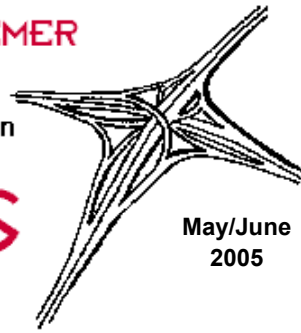




CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

A Christian Liberation Community
in the Episcopal Tradition

CROSSROADS



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Stewardship: Not Just a Question of Money

by the Rev. Phillip Wilson, Rector

The leadership of the Vestry has made a commitment to take Stewardship seriously and create a year round committee to help the parish think about the subject in a deeper way than just generating enough money to meet the budget. Peter Arney has taken leadership of the Stewardship Committee. I plan to go to go to a three day Stewardship Conference in June. The issue is more about the spiritual health of Redeemer than it is about money.

Stewardship is about how we spend the life that has been given to us: our time, our emotions, our energy and our money. How we spend it speaks of our spiritual values and in a real sense names the god we worship. All we need do is to look at our date books and our check-books to see what we hold most important.

I told the story of Isabel Allende in a recent sermon. It is a story of Stewardship and I want to tell it again. She is a novelist and niece of Chilean President Salvador Allende, assassinated in 1973.

Isabel Allende has written more than a dozen novels, including *The House of the Spirits* and *My Invented Country*. This story is not about her uncle's death or about how she fled for her life but is about her daughter, Paula. Allende wrote, "I have lived with passion and in a hurry, trying to accomplish too many things. I never had time to think about my beliefs until my 28-year-old daughter, Paula, fell ill. She was in a coma for a year and I took care of her at home until she died in my arms. During that year of agony and the following year of my grieving, everything stopped for me. Paralyzed and silent in her bed, my daughter Paula taught me a lesson that is now my mantra: You only have what you give. It is in spending yourself that you become rich."

Isabel continued, "The pain of losing my child was a cleansing experience. I had to throw overboard all excess baggage and keep only what is essential. Because of Paula, I don't cling to anything anymore. Now I like to give much more than to receive. I am happier when I love than when I am loved... Give, give, give -- what is the point of having experience, knowledge or talent if I don't give it away? Of having stories if I don't tell them to others? Of having wealth if I don't share it? I don't intend to be cremated with any of it! It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world and with the divine. It is in giving that I feel the spirit of my daughter inside me, like a soft presence. [1]"

This is a story of stewardship in the deepest sense. It is about giving in the various ways that we can give as a way to connect with others, with the world and with the divine. The question is, how are we to spend the life that is given to us? Sometime it takes a crisis for us to discover this. Hopefully we can work on this before the crisis. It is the issue of stewardship in its deepest

sense.

[1] "In Giving I Connect with Others," Isabel Allende, April 4, 2005, *This I Believe Series*, National Public Radio

Just What Is the Vestry and What Does It Do

In the Anglican style churches, of which the Episcopal Church is a part, though the rector has overall responsibility for the church, unlike the more hierarchical churches that person shares their authority with lay leadership of the church. This lay leadership is represented by the Vestry and by their overall leaders, the Wardens.

The Wardens are the senior lay leaders of the church and they have the responsibility of overseeing the vestry as well as acting as advisors and support for the rector in his/her duties. Redeemer is a bit different in that we make no distinction between the two Wardens, they are equals in terms of duties and responsibilities. At many churches they have the traditional concept of a hierarchy, of a senior warden and a junior warden. In the name of diversity we also strive to have warden duties shared between a man and a woman. The wardens with the Rector put together the agenda for vestry meetings, help the rector with important emergency decisions and along with the rector help to set overall church direction in terms of the running of the church. I would give the rough analogy that the Rector is like the President of the US and the Wardens are the Speaker of the House and Senate Majority Leader.

The vestry are the lay leadership people who act upon the needs of the church. This includes being the heads of various ministry areas with the ministry heads reporting into them, and also, along with the Wardens and Rector, the vestry is in charge of the running of the church and the decisions needed to do this. This includes setting budgets, approving non-budgetary expenditures, creating new ministries and anything else that warrants their attention. This decision making process follows standard parliamentary procedure, with all resolutions motioned and voted upon and carried by a majority of the voters.

Vestry members and wardens in the Episcopal Church are chosen in a variety of ways. At Redeemer people can indicate an interest in being on the vestry when they are choosing their ministry pledges. When openings on the vestry occur this list is checked and if a potential vestry member from the list is willing to oversee that particular area they are voted upon by the current vestry and if confirmed, seated. Vestry terms last 3 years, unless someone has filled a vacancy mid term and then they can finish out the unexpired term and fill another 3-year term as well. Likewise, if no one has indicated an interest in a vestry position, vestry members can choose to continue serving another three-year term, subject to confirmation by the rest of the vestry.

Speaking as a currently sitting member of the vestry, it is a position that requires a good deal of attention and work and a real caring for the church, but it is also incredibly rewarding and yes, even fun. If you are curious about what the vestry does, or even might consider wanting to join the vestry someday, meetings are on the 2nd Monday of the month at 7PM and all members are welcome to attend the meetings. We the members do a lot to make this church our community and a shared home and the vestry is a prime example of this.

The wardens and their oversight areas:

Peter Arney - Membership, Property Administration, Communications, Pastoral Concerns, Stewardship

Colleen Hintz - Worship, Education, Parish Activities, Social Concerns

Vestry members and responsibilities:

Diann Castiaux - Property Administration
John DeWees - Property Administration
Lauren DeFilippis - Worship
Dan Goldman - Education
John Goodwin - Worship, Clerk
Joe Kane - Social Concerns
Doug McKibbon - Communications
Steve Osvold - Parish Activities
Terry Perkins - Membership
Paulette Primus - Social Concerns
Louise Wu - Parish Activities
Wayne Walton - Stewardship/Planned Giving

Ministry Through the Eyes of the Administrator

by Donnalee, a Member of the Congregation

Service and the dedication to helping others is one of the core values of Redeemer. There are more than 20 different ministries that members of the Redeemer family are committed to and each ministry has one or two people who lead their team's efforts. It is these people who define the mission statements for their cause and provide the insight and hindsight to the achievements and challenges their teams face. But there is so much more behind these simply stated facts.

I had the pleasure of experiencing first hand Redeemer's Mission in action at the new member's luncheon on March 6. What makes Redeemer so unique is the leadership and the people who comprise the congregation. The Membership Ministry ensures that Redeemer is never at a loss for maintaining and growing our unique church family. For those of us who have been a member of Redeemer for a long time, we may inadvertently take this task for granted. However, it is no small endeavor to organize new membership activities and more importantly, make new members feel as comfortable as they do when they walk in door of their own homes. Yet, Terry Perkins and her team do just that and they manage to make it look so very simple.

Change by nature is unsettling and is accompanied by some nervousness, even when the change is welcomed and the circumstance a joyous one. When my wife Jen and I made the decision to join Redeemer, we were excited and yes nervous. As reforming Catholics, we were still waiting for the shoe of sin to drop and squash this new found safety we had been feeling because try as we might, we are indeed sinners. So as we stood in front of the congregation and proclaimed our intention, the joy and the nerves met head on in a wave of emotion that was hugged away by the leadership of our new family. Making our way to Phillip's house and sheepishly knocking on the door, uncertain if we would really know anyone, Jen and I instantly felt as though we had just arrived at a close friend's house. Terry met us with a smile and waiting for us were nametags already filled out as if to say, 'I know what you're feeling so let me think of the little things that will make you feel more at ease.' After a few minutes of hugs and chatting, the very large group joined hands and formed a circle in Phillip's living room. Each of us took turns introducing ourselves and stating why we had decided to join Redeemer. We all proclaimed what each of us knew the moment we first walked through Redeemer's inviting doors...the love and acceptance, the values and diversity, the mission and the leadership-- all the things that are Redeemer. (Not to mention the representation of our diversity by the varied selection of delicious and abundant food!) Then, it was Terry's turn and she stood there, with the biggest, warmest smile and took a moment, looked to her left then to her right and simply said, "All of you and the chance to meet each of you and share all of this with you, that's why I'm here." A simple statement, perhaps as simple as making sure we all knew where we were going and had our names written on our nametags and were greeted the moment we approached the door. It's amazing the power of simple things. If I didn't know what Terry membership mission meant to her before, I knew then and so did everyone else in that room.

It's easy to report on what each Redeemer mission is doing has done or plans to do. It's easy to list the various Ministry names and heads and have a nice informative article that everyone can read and say, 'Oh there are 23 ministries at Redeemer and Terry Perkins heads the new member Ministry. However, that would not do justice to the heart and soul of Our Redeemer ministries, the leadership, team members and the passion they all share in the services they do for us and for others in our community. That kind of insight, appreciation and understanding comes from the glimpse inside the hearts of those who are the Mission and who in their simple deeds and succinct words, share more with us than any 'who, what , where, when, why and how' article.

I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to experience a Redeemer Mission through Terry's eyes and I look forward to bringing a different inside view into each of Redeemer's ministries throughout the forthcoming editions of Crossroads.

Letting Go ... One Person's First Lenten Journey at Redeemer

by Stephanie, a Member of the Congregation

For me, this Lenten season has been like no other. You see, I was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition, which always seemed to mean that one had to always "give something up" for Lent. That invariably led to swearing off chocolate and other sweets as a child, and progressed to putting aside a variety of alcoholic beverages and fattening foods as an adult. Generally speaking, these "sacrifices" were short-lived and always seemed to have a hollow ring to them for me.

I guess I missed the point somewhere along the way, but what did any of that have to do with me deepening my relationship with God - or creating positive change in my life? So it is against this rather uninspiring backdrop that I embarked upon my first Lenten journey at Redeemer. It began with the parish retreat and continued through my participation in the Wednesday evening Eucharist and the Letting Go group that met afterward.

In short, the entire experience has been without a doubt the most introspective time of my life. At the outset of this journey I had many questions swirling about in my head related to who I am, my own life's journey, what the future holds, and ultimately - how God fits into all of this. As I sat in my chair at the beginning of the retreat I must confess that I harbored no lofty

expectations about actually finding all of the answers. As Philip so often says, it's a start to just "get comfortable with the questions." Well, I figured that at best I might somehow figure out one or two and then leave the rest for some other time. I was not prepared for what was to come.

As I began to allow myself to explore my soul - for probably the first time in my life - I first realized I was afraid. "Afraid of what?" you may ask. In short, afraid of everything: of my transition coming to a halt, of my son abandoning me, my family not accepting me for the person I really am, and of losing my job. I also wondered aloud if my parents - both deceased, and who never met Stephanie - still loved me as they watched my journey from Heaven.

While I have worked very diligently up to this point in my life to ensure that those negative things do not happen, the simple fact of the matter was I still harbored a great deal of fear around all of this. It felt good, and tremendously cathartic, to recognize that fear and then once and for all, cast it aside.

Just when I had it all figured out, I went to the next-to-last Wednesday Eucharist and was asked by Philip to do the contemporary reading. I, of course, said yes and dutifully took my seat. I gazed upon the paper and could not believe what I saw. The reading talked about letting go of the future, of putting things in God's hands, of ridding yourself of the worry related to it all by living as the reflection of His light and love wherever I go. It's at that precise moment when it hit me. While I may have been genuinely afraid of the things I mentioned before, this was the real thing I needed to let go of-my almost constant preoccupation with the future, the place where I longed to be so I could ultimately live as my true self all of the time.

This was the "elephant in the room," that I had avoided dealing with since the very start of my journey. I began to cry; so much so that I was worried I could not compose myself in time for the start of the service. It was if God said to me, "Look Stephanie, I can't be anymore direct than this. Feel the words of that passage, let its meaning connect with your soul."

But it was even more than that, as I realized later that night in our group. For whatever reason - perhaps because of this preoccupation with the future, I was not allowing myself to feel God's warm embrace as he guided me down this sometimes-perilous road. Whatever concerns I might have about how things will turn out shouldn't really matter if I accept two simple facts: that God has a plan for me and he will watch out for me. I guess I was thinking the answer was going to be more complex, and as a result, I could not grasp what now seemed so patently obvious . . . that God loves me. I am now in a place where I believe it is through his love that I will cope, I will succeed, and I will shine . . . one day at a time.

I would like to personally thank Philip, Sr. Shane Margaret, and my fellow "groupies" for sharing their fears, their joys, their dreams, their tears, and their laughter. I will always cherish the experience and its memories for they have truly changed my life. God bless you all!

A Family Within a Family

by Dan, a Long-Time Congregant

Janice and I first attended Redeemer in the fall of 1980, shortly after we moved to New Jersey, and I joined the theater arts department at Drew. Janice is a life-long Episcopalian, but I, like many Redeemerites, was raised Roman Catholic. (I was "received" into the Episcopal Church at Redeemer by Bishop Spong in 1981.) We didn't have to do much church-shopping before finding a spiritual home in Redeemer, as we were thoroughly inspired and challenged by Sandy Cutler's vision of social justice. Sandy was an incredible speaker. He would always give his sermon, without any notes, from the top of the steps just in front of where we now have the altar. We were also welcomed and charmed by the magic of Preston, who made sure we attended coffee hour on our very first visit. At 99, Pres certainly hasn't lost his touch! In those early days, Redeemer appealed to our interests and needs, and the thought of raising a family in that environment was not really in my consciousness yet.

Through the 1980s, we maintained our membership at Redeemer, despite our somewhat nomadic life during that time. We lived in Madison, Lake Hiawatha, Manhattan for a while, Jersey City for two years (during which time Madeleine was born in 1985), and Florham Park. And we may have been the "parishioners with the farthest commute" when we lived in London from 1988-1990. (I was directing Drew's London Semester.) Needless to say, we didn't make it to Redeemer very often during those two years abroad, but I believe we did keep up our pledge! Madeleine was 2 when we left for London, and Emilia was just an infant. We returned to New Jersey, Drew, and Redeemer with two little girls with English accents, which they unfortunately lost very quickly. In 1994, when Colin was just a few months old, we moved to Morristown, drawn to its diversity and its appealing mix of town and suburban amenities. We love living in a town where we can walk everywhere, a lifestyle we grew fond of in London.

For me, I think it wasn't until Colin was baptized at Redeemer in 1994 (Janice's dad, an Episcopal priest, did the honors) that I began to realize the full importance of raising my children in and with the Redeemer community. As Phillip does with all parents of the baptized, he asked us to make a public commitment to our child. What my life at Redeemer has shown me is the beauty and wonder of God's diversity, and that rather than being fearful of difference, I could celebrate, learn, and grow by getting to know my fellow parishioners and hearing their stories. My commitment on that morning, not just to Colin but to all of my children, was to help them to relish the broad spectrum of humanity and to see all people as God's children, worthy of love and respect. We have been very lucky in striving to keep this commitment to have had the Redeemer family helping us so very

much. Our children have been blessed to have grown up in Martin Luther King's "dream," where all people: black and white; male, female and transgendered; gay and straight ... and even nuns (!!! a tough one for a former Roman Catholic) are a natural part of our regular community-a larger family to nurture our biological family. In a very real sense, Madeleine, Emilia and Colin are children of Redeemer, and I'm proud to say we've all done a good job raising them!

Family

by Allison, a Member of the Congregation

I was born into a family, I didn't have much choice about it. As an adult, I've been able to thoughtfully and logically build a family, but the best decisions have come from the heart.

Sixteen years ago, I met a man. He was handsome and smart and made my heart race. Within weeks we knew we would be together forever. We married right out of college. We made choices about our lives, careers and religion (we came to Redeemer in 1992). We did things a family does; we were a family.

Yet, something was missing. We fixed that. We got a dog. She was lovely, but not quite the legacy we were hoping for.

We wanted a baby, but we wanted to be ready emotionally and financially. We wanted to think things through. Joe's brother gave us good advice, he said, "There is never a perfect time to have a baby." In our hearts, we knew in that moment that we were as ready as we would ever be.

Alas, having a baby was not as easy as we thought. We dealt with infertility. We struggled with the fact that we might forever be a family of two. Thankfully, our prayers were soon answered and Jake joined our family. Now we were three. Jake was so cute we decided we wanted another. We didn't contemplate the reality of having two babies at once, our hearts said "Do it." Sydney joined our family 17 months after her brother. We were a bigger, happier family. I don't remember much after that. There were diapers and crying and laughing and first steps and runny noses and crying and first words and hugs and crying. Life was hectic, but good. We made our own traditions, our own rules. We were a part of our childhood families, a part of the Redeemer family and we were our own little nuclear family. Still something was missing. A friend of mine, who had just had her third child, said to me. "Two is too neat. We threw in the third for a little chaos."

Our family was a bit neat. A boy for him, a girl for me. I had this feeling that our family could be even more complete. One night, I turned to Joe and said, "I want a baby." Talk about pregnant pauses. Joe recovered and we discussed why I wanted another child. We talked about whether he wanted another child. He had serious misgivings about another pregnancy because I had gone through prenatal and postpartum depression with both kids. We decided a biological child was not the way to go. The discussion progressed to adoption.

Adoption felt right. In our hearts we knew a domestic, foster care adoption was what we wanted. But then our brains kicked in and we started questioning our decision. How would it affect Jake and Sydney? Would we be able to deal with profound problems? Could we love another as much as we do Jake and Sydney? How would we deal with a child who doesn't look like us?

Then in the news, a child under foster care was found dead in a Rubbermaid container in a basement. This tragedy stuck with us. There were kids out there who needed a family to love them. That was our first sign that we should adopt. But we were still unsure. A few weeks later we were in church, I wish I could remember the topic of Phillip's sermon, but I don't. I only remember that it moved me so much, that at the end of it, Joe and I looked at each other and I said, "Call DYFS (Division of Youth and Family Services) on Monday." And he said, "My thoughts exactly." We knew we were being called out of our comfort zone, we were being asked to deal with the questions, we needed to take this step to bring meaning to our lives and the lives of our children.

We started the process of adoption. We went through the mandated classes and home studies. Still we questioned, was this the right thing? Was this what our family was about? Then we met this little boy. He was two and had a great smile and he liked to dance to the Dora the Explorer theme music. He had a foster family, but no for-real, no forever family. Our hearts went out to him and his heart responded. Within a month, he was living with us. Many of our questions were soon answered. Jake and Sydney loved him. We loved him. He loved us. We could deal with the rest. We could deal with the problems of adoption, the problems of an interracial family, we could figure it out.

A year and a half later, I still have doubts about whether it was the right thing. I still struggle to love this demanding little creature. I still wonder why I thought chaos would be a good thing. I still wonder if we're nuts. But that is all a part of being a family. You love each other one moment and not so much the next moment. Sometimes the doubts offered by the brain are not as important as the certainty offered by the heart.

Family

by Peter and Brian

"We are fam-i-ly! Brian, Peter, Jeannie makes three!" It's not unusual for one of us to break out singing this as we're driving in the car. Because we ARE family and we are delighted to have been asked to share with you a brief sketch of our life together.

Brian and Peter have been together for 25 years. Jeannie, Brian's sister, is a 42-year-old woman who was born with Down syndrome. Three years ago Peter retired from thirty years in parish ministry with the Moravian Church. Since then we have settled into a new home and neighborhood in a community of 58 homes, which is located in Easton Pennsylvania, about 2 miles north of Lafayette College. And while we are blessed with fine neighbors, we no doubt, are the "odd couple" living in this Ozzie and Harriet Land of young families!

We've had a great deal of fun landscaping; evergreens, rhododendron, a butterfly garden, a cutting garden full of perennials and annuals, and a delightful patio that is awning-covered in the summer. A spring project calls for extending the patio and installing a small pond. Our favorite space in our home is the family room, which opens to the kitchen. That's where we spend most of our time. The loft holds the computer, stereo, our books and a comfortable couch that makes for a great reading area.

Brian works in Bethlehem (about a fifteen minute commute) and a few days a month travels into the Manhattan office of a major insurance company for whom he works. Jeannie works at a sheltered workshop in Bethlehem five days a week. All three of us are usually up by 5:45 each morning and both Brian and Peter help Jeannie get ready for work and monitor her pill taking and lunch packing. A van picks her up at our front door at 6:30 a.m. and brings her home by 3:45 p.m. She loves her job, and the social interaction with her co-workers is important for her. Peter works three days a week at Wegmans, an upscale grocery chain.

Our life together is much like any other family, experiencing both good times and difficult moments including the unexpected loss of a parent. Fifteen years ago, for example, Brian and Jeannie's mother, Dot, was diagnosed as being in the late stages of cancer with only a few months to live. As she became less able to care for herself, Brian and Peter brought her to live with them in their home on the church campus for the last six weeks of her life. It was a charming old stucco-covered stone house with two bedrooms on the first floor. Dot was in the front bedroom adjacent to the living room so she would not feel cut off from the normal household routines.

Often on weekends the house would be filled with the voices and laughter of Brian's siblings, and Dot's grandchildren who had come to visit her. During the day women from the congregation would stay with Dot until one of us returned from work. At night we took turns sleeping in her room. One of Dot's biggest concerns was, of course, Jeannie's well-being, and it was Brian who assured her that he would care for Jean.

A few months after Dot's death, Brian was given legal responsibility for Jean's welfare. But how does one explain the loss of a mother to Jean? So we waited for a cue from her. Then one day it happened. Sitting on the couch with Peter she said, "I don't want to go to heaven because if you go there you can't get back." "You miss your mother don't you?" Peter responded. And for the first time the tears came for Jeannie.

It was years later on our way back from a trip to California that, out of the blue, Jeannie said, "I know how you get to heaven now, a special airplane takes you there," with which both Brian and Peter quickly agreed! So, for now, heaven seems to be an O.K. place for Jean to go to... someday!

Amazing how Spirit speaks to us through Jeannie's life. We share another wonderful example with you. A few years ago while driving through downtown Bethlehem during the Christmas season, we passed a huge nativity scene. Jeannie became quite animated and excited as she pointed to it and said, "Look, it's baby Jeannie!" Quick to correct her mistaken identity we said, "No, not baby Jeannie. It's baby Jesus." But quite adamantly she insisted, "No, that's me, baby Jeannie." Apparently all her life, she thought she was hearing people refer to the Christ-child as baby Jeannie. And suddenly, like a lightning bolt it hit us. She's RIGHT. When we look into the face of Jeannie we are seeing the face of God. Whew!

Our years together have been filled with good times: extended family gatherings, visits to Disneyland and Disneyworld with Jeannie, annual winter trips by Peter and Brian to Maine with dear friends, vacations in Provincetown and California. Brian aptly describes us as being a rather "vanilla" couple.

When Peter retired three years ago, an important concern for us was where we would worship. One thing was certain, we would now live our lives with an openness about who we were and we wanted to be part of a faith community that would allow that to happen for us. Peter remembered a friend telling him years ago about an Episcopal church in Morristown, New Jersey that was an inclusive parish. He went online and found the website for Church of the Redeemer. And that began our new spiritual journey.

We first attended Redeemer during the Advent season of 2002. It took only that one visit for us to realize this was the place for which we were searching. We joined the Redeemer family in 2003 and were received into the Episcopal Church in 2004. So we travel from Easton each Sunday, an easy drive of 53 miles one way.

Redeemer has become a vital part of our lives. Brian serves as an usher, a greeter, and a chalice bearer, Jeannie is an acolyte and usher, and Peter serves as a lector, occasionally sings in the choir, and coordinates The Pastoral Response Team. During the worship service on Sunday, November 21, 2004 in honor of their 25th Anniversary together, Peter and Brian had their relationship and rings blessed (a long-awaited moment for us). After the blessing, the congregation broke into applause, and Jeannie, no longer able to contain her excitement, jumped into the aisle, raised her arms in the air and yelled, "THAT'S MY FAMILY!" and then came running up the aisle to hug us. So much for the Religious Right's definition of family and family values!! We are incredibly happy and content at Redeemer. It's more than anything we could have ever imagined.

And so we will continue to love and live deeply into our life together as it unfolds for us, trusting it all to a gracious God who, we are bold enough to believe, is pleased to be an integral part of it all.

Girl Scout Memories

by Dottie, a Long-Time Congregant

Yes, I am the oldest Girl Scout in the Morris Area Girl Scout Council, and yes, "working with children has had a miraculous effect on my spirits"---quoted from The Leader---and yes, I'm 81.5 years---not old!

My life as a Brownie and Girl Scout began in Kohler, Wisconsin, where I learned to build a bonfire the correct way! Camp for one week each summer was wonderful and sad---12 months away. Of course marshmallows were toasted and burned!

I moved to Iowa and then to Pennsylvania, and finally to Madison, N.J. I became my older daughter's Brownie and then Girl Scout leader---training was in the Morristown Methodist Church. During our year in Santa Monica, CA, I was the other daughter's leader. They graduated from high school and the NJGS Council asked me to train mothers. At one workshop, a gentleman told me that he and his wife were going to be co-leaders. "Oh, I thought, he'll know how to tie knots, memorize the Morse Code, and show me how to tie knots." When he received his Girl Scout pin, he thanked me for teaching all he should know!

A dream came true while we were living in Delft, the Netherlands. Don and I drove to Switzerland---the location of Our Chalet--the world wide home for Girl Scouts. The lady who opened the door said, "You must be from States---no one else would come here in a blizzard." We returned to Our Chalet in the spring---no Scouts, but edelweis everywhere!

My badges and pins did not get moved with us to Denville, but as of today I have a new badge from Randolph Girl Scout Council, and yes, the Girl Scout Promise is the same.

From the Rector: In the News

*From The Angelus
The Weekly Newsletter for Saint Mary the Virgin
Volume 7, Number 22, April 17, 2005*

I've resigned myself to the Episcopal Church being in the news for the foreseeable future. This morning's Times reported that six rectors in the Diocese of Connecticut are about to be punished for "abandoning the Communion of this Church" because they cannot accept being in communion with a bishop who supported the ordination of the present bishop of New Hampshire. The Episcopal News Service reported yesterday that the Episcopal Church's Executive Committee has decided that our Church will accede to the request that we not send representatives to the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council.

I regret that it's not at all clear to me that our bishops, clergy and lay leaders in the Anglican Communion will want to address the theological issue at the heart of all the debates over Christian sexuality: Who is welcome to receive Holy Communion? The question comes up in the New Testament and remains with us today.

The great majority of Christian communities would normatively exclude non-celibate homosexuals from Holy Communion. The number of Christian churches that officially welcome non-celibate homosexuals to receive Communion is small. Most Christians are Roman Catholics. Anglicans comprise only four percent of the world's Christian community. Most churches have no place at their altars formally for divorced and remarried persons either without a lot of canonical gymnastics (annulments in the case of Roman Catholics).

Since the time of the New Testament, Christian communities have practiced excommunication over issues of sexual morality and marital fidelity. I hope that the wider Church will eventually embrace a theological position that welcomes all to the Lord's Table. This too is a New Testament position.

In John's Gospel, Jesus didn't ask the woman at the well for a confession and he didn't tell her to leave the man she was living with, a sixth man after five husbands. In John's Gospel, where Jesus knows all things, he doesn't have any trouble washing the feet of and eating with Judas and all of the others who will betray him. Frederick William Faber captured the spirit of the Church all too well in a verse of his great hymn There's a wideness in God's mercy, a verse that is omitted from our own Hymnal, "But we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own; and we magnify his strictness with a zeal he will not own."

Again, I expect us to continue to be in the news for a while to come, in pretty much the same way, because it will take a while for our Church to take a clear stand, one way or another, on the issue of who can be ordained. This really is a theological question of the second not first order. The Anglican Communion will probably continue to want to dodge the more important issue at hand.

I want to encourage you not to be discouraged about our Episcopal Church despite its shortcomings and challenges. There will be another theological crisis after this one. The Good Shepherd still plans to call all of his sheep by their own names and to bring all of them into his fold. That's his plan. I think you and I should continue to try to be thankful for God's gift of life and of the mercy that cares for us along the way to his home.

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