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Rector's Column

This month's Rector's Notes are excerpted from the homily preached at the Wednesday night Eucharist on January 10, commemorating the Feast of William Laud. The manuscript for the entire sermon can be found on the St. Francis website at <http://www.holdenma.com/stfrancis/> (then click on "sermons.") Archbishop Laud was a polarizing and divisive figure in his day. How does his witness help us to think through the contested questions of what it means to be an "Anglican" in our own time and place?

. . . I have a confession to make. When I was first attracted to the Episcopal Church I think I had a false and idealized vision dancing in my head (like a kind of sugarplum) of what the *via media* was all about. I mean that at the time of the Reformation (as we've all learned) you had Catholics and Protestants killing each other in England. But then good old Queen Elizabeth saved the day and we ended up with the Elizabethan *settlement*. It sounds so British, doesn't it? Everything was *settled*. It sounds as if they all got together and sat in a circle and worked it all out and then held hands and sang *Kum Ba Yah* together. And that this "middle way" held tight until General Convention 2003.

Of course once you say it out loud like that you realize how silly it all sounds. The fact is that nothing was ever *settled*. A new *Prayerbook* held things together but the tensions have always been there and from time to time they bubble up into crisis. Laud lived in such a time. Lines were drawn and some were accused of not really being Anglicans.

I think the great danger of the Anglican tradition—whether in the sixteenth century or the seventeenth or the twenty-first—is that we are prone to the sin of Laodicea. (See Revelation 3:14-16) In our desire for things settled we can become lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. And yet our prayer tonight was that we might be not only constant in faith, but *zealous* in witness. Yet the paradox is that a faith community that encourages zealous witness will always be a faith community where conflicts bubble up from time to time.

And if that is so, then I ask you this: what is it about our Anglican heritage we most need to remember? . . . perhaps we need to remember our tradition in ways that highlight the rougher edges and the struggles and the zealousness of our witnesses—on all sides. Don't get me wrong. I do believe we are called to a ministry of reconciliation. But I wonder if we don't need something more than that in this time and place: *a theology of conflict*. We need to, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it, let go of our "wish dreams" for Christian community so that we can recognize that Christ is present in the mess of it all. Yet even when it's a mess it's a holy mess—precisely because Christ is in it all. Maybe we need a theology of conflict to remind us that conflict is simply part of the deal, especially in a community that values and treasures each and every voice and perspective.

At the outset a theology of conflict has to insist on certain rules. It's more like boxing than the W.W.F. No scratching or biting or hitting below the belt. No making it personal. But beyond rules of engagement I think we need to celebrate the fact that we gain clarity when we encounter each other's truths: that there are gifts of the Spirit that emerge in communities and families that learn how to fight together. Indeed there is no intimacy where there is no passion. Just as with couples (the making up is the best part of fighting!)—so it is as well in Christian community: the opportunity to grow and to love and to come to the table to share a meal is the best part. Do we dare to imagine such a community as a gift from God?

Peace,
Rich

Ash Wednesday Worship

Services of Holy Eucharist with Imposition of Ashes will be held on Wednesday, February 21st at 7:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Youth Confirmation Class

Class meetings in February are on 4th and the 25th at 11:30 a.m. in the Library. Also, please plan to attend one of the Ash Wednesday services with your mentor.

Adult Confirmation Class will begin on Wednesday, February 7th at 7:30 p.m. in the narthex.

The schedule for February will be as follows:

February 7th – Baptism

February 28 – Holy Eucharist, As Manna in the Wilderness

Church School News

Eucharist Instruction Program

Purpose: Recognizing that at Baptism, parents promise to “see that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life,” (BCP p. 302) we want to provide resources and opportunities which support parents as they teach their children about the gift and mystery of Holy Communion and its connections with our daily lives.

- ✦ This program will begin on March 4th with an informational meeting for children and parents after the 10:00AM service.
- ✦ The curriculum, “Visible Signs ~ Spiritual Grace” will be used. This is primarily a home program designed for children ages 8-10. The program is appropriate for children who have not yet received communion as well as for those who have received but who are ready for more formal instruction.
- ✦ Three additional meetings will be held. The purpose and proposed dates of these meetings will be as follows:
 - Sunday, March 25th: Children will meet with Susan Bastardo during regularly scheduled Church School time to review lessons on Baptism and begin the lessons on the Eucharist.
 - Saturday AM, April 14th: Parents will meet with Fr. Rich to talk about the Eucharist for children, and children will meet with Susan to review lessons on “The Word of God” and introduce lessons on “The Holy Communion.”
 - Saturday AM, May 5th: Children and their parents will meet with Fr. Rich to learn more about receiving Christ in the Eucharist and to bake altar bread. This lesson includes an opportunity to see the altar area up close and learn the name, function and purpose of many sacred items.
- ✦ The children will be honored during the Saturday 5:00 PM service on May 5th and will receive Holy Communion with their families.

A sign-up sheet will be available in the Narthex during the month of February.

Youth Group News

Souper Bowl of Caring

Our teens will be ready to greet you with soup pots as you leave the service on February 4th. This national organization encourages youth groups to collect \$1 (or more) from parishioners as they leave services during the weekend of Super Bowl. All collections are donated locally – and the Souper Bowl organization tallies results of donations nationwide. You can check them out at www.souperbowl.org. This is a long standing tradition for the Youth Group and we thank you in advance for your support.

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper and Eucharist

The Youth Group will provide a Pancake Supper beginning at 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. followed by Eucharist at 7:00 p.m. Adults \$6, children \$4 – Proceeds will be donated to charity. Please see the sign up sheet in the narthex.

30 Hour Famine and Youth Led Services

The Youth Groups will be participating in a nationwide 30 hour famine on February 24/25, sponsored by World Vision. They will spend the day and overnight at the church, and participate in leading worship at the 3 services that weekend. Please support them by sponsoring a youth. Speak to one of the youth group members or to Lori Churchill.

Mission Matters

2007 Mission Focus

At our January Mission Team meeting we agreed that our mission focus would be hunger, housing and health. Millions of people worldwide are hungry, without homes, and will die unnecessarily every year from diseases that are preventable and treatable. People everywhere need access to life essentials – healthy food, safe drinking water, a place to live, basic

health care services and protection from deadly preventable diseases such as malaria. The Mission Team feels deeply that every man, woman, and child deserves these very basic gifts of life.

Heart to Heart Kids Kits

This February give a gift from your heart. Our Heart-to-Heart Kids Kits recognizes that even as faces must be washed and bellies must be fed, children's laughter must be heard as well.

During February, we urge you to select a heart from our Heart Board in the narthex and purchase the items designated. Bring your items to the Mission Table by Sunday, February 25th, so that we may assemble all our Heart to Heart Kids Kits for delivery. (We hope to collect 20 or so boxes.)

Here is a list of items that are needed:

- One Rubbermaid Clear Impressions shoebox with lid, 6.5 qt., or other flexible clear plastic 6.5 qt. shoebox with lid
- One small stuffed bear
- One soft small ball
- One harmonica, or other small musical instrument
- One 6" x 9" non-spiral bound pad of regular or construction paper (60-100 sheets)
- One slinky
- One yo-yo
- One 7-foot child's jump rope
- One comb
- One toothbrush (in original packaging)
- One tube of toothpaste (4-7 ounces)
- One box of 24 crayons
- One large eraser
- Six new pencils with erasers
- One pencil sharpener
- One 30-centimeter ruler (12')
- One pair blunt child's scissors

No substitutions please

Monetary donations will also be collected, as it will cost \$3.00 per box for shipment.

Remember, in a hurting world, little things we take for granted can mean a lot. For more information please contact Donna Alarie at 508-886-6031.

Ash Wednesday Offering

The Mission Team designated the Ash Wednesday offering for Dismas House, Worcester. The mission of Dismas House is to reconcile former prisoners to society and society to former prisoners by developing a strong, supportive community. There are 2 homes in the Worcester area – Dismas House at 30 Richards Street and Almost Home House on the grounds of the West Boylston Correctional facility – where former inmates can get housing and services. Each home can accommodate 12-14 former inmates at a time. (They receive more than 1,000 applicants per year.) The average stay is 6-9 months, during which they must either get a job, get a GED education, or do volunteer work for a local charity.

World Mission Weekend – February 24/25

Every member of the Episcopal Church is a member of a missionary society.....The Domestic and Foreign Mission Society. As God sent Jesus into the world, we too are sent into the world. We are united in one call to God's mission in the world. Heifer International will be giving the parishioners of St. Francis a plaque for our purchase of an arkful of animals to help feed those less fortunate.

Prayer Shawl Ministry

In January we were able to have 9 prayer shawls finished for the monthly blessing! Thanks be to God for all those who gave of their time and talents through the busy holiday season. Next Prayer Shawl meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 19th at 10:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall.

Submitted by Jeanne Schutte for the Mission Team.

Bunny Huddleston, Chairperson 508-886-4969 – darrellandbunny@msn.com

The next Little Portion deadline is Thursday, February 15th.

Save the date...Lenten Quiet Day

Saturday, March 17th, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at St. Clare House. Details in the next Little Portion