

## ***THE EPISTLE – December 2009***

### **Senior Warden's Annual Report to the Congregation, November 22, 2009:**

The event with, perhaps, the greatest impact on St. Stephen's this year was the departure on April 13<sup>th</sup> of our Vicar, the Rev. Thomas P. Dwyer, for St. James Episcopal Church in Port St. Joe, Florida. Since then, we have been blessed by the ministry of a number of Supply Priests, and are especially grateful to Fr. Allan Belton for agreeing to serve as a long-term Supply Priest at St. Stephen's. He has been faithful in his efforts to keep us mindful of the opportunities open to us in this time of transition, and has consistently given us support and food for thought in his sermons and letters in the *Epistle*.

Membership Changes since January 1, 2009: New members – None. Transfers: six (the Trimmier family, Elise Holmberg Herron and Ann Whitmire). As of November 22, there were 66 Qualified Voting Members.

Since January 1, 2009, the following services have been offered at St. Stephen's: *Holy Eucharist*—Sundays: 43, one being our Annual Lake Service and one that included a Creation Liturgy and the Blessing of the Animals. Morning Prayer – Sundays: 7. Holy Eucharist and Healing—Wednesdays: 9. Healing Services—5. Burials—2. Additional Services—2 on Good Friday.

Average Sunday Attendance: 35

Children's Sunday school and Children's Chapel have continued, thanks to the commitment of Carolyn Babb, Donna Guess and Jo Milling. And, thanks to Bob King, the Adult class resumed in September. Adult study classes were offered while Fr. Dwyer was still at St. Stephen's, and an Advent Study, "Hallelujah ~ The Bible and Handel's Messiah", will begin December 1.

Activities: This year saw some of the time-honored traditions continued: the Community Easter Egg Hunt, the Mother's and Father's Day Brunches.

Another significant change in personnel occurred when Beverley Ffrench accepted the position as Organist. Her organ, piano and voice training and experience serve St. Stephen's well, and her love of church music enriches this important part of church life.

We've also experienced the following changes in members serving in the various ministries at St. Stephen's: Bob Arndt retired as the Organist after many faithful years of service, service that was recognized and celebrated by the installation of a plaque on the wall next to the organ. We regret the loss of Emily Matthews as a Crucifer/Server, and welcome Ashley Lever in that role. We regret the loss of Lindsay Matthews as a Lector and welcome Margaret Murtaugh's willingness to serve in this capacity. This year saw the appointment of Frances DeBerry as the

new Altar Guild Director, the addition of Mary Jane Lever and Margaret Murtaugh as new Altar Guild Members and the resignation of Betty Branham after many years of service. Finally, we are grateful for the service of Tom Willingham, who will have completed his three year term on the Mission Committee as a member and as Junior Warden.

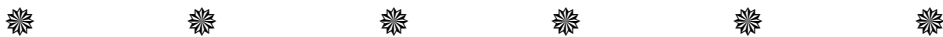
To all of these people we say, thank you. Thanks are due also to all of the people of St. Stephen's, for each one of you serve in some way to enrich our worship and time together.

Status Report on Process for Calling a New Vicar: The Mission Committee began the process before Fr. Dwyer left during a meeting with the Rev. Canon Michael Bullock, at which he described the process we would follow and urged the Mission Committee and the congregation to discover the vision and mission of St. Stephen's, a process that was described in various editions of the *Epistle*. He encouraged us to provide opportunities for the congregation to come together to share memories and experiences and, thanks to the successful pot luck meals planned by Margaret Murtaugh and Brenda McGrew, we were able to do so.

Carolyn Babb, Mary Jane Lever and Bob Moore accepted responsibility for developing the Church Profile, another very important step in the process, and it is nearing completion.

The results of the Congregational Vision Survey have finally been compiled and returned with commentary, and will be summarized in this edition of the *Epistle*. To those who completed this survey and the Bishop Search Survey, thank you. Your participation will help form the vision and mission of St. Stephen's.

The First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of a new church year and, in God's good time, will also mark a new beginning in the life of this part of the Body of Christ - St. Stephen's. *All that is needed is that we become partners, not customers.*



**Election Results:** 2010 Mission Committee: JoAnn Palmer, Senior Warden; George Langdale, Junior Warden; Michael Autry, Ben DeBerry, Mary Jane Lever, Bob Moore. Delegates: Donna Guess and Kathleen Harwood; Alternate Delegates: Carter Siegling and JoAnn Palmer. Amendments to the Bylaws: Approved.



**Voices Heard: Results from Congregational Vision Surveys:** A summary of the results. While reading, remember that the majority of these surveys were initially sent out over a year ago. They were finally submitted for compilation and evaluation, following a grace period for members to redo their surveys or submit their first survey, at midyear. Thanks to Brooks Knobel, Co-Chair, Commission on Congregations, for his work, comments and suggestions for the future.

**What factors drew you to St. Stephen's?** The main factors that drew people to St. Stephen's were the location, the friendliness of the people, referrals from other parishioners/people, and the worship experience of your services. These are the same factors that each church in the Diocese experiences for the most part. The key is to continue to be intentional in how St. Stephen's is promoted in the community and growing areas around Ridgeway.

**What do you look for in a church?** Ten aspects of the overall St. Stephen's experience were taken into account and prioritized from 1 to 10, 1 representing the most important to the parishioners of St. Stephen's, 10 representing the least important in relation to the other aspects. *The lower the cumulative score, the more important* that aspect of St. Stephen's was to those who responded. Based on the top 4 factors (which are grouped relatively close together in perceived importance), you have some control over the worship experience, who is chosen as a spiritual leader, and how friendly we are to newcomers and each other. All of these are important factors, but hopefully knowing this will help prioritize your intentionality in going forward with new programs and planning.

Worship Experience (53); Denomination (55); Rector/Vicar (59); Friendliness (64); Congregation Makeup (89); Nurturing Family Environment (93); History (94); Men/Women/Small Group (97); Community Outreach (104); Facilities/Building (111).

**Top Mentions – Positive Responses:** Worship Experience/Services- 16; ministry to the church/community/outreach – 13; friendliness/people – 12; location/setting- 7; Vicar/sermons – 7; adult study group – 5; Food Bank – 3; Healing Service – 3; fellowship – 2, Children's Ministry- 2; music from the people – 2.

**Top Mentions – Negative Responses:** Shrinking congregation/ losing members/decreased attendance – 9; Vicar/Sermons – 5; Worship Service – 3; Disruption of wholeness/loss of closeness of congregation – 2; Factions/agendas in church – 2.

**Top Mentions – Needs/Suggestions:** Increased Membership/People – 10, Education/study groups/workgroup for Life Events – 7; More involvement by people – 5; More outreach -5; Children's / Youth Ministry – 5; Vicar – 4; Understanding Vicar can't do everything – 3; More fellowship – 3; More concern about others in church/resolve issues; Pastoral Care – 3; Revival of ECW – 2; Visitor Program/Visiting Committee – 2; Understanding Ministries – 2; Keeping Members Happy – 2.

**What ministries do you find most meaningful and why?** The ministries mentioned most often were ones related to the worship services and helping each

other and the community through outreach. This is a major strength and opportunity for growth. Your congregation wants to make things better for your community and that is an incredible positive in planning. This was evident throughout the surveys on multiple questions. There is an underlying desire to meet needs and I would submit that this be used as a rallying point for your congregation. I would continue helping the Food Bank and other charities, the elderly in the community, and brainstorm on other ways to continue growing your outreach.

***How can we improve? How can any of these ministries be better?***

At the time of the survey, a fair number of people thought a new Vicar/Rector would be an improvement, but the most responses focused on improvement in outreach, community service, parishioner programs, and understanding of ministries available for newcomers. Since you are looking for a new Vicar, hopefully that person will be able to show an improvement for dissatisfied parishioners, but please remember that you are first ministers to each other through this interim period and should continue to do so even after your next Vicar arrives.

***If you could create any new area of ministry or a new program, what would it be?***

The most responses focused on creating ministries and programs geared toward community outreach, pastoral care for each other and the community, and programs that can engage youth and young families. Again, the tendency of the respondents is to help others, which is a sign of a healthy congregation. I think the idea of helping troubled youth in the community is a great idea and a way to infuse your congregational life with additional new energy while simultaneously performing a potential outreach program.

***What is the greatest need that we currently have within our parish?***

By far, most responses named the greatest need as growing the congregation/getting more people to attend. Following this across-the-board need for more people is the need to increase activity and number of current parishioners to take on more/new responsibilities. This is typical for a growing congregation; too few people doing too much. Again, this is a great opportunity to plug newcomers in to help with the ministries/programs of St. Stephen's. As you grow, the new parishioners will need to do something, so figure out what you have the biggest need in terms of utilizing time and talent.

***How can we attract new members?*** The responses largely seem to suggest that St. Stephen's increase it's visibility in the community and larger area through a combination of advertising, program/ministry development, and targeting the NE Columbia/Lake Wateree areas. Newspaper advertisements were mentioned, though just having activities and letting the community know can help a lot



**FROM THE ECW:** The ECW Executive Committee met November 28. Karen Kuehner presented the cookbooks and asked that the Committee set the cost for the cookbooks. The Committee decided to sell the cookbooks for \$12.00

each and offer them to the congregation before they are placed in various stores in Ridgeway and Blythewood. Depending on sales, the cookbooks could be reordered. Checks should be made payable to "Cash" and given to Patti Palmer. Mary Jane Lever graciously agreed to help organize and share her expertise in the formation of the ECW at St. Stephen's. The first official meeting of the ECW will be held Thursday, January 7, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. at St. Stephens. ECW will meet the first Thursday every other month at the church unless special projects require additional meetings. All members should either bring with them the ECW Planning Guide or you may fill out the form at the first meeting. If you need a copy of the ECW Planning Guide, please contact Mary Jane Lever at [mjlever@umcsc.org](mailto:mjlever@umcsc.org). The plan will outline any special outreach mission projects and any year round events and programs that may be of interest to the members as well as the possibility of hosting other ECW groups such as Winnsboro or Camden ECW. The Committee decided not to elect officers at this time in order to allow time to organize and set goals. Those participating on the Committee are as follows: Mary Jane Lever, Patti Palmer, Sara Faucett, Margaret Murtaugh, Donna Guess and Frances DeBerry.

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**DECEMBER 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*

Carolyn Babb	12/5	Gen Palmer VI	12/17	Ethan Lee Langdale	12/21
Jacob Upchurch	12/6	Diane Gunter	12/18	Jill Upchurch	12/23
Eleanor Milling	12/15	Harmony Addison	12/19	Jennifer Palmer	12/28

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**DECEMBER DATES:**

- December 9:* Healing Service, 6:00pm
- December 12:* 87<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention reconvenes to elect the 8<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, Trinity Cathedral
- December 19:* Greening of the Church. **Volunteers needed**
- December 20:* Short Mission Committee Meeting after service
- December 23:* Healing Service, 6:00pm
- December 24:* Pre-service Gathering, Choral Program, Christmas Eve Service – **Time to be determined. Notice will be sent out.**

**The Year of the Cow - Episcopal Relief & Development**

Many thanks to all who have so generously supported our endeavor to raise \$580.00 to purchase a cow for a needy family. We are very close to our goal. Please purchase the gift tags, puzzle wreaths, crosses, angel ornaments, tiny gift boxes, friendship tea and reindeer food remaining on the craft table. The gift tags can be tucked into one of the boxes and given as a homemade gift. We appreciate your kindness and wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas.

**Buck Rowe, McKinley Levister, Donna Guess and Carolyn Babb**