
THE VOICE

Bethesda Episcopal Church: Volume 2, Issue 6

December 2016



FROM THE INTERIM RECTOR'S STUDY

My Dear People and Friends of Bethesda:

Have you ever held a conversation with yourself (it does happen) or another person concerning where God is apt to appear? The Christian experience undoubtedly reminds us that He, who is Author and Giver of life, manifests Himself in particular situations which seem far beyond or in disarray. Bluntly put, there are circumstances beyond our control. They will not submit to our purported skills of management. Thankfully, God reveals Himself in such a way that all else is blessed.

It can be a real surprise.

The Church's Season of Advent is upon us. Our liturgies on November twenty-seventh commenced this holy time as we await Christ's coming not only in the town of Bethlehem but also at the end of time. Advent, as one preacher reminded his congregation, is marked by an element of surprise. Pause and reflect upon the lections, hymns, and anthems which grace this season. Begin with the principal figures of the Advent mystery. The Holy Spirit overshadowing, the Blessed Virgin Mary becomes the Mother of Jesus. The wilderness prophet of Saint John the Baptist unnerves the throngs of onlookers with his proclamation, "Repent." Christ arrives and turns upside down the imagery of what the Messiah, the Anointed One, will be and do. He judges... but with the wounds he endures on the cross as his commandment to love.

During this Advent at Bethesda, as in years past, we will pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," as well as, "Thy kingdom come." Be prepared to be surprised. Personally, I find this remark of Emmanuel [God is with us] to be real and worthy of our attention. Its origin is the Revelation to Saint John the Divine:

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Fifty Years in the Choir Stalls

Stuart Armstrong

It began in the Fall of 1966, when I was ten years old. My friend Rick Bruno suggested I join the choir. It was a lot of fun, he said. And then he added the clincher: "Besides," he said, "we get paid." Indeed, we (the boys, at any rate) did: a whopping fifty cents for each weekly rehearsal and service. A dollar a week would make me rich in no time! Since my father had recently died, my mother was eager for me to be involved in worthwhile activities, so I joined the Daniel Jones Griffith Memorial Choir.

Mr. (later, Dr.) Roger Hannahs was in charge of the choir then. He was a music teacher and chorus director at Saratoga Springs High School, and extremely popular. Rehearsals were held on Thursday evenings at 7 p.m. for approximately one hour. Each singer came in, took their assigned hymnal and folder, and sat down. The tenors and basses sat in the last row, with the younger voices filling in front of them, usually an average count of 25 to 30. In front of the chairs was an old upright piano, painted with an old coat of peeling fuchsia paint.

There were many families in the choir: the Baldwins reigned supreme with five in the choir (and more on the way); they were followed closely by the Birds. There were also groups of Richmonds, Hannahses, Tomecks, Pierces, and Armstrongs (no relation).

The choir vestments were quite something. The men and boys were garbed in red and white, and the boys had starched collars with big, floppy red satin bows. The lucky girls got to wear royal blue graduation gowns, with matching mortarboards. (Some of these can still be found mouldering in various corners of the church basement.)

The church service itself was quite different then. Father Holmes, our rector, was more interested in community

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*Behold, I stand at the door and knock;
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him. [3:20]*

As many of you know, I spent the last weekend of October at the Yale Divinity School with our Postulant for Holy Orders, Landon Moore. (While a theological student, I always thought it very odd that my rector never came to visit. Geography was never an issue, and I did not want Landon to share a similar experience.) He introduced me to his faculty advisor, who, in addition, happens to be the Dean of the Episcopal component of the Berkeley Divinity School. Dr. Andrew McGowan's praise of Landon resounded in my heart, and it should in yours too. As the youngest seminarian pursuing Holy Orders, he is much admired and respected by all of his classmates. His daily attendance at chapel services is flawless, and his academic endeavors have earned him a B average. I look forward to Landon's return to our parish for our Christmas celebrations and, again, on Sunday, January fifteenth, when he will preach at both the eight and ten o'clock Eucharists.

For the first time our seasonal Advent Lessons and Carols will occur at three o'clock in the afternoon, on Saturday, December third in honor of the one-hundred fiftieth anniversary of composer Harry Burleigh's birth. His music will be featured in the choir's selections. Acclaimed opera singer Stephen Salters will serve as soloist. Bethesda is most grateful to the Music Department of Skidmore College for coordinating Salter's visit to Saratoga Springs.

On The Sunday of All Saints we welcomed six of our young people to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It was a very happy occasion for them, their families, and the congregation. Parents with similarly-aged children who missed the start of classes, expressed a keen interest in participating in the next series. Another round of instruction for First Holy Communion will begin in April. Further details will be forthcoming in early 2017.

In closing, I want to cite two Bethesda communicants who put their creative skills to work prior to this year's Advent observance. On the four Sundays preceding Christmas, we enjoy the custom of Church School teachers and children bearing figures of Our Lord's Nativity to the Creche, the Infant Jesus excepted. Over the stretch of many decades, a variety of factors, human and otherwise, have caused cracking, breakage, and discoloration to these gifts and memorials. Lewis Bruce and Betsy Cummins could not imagine another Christmas without offering their skills to repair and restore. Their labors are now complete. The results are phenomenal. We render our accolades of thanksgiving and praise for their stewardship of talent.

Most cordially in Christ,

The Very Reverend Marshall J. Vang
Interim Rector ❖

service than high church. Consequently, the choir sang one anthem for the Offertory, and that was it. The service music, including the Gloria, were simple pieces out of the hymnal. (Later on, Dr. Hannahs would extend this music a bit, including works that he wrote himself.) On one memorable Sunday, Bethesda traded choirs with our then-neighbors, the Methodists.

Sunday school met at the beginning of the service, and we all came over to the church around the time of the sermon. The choristers were admitted to the stalls just in time to sing the Offertory anthem. Dr. Hannahs would ring a bell on the organ console, and let us know when the choristers should be sent up to the stalls in time to sing. Good music was sung: Handel, Mozart, Purcell. On Easter, Handel's Hallelujah Chorus alternated every year with Beethoven's (from "The Mount Of Olives.")

The old Skinner was still in place, although on its last legs. Dr. Hannahs had great trouble with it constantly breaking down. But its golden orchestral sound was beautiful and not to be forgotten. Thankfully, some of that sound has been recaptured in the new Pierce Memorial Organ in the gallery. But plans were already in place to replace it with a new organ by Casavant. By the next summer, the pipes were all gone, and services were being accompanied on an upright piano, which sat below the pulpit.

At Christmas back then, we sang both Christmas Eve Midnight mass, as well as the service at 10 a.m. on Christmas morning. Special pre-service music was sung with a string quartet (usually supplied by the Foye family); it was usually some small cantata by Buxtehude or Charpentier. The main worry was that the younger boys would nod off during the service. Being a natural insomniac, I had no worry about that. The singers were all given small flashlights to use when the lights were shut off during "Silent Night." We were warned not to play with them, or shine them on the ceiling, and most obeyed.

That first choir pay (in cash, in a small manila envelope) amounted to a whopping four dollars. Thus began a long tradition: after rehearsal, a trip to Woolworth's for four dollars' worth of candy and bubble gum cigars.

Who knew that fifty years later, I would still be singing! ❖





Parishioner Spotlight: Gordon Boyd

Jane Agee

Gordon's parents immigrated to the United States from England, and he was born in Bryn Mawr, PA. He lived in suburban Philadelphia, then Cleveland, and then moved back to Philadelphia (Trinity Church, Swarthmore) for 10 years before moving to Niskayuna (St. George's in the Stockade), Utica (Hamilton College) and, eventually Saratoga Springs and Bethesda. Gordon joked that "people who know my strong feelings and lack of impulse control know that I did not 'grow up' in any of these places and that I appreciate their patience."

Music, a strong part of his heritage, was his doorway into the faith. His paternal grandmother was a church organist in North Dakota, and his mother a professional pianist in England. He was enrolled in the men and boys choir at Trinity at age 9, when the monthly salary was about \$2, which paid for three rehearsals a week, plus Sundays. In Schenectady, he discovered that liturgical participation was an excuse for avoiding church school. So at St. George's, he sang at either the 8:55 service or the 11:00, and served as an acolyte at the other. He said he enjoyed an active role in the liturgy more than sitting in a classroom.

In between St. George's and Bethesda, he attended St. Mark's School, near Boston, and became President of the Choir in his 6th Form year. He was immersed in music there: "In those days, we had compulsory chapel every day before dinner plus Sunday, so there were always hymns and anthems to sing."

By far, he's found his richest musical experience has been his more than 40 years at Bethesda, where Father Tom Parke and now Dean Vang have "upheld the great tradition of music in support of the spiritual life of the parish." Gordon and his wife, Sharon, "both love the experience, treasure the routine, and are thankful for the leadership of Farrell Goehring and Kathleen Slezak and the quality that they expect and achieve." He also reminisces: "I especially

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Vestry Minutes (abridged)

"The Vestry of an Episcopal Church has three primary responsibilities... to take care of the parish finances and parish buildings [and] to choose individuals to fill various positions of parish leadership"

-Christopher L. Webber

The Vestry Handbook: Revised Edition

OCTOBER

Building Committee recommended that the Vestry approve the use of funds from the August party to pay for a hearing loop in the church as well as protective glazing on the north windows. The vestry approved this unanimously.

It's time to shift the focus of the Capital Campaign towards the community, which requires somewhat more solid commitments from possible renters.

The nominating committee is still seeking a parishioner to fill the vacant spot on the vestry. Another spot and the position of treasurer will open up in January and these will also need to be filled.

We'll have to start preparing to vacate the current parish house at the end of our lease in the Spring of 2017. Will need volunteers to inventory the contents of the parish hall and help move things out.

The Parish History committee has started talking to a designer about the book.

NOVEMBER

Anne Van Acker distributed a preliminary budget for 2017 which shows us significantly in the red. The finance committee will meet to discuss how to reduce expenses and raise income while still fulfilling our obligations.

The Diocese reserves 16.5% of their budget and allows parishes to vote on where these funds are directed. The vestry unanimously voted to send these funds to the National Church.

Boyd circulated a proposal from Lamb Studios regarding the protective glazing on the north windows.

We will need to file for an extension of our building plan approval with the city.

Limoli sent out 450 fliers with pledge cards and has thus far received only 28 back. Will send a follow-up letter in mid-December.

Coffee hour has been moved back to the Empire Room thanks to Manny's petition. She needs more volunteers to serve coffee hour.

Griffin volunteered to address certain issues raised by the recent fire inspection.

If you would like to read the complete un-abridged vestry minutes for any month, please ask Genna Henderson

"While we deliberate, He reigns; when we decide wisely, He reigns; when we decide foolishly, He reigns; when we serve him in humble loyalty, He reigns; when we serve him self-assertively, He reigns; when we rebel and seek to withhold our service, He reigns – the Alpha and the Omega, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

- William Temple, 98th Archbishop of Canterbury

miss singing next to Father Parke, who was always a welcome adjunct to our bass section.”

In 2003, he began serving as a religious volunteer at Mt. McGregor Correctional Facility, and over his seven years visiting there “came to appreciate that Jesus’ command to visit the prisoners is one that benefits all concerned.” He found his experience moving, and continues even today “to draw on the insights and wisdom of the inmates I got to know.”

Gordon also performs a number of important services for Bethesda. The range of his service is both admirable and inspiring. He serves on the Vestry and the Building Committee. He has been (and is) a major player in Bethesda’s Capital Campaign in support of the parish’s transition to a new parish house, and has worked tirelessly on many fronts to accomplish our vision for the future. He and other dedicated Bethesdians began this quest nearly four years ago with almost 20 discernment meetings, and he has led efforts to forge ahead through a detailed parish survey, capital campaign, sales of legacy properties, and design of a new facility. His work is helping to bring us to the threshold of the future for a vibrant Bethesda. He added, “I hope the new parish house will be part of a transformation of our mission in the Saratoga community.”

His noted that his involvement in the complicated and multi-layered processes in moving toward the future “has deepened and broadened my relationships with more members of the parish than ever before.” He noted, too, that his efforts also “balance out the stress, frustration and self-doubt, and for all that I thank God every day.” ❖

SOUNDING OFF!!

Virginia McMorris

In Saratoga Springs we have many church denominations. Up the street we have the Baptists at the Baptist church, around the corner on Broadway there are the Catholics at the Catholic church, on Lake Avenue the Lutherans worship at the Lutheran church and here at the Episcopal church we have the Episcopalians. Right?

Oh, please no. Don't say that!

We are Episcopalians. Often the media refers to us as “Episcopals” and sometimes I even hear one of our own flock say it. When that happens, I feel a shiver. The English majors and theologians can explain this word usage if you ask but in the meantime, take pity on me. The weather is getting colder and I do not need any more shivers going up and down my spine. So let us all get it right. You are an Episcopalian and we here at Bethesda are a whole bunch of Episcopalians and maybe one or two of us are a little quirky!

Glimpses on our Journey

Carolyn Hatch

I’m guessing that we’ve all had special moments in our journey of faith, so I’ll start the ball rolling and tell you one of mine. Almost forty years ago a friend called me on the phone and said, “I’m having a bible study at my house, wanna come?”

“Bible study?” I responded with disinterest. (The only people I knew who read the Bible were old ladies who wore glasses and black shoes, and I certainly didn’t want to look like THAT.)

“I thought you’d like to come since you’re always talking about God.”

“I am?” Well how long would these classes last?”

“One study is 5 weeks and the other about Mark is 14 weeks.”

“Choose the 5 week study and I’ll stick it out. If you choose the 14 week study and I don’t like it, I’ll quit.”

She chose the 5 week study and at 10 AM on January 25, 1977, a brilliant, sunny, wintry day with fresh fallen snow, we sat at the picnic table in her kitchen (there were 9 children) – just the two of us and our guide. The moment the guide began speaking, I thought “This is what I’ve been looking for,” and I have been at it ever since, albeit now an old lady wearing glasses and black shoes.

Send your memory of faith to Genna by January 15, 2017.

Adopt a Grandparent

Anne Van Acker

We always remember the children when it comes to Christmas gifts, but often we forget about the elderly in our community. Paying it forward and blessing our elders is a wonderful way to give this season. Given Bethesda’s close ties with Home of the Good Shepherd, I am organizing an Adopt-a-Grandparent program. I will be assembling gifts of hand lotions and body wash which I will deliver to all four HGS locations (or you can volunteer to help wrap and deliver! This would be a great way to see inside our beautiful facilities and bring joy to the residents!) For \$20.00 you can adopt a grandparent, but you’re not limited to just one! We currently have close to 225 residents among all four HGS locations. I would like to deliver gifts to ALL of our residents, so please consider adopting more than one! If you would like to participate, please respond by December 5th; checks can be made out to me and mailed to 8 Bingham St., Saratoga Springs. All donations are greatly appreciated! Thank you in advance for remembering our elderly who are often alone and forgotten during the holiday season!

From the Editor

Geneva Henderson

The season of Advent is upon us and, before the next newsletter is out, the Christmas season will have come and gone. It is, however, I am told, inappropriate to write about Christmas during Advent.

So I won't tell you about Midnight Mass. I won't tell you about how, for years, I found ways to weasel out of singing at it when I was in the treble choir but, eventually, it became one of my favorite masses. I won't tell you about the church in darkness, lit only by candles, while we sing Silent Night. I won't tell you about processing down the aisle with the choir and grinning at old friends in the congregation that I haven't seen in years. I won't tell you about how much I don't like Rutter's carols, but can still find a very solid spot in my heart for What Sweeter Music. I also won't tell you about whooping up from the basement after mass to greet the old friends I could only grin at before, about pulling small gifts out of my pockets for people I only thought might be there.

I won't tell you any of those things, because it's inappropriate to write about Christmas during Advent. It would, at this point, be inappropriate to tell you that pre-service music will probably start at 10 PM on December 24th and that, while it may SEEM late, and you may THINK you'd be happier at home in your jammies, it's actually really nice to go to church, to see all of those people you used to know.

Because, although I'm not allowed to tell you this right now, the best services are the late ones, the ones that mark the transition between one thing and another. I've already written about the awesomeness (in the original sense and the new one) of Holy Saturday, when Lent perceptibly changes into Easter; if only I could tell you about the moment when Advent turns into Christmas, when we go from anticipation to joy, when we keep half an eye on our watches to see when midnight hits.

But I can't tell you any of that, because it's still Advent and, in Advent, we do not speak of such things.

But what if I just say, without saying specifically what it is that I mean,, "Come and see." ❖

Your pledges and regular donations pay our hardworking staff and keep the heat and lights on! Filling out and returning your pledge card will allow the vestry to put together an accurate budget for 2017, and fulfilling your pledges (or going beyond if you can manage) keeps our great ship afloat!

Plan ahead! The Annual Parish Meeting will be
1/31/17

A Season of Preparation

Fr. Paul Evans

The Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel readings for the opening of the Christian Year stress the role of the prophets and John the Baptist, images and lessons to broaden our horizons as "children of the day". Luke provides the setting to await the angelic announcement of Christ's birth and the dawn of a new heaven and a new earth.

Dominant themes of the Season are offered in the hymns we sing (Hymnal, numbers 1-11):

Immediacy:

"Hark a thrilling voice is sounding;
'Christ is nigh' it seems to say;
Cast away the works of darkness,
O ye children of the day."

Darkness and Light:

"The King shall come when morning dawns
And earth's dark night is past;
O haste the rising of that morn,
The day that aye shall last."

Preparation:

"Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
Make straight the way of God within,
And let each heart prepare a home
Where such a mighty guest may come."

Hope:

"O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace."

Anticipation:

"Our hope and expectation,
O Jesus, now appear;
Arise, thou Sun so longed for,
O'er this benighted sphere!
With hearts and hands uplifted,
We plead, O Lord, to see
The day of earth's redemption,
And ever be with thee!"

Advent is a time when we are reminded that God challenges pilgrims to be faithful, steadfast, patient, hope-filled; expectant of the Glory which shall be revealed.

There's a blank page somewhere in this newsletter. Blank pages irritate our editor. Why don't you draw something on it? Maybe draw your favorite thing about Advent? Then it won't be blank anymore. How symbolic!