



The S. Stephen

The monthly news at S. Stephen's Church in Providence
May/June, 2007

Vol. 6, No. 9

Come to the Annual Parish Picnic! NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO BE A ROUSTABOUT, GRILLMASTER or COOK

It is Parish Picnic time again and all hearty appetites are in for a S. Stephen's treat! Sunday, June 3, following the 10:00 Solemn High Mass the 2007 Parish Picnic will be held on the lawn behind the Guild House. Come for a cook-out (hamburgers and hotdogs with rolls and cheese if you please, chicken and vegetarian alternatives will be provided, see below for other menu items!), games, conversation and good times for all! Enjoy making new acquaintances and renew old friendships! We expect sixty-eighty hungry folk and look forward to finding you among them.

Ever wanted to be a **ROUSTABOUT?** Please call George Ryan at 401-943-6366 who is assembling the crew for Saturday morning June 2 at 11:00 to erect the tent and set up tables and chairs. You'll find an opportunity to help again after the picnic on Sunday when the tent has to be taken down.

PARISH COOKS, you know who you are (the producers of all the delicacies at our pot-luck suppers in the Great Hall), we want your salads and desserts.

DONATIONS of potato chips, pickles, watermelon, non-carbonated beverages may be left in the church kitchen anytime after May 27.

SET-UP CREW/RUNNERS will be needed 10:00 Sunday morning, June 3, to help with preparations and transfer of all that has been brought to the kitchen outdoors to the picnic site.

GRILLMASTERS, come demonstrate your prowess with our Parish-sized grill! Bring your favorite tools – you'll be cooking for sixty to eighty people!

CLEAN-UP/RUNNERS/ROUSTABOUTS will work together, once the last hot dog, the final baked bean, the very last brownie or cookie has disappeared. Join the after-party fellowship, swapping tales about the day, and thinking about the fun we'll have next



The Stations of the Cross.

A Report: The Parish Retreat

Nine people, including Father Alexander, attended S. Stephen's Parish Retreat at Christ the King Spiritual Life Center in Greenwich, New York, from Friday, May 4th to lunchtime on the 6th. Our retreat conductor was Sister Mary Elizabeth of the Community of St. Mary, Eastern Branch—the oldest Religious Order in the Episcopal

Church. Her topic was "Christ: Our Journey Home" based on St. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Mansions*.

Most of us arrived in time to join the Sisters at St. Mary's Convent for tea. We were happy to see them and to greet Mother Miriam who has come to S. Stephen's several times and who conducted our Advent Retreat back in December. However, we missed the African Sisters who had been there last year, but are now settled in their own Convent in northern Malawi.

We returned to the convent three times a day for Matins and Mass, Terce (Noonday Prayer) and Vespers. However, we stayed at the Library, a beautiful building which used to be the farm house when the property was an operating farm, and is now filled with scholarly and devotional books. It looks out on the mountains of Upper New York State. The retreat addresses were also given here. Our meals were eaten in the Welcome Center which has a refectory where many groups eat. Sister Mary Elizabeth joined us for meals. Free times allowed us to explore the beautiful grounds, to read, think, pray or nap.

In the words of St. Teresa: "Think of the soul as a crystal palace or a dwelling faceted as from a single diamond composed of many rooms emanating outward from the central throne room where the King of Glory dwells—for the soul of a righteous man is nothing less than a paradise in which God delights to make His habitation." The purpose of a retreat is to come home to our true selves in God: to bring order to our inner lives, re-center ourselves in God's grace, to open the soul to the infused grace of the Holy Spirit and prepare ourselves to rest in God's love and to walk with Christ. Regular retreats are necessary to perfect these tasks and grow in holiness. In her addresses, Sister Mary Elizabeth illustrated this path with practical illustrations from her own life. People unused to mystical writers often think of their experiences as abstruse but actually many of us have had experiences of mysticism which is the deepest experience of prayer and the union of the soul with God.

The opportunity to pray in community, to let go of the cares of daily life and to listen to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit within ourselves is a transforming experience. We returned renewed and spiritually refreshed. It is our prayer that our fellow parishioners can attend future retreats.

Phoebe Pettingell

year! Everyone is invited to the Parish Picnic. Bring your appetite and a friend and have a joyful time regardless of the weather! **Free-will donations** will be accepted to help defray costs. Sign-up sheets will be in the Narthex and the Great Hall.

Questions can go to George Ryan or Sandra Bartlett (who will be looking for willing folk to take leadership of this event next year).

Save June 3 for our Annual Parish Picnic! See you under the tent!

Sandra Bartlett

Father Alexander's letter to the parish**My dear people:**

Once again this is the last issue of *The S. Stephen* before the summer. The 2006-2007 season has gone by quickly. We have accomplished much together. And planning for the 2007-2008 season is well under way.

Looking back, some of the highlights of the past nine months include: the four-part series in November on the 2006 General Convention; the Advent Lessons and Carols with readings by an ecumenical representation of area clergy; the Centering Prayer Workshops; the Kenneth Miller lecture; the Guild of All Souls Annual Meeting and Mass; the visit of former Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold; and, most recently, the Parish Retreat at the Community of Saint Mary at Greenwich, New York.

Alongside these special events, we have carried out our full schedule of worship and devotion, educational activities, fellowship events, and service projects. We have stayed busy. I for one am looking forward to the "summer slowdown," with its opportunities for relaxation, refreshment, and renewal. My family and I have a short vacation planned in Argentina and Chile later this summer—our first trip ever to South America.

Upcoming events before then include Solemn Evensong and Benediction on Sunday, May 20th, Brown Commencement Sunday with its one Mass at 8:00 am on May 27th, and the parish barbecue on June 3rd, Trinity Sunday.

As far as Commencement Sunday is concerned, please be aware that George Street becomes part of a one-way system that weekend. If past experience is any guide, the church must be approached from the west, i.e., from the direction of Benefit Street and Brown Street, rather than from the east, i.e., from the direction of Thayer Street. Last year, some parishioners apparently got to the intersection of George and Thayer, saw the barrier, assumed that the street was closed off, and went home—apparently not realizing that the church could easily be approached by car from the opposite direction.

On a bittersweet note, this summer we shall be bidding farewell to four of our most talented young parishioners: Michael and Tonya McArthur, who are moving to Troy, New York; Erika Chang, who is moving to Seattle with her husband Matt; and Steven D'Evelyn, who is moving to Bristol, England. In my capacity as spiritual father, I feel a definite sense of loss as they move on, since I baptized both Steven and Erika at celebrations of the Great Vigil of Easter; and I prepared Michael and Tonya for Confirmation. All four have made enormous contributions to our life together during their all-too-brief time with us at S. Stephen's. So, we rejoice with them for their new opportunities, even as we mourn their going from us.

Part of what makes S. Stephen's unique, I am convinced, is that some—not all but some—of our most rewarding ministry takes place with bright young people who are with us several years and then move on. During their time with us, we have the opportunity to let God use us to make a real difference in their lives, even as we have the opportunity to let God use them to make a real difference in ours.

Mind you, this has been going on a long time. It never ceases to amaze me how many visitors to S. Stephen's—for example, those stopping by to have a look in the church during the week—turn out to be people who attended S. Stephen's at an earlier stage of their lives, often during their

student days. With considerable frequency they say that S. Stephen's was the place where they found God, discovered the Catholic faith, or embraced the Anglican tradition.

The challenge for us, then, is to keep up this aspect of our parish's mission and identity. Let's work hard to ensure that S. Stephen's remains a place where bright young people from Brown, RISD, and elsewhere in the local community can be made welcome, have the opportunity for a life-changing encounter with Christ, and know that we value their gifts and the contribution that they can make to our parish life—regardless of how many or how few years they will stay with us.

This letter comes with all best wishes and prayers for a happy, healthy, and refreshing summer. I remain, faithfully,

Your pastor and priest,

Fr. John D. Alexander

Editor's Note:

It is my pleasure to give thanks for the people at S. Stephen's Church who help me put this newsletter together nine times a year. No editor would have time to do this work alone, but together we manage to produce an interesting little newsletter devoted to the mission, identity and teachings of our Anglo-Catholic parish.

My thanks, then, to Father Alexander, Phoebe Pettingell, Sandra Bartlett, Brian Ehlers, Julia Steiny, Alan Reniere, Stephen D'Evelyn, Father Shattuck, Cory MacLean, Kari Johnson, Deborah Lawrence, Ed Zeldin, Tom Bledsoe, and Beverly Myers for your 2006/2007 contributions to *The S. Stephen*.

Karen Vorbeck Williams

Things that are not eternal are already out of date.

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**“To Have and to Hold”:
The Wedding of Bishop Geralyn Wolf
and Thomas Charles Bair**

In brilliant sunshine, many joyful members of the Diocese of Rhode Island and the House of Bishops packed the Cathedral of Saint John on Saturday, April 21, to witness the celebration and blessing of the marriage of the Right Rev. Geralyn Wolf and Mr. Thomas Bair. The Most Reverend Frank Tracy Griswold, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, officiated and celebrated. In years past, Bishop Griswold baptized Bishop Wolf and preached at her ordinations to the diaconate and priesthood, and at her consecration. At the wedding, he was joined by the Right Reverend David Joslin, Assisting Bishop of Rhode Island and the Right Reverend Arthur Williams, retired Suffragan Bishop of Ohio (Bishop Williams was born in Providence and was a parishioner of S. Stephen’s before entering the priesthood).

The homily on Holy Matrimony was given by Father Norman Catir who introduced the couple to one another last summer when he was Priest-in-Charge of St. John the Evangelist in Newport. With an appealing mixture of humor and theology, Father Catir spoke of the centrality of marriage in the vision of the Christian journey where two people give up part of their own individuality to grow together. In the same way, we are all called to give up our willfulness and join ourselves to God’s will so that we may ultimately become the people he created us to be.

Bishop Wolf made her wedding a diocesan celebration: the choir was assembled from many parishes, while at the entrance of the bride, she walked down the aisle surrounded by a bevy of little girls—children and grandchildren of Rhode Island clergy and laity. Diocesan clergy (including Father Alexander) were recruited to assist in the administration of Holy Communion. But other aspects of the couple’s lives were also represented. The groom was attended by his two sons; one of the lessons was read by Esther De Waal, noted British authority on Celtic prayer and liturgy (and wife of a former Dean of Canterbury Cathedral). At every point, “the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church” shone through the rite.

A number of parishioners from S. Stephen’s were present to witness this joyous occasion and to add our voices to the ringing “We will!” when asked to do all in our power to uphold these two persons in their marriage.” As Bishop Griswold said afterwards, “I think it was the most spirited wedding I ever attended.”

Phoebe Pettingell



The Right Reverend Geralyn Wolf enters the Cathedral with children



The happy couple.

Photos by Scott Gunn

Solemn Evensong & Benediction

**Ascension of
Our Lord Jesus Christ**

May 20, 5:30 pm

The Rev’d Patrick T. Gray, preacher
Curate of the Church of the Advent, Boston

The Schola Cantorum
under the direction of **James Busby**

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (*The Second Service*)
by William Byrd
Antiphon (*Five Mystical Songs*)
by R. Vaughan Williams

A Reception in the Great Hall Follows

S. Stephen’s Prayer Group meets Thursdays at 12:30 at Deborah Lawrence’s home. For prayers for yourself or for others, please contact Deborah at 621-3630, Cathy Bledsoe, at 246-2194, or send an email to vorkar@cox.net. **All are welcome!**

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH S. STEPHEN'S? *An Essay in Discernment*

by Father Alexander

In my final semester in seminary, I took a course entitled "Marriage Enrichment." If that sounds like a lightweight course, it was. After five semesters of some pretty demanding courses in Scripture, Church history, Theology, and Ethics—not to mention two years each of Greek and Latin—I was ready for something different.

Different it certainly was; and a lot of fun. The class was scheduled in the evening so that spouses could attend; and the first half of the weekly two-hour session consisted of a social hour complete with wine and cheese.

The professor's premise in this course was that while many marriage programs aim at identifying what is *wrong* with a marriage so that it can be *fixed*, it is far more beneficial first to identify what is *right* with a marriage so that it can be affirmed and *celebrated*.

Sometimes I recall that premise when I hear parishioners complaining about what's wrong with S. Stephen's and authoritatively prescribing what needs to be done. Yes, there are areas that we need to correct and improve as a parish. But we need to put those challenges into perspective by first learning to identify, proclaim, and celebrate what's *right* with S. Stephen's.

Often, the complaint takes the form of a statement that begins with the words, "We need to be more ..." And then the predicate completing the sentence is some adjective like "welcoming," "hospitable," "social," or "family-friendly."

The impression I often get when I hear such statements is that the speaker is measuring S. Stephen's against some externally derived ideal of what a parish should be—perhaps based on experience of parishes elsewhere—and finding S. Stephen's wanting by comparison.

The question I always want to ask is, "Have you prayed about this?" That response is not meant to be a sanctimonious put-down. Its point is rather to suggest that ultimately the standard that matters is not what kind of parish *we* want to become but rather what kind of parish *God* wants us to become.

Discerning God's will for our parish is a tricky business that requires a great deal of humility. We fallen human beings are prone to enormous self-deception. But, most often, such discernment involves asking two simple questions: First, what gifts has God given us? And second, what opportunities is God giving us to use those gifts in his service?

The first question – What gifts has God given us? – is absolutely crucial and brings us back to my earlier point about the necessity of identifying what's *right* with S. Stephen's.

God distributes very different gifts to different parish communities. The challenge before us, then, is not to emulate the very real virtues of some other parish—a Grace Church, an All Saints, or a St. Martin's—but rather to understand the unique gifts that God has given *our* parish, how those gifts make us unique, and how we are called to employ and develop those gifts in God's service.

In other words, our calling is not to become something that we're not, but rather to understand and more fully become *who we really are*: What gifts do we have? What's *right* with our parish? Only then can we begin to discern the outlines of the specific mission to which we're called.



The second question—what opportunities is God giving us to use our gifts in his service?—focuses our attention on the prospects for mission and ministry presented by our environment. For example, it's no good lamenting the lack of parking spaces in the immediate vicinity of the church. That's unlikely to change any time soon. But consider the number of people who live within walking distance. What opportunities does *that* feature of our environment present?

Again: it's no good lamenting our inability to offer a 10:00 am Mass on Commencement Sunday. That also is unlikely to change any time soon. But consider the number of out-of-town visitors on campus that morning who would welcome the opportunity to attend Mass before the day's academic proceedings begin. What opportunities does *that* feature of our environment present? In other words, what's *right* with our situation?

Now, I plead guilty to being an optimist. I like to accentuate the positive, and as a rule I see the glass as half-full, not half-empty. This is not to rule out legitimate self-criticism. Your Rector, Wardens, and Vestry are well aware of features of our parish life that need correction and improvement. All parishes—some more than others but all nonetheless—have certain dysfunctional areas. Denial of their existence serves no good purpose and may do a lot of harm.

Yet I occasionally wonder if focusing on our parish's problems can be a mechanism of avoidance of the problems in our own lives. Facing up to the need for change begins with each individual. In our Anglo-Catholic tradition, the process by which we do that is called repentance. And the place where we do that is called the confessional.

As a parish community we are blessed with wonderful gifts and equally wonderful opportunities. For starters, we have a supremely talented and gifted congregation, a beautiful Richard Upjohn church building, a traditional liturgy marked by dignity and beauty, a first-class music program, theologically sound teaching, and a venerable heritage of Anglo-Catholic tradition. Our location on the East Side in the middle of a prestigious university creates some significant limitations on what we can do—but many, many more opportunities to be of service in ways that no other parish can.

So, let's focus on what's *right* with our parish. In this way, we build on our strengths and fulfill our identity and mission to be the community that God calls us to be.

EPISCOPAL CHARITIES, 2007



*“Beautiful things happen when,
like snowflakes, we join together.”*
Episcopal Charities

The theme of this year’s Episcopal Charities campaign, as stated above, emphasizes the multiplicity of the agencies served just as it does the breadth of our diversity here at S. Stephen’s. Each snowflake is an individual like no other. And having built snowmen and snow forts, crawled through snow tunnels, climbed over banks, shoveled, and skied or sledged down hills covered with snow, we all know what an awesome whole is created when all these snowflakes get together.

Several weeks ago we received the 2007 mailing from Episcopal Charities of Rhode Island, an organization begun by Bishop John Seville Higgins whom some of us here at S. Stephen’s were privileged to know as he made frequent trips around the corner from the Bishop’s House to worship here, at his neighborhood parish.

Unlike this week’s weather which would make all those snowflakes disappear in a hurry, the support of Episcopal Charities of Rhode Island is an on-going source of funding to organizations who hope to better the lives of the people they serve. This month I would particularly direct your attention to www.warmshelter.org to see how this has worked for the W.A.R.M. Shelter (Westerly Area Rest Meals, Inc.) an organization founded in 1987 and still serving people in need in the Greater Westerly area. The Rev’d Jean Barry, current Executive Director, spoke at the ECRI Awards ceremony last year and gave moving testimony to the importance of ECRI support for their ministry.

Now it is time for the people of S. Stephen’s to unite in helping our Episcopal Charities. Our participation goal has been set at 101 gifts and our dollar goal at \$13,740. How do we do this? If 101 donors were to give \$11.35 per month for 12 months (\$136.20 in a year), we would exceed our goal!

The following table reflects how we in our diversity might also accomplish this goal.

Range	Average	Number	Total
\$1,000+	\$1,000	002	\$ 2,000
\$500 - \$999	750	002	\$ 1,500
\$200 - \$499	250	015	\$ 3,750
\$100 - \$199	150	030	\$ 4,500
\$ 50 - \$ 99	50	030	\$ 1,500
\$ 5 - \$ 49	25	022	\$ 550
TOTAL		101	\$13,800

We ask each of you to find within this table the place you feel that you can make a difference in the lives of other Rhode Islanders less fortunate and to complete your pledge card accordingly when you are contacted by a member of the S. Stephen’s Episcopal Charities Committee.

*Chester Files
Phoebe Pettingell
Sandra Bartlett*

Visit our website at www.sstephens.org
View and print our newsletter in living color.



Saint Benedicta a Cruce

Saturday, June 2: Edith Stein The Society of Mary

Beverly Meyers has become increasingly moved by the writings and witness of St. Edith Stein, and will be giving a talk about this important saint of the 20th century at the next meeting of the Society of Mary’s “Our Lady of Providence Ward.”

Edith Stein was born the eleventh child of German Orthodox Jewish parents in 1891. However, by age 13, she had abandoned her ancestral faith—indeed faith in

general. She attended the University of Göttingen where she studied philosophy with Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology. Her doctoral dissertation was on the nature of empathy.

In 1921, Stein picked up a book by St. Teresa of Avila, the 16th century Spanish Carmelite mystic. She read throughout the night, and concluded that she had found true religion. She was baptized as a Catholic, but, for the sake of her mother, also accompanied her family to the synagogue, feeling reconnected to her Jewish roots. For the next ten years, she struggled to discern her own vocation, especially whether or not she should continue her academic career. This was resolved for her in 1932, when Hitler came to power, and scholars with Jewish ancestry lost their university appointments. At this point, she discerned that Christ’s cross “was now being laid on the Jewish people, and that the few who understood this had the responsibility of carrying it in the name of all.” She became a Carmelite nun, Sister Benedicta a Cruce, already foreseeing her martyrdom, which happened at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942. She embraced her death as an act of atonement for the evil of her time, and as a conscious identification with the cross of Christ.

Beverly’s own scholarship and spiritual insight will provide further illumination on the significance of Edith Stein. So join us on June 2 in the Lady Chapel at 9:00 for Morning Prayer; Mass at 9:30 with recitation of the Rosary, followed by breakfast and fellowship in the Great Hall, and then Beverly’s talk in the Library. Bring your friends to hear more about this fascinating saint whose influence continues to shape the times we live in.

For further information, contact Phoebe Pettingell at 724-3090 or Phoebe1446@aol.com

Lectionary Bible Study meets Fridays at 9:30 a.m. in the church library. The Lectionary texts for the coming Sunday are the object of a study led by Father Alexander. (Our last meeting before the summer will be on June 8th.)

Everyone is welcome!

INHABIT THE NEWNESS OF LIFE

by Julia Steiny

*"...grant that we may ever hereafter
serve and please thee in newness of life"*

—The General Confession, Rite I

On a sticky-hot Sunday afternoon at the end of last August, Conrad and I headed out to what we think of as "our" beach, knowing full well that the outing might be ruined by my noxious mood.

Already for a couple of months, I'd fallen back into a tired old fight with myself about why I wasn't more successful as a writer. This subject makes my friends and family roll their eyes with exasperation, so I try to keep my mouth shut. I decided that the problem was my own wretched skills – I am largely self-taught – so I'd engaged someone I thought was a highly-skilled and exacting tutor. In retrospect I think I misjudged how much I could take of his unalloyed, unrelenting and often caustic criticism. Seeing my work through his eyes kept me awake nights worrying about my mistakes of lazy grammar, imprecise words, hyper-intense prose, and overuse of lists. Trying both to write and be my own angry, tyrannical judge, meant that my newspaper columns had become dense and humorless; work on my book proposal ground to a crawl, and I fell easily into the aforementioned foul moods.

But no one healthy and able to pay their bills has a right to be crabby in the glory of New England's August. The moribund winter landscape has long quickened into living color, until by August armfuls of gladiolas, dahlias and cosmos can be had for a song. And the crowning glory of the season, for me anyway, are the tidal estuaries, amoeba-shaped lawns of long, dense, emerald eel-grass that grow along the southern coastlines in shallow coves.

"Our" beach became the favorite because to get to it you have to walk through such an estuary, along a narrow path. When the tide is high, the estuary floods, as does the path. Beach-goers slip off their sandals and wade through shallow water on silted soil so squishy it feels like walking on the inside of someone's mouth. When the tide is low the path is conveniently dry, but that same



bird droppings cooked by the sun, stinks. Happily, the slightly poopy odor of organic rot inhibits the popularity and population of the beach. I myself take no issue with salty earthiness, so I linger in the middle of the estuary's path, pretending to be one of the lanky herons grazing lazily in the safety of the razor-sharp grass. Fluffy waterfowl pubescents make trouble with their siblings under the watch of their beautiful parents.

On this day we parked the car in the shade of a big maple and hiked across the field to the estuary. But, consistent with the dark, foul mood of that otherwise glorious day, the estuary was flooded – which I hate. One indignity of my age is to have feet now so damaged by decades of dance training and a massive twin pregnancy that I can't wear sandals. I have to take off my socks and the sneakers with orthotics, and then, at the other end of the path, clean the silty sand off my wet feet using the socks, which makes them yucky. Okay, so putting shoes back on feet that still do function reasonably well doesn't sound all that terrible. But on that particular day, the flooded estuary conspired with my nasty mood to prove all was against me – face it: I'm to suffer, not succeed. The pittance of

recognition and recompense I have managed to attract is just a crumb, a tease designed to mock me with what I *should* have accomplished.

Wrapping myself in defeat may feel like a humble, penitential sacrifice, but it's really just an excellent way to induce depression. It knots my stomach. It's oily darkness obscures Possibility. As the remaining inklings of positive potential die off, I settle in to ponder ruefully which of my mistakes was the biggest killer. Let's see...

Well, once I'm on this slippery slope, every tiny regret becomes full-blown heartache – over not having learned to play the piano, or seen the Taj Mahal, or mastered Spanish.

But most debilitating of all is comparing myself with others, especially other writers, whom I deem successful. I invent contests between me and the Successful and instantly lose them. So I regret my manifold lazy habits, self-indulgent choices, poorly-managed opportunities and all my other sins and wickedness. I acknowledge the stupid things I have done. I bewail the long, long lists of things left undone, both the mental lists composed during sleepless nights and the written-down ones metasizing on my desk.

The remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable.

"Oh for heaven's sake," Conrad implored, very much wishing to have a nicer day. "You don't have to take off your shoes; I'll carry you."

"Oh, ri-ight!," I scoffed.

"You're going to sweep me up in your Schwarzenegger arms and carry me off like you were some TV hunk. You have a bum knee and I'm hardly the little slip of a thing you married."

Conrad was patient, using his Valium voice, "No, you're getting on my back."

"Forget it," I barked, "It shouldn't be a big deal to take a pair of shoes off and on. How dare I complain about achey feet when there are small children confined to wheelchairs who've never danced once in their lives.

Conrad knelt down, as he used to do when the boys were little, and commanded, "Just jump on."

Conrad's not one to give orders, as a rule, so with a strangely pleasant flutter in my stomach and a good bit of protest, I did climb on his back, wrapping my legs around his torso, and death-gripping his shoulders with my arms as if that would somehow ease his 30-yard trudge through the shallow water. Giddy for no good reason, I found myself shrieking with: "I'm too heavy. Go back. Your poor knee. You'll be crippled for life!" And the tip-off to the day's root problem: "What will people think?!!"

In fact, the smattering of people leaving the beach and passing us on the path grinned broadly. They saw two older people, both laughing and carrying on like a couple of teenagers, making an absurd amount of noise and public fuss. The mouths of three kids in a family group were gaping with shock, but their parents beamed. No one was shy about staring. We were entertaining. Moments earlier I'd been a walking wailing wall, but wriggling and giggling on Conrad's back, I'd become as light and fun as the radiant day itself, caught up in a burst of pure, silly pleasure. Conrad set me down at the other end with: "What a complainer," but in truth, we fell to kissing such as we could with the giggling.

*...forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may hereafter
serve and please thee in the newness of
life...*

Conrad wandered off a few yards to compose himself, shaking his head at what he puts up with, but chortling. I sat in the sand drinking in all the emerald-and-sunshine sensations my evil mood had kept at bay. Jesus, probably bored to tears with my behavior, surely whispered encouragements to Conrad, causing grace – *undeserved* rewards – to redeem the day.

And just like that, the Judge that normally carps and condemns at me was gone, evicted with comic ferocity. In her place I could feel my forever-young Me, the self who's cute and agile, and unshakably optimistic about the valuable gifts she brings to a welcoming world. That young Me sat in the warm sand appreciating all sensations, and feeling kind of pretty, to tell you the truth. The

water sparkled; a breeze blew gently; the green was so green; Conrad seemed tall. And looking across the short distance to the very recent past, I could see the black-clad Judge rehearsing her tired repertoire of disappointment stories, all pulled from the same-oldness of life.

And just like that, I knew that what I'd always thought of as grave mistake in the Liturgy's General Confession was actually my mistake. All those years, I had been approaching the Confession not with an open heart, but with that Judge in my head. Who knew? I'd gotten quite disciplined about preparing before Mass to call my darker deeds onto the carpet of consciousness. Cued by the Confession's "*Almighty God, most merciful Father...*," I would name three sins of that week, and only three – hardly the tip of the iceberg – to force myself at least to grapple with those. But the prayer goes too fast. It hustles you along. Shouldn't the group of sins coughed up at the beginning of the Confession gnaw at you for a while, beating your ego into raw repentance until, say, just before Communion? Shouldn't the regret torture for longer?

Ah, but that was the Judge egging on what now seems like an addiction to a certain pain. As of now I regret and bewail the amount of credibility I've given that toxic voice. The silly adventure in the estuary proved I could brighten back into living color myself, rather quickly, if I could quit condemning from afar and jump back into my life. Only as the innocent Me, looking out on fresh life as it spontaneously unfolds in front of me, only from there can I feel gentleness of a summer breeze, the fun in a fit of giggling, or the effects of a good man's love. Those dark, cloying moods born of regret are not about God's wrath and indignation. They're about mine. Chastising myself, wallowing in abjection, believing anxious paralysis to be rehabilitating – these are not signs of true repentance, but sins. In the hands of some people, alcohol drives an ugly wedge between them and God. In my hands, regret becomes just as sinful.

The solution, gently stated right there at the end of the Confession, is to live fully in the newness of life. Now, when the knot twists tight in my

stomach, I remember to jump inside of the present moment and pay good attention to the drama of my life unfolding in front of me, filled with subtle surprises. When I make the switch from sinfully heeding the Judge's admonitions to the Now, a faint memory of that estuary and sun-washed day color the effort. If I need extra help, in the space of a few lines of prayer, with roots as old, deep and promising as the estuaries', saying the Confession helps me back onto my feet, alert to my surroundings, with all systems functioning, so I can go out and grow living-green solutions no matter what adversity life presents. Because only fully alive inside the newness of life can I possibly serve and please anyone.

And that will produce success enough, for God's sake.

*To the honor and glory of thy Name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



*On Sunday April 22, former Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold visited S. Stephen's Church for the first time. He celebrated, preached and confirmed Abby Martin, Arthur Bledsoe, Erika Chang and Gordon Latham.
Thanks be to God!*

**Early Mass on May 27th
Brown Commencement**

There will be only one Mass, the morning of Brown University's Commencement—Solemn High Mass at 8:00.

Your life may be the only Bible some folks read.

S. Stephen's Church in Providence
114 George Street
Providence, RI 02906
Address Correction Requested



The Day of Pentecost

Sunday May 27, 8:00 am Solemn High Mass

Whitsunday

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,
And spread thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wing, and fly away with thee.

Where is that fire which once descended
On thy Apostles? thou didst then
Keep open house, richly attended,
Feasting all comers by twelve chosen men.

Such glorious gifts thou didst bestow,
That th' earth did like a heav'n appear:
The stars were coming down to know
If they might mend their wages,
and serve here.

The Sun, which once did shine alone,
Hung down his head, and wished for night,
When he beheld twelve suns for one
Going about the world, and giving light.



The Unknown Illustrator of 'Bamberg Apocalypse'

But since those pipes of gold, which
brought
That cordial water to our ground,
Were cut and martyred by the fault
Of those, who did themselves through
their side wound,

Thou shut'st the door, and keep'st within;
Scarce a good joy creeps through the
chink:

And if the braves of conqu'ring sin
Did not excite thee, we should wholly sink.

Lord, though we change, thou art the
same;

The same sweet God of love and light:
Restore this day, for thy great name,
Unto his ancient and miraculous right.

George Herbert
The Complete English Poems