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# THE MESSENGER

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April/May 2008

THE CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST *125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*

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## FROM THE CLERGY

**THE REV. DR. KATHARINE C. BLACK, PRIEST IN CHARGE**

Welcome back! Welcome home! We are delighted to welcome you back to celebrate with us the beginning of the celebrations of our 125th year. We are excited—and growing more so by the day—at the prospect of having heard from many of you, seeing you, hearing from you, and of welcoming more and more of you back during this year-long celebration.

The Saturday dinner features the Rev. Dr. Richard Valantis speaking, but will be a gala event in itself. Nearly a hundred people are gathering to begin this



“homecoming” weekend. The Rev. Dr. Ellie McLaughlin will celebrate on Sunday morning. On Sunday evening, the reception will include Brother Curtis Almquist of SSJE talking about

the SSJE-St. John’s connection, Ron Tibbetts talking about NAI, and me saying something brief about the activities for the rest of the year.

We hope to arrange three kinds of events, with a chance for a fourth. Jan Nunley will try to come to Bowdoin Street just after the Lambeth Conference to give us an insider’s note. A small committee and I have been working to set up a group to help with recruiting, training,

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*Please see Priest on page 10*

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## OLD FRIENDS GATHER FOR ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND

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**JEAN MORROW, ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE CO-COORDINATOR**

Welcome back to all former clergy, staff and parishioners who have come to share in the wonderful memories and celebrate the outstanding ministries of our beloved church. On behalf of current parishioners and staff, I express our deepest joy that you are able to join us on this grand occasion.

You will notice much that has remained unchanged at St. John’s – the beautiful liturgy, inspiring music and a warm and welcoming congregation. In addition, our ministries

to the neighborhood have expanded and our building boasts significant improvements, most importantly a new heating system and a newly painted interior. Perhaps the Common Room also seems cozier and more inviting that the last time you visited the Mission House.

As our anniversary celebration continues in the coming months, we hope to see many of you again at the various events we’ve planned in both our arts and our theology series. And, most of all, we would love to see you again at Mass, on any Sunday morning during the year.

*Celebrating 125 Years!*

*A Day of  
Joy and Celebration*

*April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008*

## GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY

COREY SPENCE, MESSENGER EDITOR

I wrote this piece as a meditation for the readings appointed for the First Sunday of Epiphany in year A according to the Book of Common Prayer Lectionary.

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 89:1-29; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17

The other day I began reading the book *Amazing Grace – A Vocabulary of Faith* by Kathleen Norris. In the book she talks about her difficulty with the words of faith and how she has reconciled them so she could return to church.

She read Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.” This verse played off her sense of perfectionism and thinking that she could never be perfect enough for God. Then she delved deeper into the source of the word “perfect.” She discovered that the word “comes from a Latin word meaning complete, entire, and full grown. To those who originally heard it, the word would convey ‘mature’ rather than what we mean today by perfect.”

What an amazing thought! God wants us to allow room in our faith and in our lives for growth and development. The faithful life isn’t about making ourselves perfect, it is about allowing God through the Holy Spirit to enrich our lives with new discoveries and ideas. We use our gift of reason to sort through what we have been taught and what we read or discover.

So many of us are worried about being perfect on the surface. We want others to see us live a life free from addiction, anger, greed, or

any of the other afflictions human beings suffer. We worry that others might laugh at us behind our backs or even to our faces. We want others to do the thinking for us and want the priest to tell us what we should believe.

I lived for a long time with the faith that was given to me by the minister at the Baptist Church I attended. I was encouraged to listen to his sermons and not ask questions. Doubt was seen as a sign of a faith that lacked substance. This was the faith that failed me when I got to college and realized I was gay. Suddenly, I was one of those that were being preached against and my faith crumbled until I thought God didn’t love me. I fell into despair because my faith has always been the most important thing in my life.

It was when I was at the lowest point and I had lost my faith in pronouncements and doctrines that I finally looked up. Past all the sermons, past all the trappings of church, past the condemnation, and past the people telling me that God couldn’t love me. It was there that I saw God with arms outstretched welcoming me home. I realized that the words of the song we sang in Sunday School, “I know I am something special because God doesn’t make junk,” were true. I realized that God loved me for who I was and who I could become. God looked past my sins and doubts and touched my heart with love.

I had discovered the God of love. I knew now that nothing could separate me from the love of God. I am a beloved child of God,

doubts and all. I still occasionally doubt things about my faith, but I know that those doubts are healthy.

Peter says in the Acts lesson, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Micah reminds us what is acceptable to God, “to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”

God looks past the trappings of office. Riches and possessions mean nothing to God. God doesn’t care about titles, job descriptions, or status. God can see into the depths of our hearts and knows the motivation behind what we do. Will God see us as immature and greedy people seeking our own advancement? Or will God see us as loving, merciful people seeking to help each other work out our faith?

I encourage all of us to grow in our faith. Let us learn as a community what it means to work towards perfection – a maturing faith. God knows that we will have doubts and questions. God knows that in the end we are all fallible human beings. God loves each and every one of us and that love crosses all the boundaries we try to set and all the things we do to try to make ourselves better than others.

The Good News of the Gospels is that God’s love is in all and for all people. May we seek to show that love to all who enter our doors, regardless of who they are.✠

# THE LAST CHANCE CHURCH

MARJORIE BUCKINGHAM

I often think of St. John's as the Last Chance Church. So many of us come here after experiencing rejection or a sense of alienation from the churches of our childhood. It is not just Lesbian and Gay people who have this experience. I grew up Roman Catholic and was divorced from my first husband in 1975. After I remarried, without going through what I considered a sham of an annulment, I was no longer allowed to receive communion in the Catholic church. I even experienced that sense of not belonging in the first Episcopal parish that I belonged to. I remember saying to one of the parish priests, "I'm having trouble reconciling my Christianity and my feminism." His reply was, "That's because they are irreconcilable." Here at St. John's that is not an issue. Sure, I would like more expressly feminist liturgies, but I know I am not alone here in that wish. And I don't feel weird talking about such things.

Being a part of St. John's isn't always easy. The longer I stay the more demanding it becomes. That doesn't mean that I always have to be involved in lots of activities and going to lots of meetings. In my experience, what St. John's demands is authenticity

and engagement. Our genuine sense of inclusivity comes from our first hand experience of being excluded. At St. John's you can be accepted no matter who you are, as long as you are honest about it. Hypocrisy and pretense have no place here. The danger for us is in becoming smug, complacent and worse yet, arrogant



about who we are. I think arrogance is particularly offensive to God whether that arrogance is in an individual, a parish or a nation. When we fall into that sin, something happens. I don't want to get into the argument about whether God causes misfortune or just allows it to happen, but the result is a change of heart away from arrogance and toward humility and gratitude.

In the mid nineties St. John's went through a crisis. Some people say this was because we made a mistake and called the wrong rector. I take a different view of

what happened. I believe that we called the right rector and that the pain we suffered as a result of what happened involving our music program and plans for a new organ were necessary for our spiritual growth. I think we had become complacent and self-satisfied about how special we were. And yes, we had become arrogant, so convinced of our superiority that we reprimanded Bishop Shaw for the way he conducted liturgy. That kind of arrogance has no place in a community that calls itself Christian. No longer is St. John's an in-group, self-satisfied in its superior music and liturgy, not needing to look for new members or examine its motives. Today we genuinely welcome newcomers and sincerely hope

that they will join us. We value each and every member of the community and sincerely miss anyone who is not present on a given Sunday. As a parish I believe our spirituality is deeper and more thoughtful. This is a good thing. Of course I still miss people who left during those difficult times, but I believe the parish as a whole is better for having faced its shortcomings and been open to change.

The future is both scary and exciting: a test of how far we have come and how willing we are to trust in God's plans.✠

## FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

**JEFFREY MILLS, ORGANIST AND DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**

Our parish has a rich history of involvement with creative persons of many types—architectural, visual, poetic, and musical—and we will be celebrating the creative gifts of various artists over the next several months. Luminaries such as Ralph Adams Cram and T. S. Eliot regularly worshiped at St. John's. Many of our parishioners have been involved in the production and promotion of the arts in Boston. During the anniversary year, we will host events focusing on specific artistic contributions by parishioners, including musical contributions.

Notable among the musicians associated with St. John's is Everett Titcomb, who served here as Organist-Choirmaster for fifty years, from 1910 through 1960. During the month of April, our choir has sung one of Titcomb's anthems each Sunday. At Evensong on April 27<sup>th</sup>, we will dedicate the Angelus bell in the tower to Titcomb's memory, and one of his students, Sally Slade Warner, will join us as an honored guest performer at that service. Sally also served for many years at St. John's as Organist and Director of Music.

Anniversaries are occasions for celebrating new things, as well as historic ones. The Wednesday afternoon concert series was launched this past year. Parishioner and choir member Jane Struss

started a series of concerts during the early summer of 2007. It provided the opportunity for singers to perform short recitals in our excellent acoustic. The enthusiasm of the musicians and the audiences led to the establishment of the weekly series that began during September. Each Wednesday from 5:30 until 6:15 PM, musicians offer superb programs of classical music for anyone who comes through our doors. A free-will offering is taken, and performers have been grateful for the generosity our concert-goers have shown. Musicians who have offered their talents in our church have included singers, organists, pianists, violinists, a violist, a cellist, gambists, guitarists, and composers. Music performed has bridged a vast array of styles and periods: Renaissance music for a consort of viols, scenes for a countenour and mezzo-soprano from a Philip Glass opera, Latin American classical guitar music, verismo arias, unaccompanied viola music, Gershwin songs, and d'Aquin Noëls for organ, to name a few! If you haven't attended one of these recitals, please make the effort to come. St. John's is providing a ministry to musicians and to the neighborhood week by week, not only through the music offered at Mass, but through the mid-week concert series. I hope to see you and your friends early on a Wednesday evening soon.✠



**EVERETT TITCOMB LEADING A CHOIR REHEARSAL**

## MEMORIES OF SAINT JOHN'S PRESENT AND FORMER MEMBERS

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### CAROLYN METZLER

My first Easter Vigil ever was at St. John's, and I couldn't remember dying and going to heaven. On the way home to the convent, someone with slurred speech from the side of the road asked, "So—is Christ risen, Sisters?" To which Sr. Susan responded "He always has been!"

Other Easter Vigil memories: Gwen reading the Exodus story—you'd swear she'd been there; and the darkness before the service—barely light enough to even find your way to the pew; and such a palpable sense of expectancy to that darkness. It was the tomb, yes, but we knew how this story would play out and could hardly wait. It's the expectancy of waiting that so impressed me. I've never found that anywhere else.

One was the baptism of the son or grandson of Edward LaPlante. The child was a special needs child with the face of an angel. After the baptism, he was carried back up front by Edward, and the love and tenderness was powerful. We all sang "Our Father by whose name..." and I just wept.

Another memory was of Nicco, the man in drag, on some Epiphany procession coming in dressed like the Queen of Sheba as one of "The Wise Guys." Very funny.

Another was when Richard and Jennifer announced they were risking their orders to advocate for blessing of same sex relationships and received a standing ovation from the congregation. A

powerful moment.

Another was when I got to preside at the Christmas Eve Vigil, wear a cope and cense the altar!

Another was the time when our 2 year old Jesse (who was very obvious about everything he did) received communion at the rail and proceeded to lean against it, making great guttural pushing sounds...

But my favorite memory of St. John's was the baptism of our two children at the Great Vigil in 1989. There was another little girl being baptized, a little black girl with wonderful curls. She went first, and she and Jesse reached out and held each other's hands while she was baptized. Then we stripped Jesse and Margaret, Fred Wolf baptized them, and we re-diapered them and dressed them in the white robes I had woven for them while recuperating from a broken ankle. It had a woven gold border on the hems and sleeves. They were anointed with that wonderful-smelling oil of chrism that made me not want to stop smelling them for days. Then they were carried up while we all sang "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," all by golden candlelight, with the organ sounding very simply beneath the hymn. The awe and wonder on their faces was beautiful. My father carried Margaret back to the front and wept all the way. It is still the standard for baptisms I try to reach in our own sacramental life.

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### THE REV.

### KATHRYN PICCARD

Sometimes when I have celebrated the Holy Eucharist in the Epiphany Chapel after the Thursday Night Suppers the congregation has come together in a wonderful way. When it has been composed of people from both the suppers and the parish, and everybody has felt fairly comfortable with controlled chaos, occasionally I have felt like the conductor of an orchestra. These are the times when people have felt free to ask questions not only during the sermon, but even during the readings; to make comments freely, to move around, and so on. One person will complain that another person is disrespectful because he has fallen asleep, and I will make my usual comment, "That's OK—this is a safe place to sleep. I think he needs it right now." One person will ask me a question, and another person may answer it for me, accurately or not.

When I went to seminary thirty-five years ago nobody teaching liturgics mentioned to me that how people get treated at moments like this is a critical part of liturgy because actions speak louder than words, but of course it is true. The kind of welcoming liturgical space that forms in that chapel is not just the work of a priest, and probably not primarily the work of a priest. When it works well it is primarily the work of God the Holy Spirit and of people cooperating with the

# Clergy that have Served at Saint John's

1977 - Present

Until 1977, at least one member of the Society of St. John the Evangelist resided in the mission house and was in charge of the church on St. John's Bowdoin Street. The Society appointed Vicars to be in charge from 1977 until 1985, when the church obtained its independence.

1977 - 1980

The Rev. Robert Dunbar, Vicar

1981 - 1985

The Rev. Emmett Jarrett, Vicar

1985 - 1986

The Rev. Emmett Jarrett, Rector

1986 - 1988

The Rt. Rev. Frederick Wolfe, Interim Rector

1988 - 1994

The Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phillips, Rector

1988 - 1992

The Rev. Dr. Richard Valentasis, Co-Rector

1994 - 1996

The Rev. Juliana Anderson, Interim Rector

1996 - 1999

The Rev. Jeannete Myers, Rector

1999 - 2002

The Rev. Lisbeth Hall, Priest-in-Charge

The Rev. Lyle Hall, Priest-in-Charge

2002 - 2003

The Rev. Dr. Richard McCall, Interim Rector

2003 - 2005

The Rev. Michael Roeske, Rector

2005 - 2006

The Rev. Steven Godrey, Priest-in-Residence

2006 -

The Rev. Dr. Katharine Black, Priest-in-Charge



## A BIT OF QUIET

DAVID BRESNAHAN



While I was at university in London and I needed a centering moment of quiet, I would often go to Evensong at St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey or take a short train ride to Canterbury, Winchester, or St. Albans.

In New Orleans, struggling through post-Katrina life there, we would come together each Wednesday evening at Grace Church on Canal Street to do the same thing according to the ages-old evening ritual of lighting a few candles, burning a little incense, chanting the magnificat, nunc dimittis, and a psalm – simply, quietly.

The experiences in England and New Orleans were very different. In London, the amazing choirs would fill the incredible

spaces with glorious music. In New Orleans, we were hardly musicians, but there was a very simple peaceful glory there too in our flood-ravaged church. Both experiences provided an opportunity for peace and reflection to an eclectic collection of travelers, business people in power suits, blue-haired ladies, students, homeless people and so on.

Many of us thirst for all-too-rare moments of quiet peace.

St. John's has a long and distinguished tradition of offering peace and welcome to all people in our bustling urban setting. Our own Wednesday night concert series provides just such an experience for weary workers and people who need a

little midweek refreshment.

A simple Evensong could follow our concerts and honor this ancient tradition and offer a further moment of pause and prayer. Inviting concert-goers, students, downtown professionals, and everyone else to join us for a moment of quiet prayer would rekindle an old tradition here at St. John's. Let me know if you'd like to join me in such a weekly ritual.

Evelyn Underhill, the great 20th-century Anglo Catholic theologian and mystic urged: "try to arrange things so that you can have a reasonable bit of quiet every day." Our wonderful weekly concerts followed by a simple Evensong might be just one way to do it.✝

## CONCERTS AT SAINT JOHN'S

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WEDNESDAY NIGHTS AT 5:30

April 30<sup>th</sup>, Paula Downes  
(soprano)  
and David Trippett  
(piano)



May 7<sup>th</sup>, Anthology  
(women's choral ensemble)

May 14<sup>th</sup>, Joshua Lawton,  
organ

May 21<sup>st</sup>, Alexandra Lang,  
soprano

May 28<sup>th</sup>, Steven Serpa,  
countertenor

Check out our website at  
[www.stjev.org](http://www.stjev.org)  
for more information.

## WITH GRATITUDE

TO ALL WHO HAVE HELPED MAKE OUR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS POSSIBLE

### THANK YOU TO OUR FINANCIAL DONORS

Peter M. and Katharine C. Black	Jeffrey D. Penn
Lorraine Dee and Leslie Collins	Jennifer Phillips
Louise Forrest and Leslie Horst	Rocco J. Pigneri
James C. Gorman	Kathleen Pitman and Hilary Ziven
Leoule Goshu	Tom Portagallo and William Wade
Lisbeth and Lyle Hall	Vincent and Therasa Raso
Martha Heddon	E. Richard Rothmund
Emmett Jarrett and Anne P. Schreibner	David J. Russo
Katharine D. Kane	Barrie Scardino, to celebrate Lucy Barrow Booma
Peter and Monica Liberman	Jeffrey P. Seamans
Edward A. Mavericks	Corey W. Spence
Anna McIntyre	Kendall Watts and Robert Derry
Jean Morrow and John Joanou	Brett Whelan and Debra Poaster
Michael Kuhn and Maria Elliott	
Jeffrey Mills	

### THANK YOU TO THE 125<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY TEAM \*ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE

Katharine D. Kane*, Dinner	Dan Cronin, Place Cards
Jeffrey Mills,* Musician and MC	Loren Gary, MC
Jean Morrow*	Ed Mavericks, Sacristan
Carole-Jean Smith*, Parish Historian	Louis Tsien, Senior Warden
Corey Spence*, Graphic Design	Richard Valentasis, After-dinner speech
Jane Struss*, Reception	Sally Slade Warner, Guest Musician and Conductor
Hank Anderson, Scheduling	The Parishioners of Saint John's for their many gifts of time, talents, and baking that have made this weekend possible.
John Burrows, Sanctuary Carpet Donor	
Joyce Caggiano, Grace	
Danny Cox, Sexton, Reception	

## AN EXAMINATION OF MY PRAYER LIFE

CAROLE-JEAN SMITH

Tonight  
 God goes  
 to the theatre. I  
 am performing. I  
 am wearing a mask  
 and a wig  
 and ratatat dancing shoes. I  
 am hoofing about  
 on the dim stage  
 reading psalms.  
 God goes  
 to the back door  
 in hope of catching me  
 after the show.



and deploying people from this diocese who have some sort of medical background to a clinic in New Orleans where one of our parishioners has worked for a couple of years, and will return in late May. We'll try to work with both another parish and several existing organizations to help provide a pipeline for people to this clinic. While the Katrina damage is not fixed, New Orleans's medical system needs every kind of medical support for the few functioning clinics, and we want to be a clearinghouse for that connection.

We are working to arrange two fall symposia: one about Music, Theology, and the Church, and the other about Theology, Worship, and the Church. I have contacted a range of people and we're trying to find dates suitable for these core events. We'll be inviting other speakers to lecture

in weeks before or after these two focal times, to enlarge the thinking of these two occasions. Many people connected to St John's are leaders in the work, thought, and theology of these fields, and we'll hope to welcome them back to talk to us and our extended communities.

We have chosen to use Anniversary Donations for specific and finite tasks. We thought we'd begin with redoing the floor under the altar and re-carpeting the altar area, since some donations came in early. Then one of our parishioners met a former parishioner who had exactly the right carpet in his storehouse, carpet which had been ordered and not used by another church. Without the expense of the carpet, and with the early donations, we could refinish the floor and install this gift carpet. It will be installed and glamorous by the time this

Messenger is printed. Amazing and providential. We are excited that a seemingly unreachable immediate goal has turned into a completed project that adds to the life and health of the church. It's not the only one; come see.

The warmth from each person asked to participate has been extraordinary whether the person could get to Boston for this weekend or not. People from every era convey great warmth and fondness for St. John's and intend to participate and be part of our on-going life, in prayer, if not in person. It is a joyful time, and we hope everyone who reads this will come and join us as we celebrate and begin our next 125 years. Will you come?✠

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*Memories from page 5*

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Spirit in a generous, affirming, welcoming way. The “official” message of the sermon may be lost to most or all of those in attendance within a few minutes or hours. But the message that “I was accepted, I was respected, I was listened to, I belonged there before God” can last a very long time. God can build a great deal on that healing foundation, and I have seen God do that repeatedly at St. John’s. The memories I cherish the most about St. John’s are of the times God gives me the grace to participate in that.

My grandmother Jeannette told me that before she met my grandfather, who she married in 1919, she once made her confession at St. John’s and mentioned having a vocation to the priesthood. The priest firmly predicted, “You will get married, and maybe you will have a son, and perhaps he will be a priest.” At the time she told me she had, indeed, gotten married, had had three sons, 14 grandchildren, and we were both already priests. I said to her, “That was rather presumptuous of him, assuming you were heterosexual!” which she dismissed with a wave of her hand. (Later I realized that whatever sins she had confessed may have made it abundantly clear that she was heterosexual.) She commented on the inappropriateness of expecting people to live vicariously through their children

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### WILLIAM HARRIS

Like many people who have come to love St. John’s, I came to St. John’s nearly by accident.

Having moved back to Boston, I began looking for a church and visited many—some Roman Catholic and some Anglican. None was “home”. One day, while searching the Internet, I stumbled upon the St. John’s web site. I had read about this parish before and I decided to attend Mass the following Sunday. That Sunday, my search ended. St. John’s was “home.”

I had no idea that at a time when I was taking a break from work in the Church that I would, within about a year, and again quite accidentally, become Organist and Choirmaster of this august and unique parish. In 25 years of professional work in this field, the opportunity to serve this parish has been the absolute high point of my vocation as a Church Musician. I am especially grateful for the opportunities it afforded me to grow as a composer of sacred music.

What St. John’s taught me cannot be bought; it cannot be learned in conservatories or seminaries, or merely from books. My experience there taught me good liturgy without undue preciousness, Catholicism without conscious exclusion, and to focus on social justice. It was a formative experience, and overall, a good one. My time there was one of some transition and tension, and I must say that this had a solidifying effect on my faith. Many of the people I met there have been instrumental in forming who I am today as I continue to serve in lay ministry.

I wish St. John’s the best on this important anniversary.

*William Harris was Director of Music at St. John’s from 2003-2005. He is currently the Minister of Music at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Easton where he plays the 1859 E&GG Hook organ.*

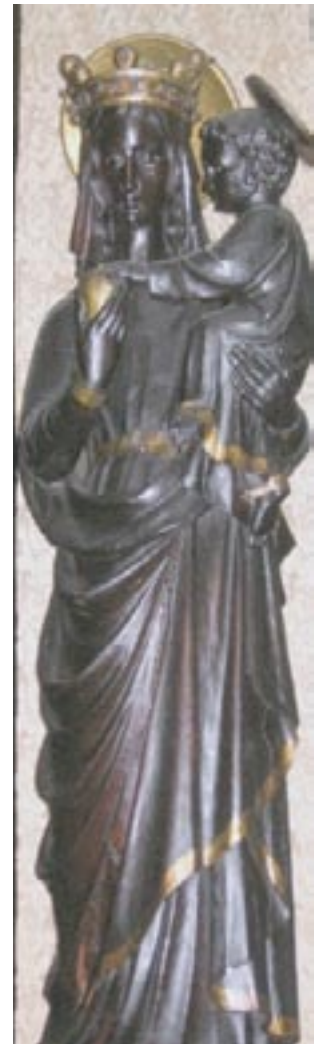
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### LOUIS TSIEN

kids wandering the aisles.  
kids praying with their teddy bears.

congregation a capella in parts:  
Sine Nomine.  
St. Patrick’s Breastplate.  
St. Columba.

Twelfth Night. Candlemas.  
parish picnic.  
didn’t matter where.✝



# THE ANNUNCIATION BANNER

CAROLE-JEAN SMITH

In this departure from the traditional image of the young Virgin being visited by the archangel, I am giving voice to a fuller, more comprehensive look at this remarkable moment. Most well-known versions of the Annunciation show Mary in what is often described as a state of peaceful acceptance, humble bliss, despite her surprise. Arms folded across her chest, eyes lowered, she sits or kneels and listens to the news. Almost always, she is depicted in her room with a prayer book nearby, obviously in the middle of meditation.

It may be that Mary was saying her prayers when Gabriel arrived; therefore such a depiction is certainly valid. (We are taught that she was a very devout Jewish girl.) Indeed, the almost universal depiction of her in this attitude seems to speak with the authority of an eyewitness account. But the establishment of this image owes less to historical authenticity than to the accumulated conventions of religious art and to the dominance of monastic spirituality. Therefore, it is an interpretation, and one that seems to me rather narrow, if not misleading.

Monastic Spirituality required long and/or frequent periods of silent meditation and prayer in order to become pure enough to see God. As noted, Mary may have been in the middle of prayer. It is just as likely, however, that she was elbow deep in household chores. So, I show her with an apron on and her sleeves rolled up. In traditional patriarchal societies, women have not had the luxury of long and frequent periods of uninterrupted meditation. Women's spirituality was constructed from the blood and bread of everyday chores. Their "canonical hours" were not marked by the passage of the sun or the striking of a bell, but by the preparation of meals, the washing of clothes, the nursing of babies, the tending of the sick, the garden, and the livestock, and the servicing of men. And their "canonical prayers" were not recited in a quiet alcove at specifically designated times. If we can imagine Mary's own prayer life, we might render it like this, in the eloquent words of Harriet Tubman: "Pears like, I prayed all de time...about my work,

eberywhere; I was always talking to de Lord. When I went to de trough to wash my face, and took up de water in my hands, I said, 'Oh, Lord, wash me, make me clean.' When I took up de towel to wipe my face and hands, I cried, 'Oh, Lord, for Jesus' sake, wipe away all my sins!' When I took up de broom and began to sweep, I groaned, 'Oh, Lord, whatsoebber sin dere be in my heart, sweep it out, Lord, clear and clean...'\*

And so, Mary was chosen to be the Mother of God. In spite of her surprise and trepidation, she must also have felt wonderful, for her selection was the affirmation of her life. It is worth examining more closely Mary's body language in these traditional paintings. In earlier pictures, due to stylistic requirements, she is assigned a stiff and motionless posture. In later ones, she is bent over or kneeling or crouching back, appearing passive if not somewhat unwilling. Her face in most cases is expressionless. An exception being the dreadful face on the gilded painting by Simone Martini. She does not at all look as if she is saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices..." In fact in the Martini and in the much later Rossetti she looks as if she is saying, "Don't beat me." In my banner, I show Mary rejoicing in her oneness with God.

Mary's relationship with God was already profound before the Annunciation. (Remember Abraham? He was given circumcision as a sign of the faith that he already had). We don't know how long it took Mary to say, "I accept," but it couldn't have been that long. She certainly didn't say, "I'll get back to you." She had already journeyed far to meet God. Mary's part in her relationship with God, we can infer, was active, diligent, ardent, unwearied. In all the unrelenting flotsam and jetsam of everyday chores and relationships, Mary recognized and loved the face of God. The stillness and passivity with which she is identified in traditional Annunciation pictures, though valid to a point, is an unnecessarily limited way of interpreting this event. I show Mary actively engaging God's plan. She is standing and raising above her head a glorious golden serpent.

The serpent is an ancient symbol of the renewing power of God. Because of the serpent's ability to shed its skin many times, it seemed to live anew. It was often compared to the moon, which shrank, disappeared, and returned again every month. Frequently, the symbol of the serpent and the symbol of the moon combined, as in the headpiece of Isis, to represent the most transcendent life-giving power imaginable.

This is a banner that takes Mary at her word, and unambiguously portrays her joy and spiritual strength. And it urges us to look anew at what has become conventional and accepted.



## BOOK REVIEW

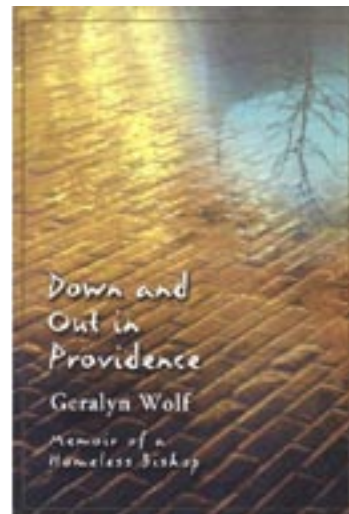
NED CARLETON

*Down and Out in Providence* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005) records a month spent by Geralyn Wolf, Bishop of Rhode Island, as a homeless person in Providence. Her street ordeal lasted from December 30, 2002 to January 24, 2003. As she tells you, there was an element of theatre in this. "I'm quite recognizable in Providence," she writes, and so she disguised herself, letting her hair grow, then dyeing it, and using a lot of lipstick. She had to come up with a fake I.D., which she made as close to the truth as possible, trimming her name to 'Aly Wolf' and calling herself a "one-time employee of the Diocese of Rhode Island." She even worked on how she spoke, contriving a "lispng Aly voice," with which she greeted people, at least in church, as 'her sisters (or brothers) in Jesus.' It didn't work perfectly. People tended to shy away from her, and after a week she washed the dye from her hair because it made her scalp itch. And sometimes she was spotted.

Nevertheless she got a real experience of homelessness, because it is a life of disguise anyway. A thousand people, a thousand stories. One of the things you learn in the shelter system is to keep your mouth shut. Bishop Wolf came to accept this. As she says, "The desire to help someone must have boundaries. Always." This, despite having begun with hopes to the contrary. It is a common fantasy – 'the anonymity of the shelter system.' "I have such a sense of freedom," she records in the entry for Dec. 31, her second day. "No worries...the rat race is over. Not much is hidden here." By Day 12 (Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>), she is a little more realistic. "It's exhausting to be homeless....Putting one's head on a table for months is like being warehoused. Even pets have decent kennels....How can we treat our children worse than our dogs?" That last is a recurring theme. Wolf saw a lot of children, because when a woman becomes homeless her children go with her. Like Oscar Wilde in Reading Gaol\*, she was horrified by the effects of institutionalization on a child and reacted immediately. "It's the homeless children who are most painful to watch....It makes me sick to my stomach....What's wrong with the rest of us?" – this on Day 5.

Then there is the disconnect between Wolf's Christian valuation of the poor and what she actually encountered. Shelter life is an in-your-face confrontation with the nuisance value of the human animal – loud, inattentive, ignorant, and unsilenceable. Wolf grimly held on to her determination to seek Jesus in the poor, which was also an attempt to find herself – she calls what she was doing, "A pilgrimage to my soul." Again, she got what she was looking for, in an epiphany of awareness Day 20 (Jan. 18). I leave evaluation of this to the reader. That bitterly cold day, she took the bus to Boston for Gayle Harris's consecration. A few days earlier she had reflected:

I was tired with a pabulum Jesus before I entered my pilgrimage....Unless we identify with the crowd that cries, "Crucify him, Crucify him," we have yet to claim the fear and anger, envy and sloth that dwell within us. Failure to admit our participation in perpetuating the plight of the poor and rejected inhibits us from receiving the freedom and new life that we desperately seek. I know that if humanity is to inherit the kingdom of God, it will be because the poor have opened the door.✠



\*Adam Gopnik, 'The Invention of Oscar Wilde,' p. 75, May 18, 1998 The New Yorker.



*125 Years of Welcome*

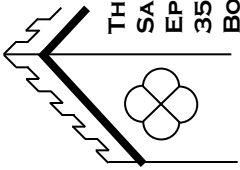
*Saint John*



*the Evangelist*

*1883 - 2008*





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