

The Epistle of St. Paul's, Bristol Parish Petersburg, Virginia

March 2011

The St. Paul's Vestry Retreats to Contemplate Moving Ahead by Tom Raines

One definition of "retreat" provided by Webster is a "withdrawing, moving backward". Nothing could be further from the truth in describing the St. Paul's Vestry Retreat in January, 2011. The twenty-four hours spent at Cheatham Annex provided an optimistic examination of the future of St. Paul's.

At each session, vestry members provided their visions for St. Paul's 10 years from now, in the year 2021. Each member had been provided with a set of questions pertaining to a long-term vision for our church. The questions involved who will be sitting in the pews? where will they come from? what role will our church play in the tri-cities community? How will St. Paul's be identified and distinguished from other churches?

The long-range visions provided a background for drafting a practical approach to the current year. The vestry organized activity around the following committees: (1) Hospitality; (2) Stewardship; (3) Membership and Marketing; (4) Inreach; (5) Service (under the Jr. Warden); (6) Worship; (7) Finance; (8) Childcare/Christian Education. Also, a committee formed in 2010 consisting of former Senior Wardens will continue to examine long-range planning.

In analyzing our past performance, it was noted that our Vestry and church Members are terrific on ideas but we are frequently weak on follow through. This year each new idea will be examined in light of resources needed – both money and volunteer hours, how it fits into an overall annual schedule, who will be the leader, and a date set for the first report.

Vestry Members left Cheatham Annex with a sense of real accomplishment. They expressed their gratitude to Rev. Rick Greenwood for organizing and conducting the meaningful sessions, Steve Tuck for securing the location of the retreat, and to the outgoing Vestry Members for cooking and cleaning.

Another Webster definition defines a retreat as "a period of seclusion, esp. one devoted to contemplation away from the pressures of ordinary life..." This definition better defines the hours at Cheatham Annex, along with the definition of "advance": "...to go forward, move ahead, to make progress..."

Highlights of March Events

Tuesday, March 8th – Shrove Tuesday

6:00 p.m. – Mardi Gras Dinner
Please sign up in Church Office

Wednesday, March 9th – Ash Wednesday Service

7:00 p.m. Ash Wednesday Liturgy
with Imposition of Ashes

Sunday, March 13th – Lent I

5:00 p.m. – Traditional Evensong

Wednesday, March 16th – Lenten Program Begins

7:15 to 8:30 p.m. – Video/Discussion every
Wednesday in Lent

Sunday, March 20th – Lent II

10:30 a.m. – Celtic Communion for St. Patrick's Day
12 Noon – Vestry Meeting: All are welcome!

Sunday, March 27th – Lent III

12 Noon – ECW Meeting

A Letter from the Rector

Dear St. Paul's Friends,

Though it is unlikely that Jesus was actually born on December 25th, one favorite Christmas Carol is well-known by its opening line, "In the bleak midwinter..." In the midwinter days of February when the frosty wind still makes moan and the earth seems to stand hard as iron, it is difficult to think of the seeds in the ground waiting to send forth their dark green shoots up towards the warming sun. Yes, the days are indeed lengthening. It is no longer dark at five o'clock in the afternoon. It is getting light at six o'clock in the morning. There are buds forming on the trees. And my heart is longing for the flowers of spring.

Most of us in midwinter do not move through our daily lives with the blazing brightness of the empty tomb bursting forth from the gardens of our souls. We are more familiar with the water frozen like a stone and the snow fallen snow on snow. If we can, however, greet the darkness that so often surrounds us as that which immediately precedes the dawn rather than the beginning of a long dark night, then we might find ourselves moving into a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christian hope. The certainty of our spiritual hope is not dependent upon the hottest presidential candidate, the next fiery charismatic leader, or the most influential TV personality. We can be at peace with the cold and empty hours, because we know that God will soon fill them to overflowing. We can wait in the midst of anxiety, because God's abundant provision is only a moment away. We can look into the darkness and see the sparkling splinters of a brighter light about to blaze forth. Christian hope allows us to be comforted by the sight of things as yet unseen with human eyes but perceived and even grasped by our spiritual hearts.

With the coming of the 40 days of Lent, we can explore the darker parts of our souls which we would otherwise avoid. This spiritual discipline is commended to us in the invitation given by the Celebrant at the beginning of the Ash Wednesday liturgy, "I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word." Given the difficult and unfamiliar nature of this work, I recommend that your reading and meditating on God's holy Word include particular attention to the Psalms as they make the pouring out of one's heart before God a great deal easier. And the verses in the Psalms that lift up praise to God's power and presence will encourage the heart made weary by the daily encounter with one's deepest sins. Even though Lent is clearly a time for serious thoughtful and prayerful reflection, it does not need to be overwhelming. Expect there to be bits of Easter light breaking into the shadows of your life and leading you on to the glories of the resurrection.

May your Lenten discipline be enlightening and encouraging. May you find the Lord's gift of strength more than sufficient for the spiritual work that needs to be accomplished. May you ultimately find your efforts deeply rewarded by the soul-satisfying knowledge and conviction that God loves you at your innermost depths.

Peace, Rick

2011 Lenten Program

Wednesday evenings during Lent from 7:15 to 8:30 p.m.

All are invited to participate in the program!

Each evening will begin with the viewing of a 15 to 20 minute video segment to get the discussion started. Relevant scriptural passages will also be examined as they relate to each evening's topic. The schedule of personalities and events to be discussed are as follows:

- ❖ March 16th – Mary of Nazareth
- ❖ March 23rd – Judas: Traitor or Friend?
- ❖ March 30th – Pontius Pilate Biography
- ❖ April 6th – The Trial of Jesus
- ❖ April 13th – The Last Supper

ECW Offers Two Scholarships

Did You Know?

The Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of Southern Virginia are offering aid to men and women for continuing education. These scholarships were established many years ago and have provided aid to many young people throughout the years and are available to communicants in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. **The deadline for applying this year is April 30, 2011.** The scholarships are funded by investment grants, money from the Special Stewardship Fund, and contributions to the ECW Book of Remembrance. The money will be awarded to no more than 35 applicants.

The two scholarships are:

- ❖ **The Elise Holladay Scholarship** was established by the Episcopal Church Women as a memorial to Elise Holladay, an early president of the ECW of the Diocese of Southern Virginia. It provides assistance to men and women for **continued education beyond high school in undergraduate study only.**
- ❖ **The Tucker Memorial Scholarship** was established in 1925 by the Episcopal Church Women as a memorial to the late Beverly Tucker Dandridge, Bishop of Southern Virginia from 1906 to 1930. It provides assistance to men and women in **church-related training in an accredited Episcopal Church training school.**

The stole that the priest wears around his neck is a reminder of the towel that Jesus wore about his waist when he washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. Its color changes with those of the liturgical season and it is often made of beautiful fabric, but it is a compelling sign of the priest's primary call to be a servant of all.

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*We've included February birthdays and anniversaries as there was no newsletter last month.*

### February Birthdays

- 11<sup>th</sup> Wert Smith
- 13<sup>th</sup> Brennan Joiner
- 15<sup>th</sup> Andy Cuthbert
- 16<sup>th</sup> Mike Lytle
- 16<sup>th</sup> Wayne Tuck
- 18<sup>th</sup> Mike Smith
- 20<sup>th</sup> Kitty Hatcher
- 28<sup>th</sup> Ellen Smith

### February Anniversaries

- 13<sup>th</sup> Mike & Ellen Smith

### March Birthdays

- 4<sup>h</sup> Paden Vargo
- 5<sup>th</sup> West Cuthbert
- 8<sup>th</sup> Rick Greenwood
- 13<sup>th</sup> Heath Thompson
- 14<sup>th</sup> Maria Booth
- 16<sup>th</sup> Max Haynie
- 17<sup>th</sup> Elizabeth Chandler
- 18<sup>th</sup> Dollie Rogers
- 22<sup>nd</sup> Jack Keeler
- 29<sup>th</sup> Ashleigh Tuck
- 31<sup>st</sup> Derek Nelson

### March Anniversaries

- 28<sup>th</sup> David & Susan Wells

## Little Notes from You

Dear Friends,

I really do appreciate my Valentine, I loved it! It was so cute and full of fun. I wore my pink Valentine socks on Valentine's Day and they were a big hit with the ladies. It means so much to me to be a part of St. Paul's. Thank you all so much for thinking of me, it really makes me feel good.

God Bless, *Dollie Rogers*

Please forgive us! If we did, let us know. We may not have had the information. As a parish family, we really do want to remember each person's birthday and anniversary.