



LOGOS

The Newsletter for St. John's Episcopal Church, Arlington

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it" John 1:5

March 2015

"Ashes to Go" Brings Church to the World

She stood at the top of the Metro escalator as if unsure of whether to descend. Finally she turned and came over and said, "I haven't had ashes in years. I was raised a Roman Catholic." So Rev. Ann Barker and Bill Pritchard gave her ashes and a Lenten devotional book, hoping that perhaps what they offered would be a spur to get her to think about embracing church again. One woman came up and said, "Ashes to Go, I'm so glad you're here again this year." Another said "Perfect, just perfect." Yet another was relieved that Ashes to Go was "open for business" when she came by.

On Ash Wednesday, Ann and Bill stood at the Ballston Metro station and offered ashes to anyone who wanted them. They gave ashes to more than 20 people. Others who didn't get ashes smiled as they went by. One person didn't want ashes but did want to make a donation. It was a good experience to be out (though a cold one), bringing the church to the world. The practice, begun several years ago, has been picked up by many churches in the area, and you can get ashes at Metro stops and other places that have large populations of people going by during the day. "It's a

wonderful experience," said Ann. "It brings us in contact with people, even with people who just look at the sign and move on. Perhaps they will come next year."



On Ash Wednesday, St. John's brought "Ashes to Go" to the Ballston Metro station.

From the Rector: Stretch Yourself

Lately, I have been doing a lot of stretching. I already had stretches for my neck to separate my compressed disks. Recently I have been doing stretches for my sore ankle to relieve tight muscles. And now my tennis elbow (or snow shoveling elbow) requires more stretching. Stretching makes a tight, cramped, or sore body feel good. Recently I gave myself an emotional stretch by putting my arms around someone I hadn't seen in a while and giving them a big hug. I gave myself a spiritual stretch by giving "Ashes to Go" to people on Ash Wednesday. I felt like I was doing something for God by bringing the church to the world.

Stretching is a good thing for bodies, hearts, and souls. It loosens us up and makes us more flexible. There are several things we can do to stretch ourselves, to be flexible, to be open to God's leading. We can walk a new path. Debbie Middlebrook writes in *The Upper Room* that she caught herself walking her dog around an obstacle in her yard that wasn't even there anymore! Sometimes we do the same. We stay stuck in some place because it is comfortable instead of striking out on a new way that could lead somewhere wonderful.

We can widen our circle of vision. We can be so focused on ourselves and our problems that we may not look around to see that a blessing from God is nearby. Judy Walton in *The Upper Room* tells the story of towing stranded fishermen home, when she and her husband saw a huge number of beautiful migrating butterflies in the sky. When they mentioned the sight to the men in the boat, they hadn't seen them because their field of vision was limited to their boat. Widening our field of vision is a stretch that can lead to gratitude and new life.

We can stretch ourselves by persevering at something hard that will lead to something

good. It takes courage to persevere. As one saying goes, "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'"

Taking risks stretches us. Getting on a dating site, looking for a new job, and reaching out to make a new friend all involve risk. You may get rejected, but you may be successful too. Whether you succeed or fail, you learn, and learning keeps us alive and growing.

Pope Francis suggests that we fast from indifference this Lent—that we open our hearts to the world in love, in compassion, in curiosity. God's children are out there. They are our neighbors. By getting to know them, we can share their joys and sorrows in a way that stretches us spiritually.

Using our imagination is a good way to flex our soul muscles. Brother Robert L'Esperance of the Society of St. John the Evangelist (SSJE) says that "Jesus invites the possibility of changing one's mind and heart from settled patterns into something that admits of wide open possibilities contained in our life with God." Lying in the grass and looking at the clouds, daydreaming, and drawing a picture of yourself in a place you want to be and then looking for that place keep us open to possibilities. I knew someone once who dreamed of being able to do her job barefoot. She is now a massage therapist—and yes, she works barefoot.

Once I saw a picture of a child with her arms flung open as if she wanted to embrace the whole world. We can create a whole new atmosphere in our lives by saying yes to the world. There is plenty of negativity and cynicism to go around, especially in Washington, but if we can get free from

thinking that way our hearts will stretch and grow strong with positive energy.

Stretching gets the kinks out of our bodies, minds and spirits. It helps us stay healthy and growing and moves us toward wholeness. God stretched Godself into the world by sending Jesus to teach us how to stretch ourselves by loving God and caring for others. By doing what we can to make ourselves flexible, we

are helping ourselves be ready to listen to God's calls to us to do new things or do old things in a new way. God stretches God's arms out to hold us in love. Our answer is to stretch our arms out to receive God's loving embrace.

Ann †

Lenten Study in Adult Forum

St. John's adult education class is exploring a Lenten study on "Seeing Ourselves in Those Confronted by Jesus." The discussion will cover the Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes, and Zealots; the disciples; and the women who surrounded Jesus. Participants will study the characteristics of each group and look at modern-day examples. On April 12, Kathie Panfil will discuss Hispanic Christianity (this talk was postponed from an earlier date). Come and join the class on Sundays at 9 a.m. for these stimulating discussions.

A Seat on the Diocese Executive Board

Rev. Ann Barker has become Region 3's representative on the Executive Board of the Diocese. According to Diocesan Canon 7, the Executive Board prepares and recommends diocesan programs and proposed funding for those programs to the Diocesan Council for approval. It is responsible for the execution of all approved programs except as specified by the council and shall be responsible for the work of the church in the diocese between councils.

The Executive Board is made up of one person from each of the diocese's 15 regions, the bishop, and the suffragan bishop or bishop coadjutor. At any given time, half of the members are clergy and half are lay. Terms are technically for one year, but normally members are appointed for two additional years for a total of three years. The board meets five times a year at various locations in the diocese.

St. John's Mission Statement

We welcome everyone including believers, seekers and doubters to share God's love and acceptance in a community of worship and service.

St. John's Vision Statement

St. John's is dedicated to nurturing disciples for Jesus by:

- > Offering faith-deepening worship, education, outreach and pastoral care;
- > Attracting and welcoming newcomers; and
- > Sharing God's love with our community and the world around us.

Words on Hymns: *Seize the Opportunities of Lent*

“I don’t like Lent,” I have heard. “The hymns are gloomy, there are no flowers on the altar, and we don’t sing the ‘Gloria.’ I’d be just as happy without Lent.” So why is Lent an important part of the church year?

As the Ash Wednesday liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer tells us, Lent is a time of reflection on what Christ went through for our sakes, his suffering and death. Consequently, the church is left bare of floral decorations, which are usually associated with celebration. The flowers in churches on Easter Day after a time of the churches looking quite bare serve to enhance the specialness of the day. The “Gloria” is a hymn of praise and celebration and, as such, is inappropriate for this season. The Lenten hymns speak of penitence for our sins and give thanks for God’s mercy. While God loves us as we are, each of us has room for improvement and, without dwelling on our failings obsessively, Lent is a good time to examine ourselves and try to be a better person. We want to spruce our church up for Easter as it symbolizes new beginnings. Last year the organ technician and I jumped through hoops to get the organ repaired and up and running for Easter. (We made it!)

Since the earliest times of the Church, there is evidence of some kind of Lenten preparation for Easter. St. Irenaeus (d. 203) wrote a letter discussing a dispute as to how long the Lenten fast should last—one day, two days, or more. Some made their “day” last 40 hours on end. St. Irenaeus observed, “Such variation in the observance did not originate in our own day, but very much earlier, in the time of our forefathers.” Since the time of “our forefathers”—always an expression for the apostles—a 40-day period of Lenten preparation existed. However, the actual

practices and duration of Lent were inconsistent throughout the Church.

Where did Lent come from? Certainly Jesus didn’t mandate it. The current state of research points to three possibilities. The first is that it simply appears after the Council of Nicea; any attempt to connect Lent to pre-Nicene fasting practices is too speculative to be of any value. Another, rather opposite, position has been to accept as historical an alleged Egyptian fast as an antecedent to Lent, and that Lent’s rapid dissemination throughout the Christian world resulted from the program of liturgical and theological alignment begun at Nicea. A final position, a sort of middle road, acknowledges the incomplete and sometimes contradictory nature of the evidence but asserts nonetheless that Lent developed as an amalgamation of several early fasting customs. The conclusion is up to the reader.

Lent became more standardized after the legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313. The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) noted in its disciplinary canons that two provincial synods should be held each year, “one before the 40 days of Lent.” Based on writings, one can safely conclude that by the end of the fourth century, the 40-day period of Easter preparation known as Lent existed, and that prayer and fasting constituted its primary spiritual exercises.

Of course, the number “40” has always had special spiritual significance regarding preparation, despite the conjecture that it simply meant a heck of a long time. From Noah’s ark to Moses on Mount Sinai, Elijah on Mount Horeb, and Jesus in the wilderness before beginning his ministry, and others in between, 40 days and 40 nights has had a mystical quality. Once the 40 days of Lent were established, the next development concerned

how much and to what extent fasting was to be done. Eventually, the practice prevailed of fasting for six days a week over the course of six weeks, and Ash Wednesday was instituted to bring the number of fast days before Easter to 40.

Over the years, modifications have been made to the Lenten observances, making our practices less stringent. People are still encouraged to “give up something” for Lent as a sacrifice to be made willingly and without fuss. An alternative is to add something such as reading from the religion section of the public library or volunteering to help the poor,

sick, or elderly. Rather than lamenting the aspects of our church service that are absent during this season, seize the opportunities that Lent gives us. Although the practices may have evolved over the centuries, the focus remains the same: to repent of sin, to renew our faith, and to prepare to joyfully celebrate our salvation through the resurrection. And on Easter, let St. John’s ring with our processional hymn, “Welcome, happy morning!”

Carol Dunlap

P.S. Enjoy the hot cross buns we can find at the grocery store only during Lent.

St. John’s Staff and Leadership

Staff

Rector: The Rev. Ann B. Barker
Minister of Family Programs: Jonathan Muehlke
Minister of Music: Lynn Robinson
Organist: Carol Dunlap
Parish Administrator: Virginia Pearson
Sexton: Juan Figueroa

Parish Leaders

Bill Thomson, Treasurer
John Restall, Pledge Clerk
Lenore Schmidt, Chair, Finance Committee
Eileen Tallent, Chair, Altar Guild

Vestry

Bill Schenck, Senior Warden
Sandy Winger, Junior Warden
Jeff Aitken

Paul Stenger
Bill Thomson
Linda Trochim

Vestry Retreat Discusses Closer Vestry–Rector Relationships

On January 31, 2015, St. John’s held a vestry retreat at Goodwin House, Bailey’s Crossroads. Facilitated by the Rev. Jonathan Bryan, a retired priest of the diocese, the retreat was designed to help the vestry and rector function better together as a team and have that improvement in mutual ministry extend to the entire congregation.

The vestry reached consensus on using consensus rather than voting as a new way of addressing questions for vestry approval. Consensus is a way of agreeing on a decision. It does not mean unanimity or uniformity about the option. It means that no group member has a fatal objection. Fatal is defined as an output that would intolerably violate the member’s conscience or vital needs. The objecting member is expected to explain this reasoning. The group gradually works on building a consensus until no one has a fatal objection or until an impasse is reached and the process must be discontinued.

Governance by consensus, the Rev. Bryan explained, reflects commitment to the integrity and unity of the group.

The vestry also supported increasing mutuality by committing to the practice of a short mutual ministry review at the end of every meeting. There would be four questions:

1. In the past month, what has been a happening or development or trend in our ministries together that we are glad about?
2. What has been a happening or development or trend in our ministries together that we are not so glad about?
3. How do these two show that the parish has strong mutual ministries and areas we need to strengthen with improved mutuality?

4. What are actions needed to improve weak areas?

The vestry and rector would agree that no one is either to blame for outcomes or to take exclusive credit. We’re all in this together.

A covenant between the rector and the vestry was also agreed upon. The covenant’s important points are that the vestry and rector covenant to serve together as a rector–vestry team, emphasizing the qualities of collaboration, consensus, and mutuality in order to carry out their respective ministries in the body of Christ; the vestry authorized the rector and the wardens to serve as a rector–wardens governance team with the same qualities to provide executive functions pursuant to managing the work of the rector–vestry team; the rector and vestry affirmed the mutuality in the rector’s and vestry’s responsibilities to provide for St. John’s ministries; and the vestry and rector commit to regular and frequent mutual ministry reviews, routinely in each vestry meeting and annually as a three-hour review with a diocesan consultant.

Outcomes from the retreat also included that we are a welcoming group without appearing desperate for new members; we should appreciate what we have rather than focusing on what we need to be or should be; we need to make positive statements about volunteering, instead of treating it as a chore or drudge, because we are using our gifts to serve; we should put less focus on money and numbers and look at things more positively; and we should put more information out about the church to the community.

Parish News

Upcoming Events:

The St. John's Book Club will meet on **March 3 at 7:30 p.m.** to discuss *Look Again* by Lisa Scottoline. All are welcome! *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed is the selection for the **April 7** meeting.

Holy Week services begin on **Palm Sunday, March 29**. The 8 a.m. service will feature a reading of the Passion Gospel, with the congregation speaking the roles in the story. At the 10 a.m. service, we will enter the church waving palms and singing "All Glory, Laud, and Honor." This is followed by the reading of the Passion Gospel, with congregational participation as at the 8 a.m. service.

On **Maundy Thursday, April 2, at 6:30 p.m.**, a **Loaves and Fishes meal** will be held in the undercroft, followed by a short Eucharistic service at our tables. The service will conclude in the nave of the church, where we will strip the altar, drape the Cross, and place a bundle of thorns on the altar.

On **Easter Sunday, April 5**, we will welcome our Lord's Resurrection with joy and music at the 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. services. The 10 a.m. service will include a children's message, and all children are invited to help flower the Cross. This service is followed by an Easter egg hunt and a special Easter fellowship hour. No Christian Education sessions will be held on Easter.

Thank you to:

- Lynn Robinson and Norka Antelo for hosting game night in January.
- Bill Thomson for organizing the Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, Del Hunt for buying supplies, and all the individuals who volunteered to work at the supper. We are sorry it was canceled due to bad weather.
- Bill Pritchard for helping with "Ashes to Go" during both the morning and afternoon shifts at Ballston Metro.
- Patricia Broida, Debbie Carter, Diane Henderson, and Barbara Wien for helping to host the February 24 Region 3 Lenten supper at St. George's.

Rest in Peace

Betty Vertiz, who entered the Life of the Resurrection on February 21.

We celebrate with all who have birthdays in March:

Rev. Ann Barker, Beth Cavey, Ian Kunkle, Pete Olivere, Cristina Tallent, and Dave Vistica.

We celebrate with those observing anniversaries in March:

Debbie and Henry Carter; Jim and Janice Hull; Anne and Paul Stenger.

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Lisa Pope, LOGOS Editor

Articles for LOGOS may be emailed to logos@stjohnsarlingtonva.org (preferred) or left at the church office.

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