



The S. Stephen

The monthly news at S. Stephen's Church in Providence
September/October, 2007

Vol. 7, No. 1

APPOINTMENT OF PARISH SACRISTAN

For many years, the members of S. Stephen's Altar Guild have put in long hours of devoted service and hard work preparing the Sanctuary week by week for the worship of God. To facilitate and support their efforts, effective September 1st, Fr. Alexander has appointed parishioner Ty Creason as Parish Sacristan, a position that includes serving as Director of the Altar Guild.

During the week, Ty works in the Diocesan Office as Administrative Assistant to Bishop Wolf. He also serves as Bishop's Chaplain, accompanying Bishop Wolf on her visitations in the diocese. In years past, Ty tried his vocation with the Order of Julian of Norwich in Wisconsin, where he trained as Sacristan of the monastery.

The *Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* defines a Sacristan as a "person charged with the care and maintenance of sacred vessels, vestments, altar linens, candles, oils, holy water, and other liturgical items."



Ty Creason
Sacristan

The Parish Sacristan's responsibilities will include building up the Altar Guild by recruiting, scheduling, training, and assisting its members in the performance of these duties. Since Ty's work in the diocese will usually preclude his being with us on Sunday mornings, he will perform his tasks as Sacristan on Saturdays and during the week.

In return for his services, Ty will receive living quarters in the currently unoccupied apartment on the fourth floor of the Guildhouse. The other apartment is occupied by George and Cory MacLean, the parish Sextons. In recent years, the second apartment has been refurbished and used as guest quarters for visiting preachers and speakers.

In an email to the Vestry earlier this summer, Fr. Alexander noted that "the benefits of having someone living on premises to do the job of Sacristan are obvious," and that making the fourth floor apartment available for this purpose seems a wonderful way to leverage one of our most valuable (but currently under-utilized) assets.

We extend Ty a hearty welcome as he takes up his position on the staff of S. Stephen's Church as Parish Sacristan.

SUNDAY EVENING SERVICES

Beginning 23 September, we shall resume our schedule of sung Sunday Evening services in the Lady Chapel at 5:30 pm. As in the past two years, these services will normally take the form of plainchant Evensong. However, this year we shall occasionally vary the format to include such services as Compline and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Please consult the Sunday *Kalendar* for details of the evening service for that day.



Lecture Series: Mary in Ecumenical Perspective

Since the sixteenth century, the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in theology and spirituality has often been a source of division among Christians. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, Mary is becoming a focal point of unity for many Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants.

On Sunday evenings in October, we are planning a three-part lecture and discussion series on "Mary in Ecumenical Perspective" to explore how Christians of different ecclesiastical affiliations see the Mother of Jesus. The series will take place in the Great Hall on Sundays October 14, 21, and 28, immediately following 5:30 pm Evensong.

At present we have lined up the following schedule and participants:

Schedule

Sunday 14 October—The Rev. Dr. J. Robert Wright, on "Mary in the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue."
Sunday 21 October—The Rev. Dr. Donald C. Lacy, on "Mary in Protestant Spirituality."
Sunday 28 October—The Very Rev. Isaac Crow and the Rev. Canon Gregory Howe, on "Mary in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition."

Participants

The Rev. Dr. J. Robert Wright is Professor of Church History at the General Theological Seminary in New York City. The author of a vast output of scholarly writings, Professor Wright has been a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) since 1971.

The Rev. Dr. Donald Lacy has been a Methodist minister for over forty years and was a founding member of the American branch of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Dr. Lacy was featured in the article "Hail, Mary" in the March 15, 2005 issue of *Time Magazine*.

The Very Rev. Fr. Isaac Crow, a good friend of S. Stephen's, is Pastor of Saint Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church in Pawtucket, RI, and Chaplain of the Orthodox Christian Student Association at Brown University.

The Rev. Canon Gregory Howe was Rector of Christ Church, Dover, Delaware from 1966 to 1998, and now lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Since 2000 he has been the Episcopal Church's official Custodian of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and is well versed in the Orthodox liturgy and Anglican-Orthodox relations.

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

This issue of *The S. Stephen* is being mailed early to let you know of our plans for the month of September as we begin an exciting new round of parish activities for the 2007-2008 season.

I trust that the summer has been pleasant and relaxing for us all. For ten days in July, my family and I visited Argentina and Chile. We spent four nights in Buenos Aires and three nights each in Santiago and a place called Viña del Mar, which is just north of Valparaiso on the Pacific coast. I know that some parishioners are well familiar with South America, but it was our first time ever to that region of the world. One high point of the trip, literally, was flying over the Andes—far more spectacular from the air than either the Alps or the Rockies. Gastronomic highlights included Argentinian steak and Chilean seafood, including my first taste of octopus, which I loved.

Looking at a map, we determined that we were about as far south of the equator as the Carolinas are north of it. The weather was reminiscent of late October or early November—temperatures in the 40s and 50s, for the most part brisk, chilly, and sunny. We certainly needed the sweaters and windbreakers that we had brought along—and this while New England was sweltering in 90-degree heat and humidity.

Several people have asked me whether I made contact with anyone in the Anglican Church in that part of

the world, but it was not that kind of trip. We did visit several splendid churches, including the metropolitan cathedrals in the two capital cities.

On the Sunday we were in Santiago, we attended Mass in the parish church a short walk from our hotel. It was very contemporary, with Spanish hymns sung to folk tunes—although the guitar playing (in a sort of flamenco style) and singing reflected musical skill superior to anything in the way of contemporary worship that one normally hears in this country. One of the hymns had a very familiar tune, which I recognized after a moment as Simon and Garfunkel's *Sound of Silence*, but with different words. Not knowing Spanish, I could not follow the liturgy word-for-word; and yet the structure and flow of the Mass were immediately recognizable, comforting, and conducive to prayer. It was very different in style from S. Stephen's—and yet it was the same Mass, with the same Lord in the same Sacrament, so we felt right at home.

Now that we have returned home from our summer adventures, I am looking forward with eager anticipation to the programs and activities that we have planned for the Fall. The articles in this issue will fill you in on what we have planned in the next month or so. You will soon be receiving copies of the *Liturgical Music* brochure and the *Programs and Events* brochure for 2007-2008. These will give you a picture of our services, music, programs, and activities for the entire season.

This letter comes as always with all best wishes and prayers. I remain, faithfully,

Your Pastor and Priest,

Fr. John D. Alexander

Stewardship 2008

By Tom Bledsoe

Well, it happened again. Last Thursday I went to the ATM and got enough cash to last through the weekend, and ideally into this week. Friday evening, my daughter and then my older son informed me that they had plans for the evening and needed some money (the price I pay for not giving them allowance). In the morning, Cathy sent me to the grocery store and then I stopped at the hardware store. Lucas needed some money for the ice cream truck. By the time Sunday rolled around, I had a few dollars left. It is so easy to spend money without thinking about it; it just flows like water out of my wallet.

Stewardship season is a good opportunity to change that pattern, to not only *think* about where your money goes, but to actually *pray* about where your money goes. The money in your pocket, in your wallet, in your savings account, in your investments has been put there by the grace of God for a purpose. Prayer is an important way to discern that purpose. What good works "hath God prepared for you to walk in?" Pledging to S. Stephen's is one of the ways you may further the work of our God by directing your resources to a specific purpose.

Soon, you will receive a letter from the chairs of the Stewardship Committee requesting a pledge for 2008. Please take time now to look over your budget and pray for guidance on how you might increase your pledge for next year.

...and we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in...

Anyone interested in helping out with this year's Stewardship Campaign, please contact Cathy Bledsoe at 246-2194 or CBledsoe1@verizon.net.

Prayer is so simple. It is like quietly opening a door and slipping into the very presence of God. There, in the stillness, to listen for His voice, perhaps in petition or only to listen, it matters not. Just to be there in His presence, is prayer.

Anonymous

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Deadline: the fifth day of the month.
www.sstephens.org



NEWCOMERS DINNER

The whole parish is invited to a dinner beginning at 6:30 pm on Saturday 27 October, to welcome our newcomers.

If you have started (or resumed) attending S. Stephen's in the last year or so, this dinner will allow you to meet and get to know some of our long-standing parishioners, including those in positions of leadership in parish committees and organizations.

If you are a long-standing member of the parish, you will have noticed some new faces in the congregation lately. This dinner will allow you to meet our newcomers and get to know them better.

During the course of the dinner, members of the Vestry and other parish organizations and groups will make *brief* presentations on opportunities for involvement in such areas as Acolytes, Ushers, Lectors, Altar Guild, Stewardship, Prayer Group, and Society of Mary.

We need volunteers to help with this event. For more information, please contact Ed Zeldin and Suzanne Ramczyk, who are in charge of the logistics of the evening.

All parishioners of S. Stephen's are asked to make a note of the date and time, and plan on joining us for this important gathering of our parish community.

HELPING THE SISTERS IN MALAWI

The Sisters of Saint Mary in Malawi, South Central Africa, need our help in building a guest house for their new convent. One S. Stephen's parishioner has already stepped forward with a generous contribution of \$10,000. This Fall, we will appeal for further contributions towards the total cost of \$40,000.

Over the past couple of years, we at S. Stephen's have been building a relationship with the Community of Saint Mary (CSM) in Greenwich, New York. S. Stephen's parishioners have attended retreats in Greenwich; and Sisters from the Community have in turn visited us to speak at Quiet Days and other parish events.

Founded in 2002, the Sisters in the Community's convent in the south central African nation of Malawi have responded to calls to speak in parishes, to lead Bible Studies, and to visit the sick. Their apostolate is principally to women, girls, and young children through Church-related outreach. An important component of their ministry is support of extended families in caring for children left without parents by HIV/AIDS.

As they seek to build up their community, the African Sisters have a number of ongoing capital projects that depend on overseas funding from parishes and individuals. One such project is the construction of a Guest House for ten retreatants in the convent compound.

Shortly we will send parishioners and friends of S. Stephen's a letter appealing for contributions to assist in this worthy endeavor. Also, on Sunday 21 October, Mother Miriam of the Community of Saint Mary will be with us at Coffee Hour to make a presentation on the work of the Sisters in Malawi and the projects that need funding.

For more information, please visit the Sisters' website at www.stmaryseast.org. Also you will find leaflets entitled *Luwanga Mission* in the tract rack in the Narthex.



S. Stephen's Welcomers:

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Epistle to the Hebrews 13:2

Starting this fall, S. Stephen's will initiate a program that will focus on ways in which we can become more welcoming to the new faces in our pews. Welcomers will help strengthen the mission of S. Stephen's by personally welcoming—not just greeting—all visitors and newcomers who come through our doors, and introducing them to the life of the

parish community. On Thursday 13 September, at 7:30 p.m., there will be a meeting and brief training session in the library. All who feel they may be called to this work and are willing to contribute a little time are welcome to attend and participate in this team ministry of hospitality. Welcomers will work in teams at the 10 o'clock Sunday Mass. Further duties will be explained at the meeting.

There will be a Newcomers' dinner on Saturday, October 27, so mark your calendars, because this is an event for the entire parish. In addition, in September, a brief, fun presentation

at the 10 o'clock Coffee Hour will demonstrate ways to make our visitors welcome.

Each of us values the qualities that make S. Stephen's important to our lives. Let's help make these obvious to our visitors so they feel welcomed into our community. In the words of the Rule of St. Benedict, "Let everyone who enters be received as Christ."

For further information, please contact Elizabeth Alexander (508-399-5942 or singmom@comcast.net) or Phoebe Pettingell (401-274-3090 or Phoebe1446@aol.com).

Edith Stein: Saint and Martyr

by Beverly Myers

Beverly Myers was the featured speaker at a Society of Mary meeting last June. Her talk on the modern saint, Edith Stein, was so well received that we are pleased to re-print a synopsis of its highlights.

Edith Stein, a Carmelite nun who died in Auschwitz on August 9, 1942, was canonized by Pope John Paul on October 11, 1998. She was a brilliant scholar and woman of prayer who chose the path of martyrdom in sharing the fate of the Jewish people—even when she might have avoided death in a concentration camp. When she entered the Carmelite Order in 1933 and took the religious name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, the cross became her vocation, the meaning of her life, long before she was martyred.

Stein was born in 1891 on the Day of Atonement—a day of great importance to her—to a large Jewish family in eastern Germany. Although she prayed with her mother as a child, she stopped praying at fourteen and moved toward atheism. In her search for the truth, she chose to study philosophy. At that time, she was described as an arrogant young woman, who liked to point to other's faults. Her further education included study with Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. She obtained her doctorate in Philosophy with her study of Empathy.

She struggled for years over Christianity, as the Christian faith of many of her colleagues impressed her. During World War I a close colleague died in battle and Stein was impressed by the strength of his Christian wife. One night in 1921, at age thirty, she read Teresa of Avila's autobiography, and was moved to declare, "This is the truth." Shortly thereafter she was baptized in the Catholic Church. She thought she wanted to become a Carmelite nun like Teresa, but the time wasn't right.

In 1933, with Hitler and the Nazi regime coming to power, life for Jews began to change. Jews could no longer teach and Stein was fired from her position in a Christian women's college. She had an opportunity to obtain a



teaching job in South America. Instead she chose—much like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who returned to Germany during the war rather than work in the United States—to stay. The time had come for her to apply to Carmel in Germany.

During Easter 1933, before entering Carmel, she visited the Cologne Carmel for the Passion Thursday service. During the service, her mind wandered:

"I talked with the Savior and told Him that I knew that it was His cross that was now being placed upon the Jewish people; that most of them did not understand this, but that those who did would have to take it up willingly in the name of all. I would do that. He should only show me how. At the end of the service, I was certain I had been heard. But what this carrying of the cross was to consist in, that I did not yet know."

Shortly thereafter, Edith Stein was accepted into the Cologne Carmel where she began a spartan life with twenty-one other women in enclosure, obeying every order of the superior. She no longer belonged to herself: God was her goal—to pray and to seek union with God. "He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:30). Her priority was to pray. With support from the Mass, her purpose was to sacrifice herself with Jesus—surrendering totally so as to be transformed with Him and offered up with Him. But it is impossible independently to make oneself like Jesus; God will do the work of transformation. To be formed by Christ involves meeting him in the Eucharist, the Gospel and silent prayer.

In 1938, came *Krystallnacht*--the destruction of synagogues and Jewish libraries in Germany. Edith Stein, now a danger to her sisters in the Cologne Carmel, was transferred secretly to continue her life in the Carmel at Echt, in Holland. Her spiritual transformation continued even as the war began. But the Nazis overran Holland in 1940 and it ceased to be a place of refuge for Jews. In summer 1942, the Catholic Bishop of Holland

openly criticized the Nazi deportation of the Jews. In response all baptized Jews in Holland were arrested.

On August 2, 1942, despite much effort by the Carmelites to transfer Edith Stein to Switzerland, the Gestapo came to arrest Edith and her sister Rosa, a Christian, who had joined her as a lay assistant. As they left the monastery, Edith Stein said, "Come, Rosa, we will go for our people."

Along the way, at a Dutch transit camp, several people observed a nun. Unlike everyone around Edith Stein was aware of her impending death and tenderly nurtured the frightened women and children. During their transport by train, she dropped a note at one of the train stations: "Greetings from Sister Teresa Benedicta a Cruce, en route for the East." She died anonymously in the gas chambers at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942.

"To suffer and to be happy although suffering, to have one's feet on the earth, to walk on the dirty and rough paths of this earth and yet to be enthroned with Christ at the Father's right hand, to laugh and cry with the children of this world and ceaselessly sing the praises of God with the choirs of angels - this is the life of the Christian until the morning of eternity breaks forth."

Edith Stein

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The Feast of S. Michael
& All Angels
Solemn Evensong
& Benediction
Sunday 30 September at 5:30 pm

James Busby, organist & choirmaster
with the Schola Cantorum

**Father Alexander's Sermon:
Finding of the Relics of Saint Stephen**

The Feast of the Finding of the Relics of St. Stephen occurs on August 3rd. We celebrated it on Sunday 5 August as our summer patronal festival.

The last mention we have of Saint Stephen in the Bible occurs a few verses after the end of our reading from the Acts of the Apostles. In the midst of the great persecution that arose against the Church in Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom, we are told in chapter 8, verse 2, that "*Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him.*"

At this point the biblical record concerning Stephen falls silent, and the extra-biblical traditions begin. According to one tradition, the devout men who buried Stephen included Nicodemus and Gamaliel, both of whom the New Testament mentions as righteous members of the Sanhedrin, the governing council of the Jewish people.

According to this tradition, when Nicodemus and Gamaliel eventually died, they were also buried in the same location—a village not far from Jerusalem known as *Caphar-Gemala*, perhaps on account of its connection with Gamaliel.

For several hundred years, the bones of these saints lay hidden, their location forgotten. At length, in the year 415, the parish priest of the town, whose name was Lucian, had a dream in which Gamaliel appeared to him and told him the location of the tomb. Lucian reported his revelation to the Bishop of Jerusalem, who in turn directed that excavations be undertaken at the site.

Knowing what we do about Jewish burial customs of the time, my guess is that if there's any truth to the story at all, the remains would have been interred in stone ossuaries, or bone-boxes, rather than in full-size coffins. And it's likely that the names of the deceased would have been carved on the ossuaries, thus making possible accurate identification of the bones within.

In any case, as the story goes, Lucian did indeed find the relics in the appointed place. Then, on August 3rd, the Patriarch and an entourage of his clergy came with great solemnity and removed the bones to Jerusalem, where they were eventually interred in a basilica built on the reputed location of Stephen's martyrdom.

In those days, however, everyone wanted a portion of the relics of so great a saint. Before long, fragments of Stephen's relics had been distributed far and wide. A fascinating contemporary witness is Saint Augustine of Hippo. In Book 22 of his classic work *The City of God*, written sometime in the 420s, the decade after Lucian's discovery, Augustine describes the arrival of some of Saint Stephen's relics in North Africa.



Detail from The Stoning of Saint Stephen by Rubens

Augustine devotes several pages to accounts of many miraculous healings that took place when people prayed at shrines containing Stephen's relics. Augustine is careful to say that it is not Stephen but God who performs these miracles. And he goes on to explain the Church's belief that those who pray before a martyr's relics on earth obtain the prayers of that martyr in heaven. Any healing that then occurs is thus to be understood as given by God in response to the martyr's prayers.

By the sixteenth century, relics of the saints had become the focus of much superstition, corruption, and fraud. So, the Protestant Reformation largely rejected all practices involving their veneration. Nonetheless, the witness of Saint Augustine and other early Christian writers affirms an absolutely crucial theological principle. The relics of the saints remind us that the Christian faith is grounded not in timeless myth but in real human history. The patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs about whom we read in the Bible were flesh-and-blood human beings like you and me, *and they've left behind their mortal remains to prove it.*

So, regardless of whether the bones that Lucian found in 415 were really those of Saint Stephen, the important point is that *they might have been.* And that possibility, however slight, expresses the incarnational grounding of the Christian faith. Our patron saint is not some mythical figure from timeless legend, but rather a real person who was born, lived, and died at a particular time and place in history.

Moreover, relics furnish a tangible sign of the Communion of Saints. As Augustine describes it, when Stephen's relics were brought to North Africa, the Christians there discovered that somehow Stephen himself was present with them in spirit. The doctrine of the Communion of Saints teaches us that in Christ we have fellowship with all members of Church, both living and dead. Just as we pray for each other on earth, so the saints in heaven pray for us. In Augustine's day, the Christians in North Africa certainly experienced the power of Stephen's prayers for them.

To belong to a parish dedicated to Saint Stephen is thus to stand in a special relationship with him. Remember, Stephen is not only an historical figure who lived and died in first century Palestine, but also someone who's alive with God and watching over us today. And our founders laid claim to Stephen's special protection and prayers when they dedicated this parish to his patronage.

Now, to my knowledge, we don't have any relics of Saint Stephen here in this church. We do have several artistic representations of Stephen, including the statue back there by the baptismal font; and that shrine serves as a tangible sign of Stephen's presence with us.

It's entirely appropriate when you pass by that statue to stop and ask Stephen for his prayers. You might even want to light a candle. Pray that Stephen will continue to watch over, guide, and protect this parish. Pray that he will obtain for us the strength and courage to be faithful to Christ in our day, just as he was faithful unto death in his day. Pray that he will show us how to fulfill our mission and calling as his parish, Saint Stephen's Church in Providence.

There are two things in life that I've learned: There is a God, and I'm not Him.

The Society of Mary: Our Lady of Providence Ward



Saturday 8 September, is the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On that morning, the "Our Lady of Providence" Ward of the Society of Mary will convene at 9 a.m. for recitation of the Rosary, followed by a convivial breakfast, a short presentation on Our Lady's birthday, and discussion of program for the coming year.

Elsewhere in this issue, you will find the announcement of a Fall series: "Mary in Ecumenical Perspective" with distinguished speakers from the Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox traditions discussing the growing interest in the role of Mary in the ecumenical journey towards Christian unity. These programs will attract interest outside our parish, and I know you will want to support them and be hospitable to our speakers and visitors.

In addition, our ward has two very special festivals to look forward to. On Saturday, February 2, 2008, S. Stephen's will celebrate a Solemn Mass for the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple (Candlemas) at 11 a.m. The Rev'd R. Michael Tuck, Priest-in-Charge of St. John the Evangelist in Newport, will be our preacher, and we will have visitors from Newport to help us keep this feast. On Saturday, May 3, we will go to St. John's, Newport, for a May Festival of Our Lady. Fr. Alexander will be the preacher. So mark your calendars for these joyous festivals and join us for our regular meetings throughout the coming year. They will enrich your devotional life, inform you, and provide warm fellowship.

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!



A Little Brown Bird

by Kari Johnson

Harry and I became avid bird watchers when we lived in southern Africa where the variety of birds is probably the most diverse in the world. When we came home in 1999, we continued bird watching and always had a bird book handy; one in the car with some binoculars and one each on our back porch and in the bedroom (we had a large window installed so that all we had to do was pick our heads up from the pillows to see the bird feeders, bird houses and garden with many plants and trees put in to attract birds). The

last Christmas present that Harry gave me was a beautiful, large copper heron that we planned to place near the small pond we hoped to build this summer. Yes, we were for the birds.

On a Friday in mid-March, two months after Harry's death, after thinking that maybe I was getting used to living alone; not looking for him in his reading chair, at his desk, or beside me when I woke up every morning, my sadness had lifted a little. I was going through his papers and found his journals full of memories: camping trips, concerts, dinners with friends, visits with our children. He had also started one for the children with stories about their babyhood, things they were too young to remember. It was so like Harry to want them to know these stories. As soon as I read the first sentence of one of the journals, I was totally devastated to think that never again would he write about our times together, no more memories to be made, no more incredibly beautiful moments to share. I was thrown back into the darkest time of my grief all over again, the worst despair I had known.

The following morning my daughter phoned. I tried to explain to her what had happened because she could tell by my voice that I was crying. I was sitting in bed at the time and glanced out the window and noticed a small brownish-red bird sitting in the weeping cherry tree we had bought on our anniversary, the first tree Harry had planted when we bought the house. I did not recognize the bird and told my daughter I had to hang up and get my binoculars for a look.

The first thing bird watchers look for is the beak because that will almost always tell you what kind of bird it is; a seed eater, borer, a raptor with its hooked beak to tear up his prey, among others. This small bird had a delicate, black, slender beak (similar to a sandpiper's), quite different from the short broad beaks of the seed-eating birds I saw out the window. The eyes were dark and I noticed it had a particularly lovely face. The next thing I looked at was the tail and the markings. The tail was short and he had black speckles on the chest and bars across the wings. Finally, I noticed that he had a crimson red collar, not very wide but very apparent. I went to get my camera so I could take a photo. I was away about ten seconds to get the camera, but when I returned to the window the bird was gone.

I have the newest, most complete Audubon (Harry and I bought as a Christmas present to each other a few years ago) with pictures of all the birds in North America. I could not find the bird in my book. I checked my old Peterson's bird book and a different Audubon with photographs rather than drawings. The bird wasn't in those books either. The closest thing that it resembled was a wren but it was too large and didn't have the right markings. It was nine degrees outside, so it couldn't have been an escaped pet bird.

I was still very upset on Sunday and decided to go to my daughter's house after church where I took care of my grandson, Jonathan. He lifted my spirits. I drove home Monday night and the next day, during my morning prayers, my mind returned again and again to the bird. Suddenly I realized that the bird was a sign from God.

During my darkest grief my prayer had always been, "Please God, let me be with Harry again. If only I could believe, I can bear the loneliness and missing him."

I must admit that I had big doubts about the resurrection and "the life

MINOR LITURGICAL CHANGES

by Fr. Alexander

everlasting” in spite of reciting the Nicene Creed every Sunday at church. But now there came an indescribable feeling of peace, of not being part of this world. For three days after, the bird would enter my thoughts. Why wasn’t he in any of the books? I remembered the particularly striking red collar. It was Lent and the services at church were leading us toward the Passion of Christ. All of a sudden I knew that the red collar symbolized the blood of Jesus. It is impossible to describe the feeling I felt at that moment, but it could only have been a “state of grace.” It took me nearly four days of wondering to know exactly what the bird was.

Our fellow bird watchers in South Africa used to refer to small brownish birds as “LBJ’s” - not in reference to our former president but “little brown jobs,” not worth the effort to identify because there are so many other birds with vibrant colors and form. But there was something about this LBJ that had captivated me; and because Harry and I shared a love for birds, I knew that in a terrible moment of grief, God had sent me this bird.

YES, I will be with Harry again. It makes me wonder how many “signs” there have been in the past that I was too insensitive and skeptical to understand, things that defied logic. The feeling of peace that I have in my heart now is incredible and although I still miss Harry as much as ever, I don’t feel so alone. As long as I live, I will never need another sign to believe what I know today.

I keep telling my children that you have to look for God. “Seek and ye shall find, knock and it will be opened to you.” It’s true. I must admit my first reaction to the “miracle” of my bird was my elation in knowing that I will be with Harry again. But even more important, God is in my life, in my heart, and truly listens to me and, yes, to you.

Epilogue: Harry had planned to give me a Yamaha piano for my birthday on May 29th. On the 22nd, I saw an advertisement in the Providence Journal for a piano sale at the only licensed Yamaha dealer in Rhode Island. I found just what I wanted—my first new piano! I found my box of music in the basement, a treasured collection I’ve gathered over the past sixty years: German Lieder, opera and choral pieces. I came across a piece of sheet music that I found years ago in the piano bench of a second-hand piano we bought in South Africa. It was published in 1922, at a time when there was a piano in every parlor, when folks would stand around and sing corny, old, familiar songs at every holiday gathering or party. The title of the song, as incredible as it seems, is, *A Brown Bird Singing* and the words are so poignant to me:

*All through the night there’s a little brown bird singing,
Singing in the hush of the darkness and the dew,
Singing in the hush of the darkness and the dew.
Would that his song through the stillness could go winging,
Could go winging to you, to you.*

A hypocrite is a person who's not himself on Sunday.

This September, you may notice some changes to the 10 am Sunday Solemn High Mass.

Before describing the planned changes, however, it is as well to state what *cannot* be changed. In my view, the essential and hence inviolable features of the S. Stephen’s Solemn High Mass are four: (a) the use of Rite I traditional language; (b) the singing of choral Mass settings; (c) the singing of the Minor Propers (Introit, Gradual, Tract, etc.); and (d) the use of the three-year lectionary with all three appointed readings. Any proposed change that affects any of these four essentials is a non-starter.

At S. Stephen’s, the Solemn High Mass is essentially a hybrid of at least two liturgical forms—namely Rite I from the 1979 Prayer Book, and more traditional Anglo-Catholic liturgies from such sources as *The Anglican Missal*.

The structure, outline, and much of the text of our liturgy come from the 1979 Prayer Book. But a “pure” Rite I Mass would look and feel quite different from what we do on Sundays because we also import a number of features from the Anglican Missal tradition, such as sung Minor Propers, as well as the *Orate Fratres* (“Pray, brethren, that this my sacrifice and yours ...”), and the *Ecce Agnus Dei* (“Behold the Lamb of God ...”).

Like fine whiskeys, some liturgies are single malts. Ours is a blend – an excellent blend to be sure, but a blend nonetheless.

The problem with a hybrid liturgy is that redundancies can creep in. For example, the Opening Acclamation “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” in the 1979 Prayer Book effectively duplicates the Introit in the Anglican Missal. It thus makes sense to drop the Opening Acclamation when the Introit is sung at Solemn High Mass, which is what we shall now do.

On the same principle, the Gradual Psalm sung after the Old Testament reading in the 1979 Prayer Book is duplicated in the Anglican Missal by the Gradual verse sung before the Alleluia at the Gospel. In a number of prominent Anglo-Catholic parishes, including Ascension and Saint Agnes in Washington DC, and Saint Ignatius of Antioch in New York City, the Gradual verse is sung after the Old Testament reading in place of the Psalm, while the Alleluia verse is sung in its accustomed place after the Epistle. The result brings the Minor Propers into their own as *the psalmody of the Mass*.

Another change is that we shall discontinue reading the names on the Intercession List during the Prayers of the People. But these names will continue to be read out loud publicly *every day* at Low Mass. They will also continue to be printed each week in *The Kalendar*.

Finally, from now on we shall normally use Eucharistic Prayer II from Rite I instead of Eucharistic Prayer I. The advantage of Eucharistic Prayer II is that it’s not only a bit shorter, but also considerably richer theologically – it even mentions God’s work in creation: “All glory be to thee, O Lord our God, for that thou didst create heaven and earth, and didst make us in thine own image ...”

Most of these changes are so subtle that I suspect that many parishioners wouldn’t even notice them if they weren’t pointed out. But I wanted to mention them so that those who do notice will understand their underlying reasoning. We already have a glorious liturgy. By streamlining it a bit and enhancing its rhythm and flow, the planned changes will render our praise of God all the more glorious.

FAITH, BELIEF, RELIGION: Some Necessary Distinctions

by Ed Zeldin

The recent spate of neo-atheist books has garnered much publicity. *The God Delusion* (Dawkins); *God Is Not Great* (Hitchens); *The End of Faith* (Harris); *Breaking the Spell* (Dennett) and the list goes on. Atheists who lived in quiet denial of God now have public spokesmen with excellent academic credentials to take their part, and they can now say "Yes, I knew all along that religion is barbaric, primitive superstition; these brilliant men have made it perfectly clear. These are the books I would have written had I the intellect etc." A kind of public triumphalism has taken hold. Blogs, websites and chat rooms are full of impassioned dispute about matters of faith, belief and religion. As we might have expected, each camp is trying to convince the other that they are right and the others are wrong. It's difficult to imagine that this will lead to a constructive outcome.

As Christians we have an obligation to address what is happening in the public square, if only because of the Great Commission. We are obligated to be witnesses to the Gospel, and we therefore need to be able to define and articulate our response to this movement which has us so clearly in its sights. Much of what is being bruited about by the neo-atheists is hostile to our mission and to our way of life. What do we say and what do we do in response this? The thoughts that I want to share are very general in nature, and in a short article of this kind may raise more questions than they answer. The main idea, however, is that we need to make a careful distinction between the concepts of faith, belief, and religion. In their unhidden contempt for all things religious, the neo-atheists fail to do this, thereby vitiating the coherence and validity of their arguments.

A religion is a collective historical and social movement, organized by its beliefs and animated by faith. It consists of individuals and groups of people who, across numerous generations, have adhered to a particular way of life, whose origin is attributed to an exalted founder or ancestor, and who hold certain aspects of their life and religious practice to be sacred, even to the point of being willing to die for them. When asked to give an explanation for a ritual or social practice, the member of a religion will answer in terms of the religion's beliefs, which are highly valued and which define the believer's world-view. Not every adherent of a religion will have the same degree of conviction about all of those beliefs and practices but almost all will agree that these define what it means to be a member of the religion. To an outsider, many religious phenomena are counterintuitive, counterfactual, and apparently senseless. To a person of faith however, they open the door to a broader universe of meaning and to a new world of possibility.

It seems to me that the neo-atheists do not take the trouble to make the distinction between faith, belief and religion. They spotlight the inconsistencies in sacred scriptures. They point to the harm and social injustice that religious groups have perpetrated over the millennia. They take delight in exploding religious articles of belief by confronting them with the findings of science and the canons of reason. None of this is especially new, but in the mind of the neo-atheists their project to dismantle religion is more urgent than ever before because groups of religious fanatics now have powers of destruction not imagined in any previous age, and are thereby capable of tipping the

world into global catastrophe. In their eyes, 9/11 is only a tame example, only a beginning. Thus, they see in religion an immense force for harm, lacking in proper intellectual foundations, and want to discourage people from having any part in it.

Now, any reasonable person will agree that at times some religions have indeed caused harm, sometimes on a very large scale. Identifying as a member of a religion does not in and of itself render anyone immune from wrongdoing. It is also true that the core beliefs of most religions are incomprehensible to most outsiders and that, as propositions, they collide squarely with the world-view promulgated by institutionalized science. (In passing, let me merely note that the activities of "science" also rest on a belief system, which may be less defensible than the ones the neo-atheists despise). In this post-Freudian age we also know that people, individually and collectively, will all too often abandon rationality in favor of regressive ways of thinking, perceiving, feeling and acting. Does this then imply that religion is a misbegotten enterprise which we need to forsake in order to protect and save the world for future generations? On what basis can persons who value reason also continue to live a religious life and support the aims of their chosen religion?

To answer this question I appeal primarily to the concept of faith. Religions are communities of faith. It is not the separate items of belief that are truly at the core; it is the faith in terms of which the beliefs have their meaning. Without faith, religious beliefs can indeed seem to be a primitive attempt to explain the world, or, as the neo-atheists would have it, a system of delusions. Faith, however, is neither superstition nor credulity. It is not a childish exercise in wish fulfillment. It is an embrace by our whole being – individual and collective - of that which we perceive to be most real and fundamental. It points to a realm of being that transcends this mundane one. It arises in our living *encounter* with the world, *not in our attempts to explain it*. On a purely human level the closest we can come to this is the experience of love, or as some would argue, the transcendent experience that is given to us through great art. The Jansenist philosopher Pascal fully awakened to this dimension of faith when he realized that what he sought was not the "God of the philosophers" but rather the living God, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." In the words of the theologian Martin Buber, in faith we meet and become intimately involved with "the Eternal Thou." People of faith have had a call, a vision, an intimation of something which transcends the ordinary world, and from out of their deepest self they respond "Yes; here I am." In doing so they freely choose to enter both the world and the history of those who have done the same, in their own time and in ages past. In short, faith is an actual relationship with the divine.

We are on the verge of encountering some foundational questions here. For example, given this notion of faith, is faith alone sufficient for living a religious life? Can there be religious faith without belief? Is a person free to pick and choose, like items from a menu, from amongst the various beliefs that seem most true or appealing? Is there a way to distinguish between good faith and bad faith, between right belief and wrong belief? And how do we think about the competing truth-claims of the major world religions and religious sects? The neo-atheists

ask why it is any more valid to have faith in Zeus or Apollo than in Jesus. These questions are beyond my scope in this article. In my own conversion to Christianity, entering the world of Christian faith was very much like adopting and being adopted. It was the experience of faith in God and in Jesus which came first, and which led to adopting the beliefs and practices, thence to further identifying as a member of the religion as a whole, i.e. the Church. Each individual will encounter this process in his or her own way.

It may well be that in the modern world more and more people are losing the capacity to know and perceive the world through faith. There are people who cannot perceive melody or harmony in music; those who cannot perceive patterns in a work of art; those whose ability to appreciate beauty has atrophied or never developed. I am suggesting that the neo-atheists are unknowingly suffering from a deficiency analogous to those. This may be culturally conditioned. If they truly understood what faith is (and it seems impossible that they do, since most of their work shows little evidence of having respectfully interacted with people of faith), they would have to acknowledge what people and communities of faith have contributed to the positive development of humankind. It is arguable that the achievements of the great societies and cultures of human history – the arts, architecture and civic life, codes of laws and ethics -- are rooted in religion. They would also have to acknowledge that they stand in debt to them, on that very account. Instead of asking the question “How can we explain the evolution of the human brain’s strange propensity to view the world in such an unpragmatic and unrealistic way?” they would ask “How can we explain the ongoing extinction of mankind’s capacity for faith, for hearing the voice of the divine?” They would also have to realize that their vision of a religion-free human history is purely hypothetical, and that there is no reason to believe that mankind in ages past would have been better without it, even if this had been possible. (Indeed the purely secular political experiments of the modern age, including the results and products of scientific activity, have led to human destruction on an unprecedented scale – world wars, nuclear weapons, etc.)

To be sure, the neo-atheists and all the generations of atheists who preceded them would not admit that faith has any reality beyond the psychological. We can and ought to attempt to show up the inconsistencies in their arguments, but ultimately there isn’t any discourse that will persuade or convince them, nothing that will bridge this gap. Their atheistic pseudo-faith stands in the way. Even the living example of many scientists who profess their religious faith doesn’t seem to count as evidence. What, then, are we to do? This is an urgent question because – let there be no mistake – the neo-atheists, those who would eradicate religion if they could, and who are using all their powers of persuasion in the public square to this end, are enemies of the Cross of Christ. If Jesus were to come tomorrow they would do their utmost to have Him committed to a mental hospital and silenced with antipsychotic medication.

As Christians, we are left in no doubt about behavior toward such enemies. We are enjoined to love them. I take this to mean at the very least that we are to make a sincere effort to understand their point of view and to have respectful dialogue with them. Such dialogue may help us more clearly define and appreciate what is important to us in our life of faith. Insofar as we believe that they are missing the truth, we are to do what we

can to counteract this, not by trying to prove them wrong, which I believe is impossible, but rather by bearing faithful witness in our own lives to the values of the Gospel in our interactions with other individuals, and with social and political institutions. We can strengthen the life of the Church through increased participation, outreach and giving of resources. We can participate, even in small ways, in the effort of Christian education. Over and above all this, however, we can appeal to the most powerful force in the world, the will of God, by praying for them, as our patron Stephen did. They are among those who are most in need. Perhaps some of them will come to hear God’s voice after all.

(My thanks to Fr. Alexander for offering incisive questions and comments as this piece was being written.)

News from Epiphany Soup Kitchen:

The Soup Kitchen business is booming —*your help is needed!*

With the move downtown to Grace Church earlier this year, attendance at the Epiphany Soup Kitchen has risen steadily and the meal site is now feeding almost twice as many hungry and needy folks as it had been down on Broad Street.

On Sunday, August 19 nearly 200 guests meals were served a hearty meal of ribs, confetti rice, salad and ice cream, put out by a hard-working crew of volunteers including Richard and Philip Noble, Louise Wells, Tom Oakes, Joe Pearson, Cathy, Arthur and Lucas Bledsoe. Arthur, Lucas and Philip were on dessert duty, and we are pretty sure all of the cookies and ice cream made it to the guests!

George Tubman, the director for the last several years, relocated quite precipitously back to Liberia a couple of months ago and the Board is currently looking for a replacement. (Direct inquiries to Tom Bledsoe at 246-2194!) Marie Germaine, the dedicated and skillful cook, remains in charge of the cooking.

Given the increased numbers, there is a real need for more volunteers from S. Stephen’s for this important ministry. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Tom Bledsoe. The next chances to volunteer are October 20 and December 1st.

Weekday Services and Saturday Evening Mass

Effective Tuesday 4 September, the weekday service schedule will change to the following times, Monday through Saturday: Evening Prayer, 5:00 pm; Low Mass, 5:30 pm.

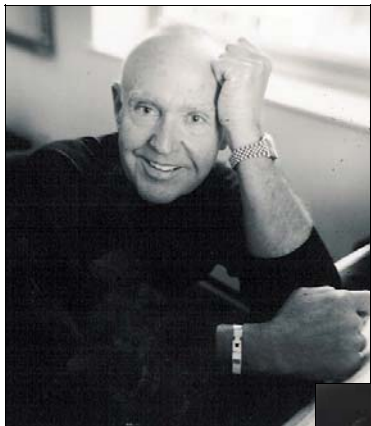
On a trial basis for the coming year, this schedule comprises a Vigil Mass of the Sunday at 5:30 pm on Saturdays. The Readings and Prayers at this Mass will be those of the Sunday. Those who for one reason or another cannot be present at Mass on Sunday morning are invited to attend this Saturday evening Mass instead.

Music Program Dates

After the summer break, we look forward to beginning our 2007-2008 music program with an Organ Recital (9 September at 5:30 pm) and Solemn Evensong and Benediction (30 September at 5:30 pm).

The Schola Cantorum resumes singing at the 10:00 am Solemn High Mass on Sunday, 16 September. Details of our music program are found in the *Liturgical Music Brochure*. Look for it soon in your mailbox.

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



Annual Organ Recital

Sunday, September 9 at 5:30 pm

James Busby, organist

Messe Solennelle a l'usage des paroisses
by François Couperin
with the gentlemen of the **Schola Cantorum**
works by J. S. Bach

with
**Aaron
Sheehan**, tenor



Sheehan is just back with rave reviews in the New York Times and *Opera News* for his role in The Early Music Festival 's opera, *Psyche* by Lully.

A gala reception
will follow in the
Great Hall.