

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

Molly is dying.

Most of you know that I share my life with my beloved Cairn Terrier, Jamie. Recently I have been joined by a cat named Skeeter (more on Skeeter in future Ramblings) and a gentle, sweet Black Lab named Molly. (For those of you who don't remember, I also continue to share "custody" of my loveable terror of a terrier, Keltie, who now lives in Madison with my former house-mate.) And oh yes, I have a new house-mate named Carlynn.

Molly and I have been friends for many years now because her "Mom" and I are friends. So, I have watched Molly go from young dog, to middle-aged dog, to old and greying dog. And now I am privileged to live with her during her final journey in life. Molly has hemangiosarcoma, cancer of the blood vessels. The vet says that she could live for another year, or only for the next few weeks. She says that there is a 99% chance that she already has cancer in other sites beyond her spleen which was removed last week. The mean life expectancy for dogs with hemangiosarcoma is two months.

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So, Molly is dying.

But here's the thing. She does not know that she is dying. So, she continues to want to do "happy dances" in the morning. She continues to roll her tennis ball towards us with her nose to gently toss back to her. She still loves scratches in back of her ears and under her chin and, of course, treats. She sleeps most of the day, but she's been doing that for a long time. So, Molly is living her life as fully as she can live it, even though she is dying. Great learning from an old dog.

Dogs live in the moment. They have memories and can respond out of those memories. But they live in the moment. It is one of the greatest gifts of dog ownership. Jamie can go to the vet *and* the groomer in the same day (two of her most dreaded activities), but when she is back home, she's back home completely and she is up for treats and cuddles and back scratches. When she returns from a bad day she is completely focused on being home. Again, great learning for us.

Christ asks us to live our lives fully. Jesus did that. The shadow of the cross was in his heart long before he went to Calvary, but still he contin-

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ued to heal and teach and enjoy those who traveled with him. He lived his life, short as it was, to the fullest. And the Gospels give us a picture of a man who was focused intently on the moments he was given to live.

Part of me wants to begin to grieve Molly's impending loss. But Molly is still here. Still sweet and gentle and fun to be with. It still feels good for her and for me to sit beside one another and to pet her. She's soft and silky and she sighs long sighs of contentment when she is near Carlynn, or Carlynn's son, Ryan, or, blessedly, me.

Grief is for the future with Molly. Right now, she shows me that my job is to appreciate her presence in my life to the fullest. To pay attention to this precious time left with her and to love her well. Christ did that with his disciples. And we, who are blessed with our time with one another, can do that, too.

We are all of us one breath away from dying. But, while we are living, let's live our lives to the fullest and love another well. It what dogs do. And, as it turns out, good Christians.

Love, Mother Debra+

Ed.'s Note: Molly died on October 28, 2009.

FROM THE DEACON'S BENCH

The streets are changing around 833 (St. James'). A recently-released study indicates a 13% increase in the number of homeless... and some feel that if the study were done today the number would rise to 20%.

Not only are the numbers increasing, but the nature of the homeless population is changing. In the time period when The Gathering started, the homeless population were middle-aged and older folks who were either mentally ill or alcoholics or addicts, or a combination of these. Generally, their behavior was compliant, with the occasional mental health related episode or being high. Generally, they were grateful because there was considerably less help available food-wise and shelter-wise than there is today.

Today, the homeless population is evolving and has been so for the last year or more. It is younger. The attitudes are of a "street smart" character. That means they are characterized by: bravado covering any personal issues; disrespect for others and for authority figures; being "I"-centered; not willing to take responsibility. It is as if they have brought the desperation of their former neighborhoods with them while not recognizing their own desperation's causes. For others, they are refusing to take responsibility for their feelings and working on them. Instead, they choose their

bravado attitude, their tough "street smart" swagger, and blame "the system".

Desperation isn't the only thing this new generation has brought with them. The prevalence of drugs is increasing visibly. This adds a whole new dimension to the streets of the central city.

So we have a mix within the homeless population very different from what we were prepared for in the past. It can become volatile unless we see the potential and unless solutions are found within the community that serves them. The generation that has been around for a while because of their ages, mental stability, physical conditions and compliant natures are easy prey for this new breed of homeless.

We have at hand programs to work with and serve the needs of the homeless. There are shelters and shelter-and-beyond programs. Meal programs are in place. Programs to aid in employment barely scratch the surface of their needs.

The older generation over the years have found their way to a somewhat improved life via shelters and their programs through to treatment for addictions

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CHRISTMAS CHEER FOR OUR GUESTS AT THE GATHERING

As Advent and Christmas rapidly approach, I've been thinking about the guests at The Gathering. This year along with our December sundries distribution, we could give back something a little bit extra during this tough economy.

It would be a wonderful gift to put together a small package with Christmas goodies for the guests. This year we would like to give them things that will fit in their pockets to eat later. So for the next 6 weeks we are asking St. James' to help out. This year we are looking for individual packaged items like nuts, trail mix, dried fruit, pretzels, hard candy and snack size candy bars. I'm confident the parish of St. James' will remember our guests at The Gathering. When you are out shopping in the weeks to follow perhaps you can stop and pick up some items for this distribution. Items and cash donations will be collected until December 13. We normally hand out sundries to approximately 190-220 people. So we will need enough for everyone. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

If you would like to help out please contact me, Kris Ochocki.



Amanda Smith and Vanda Healy — champion bowlers. See the article on the next page.

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and/or mental health care and beyond that to some form of work on SSI. And they have often finally found "their own place."

The new generation utilizes some of the feeding programs and the free clothing outlets. It is doubtful that they would seek out some of the shelters, let alone be admitted because of their being high. It is interesting to note, however, that as you watch the new faces arrive and then see them after some time living on the streets, small changes appear. While the bravado with their peers persists, away from them they say "thank you" or accept what is offered without critiquing the offering. Time may offer a tempering effect for some.

I do not offer any magic solution. The key is, first of all, to be keenly aware of what is happening. Acknowledging the problem is always the starting point in dealing with any situation. This is a problem that extends beyond 833 West Wisconsin Avenue. It is a community problem. It is particularly a problem of all the various agencies, programs and churches in the central city. Experience tells us that any solutions must start with these, as it will not come from government, without action by those involved.

Pray on this. We need God's guidance and love to find our way. We need our fellow central city providers to join in our prayers.

Deacon Ned

FUN FOR ALL!

For those who were willing to “pin” down some “spare” time, attending Bowling Night was a “ball”! Nearly 40 people gathered at the AMF Lanes in West Allis to share an evening of community building, bowling, and pizza. Many surprises were uncovered, from celebration of Vanda’s birthday to the incredible bumper bowling skills of our youngest members (and a few of the bowling challenged adults), to Clem’s triumphant return to the lanes. Perhaps nothing will top the little happy dance of Vanda as she nailed strikes and spares and put our good Deacon Terry to shame. (For that matter, she put a goodly number of other people to shame as well.) It was great fun and we are deeply grateful to Vanda for the wonderful gift of the outing.

The fun doesn’t stop at bowling! We are sure that with *Game Night II – The Second Coming*, fun will “strike” again!!! Join us on **Saturday, November 21st**, in the lounge for another heaping helping of hilarity. Family friendly games, food provided by the vestry, and wonderful time with our parish community await! Clear your calendars and make it a date!

John Washbush



Clem Wagner and Sullivan Roepke — bowlers extraordinaire!

HOSPITALITY AMONG OURSELVES

Every church has lots of lists. We live by lists because they give us information about how is doing what in the parish. Our lists tell us: who is doing fellowship; who is serving as a Subdeacon, Crucifer, or Lector; who is counting the money from the Vestry; who is doing Sunday School, and who is coming to the various activities we have planned around the parish. We live by our lists because we have a lot of people, and in order to be able to meet people’s needs we need to know who is going to be doing what and coming to what. It is hospitality to ourselves when we either sign up on lists, or follow the lists that we are already on.

Recently we’ve become just a bit sloppy with our lists. We have not been practicing good hospitality to ourselves. Here is what we need, it’s simple:

*If you are on a list to do something, please find a replacement for yourself if you cannot do it. And then, please let Gust know. Particularly when this has to do with something related to Sunday morning, it saves us from having to scramble at the last minute.

*If you are asked to sign up for something that you’d like to do, please sign up as soon as you can. That way we can plan for the event, or cancel it if there is not enough interest.

We practice radical hospitality to and for those folks that we do not know, those whom God sends to us. Let’s also practice it among ourselves.

Mother Debra+

A PILGRIM PREPARES TO MOVE ON...

Dear friends at St. James',

I have been on an active spiritual quest for many years. I am trying to discern the ways I can best live out the way of love that Jesus taught us. This journey has blessed me with the wisdom and support of many people – relatives, friends and strangers who have all shown me something about loving others, and sometimes, revealed to me my own weaknesses. I am grateful for everyone who has crossed my path.

Recently I have become aware that I am being called to travel a new road. My understanding of Christianity has become more inclusive and maybe a bit more mystical. I find that this statement about Jesus by Deepak Chopra resonates with my heart:

“I want to offer the possibility that Jesus was truly, as he proclaimed, a savior. Not the savior, not the one and only Son of God. Rather Jesus embodied the highest level of enlightenment. He spent his brief adult life describing it, teaching it, and passing it on to future generations. Jesus intended to save the world by showing others the path to God-consciousness.”

This feeling of mine has led me to be a member of four different faith sharing groups. We meet, study and talk about our personal spiritual journeys. They nourish me with new ideas and understanding. We talk about God as the ‘ground of all being,’ ‘the life force,’ and most of all, Love. The traditional language of the Mass has become difficult for me.

And so I have decided to let my membership at St. James' lapse at the end of this year. This decision is tinged with sadness because I have been welcomed, valued and loved by so many of you. I admire the spirit and mission of this wonderful parish and the way you live out your faith. I am grateful that I have spent two wonderful years of my pilgrimage with you. Thank you St. James'.

Pat DeFrain

VESTRY NOTES FOR OCTOBER 2009

The monthly Vestry meeting was held on the evening of October 21, 2009. After opening prayer, the meeting began with a discussion by each of the members of the question, “How has God changed you this week?”

After discussion of the Treasurer's Report, the Vestry heard the Rector's Report, which covered reviews of building issues, music program developments, the proposed Listening Sessions, Stewardship (“Thank you, and...”) and volunteering for the various outreach programs. There were updates regarding Common Ground's foreclosed housing campaign and Red Door Clothes as a joint ministry with Trinity, Wauwatosa. There was a discussion about how well Bishop Miller's visit went on October 11 and the success of the fellowship time afterwards. We then discussed Chapter 4 of *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, focusing on how to move from being reactive in anxious times to being reflective.

The meeting ended with Mother Debra leading closing prayer and a blessing.

Leanne Mittelstadt

THE ROAD AHEAD

Mother Debra referred to this prayer by Thomas Merton several weeks ago. I knew I wanted a copy of it and thought that others might too.

Jill Littlefield

Thomas Merton's Prayer

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think am following your will does
not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know
nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow
of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my
perils alone.*

COMMON GROUND UPDATE: FORECLOSED HOUSING CAMPAIGN

Banks have foreclosed on thousands of homes in the Southeast Wisconsin region, causing a variety of problems in communities. The home values of houses located near foreclosed properties are dropping significantly, most of the foreclosed homes are in need of rehabilitation or demolition, and the banks that own them are not selling the properties to responsible homeowners. Many end up in the hands of "slum landlords" or rent-to-own scammers.

Common Ground leaders have been researching this issue extensively, and we are preparing to launch a campaign to negotiate with the top three owners of foreclosed homes in this region: Deutsche Bank, Wells Fargo, and US Bank. Our goal is that these banks will reasonably and responsibly dispose of the hundreds of properties they own by selling the homes in decent condition and demolishing the homes which cannot be rehabbed to prevent the deterioration of our communities.

Over the course of the next few months, we will hold several actions as we move forward on this campaign. On October 31 we continued a photo survey started in September to document the homes owned by these three banks. On November 19, we will hold a public hearing during which members of our community will testify to the ways in which foreclosed homes affect the health of our neighborhoods. In January (date and time TBA), we will hold a large public action to formally launch our campaign for the reasonable disposition of these foreclosed properties.

For more information or to get involved, please see a member of St. James' core team.

Dorota Pruski

MEET CLEM AND NANCY WAGNER

Clem and Nancy Wagner were married at St. James’ in December, 1950, by Father Bernard Buley (Rector of St. James’ from 1950 to 1958). They had attended a little while previously, Nancy coming from her home at 24th and Wisconsin and Clem from near the Washington Highlands. Clem was a Milwaukee Police Department patrolman, working the 4th District in the NW part of the city; Nancy worked for 10 years in the office at South Division High School until they adopted son Mark in 1958. They both have deep roots in Milwaukee: Clem with connections to the fishermen of Jones’ Island, and Nancy with grandparents emigrating from Germany and Scotland.

Clem served St. James’ for many years as a lector and as Junior Warden. During his years in service he oversaw the re-tiling of the steeple, putting the grids on the stained-glass windows and acquiring wonderful natural oak doors from Chicago for the doors at the west front entrance. And he says they cried when they were told the doors would be painted red, the natural wood was so beautiful. He didn’t say how much they cried when he and Tom Curtis chased a bat from the choir loft to the chancel and back, finally getting it with a

broom. Clem spent untold hours on the upkeep of the parsonage at 77th and Wisconsin, to everyone’s great satisfaction.

Nancy was Treasurer for many years of the St. Mary’s Guild. The group included names still resonant at St. James’: Jean Gries, Vanda Healy, Eleanor Turner, and Marion Johnson. The Guild was a service ministry, helping out at weddings, and potluck suppers – Nancy brought the desserts.

Son Mark followed his dad as a MPD patrolman, and daughter Linda is in HR at Miller-Coors. Four grandchildren are in various stages of their education: three in university, studying criminal justice, nursing, and teaching. A fourth grand-daughter will graduate from West Allis Central this year.

When asked what kept them at St. James’ for so many years, they replied in unison: “This is family; this is home.” And as we look around the building and the people in it, we can thank them both for the love they have put into this family, this home.

Gust Olson

APPROACHING THANKSGIVING

As the weeks count down and we approach the holiday of Thanksgiving, we are also approaching the end of our parish season of thanksgiving and stewardship. In the personal vignettes we have been able to share on Sundays we have heard our church community, over and over, saying “thank-you” for your generous support through your pledge. Christian formation of adults and children, the building, superb staff, liturgy, music, and outreach – all are made possible by the support of the spirit and your financial support of St. James’. On behalf of all, again, thank you.

However wonderful it is to hear,

those expressions of gratitude are a celebration of past commitment. As we approach Thanksgiving, we now must face the very real call to see how we “approach thanksgiving.” How do we express our gratitude to God for all that He has given us? How do we celebrate the time we have been given, and use it in service to others as we are called to do? How do we approach our thanksgiving to God for the wonderful, varied, and plentiful gifts of talent that we all possess? And how do we use it in service to others as we are called to do? How do we approach our thanksgiving to God for financial gifts, large and small, that we have been given? Our earn-

ings represent what we have done with the time, talent, and opportunities that God has given us. And how do we use it in service to others as we are called to do?

As we approach our communal Thanksgiving on Sunday, November 22nd, it is time to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider our approach to thanksgiving, our answer to God’s call, and our commitment to stewardship. Please join our parish community on that day as we offer our pledges and gather for a parish meeting and pot-luck.

John Washbush

STUMP THE PRIEST

Dear priest,

I do not know how to pray. I mean, I come to church and that's good. But you talk about praying outside of church. How do you do that? How do you pray? Signed, Wannabe Pray-er.

Dear Wannabe,

Oh, I love this question! And I could write on and on about it. (Make an appointment to come and see me and we can talk more.) Here is a short hand answer:

People pray in many ways. Prayer is about turning our thoughts and hearts to God, however we do that. I do not pray in just one way.

Each day, at some time, I pray the Office. The Office is a structured way of praying with the Psalms and other scriptural readings and prayers. If you look at a *Book of Common Prayer* you'll see Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline. Those are "the Office." The church has been praying these prayers, in roughly this same way, for many, many centuries. I love to pray the Office with someone else (since some of it is responsive). But when I am praying it by myself I content myself in the knowledge that somewhere else in the world, at the exact time that I am praying, there is someone else also praying the Office.

But the Office is a more formal way of praying. I also like to pray more informally—just sort of hanging out with God. I can do that by taking a passage of Scripture and focusing on what it teaches me about God and myself and our relationship. I can do that by being out in nature and letting the beauty of it wash over me and fill my heart with gratitude (the gratitude, of course, is for God's bountiful gifts to us.) I can do that by being in a chapel and just focusing my thoughts on a word or phrase: "Jesus," breathing in. "Love me," breathing out. Or, "Lord God," breathing in. "Help me," breathing out. Or many other variations on that kind of "breathing prayer."

When I am on retreat (I take time to retreat by myself, twice a year) I am often able to get enough rest so that when I close my eyes to focus on God's voice within me I don't start to fall asleep! This kind of meditation prayer takes practice—like learning to have a good dialogue with someone you love. But it's worth the practice.

I pray each time I get a parking place in downtown Milwaukee. "Thank you, God" never hurts. (For the record, I don't think that God got me the parking place, but why not use it as a time to say thank you to God for all the other things that God does for me?)

Sometimes I pray looking at pictures or icons. Sometimes I pray using the prayers (collects) that are in the *Book of Common Prayer*, or other prayers that I have gathered over the years. Often I pray listening to music: Barber's Adagio, Michael Card, the old hymns of the church, etc. Music can swiftly put my heart into a place of prayer.

I pray for each of you and those things you have asked me to pray for (and some you have not!). I pray for my friends, my colleagues, my Bishop. I pray for myself. In all these prayers I use my own words and just talk to God in my heart.

There are so many, many ways to pray. There are lots of books that will offer you suggestions. But the best way to learn to pray is by praying; to find some time in your day when you tell yourself that you are going to focus this time on God and you. What you need to know is, when you have that impulse to pray, God will already be praying for and in you.

Blessings on your prayer time. Signed, the priest