

Interim's Corner

Our Church Gathered

By Rev. Won-Jae Hur

Every three years, the Episcopal Church gathers at the General Convention as our governing and legislative body to pass legislation and celebrate our fellowship in Christ. The General Convention is a bicameral body comprising the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies. All bishops, active and retired, have a seat and vote in the House of Bishops. For the House of Deputies, each Episcopal diocese can elect 8 deputies (4 lay, 4 ordained).¹ Proposed resolutions are submitted to legislative committees. These committees hold hearings where deputies, alternates, and registered guests can speak on the proposed resolutions. Both Houses have to pass a resolution in order for it to be enacted.

At this year's General Convention Resolution D025, titled "Commitment and Witness to Anglican Communion," has drawn much attention. Referring to gay and lesbian persons, the resolution states that "the 76th General Convention affirm that God has called and may call such individuals to any ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church."² Although there are varying interpretations of and responses to this resolution, it is a clear affirmation of full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life and ministry of our church.

The dialogue in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion on human sexuality and the full inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals in the church, especially in ordained ministry, has been a very difficult one. It has been too slow for many, while it has proceeded too quickly for others. The pain and trials of living into our unity as the Episcopal Church and with the wider Anglican Communion have demonstrated the high demands of living in community. Yet we as one body have taken on these demands without wavering, taking the stand we believe to be just while remaining at the table, speaking the truth in love to each other.

¹ Deputies do not represent their dioceses in their votes. They vote according to their own conscience for the building up of the church. For more information, go to www.cuac.org/gc2009.htm

² All resolutions are available on the internet: www.gc2009.org/viewlegislation

The Episcopal Church's steps toward full inclusion and the arduous process of dialogue remind me of the peculiar exhortation in Colossians to "bear one another."

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:13-14)

The sense of the word "bear" is to endure or tolerate. The author seems to acknowledge that sometimes our patience with each other in community can stretch to its limits! As with Paul, the author understood that love in community at times requires hard work. The binding force in community in challenging times is greater love, which finds its most important expression in patience and forgiveness.

The Episcopal Church continues to strive for justice, as Christ commands us and as we promise to do in our baptismal covenant. Our search for justice, however, does not preclude continuing loving relationships with sisters and brothers who disagree with us. This path of love is more difficult because we do not simply disagree and go our separate ways. As trying as the process may be, the Episcopal Church is modeling one way to live into Christ's call to love while we address head-on one of the most divisive issues in the church. In this sense, the process is a unique witness to the world of how the Church seeks justice in love. We can all learn from this witness as we deepen our life in our respective communities.



A Letter to the Parish Vestry Decision on the CLC Building Project

Fellow St. James Parishioners,

We are writing to share with you the decision that your Vestry has made regarding the Community Learning Center building project. We have decided not to move forward with the building project, and to cease fundraising efforts for a new building.

We reached this decision after research, thoughtful contemplation, and earnest discussion, taking into deep consideration the congregation's views as expressed to us individually and at the Parish Semi-Annual Meeting.

These views included strong support for the mission and outreach the CLC provides, but also deep concern for the financial burden that a new building would impose on St. James parishioners, present and future. We feel, and this is reflected in many parishioners' views, that the logical course of action for St. James is to focus on our mission of outreach and expanding our membership—which can and will continue in our present facilities—and on our Rector search.

The programs of the Community Learning Center at St. James will continue. The CLC will continue to offer services, host meetings, and support outreach. The congregation

and Vestry have showed strong support for the mission of the CLC: serving unmet needs in the community, bringing people of all ages into St. James, and raising awareness of St. James in the community. This will continue uninterrupted.

Currently, the remaining Capital Campaign funds are in an account segregated from Church funds. A committee from the Vestry and the CLC Board will consult with the diocese and other experts on the appropriate use of the funds.

The Vestry extends warm thanks and congratulations to everyone who has participated in this process over the years, including the Needs Study Group, the Space Explorers, the Preschool, the California Counseling Institute, the Community Learning Center Board, program staff and volunteers, and the Capital Campaign workers. We honor and recognize your commitment and leadership in extending the reach of St. James in our community. St. James is blessed to have a congregation of loving, giving people dedicated to this community.

We will continue to keep you informed as this process continues.

Sincerely,

The Vestry of St. James
July 11, 2009

Editor's Note

The CLC Capital Campaign began with a voice vote at a Parish Meeting. The (then) Vestry had prepared a resolution and taken its own vote; then, because the resolution called for such an enormous new commitment to mission by the whole parish, it was brought back to a meeting of the whole parish to be ratified. A similar process had been followed several years before, when a Parish Meeting voted to ratify the St. James Resolution on Inclusivity. Such a fundamental statement about our congregation's vision of the Gospel, and of our relationship to the wider community, seemed to call for the whole congregation's approval.

At several stages of the Campaign over several years, resolutions of support and affirmation of next steps were presented by the Vestry at Parish Meetings, and voted on by all in attendance. Now comes this final, conclusive decision about the Campaign, made following a parish discussion but without a parish vote.

I'm reliably informed that such votes, if meant to be binding, are actually non-Canonical; that Episcopal polity, from Vestry to General Convention, is based on decision-making by elected representatives and not by congregations at large. In this case the Canons don't matter to me as much as they probably should. With great respect to the hard-working elected representatives on our Vestry: in this enormous, community-changing decision, I missed that community vote. I will miss the habit of such votes in the future, if our parish reverts to strict Canonical obedience. To me, those votes expressed something fundamental about St. James, our identity and our intentions, our commitment to finding God at work in process as well as in results.

I do not put these opinions forward to be contentious or divisive, and I hope I'm not abusing my editorial privilege. I offer them as observations on process and God's elusive presence in it, and as a prayer to God's Son Jesus (not a strict follower of Canons himself) to help all of us attend to one another with honesty, love, and wisdom, through all these difficult days.

-- Elizabeth Nelson

From Our Senior Warden

By Doreen Canton

Once again the Vestry has had to make a tough decision that affects the people of St. James. After much prayer and deliberation, the Vestry voted not to move forward with the building project and to cease fundraising efforts for the new building. We recognize that people's reactions to this decision are varied. Some may be feeling stunned, hurt, and a bit betrayed, while others may feel relief that a decision has been made and a new course identified. This decision was not entered into lightly but through a thoughtful and prayerful process of listening to many voices, examining the facts, and separating our emotional connections to the project from the business issues related to it.

St. James has a long history of openness and toleration of many ideas and opinions. It is now time for us to seriously practice what we say and be respectful of each other and our differing points of view. The grieving process has been well documented and most of you know the stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I do not offer them in any order, because individuals go through these stages differently; length of time and sequences vary and change, often with a return to a stage we thought we had worked our way through. What personal experience and the literature tell us is that faith and support will lead us to healing. Let us continue to love and support each other so we can come through with grace to be better instruments of God's love in this world.

Going forward, a subcommittee of the Vestry and the Community Learning Center will lead us through wrapping up the capital campaign and identifying our next steps. They will provide updates as they have concrete information to share.

Those who had the good fortune to attend church on July 12th heard Jane Weston preach on plumb lines and the beheading of John the Baptist—not easy topics!—and I think you will agree she did a great job. We will miss her excellent sermons and wish Jane and Hal all love and joy as they start the next phase of their life in Atlanta, Georgia. We hope they will come back and visit often.

Thank you to Helen Lantz and Elia Pochron for coordinating the party celebrating Carole Jan Lee; to Calder Coulsen for his amazing marinade and grill work; to Katie for putting up with her mother and letting Calder help; and to Herb and Nancy Chew, Taylor and Ryszard Pochron, and all the other helpers who made this a beautiful and sunny occasion.

Michael Barlowe has met with the Rector Search Committee and this group is collecting information and getting established.

Lauralee Markus is creating wonderful ideas and energy to revitalize the annual picnic when we honor our Saint, so thank you Lauralee.

Katie Canton is filling in for Erazm Pochron as he takes a well deserved holiday with his family.

Please continue to contact me when you have questions or concerns.



Capital Fund Transition Committee Starts Work

By Bethany Baugh

The transitional committee, with representatives from the Vestry and the CLC Board, has met several times since being formed in mid-July. Its members are Bethany Baugh, Carla Cooper, Claudia Lewis, Ebe Metcalf, Anne Purcell, and Judy Spain.

We've taken the following steps in the transition out of the Building Campaign:

- Through initial conversations with lawyers and fundraising professionals, we have made significant progress in understanding the legal and ethical options for allocating the remaining capital campaign funds.
- A selection of thoughtful options has been drafted that honors the original vision of the campaign and reflects the intent of our donors.
- As part of the plan for communicating with donors, we have sent an initial letter to all donors informing them of the Vestry's decision. Further communication is being planned.

Throughout this important process, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us via email at campaigninfo@clcstjames.org or leave a message at 415-751-1199. Please leave us information about how to reach you, and one of us will contact you.

Rector Search Committee Update

By Jan Vennari and Ann Rieger-Matthews, Co-Chairs

The Rector Search Committee is well under way in planning and organizing itself for the work ahead. The Committee met with the Reverend Canon Michael Barlowe on June 28 for an invaluable Diocesan overview of the search process, with strategic and tactical recommendations on how to organize ourselves, what to do first, and how the process will proceed.

The Committee will be meeting approximately every two weeks through December. Our summer and fall focus will be to prepare the Parish Profile, a written document that describes St. James for potential rector candidates. To write a really good Profile we need input from everyone in the parish as part of this "self-study." We will be organizing town-hall meetings and small group discussions throughout September, so watch for those dates.



Carole Jan Says "Thank You"

Dear Friends,

My special day at St. James was just wonderful! It was a treat to be crowned Queen For A Day, complete with an orchid lei and a beautiful creative "throne!"

The perfect weather was matched only by the food—lovingly prepared by all the members and served by the barbecue crew.

My family joins me in sending thanks for all the sentiments and words of appreciation that were expressed. Even though we have moved to Oakland, it isn't that far away, and I hope to be active for a little while longer among my St. James family and friends.

With sincere thanks,
Carole Jan Lee

The Community Learning Center at St. James
presents the Third Annual

"Going Baroque" Concert

Sunday August 30, 4:30 p.m.
at St. James Church



Bach

"Sonata in C Minor for Violin and Piano"
"Fugue in G Minor"

Albinoni

"Adagio for Organ and Violin"

Telemann

"Concerto in G for Four Violins"

Performers:

Heidi Wilcox (*violin*) Ed Wilcox (*violin*)

Aki Amai (*piano*) Tomoko Goto (*piano*)

Farley Pearce (*cello, viola da gamba*)

Fred Goff (*baritone*)

Maureen Newlin (*soprano*)

and the SF-STEP* Wire Choir

* San Francisco Suzuki Talent Education Program

Admission is free –
donations gratefully accepted!

Proceeds benefit

the Community Learning Center at St. James.



Rev. Merry Moves On to New Missions

Dear CLC Board and ASPIRE Team,

As you may know, I was ordained to the priesthood in June. The Diocese has now assigned me as Interim Priest at Christ Church Sei Ko Kai in San Francisco, and as Area Missioner for the North of Market region. These are demanding assignments and will require my full attention.

It is with great regret that I must announce my resignation as Director of the ASPIRE Summer School and After School programs. My three years with the CLC have been fulfilling and rewarding. I've met and worked with so many wonderful people, including the Board, the ASPIRE staff, the parents and the children. Most rewarding of all, I saw many young souls grow and blossom under the care of our wonderful volunteers. It is with mixed feelings that I leave ASPIRE: with optimism and excitement for the future, and with a deep sense of loss for the wonderful people I've worked with.

I want to take this opportunity to thank two groups, from the bottom of my heart. First, there are our volunteers and MYEEP teens who gave so selflessly to the children and the program. Under their tutelage, I watched the children improve their study habits, work ethic, sense of social responsibility, and interpersonal skills. But most important, and often without a word, our staff taught them that they are loved, cared for, and worthy of respect. I believe that lesson alone will be a wind at their backs that carries them through their lives. Volunteers, thank you, thank you, and thank you. None of this would have happened without you.

Second, I want to thank the CLC Board for your contribution to the children of our community, and for the opportunity you gave me to lead the ASPIRE program. I learned so much and had so many great experiences. Your trust and appreciation was unwavering, both through the good times and the difficult times. When I needed a helping hand, you were there. I thank you also on behalf of my son Benjamin: the income I earned in the ASPIRE program made it possible for him to go to medical school.

Finally, I want to thank *all* of you for the gift you gave to our children. Their experience in the ASPIRE program will live in their hearts forever. I can assure you, every single one of these children gained something valuable from our program. For some of them the experience was life-changing, and for some of their parents as well. I am proud to have worked with each and every one of you. I will remember you always.

I invite you to join me any Sunday at my new ministry at Christ Church Sei Ko Kai, at 2140 Pierce Street (cross-street is Clay). Services are held at 10:00 a.m., and it would be my honor to have you present.

God bless,

Reverend Merry Chan Ong
July 8, 2009



Time and Talent: Kathy Henry

By Barbara Burgess

Most Sundays you won't see Kathy Henry in church until the children come up for Communion. Kathy is busy, along with Elia Pochron and Carla Cooper, helping to coordinate the Children's Ministry. "I have children," Kathy explains. "I'm interested in the curriculum and activities." In fact, one her most memorable moments at Saint James occurred while working with the Children's Ministry. "I enjoy seeing the kids working together on Elia's wonderful projects," she told me. "After Easter, we decided to keep the cross, which we decorate with fresh flowers on Easter Sunday, out and available for the kids during the whole Easter season. They created beautiful flowers (out of coffee filters!) and decorated the cross with paper flowers, butterflies, and a caterpillar, and we enjoyed this 'resurrection cross' until Pentecost."

When Kathy began attending Saint James around 1993, she originally attended the 8:00 a.m. Eucharist and post-service breakfast and discussion. "I enjoyed the community,

the rectors (Peter and Mary Moore, it was before they were co-rectors), and liked that people genuinely enjoyed discussing and debating issues of faith," she says. "It's a warm and loving community of people who are serious and thoughtful about their faith."

Kathy first joined the Episcopal Church in the 1990s and says, "I was pulled into a number of diocesan activities and didn't have a lot of time for parish activities." Currently Kathy serves on the St. James Vestry, as well working on Children's Ministry. She has also been a delegate to Diocesan Convention for many years, has served on a wide variety of Diocesan boards and committees, and was heavily involved in the search for a new Bishop. It is this experience that she hopes to bring to her relatively new position as a Vestry member and the "fruitful search for a new rector." Kathy says she enjoys working with a wide variety of people and getting to know them better, creating a stronger bond of community.

One challenge Kathy faces as a member of the Vestry is helping to guide the parish through this time of transition. "Transition times are always challenging, and the sense of the unknown makes it difficult sometimes to move forward." But, she says, "through working together, we learn more about each other and how to live together in this community of faith."



Aspirations

By Jon Owens

It seems as if it has been forever since I have written a column for a newsletter. I use to do column writing many years ago, back in my college days when I worked for a newspaper. After that it was just an article here or there for a church newsletter ... until—you guessed it—the Vocations Committee got hold of me. I find it quite an honor to write to all my brothers and sisters at St. James.

Why the title "Aspirations," you might ask? Well, in the Church, when someone begins the process of preparing for ordination they are called an aspirant, "one who aspires to." In many ways we all have aspirations, or what we may call goals or ideals, that we are trying to achieve.

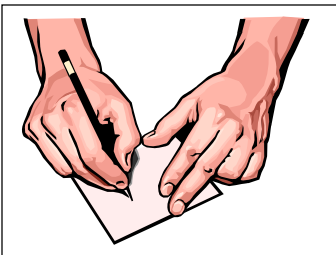
Recently I traveled to Europe with the choir of Notre Dame des Victoires Church—twelve choir members plus Giselle Bosc, who tagged along for the fun. We sang in four churches in Paris. It was my first visit to the European continent, and I was immediately enchanted by the historical buildings. It gave me a different sense of what "old" was. One of the churches we sang in was St. Julien, which is the oldest church in Paris. Here we were, singing this 15th-century polyphonic music, and I could not help but think what it must have been like to sing in these churches back during the time when chant and polyphony were the norms in the Church.

For me, connecting to the history of the Church is comforting. The older music takes me to another plane of existence in my prayer life. Performing the ancient rites of the Church allows me to feel as if I am connecting to those saints who have gone before us. What I find so special about participating in the Eucharist is the connection not only to the people in the pews around us, but to the world past and present.

Letters to the Journal

Got a thought about something
you've read in the Journal?

Want to share it with the St. James community?



Drop the editor a note,
and you could be in print next month!

Send your letter by August 15th to:
elizabethn@jfc.org

or to: Elizabeth Nelson – LTJ
578 26th Avenue #6,
San Francisco, CA 94121
(or hand it to me at church on Sunday)

While in Paris we also performed in three other churches, named Trinité, St. Leon, and the Basilique Notre Dame des Victoires. At the Basilica it was particularly interesting to hear the miracle story of “Our Lady of Victories.” The story goes that the Virgin Mary appeared and helped one of the former Kings of France to win a battle, and he dedicated the Basilica to her. Later during the French Revolution, when churches were getting destroyed, the Basilica and its statue of Mary remained untouched. Similarly, its “sister church” in San Francisco—the Catholic church of Notre Dame des Victoires—was damaged badly in the 1906 earthquake, but its statue of the Holy Mother remained undamaged and in place.

After touring the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, and Costes Au Centre Pompidou, and attending Mass under a cardinal at Notre Dame de Paris, Giselle and I made our way to Frankfurt. There we visited St. Paul’s, the home of the first German Parliament, toured more churches and took a boat-ride down the Rhine River. It really was a wonderful trip, and I hope to return one day and see more of France and Germany and other European countries.

The Quest for Meaning

By Carolyn Swearingen, Ph.D.
California Counseling Institute

It can be heavy, this work we do. Someone I don’t know, have never met, suddenly takes their own life, and I am shaken to my core; left searching for explanation, meaning, purpose, understanding, wisdom. Life can feel so precarious, so tenuous. We are left yearning for some sense of deeper understanding.

For so long I have seen life and its joys and miseries through the lens of the psychological, but I recently found myself searching for and needing the spiritual perspective as well. At some point many of us must ask ourselves: Why am I here? What is my purpose? What is this life about? Why do we, as a human collective, exist? As I am just beginning to ask myself these questions, I don’t pretend to have much insight into this arena of the human experience, but I think it is important to acknowledge and reflect on these dilemmas when they arise, as we are the only beings capable of asking these questions.

“Amazing Grace” Comes to St. James



Screening in the Sanctuary!
Sunday August 23rd,
starting 20 minutes after the
10:00 a.m. service ends

Bring a brown bag lunch!

Amazing Grace is based on the life of antislavery pioneer William Wilberforce, who navigated the world of 18th-century backroom politics to end the slave trade in the British Empire.

Starring

Ioan Gruffudd (*Black Hawk Down*) Albert Finney (*Erin Brockovich*) Romola Garai (*Vanity Fair*)
Michael Gambon (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*) Benedict Cumberbatch (*Hawking*)
Rufus Sewell (*Legend of Zorro*) Ciaran Hinds (*Rome*) and introducing Youssou N'Dour.

Directed by [Michael Apted](#) (*The World is Not Enough*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*)

Screenplay by [Steven Knight](#) (*Dirty Pretty Things*) Executive Producer [Jeaney Kim](#) Co-Producer Mark Cooper

Producers [Terrence Malick](#) and [Ed Pressman](#) (Sunflower Productions), Patricia Heaton and David Hunt ([FourBoys Films](#)), and [Ken Wales](#).

Come reflect with us how faith and politics are part of our call to action and ministry!
For information contact Jon Owens at 510-289-9407 or Jowens1517@yahoo.com

For me it has helped to first consider where I find meaning and what gives me a sense of purpose. Being a good therapist, having close relationships, being a caring dog owner, giving back to my community, challenging myself to grow and learn—all of these give me my own sense of meaning and purpose in the world. They help me to keep going, even in the face of the immense suffering I am confronted with, be it in my office or on the evening news.

The larger questions, those concerning the meaning of life, the purpose of humanity, the nature of the human condition—those are the questions about which I am less clear. But perhaps the important part isn't the answer, but the question itself. It may be in the asking that our answers lie. Maybe it is not until we are broken open enough to ask our questions that we may be ready to receive our answers. I feel ready.



Conflict!

Sex, Religion and Feminism

By James A. Turner

"We think the victim [baby] should choose whether to live or die. Until science devises a way to communicate with a fetus, let's wait until the baby can reason, and then ask him if he wants to die."

- One definition of "pro-choice" from the internet site "Abortion: Tune into The Truth"

"It is time for our church to be liberated from the hypocrisy under which it has been laboring."

- Bishop Stacy Sauls, statement on issues of sexuality, made at the Episcopal General Convention, July 2009

The first quotation above is a stark, nonsensical definition of "pro-choice" from a group whose website speaks to their activist anti-abortion, pro-life views. The second is a statement made by an Episcopal Bishop at the General Convention this past month, in reference to the Convention's



COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER ONGOING CLASSES AND EVENTS

For Children and Youth

Saturday Learning Time

Call 415-751-1199 for information.

Kindermusik and Advanced Kindermusik

Contact Dee Dee Lawton at 415-561-9754.

ASPIRE Summer School Program

Call 415-751-1199 for information.

Suzuki Music Lessons

Call 415-412-6723 for information.

Homework Help Center

Contact Nayad Abrahamian at 751-1198 to volunteer.

For Adults

Buddhist Meditation

Wednesdays 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall.

Overeaters Anonymous

Sundays 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. in the Caldwell Room.
Tuesdays 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall.

Debtors Anonymous

Tuesdays at 6:00 – 7:00 in the Caldwell Room.

overwhelming vote to allow each diocese to consider gay candidates to the episcopacy. This is a challenge to Archbishop Rowan Williams's stance of doing nothing on this issue for now, in deference to the fundamentalist wing of the Episcopal Church. While Bishop Saul's statement specifically referenced issues of sexual orientation within the church, the same statement could well be used more expansively to express a challenge to all the hypocrisy and misunderstanding revolving around the continuing conflicted issues of sex, religion, and feminism, both within the church and in the public at large.

At the Lambeth Conference of 1908, the bishops condemned both abortion and birth control. Thereafter they continued to condemn birth control and to hold it responsible for prostitution. They requested that governments prohibit "the open or secret sale of contraceptives and the continued existence of brothels," and issued a proclamation stating that "deliberate tampering with nascent life is repugnant to Christian morality." By 1920 women had received the right to vote in both Britain and the United States, and the bishops agreed that women could serve in any office in which a layman might serve; yet it would be another 50 years before they would agree to allow women to serve on Vestries or be elected as deputies to the General Convention. Our Anglican/Episcopal Church was marching in lockstep with the Catholic Church, at least regarding attitudes toward women, sex, contraception, and abortion. Since then there has been a sea change and a new "Age of Enlightenment" on those matters, at least in the American Episcopal Church.

Time and space do not permit me to address the varying viewpoints on these issues in other segments of Protestantism, nor those emanating from religious fundamentalists, atheists, or agnostics—and there are indeed many viewpoints.

The issues of abortion and contraception are closely allied, and there are no pat answers to the questions revolving around them. Extremism exists on both sides and seems to be based on combinations of misinformation, misunderstanding, strong religious fundamentalist beliefs, and moralistic emotionalism.

There is also, of course, the question of what role the rule of law should play in these contestations. Here is one example of how legal issues over abortion can manifest. As you know, the Senate has been holding confirmation hearings on Judge Sonia Sotomayor, President Obama's appointee to fill a position on the Supreme Court. The other day I happened to hear one Senator ask her the following question (here I am paraphrasing rather than giving you a direct quote): *If you knew that a fetus had a condition of spina bifida in which the spinal cord was open,*

would you permit the mother of that fetus to have an abortion ?

Let me explain. Spina bifida is a congenital condition in which the tissues that normally enclose and protect the lower end of the spinal cord do not fuse together, which leaves the lower spinal cord open and exposed. In its more severe forms, which cannot be repaired surgically, the infant will be left paralyzed below the waist, without normal bowel and bladder function—a life-long sentence for the child and for the whole family, because this individual will always have special needs: wheelchairs, braces, special attention to prevent pressure ulcers, and other care. I know from my earlier medical practice, in which I cared for some of these children, that the realistic and necessary demands for care can stress the entire family—especially the mother.

So the question that the Senator was really asking was this: *Is it morally right, and should it be legally right, to abort a fetus that we know has a dire and devastating condition which will make that life significantly abnormal and often miserable ?* I leave you to ponder that question.



Thoughts While Shaving

By Ray Muñoz

Some weeks ago we celebrated Trinity Sunday. I think that this has to be one Sunday when most priests either get sick, take a vacation, or in some way bug out. I know I would. What do you say about something that is so difficult to explain or to understand in the first place? We got into it once when I was a seminarian, and after a while I thought to myself, "Why are we discussing this? My eyes are crossing and I have to go to my job.... Do the confrères get together and casually discuss this while smoking their cigars? "

There has been an undue amount of grief related to this subject. Indeed, blood has been shed. The Bible and the writings of the sages have been studied to prove this or that favorite point. This has been going on since the first century! Lord have mercy....

We separate a Sunday just to celebrate the Trinity. I guess it is very important. Yet....

I don't understand it. I don't want to understand it. It takes too much bandwidth, to put it mildly. And ... I don't care. I just don't care.

The Muñoz home church has been Trinity Cathedral since we moved to Phoenix. This is our Bishop's home church too, of course. Naturally he had to give the homily on Trinity Sunday and, smart man that he is, he introduced his sermon by explaining that he was not going to go over stuff that he as a seminarian yawned over. (Well, the good Bishop didn't say yawn.) Then he ably and astutely segued to how he explains it to himself. The Trinity, he said, is Relationship, Relationship, Relationship.

Now, this I can understand! I honestly don't remember what he said after that. I started to write my own sermon. (I'm sure the rest of his was excellent ... ahem.)

The God that is in us and in which we live and which is all around us gives us hope and guidance and renewal. Now, that Trinity I understand. To my mind this is indeed the triune God that we live with from the first day of our life to the day when we breathe our last.

Shalom

Hope and Process

By Elizabeth Nelson

Last month I celebrated the Fourth of July as usual, by re-reading the Constitution of the United States. I know the Declaration is the thing to read on Independence Day, and it's a phenomenal document, but the Constitution interests me even more. As usual, reading it took less than an hour (including all the Amendments); and, as usual—more than usual this year, for some reason—I've been thinking ever since about human nature and human government.



One thought I've had, surely not an original one, is that democracy is difficult because it goes against human nature. Democracy is a concerted effort to keep public power (the power to make decisions for a community and get them carried out) circulating freely through the whole enfranchised population, whereas the natural human tendency is to let public power coagulate around those people who want it the most. For most members of a community, most of the time, it can frankly be a relief to have someone else in charge—as long as those in charge are getting results that serve the community's interests. So we often end up with a small group of people engaged in the process of exercising (or protecting, or trying to shift) public power, and a majority who enjoy or suffer the results while absorbed in the hard-enough job of getting through each day.

Democracy militates against this natural state of affairs. It attempts to involve everyone in the process, as well as the results, of exercising public power ... and for that reason it's both revolutionary and ridiculous. Its purest, most radical form, the town-hall meeting—one citizen/one vote, all voices heard, all decisions made by the whole community—is at once exhilarating, exasperating, and spectacularly inefficient. How in the world can you *get things done*, for Heaven's sake, if there has to be so much talk and so much voting?

Representative democracy is a compromise. Citizens vote, not on every decision, but on their choice of delegates to a decision-making body. It's hands-down more efficient than town-hall democracy; it's also less straightforward. The voter's role becomes more nuanced, harder to keep track of between elections. But unless voters are paying attention *at all times* to their representatives—how they get nominated, how their stated goals match up with their actions, how they approach the process of decision-making and what they're prepared to do to achieve a given result—then power can once again start to coagulate, and representative government can regress into something other than democracy.

I embrace the compromise that representative democracy represents. I'd be a fool to do otherwise; it was a group of democratically elected representatives that produced, for example, my country's Constitution, a framework for government which I would happily live and die to preserve, protect, and defend—and a document which outlines in detail how representative democracy can function. But when I remember the astonishing men who put that document together, I also remember that before it became the law of the land it got published and discussed from one end of the nation to the other—in newspapers, public houses, private homes, town halls. And I remember that, as brilliant and innovative a result of representative democracy as the Constitution is, it was also flawed from

the outset. Reading the twenty-seven Constitutional Amendments is an education in long-term democratic process, watching a people attempting both to exercise the values codified in their government's founding documents and to correct the oversights, inefficiencies, and outright sins that those documents contain as well. Democratic process is no guarantee of perfect results; it's the process itself that embodies democracy's greatest worth, because the process is ongoing and, in the long run, self-amending—if the entire community, elected representatives and those who elect them, spend enough time and energy participating in the process to ensure that it remains democratic.

Alongside these secular reflections I've been having some equally unoriginal thoughts about Christianity's struggle with government—not the whole Church-and-State debate,

but the processes of self-government which different Christian communities, large and small, have grappled with over the years. Whatever else Christ's Church is or might be, it's a human institution, or a set of them; decisions have to be made and carried out, and therefore public power has to circulate (or coagulate). In what ways does that happen, in a community rooted at least partly in authority and tradition? What happens when tradition and authority encounter the social expectations of democracy? What, in a case like that, would Jesus do?

No answers to offer, not so far. Just questions and unoriginal thoughts, on my mind for some reason—probably because of what I was reading on Independence Day. Had to be that, right? It's summertime, nothing else much going on.

CALENDAR

- August 16 Vestry Meeting
- August 23 "Amazing Grace" screening and discussion (see p. 7)
- August 30 "Going Baroque" Concert (see p. 4)
-

The St. James Community Journal is a monthly publication of the Community Center at St. James, whose partners include:

St. James Episcopal Church

Rev. Won-Jae Hur, Interim Rector
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.751.1198
fax 415.751.1545
stjames@stjamesf.org
www.stjamesf.org

St. James Preschool

Roger Setterfield, Head of School
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.752.8258
rsetterfield@stjamesf.org
www.stjamespreschoolsf.org

The Community Learning Center

at St. James
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.751.1199
www.clcstjames.org

The California Counseling Institute

Elaine Chan-Scherer,
Executive Director
4614 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.752.1702
ccpsyche@earthlink.net
<http://californiacounseling.org>

**We welcome your articles
on or before the 15th
of the month.**

Submit articles to:
elizabethn@jfcfcs.org

Editor:

Elizabeth Nelson

Production and Distribution:
Andrew Hom, Elizabeth Nelson,
and Mary Ann Faris