

Advent Greetings

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past year during my visits in many congregations various people have approached me – either from the Vestry, or from the pews – and asked, “How can we get more members to come to this Church?” The question implies that there is some quick answer out there, or that the Bishop, the Staff, the “National Church” or someone else out there has a special program or project, just waiting to be used at the appropriate and precise moment.

I wish that there was such a program. But, if there was, don't you all think that we would have implemented it by now?

There are no quick and easy answers.

Many years ago the founder of the Alban Institute, Loren Meade, wrote a 12 page book, entitled “The Whole Truth, Everything a Congregation Needs to Know in 10 Pages.” (It also included a preface and a postscript.) One of the profound statements was that ‘there are no big answers.’ In the past (primarily during the great Church growth era of the 1950's) congregations looked to the National Body or the Central Office for such things as Sunday School curriculum, Stewardship Resources, Evangelism Programs, etc. We lived and expected to flourish in the old ‘Father knows best’ model that said that someone from ‘on high’ was going to come and fix all of our woes. Meade rightly pointed out that such grand fixes are no longer possible.

As this Season of Advent begins, I am reminded that one of the first days of Advent this year is the Feast of St. Andrew. Andrew was an interesting character. It was Andrew that brought his brother Peter to Christ, and Andrew that became an evangelist long before Peter even knew who Jesus was.

The collect for the Feast of St Andrew reads,

Almighty God, who gave such grace to your apostle Andrew that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ, and brought his brother with him: Give us, who are called by your Holy Word, grace to follow him without delay, and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The collect says much about what we might do to bring more people to our congregations – it could be the answer we've all be looking for:

Andrew readily obeyed the call of Jesus.

Andrew invited his brother.

Andrew did this with utmost haste.

This collect calls us to receive the Grace of God to follow Christ without delay and to bring those who are near to us to Christ's gracious presence.

What a simple, but difficult solution for us to follow.

As we travel through the days of Advent, looking back to the First Coming of Christ, and we look ahead to the Second Coming of Christ, may we open our hearts, our ears and our minds to readily answer God's call to us and to invite others along this journey.

Have a blessed Advent.

In Christ,



The Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop

News Around the Diocese

Newsmakers and Events

In observation of Advent, **Lawrencefield Parish, Wheeling**, will set up a portable labyrinth (loaned by the diocese) in their undercroft. The labyrinth will be open to the public several times a week and instruction in walking the labyrinth will be offered. For details, please contact the Rev. Cynthia Walter at cbwalter@comcast.net.

At right is the newly installed ramp at **St. Stephen's, Romney**, that makes both the church and the fellowship hall handicap accessible. A cement sidewalk now runs from the parking lot behind the church to both ramps into the church and the hall next door. Members of the Vestry, Junior Warden Bladen Lowndes, and engineer Andy Booth drew up the plans and supervised the work. The church recently celebrated its 124th anniversary with a sale, a memorial service and a picnic. The sale raised more than \$1,500 for ministry including the book give-away at a local school.



The **United Thank Offering** Ingathering at Diocesan Convention was over \$10,000. Currently, the total is about \$13,000 for 2009. Several churches presented offerings this year for the first time in a number of years. There is still time for a Fall Ingathering to be scheduled — any time is appropriate. Contributions should be sent to Becky Szabo, 1328 Main Street, Follansbee, WV 26037 by early December for inclusion in 2009. Questions or supply needs (envelopes, boxes, brochures) should also be directed to Becky at Becky8910@aol.com or 304-527-2537. Thank you for your generosity.



Left: **St. Matthew's, Wheeling**, held its first Vacation Bible School in June at St. John's Chapel. The Rev. Richard L. Skaggs, assistant rector, was the director for VBS. Music leaders were JoAnn Dull, Pam Hartman and Robert Troeger. The theme of the week was "Discovery Canyon."

During his September 20th visit to **St. John's, Harpers Ferry**, Bishop Mike baptized adorable Kyleigh Zaria Lynn Hoffman.



A Message from the Health Ministries Commission

Ladies, be it noted that an article in the Johns Hopkins Medical Letter "Health After 50" tells us that women with episodes of chest pain may need to take aggressive action to reduce the risk of a heart attack. It has been found that some women with normal coronary arteries on angiography, but with recurring chest pain, are **three times** more likely to die of a heart attack within five years than women with healthy arteries and no history of chest pain. So be aware that if you have occasions of chest pain but are told that everything is normal, you should still ask for a referral to a cardiologist for a complete cardiac workup. We **MUST** be proactive and take care of ourselves!

Ghosts and Goblins at Emmanuel, Moorefield

Emmanuel, Moorefield, joined in the community celebration of Halloween. The All Hallows Eve worship service was followed by distributing candy to over 200 children. This is the third year that Emmanuel has participated in the program. The program was such a success the last two years that the Methodist church followed their lead and opened their doors this year, too!





Left: Bishop Mike visited the *Food for the Journey* Food Pantry at **Church of the Transfiguration, Buckhannon**, earlier this year. The Food Pantry was started in 2004 with volunteers and donations from the community. The program began operating under the auspices of the Episcopal Diocese of WV in 2008. Food is distributed to 60-70 families on the third Thursday of each month at the Transfiguration Parish Hall. In this photo, the Bishop is offering prayers for the new pantry room, freezer and sidewalk. These improvements were made possible by his generosity.



Eighty-four people from at least four dioceses and four denominations attended **Mt. Grace VI** in Huntington Sept. 11-12. Pictured above at the closing Eucharist: Bishop Price (So. Ohio), Archdeacon Faith Perrizo (WV), and Carol Callahan, (Deacon in So. Ohio and member of the Mt. Grace Planning Board).



Bishop's Slide 2009

The weather on Saturday, October 17, was rainy and colder than normal, but that didn't stop Bishop Mike from strapping on a harness and sliding 700 feet down a zip line as part of the Bridge Day Festivities near Fayetteville. He took this brave 'leap of faith' to raise money for the Church Periodical Club (CPC), an institution that provides free books, tapes and magazines for seminarians, inmates at the Women's Prison in Alderson, and the Highland Educational Project in McDowell County.

All Saints Celebration at St. Matthews, Charleston



On Wednesday, October 28th, many of the Sunday School children at St. Matthews in Charleston attended 'Faith and Fun with Fr. Bill' to learn about the origins of their names, and to learn about All Saints Day. Each child then chose a Saint to represent on All Saints Day, and made a sash to wear bearing that Saint's name and picture.



On Sunday, November 1st, over 50 children dressed in their sashes and attended Sunday School. Just before The Peace, the children entered the church behind a banner bearer to the sound of "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God." The senior Sunday School class also carried in a model of the Ark of the Covenant that they had made. The children stood around the altar for a short interaction with Fr. Bill, before the "Saints" were sent out to spread themselves among the congregation.



(Submitted by Lucy Templeton of St. Matthews)



The Ninety-and-Nine: A Parable

By Canon Donald Vinson

A certain group of shepherds had a hundred sheep. They cared for them diligently, but they kept them in their sheep-fold. These sheep were a fine and high-quality breed. The sheep didn't seem to want to mingle on the pastures with other sheep, anyway. The shepherds sheared the sheep regularly, and supported their operation by the sale of wool. They didn't send any sheep to the slaughter-house, though. They had put out of their mind that domestic sheep have such a purpose in life. They considered it their duty to care for the sheep, and protect them—within the fold.

As time went by, the sheep had lambs, but nearly all of the lambs found a way out of the fold and into the pastures and hillsides beyond, where they did mingle with and sometimes join other flocks, with other shepherds. Some of the older sheep also escaped the fold, while the shepherds weren't paying attention. Then, many of the older sheep began to die off. The shepherds were saddened by these losses. They gave the deceased members of their flock magnificent and moving burials. What they lacked in knowledge of barbeque, they made up for in funeral ceremony. The flock dwindled.

It came to pass that, at last, there was only one elderly ewe left in the pen. They offered to take her out to pasture, but she did not want to go. She picked around inside the sheepfold, seemingly reminiscing about the way things were in better times. The shepherds themselves did a lot of pining for earlier times with a large, healthy flock.

Finally Frank, who counted as a radical in this staid group, spoke up.

"This is just sad," Frank said. "What we need to do is get off our butts and go out into the fields and the valleys and round up our sheep, and bring them home."

"Who would watch after Alice?" asked Ed. "She's all we have left, and the wolves might get her if we go out. Anyway, she counts on us to sit with her and keep her company."

"And what if the sheep refuse to come back? They've had a taste of freedom out there on the open pastures. They might not find life in the fold very exciting anymore, especially the younger ones."

"If we are patient," opined Melba, "they will come back. We just have to maintain the sheep-fold, and be ready to open the gate and let them in."

Maintaining the sheepfold had been a major preoccupation in recent years. With wool from only Alice, there just wasn't enough to keep things up like they used to do. But it had been a long time since any sheep had applied for readmission. Frank looked dubious.

"What if the sheep-fold is part of our problem? What if we just give it up and gather the sheep out yonder, where they want to be, anyway?" he challenged, knowing he was on shaky ground now. "Maybe we could have just a simpler, more flexible kind of enclosure that would be easy to move and adapt to new conditions." He had a desperate look in his eyes.

The others quietly gazed at him as if he had grown a second nose. Everyone knew that the quality and traditional design of the sheep-fold were of paramount importance. This reality hardly needed defending against such lunacy. Frank just needed to settle down and get hold of himself.

In a moment, Ed took up the argument matter-of-factly. "I don't think I want any of those old sheep back, anyway. They wouldn't fit in here. Let the other shepherds have them."

"They have tattoos," said Melba.

"And have you seen them eat?" said Ed. "It isn't pretty."

"I don't like the noises they make," added Melba, "They don't know the old, dignified 'baa' of our chosen breed. No class at all."

"Can you guarantee that if we leave Alice and go out looking for more sheep, it will even work?" asked Ed, with an air of having played the Rook card.

Frank was stumped. He realized that there was risk in what he had suggested. He also had a certain attachment to the old ways. But the old ways were gone! All they had left was sweet old Alice, whom he observed standing obliviously apart, placidly tormenting a tuft of grass with her few remaining teeth. She belched, as genteelly as one can.

Frank knew he had a choice to make, and he must make it soon. Should he stick around with Ed and Melba, reminiscing about the old, familiar days, until poor Alice went the way of all flesh, and the sheep-fold had to be shut down for good? Or should he leave the one sheep on her own,--and his comrades as well, if they chose that-- and head out into the rough, unfamiliar terrain, in search of the ninety-and-nine "lost" sheep of his fold? It would be a scary move.

But, in the shepherding business, doesn't one need some sheep?

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