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THE BEACON

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
July/August, 2009

Father Bill's Message

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Summer Schedule

**Liturgy with Eucharist
at 9:00am**

I'm writing this on June 16th; why is that significant? I was ordained a Deacon on this date thirty-six years ago. At that time, women were not allowed to be ordained to any office, and the understanding that they could and should be was just being seriously discussed. In fact, many parishes weren't even using girls as acolytes. The ordination of homosexual persons wasn't even on the horizon. Parishes were dealing with issues such as First Communion, i.e., could children receive the Eucharist before Confirmation? The denomination had begun to use the so called "green book", but the idea of a prayer book to replace the 1928 Book of Common Prayer was still years away. We were singing hymns from the 1940 Hymnal. Hymnal '82 was decades away, as were *Lift Every Voice and Sing* and *Wonder, Love and Praise*. I mention these last two items to show that the Church was characterized by a sense of sameness, as many of today's writers have pointed out. If you went on vacation to Alaska from your home here in Massachusetts and went to church there, you could be assured of getting the same service there as here. There was a certain comfort in that.

The Church in 2009 is not the above church, and it hasn't been for quite awhile. Women serve in all offices; children regularly receive Communion years before Confirmation; we have three (actually four) hymnbooks; and a new Book of Common Prayer offers six different Prayers of the People and four different Eucharistic prayers. If we add "Enriching Our Worship" to the mix, we have a total of seven different Eucharistic prayers. Because of our relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we can actually add the Lutheran Book of Worship to our many choices. My point is that we're no longer a church of sameness. Many alternatives are now offered. The Episcopal

Church of my ordination has long ago ceased to exist, and so far, I've been talking primarily about aspects of worship. There are, however, many more changes in many different areas. You can guess that as parishes face different issues, many different solutions are offered...as varied as the people in each individual parish.

For the first ten years of my ministry, many new people (families) walked through the "red doors" of my various congregations. At one point in the early 1980s, my then parish congregation picked up a new family per week for over six months. I can guarantee you, however, that that is not happening there today, just as it's not happening at St. Stephen's, or in most other parishes. In 2009, people are no longer coming to us; the Church has had to redesign itself to go to them. It has required denominations (and their parishes) to re-think "how to do church". This, as you would expect, has not been easy for either the clergy or the laity. Can we "vision" church outside of the box, so to speak? Can we then turn that vision into reality? Do we have either the inclination or the energy to do so? But this is today's reality. I'm not saying this is good or bad, right or wrong; I'm simply saying that it is as it is. Now we have to deal with it in order to survive. I've asked the members of the Vestry to read a book entitled, *Leading Change in the Congregation*, by Gil Rendle. We have decided to have a special meeting on August 17th to not only talk about the ideas found in this book, but also to generate some of our own "out of the box" thinking. All vestry meetings are open to the parish; I invite you to join us.

Fr. Bill

Save the Date!!!
Fall Marketplace
Saturday, November 14
Watch for details...

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from the editor's desk

Happy summer! Have you warmed up yet? Reminds me of what they say about Maine; it has two seasons – winter and the 4th of July. Well not quite that bad but you have to wonder. As I write this, Sharyn and I are planning for a few days in Booth Bay Harbor, ME to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary. Hope the weather is better than what we've been getting. Anyway, to the subject at hand.

You know that I love to read. Have ever since I was a youngster doing "See Spot run." Mom used to have to make me go out to play. Said I couldn't read until I had been outdoors for a while. Lately I've been spending time reading old books; not ancient but well-used books that a friend brings me from leftovers at the Grafton Library. I've read a few old James Bond books which I find can be read in about two days; that is, if I stop somewhere in the middle so I leave something for the next day. I've also read some John McDonald mysteries in the Travis McGee series.

I find these book interesting in the perspective they reveal about the time they were written. McDonald was obviously quite conservative. He sets his books in Florida and his main character spends a good deal of time bemoaning the decline of living in the state. Too many tourists, too much development, government corruption, the list goes on. In some ways things haven't changed. These books I can read quickly and just as quickly forget – sort of like chewing gum for the mind. Refreshing while you're chewing but easily discarded and forgotten.

However, I have recently read a book that was very different; it's *The Shack* written by W.P. Young. My sister-in-law loaned it to me one weekend when we were camping. She said, "I

think you'll like this." She was right. It grabbed me from the beginning, but I found I had to read it in small doses. Not that it was a difficult read but because the book moved me and gave me so much to think about.

It's the story of a man who suffers a "great sadness" as it's called in the book, but later encounters God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The book is a fantasy, as you might imagine, but it contains some very forceful insights into Christianity. Some critics have likened it to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory written in 1678 that tells the story of a pilgrim (Christian) who realizes he is a sinner and goes on a journey to redeem his soul. On his sojourn he encountered people personifying the Seven Deadly Sins who tried to prevent him from making the trip.

The Shack also is the story of one man's journey, but I found that as I read it, I found a different way, a deeper way to look at my own faith. The book depicts the Trinity in a way that made sense to me. Through Young's writings, I could more clearly see how the Trinity is three and yet one, something that I have accepted for years without fully understanding the concept. I've ordered my own copy of the book because I want to re-read it when I can take the time to read some passages and really think about them.

It's a wonderful book, very moving in places; heart-warming in others. I was surprised at the ending, but soon realized that it was really the only way the author could make the story work.

You'll have to accept the premise on which it's based, but I found it an intriguing premise. Get hold of a copy and read; I think you'll be glad you did.

Peace,

frp

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The next Vestry Meeting will be held on Monday, July 20, at 7:00pm. All vestry meetings are open to the entire parish. Parishioners wishing to include items on the agenda are asked to contact one of the wardens or the rector no later than two (2) weeks before the meeting. Vestry meeting agendas and minutes will be regularly posted on the bulletin board between Fay Hall and the narthex.

Come and visit the labyrinth that was done by *Logan Scharen* for his Eagle Scout project last year. It's behind the church and it is not only beautiful, it's for your spiritual health. Feel free to use it anytime, and invite your friends.

- ✦ Many of you are (or soon will be) taking weekend mini-vacations as well as long term ones, and thus will not be here every Sunday. The church co-treasurers ask you to **please keep your pledges as current as possible** because the debts of the parish continue throughout the summer months. Thank you.
- ✦ Altar Guild is in need of a few good people!!! Altar Guild finds itself short some worker bees due to some of our more experienced members moving on to other things. This leaves some holes in each team...holes that need to be filled. If anyone is interested in this valuable ministry please contact me, either at church or by phone (508-898-2513). This ministry involves one weekend a month...Saturday morning for an hour or so to do cleaning and prepare for the Sunday services, then on Sunday to clean up from the services. There are plenty of experienced workers who will be

happy to help you learn the ropes. Please give this some consideration so that we may start the fall season with full teams. Thanks so much. *Diane Barrette*, Altar Guild Directress

- ✦ **Why the glass jar?** I was asked recently about the glass jar on the serving table in Fay Hall. Not all of us have been here to know the reason why its there. Just before his death, Men's Group Member *Steve Hull* was working with *Bob Lewis* on a worthwhile project for the group. They had researched **Food For The Poor**, a highly rated charity working to help the poor of Central and Latin America and the Caribbean. *Steve* and *Bob* suggested that everyone in the parish take a collection canister home and contribute their pocket change every evening at dinner in thanks for our God-given bounty. Following *Steve's* death in 2002, the Men's Group dedicated the project in his memory. Will you join the effort and take a container home? If you can't find a container in Fay Hall, please use any jar or can. And so far the parish effort has been able to provide 177, 840 meal equivalents to families in the area served. It only takes a nickel a day to save a child for one more day. We'll tell you how in another bulletin. Please help us. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Men's Group
(*Tim Moss* 508-366-7202)

- ✦ Let's fix *Don Shapleigh's* "Little Red Wagon" by donating canned goods and non-perishables for the Westborough Food Pantry. There has been a significant increase in the number of people who need help putting food on the table. You can be sure your donation will be appreciated and put to good use. For more information please see *Don Shapleigh*.

- ✦ Many thanks to those parishioners who helped with the folks from INH, either by providing meals or staying overnight at the church. Well done!
- ✦ And many thanks to *Don Zereski*, *Don Shapleigh*, and *Yvette Kite* for the yeoman work they did in dealing with the water damage at the church and the rectory. Bravo!!

Prayerful Notes

Summertime in New England, often finds us entertaining house guests. Long time friends of mine, former residents of Massachusetts, who now reside in Virginia, recently stopped by for a visit. They were in the area, visiting their grown children and spent a couple of days with me. While we stay in touch via E-mail, we had not actually seen each other in several years. We had a great time reminiscing and catching up on each others families and mutual friends. We marveled over how our kids had grown and the many changes in our lives.

In the morning, we gathered around my dining room table for a leisurely breakfast, a rarity for me, as I usually take my meals at my kitchen counter, before dashing off somewhere.

It was a picture perfect morning and my bay window afforded us an expansive view of my spacious back yard. My red roses were at their peak and looked so pretty draped across my white garden shed. As we were all admiring them, my friends spotted a family of brown ducks: a mom and 6 tiny ducklings.

Walking close to my stockade fence at the back of the yard, they went back and forth from one end to the next, then did the same along the side fence. We surmised they must have come from the nearby lake and lost their way. What a heart warming scene it was to watch these tiny little ones, following ever so close to their Mom and finally finding their way out.

Over to the right of the yard, the newest resident of my bird house, a tiny house wren

was chirping merrily from his entrance perch. Was he calling to his mate or perhaps just welcoming the day?

The rain from the night before had filled the bird bath in the middle of the yard. Feathered friends soon gathered there and took such delight in splashing in the water. They kept going round and round, flapping their wings like little motorized propellers. They were so comical, we couldn't help but laugh.

Amidst all the other activity, I spotted the little brown bunny, who lives in back of my garden shed. He was munching on clover, peacefully coexisting with all the other visitors to my yard that morning.

We sat around the table for a couple of hours, savoring good food, good friends and God's creation on display before us. What a beautiful way to start the day. Life is short. I think I will take my meals in the dining room more often.

Welcome summer! God's gift to New England.

Blessings Always,

Phyl Endicott

New Thing

by *Tim Moss*

Did you read Bishop Scruton's Pastoral Mission Letter in the June issue of the Pastoral Staff ? If not, please do- it deals with the "Great Disruption" as the Bishop puts it and the effects of the global economic collapse that has impacted us all personally, as congregations and as a Diocese. As the Bishop reminds us, we live in a "media-fueled environment of contagious anxiety and fear," and he goes on to ask what is God's invitation to us in this situation and what are the temptations that would distract us from fulfilling our God-given mission at this time? Bishop Gordon asks us to recognize that God is urging us to change our familiar patterns so

that Christ can live out his mission more effectively through us. God's spirit is eager to help us become more creative and innovative for the sake of God's mission. The Bishop states that we will be tempted to withdraw from the needs of our neighbors both locally and globally to take care of ourselves first but he goes on to point out that God invites us to tell our neighbors stories of how God and our relationships in Christian community are sustaining us, providing fresh perspectives and inspiring new ways of living during this challenging time.

It was a big shock to me to learn recently that the people of St. John's, Worcester, made the hard decision to close and disperse. Some of us remember fondly a Faith Alive! Weekend held there some years ago and the wonderful friends we made. I saw St. John's then as a congregation very much akin to ours in size, fabric and structure so I feel it would be appropriate to take our sister parish's decision as a prompt from God for us to take a good look at our own current situation and see if God is inviting us to examine new ways of living. In that context, I remember Peter Kite's warning at our last Annual meeting that our deficit financing can only be sustained for a limited period of time.

We are halfway through this calendar year already. We are heading in to the summer season. Bishop Gordon suggests at the end of his letter the need to deepen our relationship with God through the practice of Holy Habits like prayer and reflection on Scripture and reminds us that we cannot find our way through this wilderness with our own wisdom and strength alone. He says we need God more than ever. and as disciples of Jesus we will need to make time to gather in small groups to deepen our relationship with God, with each other and with the mission to which Christ calls us.

As EMC, I'm not sure if a dialog such as this falls strictly within my purview or not but it's time folks! We need to gather ñ we need to

pray ñ we need to study ñ we need God's presence and direction and we need to be together. The Body of Christ!

Connections III

by *Marsha Platt*

Building a clearer world full of love takes work. As Rev. Martin said recently in a sermon, "prayer takes practice". When we were young, operating within love was easy. Over time, we have learned to hide our feelings and present the "expected norm". We can relearn opening our hearts and practice loving others.

If we are willing to accept that all of us are connected within the matrix, (The Divine Matrix, by Braden) and that every action we take affects others, we can see why operating from the heart and from a feeling of love is essential.

This heart is not the muscle that pumps nutrients through our bodies, but rather something deeper, more like the soul. This heart should be in control of us. When our left-brain controls our bodies, all kinds of things can go wrong. Ego gets in the way. All kinds of creativity can come from the mind and if the heart is in control, that creativity is designed for good outcomes. Creativity dominated by ego can result in negative outcomes. (See Love Without End, by Glenda Green)

Prayer is much like meditation. Practicing either can keep you in touch with the matrix. During meditation, students are asked to let the mind go blank. When interrupting thoughts enter your head, one is told to let it pass and gently go back to an empty slate. Some may find it easier to keep your mind open by using a mantra. Even a simple mantra such as one, two, one, two... will do. You are trying to keep your left-brain, the part that thinks, holds memory and future vision, busy, so that the

"present brain" – the right side, can be blank to communicate with the matrix.

If one gains a meditative state, one can concentrate on different things. Interesting experiments with persons who will meditate on peace or a world without violence have shown that violence declines. There is a theory that the square root of one percent of any population can change the paradigm. Violent crime in Washington, D.C. was diminished after four thousand people meditated on peace. Similar results happened in Lebanon during the Israeli war. There was a reduction in the number of bombs dropped. (See Dedroidify.blogspot.com)

So if one can think peace, from the heart and with compassion we can shift thought to causes a more peaceful outcome. By connecting with others through prayer or meditation, we can affect a change. We can see attitudes shift towards peace.

If every day, in our prayers, we leave time for a conscious stream of thought centering on non-violence, we will affect a change. With practice, we can communicate via the divine matrix, with others who are also focusing on non-violence. As we build a critical mass, we will see change. As we communicate with like-minded souls, we will recognize what we have in common; a feeling of peace will grow within all of us. We will grow more tolerant and more relaxed. We will feel compassion, not disappointment, frustration or anger. If we accept the idea of a hologram, a change in one level will spread throughout the whole.

Bibliography:

The Divine Matrix, by Gregg Braden, Hay House, NY 2007
 Love Without End, by Glenda Green, Spirits Publishing, Sedona, AZ 2006