

5 Easter  
May 2, 2010  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## “Educating the Dedicated”

Next week May 9<sup>th</sup>, we will be visited by Kim Knowles the Diocesan Staff Commissioner for Youth in all the parishes of the Diocese. Kim has been asking to come for some time, to address the congregation on youth ministry in the diocese. Youth ministry has two dimensions, the work of the Diocesan Youth working together on projects such as the trip to rebuild homes in New Orleans, plus the annual events that include *Christophany* and *Happening*. Then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension, there is youth ministry within the parish and what we can do about making our youth, actively involved in the mission of the parish.

May is Children’s month in the church, as you will read in the Cobblestone for May.

This week two parishioners came back from a visit to the city, with them they brought the parish bulletin together with a booklet entitled: *A Child’s Holy Eucharist*.

*A Child’s Holy Eucharist*, accurately takes you through Rite II of the Sunday service as laid out in the Book of Common Prayer. In heavy print and descriptive drawings, it explains the service and what is happening stage by stage. Not only is this a wonderfully useful document for parents teaching their children, but anyone reading it would well be left with the impression that many of us adults would benefit from reading it also.

One of Bishop Paul’s abiding complaints is that too many Episcopalians in the parishes of the diocese do not have a strong educated knowledge of the Episcopal Church, its beliefs and rituals.

Thinking about this casts my mind back to when we seriously considered changing the weekly bulletin. We talked about copying another parish bulletin that included everything and had no need of books of any kind including the BCP and the Hymnal.

The argument for keeping the present format of bulletin was that encouraging members to use the BCP made them more familiar with it. Recently, even this has been cast into doubt by the recent Standing Committee Report on the state of the parishes. There is now a diocesan wide call for a re-education of the laity in the parishes in, theology, scripture, the Episcopal Church, its Canon and Constitution and a thorough knowledge of the BCP. There has also been a call to re-train clergy to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century parish and to meet the needs of churches in decline, turn them around and seek growth. Clergy unwilling to submit to this program will simply be requested to retire.

The clergy half of the Bishop’s Program “From Risk to Opportunities”, does not have to concern us, but re-educating the laity in all things Episcopalian does.

The Book of Common Prayer contains a Catechism of our faith at the back, starting on page 845. I think most people have dipped into this from time to time.

Few, however are knowledgeable of the 39 Articles of Religion found between pages 867 to 876.

The difficulty facing the bishop over the next twelve months is how to bring us, “Educating the Laity” and make it a reality. Asked recently by the bishop: “What is the chance that the laity in parishes would voluntarily go to classes or training days to fulfill a need for the education of the laity?” The bishop received the answer: “As ‘bout as much chance as the Mets winning the World Series in successive years.”

This was followed by the statement: “Increasingly, congregations are becoming so ignorant of the tenants, rules and theology of being Episcopalian that there is a danger that they slide down a dangerous slope, where they are no longer distinguishable from the Bible Churches and see themselves as a Congregation Church and almost independent from the diocese.

Bishop Paul’s reply to this has and is very clear: “Such a change would be sad and unfortunate because we belong to a rich heritage. We are a church where everything begins with Christ. Christ is our Savior, our Redeemer and our teacher. Only Christ’s saving mission is important. As parishes, our mission is not to worship, our mission is to minister. We are commanded by Christ to continue his saving work of redemption. Jesus Christ laid hands on the Apostles who in turn appointed others to do the work of healing and proclaiming Christ’s teaching. The role of a Bishop is to lead and guide us in the way of the Gospel. The church does not belong to any one of us; it belongs to Christ’s mission.”

How the diocese intends to inaugurate such a massive program of reform, growth and re-education will be interesting to see. Suggestions have already been made that the diocese recruit from each and every parish, Episcopalians who are grounded in their faith, sure of their identity and have the knowledge and talent to each others.

This all poses an ultimate question for each one of us. “If we are unprepared to teach others about the core values of our Episcopalian faith then how do we value it in our own lives?”

As our Archdeacon, Howard Stringfellow never tires of reminding us: “The church has to be more to us than a social club. The church must be the Body of Christ, our vehicle of salvation and the vehicle that brings salvation to others also.”

I personally would add to Howard’s definition by unpacking the word salvation. “Salvation from what?” I would ask. For me it is not salvation from hell or what happens after we die. For me, Christ does all that; we just have to make him known to people in their lives. No. I want to bring Christ’s salvation to people, but I want to bring it now. Salvation from hunger and not being able to feed your family on a Friday night. That would be a good start. Salvation from being beat up by a drunken

husband. To me that is doing Christ's work of saving salvation, meaning having a place to put your child in Day Care so you can go to work as a single mom.

Salvation from the lonely existence of a shut-in; unable to do the things you used to do. Confined by age and sickness, deserted by family living out your days with only television as human companionship.

Christ's salvation can take many forms, each time you and I put his teaching into action we are involving ourselves in the saving work of Christ.

Visiting the sick, caring for the prisoner, reaching out to the oppressed, this is the living Gospel. Everything else is extras.

We do not come to church just to worship. We come to church to receive the grace to go out and minister Christ's teaching to others in our lives and world.

We receive Christ's saving grace in order to give Christ's saving grace.

There is nothing difficult about ministering Christ's teaching, we just need to make the effort to leave our comfort zone. We see a new couple in church, we go talk to them and we go talk to them whether they are wearing Gucci or Wal-Mart. We volunteer for coffee hour because Jesus said: "If you would be great, you must become the servant of all. For who is greater, he who sits at table or he who serves at table? I tell you he who serves."

Being a Christian, an Episcopal Christian can never be easy. You have to want it, because the moment you take it for granted you are no longer that sharp edged knife of Christ's saving mission, you revert to being a social club member, seeking not Christ's mission but your own good.

No. Christ will make you uncomfortable. Christ always makes demands. Demands of our time, our talent and our ability to see the bigger picture and put him first and ourselves last.

If in 2010, they start to hand out diplomas for being a genuine Christian, how would we all make out?

Jesus in the Gospel has already given us the answer- "Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

That "one another" can and must never be exclusive that "one another" must extend to every living, breathing human being rich or poor, black or white, powerful or powerless, intelligent or mentally challenged, handicapped, or old. Pass with that diploma and we can indeed write our ticket to all that comes after.

Amen+

