

## Interim's Corner

### Our Place in Ministry

By Rev. Won-Jae Hur

The first sermon I ever preached was during my first year in seminary. My sponsoring parish in Ohio had a nice tradition of inviting seminarians back as guest preachers. I remember getting up on Sunday morning and taking a leisurely walk to the church. Saying hello to some early comers, I went into the sacristy and put on my cassock and surplice. Ten minutes before the service was to start, I reached into my bag to look for my sermon. To my surprise, it was not there. I had left it at my friend's place, and it was too late to go and get it. In panic, I told Father Brian. He shrugged and said, "Well, looks like you'll have to wing it!" and walked cheerfully away.

The world seemed to crumble around me as I sat there in the chancel, while the clock inevitably ticked away toward eight o'clock. I felt like a criminal waiting for trial. I consoled myself with the thought that the early service drew a small crowd. With this in mind, I turned to look at the people coming through the door. To my horror, my college advisor, his wife, and two other professors I knew well entered the church and sat in the front pews. My stomach twisted and turned, and my heart thumped so loudly that it seemed to drown out every other sound.

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After he read the Gospel lesson, Father Brian turned and gave me an enthusiastic nod. "My gosh, he has no idea!" I thought to myself. I heaved a sigh, forced myself up to the pulpit, and faced those expectant faces. I spent the next eight long minutes trying my hardest to remember the words I had written so enthusiastically the week before. Stammering, I managed to deliver a barely coherent sermon to a group of bemused people and stumbled back to my chair.

After the ordeal, my advisor David and his wife Maggie drove me to my friend's place to pick up the sermon. I felt so embarrassed I didn't know what to do with myself. I kept saying over and over, "My gosh, I am so embarrassed! I can't believe I messed up like that!" Maggie finally turned to me and in a gentle but straightforward way said, "You know, a lot of what you said was actually quite profound. If God used your sermon to help the people there, then it served its purpose. If not, that's okay. *It's not about you.*" Her words woke me up from my drama. I knew she was speaking the truth.

This first experience of failure in ministry, and my friend Maggie's response, taught me one of the foundational lessons about Christian ministry. Ministry is not about oneself. Our ministry belongs to God for the welfare of all. Ministry is about moving in grace. Whether a sermon is good or bad, whether a program succeeds or fails, the important thing is not to seek a preconceived result but to offer our best effort and trust in God's grace to do the rest.

Of course, ministry is a way of expressing and living our deepest convictions. We need support from others, and we don't set out to fail. The danger, as Maggie pointed out to me, lies in making ministry a means for getting self-affirmation rather than truly seeking God and the good of the larger community. Seeking praise from people who like what we do, or harshly criticizing ourselves or others when things go wrong, are both symptomatic of a ministry centered on the self. When my ministry stops opening the window to God and starts propping up my ego, it has lost its purpose.

This is why establishing clear boundaries in ministry is essential. They help us clarify the purpose of our ministry and our place in the larger scheme of God's work. We are always aware that our ministry belongs not to us but to God; that the "success" of our ministry ultimately depends on God's grace and not on our own brilliance or effort; that the part we play is an important but relative and small one in the "magnificent enterprise that is God's Kingdom," to quote Oscar Romero; that love is the only motivation and true reward for ministry.

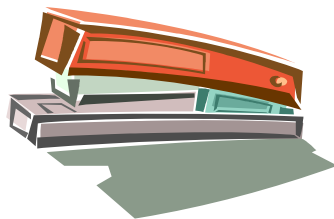
I go back to that first preaching experience again and again, whenever I feel (or someone reminds me) that I have wandered off course. I have discovered along the way that the paradox of detachment is greater enjoyment. When we know our place and boundaries in ministry, we are freed from our illusions to dance in grace. We can open our windows to heaven and let the Spirit pour down.



## Because You Staple ...

... we can mail,  
at a reduced rate!

Special thanks to those who receive a paper copy of this Journal in the mail, for providing a staple or paper clip and saving us a scolding (and fine!) from the post office.



## From the Junior Warden's Toolbox

By John Harrison

Perhaps you noticed that the sanctuary gleamed on Easter Sunday; perhaps you were astounded to be able to find things in the pantry; perhaps you wondered where the scuffs and scrapes on the molding in the undercroft went; perhaps the absence of new forms of life and remarkable botanical specimens in the refrigerator was a welcome surprise.



If any of the foregoing rings true, or if you've had another similar experience recently, you owe thanks to a small group of volunteers who got together on the Saturday morning before Palm Sunday and labored to get the church ready for Holy Week and the glorious celebration of Christ's Resurrection. (They ate a few donuts and drank a little coffee and orange juice, too.)

Please take the time to thank Barbara Burgess, Carla Cooper, Mary Ann Faris, JJ Harrison, Carole Jan Lee, Nancy Newmeyer, Grant Paul, Ryszard and Elia Pochron, Ira Simmons, Judy Spain, and of course Barbara Webb and Elizabeth Nelson (who work every Saturday morning to ensure that the courtyard looks inviting to all who stop to check out St. James) for all of their hard work. And if you missed out on this bit of sacred labor and great fellowship, please plan to join us at the next work day in the early fall – when we will, if all stays on schedule, be preparing the parish facilities to welcome our new rector.





## Parish Retreat – Save the Date!

By Carla Cooper

Please mark your calendars! Our 2010 Parish Retreat at Bishop's Ranch will be from Friday November 12 to Sunday November 14. Join your fellow St. James community members for a relaxing weekend in Healdsburg, about 90 minutes north of San Francisco.

Do as much or as little as you like! There will be a program that includes parishioner-led workshops in poetry, painting, book discussion, knitting ... and other inspired ideas. Bishop's Ranch, owned by the Diocese of California, provides a beautiful setting complete with walking trails and gorgeous views, as well as delicious, healthy meals. Opportunities for shopping and wine-tasting are just down the road.

Details and sign-ups will follow in May and June. (A note to St. Martin's volunteers: the retreat does fall on the second Sunday of November, and every effort is being made to book a non-second-Sunday for future years!) Questions? Contact me at [carlaNcooper@gmail.com](mailto:carlaNcooper@gmail.com) or 415-596-9405.



## Rector Candidate Applications Are In!

By Jan Vennari, Search Committee Co-Chair

The Rector Search Committee received an impressive 31 applications to become our next rector, a great response to our posting. Candidates come from around the country, finding us either by referral from the Diocese of California

or as self-inquirers who read or heard about our opening through diocesan channels.

We asked candidates to send in a range of materials for our consideration: their resumé, answers to three essay questions, references, and a completed "CDO profile" – a standard form from the Church Deployment Office. All of this gives us multiple points of input so we can really get a sense of who the person is.

The Search Committee is currently reviewing all applications and setting up telephone interviews with those we feel best match our needs and parish profile. We expect to complete these interviews in the next few weeks. Following phone interviews, we will be visiting a handful of the most likely candidates. This may well involve travel around the country, so if you have airline miles you'd like to donate to help offset our costs, they (or any other donation) are most welcome!

Thank you for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers as we progress through this important work! As always, let any of us know if you have any questions.



## Your Rector Search Committee

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## Time and Talent: Reflection

By Barbara Burgess



Over the past year I've been writing this "Time and Talent" column for the Journal, profiling some of our parish's most active volunteers.

I thought I'd take this opportunity to share some of my observations and reflections about the ministries here at Saint James.

There has been one recurring theme with everyone I've interviewed: someone first approached them about participating in at least one of the ministries in which they now participate. For me, I was first approached almost simultaneously by Doreen Canton and Elizabeth Nelson about writing this column. Sometimes it takes someone else to recognize your talents.

As our congregation has gotten smaller this past year because of moves and other changes, people have stepped up to fill the voids in the parish ministries. However, as someone recently said to me, "You can't take on too much or you will get burnt out." As much as we love the ministries we do, we can't do them alone.

So first, on behalf of the congregation, to those who have continuously served in 50,000 capacities at the church, CCI, Preschool, and CLC : thank you! It is because of your unwavering service to the church and its community outreach programs that we've been able to weather these uncertain times.

Second, to those who feel they just don't have the time: one Sunday a month is all we ask. Each of our ministries always needs extra help. If you think you might be interested in a ministry but don't feel comfortable simply volunteering out of the blue, talk with someone who's already active in it. I did that for both acolyting and the Flower Guild, and what I thought would be exceedingly complex tasks – especially acolyting – turned out to be fairly simple. As my stepmother is fond of saying, "It can't hurt you to ask; the worst anyone can do is say no." My personal feeling is that no one at St. James will say no to additional help at this point.

To the youth of this church: you are doing a great service with your community Eucharist once a month, bringing the next generation into church. If you are able, I'd ask that you consider one additional ministry, especially if you require community service hours for graduation. You never know where it can lead. Little did I think, when I needed community service hours for graduation in the summer of 1989, that former rector Mary Moore Gaines would ask me to be the summer Sunday school teacher, and that this experience would send me down a career path to become a credentialed teacher in 2006. You are the future generation of this congregation, and we need your help now to continue our ministries.

Finally, are you wondering what ministries there are at Saint James which need help right now?

- We always need additional acolytes and Eucharistic Ministers. (Ask Won-Jae for details.)
- The group from St. James that serves once a month at Martin de Porres Hospitality House is always looking for more helpers. (Contact Ted Ira for more information.)
- The ASPIRE after-school program could use a few good volunteers during the week. (Elia Pochron can fill you in.)
- We need charter members for a new Undercroft Guild. (See the advertisement below!)



## Undercroft Guild Members Wanted

Want to help out St. James? Short on time?  
Good news – now you can serve the church  
while doing your laundry!

Our new Kitchen Captain Barbara Burgess is seeking folks to take turns **washing kitchen towels each week**, as well as a **monthly laundering of table cloths and robes**. Everything but the robes can be thrown in the wash with your own household linens and brought back the following week.

Also needed: volunteers to take turns **doing kitchen inventory**. (Simply check supplies against a pre-printed list, and mark the items we're short on.)  
HINT: this would make a good complement to hosting Coffee Hour, since you're going through the cabinets and refrigerator anyway.

Interested? Contact Barbara  
at [missbagpipes@sbcglobal.net](mailto:missbagpipes@sbcglobal.net). Thanks!

## Aspirations

### Eastertide

By Jon Owens

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Easter is a season of pure joy. It is a time when we can look at our lives and celebrate the good things God has done for us. We have been through the desert, and now we have made our journey to paradise. We have suffered, and we now can say: look at where we have been and where we are now.



The question of suffering is a long one that always comes up when the going gets tough. We stop and ask: "Why is this happening to us?" "Why would God let this happen?" "Where is God?" In Holy Week we are reminded that even God, through Jesus, wept and suffered. I believe that even when Jesus felt abandoned on the cross, God was still there. With Easter, we know he was never truly forsaken.

Easter is also about victory. As humans we need to know we have a happy ending, and we like to know we have won. Death is something we all have to come to terms with,

and it is inevitable. This story helps us have some leverage over this issue, knowing there is hope beyond what is out of our hands.

Easter is about transformations. All things become new. We rise from the dead into new life. We see this in our world with the coming of spring. The trees are so bare and look dead, but slowly the leaves begin to sprout and flowers start to bloom. We don't necessarily get as dramatic an effect of spring in the Bay Area as in other climates, but you get the picture. We can be like the flowers and blossom and grow.

Spring cleaning is right around the corner. What is the old stuff we need to get rid of so we have room for the new in our homes and our lives? Perhaps Easter is a spiritual spring cleaning, and once we have conducted the cleaning process it is like being able to just sit back and enjoy the place in which we live.

Tax season ends on April 15<sup>th</sup>. It is a chance to finally put an end to our fiscal lives of last year and look toward our new financial goals. We as a church were able to look at this during Pie Sunday. What kind of abundance has God granted you this year, and what do you hope to gain from it? Even if you are not ahead, it is a chance to begin anew and celebrate.

*"Set your minds on things that are above, and not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Alleluia."* - Colossians 3: 2,3



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## Stages of Grief and the Capital Campaign

By Barbara Burgess

When my mom and I worked for Seton, we heard a saying popular with the Daughters of Charity: “You can’t have a mission without a margin.” Recently, with the capital campaign ending and the uncertain financial climate of the world, the country, the state, the city, and our church, there has been a great deal of focus on the margin. We are still mourning the loss of an idea, and going through the first three stages of grief (from the model first outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross). I say the first three stages because I think that as a congregation we are attempting only now to move into the fourth and fifth stages of grief.

1. Numbness and Denial The first reaction to a loss, numbness or shock can help cushion the blow. This stage can last a few hours, days, or even weeks.

2. Yearning and Anger The numbness wears off, and the painful realization of the loss hits full-force. You may be angry and have regrets of dreams never realized.

3. Despair, Sadness, and Withdrawal The storm of intense emotions from the second stage gives way to a period of heavy sadness and silence.

I believe that as a congregation we are still hovering somewhere between stages two and three. There have been ill feelings, blame, and anger associated with the ending of the capital campaign. To this I can say: First, it’s natural to look for someone or something external to blame. Second, nobody could have foreseen the financial down-turn the global economy would take at the time we agreed as a congregation to undertake this project. And make no mistake, we did agree at the annual meeting several years ago – first to undertake the capital campaign, and second to create three different nonprofit business entities (St. James Church, St. James Preschool, and the Community Learning Center at St. James).

Now we are attempting to enter stages four and five of grief. We are attempting to reorganize and move on, but that requires that we put aside our anger.

4. Reorganization Over time sadness will start to lessen, and you will begin to see a lightening of your emotions.

5. Letting Go and Moving On The final phase of this model is to let go of your need for the loss, and to move on with your life.

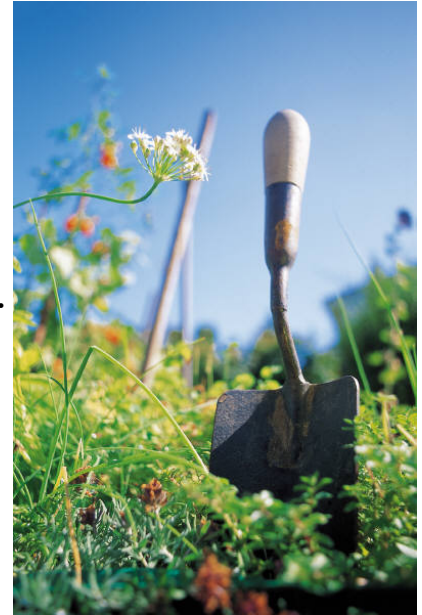
Carolyn Myss says in *Spiritual Power, Spiritual Practice*, “All we have is the now. The precious energy of now. Yesterday is gone; tomorrow isn’t here.” I am reminded

Keep  
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beautiful ...

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planting, and fellowship

Every Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Everyone’s welcome –  
rakes and brooms provided!

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or just show up on any Saturday morning

too of something Shri Anandi Ma said to a group of her disciples recently when a man wanted to know whether there were any shortcuts to giving up control. She suggested to the man and to us that we be child-like and surrender to God. After all, we are not in control, God is.

So as we move into reorganization, letting go, and moving on, my challenge to everyone is to “let go, let God.” Say to heaven, “I release my will to yours; I release my will to divine guidance.” For it is in the letting go that we are truly free.

Read more on Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief at  
<http://www.recover-from-grief.com/5-stages-of-grief.html>.



## Thoughts on Thoughts

By Carolyn Swearingen, Ph.D.  
California Counseling Institute

The theme of thoughts has been emerging for me recently. It is an area about which life continues to teach me, and I am grateful to remember that I still have much to learn.

Thoughts can be powerful things. So often, when we have a thought, our tendency is to grab it with both hands and run with it wherever it takes us. We may think, "I wonder if I would be happier living somewhere else," and before we know it we are worrying about how to find a job and make friends in a place we haven't even decided to move to yet! Or we may assume that because we have a thought, it must be true; we have a moment of doubt about our lovability, and immediately we believe that because we had these doubtful thoughts we must be unlovable. Our thoughts can spiral into a deep well of despair and pain, seemingly instantaneously. One mistake at work can

quickly become: "I am a failure. I can never get it right." We can also use thoughts to create a sense of control over situations that may be uncontrollable, believing that if we worry enough and plan for every possibility, we can somehow control things. This way of coping becomes problematic when worry becomes insidious and constantly present in our minds.

Our thoughts can become so big, so all-consuming, and so believable so quickly that we can drop into a well of anxiety or self-doubt before we even know what has happened. Then we feel confused, overwhelmed, and maybe a little "nuts" because we have no idea where we have gone or what has happened in our own minds.

But if we can begin to catch ourselves, and to notice our thoughts before we run away with them, or before they get so big so fast, or before we believe that they are true, we can work to free ourselves from that state of confusion and overwhelm. Being able simply to notice and observe



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### For Children and Youth

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<b>ASPIRE After School Program</b>	M-F 2:45-6:00 p.m. Call 415-751-1199 for information.
<b>Suzuki Music Lessons</b>	Call 415-412-6723 for information.
<b>Youth Empowering Youth (Homework Help Center)</b>	Call 415-751-1199 to volunteer.
<b>Children's Yoga with Ms. Homa</b>	Call 415-752-2192 for information.

### For Adults

<b>"Always Active" Senior Exercise</b>	Mondays 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. in the Parish Hall. Wednesdays 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. in the Parish Hall.
<b>Buddhist Meditation</b>	Wednesdays 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall.
<b>Overeaters Anonymous</b>	Sundays 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. in the Caldwell Room. Tuesdays 7:30 – 9:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall.
<b>Debtors Anonymous</b>	Tuesdays 5:30 – 7:15 in the Caldwell Room.
<b>California Collectors Club</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> Fridays, 6:00-9:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall.

our thoughts can allow us to detach from them. From this place of detachment we can then examine our thinking more objectively, question whether it is in fact “the truth,” and cultivate more compassion for ourselves regarding our often-harsh inner voices.

I encourage you to dedicate one week to noticing what your thoughts are. That’s it – just work on noticing and observing your inner voices, rather than responding, reacting, believing, or flying away with them. I hope this exercise helps you along your path of growth, understanding, and self-compassion.



## Hell and High Water

### Climate Change, Global Warming, and Other Matters of Consequence

By James A. Turner

This is the third and last of a three-essay series on the controversial issue of climate change and global warming. In last month’s essay I presented evidence demonstrating that our earth has experienced alternating periods of cooling and warming over millions of years of geologic history, right up to the present time. The evidence comes from sound scientific methods involving the study of ice sheets, ice cores, tree rings, sediments, corals, and rocks.

The last “Ice Age” peaked about 20,000 years ago, when large areas of both the American and Eurasian continents were covered with vast ice sheets. Evidence indicates that since then, earth has been experiencing a warming trend during which the glaciers have retreated, again exposing the land beneath. This warming trend supported the beginning and development of agriculture and the spread of human beings over much of the earth. However, evidence indicates that within the last 160,000 years, temperatures have varied a great deal. During the Middle

Ages, from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the European continent experienced relatively warm temperatures. This was followed by a “Little Ice Age,” an experience expressed so well by Pieter Bruegel in his winter paintings from the early 1600s. This period of cooler climate lasted until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when warming began again. That brings us to our day and our present climate.

Scientific evidence now shows us that since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Earth has been in a period of warming that has been accelerating rapidly, especially in recent years. While it is true that actual temperature measurements have shown a rising trend, “on the ground” evidential experiences also demonstrate global warming. These include reduced frost days, rapidly melting glaciers, shrinking polar ice caps, a rise in sea level, melting of permafrost, longer ice-free periods on lakes and rivers, accumulation of water vapor in the atmosphere, lengthening of the growing seasons, and many others.

While climate change is part of the history of our earth, the big controversy today is whether the current rapidly rising rate of warming is due to human activities which have produced a dramatic accumulation of greenhouse gases. The primary greenhouse gases in the earth’s atmosphere include carbon dioxide, methane, water vapor, nitrous oxide, and ozone. While there are many factors that can affect climate change, these gases can certainly play a major roll. As they accumulate in the earth’s atmosphere, they can act just like the glass in a greenhouse and reflect heat back to Earth, causing a temperature rise.

The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been shown to have closely followed the course of global temperatures, both up and down, over hundreds of millions of years. Since atmospheric carbon dioxide becomes trapped in arctic ice, ice core sampling has provided reliable means of measuring the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide during the past 800,000 years. Analysis of these ice cores has shown that since the Industrial Revolution, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased immensely. That evidence begs the questions: *Is such human activity responsible for the global warming that is now quite evident? And irrespective of that, what are the implications of global warming for mankind?*

Scientific measurements and analysis, as well as experiential evidence such as shrinking glaciers and shrinking polar



ice caps, certainly seem to indicate that the earth is definitely undergoing a period of significant global warming. The implications of that truth for humans and other species are profound. The evidence with respect to the significant accumulation of greenhouse gases since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution strongly suggests that human use of fossil fuels is, at the very least, playing a significant role in the process. Whether the current global warming is a short-term phenomenon or a long-term trend is difficult to predict. In view of the dire consequences for the earth and its inhabitants from continued global warming, it behooves us to pay close attention and consider what we might do to at least temper its effects. It would seem to be the better part of wisdom for each of us to stay as accurately informed on this issue as possible, and to be wary of those who oppose the facts because of vested interests. Time, of course, will be the final arbiter.

Sources for this essay included:

1. Dow, Kristen and Downing, Thomas E. *The Atlas of Climate Change* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2006).
2. Pearce, Fred. *Global Warming: a Beginner's Guide to Our Changing Climate* (London, New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 2002).
3. International Panel on Climate Change: *Multiple Yearly Reports*.



## Thoughts While Shaving

By Ray Muñoz

On a recent Sunday I heard a sermon by the Dean of Trinity Cathedral in Phoenix, about a passage from Luke 13. In this Gospel, we read of Jesus being warned that an angry Herod is looking for him. Not good news. Herod is not a man you can afford to take lightly. He is an experienced political operator who has a loyal force at his disposal. In the face of this, Jesus sends a message to Herod that is more than an insult; it's a challenge.

Jesus says: "Listen, tell that fox for me that I'm busy...."  
Tough talk!

The first thing that we notice is the use of "that fox" as a nickname for Herod ... and the challenge implicit in the language. Herod might forgive the use of a lion or tiger as an image of his persona... but a fox? Never! A fox is seen as small and deceitful, and perhaps as a living garbage disposal unit. Under the circumstances, you may agree with me that Jesus was pushing it. Herod will retaliate. He has no other recourse. His dignity has been publicly wounded.

After calling Herod a fox, Jesus picks another target and talks directly to Jerusalem. He gives the impression of being more than just annoyed; he is full of anger: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Here the tone is brittle and still challenging, still tough ... but – a hen?



Those of us who have had some exposure to family farms and chicken coops know that there is nothing so brave as a mother hen. She will fight loudly (very loudly!) and courageously to protect her brood. She lashes out at the invader; then, when all else fails, when she knows that her brood is in mortal danger, her instincts tell her what she has to do and she spreads her wings (what an image – as if on a cross) and bares her breast, sacrificing herself, so that the chicks have a chance to survive.

With my "hmm, uh-huh" attitude towards many of the gospel stories ("*Really, its all true, every word ... yeah sure, hmm, uh-huh*"), this is one that strikes a chord. Nobody in his right mind would ever make up a story about Jesus as a hen! So it may be that this one was carefully guarded and retold, simply and without embellishment, until it was written down some sixty or seventy years after his death.

I am not about to suggest that we commission a statue of a hen for the narthex. But this image is too good not to keep in the back of my mind, ready to bring up for those times when I get too caught up in high falutin' theology. Simple tales are so much easier to understand....

I can hear Jesus' bubbling laughter.

He is risen....

Shalom



## The Grace of Dead-Heading

By Elizabeth Nelson



When I began helping to garden in the St. James courtyard years ago, the first task that I approached with any confidence was cutting away dead and wilted flowers from the daisy bushes on either side of the church steps. In the graceful, subtle poetry of gardeners this task is known as “dead-heading,” and it improves both the looks of any blooming plant and its ability to produce new flowers. Years later, dead-heading remains my start-up task in the courtyard on Saturday mornings – beginning with the daisy bushes (for the months that they flower, bless them) and proceeding around the courtyard to inspect anything else that’s in bloom.

I can say with some authority – and with due respect to those who love Jerry Garcia’s music – that there aren’t nearly enough dead-headers in San Francisco. I’ve lost count of the times I’ve walked down a street and had to avert my eyes from borders and shrubs where a few new flowers are struggling gamely through a thicket of dried brown dead stuff. I’ve resisted the urge to carry a set of garden-clippers in my purse; if I stopped to use them every time I want to I’d never get where I’m going, and not all my fellow gardeners might appreciate the unasked-for help.

So I do my dead-heading in our courtyard on Saturday mornings: a simple, useful start-up task that puts my eyes and hands on the plants and wakes up the gardener in me. Away with dried brown dead blooms, those that are wilting or will be wilted by Sunday morning, those few chewed by insects or blotched by mold; make way for the strong, the healthy, the new beauty still in the bud.

And because our courtyard has become, for me, nearly as holy a space as the nave, my thoughts grow long and green while I work there. God and the plants keep showing me things, and I treasure their teachings in my heart and try sometimes to put them into words and onto paper. Surely, I’ve thought more than once, surely there’s something God wants to teach me in the work of dead-heading. What am I being shown each Saturday morning as I scan the daisy bushes, eyes narrowed and clippers in hand?

As soon as I began to consider it, I realized that dead-heading is *not* a lesson about life in community – at least,

not in a Christian community. Cut off the old, faded, imperfect members, throw them away so the young and healthy have more room to flourish? That’s how gardening works on the natural level, all right, but it’s not how St. James wants to garden itself. Of course we cherish our new buds, and those flowering at their peak. But say someone’s strength or faith or good humor seems to be withering, or say their blooming is slower or stranger than others’; do we cut them away? God willing, no. God willing, we bear and nurture and cherish them with the same love we lavish on the sturdiest, handsomest growth. If God’s community is a flowering shrub, then God the Gardener has some other-than-natural ideas about what healthy, beautiful flowering looks like. Dead-heading? Not a priority.

Say, though, that the shrub is not a community but an individual; say that *I’m* the shrub, or my soul is. Now does dead-heading seem like a good idea? Oh, yes, please. Old ambitions and enthusiasms, fresh and strong in their day but withered now: snip. False starts at understanding this or creating that, good-faith efforts stunted when something broke or there wasn’t enough light: snip, snip. Dead memories of weaknesses and sins already repented, choking off the strength and courage I need to try something new: snip, snip, snip. Please, God, cut away whatever you find in me that’s brown and dry and dead; cut it away, and see if I have another flowering in me still.

Here’s what God and the plants in the courtyard have taught me about dead-heading so far:

Tending your own garden will keep you plenty busy. If you are invited into someone else’s, keep your clippers to yourself until you’re certain you understand how you’ve been asked to help.

The dry brown dead stuff you trim away was once fresh and alive, and grew the best it could. Honor what it was; trust the compost-bin to turn it into something new again.

Every time you look, there will be more dead-heading to do. Strangely enough, that means you’re doing it right. Keep it up.

Nothing and nobody blooms all the time. When a bush stops flowering, don’t cut it down. Water the roots; let the seasons turn. You’ll be dead-heading again before you know it.



# CALENDAR

- May 1 5:30 – 10:00 p.m. St. James Preschool Gala
- May 2 6:30 p.m. *Lectio Divina* group (see p. 1)
- May 9 “Mothers Helping Mothers” Sunday
- May 11 6:30 p.m. Liturgy Committee Meeting (church office)
- May 15 Sacred Hours: Quiet Day of Reflection at St. James
- May 16 10:00 a.m. Community Eucharist – Youth Group Pizza Day
- May 23 Feast of Pentecost – wear red to church!  
Vestry meeting after 10:00 a.m. service – all are welcome  
7:30 p.m. St. James Chamber Players Concert (see p. 5)
- June 3 6:30 p.m. *Lectio Divina* group (see p.1)
- June 5 Confirmation at Grace Cathedral!
- June 6 Journey Sunday at St. James
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**The St. James Community Journal is a monthly publication on behalf of:**

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**We welcome your articles  
on or before the 15<sup>th</sup>  
of the month.**

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