

## *From the Rector*

Dear Friends,

I went into D.C. the other day. There was an older man selling newspapers at one of the lights. As one who likes to reward work and initiative, I decided to buy a paper. I figured I'd give the man a dollar and tell him to keep the change.

Things went pretty much as planned until I gave the man the bill and told him to keep the change. His face lit up like a Christmas tree. Apparently he only had five newspapers left, as he took those out of his shoulder bag and said, "Here, you can have them all! I'm done for the day!" He then danced off in readily apparent glee.

Tom Leary was driving the car, and he asked, "Did you mean to give him a \$20 bill?"

The honest answer was, of course—no! I meant to give him a \$1 bill! But Tom's question went a long way to explaining the man's reaction.

But you know what? Even if it wasn't intentional, giving that extravagantly, and seeing the very obvious

difference it made, felt pretty darn good.

This is the month where we celebrate Christmas and the extravagant gift God gave us in His son. We remember the very real impact that gift has on our lives, and the great joy that results from receiving it. It's a joy we seek to share with others when we too give extravagantly, not just at Christmas but throughout the year; not just to those we know and love but also to help those we've never met.

The most extravagant gift we can give, however, is not money at all. It's helping someone else receive the gift of Christmas, the gift we've been given in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. It's helping them come to know the difference that gift can make so that they too can dance with glee.

In the Spirit of extravagant giving that God has so freely shared with us, will you invite a friend to church this Christmas?

Rob†

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## *From the Youth Minister*

We're coming up on the season of Advent. For those who may not know, those are the weeks leading up to Christmas. Now, in case you don't know what Christmas is (we do serve an international audience), it's that time when Christians all over the world decide to get dressed up and go to church for the second time that year.

With the hectic life we lead all year long, it's hard to stop and reflect on where we are and where we're going. I know that for most people, if we don't make the time for this, it will never happen. It's like they say about children, "If you wait until you're ready to have one, you'll never have one."

Christmas Eve is the day when I make the time to stop and reflect on my life. I arrive about 45 minutes before the Christmas Eve service, find a good seat (right near the corner in the back row, you get the best seat being 45 minutes early), kneel and reflect with God. I walk through my entire life, from as far back as I can remember. I'll begin

with the earliest friendship I can think of, picture the person, remember a time we shared, pray for them, and ask God what he would have me learn from that relationship. I continue this for every person I can recall, family, friends, girlfriends, teachers, people in the church, and those people who have hurt me. I'll double back sometimes if someone comes to mind that I missed. At points I'll just let my mind wander to where God leads.

Once I catch up to this year the memories are much more vivid. I tend to walk through the year and see each of those individuals in my life as they were and as they are now – seeing how they have changed over the year, and how I have been changed by them.

I'll pray for those people whom I have forgotten, asking God to keep all of them safe. I'll finish up with some time for God to speak to me, to show me where he wants me to go in the coming year and where my focus should be.

I don't think I can express in words how moving this is. At times I'll laugh out loud, remembering some crazy moment I shared (this year I know one of those times will be running through a tunnel of youth to dive into a root beer float). Other times I'll be moved to tears reliving memories or sharing a friend's pain. Even while I'm writing I'm shaking by the sexual abuse I've seen and heard others endure.

This is the time I give to my God and all those people I have met in life. They deserve so much more from me than the few seconds they receive on Christmas Eve. I always come away with a warmth in my heart and a change in my outlook.

Please, through this Advent season, focus on those around you. Those souls who may be lost and those friends who are deepening your faith. Remember that every one of them is a gift from God . . . just like you.

Peace,  
†Tom

## *From the Senior Warden*

What is Advent? Well, the word advent comes from a Latin root meaning "coming." Early Christians spoke of "the advent of the Lord" referring to God becoming incarnate in Jesus. Another use of the term advent, which may have developed as early as the fourth century, is for a period before Christmas when Christians prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. Sometime in the Middle Ages the church defined the length of the Advent season as four Sundays before Christmas.

Advent is a season of preparation for remembering Christ's incarnation at Christmas. It is also—and this one is less obvious, at least to me—to remind us the Christ will fulfill his promise to return in power and great glory. Christ will come again.

Advent is also the first season of the church year. It signifies the beginning of a new year and the close of the old year. It reminds us that another period of time has come and gone. We should

ask ourselves have we used that past time to grow our relationship with God, and how can we further it in the new year.

There are many great things about Saint Matthew's, but one of them is that there are plenty of activities to help further our personal relationship with God. As we enter a new church year, how am I, how are you, going to grow that relationship? We might decide to go on the parish retreat in February (February 10-12); we might decide to go on an adult mission trip to Mississippi to assist the church we adopted, Saint Patrick's; we might decide to volunteer in a ministry of Saint Matthew's and donate two to four hours of our time each week to the mission of the church; we might decide to make a pledge to Saint Matthew's if we have not pledged in the past; we might decide to make a calendar year-end donation; we might decide to participate in the Bible reading marathon; we might decide to attend pizza & game

nights (they are a lot of fun) to meet new friends; and/or we might decide to attend Wednesday night Bible study on a regular basis. Whatever it is that we decide, I encourage all of us to further our relationship with God in the upcoming new church year.

Building our relationship with God is so important. Improving our relationship with God brings us closer to him and is an enabler for us to live better lives. Whenever I forget this I enjoy reading Psalm 24, verses 3 and 4, "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." We all are called by a loving God to build this relationship—my prayer this new year is that none of us miss our opportunity to do so.

*Wishing you all the best in your walk with Christ,*

**- Richard Leach**

## *From the Lay Ministry Coordinator*

### **Don't Just Read It. Do It!**

1. Use the fingers on one hand to count out five friends or acquaintances in your life that you like—people you enjoy spending time with. Why do you like these people? What makes you gravitate toward them?
2. Now use the fingers of the hand on this page to count our five other people—people in your church or community, you don't notice much or talk to . . . they may actually repel you. Letting each finger represent one person, write their initials on the tip of a finger.
3. Jesus loved and served forgotten, grungy people. Among his 12 closest followers he picked a variety of low-lives: a despised tax collector, uneducated fishermen, even a greedy traitor. But he entrusted them with wisdom and served them with love . . . and they changed the world forever.
4. Read Matthew 25:34-40 and Luke 14:12-14. Ask yourself honestly: Can you love these people? Can you serve them?
5. Think of one thing you can do for each of the five people you wrote on the paper hand. Write down an act of love for each person, and determine this week to act on each one. Pray that God will work through you.

**- Jodie Leach**

## SAGE

If you are age 55 or older and would like to experience fun, community, and fellowship, and explore where God is calling you at this stage in your life, please join us on Thursday, December 22, at 12:00 noon in the parish hall for a kick-off luncheon of SAGE, a group designed for the seasoned members of our church and community.

We will share a meal, discuss our plans for the coming year, and enjoy a good old fashioned yankee swap (gift exchange, ten dollars or less.) Lunch will be pot luck. Turkey and ham will be provided.

If you can attend, please RSVP to Ann Ritonio at 571-233-5880 or [Mar4kids@aol.com](mailto:Mar4kids@aol.com).

# Katrina Relief Update

Imagine for a moment if one day there was a tremendous storm, and after that storm you had nothing. No home, no clothes, no way to get to your money, no church, no working phones, no electricity. This was the reality of the parishioners at Saint Patrick's Episcopal Church in Long Beach, Mississippi.

Saint Matthew's has made a long term commitment to help Saint Patrick's clean up and rebuild. Their parishioners are still digging out of the debris, although the church has installed a temporary trailer for offices

and limited worship. They are currently worshipping at another church in the area. The media may have already forgotten the folks at the Gulf Coast, but we won't.

Saint Matthew's has been so generous since September in supporting this cause. We have raised funds and sent a team of four parishioners to assess the situation and help clean up.

In November, as this newsletter goes to press, we are collecting cold weather supplies and baked goods to send to the volunteers who are helping clean

up and rebuild. Also, we are sending a second mission team to serve Thanksgiving dinner to those in need in Long Beach.

But we can't stop now. It will take years to rebuild Saint Patrick's. As the residents of Long Beach rebuild their lives, it is crucial that their church family be there to support them spiritually, emotionally, and financially. For more information on how you can help, visit the Saint Matthew's website and click on the Katrina link, or contact Vicki Nelson at [van@sacklaw.com](mailto:van@sacklaw.com).

## Communion Classes - *Save the dates!*

January 14 and 21, 2006, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

We are offering a new class for all ages of children through middle school years to learn more about what it means to receive the Eucharist. The classes will be held during the lunch hour and taught by Dr. Debbie Bowers. It is best if your child can attend both dates. For now, save the dates and look for more information in the January newsletter and Sunday bulletins.

## G3 Hits the Trails

Sunday, October 30, was a beautiful fall day! Fortunately, G3 had scheduled a trail work-trip for that afternoon. The plan was to trim brush and pick up any trash along Saint Matthew's adopted Cedar Grove Trail in Claude Moore Park. Continuing the "and then some" spirit of G3 and Saint Matthew's, the group of teens and parents was large enough to create two trail teams. Mark Vereb, long-time park trail volunteer, led one team up Little Stoney Mountain to work on edging some side-hill trail along with the usual trail work. Merry Breed led another team along the Cedar Grove Trail. Not only did the brush get trimmed and the trail edged, but these teams were so handy with the saws, many autumn olive and cedars encroaching on the trails were also removed. Both trails are now in great shape, ready for the first snows of winter—the perfect place for a winter hike surrounded by the beauty of God's creation.

Thank you, and then some, to all who participated! Hope you are all willing to return in the spring. Or better yet, for some fun in the snow!

- **Merry Breed**

Stewardship of Creation  
Committee Chair  
CMP Assistant Park Manager



# Advent & Christmas at Saint Matthew's

## Christmas Services

Christmas Eve: 4:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., 9:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.; Christmas Day at 10:00 a.m.  
New Year's Day, Sunday, January 1, 2006: Full service schedule.

## Holiday Star Tree

The Holiday Star Tree is filled with gift ideas for the Loudoun Community Holiday Coalition. New, unwrapped gifts may be donated through Sunday, December 4.

The Coalition joins several Loudoun County government agencies, local churches, LINK, Loudoun Interfaith Relief, and others to connect people in need with all who want to help. Select a gift idea from the tree, or bring any new gift of your choice.

## 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 "Operation Angel Undercover" by Melanie A. White, a children's musical with parts for nearly anyone who wants to be involved. Ruth-Anne Dickie will be directing this year's pageant, with help from her dear pop, John (of "The Drum" fame). There is no doubt that Ruth-Anne will need lots of help, so if you have any interest in being a part of what will surely be the highlight of the 2005 Christmas season, please let Ruth-Anne know. Regular updates and information about auditions and rehearsals will be in the Sunday bulletins.

## Greening of the Church

Help us decorate the church for Christmas on Sunday, December 18, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. This is a very popular event, so please call Barbara McKinney at 703-421-6256 if you would like to participate. This is a great opportunity for the whole family. Limited spaces available.

## Advent Materials

The Spiritual Formation Committee is making available Advent materials for the entire family. It is hoped that these materials will enhance your and your family's Advent season.

The materials are prepackaged in envelopes in the narthex. November 27 marks the first Sunday in Advent, a very important season in the life of the Church. Truthfully, it is only in a careful observance of the Sundays of Advent that one is fully prepared to celebrate a meaningful and satisfying Christmas.

## Advent Preparation Night

Friday, December 2, 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Prepare a spiritual pathway to the Christmas season. Enjoy an evening of activities centered on Jesus' coming!

- Make an advent wreath with real greens and candles provided. (You may want to bring small pruning shears and gardening gloves.)
- Create a *Christmas Kiss Countdown*.
- Put together candy cane and angel ornaments.
- Coloring fun with Christmas placemats.

There will be activities for all ages! But that's not all . . . there will be a soup dinner with Starbucks coffee, hot cider, pumpkin pie, and cookies.

Lots of materials will be available to GET READY! Advent means "coming" or "arrival," and the focus of the season is the coming of Jesus Christ. If you have any questions, please contact Jodie Leach at 703-421-6310 or via email at JodieLeach2@aol.com.

## Parish Christmas Tree

Each year the church decorates a Christmas tree for the altar. If you would like to donate toward the cost of the tree or are interested in purchasing the tree, please call Barbara McKinney at 703-421-6256.



## *Bible Reading Marathon*

On Monday morning, December 26, we will begin our second Bible Reading Marathon, where the entire Bible is read aloud continuously from cover to cover. We start at the beginning—Genesis 1:1—and will continue non-stop all the way through Revelation 22:21 (this will take approximately four days).

Those who participated last year all agreed that this was an incredibly significant part of their Christmas celebration. It was met with an enthusiastic response, and we expect the same this year.

There is a sign up book for 15 minute intervals located in the narthex. Everyone is welcome to participate, including children, so families can sign up for blocks at a time. Readers are also encouraged to sign up for multiple blocks throughout the several days. We will especially need men to be available for the overnight hours.

Plan, also, on coming to hear the Word of God being read aloud. We will have just celebrated the coming of the Word of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, a few days earlier on Christmas; let us also celebrate hearing the Word of God as given us in the Bible.

For more information, contact Mark Vereb at 703-450-6050 or via e-mail at VerebM@mail.nih.gov.

## *Caring for Creation throughout the Holidays*

Check out the Stewardship bulletin board in the parish hall for ideas ranging from simple, Christ-centered celebrations to recycling your Christmas trees.

## *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 flowers each Sunday to correspond with the theme of that particular Sunday. In addition, we will again have an impressive display of holiday greens and poinsettias 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 2005. 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.

Fill out the form below (or use the dedication cards in the pews or a separate piece of paper), and enclose it and a check made payable to Saint Matthew's Episcopal Church, writing "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 flowers on the altar for Sunday, December \_\_\_\_\_

I want to make a dedication for poinsettias and greens.

My dedication should say: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## *Love Boxes*

A Love Box is a wrapped shoebox with gifts for either a needy child in the local area or a student of Mountain Mission School in Grundy, Virginia. Our goal is to provide all the children with a shoebox filled for them. How can you help?

- Pray for these children and for God's blessings on this project.
- Donate time to assemble boxes, small gifts to fill the shoeboxes, and money to be used by volunteer shoppers.

### **Here's how to sponsor a box:**

Wrapped boxes are available in the parish hall. When you pick up a box, you find a label for either a boy or girl of a particular age. Green lids are for boys; red lids are for girls. Suggested items are toiletries, jewelry, stationery, stamps, socks, gloves, hats, calculators, small books, bookmarks, and hairclips. Use your imagination!

For more information contact Kenny or Karen Thayer at 703-796-9054 or Leanna Wilson at 703-421-7086.

## *Wolf Trap Holiday Sing Along* **Sunday, December 4**

Meet promptly at Saint Matthew's at 3:00 p.m. as we caravan to Wolf Trap park. Singing on the lawn from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m., returning to the church around 6:30 p.m.

- Dress warmly, and bring along a blanket.
- Bring a canned food item to donate as an entrance fee.
- Parking and admission are free!
- We'll provide the jingle bells for that old time favorite and the candles for "Silent Night."

# Just Wondering

A question-and-answer column where you can get the answers to questions you've always wondered about.

## Q “Why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25?”

**A** For my wife, daughter, and me, a favorite holiday movie is “A Christmas Story” (1983). There are many reasons why. (I will ignore the fact that one of us, when young, looked rather like the main character, nine-year old Ralphie.) One reason consists in the sharply observant, humorous, and bittersweet lines sprinkled throughout the movie. An example comes early when the narrator (the adult Ralphie) exclaims, “Christmas ... lovely, glorious, beautiful Christmas, around which the entire kid year revolved!” Who of us – especially children and any who were once children – can imagine a year without Christmas? The colors, smells, carols, decorations, foods, and presents!

Yet there was a time when a year had no Christmas. I do not mean the time before the birth of Jesus. Even in the early years of the Church, among faithful believers, Christmas was barely observed. Certainly Christmas as we know it did not exist. In contrast, believers in Jesus and non-believers alike today often celebrate Christmas with great fervor. To paraphrase Bob Dylan, “the times they have a-changed.” The change raises a question. Why do we now celebrate Christmas every 25th of December?

There really are two questions here. First, why do we celebrate Christmas at all? Second, why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25? The first question is the more important, so we will explore the second question first.

*The second question first.* Why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25? Traditionally, Christmas is connected with the birth of Jesus. Was Jesus, then, actually born on December 25? The answer is that no one knows.

Many dates have been proposed for the birth of Jesus, yet no records remain to de-

termine the exact date. The most extensive records of the life of Jesus – our New Testament gospels – do not specify the date. Only Matthew and Luke have much information on the birth of Jesus. Yet, they do not provide the exact date. They give a historical framework for the *year* of birth. Matthew writes of Jesus’ birth when Herod was king. Luke records Jesus’ birth during a census ordered by Emperor Augustus, when Quirinius governed Syria. These references lead to estimates of Jesus’ birth around 6 to 4 B.C. Neither gospel, however, names the precise day, much less the exact year.

How did December 25 become the day then? Early speculation about the day of Jesus’ birth often occurred in contexts more theological than historical. For example, one theologian thought his birth likely took place on a Wednesday because the sun was created on the fourth day (Genesis 1). Other theologians proposed dates in spring, fall, and winter. Amid such speculation, some contended his birthday should not be celebrated, as such celebrations were associated with pagan rulers and gods.

However, by the end of the fourth century, the Church, especially in the West, had established December 25 as the feast of the birth of Jesus. Many later commentators have maintained this date was picked to absorb and transform, especially for the sake of new Christians, popular non-Christian festivals centered around the winter solstice and pagan gods.

To the extent this dynamic may have propelled fixing the feast on December 25, some represent it as theological and spiritual compromise by the Church. There may be elements of this. At the same time, we may consider that God came to us in Jesus that, in him, we might come to God. In theology, this has often been described as the “Great

Exchange.” Jesus reconciled humanity to God, thus transforming humanity from sin and death to righteousness and new life. In this context, it may be fitting that our old ways are taken up and transformed by Jesus into God-ways. Moreover, it can be argued from Scripture that, throughout nature and human history and culture, we see hints or reflections of God even apart from his explicit revelation. Where this is so, Jesus as God incarnate catches up, corrects, clarifies, and fulfills all such reflections. It could be said that, in some sense, he is the reason not only for Christmas but for all hinted manifestations of God in nature, history and culture, however dimly and imperfectly they reflect God. Hence, for theological, pastoral, and missional reasons, there may be warrant for establishing the celebration of Jesus’ birth on December 25.

(Compare this article from Christianity-Today.com for a good, concise discussion of some of this: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2000/dec08.html>.)

*The first question second.* The more significant question, then, is why we celebrate Christmas at all? This, I think, really consists of two questions. One, why do believers in Jesus celebrate Christmas? Two, why does our culture at large celebrate Christmas?

Why do believers in Jesus celebrate Christmas? The Church only slowly came to observe Christmas with regularity and devotion. The early Church focused on Good Friday and Easter – the great victory won over sin and death by Jesus through the cross and resurrection. Only eventually did the Church come to observe Christmas with similar attention. (Even in recent centuries, some Christians still have spurned Christmas celebration.) Controversies over the incarnation in the third and fourth cen-

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*Just Wondering continued from page 7*

turies may have spurred this to some extent. The need to affirm the fact and meaning of Jesus' birth took on greater theological significance.

Much the same remains true today. For believers in Jesus, the celebration of his birth at Christmas should proclaim God's real, down-to-earth love for the world. We acknowledge God-with-us in Jesus – in this flesh-and-blood child, born to save and transform you, me, and the cosmos. Christmas – when we embrace and celebrate the centrality of Jesus in it – proclaims in word and deed God's good news of great joy for all people.

Why does our culture at large celebrate Christmas? Why do people who do not be-

lieve in Jesus grasp so fervently a celebration traditionally rooted in Jesus? There are likely many reasons. I think one major reason is the need it reveals for people to experience light and joy in life, amid the darkness and sorrow in the world so grittily known by all. Though the substance may be sentimentalized, fogged, ignored, or rejected, the forms glitter with poignant attraction when the need is so deep and great. This is all the more reason why we who know Jesus, who know he wraps and gives true Christmas, must by our Christmas celebration give faithful witness to this good news of great joy for all people, the coming of a savior amid our darkness and sorrow, who is Jesus the lord.

- **Gregory Strong**

## JUST WONDERING

*Is there a question about the Bible that has always puzzled you? Have you always wondered about some aspect of Christianity but didn't know where to get the answer? Well, this is the place to ask those questions. Members of the Spiritual Formation Committee will answer one of those questions each month. If you have a question, you can submit it to Mark Vereb either by email at VerebM@mail.nih.gov or by phone at 301-496-1895 (during the day) or 703-450-6050 (evenings and weekends). Questions will be published anonymously. So if you have a question, ask away! Chances are, others are wondering the same thing!*

## G3 HAPPENINGS

**G3 Web Site** – Wondering what's going on in youth group? Do you think there's so much stuff you could never figure out what is happening when? Check out the new G3 Web site. It includes a calendar of all youth group events, lots of upcoming events, and even lets you sign up online for our big outings. Just go to: [www.stmatthewssterling.org/g3](http://www.stmatthewssterling.org/g3).

**Ski Trip and Retreat** – This January we'll be heading out to the slopes. We're going out skiing (hopefully not to break more bones than necessary)! Then in February we'll have our winter youth retreat. All the details are being worked out. Please contact Tom or Melissa for information.

**Weekly Events** – Bible study will not take place through December, since we are encouraging everyone to share Wednesday nights with their families. We have booklets to use so you can have your own family walk through the Bible.

**Sunday Night Youth Group** – Every Sunday we share some crazy fun and good friendships. We meet at church Sunday night (we're off November 26) from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. This December we'll be focusing on helping those in the community.

**Wednesday Morning Senior Breakfast** – Learn what college life is like and how to survive it! Come to Corner Bakery in Cascades Wednesdays from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

**Thursday Night Starbucks** - Come on out to just hang and talk with friends. Meet new people and relax after school. We meet at Starbucks in Cascades every Thursday from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.



## Everyone Can Use a Helping Hand

Do you know someone who could use a hot meal or some help around the house? Let **Saint Matthew's Helping Hand** know and we'll reach out to help.

Want to cook a meal for a neighbor, deliver meals, or do you have other ways to help out? **Saint Matthew's Helping Hand** would appreciate your help.

[helpinghand@stmatthewssterling.org](mailto:helpinghand@stmatthewssterling.org)

## *Vestry Highlights - October*

The meeting opened with prayer and reflection by Rob Merola on Matthew 7 - those who actually do Jesus' will as against those who call Jesus "Lord" but do not live out the life of faithful discipleship. Will we act on things that matter and endure in terms of the kingdom, or will we spend our life on things that neither matter nor endure?

After this, the vestry heard and discussed a report by Charlie Biegel on the church finances as of September 30. The general fund balance is in good shape. The relief fund continues to receive donations. The vestry deliberated whether to send more funds for Katrina assistance or for other relief needs. With respect to income, the church was ahead of budget for pledge and plate income. As for expenses, overall the church was below budgeted expenses year-to-date.

The next business concerned the upcoming 2006 Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia, January 27-28, in Richmond. Allen Tuttle was elected lay delegate to council, and Merry Breed was elected alternate.

The vestry then discussed a proposal from the Classroom of Discovery to replace the climbing geo dome in the church's backyard with one more suitable for young children in terms of height and joint fixtures. The issue was tabled until the next vestry meeting to clarify with the school exactly what changes to play equipment would satisfy the church's and the school's needs.

Next, the vestry voted to authorize purchase of another laptop to meet the work needs of additional staff.

In a report on Katrina relief, Vicki Nelson observed that several people from the church went in October to the Gulf Coast to help with reconstruction. More trips will be planned and conducted over the next months. There was also discussion about the possibility of relief funds and efforts for earthquake victims in Pakistan. A strategic question arose as to whether the church should concentrate on one or two relief efforts for maximum impact, or give to the many relief needs that are current. Discussion ensued about the pros and cons of one strategic direction or the other. Notice will be given to the church that those who wish to give have avenues through other organizations.

Next came Jay Nogle's report on the stewardship campaign. The stewardship letter was mailed to about 235 households in mid October. A number of pledges have been returned, with more expected in following weeks.

Other matters brought before the vestry included the following: a Misconduct and Sexual Abuse Prevention Workshop on Saturday, November 5; the need for lighting at the end of the walk leading to and from the trailer; and the scheduling of the annual congregational meeting for Sunday, January 29, 2006.

The meeting adjourned at 8:54 p.m. The next meeting was set for Tuesday, November 15.

## 2006 Mission Trip

The planning for the 2006 mission trip is underway. The details thus far are as follows.

- We will attend a YouthWorks mission trip (YouthWorks is a youth mission organization created to serve youth, communities, and the church).
- The mission trip is open to anyone who will be entering the 9th grade in the 2006/2007 school year (i.e., anyone currently in 8th grade) through anyone who will have completed the 12th grade during this school year.
- The week we are taking the mission trip is the week of July 9, 2006.
- The destination of the mission trip is Toronto.
- To attend the 2006 mission trip, we need you to sign-up and provide a \$300 deposit by December 1, 2005.
- To sign-up, please contact Richard Leach at 703-421-6310 or [rp1each1226@aol.com](mailto:rp1each1226@aol.com).

The total cost of the mission trip will be about \$1000 per person (cost of the mission trip plus the transportation costs). It is hoped that one third of this will be funded by the church, one third will be funded by the parents, and one third funded by kids through fundraisers. The more money we can raise, the less the burden on parents. If anyone has a good idea for a fundraiser, or if anyone would like to lead a fund raiser activity, please contact Jodie or Richard Leach.

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.



## *Mark your calendar* **Annual Meeting January 29**

We will be hosting this event at the Senior Center in Cascades to accommodate all of our parishioners. More information will be forthcoming in the January newsletter.

### **Saint Matthew's Third Annual Parish Retreat**

Save the date! The next Saint Matthew's Annual Parish Family Retreat is February 10-12, 2006! It is a wonderful time for the parish family, with lots of fun together as well as worship, prayer, and teaching for youth and adults, and childcare for young children.

# When You Thought We Weren't Looking

## *A tribute to children's ministers*

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you kneel to warmly greet a child,  
And we knew that child felt welcome.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you singing silly songs with funny motions,  
And we knew kids thought church was fun.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you pray quietly with a child who needed comfort,  
And we knew that child felt loved.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you stay late to hang children's artwork,  
And we knew the kids felt at home.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you haul armfuls of extras  
To make your lesson unforgettable,  
And we knew the children were learning.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you smile and listen while a child  
Talked about her week at school,  
And we knew that child felt important.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw your tender touches,  
And we knew you were the hands of Jesus.

When you thought we weren't looking...  
We saw you lead a child to Christ,  
And we knew we were standing on holy ground.

*(reprinted from Children's Ministry Magazine)*

How very grateful we are for our teachers! If you would like to learn more about this ministry, fee free to contact Jodie Leach, 703-421-6310, or email JodieLeach2@aol.com.

## Prayer and Healing Ministry News

Are you in need of emotional or physical healing? Do you want and need time to pray and reflect on God's presence in your life? Please join us in a service of prayer and healing on Tuesday, December 20 at 7:30 p.m. at Saint Matthew's. For more information, please call Ann Ritonia at 703-430-2121.

## Prayer and Healing Ministry Networking and Informational Meeting

We have been blessed by a very active intercessory prayer team at Saint Matthew's. This special ministry has made a difference in the life and mission of our church. Another important part of Jesus' ministry was healing physical and emotional pain and illness. Today, he calls us to continue his work of prayer and healing. We live in a world that is hurting and broken in so many ways. More than ever, we need those that are called to prayer and healing to be agents of healing and hope, to know and share God's love through this very special ministry. If you are interested in learning more about prayer and healing, or are a member of one of our prayer teams, you are invited to a networking and informational meeting on Saturday, December 10, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the church to discuss the exciting future of this ministry and explore training and ministry opportunities in our community. For more information please call Ann Ritonia at 703-430-2121, email Mar4kids@aol.com.



### Join Us!

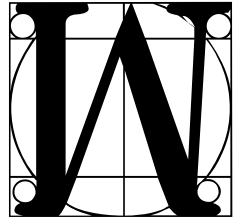
G3 and the Community Committee are sponsoring a trip to see "Les Miserables" at the National Theatre on Wednesday, December 28, 2005, at 8:00 p.m. We have reserved a limited number of seats in the front mezzanine section of the theater. The cost of each seat is \$74. If you are interested in attending, please let Richard Leach know, 703-421-6310, or rpleach1226@aol.com. Checks should be made payable to Richard.

INSIDE THIS  
ISSUE

*Prepare for Jesus' coming!  
Advent & Christmas activities, programs & services*

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Saint Matthew's Episcopal Church • Cameron Parish  
The Reverend C. Rob Merola • Rector  
201 East Frederick Drive • Sterling, VA 20164-2387  
Telephone: (703) 430-2121 • Fax: (703) 430-2638  
Sunday Service Times: 8:00 AM • 9:15 AM\* • 10:30 AM\*  
\*Nursery Provided

Office Hours: Tuesday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM  
E-mail: [OfficeManager@stmatthewssterling.org](mailto:OfficeManager@stmatthewssterling.org) • Internet: <http://www.stmatthewssterling.org>

Deadline for submission to this newsletter is the first Friday of each month. Content may be submitted by hardcopy to the newsletter mailbox in the church office or e-mailed to [Newsletter@stmatthewssterling.org](mailto:Newsletter@stmatthewssterling.org).