

The Rector's Chronicle

A Newsletter of the Church of St Michael the Archangel

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Dear parishioners and friends,

From a Christian standpoint, the main event in December is Christmas: not so much for the presents and the lights and the tree, but for the Incarnation of our Lord, and His renewed coming to our hearts in the Christmas Communion. It is the Incarnation which has changed human history (and it is quite proper that we number our years from that event, which divides history into "before Christ" and "years of grace"). Jesus is God's only Son, and the Incarnation is an event never to be repeated. Indeed, since He accomplished his work of redemption on Good Friday, reconciling sinful man to God, there is no need for another incarnation. His return at the end of the age will be in glory and power, to forever abolish evil and remake the sinful world into a godly world.

The Incarnation is a perpetual source of wonder for us: that God would be willing to enter into the conditions of human life, to be born and grow up, and then having grown up, to die – all to deliver man from the consequences of his own actions (things God told him not to do in the first place!). We rarely see anything approaching such generosity in a human being. To see it in God, upon whom we have no claim, is more wonderful still. Christmas, and the Babe in the stable, evoke our wonder because of what they tell us about God. Christmas is a wonderful time of the year not just because it is a season of good will among men, but because God's glory is both hidden and manifested in Bethlehem.

As last year, there will be a Christmas Eve Mass at the Chapel of Peace at West Laurel Hill Cemetery at 6:30 p.m. I appreciate the Cemetery's willingness to open late for us for this service. On Christmas Day, there will be a low Mass at the rectory at 10. I know you will want to be at Mass on Christmas, and I hope one of these will be convenient for everyone. Note that several Holy Days follow Christmas: St Stephen's (the Church's first martyr) on December 26th; St John the Evangelist on the 27th, and Holy Innocents on the 28th (which is also the first Sunday after Christmas). January 1st is the Feast of Christ's Circumcision. Mass on the Feast of the Circumcision is at 10 a.m. at the rectory; the other days are on the usual schedule (St Stephen's at 9 a.m., St John's at 9:30 at the rectory; Holy Innocents at 8 and 10 at West Laurel Hill). The parish Christmas party will follow the ten o'clock Mass on Sunday, January 4th. Speak with Barbara Freeman if you would like to bring something for the party. In addition to the regular Sunday morning confession time (9:30-9:45), I'll be available after Mass on Saturday the 20th and on Sunday the 21st at 9:15. I'm happy to make arrangements for other times as well. Last but not least, memorial contributions for Christmas altar flowers are welcome.

Karl Spaeth has again invited all of us to come to his family's private Christmas tree sale in Mertztown. The sale is this weekend, Saturday and Sunday, December 6th and 7th. You pick out a tree to your liking, and they cut and bale it for you, and help you load it onto your car. They also provide hot cider and hot chocolate, and have wreaths and greens for sale as well as trees. It makes a nice outing in the country. Be sure to tell them you are from St Michael's, since they make a donation to the parish for all St Michael's sales.

Advent Quiet Day

Advent is always a particularly busy time of the year. Yet for us as Christians, it is an important time of preparation for the Christmas Feast. Such spiritual preparation requires time, and quiet, if we are to prepare our hearts for the Coming of such a Guest. Certainly self-examination and penitence should play a part in that preparation, ideally leading to a sacramental confession before Christmas. In addition, it is useful to set aside some special time with no other purpose than to be with God. Doing this with others at the Quiet Day is good for many, since when we try to do it on our own, the quiet time so often gets squeezed out by other things which seem more immediate and demanding.

The Advent Quiet Day is scheduled for Saturday, December 13th, at All Saints' Church in Wynnwood. This year, it will be a joint Quiet Day with All Saints'. They are accustomed to the Daily Office at their quiet days, so we will begin with Morning Prayer at 9, followed by Mass at 9:30. Breakfast, silence and the addresses follow. I will be doing the addresses. We'll close with Evening Prayer at 2. As always, you are welcome to bring friends. We'll provide something for breakfast after Mass, before the silence begins. Please bring something for lunch; coffee and tea provided.

Homework Club Grant

Since we left the property at St James, we have continued our after school tutoring program at the Gatehouse of Laurel Hill Cemetery on the Ridge in the "old" neighborhood. We are grateful for their hospitality which has allowed us to continue the program. The children involved all come from that neighborhood, so a site there is essential. Laurel Hill gives us the space free of charge. There is, however, a small cost each time for security, since our program runs past their usual closing time. This cost has been covered by an annual grant from the Russell P Heuer and Elizabeth C. Heuer Foundation. I am pleased to announce that this grant has been renewed for 2009. This \$1300 grant will cover the out of pocket costs for the security. To cover the costs of the snacks and materials, I would invite you to join with the volunteers in the Friends of Homework Club. If seven of you would become Friends by contributing \$30 each, then we can cover the costs without impinging on the parish budget. Please let Barbara or me know. Thanks!

The children come after school two days a week, and first work on their homework with the volunteer tutors. They then receive help with reading, math facts, and other enrichment activities, and play educational games. The session closes with a short prayer service. There are currently five or six children involved. Barbara Freeman oversees the program. Also volunteering: Beth and Nancy Ousley, Janis Wilson and Melissa Smith. The student numbers are intentionally kept small so that an adult can work individually with each child. Barbara reports that this approach works, and that we have seen good progress with all of the children.

I am most grateful to the Heuer Foundation for their support of the program, so that we can continue it without stress to the parish budget. Thanks goes to a good friend of the parish, Steve Woodward, who suggested that we approach the Heuer Foundation in the first place, and has kept this going for us. I am also grateful to Mrs Freeman and the others who help with Homework Club: they are the ones who make the difference. Additional volunteers would enable us to help more children. Any takers? Homework Club meets Tuesday and Wednesday (this will shift to Wednesday and Thursday after the first of the year), 3:45-5:30. For more information, please speak with Mrs Freeman. Please keep the children in your prayers.

Missions

Since we joined the Anglican Church in America, we have been committed to sending ten per cent of our pledge and plate offerings to the Diocese of the Eastern United States. It is only right and proper that we should support our Diocese. (I would note that ten per cent is generally far less than most ECUSA dioceses demand from their parishes.) Since for many years previous we were not supporting a diocese, we have instead funded in a modest way a number of missions, foreign and domestic. Even with the funds going to the Diocese, the vestry has wished to maintain support for some of these worthy efforts.

This year we are going to continue our support for **Christ Academy**, a small classical school for boys operating on a shoe-string budget at Grace Reformed Episcopal Church in Collingdale. Two of our boys attend there. They have an expanding mission with children of Liberian immigrants. We also continue our support for **Mercy Vocational High School** on Hunting Park Avenue near St James. This is the only private, Christian vocational high school in the country. The vast majority of their students are "at risk" in one way or another, and the school gives them an alternative to the public high schools where most would be lost. Virtually all of their graduates find jobs upon graduation or go on to further education (some to college). Mercy also provided space to us for a children's Christmas party after we left St James. We are also sending a donation to the **Whosoever Gospel Mission**, a residential Germantown mission to drug addicts. The Mission has just reopened after a devastating arson fire more than two years ago. We also support **Harvest Ministries**, a Manayunk-based work with those struggling with sexual addictions. With the easy, anonymous availability of pornography on the Internet, the need and demand for Harvest's services is expanding. They have the expertise to deal with this difficult and increasingly common problem, which afflicts Christians as well as non-Christians. Harvest puts out a newsletter, of which we receive a number of copies – available with the other publications on Sundays.

We are also continuing our support for the national **Prayer Book Society**, whose publication many of you read. They work to continue the use and doctrine of the traditional Book of Common Prayer. We also receive **The Christian Challenge**, and a fine publication from **Forward in Faith-United Kingdom**, of which we are members.

For foreign missions, support is going to the **International Anglican Fellowship**, the missionary arm of the Anglican Church in America. The IAF receives requests for aid from Traditional Anglican Communion parishes and dioceses around the world, often from areas of profound material need. Our hope is that this money may begin an ongoing relation between St Michael's and a church or diocese in another part of the world – as we have had in the past with churches in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and Guyana. This is the largest single part of our missions budget.

Ordo Calendars

The 2009 ordo calendars should arrive around the first of the year. We found out late in the fall that Turner's Funeral Home will not be sponsoring the calendars as they have in years past. This meant that we had to make alternative arrangements. I am happy to report that we will have the same edition of the calendar as we've had before, though we will need to pay for them ourselves. We will give them out as in the past, but also hope for a contribution of \$3 each from those of you who can afford it.

A reminder: please return your pledge cards for 2009 by December 14th. The vestry will be meeting later that week to draft a budget for 2009, which requires a reasonable idea what our income will be for 2009. Extra pledge cards are available at West Laurel Hill on Sundays. For those of you who plan ahead, the annual meeting of the Church of St Michael the Archangel is the first Sunday in February, which in 2009 is February 1st.

Kudos

Thanks this month to:

- all who contributed to the Christmas "shoe box" project, and the parish youth for putting the boxes together. Forty-seven shoe boxes were assembled by the combined multi-parish youth group.
- Pat Lincoln and Chris Jordan for the gift of a monstrance.
- Mark and Angela Johnson for the gift of a violet cope, in thanksgiving for their children, Elizabeth and Mitchell.
- my mother for the folding and stuffing of the recent *Chronicle* and pledge mailings.
- Barbara Freeman for preparing the materials for the Heuer grant application.
- Vicki Daniels (our accounting Warden) and James Altena for their presentations at the congregational stewardship meeting.

Faithfully,

