

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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FROM THE RECTOR

Living life dangerously in an unmannerly world

Autograph books were all the rage when I was a schoolboy. But, unlike girls who, in our opinion, tended to fill them with sappy, sissified sentiments, boys preferred witticisms and humorous rhymes.

For a typical example of schoolboy wit, one need go no further than my brother-in-law Robert's old autograph book. An entry, chosen at random, reads: "When you get old and think you're sweet, take off your socks and smell your feet."

Admittedly as humor this is several grades below sophomoric, but, then, so was the writer. Even so, it is actually not bad advice. There's nothing more dreary than an old codger raving on about how much more awful things are today compared with the way things were five or six decades ago.

The fact of the matter is things today are, in many respects, an awful lot better than they were back then – health care, for starters. Indeed, if medicine had not progressed over the past 50 years, many of us would not be here to whine about it.

Food in the main is much better, too. American bread, for instance, was once merely a means of conveying ham, cheese, tuna or peanut butter and jelly to the mouth. Folks not raised on the stuff might be forgiven for thinking that spoons, on the whole, would have been more efficient and less damaging to the health.

Today, however, local bakeries turn out some of the finest bread in the world. And the same goes for beer – not all beer of course, but even major breweries are at least making a stab at introducing improved products.

That said, there are some things that are an awful lot worse – not least manners. It is not so much that younger people rarely bother to stand when an older person enters a room, though it is sad to see such courtesies go the way of the dodo.

Nor is it that the words "please" and "thank you" are becoming increasingly obsolete – and not merely among the young. A few years back, for example, I had reason to visit the Baltimore County Dump.

"Show me your driver's license," demanded the man in charge peremptorily.

If his manners left something to be desired, so, I fear, did mine.

"What's the magic word?" I snapped.

"Baltimore County," he stammered, nonplussed..

"Good try, but no cigar," I replied, handing him my driver's license, "The magic word is *please* . . ."

The light of understanding spread across his countenance. "Thank you," he said with a smile as he handed back me the license.

"Not at all," I replied as I drove away.

Reflecting on the incident, I realize the chap at the dump was just as familiar with such minor courtesies as I am, but that he had simply abandoned them – as though there might be something unmanly about common politeness.

This attitude is by no means unique to my friend at the dump – an observation that was eloquently (if that's the right word) confirmed during a recent visit to a local high school. Courtesy there was remarkable mainly in its absence. Instead of offering assistance to visitors, students simply pushed by, occasionally uttering the ugliest expletives. It was shocking even for someone who lived for years in New York City.

But not only is this sort of thing shocking. It is dangerous as well. It is life without brakes – life in which might makes right and the devil takes the hindmost. It is life blind to *Proverbs 15:1*: "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger."

Parish Prayer List

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

FOR RECOVERY: Parisa, Daniel, Leona, Charlotte, Bryan, Rachel, Elizabeth, Dorothy, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Jan, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, Adrian, Tom, Michell, Al, Kathy, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, Judy, Wade, Sifa, Theresa, Lisa, Larry, Dan & Scott

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Bethany, Caroline, Ardis, Mavis, Michael, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Kath, Rebecca, Catherine & Elizabeth

IN MEMORIAM:

THOSE WHO MOURN:

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

Good manners do not merely demonstrate respect for the feelings of others. They are the lubricant that enables society to run smoothly – soothing the sting of inadvertent offenses, quelling the anger occasioned by thoughtless actions. It is difficult to pinpoint the cause of our sad decline in manners, but, doubtless, our modern technology has much to do with it.

E-mail does not favor *Proverbs 15:1*. Rather, it encourages us impulsively to bare the ugliest of our innermost feelings and send them flashing across the ether in the blink of an eye. Texting, Twitter and Instagram enable us to do the same, only even faster and still more tersely.

But could these be symptoms, rather than the disease itself? Could it be that a growing number of people spend so much time on the Internet – both at work and play – that their "virtual lives" become more real to them than reality itself? In a "virtual life" one can't do too much harm playing Lord of the Universe. But in "real life" it's quite another matter. GPH✠

It's God who decides what is sinful and what is not

And while I am on the subject of the old ways versus the new, people today are increasingly approaching the business of finding a church in much the same way that they would go about buying a car or a house, or even the weekend's groceries.

The consumer culture has been extending itself into the ecclesiastical realm for more than a decade – transforming America into what might best be described as a nation of church shoppers. Like consumers in the secular world, church shoppers prowl the outlets (i.e. churches of the various jurisdictions and denominations) and surf the Internet searching for the best possible deal.

Aesthetic considerations often rank high on the list. However shopping for liturgical satisfaction is one thing. But shopping for convenience of belief, however, is quite another. Even so it is what large numbers of people seem to be doing. It might be reasonable enough if the "shoppers"

were actually seeking enlightenment, but many, in fact, are hunting around for the best deal on sin. They aren't seeking enlightenment. They have made up their minds already. They're looking for is a parson who will affirm whatever they deem to be "sinful" or "non-sinful." Come up with an answer that doesn't appeal, that's the last you'll see of them.

This consumer-oriented approach to the faith offers rich fields of endeavor for clergymen with none too many scruples. Sadly, however, honest parsons have a much tougher time.

The problem is that defining sin isn't the clergy's job at all. It is God who defines sin – and he did that many thousands of years ago. You'll find his ideas on the subject in a handy dandy little consumers' guide called the Bible.

It doesn't matter a hang what I, or any other human being, thinks about sin. The only opinion that counts is God's. And it is his opinion we need to worry about. If God approves of something, there's no need to ponder any further.

The Church, you see, hasn't been given the job of deciding what's sinful and what's not. The Church's business is the forgiveness of sins – and that's a horse of an entirely different color. GPH✘

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Very Rev. Guy P Hawtin, Dean & Rector
The Ven. Michael Kerouac, Vicar ·
Associate Rectors:

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki,
The Rev. M Wiley Hawks
and The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers

Mrs Happy Riley, Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding
Coordinator

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)
11 am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)
Choral Services (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
Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle
Noon: Bible Study
Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, 7.00 PM, May 15th

Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, Noon, May 15th

Reservations, call all Sara Douglas at 410-560-9026

Choral Evensong

Sunday, June 2nd at 6.00 PM

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church
11856 Mays Chapel Road
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