

Cluster Chronicle

"A community of Episcopal congregations sharing the love and power of the Risen Christ in our communities through worship, evangelization and apostolic service."

Dear Friends,

Here is an object lesson for us all about procrastination. I had an email about getting something into the Chronicle as the New Year broke upon us. But, while it was in my head, it was on the back burner. (My road is well paved).

Now, here in the second week of the month and year, I wish I had done the deed when alerted. After the events of this week, it feels like an uphill climb to offer anything that will seem trite, useful, insightful or just help us hold onto the sled as we seem to be careening down the hill.

I have been taught this lesson before. Many times by many people. Unfortunately, at this date on my timeline, I think procrastination is just baked into my being. Sort of like the old dog new tricks thing. I don't know why they never took. The lessons that is to say. As I got older, it was called disorganization; I dug that as it seemed to me to be the path to that cherished and impregnable state of eccentricity. A condition of which I had ample examples in too many Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, etc, etc, etc.



Fr. Charles on Christmas Day

But I will stop with that there for while being eccentric and disorganized and even sometimes (ok, mostly) behind schedule, I know that being that way is not quaint, nor cute to others. And, it is borderline narcissism to ask others to put up with it---blessed are they who do navigate the eccentricity of their loved ones.

It seems to me, having taken time to think about it, that what got us into this time, place and space is the very simple fact that despite great leaps forward in tinkering with technology, our nation and people have put a lot on the back burner with the promise of a "someday" and expected indulgence from those most affected.

Well, not just this past week, but in the very year past, that back burner, laden with so many ingredients for making enough for everyone has melted the pot as it boiled over.

And instead of cleaning it up, or attending to starting all over, the tendency is to blame the cook assigned to watch it. Believing that, to use another old adage, a watched pot never boils.

Well. When will we ever learn?

I like to think---and believe---that I have learned. That may mean I have reached that plain of eccentricity of my heritage. I confess, when I reached fifty, I grew to care less about how I dressed. (I have since moderated that due to the suggestions from the people who live in my building). Maybe owning the idea that lateness does not equate with greatness is more of a sign of maturity. My issues now are not as much putting off as taking too much on.

(Continued on page 2)

Dear Friends,

(Con't from page 1)

Beyond me? Out in the country? I don't know what to believe yet. It seems too much as if the can of justice, equity, peace and prosperity for each of us, is simply being dumped into another pot to be laid on that busted back burner. With someone different to watch closer so the simmer doesn't slosh.

Not sure if the hill has been fully climbed here. Maybe at least, with the soupy stew metaphor, we might think of our hunger. That's probably good. For when we hunger for something, we usually make sure we get what we need to satisfy the grumbles, rumbles and emptiness. It usually isn't put off.

Or, maybe, we have reached the hill top. The mountaintop of biblical proportions which if we don't see G-d right away, we can admire the view. And then take some time to rest and choose the direction for ourselves. A slight change from "WWJD" to "where would Jesus have us go "WWJFG".

Whatever. The point here at the end is this, it's never too late to start. It's never too late to begin. How it turns out? Meh. That's not so important right now. Besides, if we knew the ending and the path traveled too, would we go?

The answer must be answered right now. Before it all boils over again. Peace,

Charles +

Bishop Price urges prayer and action

"The scenes of violence and assault have shaken us all," stated Bishop Kenneth Price in a January 7 email to the Cluster. "In a democracy the right of people to protest decisions they do not agree with is important. What we saw this past week in Washington was not a peaceful protest but a violent act of lawlessness".

Bishop Price noted that Congress was, in fact, debating differences of belief and opinion when it was attacked. When debate devolves into demand for "my way," others' beliefs are discounted as well as the individual as a person". Bishop Price noted that a variety of things caused the event, but the result endangered elected officials certifying the election of the next president. Property was destroyed, people injured and killed.

"This situation, combined with all-too-frequent instances of racial injustice and the tension and fear of the pandemic of COVID-19, is testing humanity unlike anything we have known in our lifetime," added the Bishop. "People of faith are being asked to pray for our nation, our leaders and all affected people. This is good—I believe in and encourage prayer. But I also believe prayer is not complete unless coupled with action. As we pray for peace in our nation, our lives must become living testimony to those prayers. "

The Bishop urges us to try to see and understand all sides of an issue. And, when we witness racial or any kind of injustice, to speak up and support the victims. Concerning COVID, listen to medical experts; don't make mask-wearing and vaccination political matters. Participate for the greater good so that we may eradicate this attack on us all."

The Bishop's appeal concluded with the sharing of a youthful experience that influenced his life. "At church camp, we made bracelets that said, "What would God have us to do?" I no longer wear that bracelet, but its message is emblazoned on my heart---and I hear it in everything I do." So, my sisters and brothers, pray and then ask God to show you what you may do to give action to the prayers. May God bless you in the doing of God's work."



*(The Rt. Rev.) Kenneth L. Price, Jr.
Bishop in the Diocese of Southern Ohio*

Year-end Community Meal

While serving the final free monthly supper of the year, Our Saviour volunteers were already planning for the first Community Meal of 2021. Good news for those still living under personal pressures of the pandemic.

A hearty meal of ham, green beans, macaroni and cheese (gifted by Bill Miller of Oasis Food Pantry), dinner roll, fruit and a cookie was prepared, boxed and distributed December 30 by Our Saviour's Community Meal Regulars: Amy and Todd Boeck, Dusty Hurst, Greg Kimball, Vicki and Larry Rammel and Emily Rozmus.

It's worth noting that these volunteers are always masked and no one has contracted Covid!



Volunteers, l to r, Greg Kimball, Emily Rozmus, Dusty Hurst, Todd Boeck and Larry Rammel.



Vicki delivered coats

Vicki reorganized the church's inventory of winter outerwear and delivered several coats. Remember these warm garments are available to anyone in the community. You can call Jodi at 937-689-3986 for an appointment.

Next year Community Meals will be served at the same time, 6 p.m. on the last Wednesday of each month and at the same place, Episcopal Church of Our Saviour, Mechanicsburg. Village and area residents are welcome.

Dot contest winner taps Epiphany for award

Some will remember a Sunday some months ago when several congregants from Springfield Christ Church attended Epiphany worship, stayed for coffee hour (even brought cookies) and had a grand sharing of info, personal and professional.

They were participating in a diocese-sponsored Connect the Dots initiative which involved parishes visiting other parishes, worshipping with them and exchanging stories, ideas and community ministries. Guests were to write narratives of their visits and submit them to be considered for a \$1000 prize. The winner would bestow a second \$1000 to support a food ministry or other pandemic-related outreach by one of the churches they had visited. Bishop Breidenthal chose Christ Church Springfield as the winner of the Connect the Dots program and Christ Church tapped Epiphany's food ministry as deserving of the second \$1000.

The award was announced in a letter from Diocesan Operations Executive Carine de Lange. She praised Epiphany's "welcoming congregation and hospitality which stood out among churches visited," and for the "demonstration of Christ's love to strangers and those in need in the community."

Epiphany Treasurer Shary Stadler received the check. Since the Community Meal project is on hold during the pandemic, Shary suggested that Epiphany match the award and \$2000 be gifted to Urbana's Caring Kitchen. The vestry unanimously agreed, and a check for \$2000 was sent to the Caring Kitchen to help meet the need for food and housing which increases daily.

Advent study revisited

The Zoomed discussions guided by Fr. Charles during Advent brought much to light. Not the least was the fact that Cluster members know their scripture, have thought about it and can comfortably discuss it. Vicki and Larry Rammel, Mary Neal Miller and Amy Boeck and a participant from Columbus seriously engaged in most of the sessions. Knowledgeable, but open to fuller understanding. As Mary Neal said, "...stretching our minds and our perceptions."



Mary Neal



Vicki

Early sessions considered John the Baptist in the wilderness (a bleak, rock, desert area between Jerusalem and Jericho), announcing the coming Messiah and baptizing believers in the Jordan River. Fr. Charles walked the group along the Jordan River, noting that when one knows the actual places where biblical scenes occurred it helps to anchor them to reality.

He added that while the narrative describes what took place, little is disclosed about personalities, motivations, emotions. What brought John to this role---a sort of advance man for Jesus? Why was Mary chosen to bear God's son? Mary and Joseph must have been shaken by the Angel Gabriel's message and worried how the birth of a child to an engaged couple would affect their lives---and his. All these decisions came with a substantial cost---that was willingly paid.

Pondering John the Baptist's motivation, Vicki's reply beautifully paralleled the many scriptural mysteries. She said she believed that when Mary told her elderly cousin Elizabeth (soon to give birth to John) of the angel's visit and they embraced, at that very moment, John was imbued with God's divine plan for this family and his part in it. What a captivating vision of the genesis of John's ministry!

Later Fr. Charles introduced the variously depicted manger of Luke's story. He said the Greek word for inn, from which the family was turned away, more correctly meant simply a lodging or guest room. Most families of that time and place lived in the upper floor of a two-story structure with their livestock housed below. So, the manger and friendly beasts in the ubiquitous nativity scenes may have actually been within a family dwelling.

The various ways Christmas is celebrated concluded the stimulating series which fleshed out facts of biblical life and people known for centuries, but only in part. This eager study group voiced hope for more and that is being considered. If it does come to pass, don't miss it.

The Jordan River



Layout of typical Jewish home at time of Jesus' birth



The proof is in the pandemic pudding

If ever anything could convince of the interconnectedness of the universe, it's the rapid, pole to pole spread of Covid 19. No matter how civilized, educated, prosperous, sophisticated, enlightened, hard working, wise or devout, human beings (even an animal here and there) have contracted the virus and passed it on.

We've had plenty of reminders of our connectedness: "Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another," Ephesians 4: 25; long before the words climate change filled us with anxiety, naturalist John Muir stated, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

Physicist John Bell's theory of "nonlocality" claims that separate parts of the universe, as small as two particles and billions of light years apart, are potentially connected in an intimate and immediate way." Einstein called the theory "spooky actions at a distance." But experiments give weight to the possibility.

Not only physicists but poets ponder universal wholeness. Robinson Jeffers was asked to contribute to an anthology, *Poets at Prayer*, reflecting on the spiritual dimensions of his art. He felt that humanity had become divorced from the rest of nature, blind to the "astonishing beauty of things," and the protection of this natural inheritance. He wrote:

"...I rather dislike stating my attitudes except in a poem, however, they are simple. I believe that the universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, influencing each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. The parts change and pass, or die, people and races and rocks and stars, none of them seems to be important in itself but only the whole...in all its parts so beautiful and felt to be so intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it, and to think of it as divine...this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love, and that here is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation."

Jeffers further observes that this salvation isn't something that happens to us. It is something that happens in us, through the choices we make. Wholeness is participating---from being to becoming---this includes moral beauty. Conquering Covid 19 and future plagues of disease, hatred, indifference, injustice, inequality requires acceptance that we are one organic whole, connected and in some way responsible for other life forms and their habitations. Jeffers concludes: "One may contribute to the beauty of things by making one's own life and environment beautiful. This includes moral beauty." What an intensely earnest resolve for the use of our powers in the year of our Lord 2021.

Wild beauty

*"They toil not, neither do they spin," we read,
and God is pleased at beauty growing wild;
yet willful hearts and stubborn do not heed
this love for innocence of earth and child.
Few are they who accept the lavish gifts
of universe to man unsought, unearned;
and while the soul in pure thanksgiving lifts,
the mind goes searching for the lesson learned.
God moves in mystery, his cloak the night,
sowing both rose and rainbow where he will;
color and scent and music for delight
pattern his path from valley to green hill.*

*Forget philosophies and turn to earth
If you would learn that beauty has its worth.*

Amy Jo Schoonover



Bell tower restoration underway

Bill Westfall views results of the first work on Our Saviour's ongoing bell tower restoration. The sturdy undergirding of the open-sided bell enclosure is in place with finishing work yet to come. Mild weather has allowed Meyer Restoration of Piqua to make substantial progress even as winter officially began. The project is partially funded by grants from the Diocese and Champaign County Preservation Alliance with the remainder paid by the church.

Photos courtesy of Todd Boeck



He was home for Christmas

Ed's timing was perfect. He returned to his 116 Lafayette Avenue home in Urbana on Christmas Eve, to continue his recovery from a stroke last September. Rev. Nancy has reported good progress during therapy, most recently at Koester Pavilion in Troy. Ed's diligence was rewarded by permission to return to Champaign County to complete his convalescence. Rev. Nancy's contribution to this remarkable recovery is beyond measure. Rejoice. Alleluia.

Ed Hardin



Making your new year's resolutions?



Janus, Roman god of beginnings and endings.

If you lived in Babylonia 4000 years ago, you would spend the first day of the new year (in March) planting grain and then, to please the gods who could bless your crops, you would promise to pay your debts and return anything borrowed.

Julius Caesar made January the beginning of the year and on the first day the Romans made promises of good conduct and sacrifices to the god Janus, who could see forward and backward simultaneously. Early Christians observed the new year by pondering past mistakes, resolving to do better. Clergyman John Wesley held the first Covenant of Renewal Service on New Year's Eve, also called Watch Night.

Forty-five percent of Americans say they make resolutions; only eight percent claim success. On that issue, Romans, Babylonians and our Christian ancestors maintain silence.

More academic honors

Katie McCall of Epiphany, daughter of organist Sharon McCall, was named to the Urbana Junior High School Honor Roll, published December 11 in the Urbana Daily Citizen. It includes students in grades six, seven and eight earning averages from B to A, during the first nine weeks of classes. Katie has long been an excellent student even after missing weeks of school last year for serious back surgery. She made a sensational recovery and has taken in stride the current school pandemic protocol. Good work, Katie!

For those on the other side of the desk

Constant debate about schooling during the pandemic has involved mostly physical health and safety. Solutions tend to be political or technical. We hear little about supporting teachers' hearts and souls for this demanding job. Like well-trained soldiers they are steady and focused under Covid attack, respond quickly to change, calming student and parent fears and demonstrating exceptional leadership. How do they do it?

Teaching with Fire, poetry that sustains the courage to teach, was edited by Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner long before the pandemic, but the book was never more relevant. It's filled with the testimony of teachers and the poetry that kept them fueled when soul and spirit ran dry; when the world unraveled, and the pattern of life's tapestry faded and thinned. Like right now.

The poetry they cherish is practical. It speaks of humanity and reality and social change and hope. It can, likewise, help us restore and brighten centuries-old patterns of compassion, hope and beauty---the genius of Creation. Here are three teacher favorites:

From "The Cure at Troy"

Human beings suffer.
They torture one another
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong.
Inflicted and endured.

Call miracle self-healing,
The utter self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky

History says, *Don't hope*
On this side of the grave
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.

That means someone is hearing
That outcry and the birth-cry
Of new life at its term
It means once in a lifetime
That justice can rise up.
And hope and history rhyme.

—Seamus Heaney

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge
Believe that a farther shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.



These Days

whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle,

And the dirt

Just to make it clear
where they come from
---Charles Olson

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
Things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen, people get hurt,
Or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

—William Stafford

"I think the game is pretty much up..."

"...unless every nerve is strained to recruit a new army with all possible expedition; in truth, I do not see what is to prevent it," reported General Washington on Christmas Day, 1776. By the first of the new year, most of his troops would be free to leave, having completed the term of service they signed up for. This ragtag force of colonial militia-turned military, weakened by a barely survivable winter at Valley Forge, was encamped beyond the Delaware River. British General Howe was positioned to take Philadelphia and without new recruits the Game of Revolution would, indeed, be over.



Emanuel Leutze, a German artist painted this scene in 1851. It is symbolic, not historically accurate. The men in the boat are not soldiers, but represent the diverse racial, cultural and ethnic population of the colonies. Nor were rowboats used. And General Washington would not stand and risked capsizing the little vessel!

With his knowledge of human nature, Washington made a calculated bet. He sent word throughout the camp that every man would receive a ten-dollar bonus for an extra six weeks of service. A dollar in 1776 was about thirty of today's. It was enough. With morale reviving, Washington wasted not a minute, but on Christmas night, led his men back across the ice-choked Delaware River, captured a surprised Hessian garrison, held off the enemy at Trenton and routed British forces out of Princeton. The ten dollars was well earned; a down payment on the high cost of liberty and justice for all.

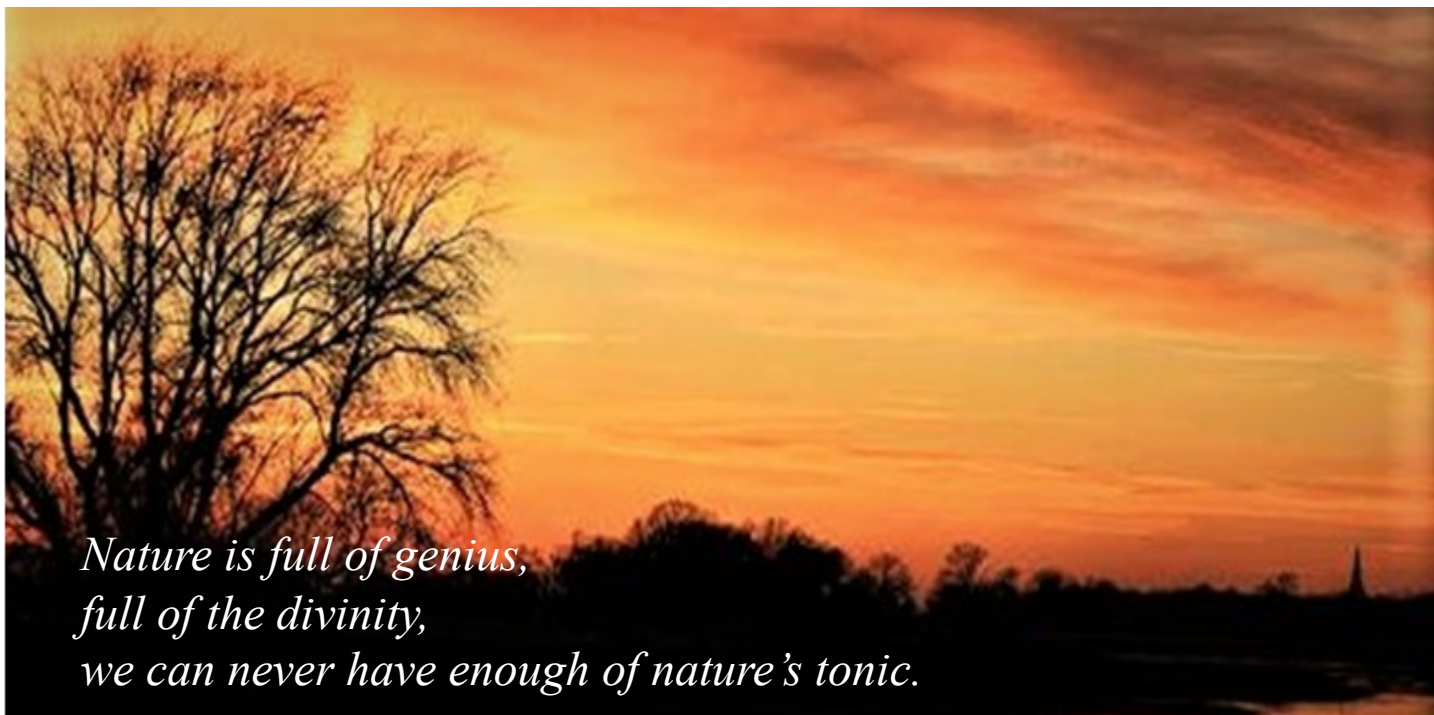
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*Nature is full of genius,
full of the divinity,
we can never have enough of nature's tonic.*