

The Bell Tower

The Church of the Holy Innocents Newsletter

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FROM THE RECTOR

The Rev. Donald Lowery



A Hope and a Future

The Episcopal Church is facing the greatest crisis since the period immediately after the American Revolution. During that time, what had been The Church of England in British North America fell into rapid decline. Members abandoned the church in droves while those who were loyalists fled the country. Much energy was spent by key leaders, especially in Maryland and Pennsylvania, reorganizing the ruins of the colonial Church of England into the Episcopal Church. Then the Episcopal Church seemed to go to sleep and drift along, losing members year by year, until revival began in the 1820's. As example of how bad things really were, here is a little story from the founding era of my Seminary, Virginia Theological Seminary,

which is now the largest and most heavily endowed seminary of the Episcopal Church. Francis Scott Key, the author of the words of our National Anthem, was a devout Episcopalian and raised much of the money used to found The Seminary. He approached his fellow Episcopalian, John Marshall, who was the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and asked for a donation for this worthy project. Chief Justice Marshall refused to give. His Reason? He feared that the Episcopal Church had no future and would not survive and that it was therefore wrong to encourage young men to pursue a profession at which they would not be able to make a living.

The Episcopal Church reached its peak membership of about 3.5 million members in 1968. After that, our denomination along with all the mainline churches entered what has been a long period mostly dominated by gradual decline. During the decade of the 1990's the Episcopal Church entered a period of modest growth, but for reasons that are not entirely clear, that growth ceased in 2002, a year before the controversies about sexuality erupted into hot flames after General Convention 2003.

The situation in which the Episcopal Church finds itself looks like this. As of 2009, the most recent year for which I can retrieve statistics, the Episcopal Church has about 2,006,343 members in about 6,895 congregations nationwide. Church growth experts, both within and without the Episcopal Church feel that Average Sunday Attendance (hereafter referred to as ASA) is a more valuable number, and in 2009 the ASA was 682,963. That

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number was a reduction by 19% over the previous 10 years. These numbers are an ominous sign that the Episcopal Church faces a difficult future.

These same church growth experts argue about the next number as it relates to generating the income needed to operate a congregation. Some feel it takes an ASA of about 125 to generate enough pledge income to operate a church with a full time pastor. Others feel it takes between 150 to 200 members. They also acknowledge that Pentecostals and conservative Baptists can get by with fewer in church on Sunday because their members are actually willing to tithe, something many mainline Christians are loathe to do. As of 2009, 67% of Episcopal churches had an average Sunday attendance of 100 or less. The number of congregations with an ASA of 100 or less is growing. Again this is ominous as it indicates that a significant number of Episcopal Churches are rapidly heading to the place where they will no longer be able to generate enough income to pay a priest. Even worse, some may be declining to the point they simply will not survive. They will close, and the buildings will either be sold to other faith communities, converted to other uses, or saddest of all will be demolished as having no value to the community.

Where does Holy Innocents' stand in the numbers? Holy Innocents has a steady ASA of between 87 and 88 which number includes the Spanish Language service. In fact, if it were not for the Hispanics who faithfully worship here, our numbers would be in the mid to low 60's for ASA. We have held our own financially; in fact, our budget has grown substantially in the time I have been here because this congregation is unusual in its generosity to its church. However, several of our most generous donors have died in the past year and several more are in poor health. We may face a very real and severe financial crisis as soon as the 2012 pledge campaign.

The time has come for very serious decisions about Holy Innocents and its future as a congregation. The first decision relates to actual church

attendance. Please note upfront that I am NOT preaching against going on vacation – I plan to spend almost three weeks in Europe this fall, and I can't wait. It is a blessed thing to be able to get away, enjoy a change of scenery and relax some. However, every time a parishioner decides to skip church when in town and not prevented by illness is a vote against the survival of Holy Innocents as a full-time parish with a resident rector. The vestry has committed as of its July meeting to being more faithful in its attendance at public worship and other activities of the church so as to set the best leadership example possible. All of us, myself included, have committed to increasing the number of non-worship related fellowship events, so that people know each other better, feel a deeper connection to the church and so, we hope, feel a greater desire to attend worship on Sunday.



WELCOME TO WORSHIP

I have also made a commitment to review everything I can related to Sunday worship to make it as worthwhile a time as possible. I do not want people to “sleep in” on Sunday

morning because they feel that what is offered is not worth the trouble. Along with the other worship leaders of the parish, we are working to tighten up the time flow of the service, that is, to begin on time and keep worship to an hour to an hour and five minutes when we are using Rite II and to an hour and five to an hour and ten minutes during Lent when Rite I is the main service. The venerable language of Rite One simply takes me longer to pray. However, while the 8:00 service will remain Rite One, I am open to making the 10:30 service always Rite II, even in Lent, if that will keep it to a length people find manageable. On Sundays when hand bells play or the children sing, we will omit a lesson if needed to keep the time within reasonable limits. We are also going to begin singing the communion hymn while the last communicants are at the rail so that we are ready to say the concluding prayers as soon as the silver has been ritually cleansed.

The next commitment I ask of the congregation is to be aware of friends, neighbors and new comers to the community who do not seem to go to church. Please invite and then bring them to church with you. The Episcopal Liturgy can be confusing to someone from a different background. Invite friends old or new, bring them with you to church, sit with them and help them with the prayer book and hymnal. I have no choice about being liturgical and using the Book of Common Prayer because I am a priest in the Episcopal Church. Even more so, I don't want a choice that is non-liturgical and non-prayer book because I love our liturgy. However, I am also a convert to the Episcopal Church and I know what it is like to be completely lost in the service. Somebody helped me so please extend the same kindness to the newcomer in our midst.

This commitment is one that I find both hard to ask, and yet curiously enough, easy as well. Remember your church in your financial decisions. I find that hard to ask, because I honestly hate asking people for money. I find it easy to ask, because I have never served a congregation as generous as Holy Innocents. When asked to pledge, please

do so as generously as you are able. When you plan for the future, remember the church in your will or amongst your insurance beneficiaries. I have done both, so that I can help insure that Holy Innocents has a secure financial future.

I make another personal commitment. I am committed to continue to learn and implement strategies to make our church as inviting as possible. I will admit honestly that I have been very discouraged of late. It seems nothing we do moves Holy Innocents off that ASA heartbeat of 87/88. Yet, in the midst of my worry, an opportunity literally fell in my lap. A group of Episcopal Clergy, mostly in Western North Carolina and part of Georgia, are coming together to form what they call The New Apostolic Movement with a teaching arm called The Epiphany Institute. They are committed to finding ways to reverse the decline in our denomination. One of the leaders, The Rev. Randy Ferebee, contacted me in July, introduced me to the group and asked if I would be interested. I am committed to joining this group and will go away August 1- 3 to meet with Randy and begin the work of planning new strategies for growing Holy Innocents. In 2012 I will be taking the Sabbatical I have earned by the years of service I have completed at Holy Innocents. At least part of the time will be spent learning to revitalize our worship in ways that are both faithful to the prayer book and also, we hope, more inviting to younger folks and newcomers.

Do I believe Holy Innocents is going to survive the demographic debacle facing the Episcopal Church? Yes, I do. However, that survival is going to take hard work by priests and deacons, by vestries and by the membership at large. The clergy and vestry of Holy Innocents are committed to this hard work. Are you? When you pray for Holy Innocents, I offer you a verse to meditate upon, and a prayer for the Renewal of the Church from the Book of Common Prayer:

I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a

hope and a future. Jeremiah 29: 11 New International Version

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light; look favorably on your whole church, that wonderful and sacred mystery. By the effectual working of your providence carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation. Let the whole world see and know that things which had grown old are being made new, that things which were cast down are being raised up, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen †



Father Donald Lowery

The Healing Service will be delayed by one week to August 10 so that I can attend a church growth related meeting. We will meet at the usual time, 7:00 p.m. in the parlor of the Hughes House. †

PARISH NEWS...



Youth Group

Father Donald Lowery



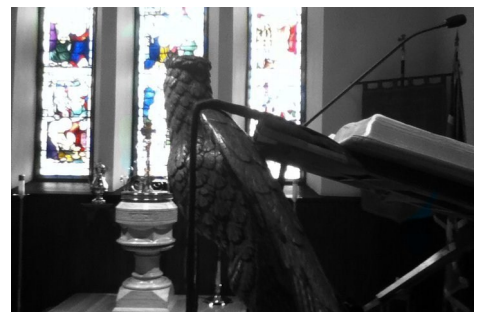
The Youth Group will meet on all Sundays in August at 4:45 in the Hughes House. There may be changes in the time if we decide to go to the movies. That notice will come by e-mail. †

★

ECW & Tabitha Guild

Both groups will resume meetings in September. Details will be in September newsletter.

★



Holy Innocents' Eagle~Font~Window
Photo by J. David Belcher



The Deacon's Bench

By the Rev. Harrel Johnson

Summer is almost over and Fall is just around the corner. We won't be able to use summer vacation as an excuse much longer for not being fully involved and committed to the real purpose of our existence as the Church of Holy Innocents in Henderson NC.

If you have not yet figured it out, Deacons are not just another actor in the pageantry of our Sunday morning worship. Being a Deacon is about being a servant. God didn't save us to be a sensation. God saved us to be servants. Deacons also are supposed to lead others to be servants. . We are all called to be servants to others without expectation of secular rewards.

So how do we become better servants?

One way is by making sure that the motivation for our service is love. Eighteenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Secker said, "God has three sorts of servants in the world: some are slaves, and serve him from fear; others are hirelings, and serve for wages; and the last are sons and [daughters], who serve because they love."

Another way to become better servants is by being mindful of who it is that calls us to serve. We should remember that in all things we serve God and God alone. By becoming more aware of God's presence in everyday life, we can strive to understand that all that we do is somehow of God. With this approach, even the most ordinary task that might not

usually be associated with our spiritual lives might be viewed as service.

A third way is to become better servants by ensuring that our church is a servant church that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus to every creature.

Is our congregation a servant church? Does it have a clear understanding that it exist in service to Jesus? Do all of our actions stem from Jesus' call to proclaim the gospel? Do our worship services, community outreach, and activities all have the possibility to transform those that we touch? If not, then it is time to begin talk about changing our focus on Christ divine purpose because, after all, the mission of the church is the mission of Jesus Christ servant to all. †



Note from the Editor...

**September
NewsLetter
DEADLINE**

**Newsletter items are due:
-August 20th-**

Please submit any newsletter items either to the church office or e-mail them to MJNELSON@nc.rr.com

You may download the church newsletter from our church website at: www.churchoftheholyinnocents.org

Thanks for your support!

August 2011 Schedule of Events

Choir Practice Schedule

All Choirs will resume practice in September.

DAILY MORNING PRAYER

Monday — Thursday (weekly)

7:30 AM, Hughes House

Adult Learning Group and youth will meet together for 8 weeks beginning August 14. (See page 7 for details)

Wednesday – August 10

7:00 PM, Healing Service

Hughes House

Sunday – August 7

8:00 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite I

10:30 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite II

12:30 PM, La Misa Servicio –
Santa Eucharistia

Sunday – August 14

8:00 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite I

9:30 AM, Adult/Youth Class

10:30 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite II

12:30 PM, La Misa Servicio –
Santa Eucharistia

Sunday – August 21

8:00 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite I

9:30 AM, Adult/Youth Class

10:30 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite II

12:30 PM, La Misa Servicio –
Santa Eucharistia

Sunday – August 28

8:00 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite I

9:30 AM, Adult/Youth Class

10:30 AM, Holy Eucharist – Rite II

12:30 PM, La Misa Servicio –
Santa Eucharistia

All services are conducted in the Church, unless otherwise noted.



Back to School

HERO Sandwich

To celebrate the Bible's many heroes, make this sandwich for a picnic.

What you need:

- An adult to help
- Shredded lettuce
- Olive oil and vinegar
- Seasonings (salt, pepper, oregano)
- Italian crusty bread (six inches per person)
- Mayonnaise
- Sliced meat
- Sliced cheese
- Sliced tomato
- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Toothpicks
- Tape



What you do:

1. Drizzle shredded lettuce with oil and vinegar; sprinkle with seasonings.
2. Cut bread in half lengthwise and spread mayo on both halves.
3. On bottom half, layer meats, cheese, tomato and lettuce.
4. Top with other half of bread. Cut in half.
5. Cut paper into small triangles. Write your favorite Bible heroes' names on them.
6. Tape the triangles to toothpicks to make pennants. Stick in sandwich halves. Enjoy!



action-packed faith

The greatest "super men" who ever lived put their faith into action.

Directions: Match each Bible character to the correct description.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Noah | 1. This disciple wrote a gospel, recounting many events in Jesus' life. |
| Stephen | 2. This man responded to God's commands, including the order to move. God made many promises to this man and his descendants. |
| Abraham | 3. This man was eager to rebuild Jerusalem. He helped the people protect their city, reminding them that God was on their side. |
| Luke | 4. This man, who became king of Judah at a young age, obeyed God's laws and helped people repent. |
| Nehemiah | 5. God saved this honest, hard-working man from destruction by having him build a place of safety for his family and every kind of creature. |
| Josiah | 6. This man stood by God's Word, showing strength of character even when faced with persecution and death. |

On the lines below, write your name and describe how you're a "hero" for God. What are some ways you put your faith into action?

Name: _____

Answers: Noah 5, Stephen 6, Abraham 2, Luke 1, Nehemiah 3, Josiah 4.

Birthdays

Barbara Collins.....	8/02
Marsha Nelson.....	8/04
Libby Hartness.....	8/04
Stephanie Rogers.....	8/08
Biz Borden.....	8/09
John Gwynn.....	8/09
Carolyn Summers.....	8/13
Matthew Williamson.....	8/15
Emma Johns.....	8/15
Harrel Johnson.....	8/17
Martha Zollicoffer.....	8/18
Sam Long.....	8/21
Anora Rainey.....	8/23
Mary Beth Seitzer.....	8/25
Shirley Young.....	8/26
Anderson Stark.....	8/28
Anne Herford.....	8/30
Maurice Floyd.....	8/30
Chris Palamar.....	8/31



Remember In Your Prayers

Pray for Healing and Comfort:

Frances Finney, Jane Zollicoffer, Joyce Stevenson, Edgar Hilliard, Wesley Young, Bill Long, Kayden Whisler, Robert Duke, Virginia Frank, & Carol Theodorou.



Anniversaries

Parkie & Ashley Stewardson.....	8/01
Ginger & John Dow.....	8/07
Anne & Lou Almand.....	8/09
Marcia & Scott Hartness.....	8/10
Barbara & Frank Madigan.....	8/16
Barbara & Chip Hight.....	8/18
Anora & Mike Rainey.....	8/23
Barbara & Harry Collins.....	8/24
Ann & Mike Behar.....	8/24
Ivey & Tom Betts.....	8/28

Calendar of the Church Year

Special Dates

According to the Episcopal Church

- The Transfiguration
August 6, 2011
- Saint Mary the Virgin
August 15, 2011
- Saint Bartholomew-Apostle
August 24, 2011

AUGUST UNIFIED SERVING SCHEDULE

Aug.	Acolytes	Crucifer	Lay Reader / Chalice Bearer	Ushers	Altar Guild	Lemonade/ Coffee Hour
7	Uriah Ford Lehman Ford	Kathryn Blackburn	8:00am—Chip Hight 10:30am—Nancy Whitt	Alton Stainback Ashley Stewardson	Anora Rainey	Lemonade on the Lawn
14	Mason Stewardson	Ric Davis	8:00am—Lucy Gray 10:30am—Richard Davis	Alton Stainback Ashley Stewardson	Anora Rainey	Lemonade on the Lawn
21	Parkins Davis	Garrett Powell	8:00am—Steve Flannagan 10:30am—Tommy Roberson	Alton Stainback Ashley Stewardson	Shirley Young	Lemonade on the Lawn
28	Sam Long	Alexis VanVenrooy	8:00am—Hut Wester 10:30am—Nick Long	Alton Stainback Ashley Stewardson	Shirley Young	Lemonade on the Lawn
Submitted by: Lucy Gray						

SPOT-LIGHT ON...



Our Christian formation programs will begin again on Sunday, August 14. Right out of the gate, we will begin by spending eight weeks working through the Psalms together in an intergenerational class during the traditional “Adult Forum” hour. The first four-week section focuses on creation and God’s works in the psalms. Then, beginning on September 11, we will conclude with another four-week section of lessons focusing on our own embodied relationship to God and creation as well as the psalmists’ creative application of body imagery to God in another set of psalms. The focus on the themes of our embodied relation to God and God to us through the creation corresponds to a resolution passed at the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Resolution C034: Creation Cycle of the Pentecost Season was passed “for the purpose of affirming the sacredness of God’s creation, of spreading hope about God’s reconciling work in creation and an understanding of environmental stewardship and ecological justice.” Thus, the whole course is centered on the creation cycle as envisioned by the General Convention resolution – focusing on creation in general in the first half and our own embodied place in creation in the second.



**Note that on October 9, the week following the conclusion of the Psalms class on October 2, is the Homecoming service at Old St. John’s – thus there will be no formation hour that week.

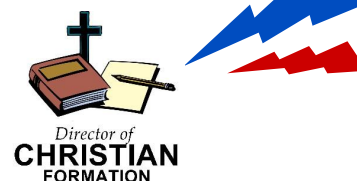
Then, on October 16, we will begin a new series of adult classes entitled, “Faith, dignity, and integrity: Conversations about end-of-life issues.” This is a course written by the diocesan School of Ministry team and is an excellent resource for thinking through and attending to the deep theological and practical issues involved in these difficult matters. As the lesson plan puts it, “The intent of this study is to encourage reflection about our faith as it pertains to the end of life on earth; and within that framework of faith, to reflect upon medical and legal realities as they may influence our own wishes when faced with end-of-life decisions. An outcome of this study may be to reaffirm decisions previously made, or to make decisions and act upon them especially in terms of advance directives regarding health care.” In many ways, then, this class continues the themes begun in the Psalms class of our embodied relation to God within our lives here on earth by reflecting on the end of our lives in death. This class will meet for six weeks, ending on November 20, Christ the King Sunday.

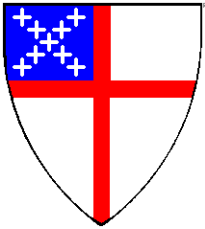
On the Second Sunday of Advent, December 4, as we transition in our lectionary cycle to Year B, we also move into a focus in the Gospel readings on the Gospel according to Mark. We will thus begin another series of adult classes working through the Gospel of Mark called, “A reckless faith: Studies in the Gospel of Mark,” another diocesan School of Ministry course written by the Rev. Dr. Fred L. Horton, professor at Wake Forest Divinity School.

Please notice that, while the Psalms course will indeed be “intergenerational” – and thus not only are children and youth of all ages as well as adults welcome, but encouraged to come! – the remaining courses are all adult classes primarily. The children’s formation courses are, after October 2, more up in the air, so to speak. Here’s where you come in! I need volunteers who would be willing to help lead classes during the Adult Forum hour for any children who would like to attend. The Episcopal Church provides brief “Lesson Plans that Work” that include notes for the facilitator, whose task is mainly to engage the children with prayer, a brief retelling of the gospel in a story-mode, and one or two activities with closing prayer. They are relatively short and very simple. Ideally we would need two participants for every week to help with the classes: one to facilitate, and the other to be present and assist. If you are able and willing to help out with this important ministry – and youth group members, you’re invited to help as well! – then please contact either myself, Fr. Don, or our parish administrator, Barbara Hight with your name, contact info, and when you may be able to help out.

May the Peace of Christ be with you all!

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The Church of the Holy Innocents



**Whoever you are and regardless of your
status in life, we welcome you.
May you find the warmth of Christian love
at 'Holy Innocents.**