



The First Order

St. Stephen's Parish

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"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

– Charles Dickens,
A Tale of Two Cities, 1859

These words were written by Charles Dickens for his time, but they could apply to our time as well. The "best of times" is usually measured by the powerful and the positioned. Their view is often seen from their own affluence and the affluence of those like them. Even in the "best of times" there are many experiencing the "worst of times."

Just a few weeks ago our leaders were bragging about how great the economy was, how amazing they were for ushering in this age of prosperity. They did not or would not look at those for whom this prosperity had sidestepped or was totally invisible. The poor, the marginalized and those who from afar believed that there might be enough of these "best of times" to share, were marked as problems or in some cases a danger to be controlled and excluded.

And then... Something invisible to the eye, something only a microscope could detect, began to sweep across the world. "The best of times" would soon be moving to become the "worst of times" and power and position could not stop it. Unprepared, many leaders across the world first denied, then cried out "don't blame me" and now seem to be settling in to reality that they are not God. Many in leadership are still clinging to the idea that money (perhaps their god) can fix everything.

Our road to recovery has three important beginning steps as those in the 12 Step programs are well aware. All of the steps are part of our

Christian tradition and are very appropriate to reflect upon as we approach Holy Week. First, we admit we are powerless to single-handedly manage our lives. Second, we come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore sanity and order to the chaos of life. Finally, we decide to "turn our will and our lives over to the care of God." (*AA Big Book*, p. 5)

I know from my personal experiences that when the waters of chaos in my life have engulfed me and threatened to sweep me away, that it is the acceptance that I cannot push back the floodgates by my own power to stop despair or uncertainty from overtaking me. Through the blessing of my faith community and many mentors over the years, I have learned that I am not and, in truth, cannot be all powerful. At first there is a quiet feeling of surrender and then a reaching out to a power greater me. There is no magic, no instant resolution, and sometimes not even release from the pain, but there is a sense of peace, of hope. That "peace of God which passes all understanding"* replaces the confusion and the fear, at least for the moment. *(Philippians 4:7)

As we surrender all the more, through God's grace, we are brought to the place where through faith we can turn our will and our lives over to the care of the One who has given us "life and breath and everything." (Acts 17:25b) The evidence of this surrender becomes visible in the words we speak and the actions we take.

These days in which we now live are an opportunity to either draw us closer to God in Christ or to push us away. Our faith will be tested. Nancy Lawton, lay deputy to General Convention from the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, once said, "faith is when we walk to the edge and then take one more step." Many of us feel at the edge. Do we have the

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faith to trust in the God so that when standing at the edge and looking into what may seem like an abyss we can have hope? Holy Week is filled with stories of triumph, betrayal, abandonment, doubt, uncertainty and death. Holy Week witnesses to a band of Jesus followers continuing to put one foot in front of the other even when they have reached the edge. This time is our 'holy week.' We are being called to believe enough to take one more step knowing that Easter is just beyond our sight.

God's peace be with you,
John

From Your Profile Committee

LISTENING SESSIONS

Our thanks to everyone who attended our listening sessions and to those who contributed their thoughts by email. As we sifted through, discussed, and continue to refer to what we learned, we identified a number of common themes, including:

1. Kids and Families and Church – many of your greatest hopes are intertwined with this theme
2. Music – love and high regard for our current programs and a desire to explore other forms/traditions/options
3. Spiritual Gifts and Community Building – much of what is most important to you at St. Stephen's centers on this theme
4. Church Leadership – many hopes and observations related to church leadership, particularly the vestry and its size, make up, and role

VIDEO SESSIONS

Special thanks to those who helped us with our video project. Thanks to your willingness to appear on camera, and this powerful marketing tool, we'll portray St. Stephen's in deep and meaningful ways. This project involves folks from outside our church community too and we can't wait to share the finished product with you! More on that soon.

MINISTRY PORTFOLIO

Since our last update, we have made great progress on our ministry portfolio. It's now complete, and is available online in a special database candidates are using to learn more about St. Stephen's.

PROFILE CREATION

We have reviewed several profile formats and studied the most effective format for ours. We've settled on one and are working on the sections of ours now.



STAY TUNED FOR
NEW DATE

Men's Hike & Lunch

All St. Stephen's men are invited to a morning hike and lunch on Saturday, May 9. We'll gather around 9 am at John Culver's house in West Stockbridge, take a moderate but invigorating morning hike, and return to John's for lunch that will wrap up by 2 pm. Not interested in a hike? Join us for lunch! It's all about getting to know one another better. The rain date is Saturday, May 16. More details to follow as the date approaches.

For more information, contact
Craig Reynolds (cmreyn@gmail.com).

Did You Know?

- That **Anthony Trapani** earned High Honors at Reid Middle School for the second quarter
- That **Sophia LaMalfa** earned High Honors at Herberg Middle School for the second quarter
- That **Heather Macfarlane** has gone from Dean's List to President's List and now to Trustees' List at Champlain College – meaning that she has maintained a 4.0 average for 2 consecutive semesters.
- That **Andrew Gillman** earned honors, and **Nathaniel Gillman** and **Cameron Langsdale** earned High Honors at Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School for the second quarter. Congratulations!

A Message from BIO

Hello BIO friends and leaders,

Out of concern for our community's health and safety, we will be cancelling all in-person BIO meetings until further notice. We will take our guidance about resuming meetings from public health experts.



April

Happy Birthday:

- 1 Noreen Reynolds (a milestone!)
- 2 Valerie Andersen, John Crane
- 3 Matt Reynolds
- 4 Craig Smith
- 5 Leslee Brennan,
Victoria Grace Shaw (3)
- 7 Bella Currie (a milestone!),
Mark Trapani
- 8 Scott Haviland
- 9 Maribeth Barney
- 10 Lexie Dadak (10),
Kaytlyn Samuels (18)
- 11 Jayne Church, Elizabeth Leonard,
Skylar Reynolds (21!)
- 12 Susan Coles (a milestone!),
Florence Proulx (93 years young!)
- 13 Mary Adams, Rachel DiGrigoli (a
milestone!), Christopher Sanders
(13), Cathy Wheelock (a mile-
stone!), Ruth Wood (90 years
young!), Pat Tarrant
- 14 Anna Black
- 15 Aiden Bradford Champagne (10)
- 17 Steven Bannon (a milestone!),
Elizabeth Trapani (a milestone!)
- 20 Scott Ellis, Wendy Leigh
- 22 Mary Gillman
- 23 Kieran Coscia (16), Michael Laurin
(a milestone!)
- 25 Aaron Cassavant (17)
- 26 Abigail Fenton
- 27 Seth DiGrigoli (a milestone!),
Josie Ellis
- 29 Bill Carter (a milestone!)

Happy Anniversary:

- 8 Cathy and Dan Doyle (1989)
- 14 Claudia and Gary Curry (1984)
- 28 Osneyda and Mark Miller (2001)

Angels Among Us

Craig Reynolds approves of this latest addition to the First Order – hope you do too! He would like to share three sets of nominees for the April edition:

- On February 4th, four men showed up to help unload an unusually large delivery from the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts for The Table. Bill Morey, John Culver, Mark Miller and I (Craig) unloaded the delivery – with welcome assistance from Sarah Morrison and Bishop John. Chris Plankey usually meets the Food Bank truck on the first Tuesday of each month, but had another obligation. So – I nominate Bill, John, Mark, Chris, Sarah, and Bishop John as “angels.”
- I would also like to recognize the team that keeps our boilers running so smoothly with water testing, water level maintenance, etc. I believe the team includes Don Phipps, Al Symonds and Scott Luczynski. My apologies if I missed anyone. – truly boiler angels indeed!
- (under protest and with humility and thanks) Craig feels he would be negligent if he didn't mention Joan, your editor, and Rob Lansdale who have faithfully produced the First Order month after month for so many years – a hidden (in plain sight) but oh-so-critical ministry!

Please keep your “angels” coming!



Pandemic

by Lynn Ungar, *The Rector of Wendy Coakley's parents' Parish in Maryland*

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath-
the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.

Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love-
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.