



Saint
Matthew's
Episcopal Church

Newsletter

December 2006

201 East Frederick Drive • Sterling VA 20164



*By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us ...*

(Luke 1:78, New Revised Standard Version)

Dear Friends,

As you probably know, in mid October I took a fishing trip up to Erie, Pennsylvania. I asked a few old friends if they could join me, but none did. Still, none of them were upset with me for the invitation. In fact, they all expressed appreciation for being asked.

Nor was I upset that they turned me down. I know how life is, and how busy we all can be. One friend of mine (my college roommate) and I have talked about fishing together for 20 years before we actually made a trip together this past summer. So I'll keep asking my friends, and I fully expect that somewhere along the line we'll end up fishing together.

At least I hope we will. Fishing is one of the things I enjoy most in life, partly because it provides plenty of time to talk about life and plenty of time to be silent and drink in nature's quiet beauty. But, of course, not everyone

sees things like I do (Big Al would far rather hunt than fish, for instance), so it may be that they will never take me up on my invitation. But it won't be for lack of trying!

I've been thinking that maybe that's a lot like inviting people to church. I truly hope you enjoy being part of Saint Matthew's. (If that is not the case, I'd love feedback as to how we might do a better job of it!) I hope that being part of our church family is something that adds real value to your life.

As such, I hope it is something you would therefore seek to share with others. Most people want to get life right, and they appreciate any help they can get in this regard. That means they appreciate it when we care enough to invite them to attend church with us. Even if they don't come, they are still glad we thought enough of them to ask. And even if they don't come the first time, who

knows how God will use that invitation in the future? At the very least, they know that we are compassionate, spiritual people, and that they can come to us with their questions or concerns.

As we approach Christmas, I hope all of us will be thinking of people – family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, people we know from Scouts or sports or other community activities – whom we can invite to join us in attending church. And if they do come, if they come to that place in life where they begin to figure how much they matter to God – that he does indeed have a purpose for their lives that gives meaning and guidance, that he will be with them in a way that brings strength and comfort and peace and joy – well, what better gift could we possibly give a person?

Inviting right along with you,
Rob+

From the Seminarian

The Advent season can be a very hectic time. For many of us, it is a time to get out the lights and decorations, shop for gifts, go to concerts, plan and attend lavish parties, and meet all the unmet expectations of Christmas past. More often than not, all the frenzied activity that leads up to Christmas can suck the life out of us. It can leave us exhausted and overwhelmed, wishing that Christmas would just be over. For others it is a time of loneliness, isolation, and deep despair. Our consumer culture doesn't help because it adds another layer of complexity, encouraging us to spend more and more money for stuff we don't need to make our loved ones happy. Now don't get me wrong, I love the trappings of the season as much as the next person, but it seems to me that all this craziness prevents us from considering the real focus of this season. Isn't that the mystery of God who became human, who gave himself fully to our human condition – God who does not stand apart from his creation but meets us at our deepest need – God with us, Emmanuel? This year I am going to make Advent a time for prayer and renewal, a time for cleansing and reawakening to the continuing presence of Jesus in my life. Won't you join me? Below are a few suggestions to help us on our journey together.

1. Spend a few minutes in God's presence each day identifying where God has been working in your life this past year, and say thank you.
2. Pray for a family member or friend who might be lonely this time of year, and ask God's guidance on how to help that person.
3. Establish a family tradition such as keeping an Advent wreath and lighting it each evening at dinner or reading a daily devotion as a family.
4. Pick one evening each week, and spend it relaxing and having fun with your family or a friend.
5. Consider giving alternative gifts such as a donation to a local charity or something as exotic as buying a goat for a family in a developing country.
6. Take your children shopping for a family in need in the local community.
7. Read Scripture each day.

I thank each of you for blessings you have brought into my life this last year, and I wish each of you a blessed and holy Advent and Christmas.

“Fear not and behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.”
“O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.”

Ann Ritonia+

From the Senior Warden

Advent stirs so many emotions in me. I listened recently to the Casting Crowns CD *Lifesong* and heard a song that really put Advent into perspective for me. Here are the lyrics to the song "While You Were Sleeping" by Mark Hall:

Oh little town of Bethlehem
Looks like another silent night
Above your deep and dreamless sleep
A giant star lights up the sky
And while you're lying in the dark
There shines an everlasting light
For the King has left His throne
And is sleeping in a manger tonight

Oh Bethlehem, what you have missed while you were
sleeping
For God became a man
And stepped into your world today
Oh Bethlehem, you will go down in history
As a city with no room for its King
While you were sleeping

Oh little town of Jerusalem
Looks like another silent night
The Father gave His only Son
The Way, the Truth, the Life had come
But there was no room for Him in the world He came to
save

Jerusalem, what you have missed while you were sleeping
The Savior of the world is dying on your cross today

Jerusalem, you will go down in history
As a city with no room for its King
While you were sleeping.

United States of America
Looks like another silent night
As we're sung to sleep by philosophies
That save the trees and kill the children
And while we're lying in the dark
There's a shout heard 'cross the eastern sky
For the Bridegroom has returned
And has carried His bride away in the night.

America, what will we miss while we are sleeping
Will Jesus come again
And leave us slumbering where we lay
America, will we go down in history
As a nation with no room for its King
Will we be sleeping?

So, my question for you is this. Will you be sleeping this Advent, as you prepare for Jesus' coming? Will you just be going through the motions? Or will you be present, an active participant? Will you make room in your life for God's Son?

I wish for all of you a blessed, safe, and wonderful Advent and Christmas.

Vicki Nelson

Community

SAGE

If you are age 50 or older and would like to experience fun, community, and fellowship, please join us on Friday, December 22, at 12:00 noon in the parish hall for our second annual Christmas luncheon. We will share a meal, discuss our plans for the coming year, and enjoy a good old fashioned Yankee swap (wrapped gift exchange, \$10 or less). Lunch will be potluck. Turkey and ham will be provided. We will also fill our HUGS boxes for delivery to our housebound parishioners and nursing home residents at Christmas. If you can attend, please RSVP to Ann Ritonia at 571-233-5880 or Mar4kids@aol.com.

ANNUAL MEETING

Mark your calendar now to attend the Parish Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 28, 2007, beginning at 2:00 p.m.

Reverence

Welcome the Christmas Story Into Your Hearts

On Sunday, December 17, 7:00 p.m., in the sanctuary, you are cordially invited to a presentation of "The Nativity According to Saint Luke" by Randall Thompson. The soloists will be our own Rebecca Bixler (Mary), Sharon Biegler (Elizabeth), Bill Podolski (Zacharias), and Maggie Osburn (Sarah). Other singers will include John Dickie, Jay Nogle, Alan Davenport, and Hank McQueeney (High Priests), as well as Charlotte Davenport (shepherd) and our wonderful choir members in various roles. Invite your friends for this evening of celebration of the Christmas message in beautiful music and drama. Come carol with us afterwards in the parish hall.

Christmas Pageant

Saint Matthew's will once again present a family Christmas Pageant at 4:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. This year's presentation will be "Christmas Letters" by Gail Gaymer Martin. What if we could write letters and find out about how people felt about the events surrounding Jesus' birth? There are lots of parts for those who can read or memorize, as well as a children's choir. There is plenty to do for all who would like to be involved in making our Christmas Eve family program a success. Our own Kelsey Hancher, Ruth-Anne Dickey, and willing teen volunteers will be directing the pageant. There is no doubt we will need lots of help. If you have any interest in being part of what will surely be one of the highlights of the 2006 Christmas season, please let Ann Ritonio know at ann.ritonia@stmatthewssterling.org or 571-233-5880. Regular updates and information about auditions and rehearsals will be in Sunday bulletins. Tentatively, we will be rehearsing after the 10:30 a.m. service beginning December 3.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES AT SAINT MATTHEW'S

Sunday, December 24 Christmas Eve

+ *Children's Service* +
Children's Pageant & Eucharist, Rite II
4:00 p.m.

+ *Family Service* +
Contemporary Eucharist, Rite II
7:30 p.m.

+ *Late Service* +
Festival Eucharist, Rite II
11:00 p.m.

Monday, December 25 Christmas Day

+ *Holy Eucharist, Rite I* +
(no music)
10:00 a.m.

Spiritual Formation

Youth Group

This is our new format with the youth group. We continue to work with the Riddle Group, and a leadership team has been formed. If you have any questions about the youth group program, please contact Peter Hart at 703-430-9117.

Sunday Alive!

For the *first Sunday of each month*, we'll host Sunday Alive! This will be a fun night of games and wild activities for all middle school and high school teens at the church from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. This is

coordinated by Peter Hart
(pfhart@gmail.com).

Small Groups

For the *second and fourth Sunday* of each month from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., we'll learn about small groups and a new way to grow deeper in our faith with our friends. The definition of small groups means different things to many people. We have four groups meeting: two high school groups; a middle school girls group; and a middle school guys group. Debbie Vereb (DVereb@juno.com) is organizing this.

Outreach

On the third Sunday (or weekend) of the month, we will organize an adventure to help serve those in our community and beyond with many different acts of kindness. This is coordinated by Maria Palmer (palmer-family@cox.net).

Communication

If you would like to receive weekly e-mail messages and updates on activities for teens, be sure to contact Jodie Leach at jodieleach2@aol.com.

High School Retreat

Mark your calendars now for our annual high school retreat. In the winter of 2007 we will go to Mar-Lu Ridge retreat center to strengthen our relationships with Christ and each other. We'll have lots of fun in the process! The retreat will begin on Friday evening, February 2, and end Sunday afternoon, February 4. The

cost will be \$90 per person. It is limited to the first 25 students in grades 9-12 who sign up. Registration forms and more information will be coming in the January newsletter. Contact Ann Ritonio at 571-233-5880 or ann.ritonia@stmatthewssterling.org. Information on the middle school spring retreat will also be in the January newsletter.

Spiritual Formation

Prayer and Healing Team

As we begin Advent, anticipation abounds. Everyone experiences that anticipation differently. Frequently, children are concerned about their wish lists, and parents want to fulfill them. Inherently, we wonder what there is for us. God always has an answer, when we take the time to meet him. With this in mind, a Service for Healing and Peace will be held in the sanctuary on Sunday, December 10, at 7:00 p.m. Reserve time for yourself before God to seek his peace.

On October 18, Stephen Becker, an Episcopal priest displaced from New Orleans and now located in Ashburn, encouraged



Mission Trips in 2007

Mission trips are spiritually rewarding and can be life changing. At Saint Matthew's we want to give as many people as possible the opportunity to take a mission trip. This is why during the summer of 2007 we will undertake two high school mission trips. One trip this summer will be international and one will be domestic. The international trip will be July 21-28, 2007, to the country of Belize. The domestic trip will be June 25-30, 2007, to the eastern shore of Virginia.

To attend a 2007 mission trip, you must sign up and provide a \$300 deposit (for domestic) and \$600 deposit (for international) by January 1, 2007. Please make checks payable to Saint Matthew's and give them to Richard Leach. Scholarships are available; please see Richard for details.

Mission trips are very rewarding from both an outreach and spiritual formation perspective. Mission trips can be life-changing events by allowing individuals to be the hands and feet of Christ and to see God in a new way. All high schoolers are encouraged to participate. If you are in 8th through 12th grade currently and would like to go, please sign up in the parish hall or contact Richard Leach at 703-421-6310 or rpleach1226@aol.com.

us with his personal story. Roland and Althea Kuniholm described the meeting this way.

Picture someone pouring living water into the cups of about 12 thirsty people and you have an idea of what happened during the meeting with Stephen Becker.... He spoke in segments with appropriate praise songs following each segment. He emphasized the importance of having prayer as a part of your daily discipline. His spirit amplified his words allowing them easy access to the heart. The meeting closed with an invitation for individual prayer.

The November meeting featured an exploration of the *Book of Common Prayer* and closed with time for individual prayer. *Please note, there will not be a team meeting in December.*

Look in the January newsletter for details on our upcoming retreat and special training during Lent. Consider joining us. Our mission is to know and share God's love and healing through the powerful ministry of prayer. Contact Leslie Patton Tracy at 703-450-0786. Confidential requests are received personally by phone or by e-mail at prayerandhealingteam@stmatthewssterling.org.

Bible Reading Marathon

We will conduct our third annual Bible Reading Marathon where we will read the entire Bible aloud from cover to cover. We will start at the beginning – Genesis 1:1 – and will continue non-stop all the way through Revelation 22:21.

- Start** Tuesday, December 26, 2006 at 8:00 a.m.
- Est. End** Late morning on Friday, December 29, 2006
- Who** Everyone is welcome to participate, including children. Bring your family, friends, neighbors, etc.

Sign-up during November

Please limit total sign-up time to 1 hour (4 segments of 15 minutes). This will give others the opportunity to sign up for more convenient times.

Sign-up after November

Beginning in December, feel free to sign up for as many segments is desired.

Reminder sheet

Please fill out a reminder sheet with the date(s) and time(s) for which you have volunteered.

Live over the internet!

Last year we broadcast the entire reading of the Bible over the internet – *live!* We plan to do the same this year. Check the church home page (www.stmatthewssterling.org) for the link to the live broadcast of the Bible Reading Marathon.

For more information

Stewardship

Stewardship Campaign for 2007

As I hope you are aware by now, our stewardship campaign for 2007 is underway. (It began on October 1.) During a stewardship campaign, each of us is asked to prayerfully consider pledging to the local church to support the ministries and mission of that local church. To those who have turned in a 2007 pledge to Saint Matthew's, *thank you!* To those who have not yet done so, I urge you to seek the Lord's guidance to help determine if you should pledge and how much to pledge. If you are unsure how to pledge, please find me and I will be happy to give you a pledge card and answer any questions you might have. Our goal for 2007 is to receive \$375,000 in pledges.

As I write this article (in late October) we are just over half way to our goal. Let me take a few minutes to give you some statistics from 2006. In 2006, the "basics" (pay staff, pay the

utilities, and maintain the facilities) will require 70% of our budget. This leaves 30% to fund outreach programs (ESL, servant evangelism, Mountain Mission School, support of LINK, etc.), mission trips (high school and adult trips, Mission Possible), worship services (music, altar supplies, etc.), community activities (doughnuts and coffee every Sunday, pizza and game nights, scholarships for events like fishing trips or trips to a baseball game, etc.), and spiritual formation (Sunday school and other course curriculum, VBS, youth group activities, WATCH, Lenten program and devotional, parish retreat scholarships, etc.). The vestry stewards the budget carefully and wisely which allows Saint Matthew's to do a lot with the money given to her. However, I know God is calling us to do more.

I wish you the best in your financial life with God,
Richard Leach
Finance Committee Chair

----- ✂ -----
Cut here and return the form below to the church office

Christmas Flowers and Greens

Be a part of the wonder of Christmas by making a dedication for flowers and greens this season. This Advent we will feature lovely greens with flower accents each Sunday to correspond with the theme of that particular Sunday. In addition, we will have an impressive display of holiday greens, poinsettias, and decorations for Christmas Eve services and beyond. If you haven't yet made a dedication this year for flowers, this is an excellent opportunity to express your thanks for the wonderful blessings received during 2006. Or express your remembrances for a loved one who is no longer with you. Your dedication can be for anything at all that moves you to make a donation for flowers on the altar. Flower dedications made at this time of the year not only make our worship space beautiful but help support the flower ministry throughout the year.

If you are interested in making a dedication or donation, please fill out the form below (or use the dedication cards in the pews or a separate piece of paper). Enclose it and a check made payable to Saint Matthew's Episcopal Church, with "Flowers" in the note section. If you don't have a preference for which Sunday your dedication is made, then leave that blank and we will include your dedication on a Sunday where it is most needed.

- I want to dedicate the greens and flowers on the altar for Sunday, December _____.
- I want to make a dedication for poinsettias, wreaths, and greens.
- I want to make a donation to the flower ministry.

Your name: _____

My dedication should say: _____

If you prefer, or if you have any questions about making a dedication, you can call Barbara McKinney at 703-421-6256.