

The Bellringer

august@bestweb.net, wstacroton.org

November 2006

Rector:
The Reverend Bradley C. Dyche

St. Augustine's Episcopal Church ♦ 6 Old Post Road North, Croton on Hudson, NY 10520 ♦ 914-271-3501 (Office)

November 2006

1	Wednesday	Noon	First Wednesday
		7:45 p.m.	Adult Education Class
4	Saturday	5:00 p.m.	Holy Eucharist II
5	<u>The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost</u>		
		9:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist I
		4:00 p.m.	The Installation of The Rev. Bradley C. Dyche
			Children's Party in St. A's House, reception to follow
7	Tuesday	6:30 p.m.	EFM Class
8	Wednesday	7:45 p.m.	Adult Education Class
11	Saturday	9:00 – 4:00	Diocesan Convention
		5:00 p.m.	Holy Eucharist II
12	<u>The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost and Stewardship/Commitment Sunday</u>		
		8:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist I
		9:45 a.m.	Sunday School
		10:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist II
		11:30 a.m.	Stewardship Brunch
13	Monday	7:30 p.m.	Outreach Committee Meeting
14	Tuesday	6:30 p.m.	EFM Class
15	Wednesday	8:00 p.m.	Vestry Meeting
18	Saturday	5:00 p.m.	Holy Eucharist II
19	<u>The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost</u>		
		8:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist I, followed by coffee hour
		9:45 a.m.	Sunday School
		10:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist II
21	Tuesday	6:30 p.m.	Interfaith Thanksgiving Seder at Temple Israel
		6:30 p.m.	EFM Class
23	Thursday		Thanksgiving Holiday
24	Friday		Office Closed, Thanksgiving Holiday
25	Saturday	5:00 p.m.	Holy Eucharist II and Healing Service
26	<u>The Last Sunday after Pentecost, The Feast of Christ the King</u>		
		8:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist I
		10:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist II
28	Tuesday	6:30 p.m.	EFM Class
29	Wednesday	7:45 p.m.	Adult Education Class



For the Rector's column, I invite you to read or re-think my thoughts on Stewardship. This is a very important part of our year, and I hope that you can join us by pledging. Although the pledges are financial, they are really promises to help make this congregation an amazing resource of education and center of outreach for this community.

Peace,

Bradley

Stewardship Sermon

10/22/2006

The Rev. Bradley C. Dyche

We are in the middle of the most wonderful time of the year. No, do not be misled by the candy at CVS. I am not spookily speaking of All Hallow's Eve. And I am not quite ready for a cornucopia of puritanical pilgrims either. Although I love the leaves changing colors, I am also not referring to them. And I pray that you do not think that I'm rushing the Department Stores for the Holidays and their generic elevator music. I am speaking about the lovely, the fantastic, phenomenal, fantabulous season of Stewardship.

Alright, you caught me. Perhaps, I lied or at least misrepresented. Most do not seem to think that stewardship is the most wonderful time of the year, but I do, not just because you could help support the life and work of this church, or even my salary. That part, in all reality, makes me more nervous than happy. Actually, why this season is wonderful is that ideally it is an answer to an existential crisis that I guarantee each and every one of us are going through, will go through, or have gone through in our lives: namely, how do we make meaning of our lives, and how do we respond to what we have in this world?

You might not have thought that a stewardship campaign could answer such lofty questions, but as a Christian, I have to believe that the answer to those questions and even our salvation rests in the giving of ourselves: sharing our time and talents for the betterment of humanity. God gives us the world, and Jesus teaches us how to live there. From his life and death, we see how a forgiving, non-

violent man transforms a community and us by giving of himself. And we are likewise invited to go into the world and share what we have to carry on the work of Jesus. And whether we like it or not, part of that sharing rests in our pocketbooks. Although I hope stewardship is a topic that we address year round, because it is about every act of our faith not only our financial support, this is the time of year when we talk about stewardship in terms of money. But that does not mean that we will be implementing well-planned money pitches in the Public Broadcasting vein of, "This sermon has been made possible by generous contributions from viewers like you!" Though it has. But I am more interested in a spiritual approach to money and how our money relates to our faith.

But of course, many of us will not see this opportunity as marvelous. Some of you might have some nervous laughter of your own. After all, money is a subject often more taboo than sex, and asking for money seems worse. And I also understand that we are still new in our relationships together. I am in month four, and I imagine that right now you are perhaps estimating whether or not I could be a shameless shamer, telling you that what you give will never be enough. Or perhaps you wonder if I could be a hostage taker demanding something like, "Give me all your money or the kid down front gets it." But I assure you, there is no shame or humiliation intended in my message. But there is an invitation, an opportunity that is, I believe, marvelous. It is an invitation to be vulnerable, to share part of what we have, even who we are, with all of us as a response to God's love. And I sincerely believe that such an approach to life is its very meaning.

So....Stewardship! Stewardship has to begin with the belief that everything we have comes from God. Our hands, our arms, our eyes to see, our brains to imagine. All of these come from God. And if those are God's, so is everything that we produce and receive. Our work is God's; our relationships are God's; and even our money is God's. Everything is God's, and this is the most important point of stewardship, primarily because it is the most misunderstood. In our society founded on individualism, we are quick to label our possessions, bodies, and relationships as "MINE." In reality, that is partly true and partly not. We are

also stewards of all our faculties and our complex communities of cells that we call bodies, until we give them back to the earth. And stewardship invites us to realize that and ask the question: what can I do with the gifts that I have received from God and with the time I have? Of course, we need to protect ourselves, feed ourselves, provide for our children, but we also need to ask the question of how to respond to what we have been given. And stewardship is that invitation to put the context of God around how we use our time, how we work, how we study, how we play, and how we spend our money.

That is “why” we invite ourselves to have an attitude of giving. But the question of “how” also arises in stewardship. For most of us, it does not seem like how we spend our money contains much flexibility, and the “how” is the crux. Some of us might not have many resources. Some of us might be close to broke. But being almost or close to broke financially is different than being broke spiritually. And if we are not broke spiritually, I guarantee that we can find some way to give back, even if it is not with much money. If we are not broke spiritually, we can realize how in some sense we are all wealthy, even if we are strapped for cash. We can all afford to share a share of what we have, even if it is what little we have. And this is important for who we are because just as what we do with our time defines who we are, what we do with our possessions and money also defines what we invest in and what we value.

The church has traditionally provided a model of giving. It is called tithing, giving ten percent of all that you receive. Alright, breathe for a moment. Yes, I did say ten percent. This ten percent idea is taken from models of offering our first fruits, the best of what we have, to God. Now, when we get to specifics, there are questions: some have said that this is pre-tax money. Others have said post-tax. I will leave that one to you. But most churches, I believe, aim at ten percent of total giving, meaning that the total giving to this church and other organizations equals that percentage of your income. But ultimately, I know that we have to make our own decisions. I can say that, from my own experience, ten percent is extremely difficult. And I want to be honest. If I ask you to be vulnerable, I want to share where I am personally. I

am not there yet. But every year, starting at 3 percent when I graduated from seminary, I have added a percentage point, and I work toward 10. I say that not to fault or shame anyone who is not there, but to share that this is a journey that we are all on, a journey that I hope you will join. No matter what percentage you find you can share, this is an important goal, giving a percentage. For me, every year when I accomplish my goal, I feel like I am more myself, like the inside of me, my goodwill, matches the outside and what I do.

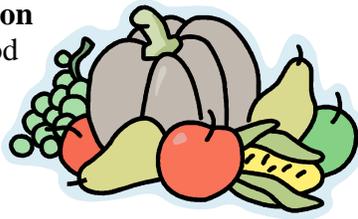
In the end, I hope that we can all take part in this year's stewardship campaign, whether you can give 10 percent or .0007 percent. Because no matter what you can give, I hope that we can all join together as a sign that we want to respond to all that we have been given. And I hope that we can all share of what we have received to help make this church better enabled to reach out to those around us. In a short time, you will receive a pledge card, which will ideally be a time when you can think about what I have said and pledge so that we can begin to plan for the coming year.

In the meantime, I invite you to consider the questions that I have asked everyone at services to ask. The first question is: what are you thankful for in this life? I ask you to seriously contemplate our blessings. What has God given you? And then, as a second item, I ask you to consider how you respond to that thankfulness with your life. Do you coach soccer, help out around the church or a food bank, give money? Those who have attended services for the past few weeks will write their answers on note cards so that on the day of the Stewardship Brunch, on November 12th, after the 10 AM service, the thanksgivings that we have will be shared in some dynamic ways. I hope to see you there. As you might have guessed, our stewardship season this year has two themes: One, to talk about proportional giving: sharing a percentage of what we have been given. And secondly to talk about thankfulness. Ultimately, as I have said, this is an invitation. But it is an invitation to something phenomenal and fabulous, and it can be part of the answer the larger questions of life. Again, no guilt. Just an invitation.

First Wednesday, November 1 at Noon. We will gather at noon to have lunch and fellowship. Please call the parish office to RSVP. 271-3501.

On November 1 the Croton Caring Committee's food

drive begins and will continue throughout the Holiday season. Share your Thanksgiving by helping the Croton Caring Committee fill Holiday Food Baskets. Non-perishable and non-breakable items can be dropped off anytime at 38 Penfield Avenue on the patio. Frozen turkeys and hams will be accepted from Friday, November 17 to Monday, November 20 for Thanksgiving and from Friday, December 15 to Tuesday, December 19 for Christmas.



Stewardship Brunch Sunday, November 12: After the 10 a.m. service we will gather for a potluck brunch to celebrate our thankfulness, in keeping with our Stewardship theme for this year. The church will provide the main course and we ask that you bring a side dish, salad or dessert to share. Please come, carefully consider how you would like to honor your thanks, and make your pledge for 2007.

Interfaith Thanksgiving Seder at Temple Israel on Tuesday November 21 at 6:30 p.m. Save the date. More to come in the weekly bulletins.



'Tis the Season: Our annual wreath sale is scheduled for Saturday, December 2. How can you help? Make bows, decorate the wreaths the night before the sale, sell on the day of the sale and or

help clean up the hall afterwards. Please sign up after church on the parish hall bulletin board, or call the church office, 271-3501. We will gather to make bows on Wednesday, November 29, at St. Augustine's House starting at 7:30 p.m.

Vestry Notes from the October meeting:

- ☛ *Financial* - Treasurer Holly Anzani reported that pledges are still down for the year.
- ☛ *Buildings and Grounds* - Co-chair Louise Levey reported that all St. A's buildings are



currently being winterized. The Vestry is exploring the replacement of certain sections of the sidewalk in front of the church in response to a generous gift from parishioner Betty Iskander in memory of her husband, Michel.

- ☛ *Installation* - The Vestry approved a budget for the Installation Celebration.
- ☛ Vestry members are reading Gerry Keucher's book, "Remember the Future."
- ☛ The December vestry meeting has been changed to December 13.

Respectfully submitted,

~Chris Moore, Clerk of the Vestry

**Treasurer's Report –
September Financial Operations:**

The Church's financial operations continue to be strong despite worries about pledges, with total revenues exceeding total expenses for the year to date. Our expense position is excellent, with most categories coming in where expected or lower than expected (some due to the fact that our new Rector did not join us until July). Revenues are generally stable. Fundraising has improved dramatically after the most successful JuneFest ever -- \$21,575 in net revenues. The success is not enough, however, to offset the drop in expected pledges through the year to date: current year pledges are dramatically behind expectations by close to \$14,000. Jenn Latham sent out quarterly reminders in early October with individual pledge information through the end of the third quarter. Although we remain in strong financial condition, a severe drop in pledge income could impact the church's ability to meet its financial goals for 2006.

~submitted by Holly Anzani, Treasurer



