

NOTES FROM THE RECTOR

“We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches in Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints – and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Cor.8:1-5).

As we look at the passage above we are amazed at the generosity of the Macedonian Christians. Their giving was not determined by what they had or by what they wanted to keep for themselves, but by their generosity. This was a generosity that was a result of their faith. They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to those in need. True Christian giving comes in response to what God has given us in Jesus Christ. Our hearts are full of joy and gratitude because of the love, joy, forgiveness, and peace that we receive from God.

We notice that the Macedonian Christians not only gave, they **begged Paul for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints**. When our hearts are on fire for Jesus and we are filled with the compassion of the Savior we want to help.

Another interesting fact we notice about their giving is that **they didn’t just give what was left over from their discretionary income, they gave beyond their means**.

The implication here is that these were poor people who gave what they could and then gave some more.

You know who the most generous

givers in America are? In the May 1997 Christianity Today there was an article which said research indicates that the weakest givers are those with incomes between \$40,000 and \$100,000 per year.

The two groups which give the highest percentages of income were those who make more than \$100,000 and those who make less than \$20,000 and while those who make more generally give more, they do so at a decreasing percentage of their income. The most generous people are those who make the least. Kind of reminds you of the story of the widow who gave her last two coins doesn’t it?

What dictates your giving to those in need, to the church, to those you know? Is your giving simply based on what you have left over, or is it based on an abundance of joy and an overflow in a wealth of liberality? If you answered the former, begin to give yourself wholly to the Lord. As you do that the Lord will fill you with this abundant joy and generosity.

LET US GROW!

Fr. Roger

MEMORIALS

The Vestry has approved two purchases for our church from our Memorial Funds. These two items have been much needed and we are grateful to God for those who have given to the Memorial fund in memory of those loved-ones who have passed on.

A new oil burning Pascal Candle was purchased. This will allow the Pascal Candle to always look beautiful and not burned down beyond recognition.

A flower stand was also purchased. Flowers, bulletins, and other items can be placed on this beautiful oak stand.

ASK THE RECTOR

Does being good do any good?

Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Allen Dershowitz begs to differ. He believes that most Christians’ good works have no real value whatsoever. It is the atheists and agnostics who are the truly moral people in our universe.

In his book, *Letters to a Young Lawyer*, the super lawyer argues that when Christians and other believers do good things, they are being given far more credit than they deserve.

In a chapter titled “Why Be a Good Person,” Dershowitz writes: “For most people, the question why be good – as distinguished from merely law abiding – is a simple one. Because God commands it, because the Bible requires it, because good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell.”

For the moment let’s ignore the fact that Allen Dershowitz is like millions of others who fail to understand the gospel, thinking that good works result in salvation.

He makes a valid point about the motivation for many Christians doing good works. If you asked a number of Christians why they do good works, or act morally, their response would be almost precisely what Dershowitz shares. We desire to be obedient to God, to obey His moral commands (or at least we say we do or should).

But Dershowitz hasn’t finished. He goes on to say “any God worth believing in would prefer an honest agnostic to a calculating hypocrite...I have never quite understood why people who firmly believe they are doing God’s will are regarded as ‘good.’ Even ‘heroic.’ For them the choice is a tactical one that

serves their own best interests, a simple consequence of a cost-benefit analysis.”

Dershowitz makes the amazing claim that the only truly moral person is an atheist. His reasoning is quite simple. “The truly moral person is the one who does the right thing without any promise of reward or threat of punishment – without engaging in a cost benefit analysis.”

Allen Dershowitz is wrong for several reasons. Even Dershowitz would admit that many atheists as well as believers do good things for less than sterling reasons. Some people give to their church or favorite charity for the tax write-off. Some do charitable work to polish their public image, or involve themselves in civic projects for the public accolades and good will it will garner them. While part of a person’s desire to give may be out of a genuine desire to help, or worship, in many instances there is also some financial, emotional or social benefit that also motivates them.

Dershowitz makes the false assumption that man can be “good” or “moral” on his own apart from God. Romans 3:10-12 reminds us that “there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands.” Paul makes it clear that there is no one who does good.” If there is no absolute good revealed from above, then good is in the eyes of the beholder.

To do good you would have to know what good really was. Since definitions change from person to person, it would be impossible for anyone to know for sure that they were doing anything truly good. If good becomes indefinable, how can you pretend you are a person of good character?

Dershowitz defines good character as something someone does “simply because it was deemed by the actor to be good.” He admits it would be necessary to strike an appropriate balance among often competing interests, such as the interests of oneself and of others (such as your tribe, race, gender, religion, nation, etc). Yet how could Dershowitz ever condemn as evil those who felt that for the greater good in the eyes of the Third Reich, it was necessary to eliminate Jews from the face of the earth?

Sincerity, or the actor’s own feelings, are not reliable. Many Confederate troops did not even own slaves, and yet gave their life sacrificially in the War between the States for a principal and standard of life they sincerely thought was eminently true and right. Were they good or bad? It is quite possible to be sincere, and yet sincerely wrong.

Dershowitz is also wrong because he is assuming that a person’s good works are his “ticket” into heaven. Buying into works salvation, he sets up a straw man and then proceeds to tear it down. The Bible does not tell us that if we are good we will get to heaven. What Dershowitz does not apparently understand is that Christians do their good deeds out of love – love for God and for those around us. Were we still counting on our good works to get us to heaven, Dershowitz would have a point. But we’re not. We already have salvation granted to us by grace through faith. Now if the only reason we do our good works is to get a greater standing in God’s kingdom, or to impress those around us with our piety, I think Dershowitz would still have a point.

When Elizabeth first played with Playdough we asked her to clean up after herself. After playing with her play-dough, she tried hard to get all of it put

back in the can. As hard as she tried, there were always “crumbs” left on the table. There was always still a mess for Nancy or me to clean up.

Though her execution was lacking, her desire to please us was not. We made allowances for her age. Our heavenly Father knows we aren’t perfect, but he still loves our well-meaning, although less than perfect, good works. How do we know if they are good works? The Bible tells us what constitutes good works. The Bible also reminds us that we should constantly be examining our motivations for the works that we do.

The above article was adapted from an article by Dan Schaeffer in Plain Truth magazine.

HAVE YOU VISITED OUR WEBSITE LATELY?

Bob Weekley, our Webmaster, has been working hard to refine and improve our website which can be found at www.st-michaels-buffalo.org.

You will find current news and events, a calendar section, and each month’s newsletter highlights. A “Virtual Tour” gives visitors to the sight the opportunity to see pictures of St. Michael’s and some of our members in action. There are also definitions for many “Episcopal” words to help the seeker and long-time Episcopalian.

There are links to some helpful websites and other interesting items. Check it out.

PARISH RETREAT

Our Annual Parish Retreat is October 10th and 11th at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora. Please make plans to join us for this spiritual renewal weekend. See Donna Strain or Jack Bidell for further information

VESTRY HIGHLIGHTS

- + Reviewed Sexton's job description.
- + Locks on the church doors have been changed. Donna will distribute new keys.
- + Admin Team has a to do list available for anyone wishing to help around the church.
- + Accepted the new church By-laws.
- + Purchase approved of new Sunday School Videos not to exceed \$250 from Education Fund.
- + Missions and Outreach Team presented their recommended disbursements. Approved. Motion was made to allow disbursements up to \$500 by OT without Vestry approval. Any such disbursements must be reported to the Vestry.
- + Voted to allow OT to disburse up to \$500 to the Rector's discretionary fund without Vestry approval but with approval of the Wardens.
- + Nurture reported that the Women's Guild donated \$72 to the garden fund.
- + A Memorial Fund Committee will be established to be the determining body for future memorial purchases for the church. This committee, made up of an Altar Guild rep., and the Assistant Treasurer, and anyone who might wish to serve, will evaluate requests for certain memorial purchases, determine other needed memorial purchases, and oversee proper acknowledgment of those in whose memory gifts are given.

SUNDAY MORNING PRAYER MINISTERS NEEDED

We are looking for a few good Prayers. Would you be interested in being trained to pray for Fr. Roger at 7:30 a.m. in the Conference Room? We are also looking for people who would be willing to be trained to pray for people at the Chapel altar during the Communion portion of our Eucharistic services.

If you think you might like to explore one or both of these ministries, please contact Bob Weekley at 897-3722 or rcweekley@aol.com.

MORNING PRAYER COMING AGAIN- AUGUST 31 AT 9 A.M.

The Worship Team will be working on an old but new type of service for us to aid in our worship of Almighty God. The team has decided to try to have a combined Morning Prayer and Eucharist service on the fifth Sundays.

This will bring back to the memories of the days when Morning Prayer was standard fare for the Sunday morning worship time. It will be an exciting new way to worship for those unfamiliar with this Prayer Book service.

August 31 will feature ONE SERVICE only (9 a.m.) with Morning Prayer and Eucharist. There will be a catered brunch following the service.

In order for us to have enough food please sign up by filling out a blue card on Sunday, calling the Church office, or sign up on sheet on one of the bulletin boards upstairs or downstairs by August 24.

GENERAL CONVENTION

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church (which meets every three years) will be meeting in the first part of August in Minneapolis.

This is shaping up to be a defining moment in the life of the Episcopal Church. It could well be the beginning of a major upheaval in the Church.

The GC is going to be considering the approval of rites to bless same-sex relationships. It will also be voting whether to accept the election of the Rev. Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire. Should he be approved this would, in essence, be seen as tacit approval of same-sex relationships since

Robinson left his wife and children to take up a relationship with another man. He is the first openly homosexual person to be elected bishop of the Episcopal Church. While there have been and continue to be homosexuals who are unethically ordained in the Church, the Church until recently has never considered changing its official policies regarding sex outside of marriage or the blessing of same-sex relations.

Not only is this attempt to change the teaching which has been held from the beginning of Christianity, it is an attempt which flies directly in the face of many recent declarations from the world-wide Anglican bishops and the Theological Committee of the Episcopal Church.

Some predict that should the above happen the Episcopal Church will face another split and the potential loss of many members. Others think that this will result in the Anglican Communion authorizing the formation of a special province into which those churches who disagree with these changes in doctrine and morality can become affiliated. Still others see the only way out is to affiliate with one of the breakaway groups existent in the United States.

We should not jump to any conclusions nor make any radical decisions until after General Convention and after much prayer and reflection. But, truly, these are perilous times for the Episcopal Church.

Please pray for the Deputies and Bishops at the General Convention that they may choose the path of righteousness and Biblical authority over pragmatism and being conformed to the image of society.

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FR. SAM TO HIGHLIGHT A CONFERENCE ON PRAYER AT ST. MICHAEL'S

September 12 & 13 will feature a vitally important conference to be held at St. Michael's. This conference entitled *The Secrets of Effective Prayer and Praying* will be taught by the Rev. Abuid Sam, a long-time friend of this church and priest of the Diocese of Western New York.

This conference will begin on Friday night with a time of worship at 7 p.m. followed by Fr. Sam teaching at 7:30 p.m.

The conference continues on Saturday morning with a continental breakfast at 8 a.m. and Fr. Sam teaching at 9 a.m. The conference will conclude at noon.

Please invite anyone who might have an interest in prayer. The unchurched are especially welcome. Whether you bring anyone or not, bring yourself to this crucial conference.

As a prelude to this conference the church will be open for prayer on September 11 from 9 a.m. until noon and 1:30 p.m. until 4 p.m.

YOU CAN HELP

As most of you know we have been printing out the whole service in our bulletins each week. Many have commented how easy it is to follow the service now. It is especially easy for visitors to enter into our worship.

Some have asked if it might be possible to help defray the costs of this printing. There are several ways you may do this. One is to buy paper for our copy machine. We use 8 ½ x 11 bond white paper. If you can buy a ream or two (or a case) you can help reduce our office expenses. Also, legal size envelopes.

The second way to help is to purchase paper for our newsletter. We currently are using legal size pastel yellow or cream colored paper- 8 ½ x 14 20 lb bond.

The third way to help is to purchase either a Laser Jet black ink cartridge (HP 74 L) or a black ink jet cartridge (HP #29). This will help reduce our costs of printing things from the computer for our bulletins and newsletters.

A fourth way is to purchase stamps for mailings. Thank you. The Vestry.

THANK YOU'S

I wish to thank my friends at St. Michael's for your caring thoughts, prayers, phone calls, and genuine concern during Mother's illness and the times of bereavement of Mother and Maryanne. It's wonderful to know that I belong to such a large and loving family at St. Michael's. God Bless you all. *Janet Mather.*

Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry acknowledged our recent gift of \$103.00 which was our offering on the day Deacon Chuck Wheeler was with us.

AUGUST ANNIVERSARIES

8/14/48 Evelyn & Jack Miller
8/17/46 Marjorie & William Blarr
8/19 Carol & Bob Weekley
8/28 Robin & Tim Meyers

2ND SUMMER FAMILY PICNIC

Save Sunday, August 10th after the 10:30 service for another St. Michael's family summer picnic. This will be held at Godfrey's Pond, Batavia. Upon arrival, it will cost \$3.00 per adult and \$2.00 for seniors and children – it is an insurance thing. Trust me, you get a lot more for your money. It probably will not cost any more than at Akron Park. There is a large covered pavilion with picnic tables.

We will supply the meats and you will bring your dishes to pass and table settings, just as we do for the June Family Picnic. There is an area to fish and swim, row boats, paddle boats and the like to rent for a slight fee. You may go hiking, shoot archery or there is also a gun range so bring your equipment for whatever interests you. We also plan to have a couple of vans so those who don't wish to drive may ride in comfort and fellowship to start off the fun-filled day. For those who are driving, we will be supplying directions. Plan to join us. *Janice & Mike Rickard*

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

1 Mike Ham 19 Gloria Gibson
1 Kelly Mogavero 20 William Blarr
2 Father Roger 21 Michael Bulera
3 Carolyn Flynn 22 David Noonan
7 Deb DiLiberto 23 Carol Shatzel
7 Alice Frueh 26 Shirley Gardinier
12 Tim Meacham 26 Janet Mather
14 Darlene Weber 29 Mildred Sanes
17 Joe Zasowski 31 C. Teschemacher
17 Joan Webster 31 Gary Kadow
18 Sue Ann Dier

NOTICE

The Church Secretary will be at a Diocesan Secretary Day August 14th, so her office will be closed. Also, Madeline will be on vacation the first week of September. Have a wonderful August and Labor Day holiday.

UNITED THANK OFFERING

Our Spring Ingathering was \$827.00. This was sent to the Diocese and will be presented with the offering of all the Diocese at General Convention in Minneapolis. Remember it is our prayers of thankfulness that accompany our Blue Box offerings that augment the work of those monies. So be sure to use the Blue Box to express your personal thanks as you enjoy your summer activities.

WOMEN'S GUILD

Our June 4th Luncheon was a great success due to the cooperation of many people. Father Roger helped at the Auction, as did both Alexandra and Elizabeth. It was fun to have the whole family there.

The Guild Treasury realized a profit of over \$100.00 for the Luncheon. The Garden Fund received over \$70.00 from the Auction, so it was worthwhile as well as entertaining.

We'll try to do more of these this Fall and Winter. If you have any ideas, let us know and we'll explore and perhaps implement them. Our next meeting will be September 10th. Our meetings are held after the 9:30 Holy Eucharist and Bible Study that will resume that day. Won't you think about joining us! *Virginia Bradley, President*

MID-WEEK EUCHARIST WITH PRAYER AND PRAISE

Would you like a service in which we sing contemporary songs, have a time of Bible teaching, sharing and prayer? Would you like to combine this with Communion? If so, you are invited to our Thursday Night Alive service on Thursday, August 21 at 7 p.m. in the Church. Come and bring a friend. The service will last about an hour.

CALLING ALL LADIES

On Saturday November 1, 2003 at 12:00 noon there will be a "High Tea". The cost will be \$5.00 per person and all you need to do is purchase a ticket and come. No fuss - no muss. This will be a great time for us all to get together and just visit and have some yummy treats. Look for when tickets will be available in future bulletins.

CHURCH SCHOOL RESUMES

I hope everyone is enjoying the summer. Maybe August will bring some real summer weather! Sunday school will be starting again before we know it and we are still looking for teachers to add to our team. Please call Madeline in the church office and give your name if you are interested. You will be contacted in August. I'd like to share two things as food for thought to help in your decision making. First, an excerpt from "I Love Sunday School" by Joseph Bayly. Why Do I Teach Sunday School? The questions sometimes comes to me. Because they needed a teacher; because someone asked me to; because I like people; because teaching forces me to study the Bible; because I want to help influence the next generation for God; because I have at least a small gift for getting through to children/adults-- helping them think and discuss -- and I feel responsible to use it. All good reasons, I guess.

But not the key one, the best one perhaps -- the one that will hold me when all else fails.

I teach because the last words Jesus spoke before He ascended to heaven were these: "Go ye therefore and teach . . ." (Matthew 28:19) I teach my Sunday school class because Jesus commanded His followers -- and I believe that includes me -- to teach His Word. Second, I find as a teacher, I learn from

my kids every day. Children have a unique perspective on the world, children always make me laugh. Shaping the world of a child is a special blessing, a gift that keeps on giving. A Sunday school teacher asked her first graders, "Where is God?" The room was filled with children that raised their hands to respond. "Okay, Mary, Where is God?" "He is everywhere," "Very good that's right." But still there were two children that didn't put their hands down, so the teacher continued. "Okay, Michael, Where is God?" "God is inside me." "Very good that's right." Now there was one boy sitting in the back of the class waiving his hand. He was the last child with his hand up, so the teacher called on him. "Okay, Danny, Where is God?" "He's in our bathroom." Well, the teacher just had to ask, "How do you know he's in the bathroom?" The answer came, "Every morning my father knocks on the bathroom door and says, 'My God are you still in there?' " Please keep our teaching ministries in your prayers. We hope to hear from you! God Bless,

Diane Meacham and the Education Team