



November 2013

"We drink from wells we did not dig."

The Thanksgiving holiday is an important time to think about the debt of gratitude we owe to so many people. We take time to celebrate with loved ones as we remember the sacrifice of our forebears.

That phrase above comes from a larger pericope from Deuteronomy...

"When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

More than just a civic holiday or banquet, Thanksgiving is a collective act of remembering that helps us acknowledge the labors of others and our many blessings from God.

We have so much to be grateful for at St. John's Church. Surely we drink from wells we did not dig. You may be able to list many of the people that shared their time and talents that make it possible for us to worship and serve as a congregation. We are caretakers of their labor and legacies.

St. John's is very close to launching a readiness assessment that may lead to a capital campaign. We will undertake a study in order to determine the needs and hopes for our shared life. We already know of a number of projects that must be undertaken very soon. These projects will preserve one aspect of our heritage and allow us to continue to live into our baptismal covenants. As part of the study, we will also be engaged in active listening to ascertain the evolution of our missional identity. What is God calling us to be and do? Your participation in a focus group or an interview will be an important part of this exciting process.

Thirteenth century mystic, Meister Eckhart wrote, *"If the only prayer you say in your whole life is 'thank you,' that would suffice."* It is my hope that each and every day you can say that simple prayer, "Thank you." Have a blessed Thanksgiving.

Father Rich+

MEET DEACON CHRISTOPHER!



Earlier this year, our parish welcomed Deacon Christopher Szarke as a transitional deacon who is serving our parish as he awaits his ordination as a priest. Christopher came to us from the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, which is his canonical home. This means Christopher is under the authority of the bishop of Atlanta. He has been given permission by that bishop to minister in another diocese and was licensed by Bishop Skip Adams to minister in the Diocese of Central New York.

In May of this year, Christopher received a Master of Divinity degree from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Christopher's seminary study concentration was in Theology and Ethics, with certificates in Anglican Studies and Faith and Health.

The word "deacon" comes from the Greek "*diakonos*", meaning servant or minister. Under the canons of the Episcopal Church, a person called, prepared and educated for the priesthood is first ordained a deacon and, usually after a minimum of six months, is ordained to the priesthood. These persons are referred to as "transitional deacons".

Many of us have had the opportunity to interact with Deacon Christopher before or after Sunday services, in which he assists Father Rich in the Eucharist. I recently had the opportunity to sit down and find out more about him.

Christopher grew up in Minnesota with his parents and 6 younger siblings (3 brothers and 3 sisters). He graduated from St. Cloud State University with a double major in psychology and speech communications and a minor in human relations. Christopher later earned a master's degree at Holy Names University in California in the years before he attended seminary in Georgia. Having grown up in a Roman Catholic family, he was a practicing Roman Catholic, and became interested in other faith traditions early in life, as a result of having elementary school friends whose fathers were Shiite Muslim and Jewish.

Before Christopher entered seminary, the work he did included ministry, human services, and healthcare, including HIV/AIDS ministry with children, women, and men; casework with homeless people; and massage therapy at a hospital cancer center and at a day center for people living with AIDS.

Christopher entered a Benedictine monastery twelve years ago and a Franciscan friary five years ago as he discerned how to faithfully respond to the call. He feels blessed to have had those experiences and to be able to integrate them into the call to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church.

What, then, drew Christopher to the Episcopal Church? He believes in an open Eucharist; meaning that all baptized Christians are welcome to receive communion in our churches. He also believes in the ordination of women to the priesthood and that LGBT people have a place in the church. Christopher also thinks that the Episcopalian Church's involvement of its laity in decision-making is a healthy choice.

During his seminary years, Christopher spent his summers working in programs that were relevant to his interests and vocation. One summer he went to another seminary with a Cuban-American professor taught liberation theology from the perspective of the South American experience and how it could apply to churches in North America. Another summer, Christopher served as a pastoral intern in an Asheville, North Carolina in a church, which ministered to homeless people. During that summer, Christopher lived in a retirement community and became interested in eldercare and the pastoral needs of the elderly.

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Snellville, Georgia, is Christopher's sponsoring parish. He served three years at St. Matthew's as a seminary intern and following ordination to the transitional diaconate. Christopher's responsibilities there included Eucharistic and pastoral visits to parishioners who were homebound, in hospitals, nursing homes, and receiving hospice care; preaching; creating and teaching religious education courses; participation in liturgies; involvement with parish outreach (including Habitat for Humanity projects); training and coordinating the parish's Eucharistic visitors; and participation in the vestry, religious education, and finance committee meetings.

Who have been Christopher's mentors along the way? One was an Episcopal priest in a congregation in Georgia who retired in 2013 after serving 40 years as a priest. From this mentor Christopher learned about the importance of developing strong lay leadership and the gift of pastoral ministry: to go when and where pastoral care is needed, even if it is the Emergency Room.

Christopher was familiar with Ithaca from visiting a friend up here in years past. In addition to his work as a Deacon at St. John's, Christopher also is a chaplain at Cayuga Medical Center, serving with 2 other chaplains. As a hospital chaplain, Christopher provides emotional and spiritual support to patients, their families and loved ones and he participates in ethical consultations with medical staff (much of which relates to end of life support). He also offers spiritual support to hospital staff and support to patients. Because of the nature of his work, Christopher carries a pager and often is called to the Emergency Room or to Intensive Care in the middle of the night.

I asked Christopher how he spends his free time here in Ithaca. He has been enjoying hiking 2-3 times a week (often in the state parks) and is looking forward to cross country skiing after the snow falls. Being out in natural areas, as well as his daily spiritual practice, is what sustains him. Christopher is developing local friendships and, among the local clergy, he is a member of the Episcopal clergy group, as well as an interfaith clergy group, which meets monthly.

Christopher has received the wonderful news that his ordination is on track. He will be ordained on December 21st, The Feast of St. Thomas, at the Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta. After his ordination, Christopher will preside over his first liturgy as a priest at his sponsoring parish, St. Matthew's.

After that? Well, Christopher would like to put down roots in the Ithaca community: to continue to serve half of his time as a chaplain at the hospital and the remaining half of his time as a parish priest within this diocese. We have been so lucky to have Christopher spent his diaconate with us at St. John's. We can only hope (and pray!) that Christopher will remain in the Ithaca area, continuing to serve God by delivering pastoral care at our hospital and serving as a priest with a nearby congregation.

-- Submitted by Susie Backstrom

ANNUAL HARVEST SUPPER
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD
6 P.M.
SIGN UP SHEET IN THE PARISH HALL
COME,
JOIN US FOR FOOD AND FELLOWSHIP!

Christopher James Szarke
Catherine Colquitt Zappa

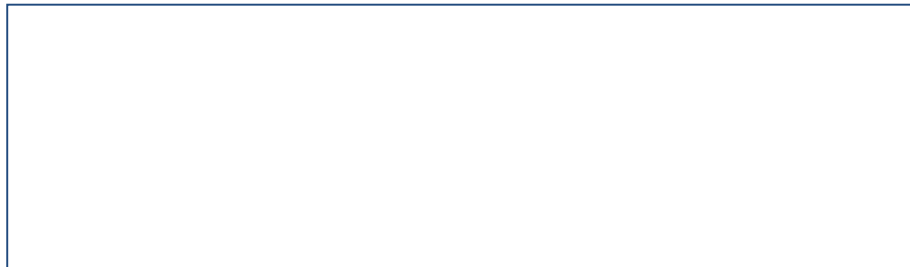
To the Sacred Order of Priests
In Christ's One Holy Catholic
and Apostolic Church

On the Feast of Saint Thomas, the Twenty- first
day of December, two-thousand and thirteen,
at ten o'clock in the morning

Cathedral of St. Philip
2744 Peachtree Road, NW
Atlanta, GA 30305

Your prayers and presence are requested.

Anyone wishing to make a monetary contribution in honor of Christopher's ordination to the priesthood may do so by sending a donation to Sarah Richtmyer at the parish office. Please be sure to mark any gifts intended for Deacon Christopher. All donations will be given to Christopher to assist him in purchasing clerical supplies and vestments.



PASTORAL CARE

Your Pastoral Care Committee has been very active. This year committee members have:

- *sent cards/called/visited shut-ins and parishioners who experienced a hospital stay and recuperated at home;
- *increased the number of members prepared to bring the Sunday Eucharist to parishioners who are at home, in a nursing home or hospital;
- * prepared and delivered meals as needed;
- * provided rides to church and delivered flowers after Sunday services;
- * provided receptions for families after funerals.

We can always use more volunteers. If you are interested in helping with these opportunities....and others please call 607-257-0002 or the Parish Office.

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

The music department is off to a great start this fall; everyone is working hard and having fun, and their contribution to Sunday worship has been wonderful. The children's choir has happily welcomed Charlotte Hoekenga to their ranks, and she's a wonderful addition to the group. We're working hard on improved vocal technique this fall, and I'm already hearing a difference in their sound. It's going to be a great year with them. If you have a child in elementary school with an unchanged voice [usually through fifth grade], bring them to rehearsals on Thursdays at 4:30 in the Choir Room. If you need a ride for your child, contact Nancy for options.

The youth choir is an amazing group, dedicated to doing their very best while having fun. There's a terrific bond between these young people, and it's wonderful to share even a small part of their lives. It's important, particularly during middle school and high school, for children to find a niche with friends and positive support. The youth choir is that place for these young people, and they're always willing to welcome new members to their niche. If you have a middle- or high-school-aged child who likes to sing, bring them to rehearsal at 5:30 on Thursdays in the Choir Room.

The adult choir is pleased to have Silas Fong and Christy Chu with them this year. Their voices, and their contagious happy enthusiasm, are wonderful additions to our group. While the choir has always been good, their sound is exceptionally wonderful this year. If you are an adult who likes to sing, join us at 7:15 on Thursdays in the Choir Room.

The bell choir has also settled in very nicely this year. This specific group of people has been together for over a year now, and their ringing styles blend together beautifully. If you'd like to join them, come into the balcony at 6:45 on Wednesdays.

The adult choir will be singing at our Thanksgiving service at 10:30 on Thanksgiving Day. They will also be presenting *Sacred Cantata No. 140: Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* by Johann Sebastian Bach. This work was composed in 1731, during Bach's later years in Leipzig. Unlike many of Bach's sacred works of this era – including the *Christmas Oratorio* and *the B minor Mass* – *Grove's Dictionary* states that this cantata was an entirely new composition. It was the custom in the 2 large Lutheran churches of Leipzig to present a cantata every Sunday after the Gospel and before the sermon. (Services routinely lasted 3 hours, and the cantata was to be completed in 30 minutes.) This work was originally presented on November 25th, the first Sunday of Advent. Often translated into English as *Sleepers wake*, this exuberant work tells of Jesus' birth and insists that the listener be ready to greet Him. I think it will be a wonderful prelude to our late Christmas Eve service. This year's concert will begin at 10 PM to provide 30 minutes of prayer and meditation before the 11:00 service begins.

We've just started work on our music for Advent and Christmas, so this is a great time to join a choir – either for the rest of the program year, or just through the holidays. You don't need experience, and you don't need to know how to read music – several of our members don't read music, and they are great. All you need is time and a willingness to work within a group towards a common musical goal. I'll take care of the rest. -- Nancy Radloff

COFFEE HOUR HOSTS NEEDED:

Do you enjoy Coffee hour after the 10:30 Service? Please utilize the sign up sheet on the bulletin board to volunteer to provide the refreshments. If you'd like to help out, maybe to coordinate volunteers to the sign up sheet, volunteer to help set up, or provide refreshments, sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board, or contact Tina Hallock to see what other ways the Fellowship Committee can use your assistance.

ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CLASS: LIVING THE QUESTIONS

I'm sure that you all have been wondering about our new Adult Christian Education class that meets on Sunday mornings! We have just completed our 8th week of classes where we are using a curriculum called *Living the Questions*. The format of the class incorporates a short reading, a DVD presentation, and discussion. The material presents a progressive lens on Christianity that invites one to re-vision Christianity and investigate how it remains relevant in the 21st century. As the creators of the series say, *Living the Questions* provides a "safe environment where people have permission to ask the questions they've always wanted to ask but have been afraid to voice for fear of being thought a heretic." Members of the class bring many perspectives, as you would expect here at St. John's, which ensure a rich and respectful discussion each week.

Here is a sample of sessions that we have covered thus far:

- Taking the Bible Seriously
- Thinking Theologically
- Lives of Jesus
- A Passion for Christ: Paul
- Out into the World: Challenges Facing Progressive Christians

A sample of topics to come include:

- The Prophetic Jesus
- Evil Suffering & A God of Love
- Social Justice: Realizing God's Vision
- Prayer: Intimacy with God
- Compassion: The Heart of Jesus' Ministry

Please know that each of these classes are independent of each other. That means one week is not building on the week(s) before and you can attend a class without feeling behind! There are a total of 21 sessions so there is ample time to join the discussion.

Please do consider joining us at 9:15 in the Chapman Room. I think you'll find it worth your time! Feel free to contact me for further information. Lisa Tatusko, 607-351-2890, Ltatusko@gmail.com

OUTREACH

St. John's Outreach Committee recently discussed Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) Ithaca MobilePack and believe that St. John's should continue to support this organization as plans for its 2014 September event are now underway. Historically, St. John's has supported FMSC due to the personal involvement with and the compelling leadership of our members, Sheri Johnson and Jim Henry and their children. The actual packing event is a very meaningful, personal experience that helps children in great need.

During the last four years the Ithaca MobilePack packed over 1 million meals for hungry children in Haiti, Guatemala and Nicaragua. The first two years, Trinity Lutheran Church hosted the Ithaca MobilePack. First Congregational Church hosted the pack for 2012 and 2013. During 3 days this September, 1400 Ithaca volunteers joined together to pack a total of 311,040 meals that will feed 852 children for an entire year. More than \$66,000. was raised locally over a year's time to purchase the food for those meals.

To prepare for the September 11-13, 2014, MobilePack, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints will lead our community in educational and fundraising events. Lloyd Weber is the chairperson for this essential work. St. John's members will hear more over the next few months about these coming activities. Please mark your calendars for one such event you don't want to miss -- a Dinner Theatre, April 25 & 26, 2014, at the Latter Day Saints Church, 114 Burleigh Dr., Ithaca. The music is straight out of the 1950s, with 4 very talented singers, The Taffetas.

For further information, please email: ldsithaca.service@gmail.com, or ithacamobilepack@gmail.com.

EPISCOPAL PEACE FELLOWSHIP: AN OFFERING OF LETTERS

An Offering of Letters was conducted by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship (EPF) on Sunday, October 27. St. John's parishioners were invited to sign letters to our New York Senators Schumer and Gillibrand and to our House Representative Reed in support of funding government programs that aid people struggling to feed themselves and their families. The Episcopal Peace Fellowship thanks the people of St. John's for your enthusiastic response to our invitation to sign letters. Over one hundred letters were signed. After the signing, Father Towers offered a prayer and blessed the letters. We are grateful and heartened by your eagerness to participate in this activity.

The EPF, would like to bring another issue to the attention of our parishioners. In the last few years, we have been exploring issues about prisons and have come to realize that the most forgotten of us, prison inmates, are in need of our thoughts, prayers, and action. We are especially concerned about the use of solitary confinement, known as "extreme isolation" by the New York State Department of Corrections. Prisoners are confined to windowless six foot by 10 foot cells for 23 to 24 hours a day. They receive meals through a slot in the cell door. They may recreate for one hour a day in a small cage, no larger than their cell, enclosed by concrete walls or metal grating. They receive no educational, vocational, or rehabilitative programming, and no transitional services to help them prepare for their return to society. Sometimes they are even released from solitary confinement directly to the streets. Two facilities in New York State, including one at Southport, just one hour south of Ithaca, are dedicated to this type of confinement. Some prisoners are confined to these "Special Housing Units" (SHU) for minor, non-violent infractions of prison rules and are deprived of human contact and mental/physical stimulation for months or years. The result is a variety of psychological and physiological symptoms including social withdrawal, anxiety, panic attacks, irrational anger and rage, loss of impulse control, paranoia, hypersensitivity to external stimuli, severe and chronic depression, illusions, and hallucinations.

Beginning in the 1970s, the penal culture in the United States began to shift from rehabilitation to punishment. We believe in the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit and that we must act to advocate for those whose voices are silenced in this system of punishment. We invite parishioners to join us in an offering of letters to our New York State representatives to examine the use of extreme isolation as a method for controlling the prison population. We believe that in the 21st century, we need a different approach to incarceration. We hope that you will join us in early December to an offering of letters to our state representatives about this issue. --Submitted by Nancy Siemon

FROM THE DIOCESE: A key ministry of The Episcopal Diocese of Central New York is the support of Mission of Miracles: Helping Salvadorans in need through Education, Medicine and Compassion. Each year, volunteers from the diocese travel to El Salvador bringing their medical and educational expertise to support the Salvadorans. The next scheduled trip is February 8 thru 16, 2014. In anticipation of this trip, the diocese is requesting donations of needed supplies. The current list includes:

- Toothpaste and toothbrushes
- Children's Liquid Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Nasal saline spray
- Anti-fungal cream
- Anti-itch cream
- Muscle Rub

Items donated by November 10 will be brought to the Mission of Miracles table during diocesan convention. (Many of these items can be purchased at a dollar store.)

For more information on Mission of Miracles, you can visit these two websites:

<http://cnyepiscopal.org/MissionofMiracles.aspx>

<http://missionofmiracles.org/>

Please consider supporting this ministry. ---Lisa Tatusko

ACOLYTES



Connor Fleming-Larratt



L-R Bolton O'Meehan, Dylan Murray, Karen Comisi, Clarissa Wyak, Brianna Wyak

The acolyte crew at St John's is welcoming new members. Our newest members are Dylan Murray, Cassady Richardson and Connor Fleming-Larratt. Anyone interested in joining the acolyte crew is welcome to contact Karen Comisi at 379-6202 or karen@jcomisi.com. Training takes approximately an hour, and I try my best to accommodate busy schedules.

On December 21st the acolytes will meet in the parish hall at noon to share lunch together. After lunch we will rehearse for the Christmas Eve service. Rehearsal will begin at 12:30 and will be approximately an hour. All current and previous acolytes are welcome to join us Christmas Eve, the only requirement is to attend the rehearsal. (if you would like to join us for lunch please let Karen know you will be there so there is enough pizza!) -- Submitted by Karen Comisi



Cassady Richardson, Clarissa Wyak