

THE EPISTLE

THE MISSION OF ST. JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH, A CENTRAL CITY CHURCH,
IS TO WELCOME ALL PEOPLE INTO THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND TO SERVE IN HIS NAME

THE RECTOR'S RAMBLINGS

In almost every way that one can imagine, Mr. Keltie has been a challenging puppy and dog. I love him dearly but recognize that he is a dog that has taken stamina to get him as far as he has come. He has gone to Puppy Class, Basic Obedience, Advanced Obedience (two times!), Canine Good Citizen (and passed with honors!), Tricks Class, Feisty Fido Class (I kid you not, that's what it's called!) and at least ten visits from a personal animal behaviorist/trainer. He is now an honorable, if still feisty dog. And I love him within an inch of his beautiful furry little life.

Cesar Milan, the well known "Dog Whisperer," says that you can tell how much you love your dog by your willingness to stay with him, to not let up on him, to stand by him even when he makes mistakes. By that standard, never has a dog been more loved than Kirkwall's Keltie of St. James'. (His formal AKC registered name.) This dog has made many serious "mistakes" in his two and a half years of life, but he has never been abandoned. He really wants to please and do the right thing. It's just really, really hard sometimes for him to know what the right thing is to do.

Gosh, that sounds like us! I know that in my own life, I very much want to do the right thing—in God's eyes. But sometimes it is very hard to know what the right thing is to do. Or, sometimes, even though I want to do

the right thing, and I may even think I know what that is, I still do something else. I've never bitten anyone, but I sure have hurt people just as much as if I did.

And yet, God has never given up on me. Because it is not in God's nature to give up on God's people. Holy Scripture is replete with examples of God's people (that would be us) behaving badly, and yet God does not give up on God's people. God never, ever lets us go. God does not abandon us to our sins. God never lets up on trying to bring us back to God. And God stands by us in the midst of the biggest messes we are capable of making.

Sometimes Keltie looks at me and I ask him if he knows just how much I love him. He blinks and occasionally will give me a puppy kiss, if he's in the mood. More often than not, these days, he is. And I am so grateful that I never let up on him so that we can be where we are with one another today.

And I wonder, does God look at me sometimes and wonder if I know

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>The Rector's Ramblings</i>	1
<i>From the Deacon's Bench</i>	2
<i>Dorota Pruski—Postulant</i>	3
<i>Vestry Notes for December 2009</i>	3
<i>Music Committee Update</i>	4
<i>Did You Hear that BEEP in Church?</i>	5
<i>Do You Need a Mid-Week Break?</i>	5
<i>Religious Preference?</i>	6
<i>A New Year's Resolution—Seize the Moment</i>	6
<i>Sundries Distribution</i>	7
<i>Stump the Priest</i>	8
<i>St. James' Annual Meeting</i>	8
<i>Sundries for Christmas</i>	8

(Continued from page 1)

how much God loves me? I don't guess that God would be especially looking for a puppy kiss, or its equivalent, from me. But I do believe that sending a full measure of love God's way is pleasing to God. And I am so grateful that God has never let up on me, or on you, so that we can be where we are with one another today.

Love to each one of you, and a very blessed new year. ~~Mother Debra+

FROM THE DEACON'S BENCH

“Resolve”

It's that time again. Time to clean the slate for the year ending and to make resolutions to make changes in our lives in the new year. We engage in this annual ritual knowing that we probably will not keep them as high minded as they might be. When we make a resolution we are resolving to make some kind of change in the way we live, or in some particular behavior.

“Resolve” is a word with different shades of meaning. It may mean settling differences between different parties. It may mean making a personal promise to change something in our life or to act a certain way or to desist from some behavior. But it is a personal decision based on personal strengths.

When we engage in the annual ritual of making resolutions, it is the personal resolve we are generally making. And, let's face it, we are probably doing it because it's the New Year, and not necessarily because we really believe it will happen. When we resolve to make some change, it comes down to the strength of our resolve whether we will follow through.

If the desire to keep our resolutions is supported solely by “I”-centered strength, it will be difficult to succeed. Perhaps the best illustration of this is a person with an addiction like alcohol or tobacco. People with such an addiction start out trying to quit on their own, but soon find that their own ability to keep the resolve fails. They find they need more than themselves.

Interestingly, the First Step in AA doesn't start with “I”, but rather it starts we “We”: “We admitted that

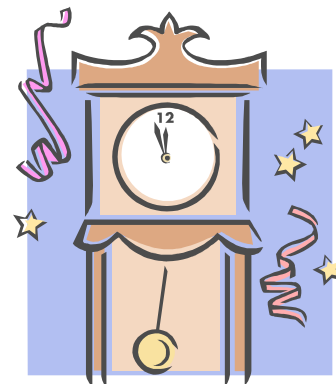
we are powerless over alcohol...” More interesting is the same group goes another step beyond the “we” and outright says it cannot be done alone and that we can make it only with help—help from a “higher power.”

Could it be that the same thinking could apply to our own resolves? Could it be that looking at our resolves in this way and being willing to partner with God might change that resolution from a frivolous ritual into a prayer-strengthened resolve?

If we look at the resolutions we have made over the years, I think we will find two things. First, we have made the same ones year after year. Second, we have thought about resolving to make these same changes throughout the year.

Perhaps, instead of engaging in a meaningless annual ritual of resolution-making, we need to strengthen our resolve with help from God. After all, if we've thought these changes important enough to resolve to make them year after year, maybe it's time to take the “I” out and make it a “We” resolve—God and I.

Deacon Ned



DOROTA PRUSKI—POSTULANT

It has been said that the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. On November 16, I took a huge step on my journey – I became a Postulant in the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee. As many of you know, this was not the first step, but it feels like a significant one because it was an official one.

Postulancy is a status given me by Bishop Miller, and with it the focus of my journey towards priesthood shifts from discernment to preparation for seminary. During the months of January and February, I will be working hard to apply for grants, scholarships, and fellowships in order to finance my education. I will also complete my application to Virginia Theological Seminary, in Alexandria, VA. This August, I will move to VTS where I will spend the next three years earning a Masters of Divinity.

I'm very grateful these days. I realize that grant applications are about as fun as going to the dentist's office, but I am, nonetheless, so thankful to be working on them – doing so means that this is REAL. I'm ACTUALLY going to seminary!

My discernment process officially began in August of 2008, when Mother Debra wrote Bishop Miller that I was beginning the process at St. James'. My Parish Ministry Discernment Committee, consisting of Loraine Garner, John Washbush, Jill Littlefield, Gust Olson, Kathy Nall, and Beth Taylor, was trained later that year and proceeded to meet with me throughout the winter and spring of 2009.

After they recommended I move forward in the process, I had to complete a psychological review, medical examination, background check, and financial review. The Vestry and Mother Debra recommended me for Postulancy, as did the Diocesan Commission on Ministry after I spend a weekend interviewing with them. And finally, I met with Bishop Miller.

In the end, the letter that Bishop Miller sent me which officially made me a Postulant was outstanding; however, what is more amazing to me is the number of people in the church who are walking with me on this journey. I am very grateful these days because of all of you. I thank you for your love, support, and guidance as I try to hear and follow God's call.

In gratitude,
Dorota Pruski

VESTRY NOTES FOR DECEMBER 2009

The Vestry meeting for December was held on Wednesday the 16th. The business part of the Vestry meeting started after everyone shared on how God was preparing his or her heart for Christmas.

Some of the highlights of this meeting were: Our awesome treasurer, Loraine Garner, presented the proposed 2010 budget. The Vestry discussed line items in the proposed budget and approved the budget unanimously. Updates were given on some of the ministries that our church nurtures: Common Ground, Red Door Clothes and the Sundries program. We also continued our book study from the book, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*.

Beth Taylor, Senior Warden

Ps. Plowing costs are high, so keep those prayers ascending for minimal snow this winter!

MUSIC COMMITTEE UPDATE

In July, 2009, Mother Debra convened an advisory music committee to assist her in determining the future direction of a music program at St. James.' The committee consists of: Paul Cooke, Lucy Cooper, Deacon Terry Garner, Gust Olson, Cindy Purpero, Cristal Weeks, and Susan Wilson.

A bit of background might be helpful here, especially to anyone who has come to St. James' recently. In late 2008, at budget time, Mother Debra and the Vestry made the painful decision to end the St. James' music program as we had known it for 20 years. The parish simply could not pay a half time Music Director to direct a choir, select music, handle administrative tasks and play every Sunday. The Vestry abolished the position of Music Director effective the end of June, 2009, and the choir disbanded at the end of the 2008/2009 season in May.

Karen Beaumont, our former Music Director, has graciously stayed on as an independent contractor to play organ and piano on those Sundays that we need an organist, but we currently have no separate Music Director from the Rector, and the future direction of music at St. James' is still under consideration. Our own volunteer ensemble, Joyful Noise, continues to evolve. However, is not in a position, nor was it ever intended to provide all of the music for our congregation.

The advisory music committee has now met ten times, and we have two more meetings scheduled, the last scheduled meeting being in early February. We have spent many hours discussing what the role of music is in worship and what kind of music would best fit our diverse parish. We have sent our members out to several other churches with different sorts of music, and heard their reports of how music is integrated into other styles of worship.

We have wrestled with issues of musical accessibility (meaning: how easy is a hymn to sing), blending music for different musical tastes in a diverse parish, and teaching new music without losing the congregation in the process.

We have also experimented here at St. James.' We tried one or two "all piano" Sundays to see how that worked. (The verdict: not so well). We had a supply organist on All Saints' Day just to see how a different style of playing sounds. (Technical difficulties inhibited the man's playing...) Mother Debra appointed hymnody advisory subcommittees for the three hymnals. Joyful Noise has increased its commitment to regular practice and playing, with the help of a consultant, Anne Meyer.

Right now, we are working toward a job description for a music director which will, when it is completed, make it easier for us to make decisions about who that person might be.

The work of the advisory committee continues as we look now directly at personnel issues and continue to bring in people from outside of St. James' to try out various musical possibilities.

In the end, Mother Debra, as the Rector, will make the final decisions about the direction of music at St. James', including any personnel decisions. She will, however, make those decisions with the ongoing advice of the music advisory committee and the Vestry. Parishioners with concerns or comments may certainly express those to committee members or to Mother Debra. We know that for some people this has been a time of some confusion and consternation. But we also know that growth doesn't happen without some growing pains.

Lucy Cooper

DID YOU HEAR THAT BEEP IN CHURCH?

It's Josie's new power chair.

And WHO is Josie?

She's *Josephine Neff*, the red-haired lady sitting in the front row. She has been coming to St. James' regularly since about 1964. She was working at the *Milwaukee Journal* (she was there for 39 years!) and a fellow worker asked her to come along to St. James' one Ash Wednesday. Josie is a cradle Episcopalian from Racine. She's been on the Altar Guild here for many years and is now the Director (by osmosis she says). Her mother was also on the Altar Guild in their home church in Racine. Josie has also been on the Vestry in the past too.



Why this CLASSY CHAIR, Josie?

In her middle 30's Josie was diagnosed with Limb-Girdle Dystrophy which is a form of muscular dystrophy. It is manifested by weakness in the limbs and waist area and general weakness. She likes the new chair which can be raised up to other people's level.

What are some of the changes and things and people you remember at St. James?

Josie remembers when we had a large youth group called YAGS. St. James' joined together with Summerfield Methodist and Immanuel Presbyterian and this was a very active group. Vanda and Bill Healy and their step-son Steve Healy were also in it. She has interesting stories about how St. James' was decorated differently for special days. There was a Rosamond Smith from the A.O. Smith family. And Josie can tell you about many other interesting folks. In fact, she's promised to write about a few of them for a future Epistle. I asked Vanda Healy for words about Josie. She said Josie is courageous, has good humor, and is a great volunteer and always generous of her time and talent. I'd agree. There is one odd thing—Josie says she was here for 45 years and yet she says she's only 39! Um-m-m-m??

Jill Littlefield

DO YOU NEED A MID-WEEK BREAK?

Do you ever find yourself needing a break in the middle of the week? If so, we have a half-hour break just waiting for you at St. James'. Every Wednesday at 5:30 PM we gather in the chapel for Holy Eucharist. During the service we listen to the readings, think about them, and—unlike a Sunday service—we do not hear a sermon, but we share with one another how the readings fit in our life today. Holy Communion follows. The service is short and oh, so sweet. It provides me with a break in the middle of the week that only such a thoughtful time can give. A chance to refocus on God to keep me centered on God for the rest of the week.

If you can spare thirty minutes on Wednesday, come worship with us. Come pray in our wonderful new chapel. I know that is where I will be. I hope to see you there.

Teresa Jackson

RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE?

Recently, as part of a registration process, I was asked if I had a religious preference. That may be a simple question for most but it made me pause. It was the first time I had been asked that question since being received as an Episcopalian several months ago. The question prompted me to think about my decision to become an Episcopalian.

In the Episcopal Church I've found a religion that's close to my roots and feels comfortable. It also allows me to discuss, agree, or disagree with any of the hot topics of the day. I've never seen it but I've been told there's a poster that says something to the effect, *Episcopalians don't check their intellect at the door*. We can argue a point from opposite perspectives then pray together.

I believe that God's love is unlimited, extended to all, without exception. The Episcopal Church and St. James' embrace that and the concept of radical hospitality. How wonderfully refreshing that is.

For these, and other reasons, when the clerk asked me, "Mr. Heindl, do you have a religious preference?" I smiled and said, "I'm Episcopalian!"

Bob Heindl

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION—SEIZE THE MOMENT

Ellie and I enjoy doing Girl Scouts together. She is now a Junior Girl Scout and I am her troop leader. For Christmas this year our troop adopted an Hispanic family in Waukesha through the Christmas Clearing Council. Our task was to shop for gifts for a family that would have a difficult time acquiring Christmas gifts on their own, and so we cared for a mom, twelve-year-old son, and nine-year-old daughter. While I worked with a translator to find out what they needed and wanted, the girls were to go out to family and friends and secure donations.

While my ten-year-old scouts may be great cookie sales people (just wait, the sale starts soon), they were not very experienced at soliciting donations. We prepared in our November meeting by talking about asking people while they were open to the message. The girls decide that they would wait until their families had sat down to share their Thanksgiving meals, and, while everyone was being thankful, to ask for donations. For the two girls who said that for them Thanksgiving was less about giving thanks and more about non-stop football we made a different plan—wait until the two minute warning near the end of the game, then stand in front of the screen, and refuse to move until collecting a donation. I must admit I suggested it as a joke, but especially for those two girls, the response was overwhelming. We had set a target and nearly doubled it!

The weekend before Christmas, Mother Debra gave similar advice—approach people while their hearts are open. We were each asked to bring a friend, a relative, a co-worker to Christmas services. The reason was the same as soliciting donations for girl scouts—approach people when their hearts are open. And so I have my New Year's resolution—to keep my eyes open and seize the moment when someone's heart is open to invite them to help those less fortunate, to join together with a welcoming community in prayer, or to invite others (and myself) to serve one another as Jesus calls us to. If you have yet to make a resolution for this year, will you join me? I am seizing this moment to invite us all.

John Washbush

SUNDRIES DISTRIBUTION

On Saturday, December 19th, Amanda and I participated in the distribution of sundries to those individuals who had been given a hot and delicious meal at The Gathering. And that Saturday was no ordinary Saturday: there had been a plethora of activity at St. James', including Red Door Clothes, Christmas carols in the church, a meal, and then sundries distribution.

There were a good number of Jamesians helping, as well as some extra family members and a few good hearted Roundys employees who came down on their own time. We worked feverishly in a small space to get everything ready, and although in close quarters, worked well together and laughed a great deal. Before "opening our doors," we put together goody bags of fruit, candy, trail mix, granola, and other snacks. After the treats were assembled, we made stations where not only the goody bags were handed out, but other items like soap, shampoo, individual boxes of laundry detergent, toothpaste & toothbrushes, deodorant, Q-tips, chapstick, combs, sewing kits, and blaze orange knit hats.



Over 300 people were served at The Gathering that day, and of those, 192 chose to pick up sundries. Roughly 2/3 of the individuals that came indoors for a meal also were in need of our services!!! There were a great many smiles on the faces of the people we served. I heard many a "Thank you," "God bless you," "Have a merry Christmas." There was no telling what would excite someone—for some it was laundry detergent. For others lip balm for their chapped lips. Some women were glad to pick out a pink, sparkly tube of lip gloss (much to Amanda's chagrin). I had to laugh because there were several occasions in which I offered a man a comb, only to have him smirk and remove his hat to show that he had no hair (or a hairstyle not conducive to the small plastic combs I had to offer). There was one woman who laughed and joked with the volunteers, but she quietly revealed to me that she had six children and had been rather upset the night before that they were not with her. I wasn't able to ask why that was the case, but what was probably more important was that I listened.

Afterwards, I asked Amanda what she thought of the whole experience. Amanda (who is six) said, "It was good. It was fun putting stuff in the bags." She insisted that "only" two people "did not stink," and her final comment was to question why some men who had received sundries were later seen outside the church smoking cigarettes. Amanda couldn't understand how someone could afford to buy cigarettes and not have enough money for detergent or rent.

I went home that afternoon feeling tired, but gratified that we were able to help. I look forward to the next opportunity!!!

Leanne Mittelstadt

STUMP THE PRIEST

Dear priest,

I have a great question for you! The book of Genesis (Genesis 2:2–3) says “On the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.” So, why did God rest? God is God, after all. Why did God need to rest?

Signed, impish Bible reader (and really wanting to know!)

Dear Imp,

Yes, a great question! I don't know what God's answer is to why God chose to rest on the seventh day, but here's a guess: An omnipotent God cannot, by definition, become tired. But the God that we read about in the Bible often models what God wants people to do. In this case, the pattern is established from the beginning of time to set aside one day of the week for renewal and reflection. For you, that means: get to church!

Signed, the Priest

St. James' Annual Meeting
Sunday, January 31, 2010 after worship

The Annual Meeting is an opportunity to

*Review the past year's activities

*Present the 2010 budget

*Elect new members of vestry and convention delegates

*Answer questions and celebrate fellowship

SUNDRIES FOR CHRISTMAS

On December 19, St. James' and friends were able to distribute sundries to the guests at The Gathering with a little extra to share. We had 14 volunteers many who came down early before distribution to help assemble goodie bags for our guests. All of the goodie bags contained a piece of fruit, 2 bags of dry snack and a bag of hard candy. We made 200 bags and distributed 192.

Not only did they get the basics; soap, shampoo, lotion, toothbrush and toothpaste. We also had special items we were able to distribute: Chap Stick, orange hats, sewing kits, q-tips, 2 boxes of laundry soap and dental floss.

Many thanks to everyone who donated Granola bars, trail mix, nuts, pretzels, filled crackers, candy, Chap Stick and q-tips. All of our guests were very thankful to have a little something special this Christmas.

Kris Ochocki