

THE EPISTLE - July 2010

This edition of the Epistle contains important information about the role of the Treasurer and the Epistle itself. Please read it.

✘ JULY MESSAGE FROM FR. BELTON

Dear Friends:

As I sit down to write this, I await a call to schedule the home inspection associated with the impending sale of our home, and by the time you all read this Ruth Anne and I should be in Ohio looking for a new one. However, as we all know, when it comes to ordinations and the selling of a home, you can't count on anything until all of the "t's" are crossed and the "i's" are dotted. Interestingly, we are looking forward to have the new minister of a local Baptist church and his wife move in. All of this means that if things go according to plan, after a bit more than a year with the congregation of St. Stephen's, I will be heading back to where I grew up and spent most of my life. At this point my last Sunday with you will be July 25th, a day that I will be saying hello and good-bye to Bishop Waldo at the same time.

In this last letter I would simply like to say thank you for allowing me to be your priest these past months and for the opportunity of sharing in the life of this congregation. It has been a joy for me.

As I have said on a number of occasions, you and I both know that St. Stephen's faces a future that is uncertain, and you will have to make some difficult decisions. Fortunately, you have had dedicated leadership, but as you have discovered it takes more than that to move the parish into a new, more vigorous life. I pray that that will in fact happen.

Actually, I say that with some confidence. Before I moved to South Carolina the first time, I was the priest-in-charge of a parish in Ohio that was on the verge of closing its doors. One Sunday the newly ordained Bishop of Ohio came to the parish for his annual visitation, and I watched him lift that parish up and literally give it new life. He did it by supporting the parish with the promise of stable clergy (part-time) leadership and by celebrating the many gifts of the spirit that were present in that place. Over the years I have been back to that congregation and witnessed their enthusiasm and growth. In the intervening years the parish undertook work on becoming a healthy congregation and then became a pilot parish in the Diocese of Ohio in something called Natural Church Development. Their work has led the parish into growing significantly and to be able to support full-time clergy leadership. What has transpired there has required concerted effort on the part of a number of people – parishioners, the bishop, and diocesan staff. Given my experience there, I see no reason why something similar could not happen here at St. Stephen's.

As you know by now, I like to salt my sermons with what I hope are humorous stories. So, after all of this serious stuff let me leave you with some of the more humorous aspects of parish life as found in various parish newsletters bulletins. You may have seen some of these elsewhere, but maybe you will still chuckle.

Allan+

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on the Water.'
The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus.'

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale... It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say 'Hell' to someone who doesn't care much about you.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again,' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on

October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice .

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.

Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be

seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

This evening at 7 PM there will be a hymn singing in the park. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.

Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10 AM. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B. S. is done.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the Congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new campaign slogan last Sunday: 'I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours'.

✘ **BISHOP'S VISITATION: July 25th, 2010:** The Rt. Rev. Andrew Waldo will visit St. Stephen's on July 25th. Make plans to be present to meet Bishop Waldo and to witness the confirmations of Jason Branham and Jason Upchurch, and the Reaffirmation of her Baptismal Vows by Beverley Anderson. A reception, organized by Kathleen and Tom Harwood, will be held following the service and your help will be solicited.

A Treasurer in Name Only

The duties of the church treasurer are *much* reduced now that we have hired Sheheen, Hancock & Godwin. There is a possibility that the accountant's duties will be increased making the church treasurer's duties even further reduced. The financials will still require a review by the Treasurer and communication with the Mission Committee, and oversight and assurance that the financial functions are carried in accordance with Diocesan Canons and S.C. and federal laws. The accountant will *pay* all bills and expenses, *balance*/reconcile all accounts and monitor investments, *record* all pledges and send pledge totals to church members. Please call me if you have a few hours a week to give to this mission---467-8690. *Carolyn Babb*

✘ **THE EPISTLE:** To give more time to other tasks that urgently require attention, this will be the last edition of the *Epistle* for the foreseeable future. You will continue to receive the calendar and important information and updates via e-mail, letter or telephone. If you would like to see the newsletter continue, and are willing to serve as editor, contact JoAnn Palmer at spalmer@truvista.net or 337-3394.

✘ **ECW NEWS:** The St. Stephen's ECW donated \$325.00 to the Red Thread Promise, which is affiliated with St. Paul's Episcopal Church, New Orleans, for an all terrain wheelchair to be sent to Haiti for an amputee. This will be a life changing event for one person and I'm so glad we could make a difference, so continue to support the ECW!! Love, Peace and Joy be yours!
Mary Jane "MJ" Lever

✘ **JULY BIRTHDAYS:** *O God, our times are in your hand: look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives. BCP*

Mack Upchurch	7/9	Haley Autry	7/24
Bonnie Bryant	7/14	Laura Langdale	7/30
Bitsy Milling	7/17	Phyllis DeLoach	7/31
Kellie McGrew	7/24		

You can find birthdays for the rest of the year on the St. Stephen's Birthday List posted on the bulletin board.

✘ **JULY DATES:**

- 7/1 Holy Eucharist and Healing, 6:00pm, church
- 7/4 Morning Prayer I
- 7/11 Holy Eucharist – Rite II; the Rev. Philip Whitehead, Celebrant
- 7/18 Midlands Convocation Meeting, 3:00pm, St. Mary's
- 7/21 Mission Committee Meeting, 6:00pm, parish hall

**A REPORT ON LEADERSHIP DAY 2010: SHARE THE HOPE
FAMILY SIZE CHURCHES - JUNE 19, 2010**

Note: This was the last of five Leadership Days hosted by the Commission on Congregations and the Bishop. Four churches in this category did not make presentations. Two churches that should have attended previous sessions for larger churches made their presentations here.

On Saturday June 19 Family Size churches in the Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina - including St. Stephen's - spent the day with the Rt. Rev. Andrew Waldo, members of his staff, and representatives from the other churches at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Clinton. (*Family Size churches are those whose average Sunday attendance is between 1 and 50.*) Representing St. Stephen's: JoAnn Palmer – Sr. Warden and Alternate Delegate, M. J. Lever – Mission Committee Member, Carolyn Babb – Treasurer, Kathleen Harwood – Delegate, Carter Siegling – Alternate Delegate, Donna Guess – Delegate. Each church had ten minutes to talk about who they are, what makes them unique, how they're known in the wider community, and what are their greatest challenges, opportunities and joys. Following is a summary of what many of the Family Size churches have in common.

- Small congregation and a history that goes back over 100 years
- Average Sunday Attendance - 30
- Small, aged, core group managing church affairs
- Unable to attract new membership
- Little or no youth or young adults in membership
- Struggling to meet bills
- Cannot afford the cost of a new minister
- Very few full time priests (many now are women) - most rely on supply priests
- About half of the Missions present are self-supporting
- One Mission is having to return to its mother church as its congregation consists mainly of undocumented Hispanics who cannot support the Mission
- Several Churches/Missions have community oriented projects which bring in visitors several times a year
- One church claimed to be the only African American church in the Diocese; three African American Churches made presentations

After the presentations and lunch, participants were invited to join one of five break-out groups addressing concerns identified as common to all.

History vs. Future: At the beginning it was said that we need to maintain our history and use it to lead us into the future. What is our vision for tomorrow?

What we are (or want to be):

- Liturgical and slow to move and change (many do not like the changes made in 1979)
- In our old churches we can feel the presence of saints
- We have spirituality and the depth of the liturgy
- We are spiritually fed at church (most prefer Rite One)
- We operate from the Book of Common Prayer

- We are working to do what we believe God wants us to do at our church - to keep the door open
- We are working to meet some needs in our communities, to bloom where we were planted
- When a new family comes to our church, we need to see what we can do for them, not what they can do for us (we need them; they need us more)
- We cannot and do not take anyone or anything for granted, we all have some contribution (time, treasure &/or talent) to make in our church

This is what we believe we're fighting and which seems to be consuming us:

- The issues of the National Church which are mostly liberal while individual churches are much more conservative
- The youth, who want entertainment, live music, TV screens everywhere, and the like
- Mega Churches - great speakers, large congregations, lots of money
- Was I spiritually fed at this church?
- “You do not read the bible at church and you cater to gays and lesbians and we Baptist will have nothing to do with you, except for financial contributions”
- Most non-Episcopalians believe we are what the news media writes and says about the National Church, its policies and the disagreement with the Archbishop of Canterbury

Time ran out before any conclusions could be reached.

Christian Formation: Small churches should be open to all opportunities and alternatives for Christian formation.

- We can, when appropriate or necessary, let go of the conventional structured “time, place and age group” classroom setting for Christian formation.
- Formation can:
 - > be intergenerational
 - > occur in a variety of settings – special events; seasonal opportunities for study and/or projects; various activities/projects during the year; small group gatherings for a meal, coffee, visits to places of interest; etc.
 - > occur through mentoring relationships
 - > occur when people with common interests work together or share their interests/expertise with others
 - > occur through participation in worship ministries
- Consider offering a whole church Vacation Bible School

Benefits:

- Small churches can be flexible and innovative
- More freedom to choose time and place

Finances: St. Stephen’s actually has fewer problems than several of the other Family Size churches represented in this breakout session. One interesting topic was the requirement that the Treasurer and all who serve as counters or handle money must be bonded. All of the churches have problems finding Treasurers. It was agreed that if a member of the congregation does not come forward and accept the responsibilities of Treasurer then the only choice is to increase the duties of the accountant if the church contracts for accounting services. Also, some smaller jobs can be given to various persons.