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Newsletter January 2014

Light in the Darkness

The week before Christmas my sons and I whisked John away for an early celebration of his 70th birthday. While the timing of the trip caused me (before and since) to question my sanity, it was the only week before June that everyone could make work. As we planned the adventure, we told John he was going to Milwaukee. In truth, we organized for ourselves a week in Puerto Rico.

We spent five nights on the island of Vieques basking in the light. Certainly, we enjoyed plentiful sunshine as we sat on the terrace of our house, snoozed on sandy beaches, and snorkeled off rocky piers. Given the 30-second downpours that characterize the Puerto Rican “rainy season,” the tropics treated us to single and double rainbows that arced across the sky. At night, in the words of the Tallis Canon, “the moon took up the wondrous tale,” with the full moon lighting our way as we walked into Isabel Segundo for dinner.

The most amazing light show the island offered was the bioluminescence of Mosquito Bay. As veterans of *The Life of Pi*, Gardy and Tiffanie knew all about glow-in-the-dark-water having modeled the special effects of the swimming fish and breaching whale of *Pi* on videos from this bright bay. With clouds drifting across the moon to provide steady darkness, our kayak paddles and hands dipped into the water and came alive with the light of millions of tiny plankton. Specks of bright light glowed from our fingertips and swimming fish illuminated their own paths through the water.

But, of course, the truly transforming light was the light of love. The sunshine, moon beams, rainbows, and magical beads of light that made a lasting impression were the lights of love-- lights that get taken for granted so often in the busy-ness of life. As we celebrated John, we all remembered the gift and grace of lives woven together by love.

During Christmas and Epiphany seasons, we open ourselves to Jesus who is the light of the world; who is love incarnate. In the midst of the stress, sorrow, and struggles of our lives, we sometimes forget God’s gift of light and love. We can ignore God’s promise of bringing light to the darkness; we can miss the bright star that leads us to Jesus; we can close our ears and eyes to the bright light from heaven that claims us as beloved children of God; and we can be blind to the transforming light of God who makes all things new. But these are the signs and symbols of the season.

And so as we begin a new calendar year in the midst of this season of light, resolve to look for the light, and to let God’s holy light shine in and through each one of us. If we Christians do not consciously and intentionally bask in God’s light and love and share it with one another and our community, there is little hope for our world.

Let the light shine in fellowship and formation activities; let the light shine through community service and mentoring our young people; let the light shine by offering God’s love to someone who is lonely or lost; let the light shine as we sing, pray, and come to the Lord’s Table every Sunday. This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine!

LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS: A VIEW BEYOND THE PEWS

By the time you receive this newsletter, all the Christmas celebrations will be done. Christmas trees will be out on the curbs and decorations will be packed up in boxes. But, the vestry has been busy working on our mission goals that will help shape parish life for the next five to ten years. As you remember, this process started back in Lent, when vestry members had one-to-one conversations with many of you about what you loved about St. Stephen's, what was most important to you at St. Stephen's and in what ways could St. Stephen's be better. From these conversations, we compiled information and started talking about where we have been and what have we done over the last nine years. Then, over the summer, the vestry spent two days at the Society of St. John the Evangelist with the brothers and our diocesan business consultant, Sam Thayer. We worked over everything we have heard and prayed where the Lord was calling us to go. From that information, we wrote a new mission statement. During the fall months, the vestry has been working on goals that will carry out the new mission statement.

So this now brings us back to you. We want you to hear what the vestry has developed so far. This is your opportunity to add to the draft goals or question what the vestry has in there. The vestry invites you to share your thoughts with us on Sunday, January 12, 2014, after the ten o'clock service. The vestry will then use your input as we develop the final draft of our mission goals, which will be "unveiled" at the Annual Meeting on February 9, 2014.

A lot of time and effort has gone into this process and I commend everyone on the vestry for their hours of dedicated work on this. Our mission statement and mission goals are very important to the life of St. Stephen's; they shape the programs and various activities that we do, which directly affect the budget and how we allocate our resources.

As we talk about leadership, please keep in mind that at the Annual Meeting, in addition to the formal presentation of our new mission statement and goals, the budget will be presented as voted by the vestry and we will be electing our parish leadership: vestry officers (Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Treasurer, Clerk, all one-year terms), and three vestry members (three-year terms), five delegates to the North Shore Deanery and two delegates and two alternate delegates to Diocesan Convention. In 2014, there will be two conventions, a special one, called by the Standing Committee of the Diocese, in April, to elect our next Diocesan Bishop and the annual one in November. Anyone who is sixteen or older, maintains regular attendance at St. Stephen's and contributes financially to St. Stephen's is eligible to vote and hold office. Due to the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Canons of the church, all officers have to be eighteen or older and have been Confirmed or Received into the Episcopal Church.

If you feel that you want to step into a leadership role within our parish, deanery or diocese, please speak with a member of the Nominating Committee: Steve Switzer, Keyana Brown, Sally Gosselin or Patrick LaFortune. I know many of you out there would make great leaders. Please consider running for a position. A little extra donated time will do a lot for your parish community.

Peace, Chris Trahan, Senior Warden

PARISH AND DIOCESAN GOVERNANCE

EPIPHANY OPEN HOUSE AT THE RECTOR'S SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2014 2:00-5:00

Why should you come?

To enjoy food and fellowship with our church community

To check out the Goulds' home

To watch football on a different couch

To celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany

All ages are welcome at 80 Ocean Street, Lynn from 2:00 to 5:00 on the 5th

BISHOP SHAW SCHEDULED TO VISIT ST. STEPHEN'S FEBRUARY 2, 2014. Having served as our Diocesan Bishop for two decades, Bishop Tom Shaw will retire when we consecrate our new bishop on September 13. We will elect our new bishop in a Special Diocesan Convention on April 5. On February 2, Bishop Shaw will be with us at St. Stephen's as he visits parishes that have been strongly connected with his ministry as Bishop of Massachusetts. Mark your calendars now so that you will be with us as we gather to give thanks.

ANNUAL MEETING FEBRUARY 9, 2014 AT NOON. Thanks to a by-law change voted at the Annual Meeting in 2012, our Annual Meeting has moved to February. While the shift gives everyone a bit more time to complete reports after Christmas, please turn in annual reports as soon as possible. And **mark your calendars now for the Annual Meeting and Potluck on Sunday, February 9 at noon.** Episcopal governance requires the participation of the members.

ARE YOU CALLED TO SERVE? The Nominating Committee of Keyana Brown, Patrick Lafortune, and Steve Switzer needs your help identifying candidates for leadership in the parish, deanery and diocese. Nomination forms and position descriptions are available in the Galahad Area. This year we will elect **4 Vestry members, 4 Vestry officers (Senior and Junior Wardens, clerk and Treasurer), Diocesan Convention delegates** (2 delegates and 2 alternates), and **five Deanery representatives** (2 elected at large, plus 2 Convention delegates and 1 Warden). We depend on people offering their gifts in service to God and this church. Please prayerfully consider whether you might be called to serve. While nominations can be made from the floor, democracy works better if people know the candidates in advance of the election. Nomination papers are due by Sunday, January 26, 2014.

ANNUAL REPORTS DUE JANUARY 17. All ministry leaders and event coordinators are reminded that your annual reports are due by Friday, January 17, 2014. Please email your concise, informative report to the office (ststephens@ststephenslynn.org) by the 17th. Our hope is to have copies of the Annual Report available by Sunday, February 2, 2014 so that you can be informed participants on the 9th.

DECEMBER VESTRY SUMMARY. In December the Vestry focused on reviewing the income side of the 2013 draft budget. The Vestry continued discussion of mission goals, discussed the Vestry's role in recruiting new Vestry members, and received updates from the Stewardship Ministry Team and Building Restoration Team.

MISSION PRIORITIES CONVERSATION JANUARY 12. The Vestry devoted significant time in 2013 to re-working our mission statement and identifying mission priorities for the next 5 years. On January 19, the Vestry will vote the new mission priorities and present them at the Annual Meeting on February 9. While setting priorities is the work of the Vestry, your leaders hope to integrate your thoughts into their final draft. Please join the Vestry on Sunday, January 12 at noon for a conversation about mission priorities. Lunch and childcare will be provided.

FROM THE TREASURER. It is not too late to complete your 2013 pledge. We will still be able to put your money to good use for the fuel, electricity, and other items purchased in December! And, we always appreciate special contributions in the enclosed Fuel envelope this time of year because it is getting cold!

PLEDGE CAMPAIGN 2014

91 have pledged \$105,328 as of December 24, 2013

this includes 10 new pledges and 34 increased pledges

Thank you gifts and offering envelopes for pledgers are available in the Galahad Area

For those who have not yet pledged, help us reach our goal of \$142,500

Mail or bring in your pledge card today!

NORTH SHORE DEANERY GATHERS AT ST. STEPHEN'S ON JANUARY 7 AT 6:00. Tuesday, January 7 at 6:00, St. Stephen's hosts the North Shore Deanery Assembly. All members of the parish are welcome. Anyone considering running for Diocesan Convention or Deanery Delegate is encouraged to attend the Assembly to get a feel for the work of the broader church in our Diocese. Also, we need people to help with cooking, setting up, welcoming people, and cleaning up so that we show folks true St. Stephen's hospitality.

NURTURING & FORMING CONGREGATION

BAPTISM ON JANUARY 12—FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST. We invite children and adults interested in baptism to call the office or complete a baptism registration form by January 5 if you are interested in baptism on January 12. Our Baptism Preparation Class for parents and Godparents will be Monday, January 6 at 6:30pm. Our next Baptisms will be when Bishop Shaw visits on February 2 and on Saturday evening, April 19 at the Easter Vigil.

LOOKING TOWARD LENT. We hope to offer by email, on our website, and on paper daily Lenten Reflections written by members of the parish. Con Squires will encourage, collect, edit, scribe... whatever it takes to encourage you to offer a 100 word reflection that describes an experience or a moment when you knew that God was at work in your life and/or in the world.

MONKS CONTINUE PRAYER WORKSHOP SERIES ON JANUARY 11. Please sign up as soon as possible for Br. Robert L'Esperance's workshop on "The Gift of Meditative Prayer" at the Monastery on Saturday, January 11. Cars will leave the church at 8:00am.

WEDNESDAY EVENING FAITH FORMATION. Wednesday evening adult formation gatherings will resume on January 15 at 6:30. We are considering options including going deeper with the psalms, engaging Bible Study through the Sunday readings, taking advantage of the Diocesan Epiphany Study Guide, and exploring the connections between the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches. Please let the clergy know what study group would appeal to you!

HEALING PRAYER & PASTORAL CARE TEAMS MEET JANUARY 9. HPT & PCT meet at 10:30 on Thursday the 9th to discuss Part 5 of Anne Lamott's *Traveling Mercies*. Please let us know if you would like to be visited by the Clergy or Pastoral Care Team.

CONFIRMATION IS COMING. Confirmation has many expectations and traditions in different communities. This year, instead of confirmation preparation focusing on the 8th grade Church School Class, confirmation preparation will meet every other Sunday for 1.5 hours after Church. The theme for our Confirmation journey is "My Faith, My Life." Anyone interested in the journey of learning more about the Episcopal Church and in deepening their faith life is welcome to join—even if you aren't yet sure you want to be confirmed. For more information, talk with Rev. D or with Irene Axelrod.

WORDS OF THANKS. St. Stephen's depends on a world of volunteers who go above and beyond reasonable expectations getting the work of the parish done. Our busy December, calls forth many thank yous. **Thank you to our Wardens who have served tirelessly through an incredibly busy year;** in visible and invisible ways our Wardens are stewards of our common life carrying the formal responsibilities of leading the Board of a half million dollar non-profit blessed with a historic buildings and the less formal work of nurturing our life as a community of Christians. **Thank you to the Treasurer's Office Team and the Finance Committee;** the work of managing St. Stephen's finances is complicated and demanding but somehow we manage to squeeze pennies hard enough and track money closely enough that we have enough to do the work God has given us to do and the capacity to report on finances in transparent ways. **Thank you to our office helpers;** without office volunteers, we would not have newsletters, bulletins, reminder calls, and a host of other pieces of communication. **Thank you to Bonnie Bishop, Susan Rosevear, the Wittrops, all the teens, and everyone who contributed to making Christmas Presents for Pantry Kids a success this year;** logistically, financially, and physically it takes an army to raise money, collect wish lists, shop, organize bags, and distribute Christmas presents to 150 children but our teens and adult helpers pulled it off again this year. **Thank you to everyone who contributed to our glorious Christmas celebrations;** from the most unruly sheep in the Pageant to Eucharistic ministers, healing prayer team members, choristers, readers, ushers, decorators, cleaners, office helpers, altar guild, flower deliverers, photographers, and everyone who joined us to sing, pray and give thanks for the birth of Christ. **And thank you to the staff during this busy time of year!**

CHRIST-LIKE HOSPITALITY TO CHILDREN & YOUTH

THE SPOT & OASIS HAPPENINGS. In December, our youth groups worked on puzzle piece art creations and other CPPK fundraising. They spent a Saturday morning canning in Salem. They also journeyed into Boston to visit staff at the Diocesan offices. While there, they met Bishop Gayle Harris, who warmly welcomed them, enjoyed looking through their selection of handmade puzzle creations, and ultimately bought two- one for herself and another for Bishop Tom Shaw! Join us in January-- every Tuesday afternoon and 2nd & 4th Friday evenings.

DIOCESAN SENIOR HIGH RETREAT IS COMING! The Diocesan Senior High Retreat is at the Barbara C. Harris Camp **February 7th-9th**; it gives teens a chance to relax and connect with other teenagers from around the Diocese. Our registration and payment deadline is **January 26th**. The cost is \$115 and we hope each teen can contribute at least \$40 but cost should never be a reason not to attend. Please contact Dan Bell or Rev. Jane for more information.

CHURCH SCHOOL CONTINUES WITH ENTHUSIASM. Church School resumes on January 5 at 9:45. This Fall, Pre-K thru 5th graders learned Old Testament stories through the creative teaching of Beatrice Griffiths & Keri Whitcomb (Pre-K-K), Johanna Gallagher (1-3) and Patrick LaFortune (4-5). Neil O'Donnell led conversations with 6th-12th graders about how their lives connect to the Sunday Scripture readings. In January, 6th-12th graders will continue using the lectionary readings while the Pre-K thru 5th graders will explore the life of Jesus through stories from Matthew's Gospel. Parents are encouraged to visit classes any Sunday at 9:45

CHRIST-LIKE HOSPITALITY TO YOUNG ADULTS

YOUNG ADULT DINNERS CONTINUE JANUARY 14. December 10th, ten YAs gathered for dinner and to discuss "What is it that you're waiting to see change in the world (and/or in your life) right now? Where do you find hope that change can really happen?" This led to a great conversation that was fun, silly, serious, and thought-provoking. All the while, we enjoyed Jason and Paulina's tasty cooking and relaxed at the end of a busy day. All 18-25 year olds are invited to come on Tuesday, January 14th at 6:30 for dinner and discussion of an outreach opportunity.

DEEPENING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR FOR CPPK! Our teenagers and young adults did an incredible job *providing nearly 150 Christmas gifts* to children in the Lynn community! With the help of committed adults, our young people interviewed families, made awesome puzzle pieces to sell as a part of fundraising, and had a blast going shopping! A huge shout-out to Kent and Sandy Wittrup for once again hosting a spectacular Spaghetti Supper in their home, and to Bonnie Bishop and Susan Rosevear for their faithful commitment to CPPK. *Many thanks to everyone who donated gifts, money and otherwise helped to make possible the 2013 Christmas Presents Project for Kids. Your support is deeply appreciated!*

ECCO HONORS NEIL O'DONNELL 7 CELEBRATES SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN. At the ECCO Annual Meeting on December 4, Neil O'Donnell won the Eileen Ryan Award, which honors leaders who, like Eileen Ryan, model dedication to family, community, and social justice for all. Neil has offered leadership to ECCO in fat and fallow times. This year, as ECCO celebrated collecting over 16,000 signatures for the Raise Up MA Campaign, increasing youth summer jobs, re-starting the E-Team, and more than tripling its members and affiliates, it truly is impressive to have ECCO single out Neil as a leader who makes a difference. Please make sure you congratulate Neil... and join ECCO in making a difference on the North Shore.

HONOR DR. KING MLK WEEKEND. Our parish MLK celebration with special music will be on January 19 at 10:00. The Lynn MLK observance is trying a new time and place; sign up to sit at the St. Stephen's table at the Lynn MLK luncheon on January 20 at the Danversport Yacht Club. And youth should talk with Dan Bell about participating in "Living into the Dream," a Diocesan Youth Day of Service for Middle and High School students on Monday, January 20.

SERVE AT THE TABLE JANUARY 26. Join the St. Stephen's Team at My Brother's Table on January 26 from 1:00 to 4:00. If you can't help serve, please bring desserts for us to share. And many thanks for all the donations of cold weather clothing. Also, our Food Pantry can always use donations of non-perishable food; and save April 3 for the Legislative Breakfast of the Coalition to End Homelessness.