



Newsletter March 2015

Back to Basics; Back to God

On Ash Wednesday someone asked me if I thought that God was punishing us with all this snow. While I quickly and confidently answered “no,” I do understand the question. Certainly scripture presents us with an abundance of stories in which God controls the winds and waves as well as the snow and rain. For many of us, our earliest Bible lessons told of God sending a great flood in the days of Noah, God bringing fat years and lean years in the land as Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh, and God punishing the Egyptians with seven plagues. Throughout the psalms, we read such verses as “God breaks cedar trees, splits flames of fire, shakes the wilderness, makes oaks writhe, and sits enthroned above the flood.” (*Psalms 29*)

As a child, I loved thunderstorms—the dark clouds coming close, the wind whipping, the thunder booming, the lightning flashing, and finally the rain cascading down. I also delighted in blizzards laughing as our St. Bernard would knock us down and lie on us in the snow to keep us safe and warm.

Yet these days, I admit that annoyance rather than awe tends to be my response to our regular winter storm warnings. Weariness rather than wonder characterizes my attitude. Everyone I know has stories of delays, cancellations, leaks, losses, injuries, inconvenience, and blown budgets. While I don't believe God has sent these storms to punish or test us, there is no doubt that the storms have begun the God work of Lent in my life by drawing me back to basics.

In the midst of blizzards, I have no choice but to live in the moment and move more slowly. I have to acknowledge my lack of control and let go of many of my plans. I simply can't do all that I want to do. And I definitely can't reschedule everything that got snowed out. In addition, I need to acknowledge and give thanks for my own privilege. I have a house with heat and a full freezer that allows me to be safe, warm, and fed. I get paid no matter how many snow days we have. I don't have to deal every day with inadequate public transportation and treacherous pedestrian paths. I am able-bodied enough to shovel out my car and clear my steps and sidewalk.

In Lent, we ask, “Is my life oriented to God or to the world?” While I have heard some people suggest that we should skip Lent this year because winter has already been hard enough, I'd suggest that this winter has landed us just where God wants us to be. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (*Matthew 11:28-30*)

Knowing both the burdens we bear and the abundance we enjoy, may we take on the yoke of Christ this Lent and find rest for our souls.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane".

Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago I was blessed to join some of my clergy colleagues on a pre-Lenten retreat led by the Rev. Dr. Sam Portaro. Over the course of two days we gathered for worship, silence, and reflection. Rev. Portaro, a well-known author and former campus minister, blessed us by sharing with us his wisdom on the themes of transition, discernment, and faith.

To be honest, when I heard the first two words my heart sank into my stomach. After three years of the ordination process where I was continually in transition from one internship to another, in discernment on why God was calling me to the priesthood—well I was a little tired. Or as my mother might say, “Stick a fork in me, I’m done!” Settling in to listen to Rev. Portaro’s first talk neither my mind nor my heart would open. And yet as so often happens God cracked me open to hear what needed to be heard, specifically the words on discernment.

Rev. Portaro defines discernment as: *“the ability to judge well. In Christian contexts, it is perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual direction and understanding.”* Several things strike me in this definition. The first is that discernment requires an “absence of judgment,” or in other words the freedom to dream and imagine without limitations. Without that freedom we can discern only in pieces like scattered pieces of one of our stained glass windows. While the pieces may be beautiful we never see the beauty of the whole window.

I’m also struck with the idea that discernment is about gaining direction and understanding, not reaching a destination. This is quite rebellious! Most of the world operates on the idea that we are constantly moving to a destination or goal: graduation, employment, marriage, family life, success, wealth. We are constantly trying to reach some point that we hope will bring us joy and peace. What Rev. Portaro is suggesting is that we shouldn’t focus on the destination but on the map that will bring us there. When we enter into discernment we are letting go of the destination and putting the map at the fore front.

One of my complaints about the Episcopal Church, and the church in general, is that we haven’t fully embraced this method of discernment. Yes, we have discernment committees for people interested in entering the ordination process, but do we have discernment committees for people interested in joining the altar guild, the healing team, or the vestry? How would your life be different if you had a group of people reminding you to dream without limits? Or a group of people who kept you focused on the map, not the destination?

My discernment committee did just this at a time when I was obsessively worried about the destination. They gave me the gift of letting go of self-judgment and the need to know where I was going. As we continue our journey in Lent I pray that St. Stephen’s can be that group for you or help you find such a group.

Peace,

Rev. Sarah

A View from beyond the Pew

“Oh what a beautiful Morning” Oh what a beauty---“ mmmm wrong words.

“Ah snowing on Sunday morning” “Ah snow covered all day”

What a way to begin the 2015 church year. Sunday February 8, 2015 Annual Meeting was the begging of a blizzard snow storm. We were not deterred. The Annual Meeting was held in the church with the parishioners who came on that day.

The following people were elected to the vestry:

Virginia Fuller Senior Warden

Irene Axelrod Junior Warden

Heather Collis Puro Treasurer

Carolyn Hoy Clerk

Alville Collymore

Joyce Wallace

Kendra Zimiroski

Shanel Anderson

Delegates to Diocesan Convention:

Pamela Alleyne delegate Elizabeth Graham delegate Joyce Wallace Alternate

Delegates to the Deanery:

Robert Dixon Chris Trahan

During the meeting there were four speakers with stories about St. Stephens.

Marilyn and Rick Cloran spoke on the historical -----of the building.

Amy Inez spoke about pastoral care. Nelson Woodfork spoke about St Stephens Towers and Kerri Whitcomb spoke about teaching Sunday school. They all were great and gave us much to think about.

February 15, 2015 first meeting of the new vestry and a Snow blizzard arrives. How different!!! Then came the challenge of postponing the meeting and rescheduling. It was rescheduled for February 22, 2015 perhaps not the best day as it is the beginning of lent but it was the most practical.

Every year has its challenges but who would have thought we all would be “buried” under over fifty inches of snow. The ice jams on our homes have presented problems for us and the ice jams at the church caused leaks in the hall near the sacristy. The small window in the sacristy is also leaking. Like our homes battling the ice is a difficult job.

However we take on the challenges and move forward with the mission of St. Stephens. The KIC program will begin its school year one day a week after school program on Monday February 22, 2015 (snow cancelled the first sessions). This trial program will run from February to June. The program will be from 2:00pm to 6:00pm with music, activity, and study. Audrey Gutfreund will lead the program with three mentors.

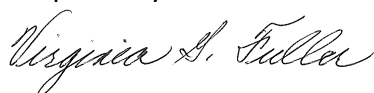
The vestry voted to replace the antiquated alarm system and put in a security camera system at the Blossom Street door and the handicap door.

The Vestry voted to approve Aileen Ryder DiBenedetto’s application for ordination.

Despite the snow cancellations and all it is a great beginning to the 2015 church year.

“Oh what a beautiful spring” It is in the calendar and we will bloom and grow again soon.

Respectfully Submitted



Senior Warden

BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF RESOURCES

ANNUAL MEETING SNEAKS IN BEFORE THE SNOWS. Almost 60 people remained in the church after worship on February 8 for the 171st Annual Meeting. We managed to hold the Annual Meeting and Mini-Potluck before the snow began in earnest. Mission presentations included Rick and Marilyn Cloran enlightening us on the artistic heritage of our Tiffany windows, Amy Inez reflecting on the ministry of the Pastoral Care Team, Keri Whitcomb speaking about meeting God in her church school children, and Nelson Woodfork talking about our prophetic presence in the community through St. Stephen's Towers. Treasurer Heather Collis Puro encouraged people to read her reports and thanked the volunteers whose dedicated service keeps the Treasurer's Office afloat. She pointed out that we finished 2014 with a minimal surplus due to higher than anticipated grant and rental income, and that the Vestry passed a balanced 2015 budget that depends on a \$30,000 Assessment Credit from the Diocese in thanksgiving for our hosting Convention in 2014. Election results: Sr. Warden Virginia Fuller, Jr. Warden Irene Axelrod, Treasurer Heather Collis Puro, and Clerk Carolyn Hoy. Vestry 3 year: Shanel Anderson, Alville Collymore, and Kendra Zimiroski; and 1 year Joyce Wallace. Diocesan Convention delegates: Pam Alleyne & Beth Graham, and alternate Joyce Wallace. Deanery Representatives: Pam Alleyne, Robert Dixon, Beth Graham, Chris Trahan, and Joyce Wallace. We thanked outgoing Warden Chris Trahan, and Vestry members Irene Axelrod, Joanne Droppers, Hazel Johnson, & Jeff McAvoy.

VESTRY SUMMARY. February 22, following a snow-out on the 15th, the new Vestry gathered for relationship building and orientation. Although the Vestry did not review full financials, we have already spent three-times our annual snow plowing budget; fuel and plowing contributions would be greatly appreciated. The Vestry voted to invest in a new alarm system, and discussed March training options: Diocesan Learning Day, SSJE Prayer Workshop, Congregational Business Practices, and ECCF Institute for Trustees.

BUCKET BRIGADE RETURNS. Many of you have noticed the collection of buckets and barrels in the hallway outside the sacristy and moisture coming in through the walls around the Children's Altar. With unprecedented amounts of snow over the last month, snow has slid down our slate roof and has gotten stuck in various valleys where multiple rooflines meet. Not having attic space in the church has allowed the heat inside the church to warm the ceilings, which in turn melts the snow stuck on the roof. The melting snow then turns into an ice dam as it refreezes with the cold temperatures outside. Part of the reason for the snow getting "stuck" is because some sections of the church roof are asphalt. If they were slate, the snow piles would most likely have slid down to the ground reducing the possibility of an ice dam. It is our hope to start work on the area over the Sacristy hallway (east cloister) this spring/summer with a \$100,000 grant to St. Stephen's from the Diocesan Closed Church Fund.

NURTURING THE CONGREGATION

LOOKING FOR A FEW MORE MEDITATIONS. Many have already written a reflection for our daily Lenten Meditations series but we still have a few of the forty days unclaimed. The clergy and other eager editors will encourage, collect, edit, scribe... whatever it takes to encourage you to offer a short meditation that describes an experience or a moment of transformation when you saw yourself or someone else or an event in a whole new light.

BAND-AID PRAYERS DURING LENT. Lent is a great time to try out new forms of prayer as individuals and as a community. This Lent-- offer your prayers with band-aids! A large wood cross, crafted by Neil O'Donnell, is in the sanctuary ready to hold our prayers. Simply write a name, place, thought or image on a band-aid and attach it to the cross as an offering to God.

LENTEN TUESDAYS WITH THE MONKS. Every Tuesday in Lent, we hope to join the SSJE Brothers for worship and supper at the Monastery. Sign up is required but everyone is encouraged to join us. Cars leave St. Stephen's at 4:15 and return about 8:00.

WEDNESDAY EVENING LENTEN SOUP & STUDY: Bible Study and Confirmation Journey. Every Wednesday in March, get to know your pew mates over homemade soup and salad served at 6:00pm. At 6:45, we will offer two study options. Using the themes of the SSJE Lenten Study Program, **Bible Study** will discuss scripture passages related to what it means for us to Stop, Pray, Work, Play, and Love. **Confirmation Journey** is for all teens and adults interested in Confirmation or Reception in the Episcopal Church as well as their sponsors; of course, anyone who wants a refresher course in Episcopal Church Basics is most welcome.

THURSDAY TEA AND TALK. A lively group gathers for Tea & Talk about Faith every Thursday after the Noon Healing Service. During Lent, our conversation starters will be Rachel Keefe's meditations in [Negotiating the Shadows](#).

DOES SNOW OR SICKNESS HAVE YOU HOMEBOUND? We know that winter can be long and lonely. Please call the Parish Office if you would welcome a visit from the Clergy or our Pastoral Care Team. We do hold monthly communion services at St. Stephen's Towers and Phillips Manor Nursing Home.

PASTORAL CARE & HEALING PRAYER TEAMS GATHER MARCH 5. The PCT & HPT meet on Thursday, March 5 for check in and discussion of the final section of [The Shack](#).

DIOCESAN LEARNING EVENT ON MARCH 7. Join the Diocese at Christ Church, Needham on Saturday, March 7 from 9:00 to 4:00 for "Mobilizing the Church: From Dreaming to Doing." The Learning Event will feature keynotes by Alexie Torres-Fleming and Dr. Mark Warren as well as workshops on community organizing and reflections by our Bishops. Cars will leave St. Stephen's at 7:45. Sign up is required.

PRAYER WORKSHOP AT SSJE. On Saturday, March 14 Br. Robert L'Esperance will lead a workshop on "Our Mutual Relationship with God." Many of us spend our time fearing and seeking to control God rather than loving God. Jesus' examples of mutuality and vulnerability teach us that "the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." Learn how sound spiritual practice and discipline can open us to Jesus' promise of a fuller and more abundant life. Sign up by March 1; cars will leave the church at 7:45am and return by 1:00pm.

GO DEEPER THIS LENT WITH CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP! MARCH 15 AT 6:30. While Contemporary Worship-- like so much of the rest of life-- got snowed out in February, we are back on track for March! Join us Sunday, March 15 at 6:30 for a time of worship, prayer, and reflection. We'll gather to hear Rev. Sarah give the message: "Sin and Redemption: Finding Wholeness in a Broken World." As always, Juliana Davis and her Berklee Band will lead us in song, and all are welcome to stay after for a time of food and fellowship. All ages are welcome and we encourage everyone to bring a friend! Also, mark your calendars for April 19! Hazel Johnson will preach on courage as we celebrate Christ's Resurrection and reflect on what it takes for us to spread the Good News today.

SELMA: A CONVERSATION WITH BISHOP BARBARA C. HARRIS-- MARCH 18. Wednesday, March 18, cars will leave St. Stephen's at 5:00pm to join Bishop Barbara in a conversation about Selma. The movie *Selma* has sparked important remembrance and reflection as we observe the 50th Anniversary the Selma to Montgomery March. Bishop Barbara will share her own experience as one who went to Selma to march after the events of "Bloody Sunday." Please sign up in the Galahad Area before March 8th.

ST. STEPHEN'S LDI TEAM PREPARING TO ENGAGE RACE & PRIVILEGE. During February, our Leadership Development Team gathered twice for training on how to share public narratives and how to facilitate intentional conversations. Our time together along with our new skills have fired us up for the next step! During March and April, we plan to host a series of small group conversations about race and privilege. We'll begin the conversations with Sunday Lunch & Learns, and within the many existing groups of St. Stephen's (choir, Knit Club, Bible Study, Oasis, YAs, etc.). We look forward to being with you all as we listen and tell our stories.

12th ANNUAL SOUL CELEBRATION APRIL 26. Our guest speaker and preacher will be the Hon. Byron Rushing. A longtime member of the Massachusetts State House and Episcopal General Convention, Byron currently holds leadership positions in both arenas as a Majority Whip on Beacon Hill and Vice President of the House of Deputies for the Episcopal Church. His talk will focus on "*Justice Reinvestment: Creating Jobs not Jails.*" Last year's Soul Celebration raised over \$12,000 and Debbie Potter & her team are hoping to be even more successful this year. To reach our fundraising goal, we all need to buy and sell ads for the Soul Celebration Ad Book. **Covers start at \$500; full-page ads cost \$150, half page \$75, and quarter page/ business card \$50; and supporter listings cost only \$20**

HOLY WEEK MARCH 29 - APRIL 5

Sunday, March 29—Palm Sunday

8:00 & 10:00 Procession with Palms, Reading of the Passion, & Eucharist

Thursday, April 2—Maundy Thursday

Noon & 7:00 Commemoration of the Last Supper and Foot Washing

Until 11:00 Silent Vigil in darkened church

Friday, April 3—Good Friday

Noon-3:00 Last Words at Washington Street Baptist

7:00 Solemn Collects, Veneration of the Cross, & Communion from Reserve Sacrament

Saturday, April 4—Easter Eve

7:30 Lighting the First Fire of Easter with St. Mary's on the Lynn Common

8:00 Easter Vigil with Story of Salvation History, Baptism, & Communion

Sunday, April 5—Easter

8:00 & 10:00 Festival Holy Communion with Choir

FORMING CHILDREN, YOUTH, & YOUNG ADULTS

A FEW SPOTS REMAIN FOR KIC AFTER SCHOOL MUSIC PROGRAM. Kids In Community's new music program just began on February 23-- a bit late due to the many snow storms. The program runs every Monday from 2:00-6:00 and is open to children in 1st to 5th grades. KICsters will learn to play instruments and sing different styles of music from all over the world. In addition, they will do homework and play games with young adult mentors. Registration is still open and forms are available in the office and the Galahad area. A child may register on a Monday as long as a parent, guardian or older sibling is there to complete the form. Contact Audrey Gutfreund, KIC Director, in the church office or at 617-435-3325 for more information.

CHURCH SCHOOL HAPPENINGS. All Church School families received resource packets to encourage focused faith formation during Lent. The best Lenten spiritual practice for families would be to come to church every Sunday by 9:45 so that young people get the full benefit of Church School and adults the full benefit of church. Our teachers Kendra, Beatrice, Keri, Paul, Dan, Irene, Neil and Paulina want your children to join them for their Lenten Journey. As we move into Lent, we are looking to recruit some additional teachers to ensure two teachers for every class and to make certain that all grades are covered. If you have been looking for an opportunity to get more deeply involved in the mission of St. Stephen's and to make a difference in the lives of young people, this might be your opportunity. If you want more information about Church School opportunities for your child or yourself, please talk with Rev. Sarah or Dan Bell.

CURE FOR CABIN FEVER: FAMILY DINNER MARCH 15 AT 4:30. The next Family Dinner will be Sunday, March 15, from 4:30-6:30pm. We'll have fun with an old classic: family game night! Come enjoy fellowship while we eat, talk, and play together. All ages are invited. Contemporary Worship service will follow at 6:30 for those who wish to attend. Contact Audrey Gutfreund, KIC Director, in the church office or at 617-435-3325 for more information.

MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP SUNDAY, MARCH 15 12-2. Our Youth Minister, Jason Cruz, will lead us in an art project as we re-connect and brainstorm possible community service work we can do this spring. There will be lunch, music, and creativity! The next Sunday, March 22, all Middle Schoolers are encouraged to join the Confirmation Class in helping serve lunch at My Brother's Table from 1:00 to 4:00.

PRE-CONFIRMATION RETREAT AT BCH MARCH 20-21. Teen Confirmands will join young people from across the Diocese for a Pre-Confirmation Retreat at which they will explore the promise and challenge of Christian Discipleship. The retreat focuses on the Baptismal Covenant and is led by members of the Diocesan Youth Council. Bishop Gates, who will be our confirming Bishop at St. Anne's Lowell on May 9, will join us for a time of story-telling and reflection. Attendance is required for all students in our Teen Confirmation Class. Please see Rev. Sarah to sign up.

BE YOU HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP KICKING OFF! TUESDAYS, 3:30-5:30. Did you know that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are two to three time more likely to attempt suicide than their straight counterparts? Did you know that, because of bullying, hatred, and prejudice, 28 percent of gay students will drop out of school? It's a sad fact that LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning) teens face hostility, rejection harassment, threats, and violence on a daily basis in school, and often experience the same at home and even (or especially!) in their religious communities. As an open, affirming, and welcoming congregation, St. Stephen's wants to provide a safe and supportive space for these teens and their straight allies to be themselves. *BE YOU*, meeting on Tuesdays from 3:30 to 5:30, is offering space for teens to hang out, check in, and talk about things that matter to them. Questions? Concerns? Want to get involved? Talk to Dan Bell, Rev. Sarah, and Jason Cruz.

YOUNG ADULT UPDATE. Tuesday, February 10th, with snow piling up all around us, a couple of young adults braved the winter wonderland (not so wonderful anymore!) for the monthly Y.A. dinner. They joined Dan, Jason, and Paulina for dinner and relaxed conversation. We got to share our favorite (and least favorite!) snow activities and catch up with each other. It was a low-key evening for folks got to enjoy the warmth of one another's company before venturing out again into the frozen tundra that is New England right now. **Our next YA Dinner is Tuesday, March 10 at 6:30.**

DEEPENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

TAKE ON THE FOOD PANTRY FOR LENT. Our Ash Wednesday readings mentioned feeding those who are hungry and caring for those who are homeless. Among the many caring, sharing Lenten disciplines available to us is serving people in need at the Food Pantry on Friday afternoons. Please consider coming down and seeing the Pantry Team in action surrounded by people, cans, boxes, grocery bags, and books. Our mission is to provide free groceries for a couple of days in a hospitable space. Recently, we've started offering books as well. Working with Lynn REAL Literacy volunteers Jan Plourde and Rachel Shwartz, Joanne Droppers and Helen Patmon offer warm smiles and free books to families. Literacy hour is great with children, parents, grandparents, friends, and all pantry people selecting free new books to take home and keep. If Friday afternoons don't work for you, you might bring a bag of food on Sunday, or drop off a bag at the office during the week. If you have any questions, please ask Sally Gosselin, Neil O'Donnell, or Harry Jackson.

HUNGER NETWORK ADDRESSES NEEDS OF HOMELESS & HUNGRY IN LYNN. The Lynn Hunger Network, which connects all the organizations that serve homeless and hungry people in the city. The goal of the Network is to meet the needs of the community as compassionately and generously as possible. The March meeting will discuss a potential survey mapping areas served by the various pantries and other feeding programs. If you would like to get involved, please speak with Sally Gosselin.

HELP AT THE TABLE MARCH 22. In the winter, counts at My Brother's Table go up and numbers of volunteers go down. Please join our Table Team serving lunch on Sunday, March 22 from 1:00 until 4:00. Our Teen Confirmation Class will be among our volunteers in March; it would be great if they had the opportunity to work with lots of other St. Stephen's volunteers.

ECCO FOCUSING WORK ON RACIAL JUSTICE AND IMMIGRATION. Join an ECCO conversation on race Monday, March 23 at 7:00 at St. Stephen's. ECCO is gathering member congregations to think and talk about how we address issues of systemic racism and privilege. The non-indictments of the police who killed Eric Garner and Michael Brown have focused attention on a conversation that has been simmering for generations. The goal of the March 23 meeting at St. Stephen's is to form teams of people who will research and plan action around identified issues of concern and opportunities for positive change. In addition, ECCO is holding workshops this spring to educate people about eligibility criteria, costs, and procedures for those who might benefit from President Obama's most recent Executive order aimed at assisting undocumented parents.

**DIOMASS TROUNCES OLYMPIA IN SOUPERBOWL CHALLENGE
EPISCOPAL RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT SAYS THANK YOU!**