



THE COURIER

The Newsletter of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, River Hills, WI August 2010

THE RECTOR'S WRITINGS

God is so good. God, in God's infinite generosity and boundless mercy gives us ample opportunities to learn the things of God; those things that make us holy, and those things that make us fully human. If we don't learn what we need to know in one way, God often gives us more opportunities until we learn what we need to learn. From alpha to omega we live our lives and then we die. And it is only then that we come into the fullness of Christ.

But along the way, we get assistance and glimpses into what we need to know. Several years ago I had a rather large opportunity to remember some things I had forgotten, and to learn some new things out of lived necessity. I was in a roll over car accident.

For many years I have worn my seat belt, if you will pardon the obvious pun, religiously. But on May 18, 2008 I was crossing 124th Street just south of Capitol Drive and was "just" going from one parking lot to another. (Note: there are no "justs" in my life related to seat belts anymore!) I believe I was not wearing my seatbelt. I was hit on the passenger side of the car hard enough that I was spun around and then my SUV rolled. Like a piece of popcorn in an old-fashioned popcorn popper I was thrown around the inside of my car. I came to rest sitting on the driver's side front window, significantly injured, but alive. Alive. And I have found myself reveling in gratitude for life ever since.

In those few moments that it took to be hit, hurt, and come through it, my life changed forever. I was forcefully reminded of things I had forgotten and, over the months of healing and rehabilitation, I learned some new things:

- *The aphorism that "life is not a dress rehearsal, this is it" is not simply an aphorism. It's a truism.
- *Tell the people that you love that you love them when you know you do. You may not get another chance. (See above aphorism).
- *Choose to love people, even the ones you do not like. This is Christian. It also feels better to live that way. And, as a corollary, choose to forgive. This is also Christian. And it also feels better to live this way.
- *Telling people that you love them can get you in trouble. People are not used to hearing those words as much anymore. And they may not love you back. But it's still worth the risk and the embarrassment.
- *Say what you mean and mean what you say. This is particularly helpful in the health care arena but has lots of applications in daily life.

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*Don't live life recklessly, but live life full throttled. You only get one chance at it.

*It really is true that with God anything is possible. It is also true that good can come from pain; and that character can be shaped for good from endurance, hard work and discipline.

*Be gentle with yourself. Forgive yourself. Let other people care for you. Jesus did all of this along with dying on the cross.

*Practice gratitude. Be aware of gratitude and let it blossom in your heart. There is much to be grateful for in life. God is so very good to us; and many people for whom to be thankful.

*And finally, but also first and foremost, remember to pray. Pray for others and seek others' prayers for yourself. Prayer works. We need to pray. We need God. One of the most authentic and heartfelt prayers that we can always pray when we have no other earthly idea what to say to God is: Help.

It's two years later. I'm finished with rehab. I'm still alive and now I'm with you here at St. Christopher's. Life is short. Whatever time we have together will be short in the grand scheme of life. While I am here I will love you steadily and obviously. I will forgive you when you hurt me. And I will be endlessly grateful for the ways you show God to me. Thank you. Deo gratias.

Debra+

We're going to build a house!

St. Christopher's has become partners with Christ Church in Whitefish Bay and another church to build a house with Habitat for Humanity.

Join our work crew! Framing week is September 13-17th and Saturday workdays are October through mid-December. No skills are necessary, just enthusiasm. We will be trained by Habitat craftspeople. You must be at least 16 years old to join.

All of you have skills and talents to make this happen. Let us put our faith into action!

To offer your enthusiasm, email or call Mark Heffron (mheffron1@wi.rr.com or 414-517-5011)



Warden's Words

Eons ago I taught school on Beaver Island in northern Lake Michigan. The school had about 90 K-12th graders each year and it was the center of an island community that had a year round population of 400 people. Late one evening, Kitty, the principal, and I were out for a walk when we noticed lights on in the school gym. Now this was a surprise to us as it was common, necessary even, to make arrangements through her for evening building use. One of the outside doors was propped open, too, and as we cautiously approached the door we heard the unmistakable thump, thump of a basketball being dribbled across the floor. As we stepped into the gym, the person with the ball turned towards us and instantly called out, "I am glad you are here. Wanna play?" We did end up playing a bit of basketball after determining how the young man came to be in what was supposed to be a locked building. While out walking his dog, he noticed a door that was ajar so he took the dog home and came back to shoot hoops. He propped the door wide open hoping that others might stop in to play some pick up ball. This situation carried no harm, no foul. The young man had no malicious intentions so there was no risk nor damage to the school or its contents.

Twenty-some years later, I find myself in the position of being guardian of two lovely and valuable buildings and in some way for the people within them. At school, the custodial crew is responsible for securing the building each night before they leave. Nonetheless, going to school one Saturday I put my key in the lock only to discover the front door had been unlocked for two full days. And, the same has happened at church. In both places, it is incumbent on us to take all reasonable steps we can to minimize risks and to make it possible in the event of an emergency to be able to account for exactly who is and has been in the building.

If you look back, you will remember that in the not too distant past at St. Christopher's, we began using individual codes to enter the building when it is locked. At about the same time, we had glass installed in the interior doors upstairs and down and began keeping the rooms downstairs locked when not in use. The exterior doors have been re-keyed with careful accounting for who now has keys. Even after these steps were taken, it has happened that the church is left open and untended.

St. Christopher's is a beautiful building and we own valuable antiques. It is also common that one person is alone at church. For our own peace of mind, the safety of our employees and parishioners, and the integrity of the church and its contents, we all need to pull together in the same direction. There are steps you can take: If you are the last person out, check all the doors before you leave to ensure that everything is closed and locked. Do not let anyone else use your code. (Anyone who needs a code can call the office.) And, there are steps we will take including refining our security system so that we can better identify in real time which codes are being used for access and when. In the event of an emergency or theft or loss in the building, it is crucial that we can create a complete history of who has been in the building.

There are many ways to serve and in this light I want us to plan ahead as best we can. After all, as Richard Cushing said, "Always plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark."

And, our recent rains have been putting me heavily in thought of Noah.



With good faith, Jayne Heffron
Senior Warden

Qs from the Pews

Several weeks ago Danny and Kitty Gute, late of River Hills, committed suicide together. The Sunday after it happened many people came up to me to ask me what I thought about what they had done, and, even more importantly, they wanted to know what our church “thought.” The Gutes were closely related by friendship and familial relationship to a variety of members of the parish. It was a tender tragedy for many. Many folks who were not related in any way to the Gutes wondered about what had happened; what to think, what to feel. Several people suggested that I write something for the newsletter on this timely, albeit painful, topic.

Editor’s Note: ‘Qs from the Pews’ are taken from questions that come up at Coffee Hour or in conversations with the Rector. If you have a Q to submit for this column, please email the Rector or the office.

The shorthand answer to the question of the position of the church on this issue is that we do not condone the taking of one’s own life. But neither do we condemn. Holy Scripture, in many instances, commends us to choose life—always and at great cost. But Holy Scripture also exhorts us to be merciful, even as our heavenly Father is merciful.

So, we bury people who have committed suicide, offering them the full and loving attention of the church. And then we attend to the devastation often left behind by those who have taken their own lives. Suicide is a very final solution to the pain and even extreme challenges of life. And Holy Scripture reminds us that with God all things are possible.

But, what of the Gutes? Kitty had Alzheimer’s, that devastating disease of the brain. Both Kitty and Danny were older. What about end of life decisions?

In the Episcopal Church, unlike the Roman Catholic Church where answers are handed down to the faithful, we find our “beliefs” about such issues to be shaped by the resolutions of our General Convention. General Convention meets every three years and is composed of lay members, and all three Orders of ministry: Deacons, Priests and Bishops. On matters of social issues Convention often puts forth resolutions which have the effect of offering us guidance on these kinds of moral issues. We do not have “dogma;” that is, the church telling us something that we *must* believe. But we do have General Convention which helps us form our decisions, Holy Scripture where we always look first, and the wise counsel of clergy and informed lay people to help us as we seek to live out our lives in Christ. Theologically we say that our moral decisions are informed by Scripture, tradition and reason

Several resolutions of General Convention which speak to the topics at hand might be helpful to us right now.

From the 2000 General Convention in Denver:

Resolved, that the 73rd General Convention adopt and affirm the resolution on Suicide Prevention by the Diocese of West Tennessee at its 19th convention:

1. We affirm our belief that, as St. Paul teaches (Romans 8:39), “Nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
2. We pledge ourselves to collaborate with other religious bodies and secular agencies in educating ourselves to recognize and minister more appropriately to those among us who are especially at risk of suicide as well as those who are impacted by the suicide of others; and
3. We urge that all levels of the Episcopal Church, parochial, diocesan, and national, accord high priority to the prevention of suicide in prayers and programming.

From the 1991 General Convention in Phoenix: (I have taken the liberty of editing this for length.)

Resolved, that this 70th General Convention set forth the following principles and guidelines with regard to the foregoing of life-sustaining treatment in the light of our understanding of the sacredness of human life:

1. Although human life is sacred, death is part of the earthly cycle of life. There is a “time to be born and a time to die” (Eccl. 3:2). The resurrection of Jesus Christ transforms death into a transition to eternal life: “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead” (I Cor. 15:21).
2. Despite this hope, it is morally wrong and unacceptable to intentionally take a human life in order to relieve the suffering caused by incurable illness. This would include the intentional shortening of another person’s life by the use of a lethal dose of medication or poison, the use of lethal weapons, homicidal acts, and other forms of active euthanasia. Palliative treatment to relieve the pain of persons with progressive incurable illnesses, even if done with the knowledge that a hastened death may result, is consistent with theological tenets regarding the sanctity of life. However, there is no moral obligation to prolong the act of dying by extraordinary means and at all costs if such dying person is ill and has no reasonable expectation of recovery.
3. In those cases involving persons who are in a comatose state from which there is no reasonable expectation of recovery, subject to legal restraints, this Church’s members are urged to seek the advice and counsel of members of the church community, and where appropriate, its sacramental life, in contemplating the withholding or removing of life-sustaining systems, including hydration and nutrition.
4. We acknowledge that the withholding or removing of life-sustaining systems has a tragic dimension. The decision to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining treatment should ultimately rest with the patient, or with the patient’s surrogate decision-makers in the case of a mentally incapacitated patient. We therefore express our deep conviction that any proposed legislation on the part of national or state governments regarding the so called “right to die” issues, (a) must take special care to see that the individual’s rights are respected and that the responsibility of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter is acknowledged and honored, and (b) must also provide expressly for the withholding or withdrawing of life-sustaining systems, where the decision to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining systems has been arrived at with proper safeguards against abuse.
5. We acknowledge that there are circumstances in which health care providers, in good conscience, may decline to act on request to terminate life-sustaining systems if they object on moral or religious grounds. In such cases we endorse the idea of respecting the patient’s right to self-determination by permitting such patient to be transferred to another facility or physician willing to honor the patient’s request, provided that the patient can readily, comfortably and safely be transferred.
6. Advance written directives (so-called “living wills,”) that make a person’s wishes concerning the continuation or withholding or removing of life-sustaining systems should be encouraged, and this Church’s members are encouraged to execute such advance written directives during good health and competence and that the execution of such advance written directives constitute loving and moral acts.

Our General Convention resolutions on these matters are guidelines, not moral absolutes. I was at both of these General Conventions and listened to the hearings and the floor debate. I thought I was personally very clear where I stood. And then, in 2004 one of my closest friends committed suicide and I had to confront these issues myself. I used Scripture, tradition and reason.

I am available at any time to talk with any of you about these difficult, challenging, and heart rending issues. We continue to pray for the Gute family and for all the members of St. Christopher’s who were touched by their deaths. May both Kitty and Danny rest now in the peace of God.

The Faces (and feet) of St. Christopher's: Rain!



Thank You!

As I leave for seminary, my cup is overflowing with blessing. (And soon my car will be overflowing with all my stuff as I pack up!) I am deeply touched by and grateful for all the ways that St. Christopher's has supported and encouraged me on my journey. Thank you for your emails, cards, and kind words. A special thanks to the Vestry for the Book of Common Prayer / Bible – what a useful gift! And compact, too! My car thanks you for that ☺ I am so touched and so grateful to all of you. Thank you for welcoming me into this community and for sending me off with such love.

Dorota

AUGUST MILESTONES

BIRTHDAYS

1	Jack Casey
3	Judy Scharfenberger
6	Joyce Kuehl Tom Napper
7	Michael Kennedy
8	Martha Davis Kipcak Meredith Petrie Amy Ruf
10	Elliot Koenig Bob Slater
11	Rick Deuser
12	Mary Marks
14	John Kendall Ginny Kyle Sarah Schmidt
15	Martha Bolles John Roesner Francie Silverman
16	Abby Wigdale Maggie Wigdale
17	Maddie Gotz Kathy Rostad Henry Uihlein Lauralee Uihlein
18	Will Bartlett Ran Hamner
20	Augie Braeger Terry Hausmann Jason Weseman
21	Mitch Coburn Diane Eisen
24	John Jamel
25	David Sande John Thickens William Warner Norah Young
28	Alan Becker John Housiaux Nancy Warner Zane Whitcroft
29	Janie Asmuth Amy Clark Jessica Etheridge Helen Sheen Olivia Weseman
30	Lily Ruf Mickey Ruf

ANNIVERSARIES

2	Jen & Mike Darrow
3	Dee & John Hodnett
6	Rosemary & Dick Fritz
7	Bonnie & Don Thomson Heidi & Casey Brunner
12	Tami & Mitch Vincent
14	Stephanie & James Klas Julie & John Wolf Jennifer & Scott Weigel
16	Susan & Brent Martin Julie & John Kennedy Karin & Jon Jamel
22	Jennifer & Darrell Fischer
24	Jayne & Mark Heffron
25	Jackie & Jack Greeley
29	Anne & Fred Stratton Hattie & Ted Purtell
31	Kathy & John Housiaux

ST. CHRISTOPHER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Parish Office

Open Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Staff

The Rev. Debra Trakel, *Rector*

Gust Olson III, PhD, *Parish Administrator*

John Beardsley, *Music Director*

MaryBeth Ansley, *Christian Formation Coordinator*

Gloria Bond, *Housekeeper*

Michael Schneider, *Building & Grounds Supervisor*

Vestry – Meets 4th Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.

Jayne Heffron and Debbie Roesner, *Wardens*

Hannah Pillsbury, *Treasurer*

Bonnie Thomson, *Clerk*

(2011) - Diane Andersen, Darrell Fischer,

Kip Jacobs

(2012) - MaryBeth Ansley, Nick Geimer, Jeni

Piper

(2013) - Ginger Browne, Diane Eisen,

Judy Scharfenberger

Committee and Ministry Contacts

Altar Flowers: Roz Krause

Altar Guild: Roz Krause, Mary Jane Perry

Acolytes: MaryBeth Ansley

Building & Grounds: Kip Jacobs

Caring Ministry: Lauralee Uihlein

Endowment: Erik Andersen

Finance Subcommittee: Charlie Krause

Flower Guild: Hattie Purtell, Helen Sheen

Labyrinth: Catherine Davidson

Memorial Garden: Jeanne Tanner

Outreach: Mark Heffron, Steve Petrie

Prayer Chain: Chilly Braun, Kathy Housiaux

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The Holy Eucharist

Sunday 8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.
Thursday 7:00 a.m.

Outdoor Labyrinth - open to the public, weather permitting

The Rev. Debra Trakel, *Rector*



Christianity is not just a religion...it's a way of life.