

# St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

Volume XXIX, Number 25

*A parish in the classical Anglican tradition*

July 3rd, 2018

FROM THE PARISH LIFE COMMITTEE

## A July 4th Barbeque kicks off our Summer Suppers

Celebrate the Red White and Blue with at a Wednesday July 4th Barbeque – the first in our season of Silly Summer Suppers. For a mere \$10 a head (half price for youngsters under 12) there is no better deal in Baltimore Country.

Actually there's no better way to enjoy a warm summer evening than to join us for one of St Stephen's legendary Silly Summer Suppers. Our chefs are combing their cookbooks for tasty menus for your enjoyment.

And what a deal it is; entree, salad, delicious bread, and dessert for a mere \$10 per person. And it all comes with a side serving of St Stephen's fellowship. There will be beer wine, and sodas for a nominal charge, and the lemonade is still complementary. We'll say it again: All this, and still only \$10! There's no better deal in town!

FROM THE RECTOR

## Falling literacy and the sad state of political discourse

The ugly tone of current political discourse is more than a little depressing. Indeed, to characterize today's political exchanges as "debate" would be a travesty. Rarely does either side attempt to argue contrary points of view in a civilized manner. Rather, listeners are simply treated to a torrent of abuse, increasingly much of it scatological.

Explanations for the toxic nature of the present political climate include: A stridently partisan media; an increasingly polarized electorate; a nation deeply divided on lines of race and sexual orientation. (I refuse to misuse "gender," a grammatical term.)

But these, arguably, are mere symptoms rather than the disease itself. A rather more credible explanation for the rancor is the American population's amazing shrinking vocabulary.

Americans today are generally far less articulate than their counterparts of even a generation ago. Evidence of this is available daily on our radios and television screens.

Forty years or so ago, TV and radio reporters could be generally assured of getting sensible, reasonably articulate responses when they took cameras or tape recorders on to the street for a "vox pop" [short for the Latin vox populi – "voice of the people"] to solicit opinions from the public about current events.

Contrast that with the embarrassing crop of "ums," "aaaahs" and "likes" that media luminaries elicit when they venture into the streets today. The folks they encounter are generally much less articulate and far less knowledgeable than the man on the street of a half century ago.

Blame for this lies in the sad decline in literacy that has taken place in this country over the past century or so.

In 1900, for example, some 90 percent of the American population was able to read and write. The U.S. government today is unduly coy about revealing the full extent of illiteracy in the U.S. but there is no disguising the fact that there has been a precipitate decline in literacy since the opening two decades of the last century.

Figures from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that today 32 million adults – out of a population of 252 million over the age of 18 – can't read, while some 14 percent of adults have a "below basic" literacy level and a further 29 percent read at only a "basic" level.

This means that more than half of the adult American population is at an acute disadvantage when it comes to communicating their thoughts to their fellows – a conclusion supported by surveys that indicate the average American's active daily vocabulary today

amounts to little more than 400 words.

Indeed, even if the passive vocabulary of the average person [the number of words he or she understands] is five or six times greater, their vocabularies are nonetheless far smaller than those of folks only two generations or so ago.

This development is deeply troubling. Words are important as the Great Sage of Dedham Vale (a/k/a my father) reminded a famous, but irritatingly self-important, news photographer. "If a picture really is worth a thousand words," he remarked acidly, "We'd still be scrawling on the walls of caves."

Light-hearted riposte it might be, but it was a remarkably acute observation – one that should be taken to heart by an education establishment that is largely responsible for the drastic shrinkage in the average American's vocabulary.

The situation is deeply troubling. For the individual, a restricted vocabulary greatly limits a person's prospects for professional and social success. Expressing complicated ideas usually requires nuance – subtle differences or shades of meaning – and the ability to convey nuance demands a wide vocabulary.

From a national perspective, the nation's shrinking vocabulary is especially worrisome. The nation's future prosperity depends, as always, largely on its innovators and their entrepreneurial ability. A limited vocabulary, however, increasingly limits the ability to innovate.

## 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: Priscilla, Michael✕, Peter, Charlotte, Bryan, Dorothy, Rodney, June, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Robert✕, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Cour Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Adrian, Tom, Michell, Aida, Mai, Al, Kathy, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, Isobel, Judy, Elizabeth, Wade, Sifa, Theresa, Lisa, Larry, Patsy; Scott, Richard & Sam

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Caroline, Mavis, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Erin, Aubery & Kath

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

It is difficult to express abstract and highly technical concepts in pictures. Try, for example, to draw from scratch a picture of the concept of, say, a microchip. Perhaps it would be possible, but by far the most efficient way to do so would be in words – if necessary augmented by diagrams.

But the most striking evidence in the overall decline in literacy is encountered in the media. Our newspapers and magazines are becoming increasingly unreadable and dreadfully partisan.

The age old maxim of "who, what, why, where and when" is notably absent from news stories and features. Instead articles are all too often a shambles – incoherent, rambling, undisciplined, self-indulgently opinionated and grossly overwritten.

There is only one truly effective way to acquire an extensive vocabulary. And that is by reading – and learning to comprehend – the works of world's renowned authors, playwrights, poets and

philosophers. In this regard one could do worse than to start with William Shakespeare, the greatest playwright in the English language.

That's not so easy to do. True, there's no shortage of Shakespearean theater in the Baltimore/Washington area, while Staunton, VA, is home to The Blackfriars Theater, one of the best Shakespearean companies in the country. But, other than the coasts, the rest of the country is a Shakespearean desert.

Once upon a time America's love affair with Shakespeare began at school. Not so today. He is in exile along with those other much reviled "dead white males" and rarely figures in the curriculum. On the rare occasion he is studied, his works are considered so difficult students get Cliff Notes to go with the Cliff Notes.

This is sad. Shakespeare coined many of our most memorable figures of speech. Through him we once learned the mysteries of metaphors, similes, hyperbole, litotes, *et al.* And he introduced us subliminally to Thomas Cranmer and Geoffrey Chaucer, giants of the English tongue and, for good measure, put flesh on the bones of long dead Roman literary greats like Julius Caesar.

I, like most of my contemporaries, developed a fondness for Shakespeare at school. Even the most brutish boys took part on school plays with enthusiasm, especially the sword fights and battle scenes. Girls relished playing his romantic heroines, notably Juliet.

And when it comes to expressing displeasure, nobody equals the Bard. Thanks to Shakespeare, my father was able to dress down folks who offended him for a good five minutes, never repeating himself and never uttering an obscenity. An act of folly was met with a

withering: "Addle-pated clown!" or a scathing "Lily livered loon!"

Shakespeare's epithets role gleefully off the tongue in glorious alliterative technicolor – to the gratification of the utterer and frequently to the object of scorn's reluctant admiration. Happily it's hard to be out of countenance for long when taken to task Shakespearean style.

Half as century ago it made politics not merely tolerable but a fascinating spectator sport. Back then the elegant *bon mot*, the stinging riposte, the sly allusion and soaring prose were the currency of politics. But as goes the country so goes politics

Contrast it with what now passes for political rhetoric. Forget about inspiring prose, vulgar hyperbole rules in politics today. Coherent, cogent arguments no long follow the statement: "I beg to disagree with my honorable colleague . . ." Today it's simply a crude "expletive deleted." GPH✘

## Fund raising at Texas Roadhouse

Good food, warm fellowship, tasty baked goods made a fun and profitable Wednesday, June 20th. All told, the evening raised \$405 for the parish. The home-made cookies were a great success, as was the raffle, and we look forward to partnering with Texas Roadhouse again.

Betsy, our retired Red Cross rep and now public relations director for the Roadhouse, has offered to bring hot rolls and butter, plus a free appetizer coupon for donors at our July 17th Red Cross Blood Drive. It will run from 1.30 PM to 7.00 PM.

## St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093  
Office: 410 560 6776 · Rectory: 443-425-2420  
Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

[www.ststeve.com](http://www.ststeve.com)

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

### SUMMER SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist  
9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)  
11am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)  
Choral Services (as announced) – [evensong.ststeve.com](http://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  
Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle  
Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

### MONTHLY & SPECIAL

## Community Blood Drive

July 17th: 1.30 PM - 7.00 PM

## The Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, Junly 18th 12.00 pm  
Bluestone Restaurant  
Aylesbury Rd Timonium

For reservations: Call Sara Douglas  
at 410-560-9026

## The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, July 18th, 7.00 pm

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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