

THE EPISTLE – November 2009

Dear Friends:

I don't know about you, but for me these fall days are going by very quickly. It is hard for me to realize that this church year is moving to a close in just a couple of weeks, and we will be beginning the cycle all over again with the season of Advent. The awareness of what will soon be upon us triggered some thoughts that I would like to share with you.

Some 68 years ago I was baptized in my grandmother's living room in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. My father and his family had been baptized in the Moravian tradition, and so was I. Much of my extended family lies buried in the Moravian cemetery in Old Salem known as "God's Acre". I still have cousins who faithfully attend Trinity Moravian Church and speak lovingly of the unique Moravian tradition known as the "Love Feast". In a publication entitled *Synthesis* Julianne L. Hollingsworth wrote the following piece about her experience at Moravian Love Feasts and her understanding of Advent. Hollingsworth wrote:

When my oldest daughter lived in Winston-Salem, N. C., I loved joining her the first Sunday of Advent in order to attend the Moravian Love Feast evening worship service held each year in the Wake Forest Chapel. It is a well-attended service, requiring early arrival in order to get a seat. Besides the privilege of being able to share this special time with one of my children, I love the service.

Everyone entering the Wake Forest Chapel is given a candle. Mid-service, all of the lights are turned out. Then, one of the worship leaders lights a single candle. Eventually, two more candles are lit. And so it goes on up the chapel rows until the place is full of light. Meanwhile, Moravian Love Feast buns along with a hot cider drink are passed out. I can still see the shape of the darkness in which our candles burned.

The first Sunday of Advent, considered to be New Year's Day on the Christian calendar, comes at the darkest time of the year. With the lighting of the Advent wreath, first one candle, then two, etc., we are reminded that God's Son, the Light of the world, entered our lives at a time of the year when nights were the longest, the days were the shortest, and the earth was brown and dead. Unlike the season of Lent when the days lengthen toward the promise of new life, Advent days just get darker, colder, and shorter. Advent calls us to welcome the coming of God into the deepest darkness of our lives, the bruised reality of this world, and to ask what is the need for which we need Jesus to come, as well as to ask where is his light most needed.

As we journey through Advent, may we all anticipate anew celebrating the birth of Jesus and the wonder of God's presence among human kind. In a story that will be read in every part of the world, in every dialect and in every language, in a story dramatized in pageants, cantatas and concerts for centuries, we will once again be reminded of the awesome reality of what God has done for us in so many different ways.

For many people, for many reasons, the days are dark and seemingly becoming darker. The season of Advent is a time of watching and listening. It is also a time for hope and expectation. There is the hope and expectation that the light of Christ will indeed bring an end to the darkness. It is a time that we can gather together to watch for the brightness of that light and listen for the angel's message that promises the something new has been given to us as a gift. During these days I invite you to watch, listen, hope, and expect.

Allan+

The Year of the "COW"

The children's Sunday school class is once again selling holiday items to raise money for the Episcopal Relief and Development project. The items will be displayed on a table in the hospitality room. The children will also be happy to accept donations toward the purchase of a "COW" for a family in need.



This year one "COW" will cost \$580.00. Please support them in trying to make a difference in this outreach mission.

Carolyn Babb

✘ **From the Senior Warden: Pledges for 2010.** A letter will come soon describing the Pledge process and containing a Pledge Card, and we will need to give prayerful consideration to our giving for the coming calendar year. How we respond will help the Mission Committee answer questions such as: How generous can we be in our outreach to those in need? Can we continue to meet our stewardship obligation to keep the church - our spiritual home and community, the parish hall and the vicarage operational and in good repair as we have in the past? Will we be able to provide the stipend, pension and insurance for a full-time Vicar? If we find new ways to enrich the spiritual and communal lives of our members, and identify programs and activities that could attract new people, can we support them financially? God has provided what was necessary for St. Stephen's and its people to be part of the body of Christ in this place for 170 years and, without doubt, He will continue to do so. Borrowing terminology from the business world, will we be customers, or will we be partners, letting Him work with and through us?

✘ **From the Altar Guild:** Order forms for the Memorial Poinsettias will be available in November. The poinsettias are \$12.00 each. The deadline for ordering will be **December 6th**. Order early! The Flower and Altar Guild Sign Up Chart will be posted on the bulletin board soon. Keep watching for it.

✘ **Healing Service:** "Seek and ye shall find..." There is an anticipation within me each Wednesday when there is a Healing Service at St. Stephen's. I know not what healing need you have, or for whom, but God does. The 2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month at 6pm we come together in hymns of praise and prayer. Marjorie Pratt, Bob King and I follow the **Healing Service** as lay people on the **2nd Wednesday**. (Note, Healing Services will now be held the 2nd Wednesdays of the month.) Gratefully, Fr. Thomas Allen will continue to come on the 4th Wednesday. We thank him for blessing us, and providing the opportunity for Holy Eucharist. During the same service songs of praise fill the rafters as Beverly Ffrench plays the organ and voices sing along. There is much need within our individual families, within ourselves, within our church, etc. May you know if there is a nudging for you to come. Be enfolded in God's protective embrace and await what you may "seek". His will be done, *Margaret Murtaugh*

✘ **November 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*

Jim McGrew	11/3	Justin Autry	11/15
Kathleen Harwood	11/5	Lexus Cobb	11/15

Dell Harris	11/5	Tom Harwood	11/16
Cleve Langdale	11/11	Jo Milling	11/17
Sharon Swofford	11/13	Jay Branham	11/30

And an apology to David Ford who celebrated his birthday the last week in October.

✘ **November Dates:**

- 6-7 Pig on the Ridge
- 11** Healing Service, 6:00pm – **Please note, this is a change in date**
- 21 Walk-About to meeting the Bishop candidates, St. John’s, Columbia. All invited, but you must register (www.edusc.org/nextbishop)
- 22 Annual Congregational Meeting
- TBA Mission Committee Meeting
- TBA Holy Eucharist and Healing Service, 6:00pm

✘ **December Dates:**

- 6 Ridgeway Christmas Parade – Looking for volunteers
- 9 Healing Service, 6:00pm
- 16 87th Diocesan Convention reconvenes to elect the 8th Bishop of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, Trinity Cathedral
- 19** Greening of the Church – **Please note, this is a date correction.** Looking for volunteers
- TBA Holy Eucharist and Healing Service, 6:00pm
- TBA Mission Committee Meeting
- 27 Observance of the Feast of St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

✘ **Potluck Meal:** There will be a potluck meal after the service on November 22. The Annual Congregational Meeting will follow. Sign up sheets will be posted on the bulletin board in the next week or two. Keep checking the bulletin board and please sign up to bring something.

✘ **Reminder:**

Don’t forget to visit the Bishop Search website (www.bishopsearch.edusc.org) to see videos of the Bishop candidates and read their answers to four questions and a short bio/résumé. You can also find a link there to the Diocesan Profile (left side of screen), developed from the results of the Bishop Search Survey, that will give you a clear picture of what our diocese wants in a Bishop and allow you to identify the candidate(s) you believe to be best suited to our diocese based on the Profile. Then, let your Delegates - Kathleen Harwood, JoAnn Palmer and Donna Guess – know what you think.

✘ **Notice:** If you receive the *Epistle* by mail and would rather receive it by e-mail, let us know at ststephens@truvista.net.

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PHILANTHROPY OR STEWARDSHIP

In addition to a new church year being on the horizon, so is that time when pledges are made and budgets are developed. This time of pledging usually takes place during what has generally been called the stewardship campaign. As we all should know, the term “stewardship” really encompasses more of our behavior as Christians than this yearly time of pledging. It is my hope that the following gives some clarity about it all.

Although we often talk about philanthropy and stewardship in much the same way, they really are different concepts. The Episcopal Network for Stewardship offers some clarity as we begin to focus more on what stewardship really means.

With *philanthropy* the approach relies on the presentation of a “case” which outlines the needs being experienced by persons other than the prospective donor or solicitor. The solicitor presents the needs of the “other” and the way they may be met or alleviated through the generosity of the donor. As the name implies, the appeal is to our love of humanity and desire to do good. In essence what we have is “ours”, but as good people with a social conscience, we give.

On the other hand, *stewardship* teaches that all that we have and all that we are is a gift from God. We are, therefore, stewards of God’s gifts during our lifetime. Discerning and carrying out God’s purpose is the primary purpose of our lives. The gifts we have been given, time, talent, and money, are to be used for that purpose. The primary role of the church is to guide individuals in discernment of the mission for their lives and the use of their resources in accomplishing it. In essence we all have been blessed with God’s gifts, freely given, and in thanksgiving we share with others what God has made possible. We are called to be God’s partners in the process of creation.

A Working Definition of Christian Stewardship

Christian stewardship is grateful and responsible use of God’s gifts in the light of God’s purpose revealed in Jesus Christ. Christian stewards, empowered by the Holy Spirit, commit themselves to conscious, purposeful decisions.

Stewardship is lived out in:

- living and telling the Good News;
- sharing God in seeking justice, peace, and the integrity of creation in an interdependent universe;
- wisely employing God-given human resources, abilities, and relationships;
- sharing the material resources we hold and giving them in service, justice, and compassion;
- providing for future generations, sharing in life, worship, and responsible stewardship for the Church and its mission

Stewardship is a joyful act for the sake of God’s world.

Stated in another way;

Stewardship is what I do, with all that I have, after I say, “I believe.”
Using the gifts God has given us to do the work God is calling us to do.

A theology of stewardship has little to say about an annual pledge campaign, but it has a great deal to say about our relationship with God and one another and how these relationships get lived out.

Allan+