

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

Volume XXVIII, Number 1 *A parish in the classical Anglican tradition* January 17th, 2017

FROM THE RECTOR

We need to rescue cursive from the dustbin of history

Something decidedly odd has been taking place in the realm of education theory over the past five or six decades. Educational wisdom accumulated over the past three or four millennia is being consigned to what Leon Trotsky called “the dustbin of history” and replaced by a ragbag of seemingly utopian notions headed in exactly the opposite direction.

Of course, not all ancient ideas are necessarily worth keeping. History, for instance, demonstrates the truth of Dr. Samuel Johnson's assertion that small boys absorb knowledge at precisely the rate energy is applied to their backsides. But it also indicates that the benefits are more than offset by the psychological damage the process inflicts.

On the other hand, judged by the results, “old fashion methods” of teaching math and reading skills were immeasurably more effective than those employed in most of the nation's schools today.

Learning the alphabet and multiplication tables by rote is undeniably a rather boring process. But learning the necessity of applying oneself even to boring tasks is a vitally important life lesson.

Acquiring skills of any kind – for work or for play – requires repetitive practice. Putting the learned skills into practice is the interesting part.

Children of my generation spent hours in the classroom chanting “once two is two, two twos are four, two three are six” and “A is for apple, B is for ball, C is for cat.” And we spent even more time sounding out combinations of consonants and vowels and on mental arithmetic quizzes.

But most of us could read for enjoyment by the age of seven and some much earlier. Even children with reading disabilities (dyslexia was not commonly diagnosed in those days) could usually read at grade level, if not for enjoyment, by age 9 or 10.

And thanks to those mental arithmetic quizzes, children as young as eight were able to wait on customers in the parents' shops, while the sons and daughters of Alf Salisbury, the village bookie, could calculate the odds on a horse in split seconds well before they had reached their teens.

Contrast that with shop assistants who today cannot add together the prices of a pair of pants, a sweater and a pair of socks without a calculator, and the supermarket cashiers who are unable to tot up a grocery bill if the power goes down.

Albert Einstein defined stupidity as repeating the same experiment and expecting different results. On this basis, one might reasonably expect the educational establishment to call a halt to innovation, assess

progress to date and abandon ideas that had manifestly failed.

But not a bit of it! The response to decades of failure is to double down on it. Indeed, the latest piece of old-established wisdom to be pitched over the educational transom is “cursive writing.”

The education establishment's contempt for cursive was summed up by an education journalist who wrote: “Cursive writing is an anachronism. Spending any classroom time on it is comparable to teaching how to use an abacus: it's interesting as a history lesson, and probably offers some side benefits, but it is not at all practical as a day-to-day skill in the modern, connected world.”

Morgan Polikoff, assistant professor of education at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, researches the design and effects of standards,

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Courtney, Marie, Joanna, Finnie, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Adrian & Michell

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Beth

IN MEMORIAM: David R. Riley, former Choirmaster & Organist

THOSE WHO MOURN: The choir alumni, his colleagues and many friends.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army

assessment and accountability policies. He believes there is no point in teaching cursive writing.

“Cursive should be allowed to die.” He says, “In fact, it's already dying, despite having been taught for decades. Very small proportions of adults use cursive for their day-to-day writing. Much of our communication is done on a keyboard, and the rest is done with print.

“Additionally, there is little compelling research to suggest the teaching of cursive positively affects other student skills enough to merit its teaching. While both research and common sense indicate students should be taught some form of penmanship, there is simply no need to teach students both print and cursive.”

On this basis, Polikoff – who apparently has difficulty distinguishing between decades and centuries – urges educators and policymakers to resist adding more skills to the Common Core because “doing so undermines the

strength of the standards.”

Actually, Polikoff’s statement sheds much light on the sort of “strengths and standards” embodied in the Common Core. None of it reassuring. Indeed, it indicates that our educators live in a cocoon utterly divorced from the real world. If they had bothered to take a glance at the world outside their cocoon they might have noticed that newspapers, magazines and a books are published in upper and lower case script – the type-setting equivalent of cursive. And they do so for the very same reason cursive writing came into being.

Cursive writing was developed almost two millennia ago for very practical reasons. Cursive script is much easier to read and write than printing individual letters. Cursive makes note taking far easier – faster than both printing and typing on a lap top keyboard.

There are educational advantages to teaching cursive:

■ Learning cursive accelerates learning to read. It makes a child more aware of the shape of letters and how words are spelled. Phonics guru Don Potter states: "Any attempt to educate American children that neglects the direct development of fluent handwriting is doomed to fail. The little dribble of handwriting done with the typical phonics programs is far below optimal."

■ Cursive makes children smarter. Researchers speculate that it helps the brain to rewire itself to become better at reading.

■ Cursive requires young students to do something precisely; not sloppily, incompletely and according to personal whim. Penmanship is the perfect path to precision – a valuable concept that enables young people to read faster and think faster.

■ Cursive teaches fine motor skills. Children learn how to create something really complicated. Videogames require the same actions over and over again. Cursive demands both physical and mental dexterity.

■ Learning cursive introduces a child to logos, type design, and graphic design generally.

■ Cursive is valuable in teaching history. When children learn cursive, they can read the Declaration of Independence and many other historical documents, as well as letters from older relatives.

■ Cursive allows for personal expression. A person's signature is nearly as unique as a fingerprint. Nowadays, children learn to print their signatures.

■ Handwriting is faster than printing. That was the main reason it was developed. Cursive is the obvious choice for taking notes in the classroom. GPH✘

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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The Rev. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*
The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*
The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki and
The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*
The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*
Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –

evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Vestry Meeting

Wednesday January 18th, 7.00 pm

Ladies Who Lunch

(Basta Pasta, Timonium Road)

Wednesday January 18th, 12.00 pm - 2.00 pm

Parish Blood Drive

Monday, January 23rd, 1.30 pm to 7.00 pm

Red Cross states: "The need is critical"

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