



the FONT

St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church, Hardwick, Vermont

Fall 2015

To all the people of the community of St. John the Baptist,

We are entering the holy season of Advent, a time when the Church celebrates the new year. Advent is full of promise and expectation. As we await the coming of Christ at Christmas, we also live in joyful expectation of Christ's coming again. Even though the Church has been waiting for this second coming of Christ for a rather long time, this nonetheless offers us an inspiring guide to living. We live as though the reign of Christ is imminent, so we live in such a manner that the values of Christ – those values that we associate with Christian living – are already abroad in the land because they are imbedded in our hearts and in our behaviors. By anticipating Christ's coming in this manner, we thereby help Christ to be present, now.

I love the music of Advent; these hymns are my very favorite of the whole year. They give voice to comfort, promise – and our Christian duty, as well. From Hymn 67:

*Comfort, comfort ye my people, speak ye peace thus saith our God;
Comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem, of the peace that waits for them;
Tell her that her sins I cover, and her warfare now is over.*

These are welcome words of hope and reassurance. At the same time, we also hear words that direct us to our role in this promise. We are to prepare the way for God within our own selves; from Hymn 76:

Then cleansed be every breast from sin; make straight the way for God within, And let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come.

That's within ourselves; at the same time, we no less reach out in Christian mission to others (also from Hymn 76):

*To heal the sick stretch out thine hand, and bid the fallen sinner stand;
Shine forth and let thy light restore earth's own true loveliness once more.*

So this is another instance of the classic Anglican 'both/and' conjunction: We both are comforted, reassured, and we look outward, toward others; the two are inseparable. I think we have seen this in the life of our parish, of late.

At our most recent vestry meeting we heard a financial report that was most reassuring and comforting.

For a number of months now running, most notably in the month just past, parish income has significantly exceeded budgeted expectations; at the same time, expenses are either on track or below budget. For perspective, I have been told that there have been times in recent years when the future of our parish has been in some doubt. And now look at what is happening – in the financial realm, at least.

But also at that most recent vestry meeting, we heard about results of our outreach. A couple of months ago, we endeavored to raise funds in support of ministry in Zimbabwe, through our guest, Reverend Shingi Kaseke. Father Kaseke specifically asked for funds to help repair his village's windmill, which was desperately needed, to provide water so his parishioners could grow crops, and feed themselves. We have now just heard that the windmill has been repaired and is indeed now watering the crops. We also heard that while Father Kaseke was in Vermont he visited three other churches (all larger than St. John the Baptist) and received donations from them also, yet our 'little' church provided more than half the total he received!

So look at what is happening – what you are doing – in the realm of our outreach. 'Both/and,' these are connected, indeed.

Ultimately, our Advent call – indeed, our Christian call – is to have sufficient faith (promise) that our own needs are being provided for (comfort), so that our true satisfaction comes from accomplishing the Christian duty God has given us.

There is a fine, timeless prayer that expresses this. It is from St. Ignatius of Loyola; I leave you with this prayer:

Dearest Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to labor and not to seek to rest; to give of myself and not to ask for reward, except the reward of knowing that I am doing your will. Amen.

~ John

WHO IS DOING WHAT AT ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Priest-in-Partnership:

The Rev. John Perry

Senior Warden:

Jan Roy

Junior Warden:

David Gaillard

Administrative Assistant.:

Elizabeth (Lisa) Reynolds

Organist and Music Director:

Phillip Isaacson

Vestry:

Leland Alper, Nina Church, Samantha Friend, David Gaillard, Marilyn May, Jan Roy, Renee Wahler

Treasurer:

Renee Wahler

Clerk to the Vestry:

Marilyn May

Altar Guild:

Bobbie Chase, Mary Jane Dexter, Marilyn May, Kathleen Ponder, Norma Spaulding, Renee Wahler

Communications:

Ellen Halperin, Steven Young

Diocesan Convention Delegates:

Jon Morey, Durrelle Whitmore, Nina Church

Alternate: Steve Young, Ruth Gaillard

Episcopal Relief and Development:

Mary Jane Dexter

Finance:

Steve Young (chair),

Nigel Friend, Ellen Halperin

Northeast Deanery Delegate:

Norma Spaulding, Mary Margaret Fondriest

St. John's Prayer Chain:

Jane Bartrum, Nina Church, Claire Dumas, Mary Margaret Fondriest, Ellen Halperin, Jan Roy, Norma Spaulding

UTO Representative:

Jan Roy

Website Administration:

Jon Morey, Lisa Reynolds

Church office hours:

Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Poverty, Discernment, Generosity, Love

Poverty, here it is again. The last time I wrote about poverty was after Maggie died. She had asked the prayer group to pray for an end to extreme poverty. I didn't really know exactly what she had in mind. Now I wish she were here so she could help us. I need her voice, her clear mind, and her faith. I'm also missing Zarina. Discernment was one of her words. She did have a discerning mind and a generous heart. In her ministry as our deacon, she was in charge of the Discretionary Fund. From time to time, she would tell us of a need: someone had run out of fuel, someone couldn't pay their rent, etc. She would also let us know if the fund was running low. In her letting us know, she was essentially asking us for help as she went through her own process of discernment in deciding how to allocate the funds. I trusted her and knew she wouldn't ask frivolously.

Now I wonder about our generosity, my generosity. Sometimes I can't find it. I'm too quick to say no. I need to learn how to say yes. I remember once when I was visiting my younger sister Suzanne in Oregon. She was wearing some great red wool socks. I said: I love those socks! Without missing a beat, she immediately took them off and gave them to me. Wow! I was stunned. It wasn't what I expected! To this day, I love those socks and I love her generous spirit. I think of the migration happening in Europe. What if it were happening here, in Vermont, in Plainfield? What if the refugees were walking down Route 2 right by my house? What would I do? Would I open my home, my front yard, my backyard, my refrigerator to them? What would I give them. How would I help? Would I and all of my neighbors open our doors and provide what we could? Where is the line where we no longer can say no? Where is the line where the only answer is yes? Would I give them my favorite red wool socks? I don't know.



I think love helps me to be generous. My compassion also helps me to be generous. Compassion requires a deep understanding of other. And that understanding requires careful listening, watching, attending to, seeing, hearing, and sometimes intuiting a need. I recently read a poignant piece in the New York Times written by

Muriel Dimen, a psychoanalyst in NYC. She was writing about a last ditch effort with a patient who had announced she was ending therapy and of her disappointment with her therapist. As the session was quickly coming to a close, Dimen, in a last ditch effort, asked in a new way:

“Let me ask you this, just for my own clarification and edification: Was there ever a time when you asked me for help, for suggestion and advice, and I ignored it? Or refused?” She (the patient) shook her head. “No,” she said. “Because you didn't offer, I didn't ask.” Suddenly, I began to see the light. “Just like with your parents,” I noted. She nodded, and I knew we were close to something important.” *

It's easy for me to get inside “I didn't ask”. I know about the fear of impinging on other, fear of being rejected, fear of the No and the resulting shame and humiliation. What I don't know enough about is ‘not offering’. Does that have to do with not looking, not seeing, not hearing not allowing myself to receive the need of other, to be open to it and then discern how to respond? Is it that I can't be bothered, that I deny my connection to other and therefore it's not for me to respond?

We at St. John's are all connected to each other in some way or other by the very fact that we worship together under the same roof. Because we're all human, we all have needs that vary from time to time. They might not fall necessarily into the category of poverty but they are needs so, in a sense, poverty of mind, body, and spirit. And we don't always ask for what we need. Nevertheless, I wonder how we can open ourselves to offer help of some kind, in some way, such that we/other feel seen and recognized and embraced in our need.

* Dimen, Muriel. New York Times, 11/3/2015.

Claire Dumas

The Episcopal Diocesan Convention
Nov 6-7, 2015
St Paul's Cathedral, Burlington

I. Call to convention by Bishop Ely

The Bishop talked about Jazzed about God's Mission (the theme of the convention) as a improvisational blending of voices in jazz music, which he likened to the conversation of diverse voices with different stories and backgrounds and which he described as "an unselfish opening to what the other is offering and a willingness to help others be brilliant as possible."

He reminded us again of the Vermont diocese's call to become more missional, saying that "one of the most important components of diocesan ministry is the support and encouragement of ministry at the local level – where the "rubber meets the road".

From the Rutland convocation in June, 2015 came a resolution "to name, share and support the local ministry approach of each congregation ... as it moves to discover in greater depth what God is up to in our neighborhoods and communities".

"I believe we need to increase our awareness of and attention to the root causes of economic injustice, income inequality, environmental justice, racism, bias on the basis of gender identity and expression, violence in its many forms including gun violence ... Our faith communities and buildings need to be known as places of sanctuary and welcome, places of hospitality and healing, places of compassion and justice."
- Bishop Ely

The diocese will implement this mission as it reviews loan and grant programs and the mission of Rock Point. The resolution does not offer a general roadmap but encourages each congregation to determine it's best "local approach to mission and ministry".

Following this, we enjoyed a delightful production, Out of the Lion's Mouth, a reworking of the tale of Daniel in the lion's den in a musical mystery play with piano, clarinet and the brilliant St Michael's Choir School chorus.

II. Day Two -- Business Meeting.

We heard reports from a number of sources including: The Brookhaven Treatment Center in Chelsea, VT which provides clinical, educational and family retreats

for an average of 15 boys with severe emotional and learning difficulties.

The Canons Committee, the Commission on Ministry, the Committee on Discernment and the Communications ministry which played a prominent role in the convention with excellent audiovisual presentations.

The diocesan website, www.diovermont.org, offers an excellent clearinghouse for news, governance and resources of the diocese. A link

for the convention provides further links to Bishop Ely's address, reports, budgets and resolutions passed.



Resolutions passed included:

A. ...to continue support of the Sustainable Development goals of the United Nations

B. ... requesting the Presiding Bishop to convene an interfaith coalition to provide moral leadership for the establishment of economic justice in our country. I encourage you to have a look at this discussion of economic justice and the churches role in addressing this issue.

C. ... The Local Mission Resolution which calls on ... " ... each congregation in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont commit to an intentional and renewed exploration of its approach to Local Mission during the course of the next two years (2016 and 2017) in order to deepen our common understanding and practice of becoming more missional."

In the discussion of this resolution, speakers made a distinction between ministry and mission, saying that this resolution challenges us with the mission to step beyond traditional outreach into our neighborhoods -- what another called our "faith habitat" -- increasing our attention, involvement and openness to discover new partners. Another speaker said "ours is a small parish with few resources. Are you telling us that we no longer have an excuse" to not be involved.

So, what is becoming more missional. I'm not sure. There is no roadmap but it is certain that each congregation will be called and will be supported to be more deeply involved in the larger community, in new ways, with greater openness to new partners in our "Jesus revolution".

- delegates Jon Morey and Durrelle Whitmore

A Report from The Senior Warden

This past summer and fall has been busy here at St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church. As I gathered my thoughts for this article, I listed what I remember has happened. We had a wonderful picnic on the lawn during the summer. The picnic had a variety of delicious food prepared by parishioners. It was graced by the beautiful garden that Kathleen has created. The garden brings joy to parishioners every Sunday as we enter the church. Village residents are enjoying it every time they pass by.

Our yard sale and silent auction generated a good sum for the Hardwick Elementary School needy children and other local charities. We have donated over \$400 to the elementary school and the Vestry will decide where to give the rest of the funds. Mary Rakowsky was stellar in arranging everything from gathering in items for the auction to organizing the yard sale. Norma and I helped on the sale day. Next year we are planning on having the sale earlier in the year so it can be staged outside.

In October, Father Keseke from Zimbabwe, visited us. He met with church members and the Perry's for dinner, preached the sermon and talked at coffee hour. Church members were incredibly generous in donating to him so the windmill in his village could be repaired. We recently learned that it is now working.

We continue to care for our own parishioners in many ways. Individuals reach out to others and we also have been asking for special offerings throughout the season. The response is heart warming. The need keeps increasing and there are many responses. The Food Pantry assembled and passed out Thanksgiving boxes last week. Christmas boxes will be similarly assembled before Christmas.

Our Treasurer, Renee Wahler, reports that pledges and plate donations are ahead of budget while expenses are on target or a bit lower. That is a good place for this Parish to find itself. The Vestry voted to donate to Rock Point School to support its mission. Marilyn May is on its board and is able to answer questions you might have about the school. As many of you remember, her son, Michael, attended Rock Point for 4 years. We have also supported our church youth



attending summer camps for the last two years, thanks to generous donations from parishioners and other community members.

It is wonderful to have John Perry here as our Priest-in-Partnership. We are benefitting from his leadership both in worship and in the parish workings.

We have enjoyed a long warm fall, but snow is slowly coming... as I write we have a white dusting around our house. The harbingers of winter are here.

Jan

The Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross (SCHC)

Over the years I have spoken of the SCHC at church occasionally, mentioning the retreats and other programs we run at our summer home, Adelynrood, in Byfield, Massachusetts.



Who are we? We are a diverse group of women, both laywomen and clergy, called to live our lives under a rule of intercessory prayer, thanksgiving and simplicity of life. In 1884, our two founders, Emily Morgan and Adelyn Howard envisioned a group of women united in prayer and companionship. Today the SCHC is comprised of almost 900 women from the Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion who pray and work with intentional concern for the unity of all God's people, God's mission in the world, social justice, and peace and reconciliation. The life of the society revolves around 35 chapters, mainly in the US, but stretching as far as India, and around the Society's retreat and conference Center, Adelynrood.

Every summer the SCHC offers a variety of programs and retreats on religious, educational, and social justice topics at Adelynrood. These are set in the context of her Holy Routine of worship. Hospitality is also offered to the homeless, to caregivers and to other groups as part of our social justice ministry. Religious and educational groups rent conference space to host their own retreat and meetings. All of these activities are supported by Companion volunteers who come from throughout the society to live in work and community. A devoted member of St. John's, Dodo Jacobs, was a Companion and served as Society treasurer years ago.



The SCHC, together with Virginia Theological Seminary recently sponsored the Anglican Women at Prayer conference and follow up events designed to invite all women of the world wide Anglican Communion into shared prayer and dialogue.

Marcia Stone

The Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross
www.anglicanwomenatprayer.org

Teleological Thinking

About the worst accusation that can be made to a contemporary scientist, especially an evolutionary biologist, is that she or he is guilty of teleological thinking. The term originates from the Greek word *telios*, which means, essentially, a goal. So teleological thinking contains the implication that natural processes are leading toward a goal, or endpoint. Teleological thinking isn't too difficult to avoid for most geologists, who can see the earth—and, by natural extension, other planets—as undergoing continuous change, but with no specific end in sight. It becomes more difficult for historical geologists, who have a difficult time in avoiding the concept that, if you use the fossil record to explicate the earth's history, there is a clear indication of progression from

fossils of simple, one-celled organisms dominating the earth's ecosystems in the distant past, to the modern world of complexity and conscious thought. And the idea that progression—progress—is leading toward something—some final, stable, perfect, point—is hard to avoid. Even if the end is unclear, or beyond imagination, this is teleological thinking.

The contemporary cadre of atheist biologists have honed in on routing all traces of teleological thinking from their field, as well as other realms of inquiry. The leading spokesman has been Richard Dawkins, whose book 'The Selfish Gene' set the tone for this movement. The idea is that an organism's physical body is the gene's way of producing more copies of itself. As I state it, this is, of course, an oversimplification; the main contention, though, is that evolutionary change is entirely random. Some chance alterations in the genetic structure that controls the physical body of an organism lead to increased 'fitness'—the ability to survive and reproduce—and these changes will be incorporated in offspring, further modified down through the generations. Since every miniscule step toward the final, or present, state of the organism is guided by pure chance, there can be no such thing as a goal, or an end point (other than extinction,) or a destiny. From here, according to this line of reasoning, it's not a very large step to saying that there is no purpose in life—which is pretty close to saying that there is—can be—no God. Or, at least, no god who takes any interest in the trajectory of events in the material universe.

Western religions are so inextricably linked to teleological thinking that it is hard to conceive of what would be left if it were to be eliminated. Whether it be the coming of the Messiah, the creation of the New Jerusalem, or the universal caliphate, there is a built-in end point. It can lie in either the perfection of this world, or in preparation for heaven or paradise. Since the end point often involves the end of time itself, there's no need to consider what comes 'after' it.

Teleological thinking has gotten a tremendous boost in Western culture over the past few centuries, where the idea of progress has become so firmly entrenched that it is almost a religion in itself. When, over the course of only a few generations, we can see a culture changing from marveling at the newly invented steam engine to exploring space, it's hard not to see us all careening full tilt toward something so radically different from the immediate present that it can hardly even be imagined. Of course, the doom-saying, not traditionally teleological version of this concept is that we are heading toward

ultimate disaster, fomented by natural selection having become (as a result of random events) perverse and destructive.

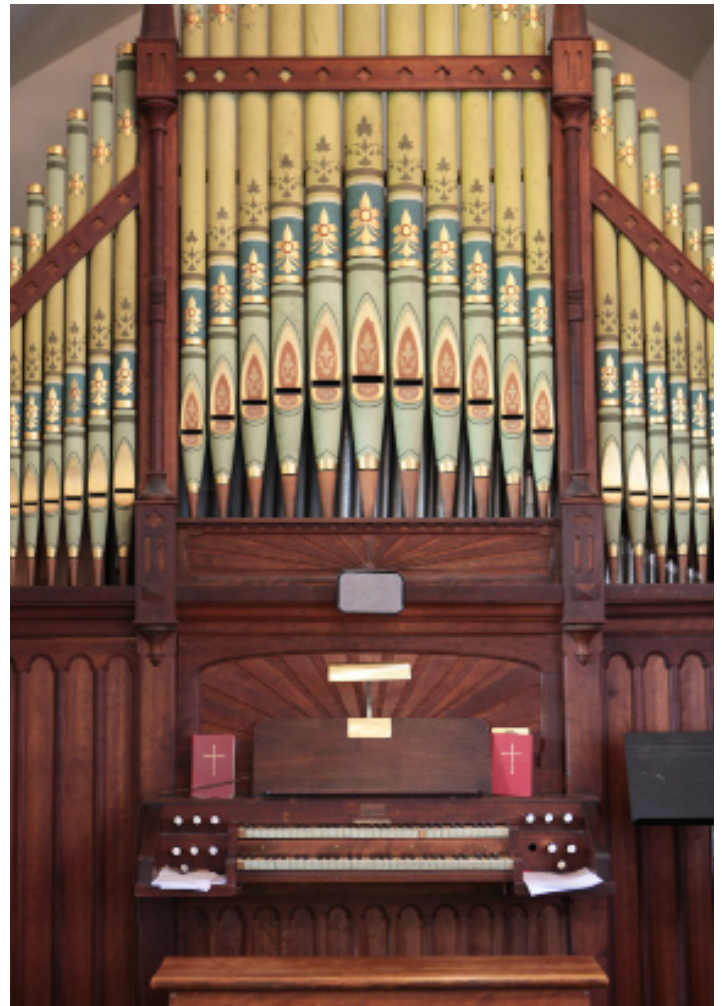
Teleological thinking doesn't need to be religious in the traditional sense. 'godless communism' is based on Marxism which, itself, posits an end state which is a workers' paradise, absent a church. Many of the excesses of the 20th Century, especially those associated with Nazism—the existence of a 'master race' and the development of the 'science' of eugenics—are examples. And not all religions exalt teleological thinking. Buddhism postulates a universe that is ever in a state of change, but without beginning or end, with the only appropriate goals either exiting the endless process or remaining in it in order to alleviate the suffering that is the lot of those beings who are trapped within the loop.

Although Charles Darwin himself emphasized the random nature of natural selection—much to the consternation of his wife—teleological thinking could still be found among evolutionary biologists a century after the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Probably the last serious proponent was the Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who proposed that humankind was in the process of reaching toward the 'noosphere,' or realm of the perfected conscious mind and the ultimate 'Omega Point.' This is why Teilhard has been pretty well excised from serious scientific literature for the past couple of generations. (He got similar short shrift from the Church, for more or less opposite reasons.) Still, an even more famous, and more mainline, evolutionary biologist, J. B. S. Haldane, is quoted as saying: "teleology is like a mistress to a biologist: he cannot live without her, but he is unwilling to be seen with her in public." Haldane claimed to be an atheist, but an even more famous quote of his is: "My suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose."

Haldane's embrace of 'queerness' provides the key to an accommodation between science and contemporary theology. The reason that this has been missed by the modern scientific atheists is that they have devoted most of their considerable intellectual talents to doctrinaire science and have ignored and misunderstood the potential contributions of theology. The theology they criticize is widely considered by modern theologians as reflecting shallow, oversimplified approaches to the profound mysteries that are the true realm of inquiry for contemporary—and many earlier—religious scholars. Physicists are convinced of the existence of dark matter, a substance that makes up the majority of the matter in

the universe, but about which we know virtually nothing. Something similar could be said of the aspects of the spiritual universe that theologians contemplate. But, sooner or later, there will probably be a generally accepted understanding of the nature of dark matter, while the nature of love, charity, and joy will likely remain mysterious forever, to be approached only via metaphor, insight, and wisdom. And it probably will always be difficult, if not impossible, to separate these God-like qualities from a sense that they provide an impetus toward a more perfected universe—one that is grander, richer, and more joyful than that which we can comprehend in our present, still evolving, condition.

Steve Young



The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3-10, paraphrased by Rev. John W. Perry

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the ones not filled with certainty, not filled with strength, not filled with overweening confidence; for they know how much they need God.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the ones who do not resign themselves to the world as it presently is – the ones who instead lament: lament wars, hunger, injustice, loneliness, affliction; for they share in the heart of God.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are the ones who have little power in this world, and the ones who choose not to exert power; for through their humility, they leave room in which God can work.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the ones who so long to know and to do the will of God; for they already accomplish God's will more than they realize, and are closer to God than they can imagine.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the ones who know themselves to be bound up with God's other children, and who live accordingly; for so also is God bound up with them.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the ones who long to have their thoughts and feelings attuned to God; for God is in their eyes, and with their eyes they already do see God, all around.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are the ones who work toward whatever is needed for meaningful life, offering hope where there is deprivation or despair; for they build peace, one life at a time, for God's children, as God's children.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are we, when we do these things. Or, when we strive to do these things, with God's help. And we do not stop to count the cost. For it is then that we live, alongside God, in the Kingdom. Not only as something that will be given us in the future, as a reward. But also as a thing that we live. In the present time. Here. And now.

**St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church
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