

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

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FROM THE RECTOR

A bold initiative to pack the pews empties them instead

It is a sobering commentary on the contrariness of fate that the spiritual train wreck currently emptying America's mainline churches started life 50 years ago as a bold new initiative aimed at packing the pews.

The 1950s Organization Man was giving way to the Beat Generation and the world stood at the threshold of the Swinging Sixties. The churches, struggling for relevance in an era of rock and roll, easy sex and recreational drug use, set out to entice 20-somethings to 30-somethings back to the communion rail.

What was needed, the churches' intellectual elite prescribed, was modern music and "swinging" liturgies young people could "relate to."

All in all, the strategy was about as successful, and as embarrassing, as my parents' efforts at dancing "the Frug." Come to think of it, it was one heck of a lot less successful and an awful lot more embarrassing – which is saying a very great deal.

Liturgies ran from the mawkishly dull through the mawkishly banal to the mawkishly dull and banal. The less said about the banshee wailing of singing nuns the better.

Predictably enough, a vast majority of the 20-something to 30-something target audience remained conspicuously absent, while folks who normally filled the pews increasingly found refuge from the cacophony in places like the golf course.

Sadly, all this damage was done in the vain hope of attracting a group of people who for more than 100 years had shown less and less inclination to attend church.

Repeal of the so-called "Blue Laws," which kept shops and places of entertainment shuttered on the Sabbath Day, was certainly a main contributory factor. Stores, movie houses, bars and dance halls offered lively competition to sonorous sermons.

Doubtless, improved health care also played a role. Churches are invariably filled in times of great danger – the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, for example, and the launching of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Rapid strides in medicine particularly during the past half century have fostered among westerners under the age of, say 35, what amounts to a sense of immortality. Barring accidents and acts of war, a vast majority of them can expect to see their 40th birthdays – and what's the point of attending church if you're immortal?

One might imagine that after a decade or so of failed experimentation, the churches' leaderships would have decided that it would be wise to throw in the towel, analyze the nature of the debacle and, ultimately, return to their traditional ways.

But that's not how human beings do things. Instead, they forged ahead doubling down on their failed programs, piling theological and liturgical innovation upon innovation.

The upshot was that when the original members of the

target audience were ready to return to the churches of their youth – namely, when they ceased to be immortal 20-somethings to 30-somethings – they found them so changed as to be unrecognizable.

As a consequence, many drifted back to the golf course; others to easy-going, non-denominational churches, more genuinely in tune with popular culture.

The trouble with this is that Jesus Christ's Church is not, and should never seek to be, in tune with the popular culture. The church is a divine and eternal institution with a human mission, not – as so many folks today seem to assume – a human institution with a divine mission that is ultimately finite.

Jesus Christ's Church is "in" the world, but not "of" it. It should be the one changeless rock in a world of constant change. It is the sole repository of the eternal truth, our sole source of certitude and, thus, our sole source of true solace.

On the national and local levels, our churches should reflect

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: Peter, Hilarie, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Wiley✕, 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, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Beth

IN MEMORIAM:

THOSE WHO MOURN:

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

this changelessness and certitude without which there can be no solace. And this cannot be achieved with a constantly changing liturgy, polity and theology.

To be sure, the Church needs, as the Prayer Book puts it, to speak "in a language understood of the people." But this does not mean its language has to reflect that of television soap operas or the back of government forms. Far from it.

At worship, we are addressing the most mighty being in existence – a being whose power renders even the "shock and awe" capability of the U.S. Armed Forces utterly insignificant. Our language and our behavior should reflect this.

It is an aspect of God that is all too frequently overlooked in an age culturally more comfortable with hymns like "What a friend we have in Jesus" than "God of our fathers, whose almighty hand . . ." True, Jesus is our friend, but he's not the sort you'd invite to a bar for a couple of martinis and a hand or two of gin rummy. GPH✕

LENTEN SERIES

Genesis and Exodus: Study with us the roots of the faith

The Books of Genesis and Exodus go to the very core of our faith. Over the past 100 years, however, their value both historically and doctrinally has been increasingly questioned. Indeed, many clergy who consider themselves cutting edge theologians shun them as the literary equivalent of mad aunts in the attic.

This year's Lenten Study will examine the first two "Books of Moses" to consider how they stand up as historical documents and to assess the contribution they have made to the development of the Christian faith.

Join us for a series of five Wednesday evening studies on this fascinating subject. They will begin at 6.30 pm from March 8th and continue at the same time until Wednesday in Passion Week, April 5th. Each study will be self-contained so you can miss a couple and not feel out of it.

So join us to hear what Adam and Eve have to teach about human nature. Find out about Ur, Abraham's hometown and why he told Pharaoh that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. Learn how Joseph's economic policies condemned the children of Israel to slavery. Discover why the Israelites worshipped the Golden Calf.

In addition to food for thought, we shall as ever be offering a hearty soup, the best bread in Baltimore and beverages of your choice. If you think you'll need more, feel free to bring a sandwich.

FROM ANNE HAWKINS

Inviting you to a Tea Party on Thursday, March 9th

Tea parties are wonderful affairs for meeting new friends and renewing old acquaintances. This is why St Stephen's teas are so popular. It has been a very long time since we have had a good old fashioned tea party. Things have been so busy of late what with preparing for the Cookie Walk and decorating the church from Christmas (then taking it all down again after the Epiphany) that we just haven't had the time to prepare for one..

However we are planning to hold a Tea Party on at 2.00 PM on Thursday, March 9th. The only variable is the weather. In case of snow and ice, we shall have to move things to a later date. To reserve your place, call Happy Riley in the Parish Office. Tel: (410) 560-6776.

FROM THE LADIES WHO LUNCH

Join us at Joey Chui's

On Wednesday, February 14th, the Ladies Who Lunch will be meeting for an hour or two of good fellowship and great Chinese food at Joey Chui's Restaurant at Greenspring Station. Why not join the fun and reserve your place by calling Joyce Perberg at (410) 252-2680 or the Parish Director of Pastoral Care Happy Riley at (410) 560-6776?

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · Rectory: 410 665 1278

Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

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

Parish Life Committee

Tuesday February 14th, 7.00 pm

Vestry Meeting

Wednesday February 15th, 7.00 pm

Ladies Who Lunch

at Joey Chui's, Greenspring Station,

Wednesday February 15th, 12.00 pm - 2.00 pm

Parish Tea Party

Thursday, March 9th, 2.00 pm

RSVP: Happy Riley (410) 560-6776

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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