



THE BEACON

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
January, 2010

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Nancy Harris
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Every Sunday

8:00a Holy Eucharist
9:15a Church School
9:30a Service w/ Eucharist
and music

Father Bill's Message

A Welcome to Our New Members

Thank you for choosing St. Stephen's Church as your parish home. Over the past decade, we have undergone a process of self examination whereby we have bared our weaknesses and failings, but also have discovered something very important. We discovered that we have the power collectively to work and dream and plan and make decisions together. We've looked to each other and found a whole store of wit, wisdom, compassion, joy, perception, strength, ministry, knowledge, love and perseverance. This is what this parish is all about. We discovered that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were poured out upon us all as God's People. Through the power of the Spirit, we have realized that Jesus has been at our sides every step of the way. We have known his presence, felt his power, and received his gifts. And your coming into our presence is a particularly special time for us as a Christian community; it reminds us to give thanks for what God has done, celebrate what God is now doing, and lay hold of the promise of what God will do.

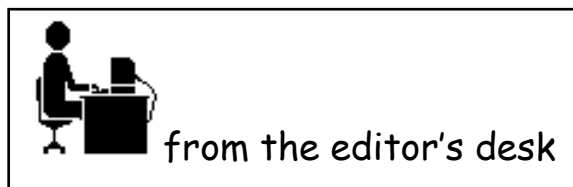
I believe that the people you will meet here in this parish are hard working, sensitive, caring, and intelligent. They are people of proven ability and strong character who have both the vision and the leadership to inspire confidence, stir excitement, and build community. And yet, I must remind you that we have no secret knowledge that will bring life and growth. We are not endowed with any mystical

powers. We are all cut out of the same wondrous human fabric that you are, with all of the hopes and fears, gifts and limitations we humans all share. What we do bring to you, first and foremost, are our own very human lives which we have offered to God, and to you as God's people. They are lives that have known joy and despair, faith and doubt, hurt and healing, loneliness and companionship, failure and forgiveness. But most of all, they are lives that have experienced the incredible mystery of God's acceptance and love. And because we have known this acceptance and love in our own lives, we have been set free to share them with you. Hopefully, your lives will be nurtured as a result.

The parishioners of St. Stephen's have many gifts, but our greatest two are love and compassion. They are the most important, the most critical characteristics of a Christian community. I believe that you have chosen this loving, caring, compassionate community to be your parish because you are loving, caring, and compassionate people. Your presence among us simply affirms the living mystery of God's grace and love which is here at work.

As new members of this community, you will look to us over the years for concern, patience, support and forgiveness. I'm sure you're excited to find a new parish family, but please remember that once that excitement begins to cool and life settles down, what will count in the long run is the quality of the love that nurtures the roots of family and parish life, so that what God has planted here will continue to grow and blossom for you and for us all. Welcome to the family!

Faithfully,
Fr. Bill



I recently attended the calling hours for a woman who was a colleague of mine for many years. Jan was a math teacher and the girls' tennis coach and she excelled at both. Over the years we had many conversations, and with Jan the talk was always about kids. She finally succumbed to a form of gastric cancer, but she always managed to attend our retirees' luncheons. I last saw her in October; she looked frail, but she was there speaking to the people who had been her co-workers for years.

I met some of Jan's family at the calling hours and saw many former colleagues as well. Several people commented that when we were younger, we would meet at weddings; nowadays we meet at funerals, and examining, I'm sure, what life holds for us.

I can imagine how difficult it must be to lose a loved one so close to the holidays. Each year they will bring reminders of the one no longer with them.

Then I think of how Advent and Christmas remind us that life goes on and the renewed celebration of the birth of Christ gives all Christians the hope of their own rebirth. Advent is a time of reflection and a promise of serenity, followed by the joy of the celebration of a birth of our Savior. And every year we get to rejoice in the miracle once again.

But we get so caught up in the frenetic activities of the season that we push the meaning of the holiday into the background. Got to get that last gift! Got to make that last dessert! Don't forget the paper boy or the

mailman! I'm sure I must have forgotten something! You know the drill. But somehow we make it to Christmas.

The holidays will be over when you receive this issue. My hope is that each of you managed to reflect on the meaning of Christmas and achieved some peace of mind from it.

I have been partaking in an Advent study called "Following the Star," which provides an opportunity to read a short Bible passage, read a meditation based on the Scripture, and ending with a prayer. The following prayer was at the end of a session a short time ago. I'd like to share it with you.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:18-21

Peace,

frp



Bulletin Board

The next Vestry Meeting will be held on Monday, January 18th, 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.

★ **Common Cathedral** will take place on February 26-27th.

It's an opportunity to learn more about homelessness and from those that are currently homeless or have been homeless in the past. It's also an opportunity to provide ministry to the poor and homeless by offering hospitality, food, and clothing.

\$60 deposits will be due no later than January 17th. We are open for 12 youth to attend.

Please let me know if you plan on attending.

Those youth that have attended 75% of meetings/events and attend Common Cathedral will be reimbursed 50% of the deposit. Please contact me with any further questions by calling 508-308-1399 or by email melaniedaniels@gmail.com.

★ **Nancy Harris will be taking vacation** from Saturday, December 26th, through Sunday, January 3rd. Would someone or someones please **volunteer to keep the church office open in the mornings?** The hours would be 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM and more if you wish. It would be mainly answering the phone and accepting the mail. If you are willing to do this, please contact Nancy at 508-366-4134 or ststephch@aol.com.

★ *Fr. Bill and Gail* will be taking their final year's **vacation** from **Wednesday, December 30th**, through Tuesday, January 5th or Wednesday, January 6th (depending upon the snow situation), as they celebrate Christmas in the *Poconos* with their extended family. *The Rev. Dr. Bob Gallagher* will be our guest officiant on Sunday, January 3rd.

★ Due to the holidays, the **Women of Faith** group will next meet as follows:

Tuesday, January 19th at 7:15 PM

at *Jean McPherson's* home

Wednesday, January 20th 9:00 AM

at *Phyl Endicott's* home

Prayerful Notes

As I write this column, Christmas has not yet arrived. I am still busily preparing for the big day, yet in the midst of my busyness, for one of my relatives, life has come to a quiet standstill. My brother-in-law Bob, my sister's husband, a cancer patient, is at home on Hospice. He was sent home on Nov. 10th. The doctors said he probably would not last more than a week. It has now been more than a month and he is still with us. It occurred to me that death is similar to birth in that we are not in control, God is. While an expectant mother receives a "due date" and doctors may predict the end of one's life, only God really knows. My own life experience has shown me that God has very definite reasons for his timing. We see but a small part of the big picture, God sees it all and acts accordingly.

A verse from today's Gospel reading comes to mind. Matt: 24: 36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father." While this verse is in reference to the 2nd coming of Christ, today it speaks to me of the day our earthly existence ends and we go to be with the Lord.

The Gospel message is all about preparation, and I see this clearly in Bob's unexpected extension of his life. While we all know he is terminal, we give thanks that he is peaceful and not in pain. Three of their 5 grown children have been taking turns staying a week at a time with him. While he is very weak and sleeps a lot, during his waking hours, a family member is always with him. His mind is still sharp and his sense of humor intact. They share family memories together, look at family photos and watch TV with him.

Four of their 5 children live out of state, so having this extended quality time together is a precious gift to him as well as being a source of strength and support for my sister. Like all siblings, their lives are all very different and some are closer in relationship than others. Both birth and death have a way of overriding

differences and drawing families together in love.

My sister is 10 years my senior and we don't really have a lot in common, but God has taken the family bond of love that we share and strengthened it these past weeks. I have been calling her frequently and we have shared special family memories and even laughter. While I don't live close enough to visit very often, I know my calls and concern are a comfort to her and God has brought us closer through this time.

Bob has already told his family that when the end comes, he does not want a wake or any kind of service and they have agreed to honor his request. As I witness his family ministering to him with such love and care, I view it as a "living wake." They are comforting each other in love. There is a holy presence in that room. It is palatable and real.

While we cannot know when the end will come for us or our loved ones, we can cherish the time that we have together. May the New Year bring love, peace and reconciliation within all our families.

Blessings Always,

Phyl Endicott

Spiritual Nuggets

1. God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts.
2. Dear God: I have a problem. It's me.
3. Growing old is inevitable, growing up is optional.
4. There is no key to happiness. The door is always open.
5. Silence is often misinterpreted, but never misquoted.
6. Do the math. Count your blessings.
7. Faith is the ability to not panic.
8. Laugh every day, it's like inner jogging.
9. If you worry, you didn't pray. If you pray, don't worry.
10. As a child of God, prayer is kind of like calling home every day.