I left Phoenix for a 10 day pilgrimage to Israel, funded by the Piper Fellowship I am receiving this year. I say pilgrimage rather than vacation or tour or class, because the pilgrim's intent is somewhat different from that of other travelers. The pilgrim isn't just sightseeing, but seeking the presence of the Holy. In those sacred spots around the world that the Celtic Christians called "thin places," where the boundary between the normal world and the divine presence is thinner, the pilgrim may, if their heart is open, experience God and be changed.

The Christian mystics down the ages would tell us that we can experience God anywhere, if we have eyes of faith to see beyond the veil. When we celebrate the Eucharist, even in the simplicity of our chapel, the angels and archangels and all the saints are around us, joining their heavenly voices with our earthly ones in praise. God is equally present in our homes, cars, and on the streets, but is harder to see there. I suspect many of us have experienced "thin places" where the divine is especially and more noticeably felt and seen, whether in the majesty of nature, or in sites hallowed by prayer, with steps worn smooth by pilgrim feet.

Part of the challenge to the pilgrim in modern times is the camera. For me at least, it is difficult to maintain a prayerful, attentive, and open heart, if I am taking pictures. And indeed, some of the holy places we visited were, for me, too intimate to capture on camera (for example, the cave in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem where Jesus was buried and rose from the dead). When tourists were taking "selfies" at the place of Jesus' birth in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I did take some pictures, some of which I will share, but more often, in the holiest of places, I tried to be in the moment, taking it all in with my outward and inner senses.

I was part of a group of 19 pilgrims from all over the world (the U.S., the U.K., Mexico, Nepal, Australia, and New Zealand), gathered at Saint George's Anglican College in Jerusalem, which is not a college in the traditional sense, but a center for continuing education, offering classes

and pilgrimage to those who come, seeking their guidance. Saint George's College is on the grounds of Saint George's Anglican Cathedral, the center of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, consisting of 27 parishes across five countries (Israel, Jordan, the West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon), 20 schools, and several hospitals and clinics.

When we were in Jerusalem, we stayed in the simple dorms of the guest house of Saint George's, sharing our meals together, and taking part daily in the schedule of public worship at the Cathedral. Most evenings, we would hear a lecture from the Dean of the College, an Australian priest, archaeologist, and scholar of early Christianity named Greg Jenks, preparing us for the next day's visits. Each morning, after Holy Eucharist and breakfast, we would board the tour bus.

After a day of orientation, getting to know each other, and moving past jet lag (Israel is 10 hours ahead of Phoenix), we drove south of Jerusalem to Bethlehem, where we visited the shepherd's fields, and the Church of the Nativity, built on the site where, legend says, Jesus was born with the animals. Many of the holy places in the Holy Land are in large churches, but are themselves quite small, and require that the pilgrim duck or crouch to get in, a useful reminder of humility.

On the same day, we visited Herodion, the enormous monument built by evil king Herod for his own burial. The contrast could not have been more striking: the overbearing pride and malice of Herod, who brutally governed on behalf of the Romans, killing all rivals including several of his own sons (and trying to kill the infant Christ), versus the humble shepherds, and the Holy Family in the stable. And yet, God and history have a sense of humor. Herod's great monument has long ago fallen, no more than an archaeological site of rubble with a trail and a gift shop, while the holy Child, laid in a feed trough, was the savior of the world and changed the course of human history, his modest birthplace now a beautiful church and site for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists each year.



As Mary sang so beautifully in the Magnificat, God often brings down the proud who trust in their own strength, while exalting the humble and meek who seek God's will. A wise reminder for the Church. Next week, part two, in Nazareth of Galilee.

September 22, 2016 A Few Brief Notes...

I have recently returned from a 10 day pilgrimage in Israel, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, funded by my Piper Fellowship. It was a remarkable experience on several levels, and I will be sharing some reflections over the coming weeks in this column, and perhaps in some other ways as well. But first, I will need some time to gather my thoughts. For now, then, a few brief notes on several other important topics.

* * * * *

This Sunday at 11am, we return to our pattern of **fourth Sundays**, with the Chamber Choir offering some of the most beautiful choral mass settings ever composed in their original context of worship, within a more traditional liturgical framework that includes incense, and additional parts sung by the clergy. As before, on these fourth Sundays, the full Senior Choir sings at 9am, with no incense, for those who prefer that option.

It is a rare gift to experience such sublime music in worship, and it is our hope that our members and friends will help us spread the word about our monthly fourth Sundays and choral evensongs, as we worship the Lord in the “beauty of holiness.”

To further enhance the sense of tradition, on fourth Sundays this year at 11am we will use the older language called Rite One from our Book of Common Prayer. This poetic language is largely drawn from Thomas Cranmer’s original 1549 text, and fits well with the harmonic and linguistic richness of the choral mass settings. Come experience these historic treasures, which we offer anew as we give our very best to almighty God.

* * * * *

I invite anyone who attends All Saints’ even occasionally for worship to invest about 20 minutes in the **RenewalWorks** spiritual survey, which is only available until October 2nd. I suspect you will find the questions interesting, and the anonymous data that we gather will help us plan our spiritual offerings for the coming months and even years. Please take the time to help us meet the spiritual needs of our members and grow as disciples of Jesus. Your input will help us teach the faith more effectively.

* * * * *

As we approach the end of our inspiring year with the gospel book of the **Saint John’s**

Bible from Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota this November, we are planning to say a fond farewell to this remarkable work that has so enriched our spiritual lives since last November. The Saint John's Bible has been a springboard for a year of guest speakers, classes, spiritual and artistic activities, guided tours, and use in Sunday worship. And yet, even as we prepare to say goodbye, we do have the opportunity to purchase permanently the full, seven volume illuminated set (of which our gospel is one volume), if our community so wishes. This would be an amazing heritage for All Saints' and an invaluable tool for worship and education for generations to come. But it would come with a large price tag, about \$140,000. This would probably require the efforts of a group of donors, wishing to leave a lifetime legacy in memory of themselves or others. **If you are interested in considering a financial gift of at least \$10,000 to help us purchase these volumes permanently, please talk to me immediately.**

September 4, 2016 Coming Soon: RenewalWorks

You may recall that our guest preacher and teacher last May 1, the Reverend Jay Sidebotham, is the Director of RenewalWorks. Through my Piper fellowship, Jay was also our leader for a Vestry and Staff retreat that weekend. Now, we will be building on Jay's time with us by entering into the RenewalWorks process at All Saints' from September through the end of December.

What is the RenewalWorks process? You can read more about it at renewalworks.org, but in short, it is a ministry of Forward Movement that inspires congregations to focus on spiritual vitality in new and creative ways.

It begins with an anonymous online (or paper) survey of the spiritual lives of our membership, beginning for us on September 11th and ending in early October. The data we gather from All Saints' will be compared to information from other churches that have participated in this process over its history (some 1,800 churches in all, and almost half a million individuals).

With this rich pool of data from our own congregation and others available to us, a parish team (headed by Lowell Adkins and Patrice Al-Shatti) will prayerfully and strategically consider where we feel called to go in our collective spiritual lives at All Saints'.

For example, are there types of prayer or spiritual practices that our congregation seeks that would help us grow deeper in our love of God and our neighbor? In all of this work, we will have the guidance of the RenewalWorks team through weekly conference calls.

I am tremendously excited about this process for several reasons. I think the data we gather anonymously from our members will be a fascinating snapshot of our spirituality. Wherever we find ourselves on the spirituality spectrum, it will be useful to see where we are!

With this data, and the wisdom of the RenewalWorks staff, our own parish team will be able to identify new pathways of spiritual growth, based on the actual responses we have received.

A number of parishes across The Episcopal Church have found this to be an energizing and life-giving program that shaped their ministries for years after. May it be such a blessing for us! Look for the survey in mid-September!

August 25, 2016 Choral Eucharist and Evensong: Exploring the Beauty of Holiness

This Sunday at 9am, our adult class will be taught by Dr. Gerber, on the topic of the Anglican traditions of choral Eucharist and Evensong. We are greatly blessed at All Saints' to experience regularly choral Evensong (second Sunday evenings, beginning in October) and a traditional sung Eucharist with choral mass settings (fourth Sunday mornings at 11am, beginning in September).

Both of these services are becoming quite rare across The Episcopal Church, and we offer them as a gift not only to our members, but, we hope, increasingly to those beyond our church who may be drawn to the beautiful, timeless worship these liturgies offer to God.

On Sunday, Dr. Gerber will help us better understand these two traditions, one handed down from the Roman Catholic Church (choral Eucharist) though infrequently found there these days, and the other the most unique and distinctive of our Anglican common prayers (evensong).

In my sermon a couple of weeks ago, I spoke about the role of the Church in helping us remember who we are as children of God. Every generation must pass on the stories and rituals of faith anew to the next generation, or they will be forgotten. And so, I hope that these glorious liturgies will find growing congregations that include some of our younger members.

One of my favorite lines in the psalms is from psalm 96, verse 9: "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Our Anglican tradition understands particularly well the complex interaction between beauty and holiness.

Not all beauty is holy or sacred, though much that is beautiful resonates with the holy. But I would suggest that **all that is holy is beautiful**, meaning it attracts our attention in a satisfying way.

Sometimes the holy is tranquil and comforting (a magnificent sunset or a lovely prelude), and other times it can be unsettling (a surprising sense of call) or even terrifying (the appearance of an angel in the Biblical stories). But all expressions of holiness draw our attention. The holy attracts us, speaks to the God-shaped longing within our hearts, and points us ultimately to God, the great artist of the universe.

Come learn more on Sunday about the beauty of holiness, and help us spread the word about these two compelling forms of worship.

August 11, 2016 Backpack Faith

Do you remember the backpacks of your childhood? I always had a beautiful, new L.L Bean backpack for the start of school, that became unusable and nearly unrecognizable by year's end, such was the wear I inflicted upon it. Thanks to the generosity of our congregation through our ICM backpack drive last month, we and other participating organizations were able to provide hundreds of students with the joy of a new backpack to start the year.

This Sunday at our 10am service we celebrate our annual blessing of the backpacks, as we send our students, teachers, and school administrators off into a new school year with the Church's prayers and best wishes.

The backpack is not only a useful tool for education; it is also a good symbol for our faith, which has its roots in the journey. The Hebrew Bible is the story of a wandering people, led by God toward their promised destination. The New Testament as well is a restless tale, with Jesus' followers traveling with him, intentionally carrying little (to emphasize their trust in God).

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the Acts of the Apostles describes the missionary journeys of the early Church, as they spread the gospel throughout the known world, often with no possessions other than what they could carry on their backs. It is no surprise, then, that the first name for Christians was "the Way," recalling that sense of movement along a path.

One metaphor for thinking of our worship, education, and fellowship on Sundays is as a time of replenishing our spiritual supplies, filling our backpacks as it were. Our church buildings are not the destination of our faith, but our supply posts to equip us as we head back into the world to be the Church.

May this be a wonderful and enriching school year for our students at our day school and at the other schools attended and served by our church members. And may our backpacks remind us of the virtue of traveling light, of taking only what we need, and of following Jesus on the paths of life, wherever he may lead.

August 18, 2016 Helping Up Those Who Fall

I love the Olympics, both the famous sports, like swimming, track, and gymnastics, and also the more obscure ones. This past week I watched badminton, handball, and water polo, among others. It's so much fun to learn about different sports, and to marvel at the talent and dedication of these remarkable athletes.

And it does take both talent **and** dedication to be an Olympian. Talent alone won't do at that level; it must be honed through countless hours of training, supported by families, friends, coaches, and teammates.

There have been so many memorable performances in the last two weeks by such incredibly gifted and hardworking athletes: Katie Ledecky, Michael Phelps, Simone Biles and many more. But this week, two Olympians you may not have heard of did something unique.

Abbey D'Agostino of the United States and Nikki Hamblin of New Zealand were running a preliminary heat of the 5,000 meters. About a quarter of the way through the race, D'Agostino accidentally clipped Hamblin with the spikes on her shoes, causing them both to fall down in a heap on the track.

The American D'Agostino got up first, but rather than take off after the pack of runners, she waited to be sure Hamblin was alright. Then, slowly, Hamblin got up, and they began to run together, now far behind the leaders. A few moments later, D'Agostino's knee began to bother her, and it seemed she might not be able to finish the race at all.

This time it was Hamblin who waited for D'Agostino to get up, and then they both made their way, gingerly, towards the finish line. Finally there, they embraced with great emotion.

The Olympic spirit is certainly found in triumph, in gold medals and world records. But it is also in these two athletes, helping each other get up, to cross the finish line, far behind the other runners. Sometimes finishing last together, but finishing nonetheless, is as meaningful as finishing first alone.

Jesus spent very little time among the victorious, the powerful, and the prosperous. He went mostly to the poor, the lonely, the sick, the grieving, the persecuted, and those who had lost everything. Jesus always looked out for the people who were hurting.

And he said to them a remarkable thing, that they were **blessed**, not cursed, blessed because God loved them, and would take care of them in this life and the next: “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:3-6).

Abbey D’Agostino and Nikki Hamblin are remarkable Olympians and people not because of their results in the race, but because they helped each other in a time of struggle, instead of thinking first of themselves.

May God give us grace to take time to look out for each other, and to help one another up when we fall, even if it comes at some cost to us. Like Jesus, may we have eyes that see those in need around us, both in our daily environment and in our world. And may we do our best to help them. For it is often through us that God blesses those who are hurting, as we run the race of life that is set before us.

August 4, 2016 Learning and Praying at Harvard

It is good to be back home at All Saints' after several weeks of vacation visiting family in different parts of Virginia, and a week of learning at Harvard Business School as part of my Piper Fellowship.

The Harvard course was called "Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management," and was inspiring on several levels. The five members of the faculty who taught us were wonderful teachers, and clearly relished the opportunity to apply their insights to the social sector.

Equally inspiring were my fellow classmates, from amazing nonprofits across the world. In my study group of eight, for example, were the CEO's of the following organizations: Habitat for Humanity in the Philippines, a Greek foundation that feeds children, an Indian charity combating AIDS, and American nonprofits spreading technology to schools, assisting the disabled, working with young mothers, and educating about preeclampsia. What a diverse group we were, and yet with many shared challenges in the rapidly changing cultures in which we seek to make a difference.

At the same time that I was learning, I found myself in close proximity to one of the oldest and best known Episcopal monasteries: the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (ssje.org). Several times over the course of the week, I was able to walk from the Harvard Business School campus over the Charles river to worship with the SSJE community. It was enormously refreshing to go from the high-intensity demands of my classes to the stillness of monastic prayer and back again.

In so doing, I was reminded that effective churches (and church leaders) need both mind and heart: the mind's drive to learn, to be curious, to strategize, to improve, and to innovate, paired with the heart's need to quiet the mind, be still, and rest in God's never-failing presence.

Best of all is when our minds and hearts join with our bodies in faithful service to others. Surely an essential aspect of our human flourishing as children of God is the active engagement of our minds, hearts, and bodies with God's purposes for us. How are your mind, heart, and body interacting with each other, with God, and with other people?

July 14, 2016 Know Thyself

On the temple of Apollo at Delphi, the ancient Greek philosophers engraved the words “know thyself.” Truly to know ourselves is a life’s work, and there are a variety of mental and spiritual tools that we can use to do so. One of these is lifelong learning.

When we decide to explore something new, we stretch ourselves, sharpen our skills, use our God-given gifts, and often learn much more than we planned. We set out to study a particular subject or activity, take a class or read a book, and sometimes find that we are learning just as much about ourselves.

The summer is a perfect time for learning something new. In one of our closing day school chapels, I reminded our students that three months off is a great gift, enough time to take up something new or truly master something we already do well. Maybe it’s an academic subject, like a language, history or literature, or a sport or artistic endeavor. Maybe it’s a skill, like cooking or scuba diving.

Even as an adult in a workplace, I find that the summer offers more flexibility (both in my schedule and mentally) for focusing on some areas where I’d like to grow. I am fortunate this year to have been named a Piper Fellow. The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust is graciously providing me with funding for a self-designed program of nonprofit executive training, reflection, and site visits to innovative ministries.

As part of that fellowship, I will be at Harvard Business School for a week in July, taking a course with nonprofit leaders from around the country (and beyond) entitled “Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management.” I look forward to challenging myself and learning some valuable material to strengthen my capabilities as a leader and as a person.

How will you use this valuable time that God has given you? I hope all of us, young people and adults, will make the most of the rest of our summer by learning, growing, and relaxing. May we learn more about ourselves, and God’s purposes for us.

July 6, 2016 What's in a Name?

With our recent clergy and church staff changes (Joie Baker arriving, Nick Jorgenson leaving us, and Lindsay Wood taking on a new role here), I've been thinking about staff titles and responsibilities.

In a fairly large church like All Saints' (very large as Episcopal Churches go), the role of the clergy and staff is of critical importance. Sometimes, clergy and staff have specific ministry tasks to accomplish ourselves, for which we have particular gifts, training, and designation. For example, our organists have honed their skills over years of organ study and practice. Our clergy have learned about and been ordained to offer the sacraments, such as the Eucharist, baptism, and anointing the sick.

But beyond a relatively modest list of ministries that the clergy and staff must do themselves, there are a great many ministries which we are meant to enable through more collaborative and supportive roles. Much of the time, the work of clergy and staff is to, in the eloquent words of Saint Paul: "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

In other words, the most effective ministry, and the ministry that best unifies and strengthens the Church, happens when leaders (clergy, staff, and volunteer) do not over-function, but rather equip all the baptized members for meaningful service in the Church and in the world.

Ideally, our clergy and staff titles reflect this Pauline understanding. And so, for example, Scott Youngs is not just our musician, but our Director of Music, leading others in the use of their musical gifts. Joie Baker, our new Associate for Children and Family Ministries, is not just ministering to our children and families, but with them. And Holly Davis has a slightly different title with Joie's arrival, as Associate for Faith in Action and Youth Ministries, focusing on how we all live out our faith actively in loving service to those in need, especially in acts of mercy.

Of course, with about a dozen clergy and church staff, hundreds of volunteers, and with so much ministry, there is lots of cooperation, and much to be done. Our clergy and staff goal is always to work closely with our wonderful volunteers, identifying and nurturing their God-given gifts, amplifying ministry impact, and modeling the kingdom of God.

June 30, 2016 A Little Child Shall Lead Them

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)*

Last week we held our annual summer program for children, All Saints' Kids for the Community. It was a great success again this year, with young people from our church, our school, and the community helping those in need through a different local agency every day.

Many children, youth, and adults have participated for multiple years, which shows how meaningful the week is for the participants. When you look at the statistics, you will be amazed at what a difference they made. This program is good for those who are helped, good for All Saints' as it gives us the opportunity to serve our community in faith, and good for the children, youth, and adults who participate, learning the value of service. Jesus was far ahead of his time in his respect for children: their inherent worth and their capabilities. He welcomed them into his presence in an era when children were meant to be out of sight.

Perhaps this is because Jesus knew himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that a little child would bring about God's kingdom of peace and plenty. Children are capable of so much, and when we give them the chance to use their gifts for God's purposes, they often achieve more than we could imagine.

God willing, the 40 children and 11 youth who participated in All Saints' Kids for the Community will grow up to be generous and compassionate adults, grateful for their many blessings, and committed to helping those in need. Those are the values of God's kingdom that we seek to emulate until Isaiah's vision of peaceful prosperity is finally fulfilled.

June 23, 2016 Go to Church? But I'm on Vacation!

This is the time of year when many of us will be away on vacation to escape the heat. Some will be away for just a few days, and others much longer. It is good for us to make time to rest, renew, reconnect, and recharge. The spiritual practice of keeping Sabbath applies not only to reserving one day per week for worship, rest, family and friends, but also to somewhat longer breaks periodically, as our schedules and finances permit.

If you are able to get away this summer, I hope you will remember the importance of worship on Sundays. Sunday, the Lord's day, is our weekly celebration of the resurrection, and is our most important spiritual activity as Christians. All else: our learning, service, our daily walk with Christ, all of these flow from our weekly worship of God in Word and Sacrament with our fellow Christians.

It can be quite enjoyable to worship in different churches when you are out of town. One of the advantages of being an international Communion is that there are Episcopal churches all over the country, and many Anglican churches abroad. But if a church from another denomination is more convenient to your vacation location, by all means go there.

When I'm on vacation, I often go to churches from other denominations (and non-denominational churches) just for the different experience. Although I never feel like I have worshipped fully without Holy Communion, there are many blessings to be found in other styles of worship (although, truth be told, I usually find myself overjoyed to return to our beautiful worship at All Saints').

It is interesting to notice what was similar, what was not, what you liked and what made you miss home. If you attend another Episcopal church, make sure to tell the clergy there what church you are from. We clergy love to meet Episcopalians from other places, and often have interesting connections. And don't forget to bring me back a bulletin. I find that there are often things I can learn even from other churches' bulletins.

But what if it just isn't possible to get to a church on vacation, for example if Sunday is your travel day, or if you are in a truly remote location. In that case, take just a few minutes for prayer. You'll be glad you did. If you're on a family vacation, you might read the gospel reading for the day, say a prayer, and share what you are grateful for that day.

Did you know that on our All Saints' website, under the Worship tab, you can find at the bottom the weekly service bulletin, the readings for the day, and even a brief commentary (Preparing for Sunday)? It is possible to worship with us in spirit, wherever you are, though without the Sacrament.

But, you may say, I'll be staying with people who are not churchgoers. Isn't it going to make them uncomfortable if we look for a church or take time to pray together? We can stay true to our values, while being respectful of the values of others. As long as we do not appear judgmental, there is no reason not to live out our Christian faith wherever we are. Perhaps God may even use us to plant the seed of faith in someone else.

June 16, 2016 On Orlando and Being Faithful to Small Tasks

This week, I've been shaken by the horrific news from Orlando. I know we all are, each in our own way. I've been going through a range of emotions and responses: shock, horror, anger, despair, and shutting down.

Even after all of these mass killings in recent years, part of me still can't believe that someone could be capable of such evil, cutting short so many innocent lives. Every person is a beloved child of God, and it grieves me especially that members of the LGBT community, many of them Latino, who already faced such hatred and misunderstanding, have now lost their lives so senselessly. I grieve for their loved ones, who will carry the pain of loss with them for the rest of their lives.

I've also felt frustrated by the same, tired script by politicians, the media, and social media, rehearsing the same ineffective reactions and counter-reactions, the same fearful retreating into our hardened ideologies. At this point, we've all memorized our own and the other side's talking points about gun control, terrorism, religion and so on. We yell right past each other.

How I long for the kind of national leadership that could bring people together, across ideological and political divides, finding common sense, and restoring common decency. For all the bluster of our outrage, we seem incapable of focusing our anger into working together on those things that most of us agree are broken, and would make a difference in lessening the likelihood or severity of such violence in the future.

But rather than dwelling any further in despair, allow me to make a few suggestions about how we might respond in times such as these. Take them or leave them, as they are helpful to you.

First, pray. Prayer is not, as some have said, a way to avoid doing anything important. Prayer is important, if it is genuine, and not cursory. Real prayer invokes the awesome power of the Holy Spirit, and can change much, most especially the heart of the one who prays. The most effective prayer always leads to action.

Second, do write our elected leaders. Whatever your political leanings, if you have strong feelings about how our government (local and national) should address these mass killings and this epidemic of violence, make those feelings known.

And third, let us commit to making a difference in the smallest and most central communities in which we are involved. All week, I've been praying with this beautiful quote from the Christian writer Henri Nouwen:

"We are not called to save the world, solve all problems, and help all people. But we each have our own unique call, in our families, in our work, in our world. We have to keep asking God to

help us see clearly what our call is and to give us the strength to live out that call with trust. Then we will discover that our faithfulness to a small task is the most healing response to the illnesses of our time.”

If things seem intractable on a national level, if so much seems hopeless, start small. Each of us can ask God to help us discover our calling, and give us strength to make a difference where we are. What can we do to be peacemakers and reconcilers in our own local communities, neighborhoods, and workplaces?

I’ve been thinking this week (and for while now) about All Saints’. How can we, in such turbulent times, offer space for holy and respectful conversations, across differences? Can we be a place where people of good will come together, to discuss the common good? Our “big tent” community of faith is a rare gift in our polarized world. At All Saints’, we truly welcome all and do our best to respect the dignity of every human being. How might we listen and how might we speak courageously from the reasonable center?

And lastly, I want to make a connection to Father’s Day. For many of us, our smallest and most central community is our family. If we think of all of the mass killings in recent years in our country, there are many differences, but some striking similarities. All involved guns, and almost all were perpetrated by young men.

What is going on with our young men, that some of them are drawn to such evil acts? Why are they more susceptible to the toxic brew of mental illness, ideological or religious extremism, and the easy availability of weapons? As the father of boys, I wonder: would I recognize the warning signs if one of my sons were being drawn to violence? What can we fathers do to teach our sons how to face adversity, grow character, fight for the good, and resist despair and merciless rage?

I am calling on all our fathers and grandfathers to be on the frontlines of our family engagements with the destructive culture around us and on the internet, protecting our children, providing for them, teaching them, and being effective role models for them in our faith and life. Our children, especially our boys, are watching us every day, and imitating us.

How we treat the women and men around us, how we treat those who are different, how we protect the vulnerable: all these are life lessons for our children. And it is better to teach them early, before it is too late. As Frederick Douglass once said, “it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

We cannot change the world, most of us, except by our faithfulness to small tasks, those little acts of light that shine brightly against the darkness. May the tragedy of Orlando inspire us to do so.

June 9, 2016 What's a Preaching Series?

As clergy, we do not often hear: "I wish you'd preached longer today!" Indeed, the Episcopal priest who extends the usual 12-15 minute sermon to 20 minutes does so at his or her peril!

One of the biggest surprises for those who come to us from evangelical Protestant or non-denominational churches is how much shorter the sermons are. At its best, a good Episcopal sermon is long enough to apply the Scripture readings of the day thoughtfully to our lives, but not so long as to lose the congregation's interest.

Our preaching is important, but is not all that is important when we gather for worship. An effective sermon finds its place in the context of the liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Altar. Like a well balanced meal, our worship is God's way of nourishing us with prayer, Scripture, sermon, and sacrament, giving us what we need to be energetic disciples of Jesus in a hurting world.

There are times, though, when I envy the megachurch pastors who, with no lectionary or liturgical structure, can develop a sermon series over weeks and even months on a particular spiritual topic. And so, I decided this June to do my own kind of modest preaching series, in a quite Episcopalian way.

I haven't changed the lectionary readings, and promise I won't preach for 20 minutes, but I **have** scheduled myself to preach for three Sundays in a row (it's the same sermon at 7:30 and 10am each week). I'm taking as my theme "Jesus for the 21st Century," exploring three key topics related to Jesus as depicted in Luke's Gospel: *Should we move beyond the word "sin"? Demons or mental illness? and Family first, or faith?*

As always, the sermons will be available in video on the website and following week's enews, for those who miss them, or want to hear them again. It should be an interesting experiment. Let me know what you think of it.

After two millennia, Jesus of Nazareth continues to speak to us afresh in each generation. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), but our understanding of him, his life and his teaching, grow over time, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let's explore together what Jesus might be saying to us now.

June 2, 2016 In Praise of the Ordinary

With the exuberance of the feast of Pentecost and the theological richness of Trinity Sunday now well behind us, we have entered in earnest the long liturgical season after Pentecost, that will stretch through the summer and fall, all the way to the first Sunday in Advent, at the end of November. In some Christian traditions, it is called “Ordinary Time,” not because it is “average” or “normal” but because it is ordered, or counted. We will count 27 Sundays after Pentecost until the church year ends, and a new one begins at Advent.

This longest season can feel like a bit of a letdown, compared with the dramatic seasons we commemorate in the year’s other half, so grounded in Christ’s birth, death, resurrection, and ascension. But this long, green season is an important time of spiritual growth in Christ in its own right.

Our contemporary culture idolizes the new: innovation, new experiences, the customizing of everything. But sometimes, it is good to be rooted, to take things slowly. As the gardeners among us know, growing things takes time, and our faith is no different. It’s beneficial to have this long, slow season to take root, grow, and bear fruit in our lives with Christ, nourished by the light of his resurrection.

To use another metaphor, in our era of rapid transportation, sometimes it is a blessing to take a very long walk. In this season after Pentecost, we are walking with Jesus, learning from him, becoming more like him. How do we do so with intention? One way is to join our Sunday morning study of John’s gospel. Over the summer, we will work our way through the whole of this unique, mystical walk with Jesus. And if you miss a week or two, you’ll know where we are and can catch up, because we’re printing the whole schedule.

Let’s make the most of this blessed ordinary time, a time to see Christ all around us and within us, and slowly mature in faith. The great mystics and poets teach us that even the most ordinary things are lit from within by God’s presence, if we have grace to see them. To look on the mundane with true attention, with wonder even, is to be amazed continually. There’s nothing ordinary about that.

May 26, 2016 Honoring the Wisdom Among Us

“Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.” (Job 12:12)

Did you know that All Saints’ celebrates the Holy Eucharist once a month for our seniors who live at the Beatitudes Campus on Glendale and 16th Avenue? I was the scheduled priest about a week ago, and as always, I found it both enjoyable and meaningful to worship and share lunch with about fifteen vibrant seniors (some of whom worship with us on Sundays, and some who are not able to).

There are many criteria for a healthy and humane society or organization, but among them is certainly how one’s elders are treated. Scripture teaches us that our elders are not merely to be helped, but shown honor, as in Leviticus 19:32: “stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged.”

Moreover, if the Church is wise, it will realize that our seniors are some of the greatest resources for ministry that we have. Seniors have skills, experience, and time to offer. As our life expectancy continues to rise, the number of relatively healthy years after retirement is rising, too. Those are years that can be spent not only with family and friends, and enjoying well-deserved relaxation, but also in meaningful service.

I can’t think of a ministry at All Saints’ that isn’t significantly supported by seniors in volunteer roles currently. In the years to come, as the Baby Boomers retire in enormous numbers, we will need to do much more to identify meaningful ministry for these wise ones in our midst, meeting the needs of a hurting world (not just the Church’s needs).

If you are a current retiree, or will be retiring soon, and you are interested in some kind of ministry (especially something we do not yet offer), please let the clergy know. It may be that God is calling All Saints’ to new ministries in the community and beyond, led by our seniors, using their God-given talents.

Speaking of honoring our seniors, join us this Sunday as we celebrate Leonel Miranda, who is retiring after more than 20 years of service to All Saints’ on our facility staff. We are grateful for Leonel’s many years with us, and rightly honor his commitment as a staff member, and important part of our All Saints’ family.

May 18, 2016 Can the Trinity Save Us from Ourselves?

This Sunday, the Sunday after Pentecost, is Trinity Sunday, when we ponder the beautiful mystery that God is Triune: One, and at the same time Three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

The term “trinity” does not appear in the Bible, and was coined in the 3rd century by the theologian Tertullian. But the **concept** of the Trinity is prevalent in the New Testament, and is especially associated with baptism (see Matthew 28:19 and 3:16-17). From a Christian point of view, there are also numerous veiled references to the Trinity in the Old Testament, as in the strange appearance of the three men to Abraham (Genesis 18).

The full development of the doctrine of the Trinity did not take place until the creeds were composed in the 4th century, in response to heresies about the divinity of Christ (the same creeds that we recite to this day as a summary of the core of our faith). But how does our understanding of the Trinity matter to our daily life? I’d like to suggest that the Trinity is not just an arcane theology, but a piece of spiritual wisdom that has a lot to teach us about how we view and inhabit the world.

One of the most toxic aspects of our modern culture is an “us vs them” mindset that divides everything into two competing sides (liberal/conservative, Republican/Democrat, rich/poor, religious/atheist, right/wrong, good/bad and so on).

The Franciscan spiritual writer Richard Rohr calls this “dualistic thinking” and says this about it: “The lowest level of consciousness is entirely dualistic (win/lose)—me versus the world and basic survival. Many, I am afraid, never move beyond this. The higher levels of consciousness are more and more able to deal with contradictions, paradoxes, and all Mystery (win/win). This is spiritual maturity. At the higher levels, we can teach things like compassion, mercy, forgiveness, selflessness, even love of enemies.”

The Trinity isn’t dualistic; it is simultaneously three and one. This is why we call it a mystery, and seek out all kinds of strange metaphors to understand it (the 3-leaf clover, ice/water/mist, and even the structure of the atom). Maybe it’s good that we can’t fully comprehend the Trinity in purely logical terms, and maybe it would be good if we could learn from its complexity, and grow spiritually beyond so much “us vs them,” which is often associated with judgment, belittling, and exclusion.

Jesus, a mystic if ever there was one, was comfortable with paradox, and constantly taught those higher level, nonjudgmental practices that Rohr notes we find so difficult: compassion, mercy, forgiveness, selflessness, and love of enemies. But our animal brains are hardwired for fight/flight and us/them. Especially under stress, we revert to our basest natures, demonizing those who are different or think differently.

It is very challenging to transcend dualistic thinking for more than brief periods, but when we do, it is enormously life giving. One of our best tools in this is our imagination. For example, try to imagine someone on the other end of the political spectrum, and seek to inhabit their point of view, without judging them. Imagine being in the shoes of someone at work that you can't stand. Prayer, especially of the contemplative variety, is also valuable in expanding our spiritual maturity, compassion, and insight.

Come, Holy Trinity, and open our eyes to see more like God sees.

May 11, 2016 Singing: The First Language?

A book called “The Singing Neanderthals” by Professor Stephen Mithen, a cognitive archaeologist, makes the intriguing argument not only that early humans sang, but that they sang in some fashion before they spoke. Many experts have assumed that speech predated song in early humans, but Mithen makes the opposite case.

It makes sense to me, for singing is prevalent in the animal kingdom. And singing is an elemental, integral aspect of human development, from an early age. Our two year old is just learning to speak, but has made sounds with something like musical tone for some time (even matching pitch with his favorite songs).

There is the capacity for music deep within each of us, and singing is a natural physical activity that involves both brain and body, so it is not surprising that singing regularly (especially with others) leads to greater health and happiness, according to numerous studies.

What a shame, then, that many of us, as we grow up, leave singing behind and grow apprehensive about it. It makes me sad when, during the final hymn on Sundays, I see some people standing without even opening the hymnal. The great thing about singing as a whole congregation is that, even if our voice isn't strong or in tune, we can add our vocal contribution to the strong voices of others, led by our choir. As our day school music teacher, Mrs. Humpage, is fond of saying: “Every voice counts!”

Speaking of our choir, this Sunday is the last for this program year with our full Senior Choir. I am so grateful for their dedicated and skilled musical leadership of our liturgies this year. I hope many of us will come not only to Sunday worship, but to the choir concert Sunday afternoon, as a way to thank all our musicians for their extraordinary gift of time and talent to God's praise and glory.

One final note about singing. This Sunday, we hear the story of the birth of the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21) through the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, surely one of the strangest miracles recorded in the New Testament.

As the believers are gathered, suddenly a sound like a strong wind fills the house, and then tongues of fire rest on them, giving the ability to communicate with those who speak other languages. This event is so noisy that a crowd gathers, and so exuberant that many in the crowd think they are drunk.

Much has been written about the kind of inspired speech depicted. Was it the “speaking in tongues” (*glossolalia*) that Saint Paul describes in First Corinthians, or something else? If I had to guess what it sounded like, I would say some kind of ecstatic, rhythmic, emotional, and

maybe even melodic speech. In other words, maybe it sounded quite a bit like singing, the first human language.

May 4, 2016 Parenthood and the Nearest Mission Field

Recently, the following headline from a satirical website was circulating on the internet: “After 12 Years of Quarterly Church Attendance, Parents Shocked by Daughter’s Lack of Faith.” It was a stinging, funny, and all too true statement, for we parents are our children’s most important spiritual role models, and the faith they see in us (not only on Sundays, but every day, in our love of God and neighbor) is the faith they are most likely to emulate as they grow up.

To put a more positive spin on this topic, there was a wonderful online article this week by an insightful Episcopalian and father, Derek Olsen, entitled “First Secret of a Pew Whisperer: Being There.” [You can read it here.](#) Olsen writes about how often churchgoers compliment him on the good behavior of his young daughters at worship. His secret isn’t really a secret at all; his girls are (mostly) attentive at church, because they are used to being there weekly. As Olsen says, “worship is important to our family, so they’ve had lots of practice.”

I share these reflections not to induce guilt among those who attend less often, for I know full well, as a parent of three young children, the insane pressures on our schedules, and how often a child gets sick, wiping out our best laid plans for church as a family. I trust that all of us (parents or not) who take the faith seriously do our very best to follow Jesus by worshipping weekly and living our faith daily, but sometimes life gets in the way. As with any habit, what we get out of our faith is largely a function of what we put into it (multiplied by God’s grace).

Another point I appreciated in Olsen’s piece is his assertion that his own family is his primary mission field for spreading the faith. In other words, evangelism begins at home, with those who are closest to us (especially our children) and radiates outward into the communities around us. Perhaps all of us, parents or no, can begin with our closest mission field: ourselves (our own hearts and lives), and those nearest to us. Let us sow the seeds of faith in and around us, to the best of our ability, knowing that it is God alone who gives the growth.

One final point about parenthood. This Sunday is a happy parental coincidence: we will celebrate Mother’s Day and the mothers and maternal figures in our lives, and also the visit of an important parental role model in faith, Bishop Smith, for his annual visitation. We wouldn’t want to overdo the parental imagery when it comes to our clergy leaders, either priests or bishops, but it is a theme from the beginning of the Christian tradition (think of the term “Father” and later, “Mother” for priests, and “Abbot” and “Abbess” – literally *daddy and mama* – for leaders of monastic communities). Bishop Smith has several symbolic roles: he is the *episkopos* or “overseer” of the Episcopal churches in Arizona, our spiritual shepherd (note his crosier, or shepherd’s crook), and also a father figure in faith.

Come join us on Sunday as we welcome Bishop Smith and his wife Laura home into our spiritual family, and as we celebrate new, committed Christians, both youth and adult, through the sacrament of Confirmation at 11am.

April 27, 2016 Coming Soon: The North Central Family 5K

It is almost time for our fourth annual North Central Family 5K and 1 Mile Fun Run and Walk, which will take place on Saturday, May 7 at 7am. This has become a wonderful Eastertide tradition, and I encourage everyone to participate and to bring friends. Whatever one's age or fitness level, it is an enjoyable morning. This year's 1 Mile course will be entirely on our beautiful All Saints' campus, using the new space afforded to us by our campus expansion a couple of years ago.

There are several reasons why this event is such an important part of our Spring, and here are just four of them.

We interact with the community. Churches can be rather insular sometimes, so it is always good to be with our neighbors and in our neighborhood. All Saints' has been a force for good in North Central Phoenix for over 60 years. God's mission is in the world, and when we leave our doors to be with the community, it gives us a greater sense of the gifts and opportunities for ministry and partnership around us.

We exercise in God's creation. Our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19) and it feels good to exercise, whether by running, jogging, or walking. To do so on a beautiful early morning in the midst of God's creation is even better.

We enjoy fun and fellowship. The air on race day will be filled with laughter, and energy. There will be all kinds of extra activities for children, and booths with information and goodies for adults, as well. And we will be together, with longtime friends, new friends, and other friendly people.

We raise money for important causes. The NCF5K is a fundraiser. The proceeds, after expenses, support our Children, Youth and Family Ministries (especially our programs in the community) and our partnership with Saint Paul's Church and School in Haiti. The race in years past has helped us build a school building in Haiti, and give sanitation to our friends there. Recently, clean water projects have been an emphasis.

Register online, at the church office, or in the church narthex (lobby) on Sundays, and come join us on May 7. You'll be glad you did!

April 21, 2016 Generosity and Human Dignity: A Syrian Refugee Story

Sometimes things happen that remind me why I love the Church. This past weekend was one such time. Towards the end of the week, we heard from our Just Faith group about a Syrian refugee family of 12 (two grandparents, two parents, and eight children) that has been living not far from us for the past 10 months.

They are doing all the right things to get settled in our community: the father has a job washing cars at a car rental agency, the children are in school, the family is learning English, and the two oldest boys are looking for part-time work as they finish high school. But until the boys find jobs, and the father is able to get a better paying job, they are under financial pressure, especially with rent on their modest three-bedroom house.

We presented the situation to our All Saints' congregation on Sunday morning, and by the end of the morning, we had several promising job prospects for the teens, and over \$3,000 to help the family with rent! It was an amazing outpouring of compassion. Church members were literally stuffing envelopes and checks into my full hands in the narthex. Several who couldn't help financially asked if there was anything else they could do.

Sunday morning showed our All Saints' community's faith in action as we reached out generously to our neighbors. We have made a real difference in this family's life. Thank you!

Helping those in need is often a complex situation. At All Saints' we almost never help a person or family with direct financial assistance, unless they are known members of our church (in which case we use our clergy discretionary funds, typically up to a cap of \$500 per year).

Our discretionary funds are financed by special donations for that purpose, and through the clergy's officiating at funerals and weddings (any honorarium we receive goes not to us personally, but to our discretionary fund, which is only used to support the poor and related worthy causes). When we get a request for financial help from outside the parish, we typically respond pastorally, and try to connect the person to a local agency that can help.

In the case of this Syrian family, we felt moved by the Holy Spirit and made an exception, but generally our appeals and volunteers are directed not to individuals or particular families, but to organizations that are addressing human need in our wider community, like ICM, Andre Housé, and Saint Mary's Food Bank.

For Christians, as we follow Jesus' teaching to help the poor, we wish not only to maximize our impact, but also to prevent unintended harm. In his classic book "Toxic Charity," Robert Lupton writes about how often churches and charities hurt many of those they intend to help, both

locally and internationally, by fostering dependency and diminishing the dignity of those in need.

The best generosity builds up the dignity of those being helped, creates partnerships and friendships wherever possible, and enhances the capacity for an individual, family or community to provide for themselves.

April 14, 2016 Not Only Hope but Courage

It is good that Eastertide lasts 50 days, for there is so much to reflect upon when we consider not only Jesus' resurrection, but its **implications**. The resurrection of Christ prepared the way for our own resurrection after our deaths, at the end of all things ("for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" *1 Corinthians 15:22*). He was the "first fruits," but not the only fruits, for we will all be raised at the "resurrection of the dead" (Nicene Creed).

How all this will happen we do not know; it is a great mystery. But the Church has taught it from the beginning. If we think of the resurrection as something miraculous that only happened to Jesus, and will not happen to us, we have missed much of the point, and much of the hope of the Gospel. But if we think the resurrection applies only to us as **individuals**, we have also missed much.

The resurrection changes everything; it transforms death into life in every possible way, place, and time. Look at what happened to the early followers of Jesus. Because of their experience of the Risen Lord, they not only found a personal, spiritual hope that they would have eternal life after death. They were **transformed collectively** from fearful, scattered sheep into strong, courageous shepherds. The single greatest evidence of the truth of Jesus' resurrection is the effect it had on his first disciples.

If they had not experienced powerfully the presence of the Risen Christ, they would not have turned almost instantly into remarkably committed Christians, willing to die for their faith (as almost all of the original 12 did). The resurrection birthed the Church no less than the gift of the Holy Spirit did at Pentecost, and it is through the resurrection that the Church found its courage.

Let us also, then, as 21st century disciples of Jesus, find hope in the resurrection as individuals, but also courage from it as the collective Church. If we need not fear death, the most fearful thing there is, then we need not fear anything. Empowered by our Easter faith, we can live the Gospel boldly, joyfully proclaim our belief in the midst of a skeptical world by word and deed, and resolve to bring compassion and love to those places that need it most, to our last breath.

And so, even as we think that Eastertide might be a time to slow down and rest easy, with the program and school year winding down and summer coming, instead we are called to draw strength from our savior's risen life. May we run with energy this part of the race that is set before us, confident that there is nothing to fear, on earth or beyond it.

March 30, 2016 What's Next?

One of my favorite traditions in the Easter season is the Church's ancient pattern of reading from the Acts of the Apostles for the first reading at the Sunday Eucharist, instead of from the Old Testament. After the very first Holy Week and Easter, the early Christians had to discover what was next for them. Jesus had been raised from the dead, but what did his resurrection mean for them, for their faith, and for their life together in Christian community?

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see the followers of Jesus finding their identity in relationship to their risen (and then ascended) Lord. They find courage, as in this Sunday's reading, when they proclaim Jesus' resurrection boldly despite the threats of the authorities. They find their voices to proclaim the Gospel, they live in hope of their own resurrection, and they begin to order their lives with prayer, simple living, and service to those in need.

At All Saints', now that we have made our pilgrimage through Holy Week to Easter day, where are we going next as Eastertide unfolds? How will Jesus' resurrection give **us** courage to proclaim the Gospel and speak the truth, hope in our own eventual resurrection, and grace to order our lives in prayer, gratitude and generosity?

I hope that one priority for us will be to practice our Easter joy by serving at Saint Mary's Food Bank on April 16 as a community. In what other ways does the new life of Christ make a difference for you, and through you, for others?

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

March 23, 2016 Now My Tongue the Mystery Telling: Music in Holy Week

Now my tongue the mystery telling of the glorious Body sing.

So begins the 13th century hymn, composed by Thomas Aquinas, which we sing on Maundy Thursday as the Blessed Sacrament is brought to the Chapel for the evening Watch. So much of Holy Week is a mystery into which we enter and that we tell and retell, year after year.

The Greek word for this in liturgical theology is *anamnesis*, which means “remembrance” or “memorial,” but it is so much more than just remembering or even re-enacting. In Holy Week, at these ancient liturgies, the past becomes present, Phoenix becomes Jerusalem, and we are mysteriously transported into the presence of Christ for his last days.

Our mission in Holy Week is not to understand, but simply to participate, to pray, to open ourselves to Jesus’ suffering, so that we may rejoice even more in his resurrection. We walk with Jesus with our feet, and pray that by God’s grace our hearts will follow.

Some things are beyond ordinary language: love, suffering, cruelty, hope, and especially the ways of God. Because Holy Week is a deep mystery, one of the best ways to enter into it is through music. Music tells the mystery, proclaims it, and shares in it much better than words alone.

This week is filled with glorious music, and I urge all of us to partake in it as much as we can by attending our worship, and also the choral devotional on Good Friday afternoon. Every year, our choir presents an amazing musical devotional on the themes of this week, and this year is no exception, with stunning compositions by John Duggan, Stephen Paulus, and Bern Herbolzheimer.

Come and bring a friend (or two) on Good Friday afternoon. Come for Stations of the Cross at noon, or just for the music at 12:30pm, as your schedule allows. In the midst of our troubled world, come to experience the peace of God which passes all understanding.

March 16, 2016 Going Through Holy Week

One of my children's favorite books is "We're Going on a Bear Hunt," which features the refrain: "We can't go over it. We can't go under it. We have to go through it!" There are some experiences in life that we can't go over or under, only through. Grief is one example. There are no short cuts when we lose a loved one. The only way to the other side of grief is to go through it. And if we try to go a short way, it ends up taking longer.

Holy Week is similar. To be sure, we can skip most of it if we choose to, and go straight from Palm Sunday to Easter morning, with nothing in between. Many do just that. But if we go over or under or around the true meaning of Holy Week, if we skip all of the services in between the Sundays, we will miss much of what matters most. Like skipping the middle chapters of a book, or falling asleep in the midst of a movie, to experience only the beginning and end of the story loses a lot.

It is better by far to go through the week in its fullness, to enter into the drama of it, especially its culmination on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. If you have never attended Maundy Thursday, for example, or the Easter Vigil of Holy Saturday, you are missing some of the most ancient, mystical experiences of the Christian faith.

Many of us have busy schedules, but please come to as many of the services of Holy Week as you can. Walk with the Church as we walk with Jesus through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Go through the events of the week with Jesus, as much as you can, and I promise you will be blessed by God in your faith in unexpected ways.

March 9, 2016 Evensong: Making a Comeback?

A recent article in the British newspaper "The Telegraph" was entitled "Looking for Britain's Future Leaders? Try Evensong." It described the recent surge of attendance at choral Evensong by students at Oxford and Cambridge. It seems that these busy, overstressed, and tech-saturated young adults are finding a peaceful, ancient, beautiful experience of God in this most quintessentially Anglican style of worship.

The story reminded me of a similar experience when I was a graduate student in seminary. I was singing in a wonderful choir at a church right next to the Yale campus. As an experiment, we started a service of sung Compline in candlelight at the late hour of 9pm on Sundays when the university was in session. Much to our surprise, it began to draw a crowd of college and graduate students, seeking a quiet, spiritual time in the midst of their evening studies.

Many of the students who attended were not Christians, and never darkened the door of the church at any other time. But they were drawn to this. The next year, this Compline service was named one of the coolest things to do at Yale at night by the student newspaper, and we knew it was here to stay! Compline continues there all these years later, touching the lives of Christians and non-Christians alike.

This Sunday at All Saints' is our next to last Evensong of this program year. We have Evensong again in April, and it will return in October. All Saints' is the only church that I know of in Phoenix that offers choral Evensong every month of the program year (Trinity Cathedral offers it periodically, but not every month). This is a rare gift, for Evensong is being sung less and less often across The Episcopal Church. Why? First, because choral Evensong with paid singers is expensive. And second, because many Episcopal churches are under the mistaken impression that the younger generations are not interested in it.

Part of our mission at All Saints' is to continue and pass on to the next generation traditional worship, with music and other elements at the very highest level, to God's honor and glory. Certainly there is room for many different styles of worship and music in The Episcopal Church, and fresh expressions of liturgy are always needed. But it is also important to preserve the best of what we have done and who we have been, as Anglican Christians, for more than 500 years.

This Sunday's Evensong, for example, features the "Collegium Regale" (King's College) setting of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis by Herbert Howells. We have been singing Howells' different settings of these evening canticles all year long, all of them lovely, but none more so than this particular composition, from 1945. It is surely one of the best pieces for Evensong ever written, and we will offer it here.

What makes this Howells piece so profound? The way his music sets the texts, from Luke. From the gracious and prayerful opening of the Magnificat in Mary's voice to the plaintive start of the Nunc Dimittis in Simeon's, from the vigorous "he hath shown strength with his arm" to the

magisterial "Glory be to the Father..." this is music that brings the Biblical texts to life and stirs the human heart.

Come join us for Evensong on Sunday if you are able, and help us spread the word about this remarkable and rare form of restful prayer in praise of God, the source of all beauty.

March 3, 2016 Go Where the Hurt Is

Recently, in the middle of the night, someone stole two nice (but old) chairs and a table from the patio in front of our house in Sunnyslope. I have to tell you, when something like this happens to me, my initial reaction is about as far removed from Christian love as you can get. We've been robbed three times in our six plus years in our house (one major robbery, and one more minor than this one), and every time, it fills me with a sense of violation and rather out-of-proportion anger.

My personality type appreciates order, fairness, and safety, and nothing feels less orderly, fair, and safe than waking up to an empty patio, and realizing that thieves were a few feet away from your children's bedroom window. At the same time, with the benefit of a few days' time, I ask myself: what causes someone to do something like this? What's at the root of it? Can we even know?

In the case of one of our earlier robberies, it was clearly the work of mischievous teens, falling under the category of dumb things we do when we are young and trying to fit in. In the case of our recent theft, I try, with some difficulty, to imagine how desperate someone must be to risk stealing fairly heavy, used patio furniture in the middle of the night. I can't believe it will get much more than \$100 at a yard sale or pawn shop.

There's a lot of hurt in our city and in our country. The economic recovery following the Great Recession has lifted relatively few people who are in the middle class and below. One of the core principles of the American Dream, that if you work hard you can move up the economic ladder, is (statistically speaking) much less true in our current economy than in the decades prior.

For many in poverty, family systems have broken down, schools are inadequate, trust in institutions is low, healthy food is hard to find, and in some parts of the country, not even the water is safe to drink. For a lot of good people, these are desperate times, economically and emotionally. To take one small example, did you know that among middle aged, lower class whites, there is a nationwide epidemic of death, mostly from suicide and drug and alcohol abuse? And we wonder why there is so much hopelessness and anger in our political system.

Fortunately, our God is a God of hope, abundance, and forgiveness. This Sunday, we hear one of the greatest stories about God's love and mercy that Jesus ever told, the story of the prodigal son from Luke's gospel. In response to his son's repentance over his poor decisions, the father in the story (often seen as a metaphor for God) runs out to meet him, and welcomes him back into the family with abundant generosity. All too often, though, the Church, both in its own circles and in the public square, plays the role of the eldest son, the self-righteous scold. It is one of our least attractive, and least Jesus-like qualities.

Let's be inspired anew by this amazing gospel lesson this weekend, and resolve to be more like the generous, forgiving father in our intentions and our actions. To be quick to give and to forgive, even to the point of great sacrifice: that is the way of Jesus and the way of the Cross.

It is no mystery where to find Jesus. We find him in the sacrament of the Body and Blood, and in the inspired words of the Bible. And we find him wherever there are hurting people at the point of desperation, on their last gasps of hope. Jesus suffers with them, and calls us there. If you wish to find Jesus, go where the hurt is.

February 24, 2016 An Interfaith Learning Opportunity

Last week, I wrote about a negative experience of communication on the internet (the initial reactions on Facebook to Justice Scalia's death). This week, I want to highlight a positive aspect of the internet: the many resources for learning. For those who have access to it, the internet offers almost limitless opportunities for education for all ages. From Wikipedia to TED talks, from YouTube language lessons to online art and music, a vast array of material is available for free.

This past week, I read about an upcoming online course being offered to adults through Harvard Divinity School, entitled "World Religions Through Their Scriptures." The course is free (except for those wishing a certificate of completion) but will require a substantial investment of time (it will run from March 1 through August 2016, with a total of 24 classes – one per week).

This HarvardX course will cover Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, through their sacred texts. As one would expect, it will approach the material not from a Christian point of view, but from an academic, more neutral stance. More information can be found here: rlp.hds.harvard.edu (look under "Academics").

I hope some of our members will consider taking the class, because most Christians have a poor understanding of other religions (for that matter, many Christians have a poor understanding of what we believe). In a time when so much conflict and misunderstanding in our world involves religion, it is useful to gain more knowledge.

Interfaith work is hard, because it involves such strongly held beliefs. Much religion, by its nature, demands commitment and makes truth claims (as in Jesus' words in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."). The most effective interfaith dialogue, in my experience, accepts that each faith believes itself to be the most authentic revelation of the Divine, and yet seeks to build understanding and find common ground.

Neither our society nor our faith are well served by minimizing the differences among religions, or watering down our beliefs in a futile effort to reduce all religions to a thin gruel of sameness. Better to have a savory stew, in which every religion holds true to its beliefs and values, but accepts its place in a diverse society and works well with others to further understanding and address the moral challenges of our time.

Society and faith are benefited when we begin by studying our own faith deeply and practicing it with devotion, and then reach out to understand better what others believe. The best interfaith work moves from respect to understanding to relationship and cooperation. We respect one another as fellow children of God, get to know other traditions better, then ideally build real friendships and find common ground, especially in areas of mercy and justice.

One key piece of all of this is understanding, and so I urge those who are interested to consider the HarvardX class, or to explore other faiths in other ways. A good local resource is the Arizona Interfaith Movement (interfaithmovement.com). Our church library also has a robust interfaith section.

All Saints' (both church and school) has a long history of building bridges among faiths, and approaching difference of all kinds with humility and respect. Our world needs faithful people who, secure in their own faith, reach out to learn from and work with others, for the sake of the whole human family.

February 17, 2016 Friendship and Compassion: Healing a Divided World

Last weekend, I had an unsettling experience of sin. I happened to be on Facebook as the news about Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's death was spreading.

Within an hour of the announcement of his passing, I saw posts by individuals and even a blog gleefully celebrating his death. And on the other side of the political spectrum, I saw individuals and blogs taking positions on whether the Senate should approve a successor nominated by President Obama. All of this within an hour of the news of Justice Scalia's death. It was a deeply depressing, though not entirely surprising experience.

I know that we live in starkly polarized times, and I know that communication on the internet tends to bring out the worst and most sinful aspects of our human nature. But somehow, as a Christian, I hoped for better, especially from fellow Christians. My friend Scott Gunn had a very similar reaction, which he expressed in his thoughtful post "When Compassion Gets Real" on his blog sevenwholedays.org.

I would have hoped that even those Christians who disagree strongly with Justice Scalia's views would pray for the repose of his soul as a fellow child of God, pray for his family and friends in their grief, and give thanks for his dedicated service. And I likewise would have hoped that talk of political strategy about his replacement would wait for at least a few hours.

Fortunately, last weekend I also had an uplifting experience of grace. I read Justice Ginsberg's moving tribute to Justice Scalia, who was her ideological opposite, and yet her dear friend. Their friendship, despite major philosophical differences over serious matters, gave me hope.

Our nation and our world could use more friendship, and more compassion. Genuine friendship between those who disagree is part of the "glue" in a healthy society. When we are friends with those who differ from us, we come to a more nuanced view of important issues and appreciation of other cultures and backgrounds. Often in such friendships, we realize that we have much more in common with others than we suspected.

And since we can't be friends with everyone, compassion is our ability to empathize with others by imagining ourselves in their shoes. In genuine compassion (which takes hard work), we try to dismantle our assumptions, listen, reflect, learn, and open our hearts to the suffering and life experience of another person.

One of the functions of the Church is to encourage friendship and compassion, as God's instruments of healing and reconciliation. At worship and other Church events, we are with people who share our faith (for the most part), but who may have very different life experiences and views on other issues. What a blessing it is to make friends at Church with those who are different!

Part of that is the mission of the Church, to provide such opportunities for friendship (as in our Lenten evenings and small groups), and part of the responsibility lies with the individual (making the effort to get to know others beyond our usual circle). You might consider, for example, inviting a small number of parishioners whom you don't know well over for dinner sometime this Lent or Easter.

The Church facilitates compassion in worship, learning, and service, by encouraging us to pray for and be aware of injustice and suffering, in our city or across the globe, and to reach out in mercy to help. One simple test of compassion is how we react when something tragic happens to someone we don't know or even someone we dislike.

Our nation and our world could use more genuine, diverse friendships, and more sincere compassion towards others, neither of which is easy. Let us make an effort to cultivate these healing virtues in our Church community, in the lives of our children, and in our divided world.

February 11, 2016 Memento Mori

“Memento Mori” is Latin for “remember that you must die,” and represents a concept in religion, philosophy and the arts that stretches back even before Christianity. The ancient Greek philosophers reflected often on the theme of mortality as a guard against pride, and a caution to make the most of earthly life.

According to legend, it was a tradition that victorious Roman generals, in their victory parades, would have a servant just behind them, whispering in their ear “memento mori,” as a reminder that this adulation (and life itself) would be fleeting.

In the medieval period, and especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, “memento mori” was a popular theme in art. You will often find paintings from that time with skulls in them, either with other symbolic items, or being held by the living. The “danse macabre” depicted death leading a dance of people to the grave, and music and poetry (as in the elegy) also dwelled often on the theme of the brevity of life.

On Ash Wednesday, we are brought rather abruptly face to face with our mortality as we receive the ashes, with the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” In this “memento mori” moment, we reflect on our mortality in a way that most of us only rarely do otherwise. It is good for us to remember that life is short, and to urge ourselves to make the most of every precious day that we have.

If these 40 days of Lent were to be our last days, how would we use them? What frayed or broken relationships would we seek to mend? What favorite books would we re-read, and what music would we listen to? What fervent prayers would we offer, and what confessions would we make? What aspects of our lives and our world would we seek urgently to change? Let us use the holy time of Lent well, as a sign of using our life well, and to God’s good purposes.

A few final points. First, this Sunday is our annual Evensong commemorating our Legacy Circle (those who have remembered All Saints’ in their wills). The Evensong is open to all, and will include prayers for those Legacy members who have died in the past year, and also for the new members of the Legacy Circle.

I strongly encourage all of our church members and friends, especially those who pledge annually, to join the Legacy Circle by being in touch with Nick or Lindsay in the Church Office. All you have to do is fill out a simple form, indicating that you have remembered All Saints’ in your will (we never ask the amount). I hope that all of us will make end of life plans that remember our loved ones, and also our church. We may not like to think about making such plans, because none of us much likes to think about our death, but it is so important that we do.

Legacy giving, which goes into our endowment, is the single most important factor in the future financial well-being of All Saints’ and our ministries. And it gives Legacy Circle members peace of mind that this church that we cherish will continue to go “from strength to strength.” One

healthy way to remember our future death is to plan for it thoughtfully, with our loved ones and our church in mind.

Finally, as Christians, even as we remember that we are dust, we have faith that there is life after death. Ash Wednesday and Lent are not the end of the story. **Our** story ends at Easter, with Christ's resurrection that is extended to us. We not only remember that we must die. We also remember that we will **live again**. And not ourselves only, but all the faithful whom we love. Thanks be to God!

February 4, 2016 A Few Words of Thanks

I have often said that my favorite part of our Annual Meeting is the Vestry Commendations, when we recognize volunteers for extraordinary service to All Saints'. That was true again on Sunday, with our recognition of three outstanding servant leaders: Travys, Erin, and Lowell.

What I didn't expect was the resolution of commendation and appreciation for me! I don't often get surprised by things at church, but I was indeed surprised and deeply touched by Bill Verdini's resolution from the floor, approved by the parish (see below for the text).

As I said on Sunday, I feel enormously blessed to minister with you at All Saints', as we seek to make a difference in our own little part of the world and beyond, to the glory of God. Thank you for the honor, and thank you even more for your energy given towards God's mission. The Piper fellowship is a recognition of the important work that we are doing together at All Saints' as members of One Body.

This Sunday, we complete the season after the Epiphany, and prepare for the beginning of Lent. The one season flows naturally from the other, as our celebration of the many revealings of God (the epiphanies) culminates with the Transfiguration, before turning to how we respond faithfully to God's manifestations in our world and in our lives.

In my class on Sunday, I will suggest some ways to think about Lent and to make the most of it. Lent is a gift from God: the chance to identify broken or strained parts of ourselves and our relationships with each other that are in need of God's healing. Let us not miss the opportunity to grow in wholeness as God's people.

Resolution of Appreciation for and Commendation of the Reverend Poulson Reed

January 31, 2016

WHEREAS, the Reverend Poulson Reed, as Rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School since 2009, works closely with leaders, staff, and volunteers to discern and implement a vision for ministries that make a difference in the lives of church and school members, students, and those in need; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust Piper Fellows sabbatical program has recognized the Reverend Poulson Reed as an outstanding leader who has a demonstrated track record of leadership within the organization and service to the community; and

WHEREAS, Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26 "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

RESOLVED: That we, the parishioners of All Saints' Episcopal Church and Day School, do now recognize, gratefully acknowledge, and share in the honor bestowed upon our Rector, Father Poulson Reed, by the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust.

January 28, 2016 The Gift of Looking Back

Not long ago, someone said to me: “thank you so much for your sermon a few weeks ago. It really helped me.” I thanked them for their kind words, but the truth was, I couldn’t remember what I said in my sermon several weeks before, other than the basic theme! I am the type of task-oriented person who, when something is completed, moves on immediately to the next thing. I am not always good at reflecting on something, looking back and considering it carefully.

This is one of the gifts of the Christian life: it encourages us to think beyond the usual, linear, what’s next of secular time. One of the most powerful spiritual exercises is, at the end of our day, to look back and ask ourselves, “where was God present in my life today?” Often we notice things from a distance that we could not see close up. So, too, our circular pattern of liturgical time takes us deeper and deeper into the mystery of our faith as we revisit the seasons anew from different places in our lives.

Even though we are well into our new year, I encourage all of us to take a few minutes to reflect on 2015 at All Saints’. Read the Annual Report that Nanette has put together so beautifully (especially in the color version online). Look at the many pictures. Recall some happy moments, and be proud of the work God has done through All Saints’.

Let there never be any doubt: God has blessed us abundantly at All Saints’, and it is our continual calling and joy to be a blessing to others, as God gives us the grace to do so.

January 21, 2016 That We All May Be One, Part Two: An Update on the Meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion

Last week, I wrote about some of the challenges and opportunities facing the Christian churches as we seek to fulfill Jesus' hope that we all be one, as He and the Father are one (John 17:21). This past week's news from the meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion serves as a vivid illustration. This is a complicated topic, so allow me to break it down into pieces, with some background and commentary. Forgive my wordiness, but it is important to understand what has happened, what has not happened, and why.

What was the meeting?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, invited all the Primates of the Anglican Communion (the senior bishops of the provinces or "national" churches) to meet at Canterbury. Our own Presiding Bishop, the Most Reverend Michael Curry, represented The Episcopal Church, and some 37 other Primates were in attendance. They met over four days for prayer and conversation.

What is the Anglican Communion?

The Anglican Communion arose out of the churches planted by missionaries from the Church of England during the height of the British Empire. From early on, there were questions as to how these different national churches would relate to each other, since our system is not as hierarchical as the Roman Catholic Church. The Anglican Communion became a series of interconnected relationships, characterized by "bonds of affection," that leave a great deal of autonomy for each province (even the Archbishop of Canterbury has no direct control over decisions in other provinces, like our Episcopal Church, which is governed by our General Convention, held every three years).

There are, however, certain agreed-upon "Instruments of Communion" that hold the various provinces together in this Communion in particular, semi-formal ways: The Archbishop of Canterbury (considered a spiritual leader and "first among equals" of the Primates), The Lambeth Conference of bishops every ten years, the Primates meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council (representative laity, bishops, priests, and deacons who meet every 2-3 years).

Why was this meeting held?

The Anglican Communion has faced increasing tension over a range of theological issues, centered particularly around human sexuality and the interpretation of Scripture. The largest and fastest growing parts of the Communion in Africa and other parts of the "Global South" are theologically conservative, while the Anglican churches in the West (England, Europe, the United States and Canada) and in a few other countries have been moving in a more liberal direction for decades (particularly The Episcopal Church). Most of these Western Anglican

churches have been shrinking, and so the relative balance of power has been shifting toward the Global South.

There was particular tension in 2003 with The Episcopal Church's consecration of the Right Reverend Gene Robinson, a partnered gay man, as Bishop of New Hampshire. Some parts of the Anglican Communion felt strongly that this was a major departure from generally accepted doctrine and practice within the Communion. Difficult conversations followed, and a few fairly minor restrictions were levied on The Episcopal Church, but efforts to develop an Anglican Covenant to more strictly control changes in theology and practice were defeated.

Most recently, tensions increased again with The Episcopal Church's decision last summer at our General Convention to offer marriage equality in our churches, a significant change to the traditional theology of marriage. With several of the more conservative Anglican provinces abroad threatening to boycott any Anglican meetings until the controversies were discussed, Archbishop Welby gathered the Primates in an effort to hold the relationships of the Anglican Communion together and to seek a way forward.

What did the Primates' meeting decide?

The Primates decided many things on a range of topics, and I encourage you to read their Communique in full. But here are some highlights. They expressed their "unanimous desire to walk together" in the Anglican Communion (**no province left or was expelled from the Communion**). They condemned "homophobic prejudice and violence" and recognized that the Christian church and the Anglican churches more specifically "have often acted in a way towards people on the basis of their sexual orientation that has caused deep hurt."

Nonetheless, the Primates acknowledged a "distance" between The Episcopal Church and the majority of the Anglican Communion on the doctrine of marriage, and required "that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee, and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity."

There will be a Task Group appointed to "maintain conversation among ourselves with the intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognizing the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ."

What does it mean for The Episcopal Church?

Honestly, rather little. There is some question about how binding these decisions by the Primates are, but even if they are implemented, they represent a three year "timeout" from a few committees. **The Episcopal Church is still part of the Anglican Communion**, and will continue to be connected to other provinces in a host of ways in addition to communion-wide

meetings, for example the many companion relationships that link us as dioceses and parishes, and the international work of Episcopal Relief and Development.

Doubtless there is pain being felt by some in our Episcopal Church, both those who feel that The Episcopal Church is drifting from the traditional faith, and (more acutely) our LGBT members who may feel that they and their loved ones are again being treated as abstractions in a theological debate.

There is no chance that The Episcopal Church will retreat from its position in favor of marriage equality, which it has taken as a matter of theological conviction after many years of discussion and debate. Although some theological differences remain on this topic across The Episcopal Church, a broad consensus is emerging. Neither will we abandon our historic and mission-based connections with other Anglicans across the world.

Disagreement over doctrine has been a part of Christian history since the beginning. Interpretations of Scripture vary among faithful Christians, and divine truth is usually settled not in weeks and years, but in decades and centuries. God's truth is revealed in the spiritual fruitfulness of our decisions, over time. Therefore, we are wise to hold our convictions (beyond the core doctrines of our faith) with some humility, gracious and respectful towards those with whom we disagree.

Whatever our disagreements, we are bound together in baptism as fellow children of God. The Scriptures teach us that we are not able to say to another Christian with whom we disagree "I have no need of you" (I Corinthians 12). Our ministries and companionship with our fellow Anglicans, especially in service to the poor and needy, will and must continue.

What does it mean for All Saints'?

Again, very little. Like the Anglican Communion, All Saints' members hold a variety of theological views, including on the topic of marriage equality, while holding in common the creedal essentials of the faith. We will continue to offer marriages and blessings equally to all church members who desire them, using the same procedures and preparation for all, in accordance with the policies of the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona and the laws of our state. Our gay and lesbian members are a great blessing to All Saints', have been for many years, and will continue to be.

Our All Saints' family is enhanced by the diversity in our midst, and we cherish the variety of people and viewpoints (theological, political and otherwise) in our pews. We will maintain our commitment to international mission work in Haiti through our partner church and school there, through Episcopal Relief and Development, and through our continued connections to the Sudan and the Sudanese community in Phoenix. We pray for greater understanding and unity, through the Holy Spirit, in our church, our nation, the Anglican Communion, and our world.

Recently, I attended the Arizona Bach Festival performance of Bach's Saint John Passion. I was struck in this moving performance by the compassion that Jesus shows to others, even from the Cross. His love for his mother, for the beloved disciple, and for the whole world radiate in the midst of his suffering. The most profound force for unity in the Church and in the world is found when we emulate the compassion of Jesus, by loving others, even (I would say especially) when they are profoundly different from us.

Whenever we have disagreements and differences, let us not follow the divisive ways of the world at its worst, but rather love one another, as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). Sometimes that love is costly or painful, but it is the way of the Cross, that leads to new life.

By all means, feel free to be in touch with me if you have further questions or concerns about any of this. Bishop Burrill is also a useful resource, especially for questions about the role of bishops in the Anglican Communion. May God bless All Saints', The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, and lead us into all truth.

Some Links for Further Reading

The Full Communique from the Anglican Primates' Meeting: [Click here](#)

The Statement from our Presiding Bishop, the Most Reverend Michael Curry: [Click here](#)

The Statement from the Bishop of Arizona, the Right Reverend Kirk Smith: [Click here](#)

A Conservative Perspective from within The Episcopal Church: [Springfield Bishop's response to the Primates Meeting Click here](#)

January 14, 2016 That We All May Be One

Our guest preacher and teacher last week, Roman Catholic priest and monk Father Eric Hollas from Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota, mentioned the importance of strengthening ecumenical connections (the relationships among different Christian denominations). He noted that while we have the Saint John's Bible with us, Saint John's routinely uses our Episcopal Hymnal 1982 for their worship. In addition, there is an Episcopal retreat center on the Saint John's campus.

It is fitting that Father Hollas was with us in mid-January, because January 18-25 is the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. During this week (from the Feast of the Confession of Saint Peter through the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul), many Christian denominations pray that we might eventually fulfill Jesus' hope that we all be one, and He and the Father are one (John 17:21).

There have been periods of time in history when it seemed that real Christian unity might be possible, and some progress **has** been made, for example joint declarations on Mary by Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and on justification by Lutherans and Catholics, all in recent years. But for the most part, Christianity has moved in the other direction, splintering into more and more denominations, sub-groups, and independent churches.

The hope for unity or even greater cooperation often seems rather remote. As I write this, the Archbishop of Canterbury is meeting with the Primates (the heads of all of the "national" churches in the Anglican Communion), including our own Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, the Most Reverend Michael Curry.

They are having difficult conversations about what form the Anglican Communion might take going forward, given the enormous theological differences among our provinces. The intense polarization, suspicion of others, and mistrust of institutions, amplified by technological interconnectedness and the blog mentality, have been putting the same stresses on the Anglican Communion that we experience nationally in our political and cultural life.

Like bipartisan cooperation, peace in the Middle East, an end to poverty, and so many other worthy ideals, the unity of the Church seems like something that would be great in theory, but is hopelessly unrealistic. That may be so. Perhaps only Jesus' return and the final realization of the kingdom of God will bring about such things.

But we can do our part to pray for and encourage coming together. And in our own way, I see All Saints' as a model for how the wider Church and society might handle differences with compassion, grace, and good humor. One of the things I most cherish about All Saints' is how we gather a wide variety of political and theological views under one big tent. Our centrist, inclusive approach welcomes all, while holding to our values and the creedal core of our faith.

Our unity is not uniformity. We agree on the essentials, and make lots of room for variety on the non-essentials. And we value each other as friends in Christ, as we pray, learn, serve and connect together. I think that's a pretty good example.

January 7, 2016 Does Beauty Belong in Church?

The coming weeks' events have me thinking about beauty, specifically beauty as expressed in the arts, and its relationship to the Church. On Friday, January 8, The Arizona Bach Festival begins, with a marvelous lineup of concerts (including Bach's monumental Passion According to Saint John).

On Sunday, January 10, we continue our year with the Saint John's Bible by welcoming guest preacher and teacher the Reverend Eric Hollas from Saint John's Abbey (along with our friend Brad Neary) in the morning and at a special Evensong. Later this month, we will explore spirituality and creativity with another guest, Dr. Paula Artac. And last, but not least, we are now offering music classes for children.

Why does beauty belong in the Church? Over history, some have argued that it does not. The iconoclasts of Byzantine times believed that most religious images were idolatrous, while some Protestant reformers condemned not only images, but also any church music and architecture that were ornate. This is not just an ancient phenomenon; many modern megachurches eschew beauty in favor of a plain auditorium with few religious symbols, and music no more complex than pop radio.

One thing I love about our particular tradition is our appreciation of beauty as a way to praise and contemplate God. To walk into All Saints' church is to be, quite clearly, on holy ground. Our sacred space is a work of art to the glory of God, from stained glass to pew to stone. In the words of our liturgy, hymns, and Scripture, we appreciate a beauty of language that often is (or verges on the) poetic. And, of course, the beauty of music at All Saints' is always marvelously present, inspirationally supporting our worship with some of the great works of the ages (including our own).

Some would ask, along with Judas, what if all this were sold, and the money given to the poor (John 12:5)? But at our best, our Christian tradition is both/and and not either/or. Ideally, the beauty of the Saint John's Bible or Bach or stained glass moves us to a deeper faith that embodies love of God and mercy towards those in need. Our faith is nurtured and energized, so that we might serve as Christ's hands and feet in the world.

There is some danger that we get stuck in our appreciation of beauty, in a certain self-satisfied elitism, and never move from contemplation to action, but that is more a function of our sinful desire not to grow than a weakness in beauty itself. Great art (which includes visual arts, music, language, and dance) has much in common with spirituality: it cuts through the static of our lives, and causes us to see and hear important things clearly in the present moment. Like true discipleship, true beauty changes us.

This happens in various ways. For me, music often taps into the emotional center of my brain, while poetry gives me a sense of profound truth, as if the words have expressed, just perfectly,

something I have always known but never considered in precisely this way. The visual arts take me to a dreamlike place of imagination.

The greatest expressions of the arts, in any form, provoke in me a feeling of wonder, very similar to the sense I often have of how God works in my life. Even art that is not religious explores essential life questions that intersect with religion. Beauty has always been not an ancillary luxury, but essential to the human experience (see the pre-historic cave paintings in France).

Christian arts even more profoundly than secular ones remind us what it means to be fully human, and made in God's image. And in so doing, they point us towards our fellow human beings, and towards the God who lovingly created and redeems us.