



The Cloister

*Parish Newsletter of
Saint Mary's Church, Castleton
December 2009*



From Fr. John:

My dear sisters and brothers in the Lord

I write this at the time of Thanksgiving, and looking forward through the penitential and awesome period of Advent, on towards the annual celebration of the Incarnation of God, and the birth of Jesus. In the life of Jesus, we experience the infusion of the grace of God into our complex earthly life, the meeting of heaven and earth.

This season emphasizes the importance of being loving towards one another. We face challenges as a congregation. We face challenges in terms of reasonable levels of health care, in terms of global issues of justice, of those who give their own lives for the sake of peace, and of the global issue of climate.

We recognize that there is hunger, betrayal, and disease. People suffer trauma in one way or another kind, younger, or older. It has occurred before, does now, and probably, will do into the future as well.

In anticipating the yearly remembrance of the birth of Christ, we are reminded of the arrival of the grace of God into our complex human history. Therefore the definition of our life, locally or in the world at large, is not confined to suffering alone. The nature of our life is not defined solely by the experiences of hurt or betrayal. By the grace of God, we can rise beyond the habit of "nursing, cursing, and rehearsing" the pain we have endured. We can, by faith in Jesus, embark on a trajectory by which, day by day, month by month, and year by year, continually reach forward into something better in the future. Surely we can. Yes, by the grace of God, we can reach forward into some better future.

During this Advent season, let us be a stand, in the name of Jesus, for love. Let us put aside and forgive what we can; and let us make a conscious act of patience. Let us maintain on the one hand, a reasonable self defense; and on the other hand, in faith, an attitude of love, of kindness, and of positive orientation towards the future.

With much love
Fr John Stubbs

November

Looking back, during November we had All Saints Day and the Baptism of Hope Maddix on Sun 1st. Skipping forward to Sunday 22nd, we had the Feast of Christ the King and the retirement of Richard Markham in the morning, and the "Building Bridges" Interfaith Thanksgiving service at Christ Church in the evening. We had the meetings of the discussion groups on Worship (19th) and on Outreach (24th). There was also Thanksgiving on 26th. The month ended with Advent 1 on 29th, and the Feast of St Andrew on 30th, with the World Aids Day observance in the evening of the same day. During November we grieved with Sally Rizzo on the loss of her sister, Caren Costello.

December

During the month ahead, December, we have the continuing season of Advent. On Saturday 5 December we have the Christmas Boutique, and on Sunday 6 December (Advent 2) there will be Advent Vespers at 4 p.m. on, at which we welcome the Staten Island Council of Churches. There will be the "Anti Bias Solutions Summit" on Wednesday 9th at 6 p.m. at the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center, 307 Victory Blvd. There is the beginning of the octave of the Jewish Feast of Hanukkah on 12th; Fr John Walsted's 50th ordination anniversary celebration at St Paul's on 13th, and the Islamic Feast of Al-Hijra (New Year's Day) on 18th. Then there is the "Greening of the Church" on Saturday 19th, the Service of 9 Lessons and Carols at St Paul's on Sunday 20th (Advent 4), followed by our great annual Christian Feast of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day on 24th and 25th December. On January 1st 2010 (the Feast of the Holy Name), we will welcome the new year with a Eucharist at 9:30 a.m.

In the world at large, it appears that a decision is imminent regarding Afghanistan from the US President. There is a great deal at stake in this decision. Let us pray that this war may soon end, and justice and peace be the experience of the people of Afghanistan. Another matter for prayer is the continuing negotiation on carbon emissions between the various nations, with the USA and China at the forefront.

A thread which runs through all these things is that this should be the season of goodwill towards all. Let us make a particular effort to be as positive as we can possibly be in all we do and say, inside ourselves and to other people.

Along with the churchwardens and vestry, may I as your priest also wish you a wonderful season of thanksgiving, of generosity, and of the sincere endeavor to be the best of neighbors we can be to one another.

Parish News

Stewardship

"For God loveth a cheerful giver."

St. Mary's Stewardship campaign is currently underway. Please return your pledge card as soon as possible to assist the vestry as they prepare the budget for the upcoming year.

Note: Your 2010 Offering Envelopes are labeled and in the back of the church. Please remember to pick up your envelopes and save the church the cost of mailing them to your home.

E-PLEDGING has come to Saint Mary's

Now you can make your financial contribution to our parish electronically. Make regular contribution easily without writing another check. Please pick up an E-PLDGING brochure in the back of the church or from the parish office. If you require additional information, please contact the parish Treasurer, or visit the diocesan website at www.diocesenyny.org.

Advent Evensong

On Sunday, December 6th, St. Mary's will be host to the Staten Island Council of Churches in a special **Advent Choral Evensong** at 4pm. Please be here to welcome our guests, to support our hard-working Choir, and to not miss what will be a moving and joyous Advent service. Bring a friend, bring your family, and come with a thankful heart for the chance to share our beloved St. Mary's with others.

Notice:

The annual meeting of Saint Mary's Church, Castleton will be held in the parish house on Sunday, January 24, 2010 following a united service at 9:00 a.m. The following terms will expire at the annual meeting: Mr. Herb Smith, Warden; Mr. Robert Campbell vestry person. In accordance with the church by-laws, Mr. Smith and Mr. Campbell are eligible for re-election for a term of two years and three years, respectively.

The nominating committee is currently considering names for all positions. If you would like to be considered for the position of Warden or Vestry person please speak with Mr. Herb Smith or Mr. Robert Campbell.

The Search Committee

Cathy Carlson

In consultation with Bishop Sisk, Canon Orso and the Vestry, in January we will formally post our position for Rector as "open" and may begin interviewing candidates in March. If you have any questions regarding the search process please speak with any member of the Search Committee. Committee members are: Cathy Carlson, chair person; Rupert Blanchette, Robert Bohnenberger, Sylvia Campbell, Patrick Cunningham, Sue Peterson, Sally Rizzo and Mary Logan Zagami.

Outreach Committee

Sally Rizzo

TROOP CAMPAIGN - The Outreach Committee would like to thank you all for your contributions to the "troop Bucket". We had a good turnout and I am sure that everybody at Moravian Church was thankful for our efforts.

Retirement

On Sunday, November 22 we celebrated Fr. Richard Markham as he retired from active ministry. For his loving and dedicated service to our parish he was presented with the Cross of St. Mary's. A lovely brunch followed.

Memorial Hand bells

On All Saints Day we blessed four new hand bells. The bells were given:

- In Thanksgiving of the 50th Anniversary of Jane and Frank Cangemi by their children
- In Memory of Donald Farrell by St. Mary's parishioners
- In Memory of Gail Hepner by the Choir, and
- In Memory of Elsie E. Smith by her family.



CHRISTMAS FLOWER envelopes can be found in the pews or the back of the church. Your generosity and loving memorials will help beautify our church throughout this Christmas season. Please print your loved ones names as you would like them to appear in the Christmas bulletin and return your envelope to the parish office, or place in the Alms Bag. You may also call the Parish Office at 718-442-1527 with your information and mail your donation to the church.

Once again we will be offering Memorial Dove Ornament

In memory of our loved ones during this Christmas season, we are again offering a memorial dove ornament. Each dove ornament, labeled with the name of our loved one, will be hung on our Saint Mary's Christmas tree. Each dove ornament is available for a donation of \$20. Please make check payable to St. Mary's Church and complete the information below.

Memorial Dove given in memory of: _____

Given by (your name): _____

*Thank you,
The Wardens and Vestry of Saint Mary's Church*

Our Parish Family

Celebrate



December Birthdays

December 3 - Ananda Dumas, Cara Barry; 4 - Kim Yarns; 5 - Elizabeth Maersh;
7 - Herbert Smith IV; 12 - Frank Cangemi; 16 - Mary Wilson;
17 - William Oyelaja; 26 - Elizabeth Davis

December Anniversaries

December 27 - Ernie and Lindy Figueroa

⇒ If you know of anyone who is feeling poorly, or is a shut-in and would like a pastoral visit, please contact one of the Wardens (phone numbers on back page) or the parish office.

THANK YOU

My family, Caren's husband, sons, and their families, would like to thank Fr. Stubbs, the prayer group, and everyone else for their prayers and wishes for Caren Costello. It meant a lot to all of us and we all know that prayers are important and very helpful. It has helped make a very difficult time easier for her and us.

Sally Rizzo and family

Thank you so much for the lovely book St. Mary's gave my mom, Gloria Carlton. She enjoyed the photos and the inspirational stories were a wonderful way for mom and me to converse. Because of mom's memory problems conversation is limited and difficult. But reading the stories to her gives us a start for a conversation. She's so afraid of losing her book she's asked me to take it home and bring it back every time I come to see her which I will gladly do. Again thank you so much. This book is such a great idea that I will suggest to my church that we do the same for our shut-ins.

Sincerely, Lee Urban

CALENDAR

Sunday Services: 8:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist
10:00 a.m. Choral Eucharist
Laying on of Hands offered on the second Sunday of the month following the 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. services.

Weekday Services: Wednesday 9:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist, followed by Bible Study.
Friday 9:30 a.m. Morning Prayer
Prayer Book Holy Days, 9:30 a.m. Morning Prayer

Christmas Boutique, Saturday, December 5 & Sunday, December 6

Sunday, December 6 **Advent II** – Choral Evensong and ecumenical prayers, 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 13 **Advent III** – Fr. Walsted's 50th ordination anniversary celebration at St Paul's Memorial Church, 4:00 p.m.

Wednesday, December 16 **Prayer Group** (third Wednesday of every month) at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, December 20 **Advent IV** – A visit from St. Nicholas and decorating the Parish House Christmas tree, 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, December 24 **Christmas Eve Midnight mass**
Choral Sing at 10:30 p.m.
Holy Eucharist begins at 11:00 p.m.

Friday, December 25 **Christmas Day**
Holy Eucharist with music at 9:30 a.m.

Saturday, December 26 St. Stephen - Morning Prayer at 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, December 27 First Sunday after Christmas, 8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 28 St. John – Morning Prayer at 9:30 a.m. (transferred)

Tuesday, December 29 Holy Innocence, Morning Prayer at 9:30 a.m. (transferred)

Friday, January 1 **Holy Name**, Holy Eucharist at 9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, January 5 Vestry Meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, January 6 **Epiphany** - Holy Eucharist at 9:30 a.m.

Merry Christmas

A Forward Step of Faith

My father taught me that if I have faith in God, God would provide all my needs. In Jeremiah 17:7-8 it says: "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream..."

In God's economy everything is gift. We have been given the gift of our lives. We have been given the gift of our health, rationality, daily food, shelter, and clothes. All of these are gifts from God. Our whole life is a gift. At any moment (say by adverse weather, disease, crime, road accident, war, or exile), these things can suddenly disappear. Then we realize that they WERE indeed a gift, and not a right. In response to a gift, there is gratitude. Gratitude comes with our faith, and is a fundamental act of worship for Christians. From birth to death, "thanks be to God" is the most theologically sound response to life we can offer. God's creative force is the foundation of our stewardship. In creating all things, God has made it possible for us to give back to God what is already God's.

Oddly enough, Jesus said to the 'righteous' and successful, "Careful. Better that you tend to your own house – where your eye wanders or your foot treads or your hand grasps, before you look down on those less fortunate." On the other hand, Jesus said to the 'unrighteous', to the sick, to the poor, and the ones working the system, "Blessed are you. You will see God." What a curious economy. Quite upside down, isn't it?

Stewardship excites me. Stewardship is a means to draw closer to God by continually yielding my will to His will. Stewardship is a means to be an active participant in His plan for the universe.

Money was a topic that Jesus brought up frequently, for example, in 16 out of 38 parables. God wants to teach us about giving. The teaching of Jesus was to teach us to put God first in life (Deut 14:23). Tithing, giving 10 percent of our income, is the (minimum) standard set by the Hebrew Scriptures for giving. It is also the minimum standard set by the Episcopal Church.

My family went to church and Sunday school every Sunday. I can still remember getting my first allowance when I was 7 years old. It was 50 cents! It was given to me in change - 1 dime, 5 nickels and 15 pennies -- a huge sum to a seven year old. I got my allowance each Saturday morning. My father would tell me to take out one nickel (1/10th) for my offering for Sunday School the next morning, and he would tell me to put one nickel in my piggy bank and the rest I could spend anyway I wanted to. If you have children, please discuss stewardship with your children and encourage them to tithe. (Along with many things,) Stewardship is taught. It is not something that comes naturally.

See what a forward step for you would be in terms of your giving. What is a small step for us, individually, yet when combined with everyone else's it is a big step that helps us going forward as a church.

A forward step is a step of faith. There will never be a right or perfect time to start, or continue to the next level. So let us think of our many blessings and to prayerfully ask God to lead us in our offerings and in every area of our lives. We are a grateful and generous people. Let us show that generosity today and in the coming weeks by making a commitment to our ministry and mission.

God's promises know no limit, no boundaries. The treasures of heaven are there for all to claim, if we would open our eyes and see, and it is for those of us who have more to then be generous enough to let those treasures go, without anxiety, without counting the cost, with no strings attached.

John Wesley said, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all ways that you can, in all the places that you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can."

Excerpts from: Grace Episcopal Church, Norwalk Connecticut. The Reverend Lois Keen; St Bartholomew's, Laytonville, MD; St Michael's, Waynesboro, GA; Carolyn Cheney, Christ Church, Washington 2006