

An Update by Scott Shaffer, Ph.D. on the First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2010 at The Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

Warden's Presentation

I open not with a prayer, but with a blessing: Presiding Bishop elect Katharine Jerrerts Schori's letter to the people of St. Mark's Chapel—

9/28/06

Thank you for your letter, the Beaufort Gazette articles, and for your prayers which are much appreciated. It warms my heart to hear of your Chapel and its faithful ministry, not unlike many of the small congregations in Nevada. Know that you and others like you are not forgotten. In each of the dioceses most vocal about dissenting from decisions of the Episcopal Church, there are individuals and congregations who hold other positions. That very diversity within and among our dioceses is, or ought to be, evidence of our Anglican heritage and nature. May your ministry continue to be a rich blessing.

Katharine

Several weeks ago I began thinking about the blessings bestowed on us through our membership at St. Mark's and became very proud. The occasion was after one of the Gospel of St. Luke's Bible study evenings. Our discussion that evening was remarkable in view of the openness and frankness with which members freely expressed themselves, not always in agreement with the opinions of all but with respect and a willingness to listen. For me this seemed to be an example of what St. Mark's has tried to stand for... an acceptance of the other and a theology requiring discernment, intelligence and tolerance of someone else's opinion.

St. Mark's has come a long way since seven years ago when 7 or 8 of us met at Roger and Headley Smiths and began the house church worship group which became St. Mark's Chapel. Since then, the growth has been remarkable. Most of you know the evolution from house church to motel reception/living area to the Mason's facility and finally to this wonderful Union Chapel which is so well maintained by the Historic Foundation of Port Royal. In this Advent season of a new church year and of thanksgiving, we have much to celebrate.

This has been a truly spiritual journey with evolution of our beliefs and our identification with the programs and theology of The Episcopal Church. From those initial, 7 or 8 people, we now regularly count 40 to 60 attendees with the record of 66 last Sunday. This growth is one more thing that makes me proud to be connected to St. Mark's.

After that initial "ah ha" Bible Study phenomenon many other things that happened within this community of enthusiasm occurred to me. These too make me feel proud and joyful to be affiliated with this ministry.

About six weeks ago we gathered on Paris Avenue and presented the Halloween Trunk or Treat to the children of the neighborhood and several other neighborhoods. It was really a joy to see

12 families decorate themselves and their cars to provide the service to at least 100 children. This, hopefully, will be a ministry for St. Mark's which will grow and grow.

You wouldn't expect Vestry or monthly Chapel committee meetings to be inspiring or a source of pride. Yet usually 7 of us gather to conduct often mundane business of the Chapel but often very meaningful, spiritual, theological business as well. My pride about these meetings comes from the fact that they are open, and we always have visitors who, from time-to-time, contribute to the proceedings. What happens in those meetings is representative of our goals of fellowship, welcoming of diversity and differences of opinion and reviewing a theology that invites questions and requires intelligence as well as our discerning hearts.

Here's something else to be proud of...the expansion and growth of our music program as exemplified today with the first gathering of what we might call the potluck choir. This promises to be the beginning of a fully developed choir in the future. Yes, that **is** something else to be proud of for St. Mark's.

Last year, about this time, we sponsored an all-day workshop which set some goals for the year we are now completing. Our primary goal was to begin on the development of a fun, responsible, theologically sound Christian education program especially offering services to our youth.

Pride again struck me several weeks ago when a young Isaiah, bearded with Spanish moss, strutted down the aisle with a cane and with fellow Sunday school members to recite some of Isaiah's teachings to us. This inclusion of the youth into our regular services on an every-third-week basis has been tremendous and well received. And be prepared, on December 19, the youth will have another opportunity to make us proud when the Christmas pageant is presented as part of the service.

We have just finished our week of co-sponsoring Family Promise, an outreach ministry to homeless families, which we share with St. John's Lutheran Church and St. Peter's Catholic Church. We can all take pride in that ministry as we can in our ministry to the unfortunate in our community who cannot afford medical and medication services and receive help through the Good Neighbor Medical Clinic. Several of our members have been active in that ministry as well as in other ministries including Habitat for Humanity, HELP of Beaufort, and others. For all of these we have very good reason to be proud.

Over the last several Sundays, we have been presenting brief talks from the coordinators of our ministry areas including Evangelism and Growth, Worship, Outreach, Christian Education and Stewardship by which we mean giving back to God in time and talent as well as financially. Today represents a formal kick-off of the financial aspects of our stewardship program, although actually the kick-off came with the pledge card mailing which you should have received this week,

The first financial pledge I received gave me another source of joy. This was from one who cannot attend very often but who nonetheless assigned half of her tithe to St. Mark's because of the commitments St. Mark's makes. What a testimony!

We have taken on a major project this year in entering into a rental agreement for the Paris Avenue space previously occupied by the Twenge Law Firm. The large expense involved in this was a major risk which we were willing to take in order to provide an opportunity to expand our youth Sunday school program and to provide facilities for other programs of St. Mark's. It certainly has provided opportunity for increasing Sunday school attendance and probably church attendance as well, and has provided space for our coffee hour social time after the services and for other meetings of the Chapel. The Chapel Committee believes this was the right thing to do even though it did require rather severe tightening of our belt. The tightening of that financial belt is something we hope will be relieved through this financial side of our pledging process.

Most of all, we want you to join in the ministerial possibilities available be they decorating the Hospice Christmas tree, calling on the sick, working with homeless families, working in the general medical clinic, serving the Sunday school or whatever. These are our main missions. In order to sustain those missions, obviously, we need a firm financial foundation, so I implore you to be generous in your consideration when you complete that pledge card which you should turn in at the service next Sunday. In case you, for some reason, did not receive one in the mail, we just happen to have a few extra here today at the end of the rows and some on the table in the back. Don't be shy about asking.

Since the program to and for youth has increased so significantly during the last 6 months and since the acquisition of the space for housing that program has put a squeeze on our budget as well, I would like to close with a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer which has always been one of my favorites and is a prayer for young persons.

For Young Persons

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world; Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.