

Saints Alive! † July 2007

All Saints Episcopal Parish, San Leandro, California, 510-569-7020

Green, Growing Season

Rector's Letter

Clarity and Hospitality

Many of you will remember the church of the 1950s. I don't have personal experience with that—I wasn't born then, as you know—but it must have been a great time to be in church. It was a time when people seemed clear about what they were doing—participating in and building a community—and they all wanted to get there together. Our church building was overflowing each Sunday. There were occasional fights, of course, but there was a general agreement on direction.

Of course, that changed. In the sixties people questioned everything; in the seventies we tended to focus on ourselves; and the eighties and nineties were the “Greed is good” era. There was a growing sense that everything was up for grabs, that there was no particular truth you could count on. It seemed like if you wanted to be part of a growing church, you had to be part of one that was not particularly thoughtful. Or you could be part of one where you came away with more questions than answers.

Along the way, our Episcopal Church often seemed to delight in ambiguity. As we became more concerned about our decline, this tendency increased. Vagueness, it seemed, would ensure that nobody would leave—that nobody would even be challenged or offended. Insignificant mission statements became common, and they were damaging, because people felt that they were doing something (these statements sounded OK) but were not really creating passion, commitment, and self-sacrifice. We couldn't say what we stood for, because (a) we didn't know, (b) we were afraid of what knowing would mean, or (c) we were afraid telling others would put them off.

In their landmark book *Death of the Church* (which I highly recommend, as it articulates these concepts very powerfully), Mike Regele and Mark Schulz put it this way:

Within the American church itself a serious battle has raged for much of this [20th] century over what the baseline elements of the Christian message are. The essence of the Christian story has fallen victim to the relativism that has entered the church. . . . While theologians battled one another, local congregations stagnated.

What I notice here at All Saints is that there sometimes seems to be a fear that if we're clear about what we stand for, we will be seen as closed-minded or inhospitable. (I have a fair amount of this fear myself, so I'm not pointing fingers.) We want to be welcoming. I love our earnestness and sincere desire to be kind and make a difference in the world. It's a really appealing quality.

But I also worry about that fear of offending, especially in sharing the basic, core beliefs of our faith. We mainline Episcopalians seem to expect our neighbors to be so gun-shy of any mention of religion that we hold everything back.

It's as if we assume from the get-go that any mention of faith, even offered with great warmth to people who seem to be freezing to death, is somehow going to be seen as an act of hostility. So often, we seem terrified that any mention of God, much less Jesus Christ, will be understood as pressure to be part of something stupid, closed-minded or bullying. In this way, we allow others to define for us what it means to be Christian.

This is sad. It is a spiritual truth that “if you want to keep it, you have to give it away.” That means that if we don't “give away” the Episcopalian faith that has been passed to us—one of the greatest Christian traditions the world has ever known, a tradition beautifully crafted to thrive in today's pluralistic, global culture—we will

lose it. Yes, we will have been welcoming and very hospitable. And we will cease to exist. There's something wrong in that picture!

It's so important to know what we stand for. A basic starting list would be this:

1. There is a God. That "Higher Power" creates and sustains all things, including us, and is concerned about and engaged in all aspects of creation. There is no place or person in whom God is not—who does not get God's loving care.
2. There are many ways to see and experience what God is like. For us, the life, person and work of Jesus Christ—kind, powerful, compassionate, present, joining us in suffering—tells us what God is like (and that God is not just a "what" but a "who"). While our individual experiences vary widely, as a church we derive great joy, optimism, awe and gratitude that the entire fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ—the incarnational theology that is so essential to Anglican understanding.
3. The Bible offers essential guidance for a rich spiritual life. We engage it seriously. And we encourage those of us who see it as metaphor to experiment with taking it literally—and those who see it literally to take it as metaphor. Both will benefit from the deep engagement this requires.
4. For spiritual growth, a disciplined practice is required. We believe that we don't earn God's love by the things we do, nor do we change our value in God's eyes in any way by the choices we make. But we do believe that nothing worthwhile is accomplished without significant effort on our part.
5. Involvement in our communities—meeting real human needs, challenging injustice, and involving ourselves in the decision-making of our elected bodies—is an essential part of Christian life.

This is just a beginning. There is much more that we can say. But the point is this. To thrive, as individuals and communities, we have to have a clear story, as Regele and Schulz put it, a "grand story" that helps us understand what we're doing and being in the world. This story must be compelling. They say, "Passion is a response to a hope larger than oneself that compels people to give themselves to the cause." So very true!

Passion and clarity are inseparable. Dithering, insipid, wishy-washy vagueness does not generate either passion or commitment—what people actually seek from us. We Episcopalians are part of a great story. New chapters are being written right now. We are learning to be one of many great traditions, all with value, while recognizing that for us the Christian story is most transformative and powerful. As we reclaim and proclaim our Christian story, refusing to let others define it for us, we will find our passion rekindled, our commitment increased—and we will thrive.

Fr. Rob Droste
robdroste@sbcglobal.net

Respecting the Dignity of All

Four All Saints parishioners lived out their ministry on Sunday, June 24, along with hundreds of other Episcopalians and thousands of people of faith as they walked in the Gay Pride parade along Market Street in San Francisco.

Holding the All Saints banner, reading "Striving for Justice and Peace Among All People—Respecting the Dignity of Every Human Being," and another message, "God Is Love," we marched close behind the convertible carrying Bishop Marc and Sheila Andrus and their honored visitor, Nigerian gay rights activist Davis Mac-Iyalla.

Photos on the [All Saints website](#) show the many other Episcopal parishes who also witnessed to their faith that day. We were surrounded, in turn, by representatives of Jewish, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), Evangelical, and other faith communities—all one in the Spirit.

The outpouring of love and cheers from onlookers during the one-hour parade walk was phenomenal: the Holy Spirit was working that day.

Maxine

The Holy Spirit was clearly working on me that day, transforming my rather stern resolve to do something potentially difficult into a joyous celebration. I have, after all, promised to *strive for* peace and justice, not just agree that these are nice concepts, so I picked up the banner and headed to the city with no idea what to expect. The day unfolded with Communion first with Father Rob at the San Leandro BART station, then again with our brothers and sisters of MCC as we waited for the parade to begin in San Francisco. Finally we turned the corner onto Market Street and were overwhelmed with cheers, applause, peace signs, and beaming faces. Christians being cheered for supporting equal rights. God is good.

Tom

Feel Like Renewal? Try the Renewal Group!

Over the past few months, you have probably noticed all the invitations to “the Renewal Group” in the bulletin, calendar and newsletter.

There’s nothing mysterious about this group. It’s about 20 parishioners who get together occasionally to be nourished by communion and to talk about what Jesus is up to in their lives and the life of All Saints—with joy and laughter, and sometimes even an attack of the giggles! Most importantly, they commit, to the best of their ability, to praying every day for each other and for a lively, vibrant spirit of renewal here at All Saints.

If you’d like to take part in this life-giving practice, and a safe place to practice talking about Jesus, you’d be most welcome! Contact Father Rob if you’re interested.

Jeanne

Sharing Our
Spiritual Journeys
Jeanne

This month it is my turn to share my faith journey with you.

I grew to young adulthood knowing and believing little except the Lord’s Prayer, the 23rd psalm, and that God was. My sister and I were baptized Roman Catholic, and my father attended Mass each Sunday and observed fast days, but my mother was Congregationalist, and due to their private agreement, we were not to be raised in the Catholic Faith. I attended Sunday School for a short time and attended Mass

with my father a few times, but my mother taught me the little I knew.


While I was attending junior college in Santa Rosa, a friend and I occasionally visited the Episcopal church. When I was at Berkeley, I started attending regularly, and was subsequently confirmed at St. Mark’s. There had been little preparation prior to confirmation, and soon other things took precedence; I was a Christmas and Easter Episcopalian—was married and had the children baptized in the church, but otherwise religion was definitely on hold.

When the children were nearing school age, Herb and I decided that we wanted them to have the Christian education that neither of us had had, and we began attending Trinity Church in Hayward. I can say that that was the real beginning of my faith journey. Looking back, I believe the foundation had been laid during those earlier years, and finally took root and started to grow. I soon loved the liturgy and became involved in all aspects of parish life, teaching Sunday School, studying scripture and church history, serving on vestries and participating in other church groups. We came to All Saints in 1972, and soon became active here.

Despite all those years as an Episcopalian, it is in the past three years of EFM (Education for Ministry) and my time on the vestry that I have experienced the greatest growth in understanding my faith and a deepening and strengthening of my spirituality. This in turn has changed my perception of both the church's mission and my own—instead of being focused only on serving my church and those in it, All Saints and I must also reach out to serve those outside our immediate faith family.

Jeanne

Mark Your Calendars

Social ministry calendar items have flags: .

Saturday, July 7—Soup Stop

Feeding the homeless in the All Saints parish hall.

When: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Contact: Church Office: allsaintsepiscopal911@earthlink.net

Monday, July 9—April Showers volunteers meeting

When: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Where: All Saints parish hall

Contact: Church Office: allsaintsepiscopal911@earthlink.net

Wednesday, July 11—Women's Spiritual Direction Group

When: 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Where: Fireside Room

Contact: Church Office: allsaintsepiscopal911@earthlink.net

Sunday, July 15—AIDS Walk

Enjoy the walk, raise some money, stop a killer.

When: 10:30 a.m.; walkers sign in at 9:00 a.m.

Where: Golden Gate Park (starts at east end)

Information: www.aidswalk.net/sanfran/

Contact: Church Office: allsaintsepiscopal911@earthlink.net

Sunday, July 22—Cooking for Building Futures with Women and Children in conjunction with the Mary Magdalene service

Take in the aromas and learn to make qabali, a traditional Afghan dish!

When: 11:00 a.m.

Contact: Church Office: allsaintsepiscopal911@earthlink.net

Saints Alive! is published monthly via email by All Saints Episcopal Church, 911 Dowling Boulevard, San Leandro, California 94577.

*Submit news items for the August 2007 issue to Church Office: allsaintsepiscopal911@earthlink.net is **July 25**.*

For changes to the parish database (names, phone numbers, addresses, or e-mail addresses), please e-mail John Trubina at jtrubina@comcast.net. To get information on All Saints' people and programs, please visit us on the Internet at <http://www.saintsalive.net>.

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