

The Archangel

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

March 2011

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

Exodus 20:18-19

The people following Moses to be free from the hard life as slaves in Egypt were now finding themselves in a new way of life with greater freedoms, greater voice, and greater responsibilities. They were also learning their lives of freedom brought new realities. They saw the powerful lightning, heard the thunder on the mountain where God was speaking with Moses and were truly terrified. Moses' words to the people, that they should not be afraid of God's majestic display, that it was meant only to dissuade them from sinning and to follow the covenant he had made with them, his people.

Moses' words were true and may have been heard, but not believed, and not only in that generation, but in every generation forward, even including the great majority of this generation. That first terrified generation before Moses stayed a distance away from him and spoke out, you speak to us yourself as God's servant what he has said and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us, because that would bring our death. They were insisting that Moses be their "go between man" with God for fear that they might hear him directly. It appears the majority of this generation prefers the same set up, to have a "go between people" servants of God, between God and ourselves. We like to listen to personal testimonies, of others, but we do not desire that God himself should speak to us. The concern I hear most often is the fear that one's life would be disrupted and disturbed far beyond one's comfort zone. Is this why our generation is so fearful that God should speak to us? Because we know that if God does speak, if we should hear his voice, it will certainly be some great charge that either the thing must be done or we are left to tell God we will not obey him. Whereas, if it is only the "go between person's" voice, the servant's voice we hear, we can feel it is not imperative. That is just your own idea, though God may have had something to do with it, maybe. A harmful result is then that we do not consciously disobey God, we simply do not heed him. God has given us his commands, but we do not want to listen too closely and choose not to recall Jesus' words, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

This scenario is offered as the season of Lent approaches and begins March 9th. It is a season given to us to reflect upon our relationship with God and with one another in his name, that we may in all ways walk closer with him and listen for his voice.

Your Brother in Christ,

Tige Newell, Rector



Adult Bereavement Support Groups

6 week Adult Bereavement Support Group sponsored by Crater Community Hospice beginning February 24th. Participants tell the stories of their loved ones, share experiences and learn coping skills for managing the pain of grief. Participation is free and open to the public--please register in advance.

Where: Crater Community Hospice Offices
Address: 3916 S. Crater Rd. Petersburg VA 23805
When: February 24, 2011--March 31, 2011
Time: 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

For additional information or to register please visit the Crater Community Hospice website www.cratercommunityhospice.org or contact Group Facilitator: Karla Helbert, LPC karlamarie@verizon.net or call 804-892-2782



Adult Grief Support Group

After the death of a loved one, we're faced with a wide variety of feelings and emotions. The challenges of our grief journey can affect us emotionally, cognitively and physically without a strong support system. Join us on Wednesday nights to gain support from others who are in a similar situation and discover coping mechanisms that will help you and your family through the unpredictable journey of grief.

Where: Bethia United Methodist Church
Address: 10700 Winterpock Rd. Chesterfield, Va. 23832
When: Wednesday Nights ~ March 2nd – April 6th
Time: 7:00 – 8:30 PM

***Participation is "FREE" of charge although space is limited, please register in advance.**

For additional information or to register please visit our website www.cratercommunityhospice.org or contact Group Facilitator: Patti Cox 804-840-6454 psheltoncox@aol.com

Eunice's Circle of Widowed Friends

A Bereavement Support Group for Widows, Widowers and those individuals who have lost loved ones. We meet once a month on the fourth Thursday, free of charge. *Where: St Mary's Hospital, Room 108 from 6 pm – 7 pm.* www.eunicescircleoffriends.com; or call **(804) 323- 9464 (Ask for Ben)**

Elaine M. C. Nowinski , Ph.D., moderator emnowinski@fastmail.us
WidowedGriefGroup@nowinski.com



March birthday party will be on
March 20th
after the 10:30am worship service .

Pot Luck Lunch Sunday, March 6th

Plan to stay after worship for good food and fellowship.
Bring a hearty dish to share.
Beverages will be furnished.

MARCH

- 1 Ferguson Gemeny
- 2 Brandon Cole
- 4 Megan Bottoms
- 6 Mollie Ogilvie
- 9 Vera McDonald
- 11 Olivia Wilmarth
- 13 Melinda Sue Strach
- 20 Jane Flexon
- 21 Colette Robertson
- 23 Cindy Warriner
- 28 Montovani Gay
- 29 Charlotte Price

Anniversaries

- 15 Tige and Courtney Newell
- 16 Larry and Colette Robertson
- 18 Woody and Ruth Woodfin

**April Archangel Deadline
Monday, March 21, 9:30am**

Summary of Vestry Minutes

- The Treasurer reported that January was a low-income month.
- David Noakes, our alternate to Council, will attend in Catherine Noakes' place as delegate due to Catherine's work schedule.
- Tige will be in Phoenix for a visit with his dad and brother February 17-21. We will have Morning Prayer on Feb. 20.
- Tige met with a representative from Jackson-Field Home.
- New Wine Project meeting at St. John's, Chester on April 9 from 9:00-12:00 for the purpose of exploring new programs and directions for the Diocese. Requested that Rector and 3 members attend. David Noakes volunteered.
- Sale of Tobias estate jewelry is complete.
- Street sign font and background color changes completed.
- During Lent we will offer a marriage enhancement series and one other.
- Jane Elliott will be reminding parishioners that we collect non-perishable food, on an on-going basis, for the Covenant Christian Fellowship food distribution program.

Thank You

To the Folks at St. Michael's Episcopal Church,

I want to thank you all for the monetary gift. It was a great surprise. You really didn't have to do that, but I thank you anyhow. It is always nice to be reminded that there are still people out there that are willing to help others. It is real easy to forget that here. In all honesty, thank you is not enough for what you all have done for me. I have an idea on how to show my gratitude for the gift. It will take some time to get it together, so please bear with me. Thank you so very much.

Sincerely,
Christopher Konkell

To my St. Michael's family:

With all of the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season and the new craziness of my life with four children now (2 of them toddlers - need I say more???) I neglected to open my envelope with my Christmas bonus in it in time to thank you in the last newsletter. As always it is greatly appreciated. Happy New Year!

Kristi Renshaw

Dear St. Michael's Parishioners,

I would like to say a big thank you to all of you who were my prayer warriors as I headed to court for Mattie's custody. The court date was Feb. 17 and the judge awarded custody to me with parental visitation. Prayers were heard and answered, and I felt God's presence in that court room. It has been a long, stressful time for me and I am just taking one day at a time. Mattie is a precious, wonderful little girl and I am privileged and blessed to care for her. God is good, indeed!

I don't know what I would do without my St. Michael's family. You all are a true blessing to me and to Mattie.

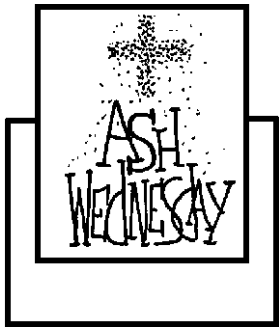
With thanks,
Phyllis Cheely

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

Tuesday, March 8th

5:30-7:00pm

The EYC will be doing our annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. We are asking for donations from those who attend. Invite your friends. It's all you can eat!



Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, March 9th

Noon and 7:00pm

Service and Imposition of Ashes

Lent is Coming!

Ash Wednesday is March 9th this year, beginning the holy time of Lent.

Our custom is to gather on the 5 Wednesday nights after Ash Wednesday for a simple supper together and a program of education or reflection. Our first gathering this lent will be March 16th. This year we offer two parallel programs. We will start at 6:30 p.m. with a simple supper and be finished by 8:30 p.m. The programs we will offer are:

1. "Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage" – Mark Gungor, senior pastor of Celebration Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin gives hilarious presentations of various subjects in marriage. Mark has "a unique blend of humor and tell-it-like-it-is honesty." He has some incisive and sometimes controversial wisdom on the marriage relationship, male-female differences and how to understand them to make a strong marriage. This program will be sure to generate a lot of laughter and discussion.
2. "The Gospel of John" – As an alternate presentation, we will use the DVD of the Gospel of John to work our way through the life of Jesus, using only the words written by one of Jesus' best friends while he was here physically present on earth. The images of Jesus' times, but much more his interaction with people of all sorts, from religious leaders, to outcast women, to bewildered disciples, bring the personal reality and love of this Man home. This is the same movie we used as a basis for our Adult Spiritual Formation class a number of years ago. It received rave reviews! This program will be sure to generate a lot of "ah-ha's" and discussion.

3.

There will be a sign up sheet in the parish hall in early March for crock pot suppers. We will need about 4 people each week to bring a pot of your favorite chili or home made soup or a simple stew. We plan to keep set up and clean up simple by using paper bowls & plastic spoons, providing bread and drinks.

Hope to see you all there,
Hank and Peggy Graeser for Adult Spiritual Formation

A Grief Workshop: Helping Yourself and Others

Co-sponsored by
Crater Community Hospice and St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Colonial Heights

Saturday, March 19th, 9am-3pm
St. Michael's Church, 501 Old Town Rd.,
Colonial Heights (Fowler Room)

- . Learn and share about the grief process
- . Small group discussions with bereavement professionals
- . Helping yourself and others in loss:
- . What to say and not to say, what to do?
- . Legal issues
- . What to do with all their stuff
- . Living alone, dating again
- . Dispelling myths about grief and mourning

Closing with a service of remembrance

Cost: \$10.00 for supplies and lunch
Please register by Friday, March 11th by calling the church office at 526-1790
Mon., Tues., or Fri., 9am to 2pm

Youth Ministry News

Aquire The Fire was a fun weekend!
Everyone enjoyed the music. The skit
was awesome!

Nikki Gay did a great job in leading
our meeting this past February. We
discussed where is God when you go
shopping.

This year's Diocesan retreat
Blackstone will be held the weekend
of April 1-3. Youth in 8th-12th grades
are welcomed to attend. Please let
me know if you would like to go to
this event. The deadline for
registration is March 18.

Thanks be to God,
Michael



Pass It On Saturday, April 2, 2011

Condon Hall, St. Ann Catholic Church, 17111 Jefferson Davis Hwy, Colonial Heights

This is a local ministry to benefit those most in need in our community. We strive to provide families with much needed clothing, books, shoes, toys, school supplies, small furniture and accessories for their children. We collect donations and twice a year we set up our Church Hall as a place for families to come and "shop" for their children. Our event is "by invitation" for the first few hours (8-11am). After 11am, we open the event to the public. Each family is given two huge bags to fill. Everything is given away for free and is all organized and run by volunteers.

You must have a ticket with you to enter between 8 & 11am. Please see Fr. Tige or contact the church office to get your ticket.

Volunteers are needed:

Thursday, March 30th and Friday, April 1st from 10am – 8pm for set up
Saturday, April 2nd, 7am-5pm, to run the event and clean up.
Please call Linda Biles, 768-2268, to let her know what hours you can volunteer your time.

Donations accepted:

Gently used clothing, hangers, rubber bands, safety pins, toys, books, shoes, strollers, etc.

If you have questions

call Marie Bottone, 479-5227.

Ideas for a Blessed Lent

The season of Lent is fast approaching. I have been exploring ideas for our worship space that would give us pause to reflect on the heart of God for his people in this time.

Two themes have occupied my thoughts for several weeks. In trying to choose one, it occurred to me that I do not need to choose between the two since they are related. I believe the Lord would use one subject ("The Lord has spoken to his people.") to speak to us about the second subject ("Lord, How can I be your servant?").

What are some of the ways God has spoken to His people from the beginning of time until now? Some are quite obvious as we read the scriptures: the creation, the Exodus from Egypt through the parting of the Red Sea, the life of King David, the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord; are some the big ones. There are so many others in the scriptures both large and small.

What about today? God continues to speak to us, his servants in so many ways. He calls us to live a servant's life for him and through him in order to bring glory to his name. What are those ways that he would ask each of us to offer up to Him?

Our creator, our heavenly father, knows the plans he has for each of us as his servants. They are plans tailored to fit each according to the abilities and talents he, our creator, has equipped us with. The mistake we all often make is limiting him in our timidity and believing that little voice that says we are not able, not capable, not smart enough etc. According to the NIV Bible 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us that "God did give us a spirit of timidity (or fear) but a spirit of power, of love and of self discipline."

During Lent many of us try to give up or fast from something we regularly do such as not eating a favorite food or watching a favorite TV program, as a self discipline. In recent years it's been suggested that instead of giving up something perhaps we do a good service for someone. I believe the Lord is asking me this year to give up some of my time to serve someone else. Some of my prayer time now will be seeking the Lord's will and ideas as to what service that might be.

Hopefully some of the offerings in our windows and throughout our worship space will provide an environment of thought and meditation that will inspire you to listen closely to our Savior's voice with the Father's plans for you in the blessed season. I invite you to prayerfully put your hand in the hand of Jesus and allow him to help you be who Jesus calls you to be and do what Jesus calls you to do in order that the name of our Mighty God be glorified in every way.

Carolyn Mason, Altar Guild

Steve Hood's Latest Status

The Virginia Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling that would ultimately grant Steve's release or retrial, but early this month the Attorney General's office appealed that decision, and as of the deadline for this newsletter no decision on that (second) appeal has been rendered, though it should be soon.

Meanwhile, also no decision has been issued from his July Parole Board interview. The most recent Parole decisions made public were for December. If his parole was decided in January, he hasn't yet been notified, so the decision could happen this month or even later.

I believe there's been no change in his medical status, with unexplained chronic swelling of his hands and occasionally his throat. He did apply to be seen in the clinic, but that sometimes takes a very long time after the application. Please continue to hold him in your prayers.

Several parishioners continue to visit with him monthly by video conference, to write him often and/or to receive his phone calls on a weekly (or more frequent basis), and to pass along to him other's inquiries and well wishes for him. Please continue to do so.

Lynnice Randolph

Coming Soon

The deadline for orders for Easter Flowers is April 10th. The cost this year will be \$11.50. Watch the Sunday bulletins and the April *Archangel* for order forms.

Coffee Hour Changes

Thank you to all coffee hour hosts for your generosity, faithfulness and creativity! Our coffee hours are filled with good fellowship and food!

Due to the economy, and fewer hosts to draw from we will be having "less" and "lighter" finger food snacks at coffee hour. We appreciate your willingness as a congregation to share in the ministry by your participation.

Donations of soft drinks or a bag of chips or cookies always welcome. Just leave on the counter in the kitchen.

Blessings from Hospitality

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

March 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 1:00-Bible Study 7:00-Cursillo Gr.	2 10:30-Al-Anon	3 7:15-Choir	4	5
Pot Luck 6 8:00am-Holy Euch. I 9:15am-Adult Ed. 10:30am-Holy Euch. II w. Sun. Sch. 5:00pm-EYC	7 1:00-Cursillo Gr. 7:00-Vestry (Harriette -	Shrove Tues. 8 1:00-Bible Study 5:30-Pancake Supper 7:00-Cursillo Gr. Out of the office)	Ash Wed. 9 10:30-Al-Anon 12:00 & 7:00 - Worship & Imposition of Ashes	10 7:15-Choir	11	12 9:00-Al-Anon
13 8:00am-Holy Euch. I 9:15am-Adult Ed. 10:30am-Holy Euch. II w. Sun. Sch. 5:00pm-EYC	14 1:00-Cursillo Gr.	15 1:00-Bible Study 7:00-Cursillo Gr.	16 10:00-A.A.R.P. 10:30-Al-Anon 6:30-Lenten Supper and Program	17 11:00-ECW 7:15-Choir	18 7:00-Cursillo Ultreya	19 9:00-Bereavement Workshop
Birthdays 20 8:00am-Holy Euch. I 9:15am-Adult Ed. 10:30am-Holy Euch. II w. Sun. Sch. 4:00pm-Baby Shower 5:00pm-EYC	21 12:00-Garden Club 1:00-Cursillo Gr. Archangel Deadline	22 1:00-Bible Study 7:00-Cursillo Gr.	23 10:30-Al-Anon 6:30-Lenten Supper and Program	24 7:15-Choir	25	26
27 8:00am-Holy Euch. I 9:15am-Adult Ed. 10:30am-Holy Euch. II w. Sun. Sch.	28 1:00-Cursillo Gr.	29 1:00-Bible Study 7:00-Cursillo Gr.	30 10:30-Al-Anon 6:30-Lenten Supper and Program	31 7:15-Choir		

The Common Purpose of St. Michael's Episcopal Church:
*We're growing to be who Jesus wants us to be and
do what He wants us to do.*

The Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia
The Rt. Rev. Herman Hollerith IV

It is with great affection and a deep sense of privilege that I stand here today to address the progress of God's unfolding mission in the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

This Council marks the end of my second year as your Bishop – and I must say, it has been a challenging, yet deeply meaningful journey. Every day I spend working and ministering among you, I am reminded of just how blessed I am to have the opportunity to build relationships with you. As I travel about the diocese, I am continually impressed by your hospitality, your love of Christ's Church and your willingness to engage with me about all aspects of our common life. I am also impressed by the faithfulness of our parishes striving to move forward in these challenging economic times. So, thankfulness and hope are the two predominant dispositions that color my reflections today.

For the next several minutes – if I do nothing else, I pray it will be to offer the unique perspective that comes with the office of bishop. Needless to say, mine is not the only perspective and some might say a rather narrow one at best, but it is a perspective that is informed by a view of the broad spiritual and geographical landscape that defines us in Southern Virginia. It is not enough for either you or me to see things simply from sea level all the time. We must step to a larger observation platform in order to better understand where we are and where our Lord is leading us.

But, before we take that step, there are some things at sea level to address. The first and most obvious is this council event. We are doing a new thing this weekend. Over the years, a great number of you have requested an event that allows you to return to your parishes for Sunday worship. That desire, as well as expressed concern about the cost of a full weekend away, prompted me to change the format to what you see before you. Interestingly enough, Southern Virginia was one of the very few dioceses left doing Council over an entire weekend.

Now I know this change has not pleased everybody. I also know that we are bound to encounter various glitches in the system the first time we do this. I also know that our social time will be curtailed a bit and that we will not have the privilege – as we did last year – of having an engaging learning session. There are some price tags to this change. But, if we can remain open minded, above all patient with one another and focused on our work, it will be a wonderful two days. And if something doesn't work, we'll learn from that and move on the wiser – because that's what the people of God do. What I hope you appreciate is just how hard the diocesan and volunteer staffs work to make council happen for you.

This time last year I talked about the importance of a ship having its engine room in order before attempting to embark on a voyage. My first two years as your bishop have involved much engine room work. Since last year's Council, major changes have occurred within the staff, including Win Lewis returning to parish ministry, Jay Magness being elected to the episcopate, the resignation of the treasurer and changes in the communications staff. While some of the changes were welcomed and some unwelcome, all were inevitable and part and parcel of any new episcopate. As of this New Year, I do believe that we are finally moving away from engine room work. Canon for Transition - Michael Spear Jones, Canon for Congregational Development - Jeunee Cunningham, Communications officer - Ann Turner, and Youth Missioner - Ashley Scruggs have each brought their remarkable gifts to the diocesan team and are doing splendidly in their work. Also, in the next few weeks, I plan to announce the name of our new Canon for Diocesan Administration. I can tell you, I am looking forward to moving away from structural changes.

Let me remind you that while your diocesan staff is a small one – given the size of our diocese – it is a highly competent group of dedicated people. They have learned to do more with less and they are ready and willing to help you. The program staff in particular, is ready to partner with you around congregational development. I am sometimes surprised by how infrequently parishes take advantage of their expertise – especially in the areas of youth, spiritual formation and communications. So remember the resource you have in them.

The hardest part of doing an annual address is deciding what not to talk about. There are so many aspects of our common life that need to be addressed but will not be due to time constraints and the limit of most people's attention spans. But, there are two areas that must be mentioned – one is Talbot Hall and the other is Chanco.

As you know, this past summer was punctuated by open hearings in Norfolk around the Talbot Hall property. Those hearings were real eye openers for me and the Property Committee and for the whole diocese I suspect. In response, I asked the Property committee to create a task force to explore possible solutions to the challenges at Talbot Hall. The genuine and valid concerns about the historicity of the Manor House, about environmental issues of the waterfront and about neighborhood impact needed exploration and reflection. Under the able leadership of The Very Rev. Stan Sawyer, that task force has now completed its work and is in the process of presenting its findings to the Property committee. What I want you to notice is that - other than a brief report from Stan Sawyer - Talbot Hall is not on the Council agenda. We're not in any hurry and we're going to take our time and allow input from every quarter of the diocese in the time ahead. And if there is a decision to be made, it will be made with integrity and thoughtfulness.

Before I move on, I want to offer you an observation about Talbot Hall. Again, I want to affirm the genuine legitimacy of the concerns expressed by the Norfolk community around the property. Your voice is important. At the same time though, I believe that Talbot Hall is also symbolic of the huge challenges that we face in this diocese. In many ways it is a symbol of the fact that we are sometimes a people stuck between two poles – the pole of nostalgia for the past on the one hand and our fear of the future on the other. So, the real challenge for all of us, as the baptized children of God, is, as I see it, being guided singularly by the mission of the Gospel of Jesus. The Diocese of Southern Virginia with all its parishes and buildings exists for one purpose alone – to fulfill the Great Commission. All else must be measured against that highest of callings.

Since my arrival in the diocese in 1999, I have appreciated and supported the mission of our Camp and Conference center. Chanco is one of our important spiritual assets in Southern Virginia. This past year I made an effort to spend time at Chanco – especially during the summer camp session – and to understand its culture. Let me tell you what I have learned: First, and most importantly, that the Chanco Board is a group of highly dedicated individuals whose passion for the facility runs deep. I have also learned that Chanco has some real financial challenges, most particularly in the conference center area. While the summer camp program continues to be well attended and full of life, the conference center ministry is anemic and struggling. Also, the entire Chanco facility is looking at some serious physical plant challenges. And please remember, your diocesan budget still shoulders \$350,000 of debt on Chanco.

Needless to say, the difficult economy we find ourselves in today has had a negative impact on almost all camp and conference centers within the church – so we are not alone. But, we must spend the next few years intentionally evaluating the challenges at Chanco and investigating new opportunities. Is Chanco adequate for our needs? How does Chanco fit in to the overall strategic direction of the mission of our diocese? What is our long term vision for Chanco? We have some real work to do around these questions.

Now, in the meantime, as we move forward with our discernment, what the Board and I need you to do is *use the facility!* It is *your* camp and conference center and it must be supported by you. Please take this request home to your respective parishes.

While, there are things in our common life that frankly keep me up at night, there are also many things I find myself enthusiastically celebrating about our diocese and very, very proud of. One is the strength of our African-American congregations in Southern Virginia. Our diocese has something unique. We have a legacy of strong Black leadership in the Episcopal Church dating back over 100 years. Because of the life and ministry of people like James Solomon Russell, Black Episcopalians in Southern Virginia have impacted the life of the entire Episcopal Church.

Now that is rather amazing when you think about it, when you consider the fact that our area was also historically one of the worst areas for human slavery and for the social oppression of Blacks in post-emancipated America. The evils of human oppression are deep within the roots of our culture in this part of the world – make no mistake about it. In my mind this historical reality testifies to two very powerful truths. The first is the remarkable redemptive power of Jesus to liberate the hearts and minds of all of us, the power of God to resurrect us from our own death. And second, are the remarkable strength, faithfulness, vision and courage of Black Episcopalians in our diocese. We truly have much to celebrate and to be thankful for. In fact, our own James Solomon Russell will more than likely be included in the new *Holy Women and Holy Men* by the summer of 2012.

With these things in mind, I asked our Council designers to give us an opportunity to celebrate the gifts that Black Episcopalians have brought to our common life. Since this weekend marks the Church's celebration of one of our most important American saints, Absalom Jones, it seemed high time that we should do that here together. And so, tomorrow in our closing worship, we will!

As a final comment, let me just say that I hope and pray that none of us here are under the illusion that racism against people of color has ceased to be an issue in Southern Virginia. It is! And it is essential that we continue to come to terms with the sin of racism across all aspects of our common life – within the Church and outside of the Church. As part of our baptismal responsibility we strive to remove those evils that bar people from the love of God. Later in this Council, I hope you will listen carefully to the report of R-1 committee as they work on your behalf to creatively address racism in our diocese in the future.

Before I move on, I also want to tell you that I think this next year will be our opportunity to address another difficult issue in our life together: sexuality. It's time for us to open the conversation on how or in what manner we will move forward on this issue in Southern Virginia, specifically in regard to the blessing of unions between our Gay and Lesbian brothers and sisters. Frankly, I am not yet sure what form this conversation should take. I have been watching with keen interest what our friends in the central diocese have been doing and there are some things we can learn from them. But, we must also find our own way. Later this spring, in consultation with the deans, I will appoint a special committee to explore options and recommend a way forward.

If you will indulge your bishop a bit longer, I would now like us to step to a larger observation platform and reflect on where we are as a Church amidst the cultural landscape.

The clergyman/scholar Sam Pascoe once said this: "Christianity started out in Palestine as a fellowship. It moved to Greece and became a philosophy. It moved to Italy and became an institution. It moved to Europe and became a culture. It moved to America and became an enterprise!"

Most of are keenly aware that in the last few years Christianity has been a failing enterprise in our culture. Like G.C. Murphy's or Sears we have been losing business. The number of people who practice their faith regularly has rapidly declined. The Evangelical conservative Church alone has lost more members in the last ten years than the entire population of the Episcopal Church. But, we in the Episcopal Church have certainly suffered a similar fate relative to our size - as have all denominations.

When I was a youngster back in the 60's the Episcopal Church was experiencing rapid growth. Being an Episcopalian had a certain kind of social power about it within the culture. It was, as Garrison Keillor once described "the Church of wingtips and scotch and soda." All a church had to do was simply open its doors and people would come streaming in. Well, that generation and that time in history are long gone now and will never ever return. We are no longer a destination church and we certainly no longer enjoy the magnetism of social prominence.

Unfortunately, as the culture changed in this country, the Church continued to do business as usual. While it is fair to say that we remained progressive in our social ethics and theology, we did not engage in new forms of evangelism or in finding new models for ministry and community, certainly not on any large scale. The results are evident. Our pews aren't as full and the membership we do have is becoming increasingly older. While there are some exceptions, especially in the highly populated areas of our diocese, the majority of our congregations have been de-evolving. As a result, ministry is more about palliative care and self-protection than it is about mission. And palliative care and self-protection are always what shrinking institutions end up resorting to.

We could have several hours of debate about who's to blame for our situation, but I don't think that's going to move us forward the slightest step. I think we are better served when we listen for God's voice in all this and begin to focus on the opportunities.

Needless to say, our present situation is enough to keep this bishop up at night, I can assure you, but I can also tell you that despair is not what I feel and certainly not what you should feel. Now that we no longer have the luxury of the social power we once enjoyed, I believe we in the Episcopal have a real opportunity to embrace the true missionary nature of our faith.

Is there anyone here who can tell me the *real* name of the Episcopal Church, the official, corporate name? I will give you a hint: it's not "Ye old Historical Church". The official name is "*The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society*". I think that ought to really tell us something about who we are called to be!

This is what we know: In this day and age, young people, young professionals in particular are seeking three distinct things for their lives. First, they are seeking meaningful community. If a Church demonstrates powerful hospitality and a deep desire to create diverse community then young people are going to be attracted to it. Note that the kind of hospitality I'm describing is not the same as warmly welcoming a newcomer to come and adopt "our way of doing things". Rather, it's hospitality in which people are welcomed in to be who they are and are clearly appreciated for their own unique gifts and perspective. Its community created not from moving the outsiders in, but from the insiders moving out.

The second reality that the younger generations seek is a meaningful way to live, a way that makes sense out of all the craziness of the world. In short, they are seeking the Gospel message, even if they don't know what that message is. Meaningful spiritual nurture, creative liturgy, and rich spiritual formation are paramount for these seekers. It isn't enough to just hand someone a prayer book and wax on and on about the beautiful historical traditions of the Episcopal Church or make them new members of the altar guild. People are seeking more than that. They are seeking a *way of life*. And if a church community can offer them that way then they will seek to be a part of it.

And finally, the third reality is that young people will become part of a community only if that community is making a positive impact on the problems of the world. In other words, opportunities to do meaningful outreach are paramount to church involvement. People want to believe that they can make a difference in the world, that they can make the world a better place. Faith communities that are primarily inwardly focused will not offer any attraction.

The simple fact of the matter is this: if your congregation is not clearly and intentionally addressing those three primary realities in its common life with all due haste and commitment then your congregation is de-evolving. It's as simple as that.

In my thinking it's time for us to organize ourselves around a missional perspective in this diocese. The lynch pin of this perspective will be intentional development of the ministry of the baptized. The increasing cost of full time clergy in the face of diminishing economic resources means that we must be both deliberate and creative.

To that end, beginning in March, the Executive board and I will be initiating a diocesan wide strategic planning process. The purpose of this process will be to engage you in dialogue around the challenges and opportunities that are before you. We will meet in the various regions for organized discussion. Let me make this clear: the time is not to be spent discussing the policies of the National Church or debating theological matters. Rather, it will be time set aside for planning the future of our diocese for forming partnerships and setting our mission priorities. The Rev. Mark Wilkinson will go into some of the details later in our Council.

Overall, let me tell you just how proud I am of our Executive Board and their willingness to enter into this strategic process. All too often in the Church we commit what our Presiding Bishop describes as "suicide by governance". Your Executive Board is understanding its

leadership role to be not just about governance, but also about mission. I find this very exciting. Perhaps one day in the near future our entire system in this diocese – canons included - will be organized around missional priorities rather than just governance. I think that would be a powerful step in the right direction.

There is no doubt that we face big challenges both in the Episcopal Church at large and in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. But, there is every reason to be both excited and hopeful. Why? I'll tell you why. First, this is God's Church and God is in charge. And second, when I look out and see your faces, my brothers and sisters, I see "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world". I know that as a community we have the gifts, the talent, the resources, and the faith to do new and wonderful things. It's all here in Southern Virginia. What we must find now is the *will* to do these things! But I am certain that we can! May God grant us the will and courage to embrace our future!

You Too Could Be Proud Owner of a St. Mike's Pew

Thanks to my husband Tom indulging my birthday request for one of the extra pews, it now sits nicely in our foyer. Do you have room anywhere for one? At \$100, they're a bargain, and mine will always serve as a daily fond reminder of St. Michael's, as well as of the Savior we worship. A pew could also be great on a porch or covered deck (where I ultimately hope to put this or another one). Don't rule it out! :-)
My thanks also to the men of St. Michael's for delivering our pew: Bob Wilson, Torsten, William Christmas & Hank, as well as Carol & Sabine who accompanied them, and any other strong folks who may have helped load it onto Bob's truck. Thank you, thank you!

Lynnice

College Scholarships Available

Each year the Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese offer scholarship aid to men and women for continuing educations. The deadline for applying is April 30, 2011.

Elise Holladay Scholarship: Assistance to men and women for continued education beyond high school in undergraduate study only.

Tucker Memorial Scholarship: Provides assistance to men and women in church-related training in an accredited Episcopal Church training school.

The applicant must be a communicant of the Diocese, have at least a "B" or 3.0 cumulative GPA on a 4.0 scale and enrolled full time for the coming year. For an application and information, see the bulletin board in the hallway or visit diosova.org and look under "finance" and then "scholarship."

Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First One Hundred Years

Sunday, February 27th, 2 and 6pm

Attucks Theatre, Norfolk, VA

Tickets, \$25, may be purchased at Scope Box Office or Ticketmaster

Read more about this play on the board in the Parish Hall.