



THE COURIER

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

January-February 2009



ST. CHRISTOPHER'S ANNUAL PARISH CELEBRATION

**SUNDAY,
January 25,
2009**



WORSHIP - ONE SERVICE at 9:30 a.m.

**SHARED MEAL and ANNUAL MEETING
beginning at 10:30 a.m. in the Community Room**

Interim Rector Notes

There are many exciting challenges facing St. Christopher's, our state and nation during the New Year. My primary job as your interim rector is to be a non-anxious presence during this time of transition. Another role that I have is to help the vestry and congregation develop a vision for your future that you can share with the search committee and the candidates for rector. Co-chairs of the search committee will be appointed soon and will assist the senior warden in naming the search committee which should begin its work with the new vestry in February.

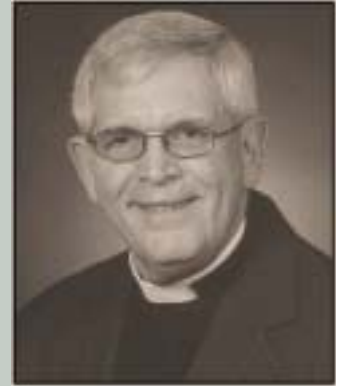
It is extremely important to have your opinions, hopes, and dreams presented at the annual meeting. If it is impossible for you to attend, please call either of the wardens or clergy and let us know how you would like to see St. Christopher's grow in mission and the kind of rector you believe we need to join our leadership team as rector. As you will note in the announcement of the meeting we will worship together on Sunday, January 25th at 9:30 a.m. prior to the meeting and breakfast-brunch.

St. Christopher's is one of the finest parishes of the Diocese of Milwaukee. Our church and Diocese need the gifts that you have to offer. You have strong programs of caring and outreach, of children's ministries and building community among generations and parishioners who come from various faith backgrounds. Stewardship, hospitality, and adult education need some revitalization if we are to continue to grow in ways that allow us to claim the best of our Episcopal traditions and those that are emerging in and around us. Our three Eucharists each week represent the best of both.

During these very tough economic times, please continue to give as much as you can to strengthen all of our ministries together. If you have not made a pledge for this year, please prayerfully consider doing so.

May the Light of Christ shine brightly through us during this Epiphany Season,

Charlie+



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News within the Diocese

Our diocese now has the first congregation in Wisconsin that has said that it wishes to leave the Episcopal Church, St. Edmund's, Elm Grove. We have posted the Bishop's letter in response to this decision. The Episcopal Church and our Bishop and the people of St. Edmund's need to be supported with our prayers as we seek to embrace differences within the community of faith while affirming the gifts of all baptized persons equally and welcoming all to join us as members of Christ's body bound together in His love.

Warden's Words

LOOKING AHEAD

Another year has passed! It went by so fast! I wish I had TiVo'ed it, except for the Michigan part! This year represented a time of change and challenge for St. Christopher's. We said good-bye to Scott! We committed to an open, honest, transparent and objective transition process and worked hard to live into that commitment. We hired Charlie Caskey to be our interim priest. He brings outstanding credentials in this specialty ministry. Charlie will be our advisor, counselor, partner and friend as we continue with our transition journey. There were other important milestones as well:

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE: Several new committees were formed or revived. New leaders and new members stepped forward everywhere to serve this parish in these capacities. These committees are reviewing and revising existing policies and procedures and developing new ones where necessary. Their work has been outstanding! Our new committee structure will free us as a Christian Community to do God's work!

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP: Your wardens and vestry committed to a new standard of financial stewardship with the leadership and support of the new Finance Committee. We reported to you monthly in the Courier with respect to our performance to budget. We made full disclosure of our financial challenge throughout the year a top priority. We will involve the parish in our budgeting process for 2009 with a commitment to parish wide ownership of the ministries which we will fund for the coming year.

MINISTRIES: We have broadened and deepened our commitment to our children and to Outreach. Our children's program continues to call to young families to join us. No where was this joy more evident than in the Christmas pageant this year. The Outreach Committee broadened our relationship with Christ Presbyterian Church and the Joy House with bible study and fellowship. We can learn much from them about ministries.

The year ahead holds such promise and such potential for St. Christopher's. Let me just touch on the highlights:

SEARCH COMMITTEE: We will begin our search process in earnest in 2009 with the selection of members to serve on the Search Committee. Over 40 parishioners have volunteered or been recommended. We expect to announce the co-chairs at the Annual Meeting. These two individuals will lead a group of 10/12 parishioners in this important and exciting work. Charlie will be an outstanding resource for them as we move forward on our transition journey.

2009 BUDGET: We will work together as a parish to shape a budget to fund our ministries for the coming year. The Finance Committee and your vestry will mail you a copy of the budget draft right after our vestry meeting on January 13th. This will be well in advance of the Annual Meeting. It will identify in broad but specific strokes our challenge for the coming year. At the Annual Meeting, we will take up this challenge as a parish. Your new Vestry will then finalize the budget for 2009. For perhaps the first time, we will have parish wide ownership of the responsibility for funding the ministries of St. Christopher's.



LEADERSHIP: St. Christopher's is blessed to have outstanding lay leadership going forward. This year's vestry established a foundation of trust and commitment on which to build. This group stepped up to meet every challenge, confident in our process together. Wonderful new members will take up the cause to continue this work with new ideas and fresh energy. Tom Napper will lead this new vestry as Senior Warden. He has been my full warden partner this year. Tom is experienced and qualified in every respect. The Holy Spirit has surfaced exactly the right person to exercise this important responsibility. It has been my joy and my privilege to serve with Tom and this Vestry. New leadership stepping forward is always the sign of a healthy parish. We are flourishing in this regard.

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FINANCIAL RECAP

The 2008 year-end financials are being reviewed and finalized as this edition of *The Courier* goes to press. The figures will be available mid-January and will be presented at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 25th after the 9:30 combined service. Thank you all for your continuing support and prayers!

A SPECIAL GOOD-BYE: You will read in Loraine's *Sticky Notes* of her decision to return to her former employer, Northwestern Mutual Life. They actively recruited her and made her the "offer she could not refuse"! Loraine has served this parish for almost seven years with a commitment to professional excellence in everything she did. She mixed that commitment with a kindness and an awareness that we are a Christian Community. We wish her well! We will miss her! Loraine is already working with clergy, staff, wardens and vestry to make this a seamless transition. She will stay with us through the end of January.

As we enter this new year, it now falls to each of us as members of this parish to trust in our transition process together with the knowledge and faith that the Holy Spirit journeys with us. It falls to each of us to participate in that process – openly, honestly, objectively. **Start by coming to the Annual Meeting on January 25th!** This will be a brand new edition of an old Episcopal tradition. This is a wonderful Christian Community with such promise and such potential. Let us go forward together to find the special work which God has for us to do.

Thanks and God Bless,
Ran Hamner, Senior Warden

Transition Position

As I considered what to write, I realized that what is happening at St. Christopher's is being mirrored in my own life. I read once that the cause of suffering is attachment, resistance and judgment. I have found this to be true.

I am in the process of building and moving into a new house with my son, David, my daughter-in-law, Nikki, and three grandchildren. One of the signs of resistance came in the letting go of some special pieces of furniture that belonged to my parents and were too large for me to use. It was extremely hard to let them go. Attachment and resistance cause suffering.

So much change! So much to consider! Why is it taking so long? Will it work? So much to work out as we make this transition into living together! I asked myself, "Where do I fit in this transition? Am I ready to give of myself and my time to help it work? What do I expect of them and what is realistic to expect? Communicate, compromise. Give and take. Scary. Challenging. How do I stay open, easeful, loving and trusting, that all is perfect as it is?"

Wow! St. Christopher's is going through the same process. We, as individuals and as a congregation, need to ask ourselves, "What am I attached to at St. Christopher's? What am I resisting? What do I need to surrender and not judge for the sake of the whole? What are the important things about St. Christopher's that I want to cherish and nurture and how will I do it?"

My husband used to say, "More will be revealed." 2009 is going to be exciting, surprising and challenging. The Search

Committee is in the process of being formed. The co-chairs will be announced at the Annual Meeting. There will be new Vestry members and a new Junior and Senior Warden. There are many questions. Where do I fit in this process? Am I willing to use my time and talents? To learn more about this be sure to come to the Annual Meeting.

My wish for St. Christopher's and myself in 2009 is to stay open, patient, compassionate, creative, trusting and loving.

Blessings,
Florence Parnegg, Vestry

Vestry Highlights – December 16th

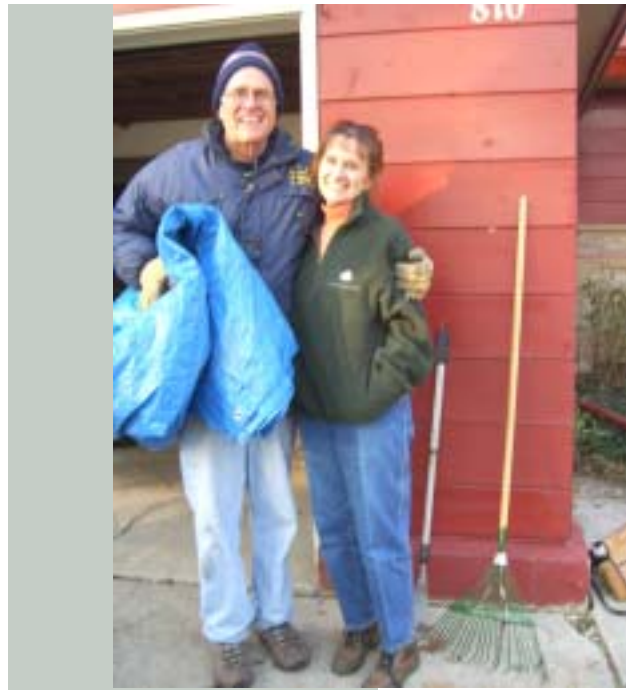
1. Set up task force to review names for search committee. Co-chairs will be announced at the Annual Meeting as will new Vestry members and the Junior Warden
2. Reviewed job descriptions for Parish Administrator and Director of Children's Education
3. Budget review and financial reports
4. Transition discussion – more home gatherings
5. Committee reports

If you wish to know more, the minutes will be posted on the Bulletin Board.

Angels in the Yard

The sun was out for much of the time on chilly Saturday when St. Christopher's amazing raking crew showed up at my house to get the yard all cleaned up and ready for winter. The inside crew kept the mulled cider hot and cookies ready to serve to the cold hands of the outside gang and in spite of the help of Nash the dog, the outside work was done in record time. I am blessed by and grateful for the help and the love shown me. Thanks to yard boss Lyn Slater and workers: Allen Higgins, Dee Hodnett, Bob Slater, Joan Seeger, Nance Schmid, Ellie Abbott, Sally Walters, Ran Hamner, Missy Levitt, MaryBeth & Harry Ansley, LeAnne Drives, Rick Taylor and Nancy Barton, and to Lynn Laun Lindert for the lovely cookies.

Wendy Sopkovich



CHILDREN'S *and*

The ROOTS children are still wandering in the desert in the Old Testament as we head into the New Year. The story at hand is the tale of Jonah and the whale and it carries on with the theme of God asking us to do something difficult. The kicker is that when God asks us, He also assures us that we will be okay and that He will be with us to make sure everything goes well.

The repetition of this theme over the course of the past months is consistent with the rotational program that we instituted last year. As we flow from one story to another, the theme, in this case, God's love and compassion, is repeated over and over. In each rotation we change the main characters and the antagonists, but not the message. We explore different ways to express the story in the Art Room using our hands to create something representational. We listen and we speak in the Drama Room using interactive techniques to coax the information from each child. When we get to the Games Room, it an all out challenge to get the information straight; the who's, when's, where's, and why's of the story. Each building block of information rests on the foundation. The foundation is the message that God gives us.

We hear frequently that our children are the driving force in getting the family to church on Sundays. They actually talk about ROOTS and look forward to it. Quite possibly it is because they know that the program is fun, but we suspect, it is also because (and the joke is on them!) the "technique" works. Children love to feel successful, and in this case, they truly are. The parent teachers and volunteers are amazed to find the children spouting the correct answers to questions about the Bible. One can only hope that this instills a lifelong quest for learning from the Holy Book.

We will be turning our attention to Jesus next month, starting with the story of John, the Baptist. Then it is on toward Easter, with stories about suffering and redemption, but mostly; the stories of God's love for us.

Sally Walters,
Director of Children's and Youth Ministries



YOUTH Ministries



The REACT Youth Group for middle-and-high schoolers will be regrouping starting Sunday, January 11 at 4:00 p.m in the Community Room.

Edith Braeger and Jan Kwiatkowski will be supporting the REACT group until the end of the school year.

We will begin on January 11 with a program called

Dating -- Avoiding Disasters and Choosing Well

Following on Sunday, January 18th, we will begin our focus on the Environment, Creation and the parish. The youth have quite a bit to say about how we could easily be more environmentally active within the walls of our own parish.

Friends are always welcome!
Please RSVP to Jan so we get enough pizza.



Through a grant from the Youth group fund, Thanksgiving gift cards were given to resident families at Sojourner Truth House.



ADVENT OUTREACH

This Advent, the people of St. Christopher's offered mounds of coats and clothing, oodles of shampoo, dozens of mittens, hats, and scarves, bags and bags of food, hundreds of goody bags, and a million laughs, smiles and songs with the residents of Saint John's on the Lake, and the JOY Center.



HAPPENINGS

St. Christopher's own *Anne Stratton* is about to become a published novelist! Her romantic suspense novel titled "Buried Heart" will soon be published by The Wild Rose Press. The story takes place in Milwaukee and among Mayan ruins deep in the Yucatan rain forest.

Congratulations, Anne!

The season of LENT begins on Wednesday, February 25 with the commemoration of

ASH WEDNESDAY

Eucharists and the imposition of ashes at
 7:30 a.m.
 11:00 a.m.
 7:00 p.m.



Back by popular demand—IT'S MARDI GRAS TIME!!

Please join us this Tuesday, February 24 at 6pm. **We are still looking for a few more cooks for our 3rd annual GUMBO CHALLENGE!** Be brave and challenge MaryBeth, Laura, Edith, Tom O. Martha or Tricia. Bring on the red beans & rice, Tom Napper's etouffee, Chase Ferrer's grits, M.J.'s salad, breads, Chip Slater's beignets, king cakes, Helen's punch and more. Family, friends and neighbors welcome as we crank up the tunes, dance off the gumbo and—Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler!!



From the Associate Rector

Various surveys indicate that as many as 39% of people interviewed report having or being aware of a personal experience of or connection with God. In some way they, acknowledge, understand or

experience God as present and active in their lives. In follow-up questions, these same people said that the last place they would talk about this is within their church. The last person they would talk to is their priest, minister or rabbi. They see the church as a place focused on doctrine, rules and rituals that do not speak to the longing of the human heart to experience something of the Living God and make meaning of that experience within their daily lives.

Most of us would say that we want to know God or God's will, explore our spirituality or make some meaning out of our lives. If we are honest, we don't want God to intrude too much. We want God to bless the meaning we have already made. We fear God interrupting our well laid out plans, rules and structures. But, God seems to have "this history" of interrupting the best laid, carefully crafted plans of human beings, institutions and nations...especially when they are not paying close attention to God. It's what God does.

I thought about the figure of Joseph this Christmas and believe he can be a model of paying attention. Joseph lived in a very dark time in human history & entered a situation which he in no way planned. God interrupted Joseph's plans about marriage, fatherhood and family, choice of place to live, even giving the child a name. At one point, he looked for a gracious way out. I don't imagine an exhausted husband & father was especially pleased about angels coming to him in dreams with directives to move or do something different...again, and again and again! Rather than pay more attention to the fear and darkness around him and his family, Joseph chose to pay attention to God and God's dream for humankind. He responded and made bold choices. God's dream of life and love for humanity was made real...incarnate in Christ.

When we allow ourselves to get past the sentimental side of the Christmas story and acknowledge the

darkness of that time, we can see many parallels to our own time in history. Darkness is as powerful now as it was then. The absolutely astounding thing is that God would do anything to get us to pay attention to the Light, Love and Healing that is ours as free gift...a completely renewable energy resource. And God did something amazing in Jesus. Like Joseph we need to choose what we will pay more attention to—the fear and darkness around us or the Light, Love and Healing so freely given.

As I write this, we are all in some place or situation we had not planned on at this time last year. As individuals and a faith community, we must pay attention to what we pay attention to. Will it be the darkness, fear, insecurities and confusion that surrounds us? Or will it be the Light, Love and Healing offered and given at every moment. Will our lives and our church constrict with perceived scarcity or will we respond creatively and expansively? God has a big dream for this faith community. We can claim it or we can choose to quietly and politely back away from it, hiding behind fear and rigid structures.

I believe God's dream for this place has to do with creating a place where people, at any place in their life cycle, can come to pay attention, understand, experience and express the astounding love of God that is active in our world...a place of deep spirituality, health, wholeness, respite and hospitality. The 13th century mystic Rumi, advised: "Start a huge foolish project like Noah. It makes absolutely no difference what people think of you." Don't hold back. Initiate a bold project that will radically welcome the Light. Give people living now, as well as the next generation reason to hope. God has interrupted us again and wants us to pay attention. There is no reason we can't.

Jan

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The Monthly Newsletter of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

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. Charles C. Caskey, *Interim Rector*
The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski, *Associate Rector*



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