Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

The Rev. Scott E. Richardson, Rector

In Advent, we prepare for the coming of Christ, both at the moment of his birth and at the moment of his return in glory. In Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation, God’s entrance into the human story through the birth of the Christ Child. In Epiphany, we pledge to manifest the light of Christ in the world through our words and actions. Let me say a brief word now about each of these seasons.

The admonition of Advent is to watch or look. We are to train our eye to see Christ coming into the world. I would encourage you to be quite literal about this and actually spend some time each day actively expecting Christ to appear. Look for him in the people you pass on the streets and in the stores, in the members of your family, in your co-workers. I love these words from a South American bishop: “I look for Christ in every person who comes into my office – sometimes he comes in deep disguise.” Look beyond the disguise to see the Christ light burning brightly in those nearest you, and in yourself.

The call of Christmas is to celebrate. We are to rejoice in the love, grace, and mercy of God as that is revealed in the Incarnation. We don’t need to do anything except take in the miracle. For reasons beyond us, God chooses to be with us. That may be the most important piece of information we will ever hear, and Christmas is the ideal time to allow that to sink in. I have found that my prayers tend to move in one of two directions – I either call on the power of God, or sit in the presence of God. Christmas is a very good time to do the latter.

The expectation of Epiphany is to act. We rise up out of our Christmas reverie with a renewed commitment to spreading the light of Christ in the world. That can happen in so many ways, and some of them quite small. I think here of my Auntie Alice. She accomplished nothing that the world would consider important, but she radiated light and love. When you stepped into her world, you were enveloped in goodwill and good feeling and incredible warmth. I count her among the most important people in my life; she would be shocked to hear that, but it is absolutely true.

So there we are – spiritual direction for the next three months. Watch. Look for Christ. Celebrate. Receive the miracle. Act. Radiate. Love. Don’t think for a moment that you need to do these things in sequence or completely. Begin anywhere and see where the Christ-Spirit leads you – and know that I would love to hear your report at any time and in any way that you care to share it.
News of Note from the Sr. Warden

The Work of Christmas

Betty Hood-Gibson

The Christmas season is approaching, and we wait once more for the arrival of the Christ Child. As we look around us, the frenzy of gift buying and commercialism has begun. Does it start earlier every year? It certainly seems so! Even amidst the commercialism, however, we can find a way to do what God calls us to do by helping others – including providing gifts for people who don’t have the means to buy Christmas gifts, or in some cases even necessary items for their families.

One of St. Mary’s very special Christmas programs is “The Giving Tree.” Under the leadership of Nancy Clark, our Sunday School Director, a Christmas tree in Fowler Hall – The Giving Tree – is decorated with gift requests from residents of Canon Barcus House, which hang as “ornaments” on the tree. Canon Barcus House is a community of 47 supportive housing units, with residents including over 100 children, in the South of Market area of San Francisco. It provides permanent housing to homeless and very low-income families.

Parishioners select an “ornament” request and then purchase the requested gifts, wrap them and bring them back to St. Mary’s. Children in particular are encouraged to select a request for their family to fulfill. Nancy Clark and others deliver the wrapped gifts to Episcopal Community Services for delivery to the residents of Canon Barcus House. By providing these gifts, St. Mary’s parishioners are able to help the residents have a happy Christmas.

While it might not seem like a big deal to provide a gift or two at Christmas time, these gifts can have an incredible impact on the recipients. One young man received a new jacket through the Giving Tree program. He related how important having a good jacket was to him. He said, “If you get a good jacket, it doesn’t matter so much what you got on under it. I feel better about myself when I got a good jacket.” In some cases, a special gift is not just about relieving a financial burden – it can have an impact on how a person sees himself and his ability to walk with confidence in the community.

Further examples can be seen in some of the many other special Christmas outreach activities that go on in our own Bay Area. A friend of mine goes to a small, local church in Antioch, California. She told me that her church has partnered with the U.S. Marines’ Toys For Tots program for the last seven years to distribute toys to underprivileged children during Christmas. A team of people at the church volunteer to work tirelessly for days, picking up the toys from the Marine distribution site, sorting thousands of toys according to ages and genders, and then gently wrapping each gift while singing Christmas carols, eating pizza, and laughing and talking. The toys are then distributed one week before Christmas. She says that during the wrapping, the atmosphere is filled with the presence of God. They get the privilege of serving hundreds of children who are full of anticipation and who walk away with their little arms full of toys and great big smiles.

When David and I sent out Christmas cards the first Christmas we were married, almost 35 years ago, David included a printed insert with each card we sent. I was very moved by the poem on that insert, a poem entitled “The Work of Christmas” by Dr. Howard Thurman, author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader.

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The Work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among peoples,
To make music in the heart.

Christmas is only the beginning. Let’s remember to do “The Work of Christmas” all year long.
Sunday School News

Nancy Clark, Sunday School Co-Director

The 2013-14 Sunday School year is all geared up and in full swing with a record 140 children registered. That dazzling number includes the tiniest participants, the nursery tykes, all children in pre-school, kindergarten, first through sixth graders, and our burgeoning Confirmation class. Add the youth group teenagers to that number and be knocked out by the tally: 160! An all time high for our parish.

Keeping all those children engaged and introduced to Bible stories and church celebrations is the Sunday to Sunday challenge. In the first semester we focus on classic Old Testament heroes and stories and special fall holidays and celebrations. Light touch detective work in the courtyard after Sunday School provides clues to themes and lessons. You would have seen suns and moons, gardens and snakes, arks and animals, Technicolor dream coats, bird houses, bird feeders and St. Francis in his burlap robe, Moses baskets, skeletons, and butterflies. Not detectable to the eye, but we hope in action at home, is the ongoing theme of “Creation Care,” environmental stewardship. To that end, we promote the St. Mary’s Green Honor Roll with its reduce, reuse, recycle themes and activities.

The Bible Times Market, the mini-experiential learning activity, was held on November 17 to the delight of shoppers and sellers wearing the customary Middle Eastern head coverings. Hand minted coins (clay) are the medium of exchange for slices of pita bread, fig delights (Newtons), as well as dazzling jewelry, prayer jars, and pinch pot bowls. As always, the money changers are there to provide more coins in exchange for answers to Bible story questions.

Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany all come with built-in themes. Special prayer books, an Advent calendar, two outreach projects, and “kingly gifts” will be among the activities in the weeks to come. During Advent, students will meet Santa Lucia, the Virgin of Guadalupe, John the Baptist, and of course St. Nicholas of Myra. Our 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders will collect canned goods and record the number of servings and calories provided. A little math combined with outreach is a good thing. The 2nd, 5th, and 6th graders will, for the second time, make sandwiches and cards to be shared at Open Cathedral. As the New Year and Epiphany roll around, we shift to New Testament stories, but will continue with creation care and outreach themes, most notably the Heifer project in Lent.

With the blessings of all these children and all this activity comes the need for more hands on deck. As always, we welcome and would benefit from additional teachers and helpers. Interested? Scott, Christine, or Carissa Hawthorn can provide all the requisite details and encouragement. You can reach Nancy Clark at nclark@sfds.net.

On Bible Times Market Day in Market Square (a.k.a. the Great Room), spirited buying, selling, and tax-collector evading took place. Money changers dispensed the requisite coins to parents seeking to join the commerce – if they could answer a Bible-type question or two.
Bollywood Dancing
Mike Stafford, Director of Youth Programs, and The Rev. Christine McSpadden

Members of the Youth Group gathered for the November Adventure Night and the sitar funk beat of a Bollywood soundtrack for an evening of dancing and fun.

Joti Singh, a Punjabi Dance instructor, led the group in high-stepping, hip-gyrating, line dancing moves from the Subcontinent. Ice cream sandwiches midway through the evening cooled the hard dancing group and sugared them up for the second round. A much requested repeat from last year’s Bollywood Night, the exotic evening promises to become a staple in the youth group program.

This is just one example of the fun we have at Youth Group and a great way for our 6th graders to get acclimated to our program. More youth are always welcome at Youth Group and encouraged to bring friends. For more information about our schedule and program, contact Mike Stafford at mstafford@smvsf.org.

Reflecting on Adult Formation
Kathleen Bean, Associate for Adult Formation

As the year draws to a close, we are taking some time to reflect on the Adult Formation programs of 2013 and consider what to offer in the coming year. To mention a few of the year’s highlights:

We had a wonderful response to our traditional Monday evening Lenten series, both in terms of attendance and comments about its relevance to people’s lives. Then, taking advantage of the space and time freed up by our summer schedule, we created a 10-week Adult Forum series called Summer in the City, which represented a tremendous increase in programming for adult education and was very well received.

This fall we launched a Thursday morning Book Group, which meets in the newly created Study. Posting audio recordings on our website of most of the offerings enhanced our community’s ability to access this knowledge. These audios are still available on www.smvsf.org by linking to them from the Adult Formation pages.

In the coming year, we hope to add a Bible study and a film series, as well as continuing our Lenten and summer programming. Scott, Christine, and I
are working on a variety of ideas, and the theme for the year that has emerged is prayer and spiritual practice. Our intention is to offer programming that is not only interesting and engaging, but also practical in assisting us all to grow in our spiritual journeys. We would like to hear from you with any questions, suggestions, or ideas you may have.

Watch the Sunday bulletin, website, and weekly “St. Mary’s Highlights” emails for announcements about specific programs. Please contact me at kathleen@lavalake.net with ideas or feedback.

Bay Area Hikes

John Walsham

Saturday, October 26, what a morning! Thick fog over the Golden Gate gave way to sparkling sunshine in Marin as we made our way to the Marin Municipal Water District lands on the north slopes of Mt. Tamalpais. There, eleven St. Mary’s hikers set out to walk four miles on the trails around lakes Lagunitas and Bon Tempe. As we walked by the dam at Lake Bon Tempe, tens of cormorants lined up nearby to dry their wings, and as we approached the south side of the lake, we saw a host of mallards paddling busily through the shallows. A peaceful time! Following the walk, most of us gathered at the Iron Springs Pub in Fairfax for a convivial lunch and chat.

Hikers with Lake Lagunitas in the background, left to right: Peter Hopkinson, Wendy Moseley, Tony Imhof, Natasha Hopkinson, Anne Kieve, John Addeo, Loren Kieve, Jane Cook, John Walsham, and Sue Steele. Photographer: Sandra Gary.
Our Stewardship

Tom Robertson, Chair of Stewardship

A resounding thank you to all the wonderful people who have pledged to support the work of St. Mary’s in the upcoming year. The campaign to increase the number of pledges to 325 and to raise $825,000 is going well. At press time, pledges totaled 222 for $710,613.

Big thank yous also to the people who spoke during services about why they love St. Mary’s: Scott Elaine Case, Russell Fudge, Frances Boggiano, and Lee Walsh; to those who hosted gatherings: Jim and Margaret Moore, Jim Griffith and Kimberly Whitney, and Brendan and Katelyn Dyson; and to the 50 volunteers who called to follow up.

If you have not yet pledged, please do so by going to our website, www.smvsf.org, by filling out a pledge card in the pews, or by saying yes to a fellow parishioner who calls you.

Year-End Finance Note

Marybeth Volk, Finance Manager

At year end, your contribution to the parish can include more than one purpose, for instance for your pledge and for altar flowers. So it is important to make your intentions clear. We can split contributions for two or more purposes as long as the amount for each purpose is clearly shown on your check. Unless otherwise noted, checks received at Christmas services will be assumed to be Christmas (special) offerings. If you intend such a check to be a pledge payment, please so indicate. All checks received in special Christmas envelopes will also be assumed to be part of the Christmas offering.

The books for December will be held open until January 6, 2014 so that checks dated in 2013 but received late can be posted as 2013 contributions. All checks received after January 6th, regardless of date, and all checks dated 2014 will be recorded as 2014 contributions. As always, we accept appreciated securities as payments for all pledges. Forms are available in the office and via links on the front page of our website, www.smvsf.org, under Stewardship.

Community Caroling

Saturday, December 21
1:00 pm

Please join in a community caroling event sponsored by St. Mary’s in cooperation with Union Street merchants. We will meet in the Courtyard at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 21, 2013. We will travel down Union Street singing our hearts out, so dress warmly! We’ll return to the Courtyard for a cup of cheer and perhaps a few more carols.

Please invite friends and neighbors who may enjoy singing carols together. This is a community event and is not a church service. No prior expertise is required; lyrics and music provided. Come, rain or shine; if the weather outside is frightful we will gather inside to sing together.
Benefactor Party, Friday, December 6th
Greens and Pantry Sale, Sunday, December 8th

Anne Kieve and Fran Hegeler, Co-Chairs

If you follow the news, you are likely aware of the growing number of people in the Bay Area who are in need: of food, of shelter, of employment, of companionship. The list goes on. As I (Fran) reflect on the many blessings of my own life, I often wonder how I can help make a difference in the lives of others.

St. Mary’s outreach program provides an opportunity. Each year at this time, we undertake a fundraising effort devoted exclusively to outreach—that is, offering financial support to agencies and organizations that are helping people in need. What do we mean by “exclusively”? We mean: every dollar raised—every dollar raised—goes directly to those in need.

How does it work? “Tidings of Comfort & Joy” raises money in three ways: through the sale of Christmas greens, through a pantry sale of homemade goodies (jams, pickles, and all manner of delicious baked goods prepared by many of our parishioners), and through the generous donations of benefactors. Consider participating. You can bake, sell, buy, and/or make a financial contribution.

Our Outreach Grant Committee then evaluates and distributes funds — more than $40,000 last year — to local organizations. As with previous years, the single largest source of these funds was benefactor donations. Here are just a few examples drawn from the fourteen grants awarded last year:

- Fact: most nursing home residents have no visitors. Our grant supports the Art with Elders program of Eldergivers (founded by St. Mary’s in 1985), which places experienced art instructors in long-term care facilities where residents learn to paint.
- The San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocate Program (SFCASA) recruits, trains, and supervises volunteers to serve as advocates and mentors for abused and neglected youth under the jurisdiction of San Francisco’s juvenile dependency court. Our grant helps support the salary of the SFCASA Volunteer Recruitment and Training Coordinator.
- The Oakes Children’s Center treats emotionally disturbed and developmentally delayed children through its educational day treatment facility. Our grant provides classroom supplies.

These and other grants from St. Mary’s are making a difference in the lives of people in the Bay Area. Your participation—as a benefactor, baker, buyer, or greens volunteer—is most welcome. Watch the bulletins for more information or contact Co-Chairs Anne Kieve at annekieve@gmail.com or Fran Hegeler at Fran.Hegeler@aecom.com.
Creation Care and the Energy Oscars

Kathleen Bean, Associate for Adult Formation

On November 12, our parish was honored at Interfaith Power and Light’s Energy Oscars, held at Grace Cathedral, where Tom Steyer, long-time attendee of our Unplugged service, gave the keynote address. The Energy Oscars recognize faith communities from all over California for their leadership in various categories related to stewardship of the earth. St. Mary’s was a finalist for Advocacy and Education.

When we were notified that we were a finalist, we took some time to think about the ways in which St. Mary’s is actively engaged in this arena, and we recognized that Creation Care is not merely a committee or an occasional event but has, over the past few years, become an integral part of the culture of St. Mary’s. One could even describe it as a charism – a power given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. Here are the areas where St. Mary’s is actively engaged in Creation Care:

Liturgy We have set aside three Sundays each year to lift up and significantly celebrate creation: the Feast of St. Francis, World Mission Sunday, and Earth Day. On those days the liturgy – including readings, hymns, prayers, and homily – is devoted to the theme of caring for creation.

Education Environmental awareness is woven into our Sunday School curriculum from Kindergarten on, and emphasizes God’s love of creation in scripture and our responsibility as stewards of the earth. In addition, we periodically provide parishioners with helpful information and book recommendations concerning sustainable farming, recycling, water conservation, reducing dependency on plastics, and other relevant issues through a variety of means, including special Adult Forums and film screenings.

Food and Fellowship Our Christian Community Committee has instituted policies that ensure that church gatherings are as green as possible, ending the use of non-compostable disposables, including bottled water, Styrofoam, and paper products, and encouraging the use of sustainably-grown food. The purchase of an industrial dishwasher in 2011 has reduced our energy and water use. Our annual Sustainable Feast potluck is a time when parishioners share their own strategies for eating sustainably, bringing foods they raise themselves or are sourced from local and/or organic farms. We’ve enjoyed traveling to the TomKat Ranch for several years to harvest and prepare food together, and our “Spiritual Hikes” are a wonderful way for parishioners to connect to each other and to the natural world.

Day-to-Day Operations St. Mary’s has created landfill, compost, and recycling stations throughout our physical plant and reduced our landfill burden substantially. We are also investigating the feasibility of installing solar panels and using the spring water that flows into our courtyard fountain to irrigate our garden. Our relatively small facility and land footprint requires us to be creative about use of space and allows us
to deliver a lot of program at a relatively low energy cost.

**Leadership** Our clergy demonstrate commitment and support for Creation Care as a core value of the parish and promote it throughout the broader Church, including traveling to southern California for the Global Green Awards this June in Santa Monica at which philanthropist, environmentalist, and parish friend Tom Steyer was honored, and participating in a forum on environmental stewardship at All Saints Pasadena. St. Mary’s was also honored for its environmental leadership at the 15th Annual Interfaith Council Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast in San Francisco in November, 2012.

In his October homily at St. Mary’s, Tom Steyer stated his conviction that care for the earth is the most pressing task facing this generation. “This is, for all of us, a deeply spiritual proposition...a chance for us together to reach for something great.” At St. Mary’s, in many ways, we are reaching together for a future in which people will continue to be blessed by a thriving, healthy planet.

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**Personal Preparedness Workshop**

**Wednesday Jan 15**

**6:30 p.m.**

**Kim Regan**

You know it’s coming! Are you ready? St. Mary’s and the San Francisco Fire Department want to help you prepare for the BIG ONE. On Wednesday January 15, at 6:30 p.m., we will offer the two-hour SFFD Personal Preparedness Workshop in The Great Room.

As you stow away your Christmas decorations, consider what you have stored in case of an emergency. Come to the workshop to learn, or to remind yourself, of what you need to do to be ready.

This workshop will cover what everyone should know in order to prepare personally, as a business, and as a community for a disaster, large or small. Topics include:

- Risk Awareness
- Disaster Supplies
- Personal Disaster Planning
- Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams
- Overview

All of our neighbors are invited to come. Please bring your friends. Helping our city get ready for any kind of emergency is a good stewardship practice. Be ready yourself; be ready to help others if you can. What you do today can make a huge difference if and when we experience a natural disaster or Boston-type tragedy.

Please RSVP so we can prepare for you. But come even if you forget to let us know. Your life may depend on it. RSVP to Carla@smvsf.org or call the Church office at 415-921-3665. For more information, email Kim Regan at Kim@KimDan.org.
Fauré’s Requiem for All Souls
Laura Leff, Parish Choir Tenor

Collaboration

On November 1 and 3, the Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin Parish Choir joined with singers and musicians from several other groups including Lacuna Arts Ensemble, St. John’s Presbyterian Church Choir, and Grace Cathedral Camerata to form the Pixley House Chorus and Chamber Orchestra. The world debut of this ensemble featured a single, beloved work: Gabriel Fauré’s Requiem, in celebration of All Souls’ Day. Two performances were given, one at St. John’s Church and the other folded into our 11:00 a.m. Eucharist. It included a remembrance of people who have died in the past year, both within the St. Mary’s community and in the broader world. One was William Thele, who with his partner and fellow parishioner Gilbert Black, generously donated to St. Mary’s Friends of Music, which makes possible many outstanding musical events.

This event was ground-breaking for our parish in that it incorporated a substantial work into a Sunday morning service and involved a multitude of musicians -- 66 singers and 12 instrumentalists -- including our Associate Director of Music Steve Repasky on the organ. It was the culmination of a chance meeting, as is the source of so many wonderful artistic creations. Almost a year ago, Director of Music Chip Grant was having dinner with the Rev. John Anderson of St. John’s Presbyterian Church. In talking about music in their respective communities, they agreed that they would like to find an opportunity to work together. Meanwhile Grace Cathedral Camerata had reached out to Chip to periodically join voices with the Parish Choir. Over the summer, Chip was talking with Sven Olbash, Artistic Director of Lacuna Arts Ensemble, and the topic turned to their mutual interest in Fauré’s Requiem. The separate threads and connections began to weave together to form a beautiful cord, and additional voices helped further the direction.

The beauty of the music deserves significant credit in inspiring so many groups to come together to perform it. Fauré wrote the piece from the late 1880s to 1900, claiming that he wrote it “for pleasure, if I may call it that!” The version used for this performance dates from 1888, which is just three years older than St. Mary’s itself, founded in 1891. The overall emotional tone of the piece is far more gentle than so many other requiem masses that feature a level of intensity and drama that seems bent on ensuring a Heavenly destination by scaring the hell out of the dead. Fauré responded to critics with, “Everything I managed to entertain by way of religious illusion I put into my Requiem, which moreover is dominated from beginning to end by a very human feeling of faith in eternal rest...It has been said that my Requiem does not express the fear of death and someone has called it a lullaby of death. But it is thus that I see death: as a happy deliverance, an aspiration towards happiness above, rather than as a painful experience.”

Personal Transformation

In my mother’s diary, she writes many times of how, as a child, I wanted people to play music for me on the Victrola or hi-fi. Music was my pacifier, my entertainment, my nurturing...it was the purest expression of love. There are reel-to-reel recordings of me up to roughly age two, and even before I could speak, the grandmother clock in our living room chiming the quarter hour would inspire me to try and harmonize with it, with my mother’s voice explaining, “She’s singing with the clock.”

Flash forward to my adult life in California. I had been led to believe that my singing wasn’t very good, based on the opinion of one person. When the Maggid (leader) of my Jewish group heard me sing about three bars of Kol Nidre (the opening of the service of Yom Kippur every year), he declared, “You’re going to sing that next year.” Initially I
didn’t think I was good enough, but he was insistent, so I rehearsed while driving in my car. That was in 2001, and each following year my group asked me to sing Kol Nidre again.

As the Jewish High Holidays approached in 2013 after a two-year break from singing Kol Nidre, I wanted to improve some specific things in my performance. At the home of friends, a fellow guest referred me to his singing coach, Sven Olbash, of Lacuna Arts Ensemble, one of the groups that St. Mary’s hosts as Artists-In-Residence.

I met with Sven and sang Kol Nidre for him with my eyes closed to calm my nerves, as I didn’t want to see him with his hands clapped over his ears. He said, “I see why they ask you to come back year after year. That was really lovely.” I was incredulous. As I was leaving, I commented about the Fauré sheet music on his keyboard and told him I had been teaching myself the Latin lyrics for fun so I could sing along with my Dutoit CD.

I had an independent audition with Sven a couple of days later to try out for his group and to sing Requiem with them, but with no prior professional training (“Can you sing solfège?” “Well, if you hum a few bars, I can fake it”), I was not ready for his group. My heart fell as the chance at singing Requiem was slipping away inexorably.

Later, Sven told me, “You have a lot of good singing ability and instincts already. There is another choir that is performing the same Requiem with us, and they may be open to you singing with them. Chip Grant is their director.” There was a Combining exceptional music with a Sunday morning service, Director of Music Chip Grant conducts Fauré’s Requiem while the Rev. Christine McSpadden readies the altar for Eucharist on All Souls’ Day.
chance I could sing Requiem with whatever skills I had. I phoned Chip the next day, and he welcomed me into The Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin Parish Choir. “Your first rehearsal starts five hours from now,” he said.

St. Mary’s choir members were as welcoming as Chip—especially to an unusual girl tenor who has been singing in that range for Cantorial material. And I wasn’t the only one who didn’t automatically know how to sing a minor 6th interval, or could use more development of my diaphragm engagement. It was okay to be learning. And the next night at Yom Kippur service, people told me that they had always loved my Kol Nidre, but that this year was head and shoulders above my past performances.

It is as if you have been going to fine restaurants all your life, eating wonderful food, and then one day you learn how to cook one of your favorite dishes. It gives you so much more appreciation of what goes into it, and just how you get all those delectable layers of flavor. Then you want to find out how to cook everything you see, because a whole new world has opened to you. I have heard so much wonderful music over the years, and now the chance to be a part of it has been completely transformative.

Now when I hear a Mass by Ralph Vaughan Williams or a piece by Palestrina or Agnus Dei by Samuel Barber, I think, “I want to sing that!” The baby trying to harmonize with the Westminster chimes of her family’s clock now has over a millennium of choral music to explore, as a new member of St. Mary’s Parish Choir.

Magical Chamber Music Ensemble

Debbie Veatch

Earlier this year, the glorious sounds of the St. Mary’s Chamber Music Ensemble graced a morning service, offering a special blessing for worshippers.

In a program sponsored partly by St. Mary’s Friends of Music, three young parish musicians had the rare opportunity to learn from and make music with four professional musicians. The Ensemble included Will Veatch, Jody Richardson, and Stephanie Bibbo playing violin; Ned Burnam and Thomas Perkins playing cello; Harry Bernstein playing viola; and James Touzel playing clarinet.

During the previous week, the three young people met daily for a chamber music workshop under the instruction of Jody Richardson, Stephanie Bibbo, and Samsun Val Loon. On the first day, the
youngsters thought they were being asked to play hard music. When they found the same music on their stands the second day, they realized they were being given the challenge of learning and mastering this advanced music. They rose to the challenge, receiving individual and group instruction along with the opportunity to play alongside conservatory-trained musicians. This was the first time that Will Veatch had ever played with an ensemble. It gave him tremendous inspiration, renewed commitment to developing his skills, and desire for future opportunities to play with others.

The value of providing our young parish musicians with the opportunity to develop their skills and share their musical gifts with the parish is priceless. We are grateful to the generous donors who support St. Mary’s Friends of Music and create the opportunity for this magical Chamber Music Ensemble and many other splendid music offerings.

The Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin
QUIET DAY FOR
ALL MEN and
WOMEN

Hosted by the Daughters of the King

Saturday, February 8, 2014
In the Great Room
12:00 to 5:00 p.m.

“They also serve who only stand and wait.”

The day will start with a bring-your-own bag lunch. Water, coffee, and tea will be provided, as well as snacks and dessert. The day will include prayer, guided meditations by The Rev. Lawrence “Larry” Holben, Priest-in-Charge of St. Barnabas Church in Mt. Shasta. There will be periods of silence for reflection.

Please join with others for an afternoon of peaceful reflection and take time for practicing the presence of God.

In order to prepare for the day, reservations are necessary. Please contact Catherine Secour by Thursday, February 6th at cathsecour@msn.com or 415-753-1973.

“But I still my soul and make it quiet.” Psalm 131

Christmas Flowers

Steven R. Currier, Chair, Flower Committee

On behalf of the St. Mary’s Flower Committee and the Altar Guild, we once again thank all who have donated flowers for our regular services, for the Christmas and Easter holidays, and for special events like the Feast of All Souls. We depend on YOU to help us decorate the Church on a weekly basis.

As the Christmas season approaches, we hope that you will be generous again this season of Advent and Christmas. If you would like to donate to the Christmas decorations and flowers, send your check, in any amount, to the church office. Please make your check payable to “SMV Altar Guild,” and mark the memo area of your check “Christmas Flowers.” If you wish, write your intentions as a “memorial” or “in celebration of.” In order to have your intentions included in the Christmas bulletins, we must receive your check by December 18. Your generosity is immensely appreciated. Merry Christmas!
The Last Tear

Sandra Gary

On the day our parish marked All Souls’ Day, our own Jean Rowcliffe returned to St. Mary’s to share her wisdom and to read from her just-published memoir, The Last Tear. It tells the story of the harrowing loss she endured when her only child died of cancer at the impossibly young age of 17. James Kessler, once a dynamic High School senior, now rests in St. Mary’s Columbarium. “He was a special soul,” she says.

Jean Rowcliffe in the Study at St. Mary’s

We knew her first as “Miss Jean,” founder of the The Village Well and dispenser of advice to a new generation of parents whom she attracted to the Well, located in Fowler Hall. Jean gleaned wisdom from years working as a nanny to the Royal family in England and translated that into her “Slow Parenting” method of child rearing.

Jean tells her attentive listeners gathered in the Study that the title of her book refers to the act of a dying person. “Hospice workers told me that sometimes when someone is dying, they shed a last tear,” she says in her soft, soothing voice. “James did, and I dried the tear with a handkerchief. That handkerchief is now my most precious possession.”

Over cups of afternoon tea and homemade cookies and biscuits, we hear that she preserved James’s fingerprints on his computer screen. “It was the last intangible essence of him,” she explains. “I couldn’t clean the computer screen for two years.”

Jean shares the story of James’s request to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the organization that grants the wishes of children facing a life-threatening illness. The year was 2008 and James wanted to meet the Democratic candidate for President. Barack Obama spent half an hour with James three days before the election, when he was deeply exhausted. Later, Obama wrote to Jean expressing his own gratitude for the inspiration and energy he gained through speaking with her son. James and Jean were present backstage when Obama declared victory in Chicago, and then, thanks to Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, joined dignitaries seated at the Capitol when the new President took the oath of office.

Two years ago, Jean decided to move home to her native Canada, feeling overwhelmed by “the grief whores” as she calls them – the inescapable memories of James playing in that playground, of James sipping his first cup of coffee in that café, of James skateboarding down that street, of James attending High School in that building – places she drove past every day on her commute route. In Ontario, she cared for her aging mother and wrote the kind of book she had searched for in vain as she struggled to face James’s death and her own grief.

James Kessler meets Barack Obama

“There wasn’t a book available about grief that made sense” she says simply. “I wrote it from the deep pain of profound loss. It’s a loss you don’t recover from.”
“Grief never leaves you completely, but it becomes something you can manage,” she says, reassuring us with a smile, patting the seat cushion next to her. “Instead of it overwhelming you, you can put it on the seat next to you. And then, eventually, you can pick it up when you choose to.” As evening falls, Jean signs books, offering us also a handkerchief embroidered with the letters TLT.

For more information about The Last Tear or about Jean, or to order a copy of the book, visit www.jeanalicerowcliffe.com.

**New Members at St. Mary’s**

*The Rev. Scott E. Richardson, Rector*

Mary and I were delighted to host the fall Newcomers Welcome at your rectory in mid-November. Belle McBride is the chair of the Welcome Committee and did a wonderful job of preparing the party. As often happens at events like this, people asked about the path to membership at St. Mary’s. That is actually a rather complicated question because people choose to enter at different levels. Here is the answer that I often give to help people find their way.

I really do mean it when I say that there is no such thing as a guest or a visitor at St. Mary’s – when you find your way into the building, then you’ve found your way into the family. If you decide that you want to know more about the activities of the parish, it is wise to register to get on the mailing list and email distribution list. You can do that by calling the office at 415-921-3665 x302 or by filling out the form on Sunday at the Welcome Table near the fish pond in the courtyard.

Pledging is another step forward. Most people find that making a financial commitment helps to concretize one’s sense of participation. The amount pledged is generally less significant than the act of pledging, and being a “ giver of record” allows you to take your place as a voting member at our Annual Meeting. You can pledge at any time; the Stewardship season is just wrapping up now and we would love to hear from you.

If you were previously a member of another Episcopal congregation, you might consider transferring your membership to St. Mary’s. There are forms for this that we will sign and send for you, as you provide direction. Those who are ready to take the spiritual step of becoming an Episcopalian are encouraged to participate in the Rite of Confirmation. After a period of preparation, you can be presented to the bishop and s/he will prayerfully confirm the promises of your baptism with you. If you have previously been confirmed by a bishop from another denomination, then our bishop will receive you into this church. Those who have been previously confirmed by a bishop in the Episcopal Church are always welcome to renew their commitment. The preparation for each of these activities is scheduled for this spring.

Finally, let me add here that membership is not just a matter of paperwork or ritual action. You will be blessed to the extent that you participate in the life of the parish. Attend classes, join in our common meals and other activities, link up with a social group at the church, or find a way to be of service. We are very content to let you find your way forward and to do that at your own pace. We also know that those who engage in the opportunities presented experience a greater sense of belonging and a deeper sense of joy. Please feel free to be in touch if we can be of assistance in this regard.
Diocesan Convention News

Roulhac Austin, Deanery Convener

A full day of business greeted voting delegates and alternates to this year’s 164th annual Convention of the Diocese of California on October 26. The most contentious issue called for immediate divestment of our endowment holdings in fossil fuel companies. In order to be at the table to push our investment advisors to consider a socially responsible investment option and to save the roughly $100,000 to close our account, the convention voted to slowly divest and push for change. The convention also voted to support illegal immigrants’ path to legalize the ability to work and to stop deporting family members; to promote an end to gun violence; and to urge immediate closure of the terrorist prison at Guantanamo Bay.

The Rev. Eric Metoyer will serve his first term as a deputy to General Convention.

Raised up from our pews and sponsored for ordination by St. Mary the Virgin, the Rev. Eric Metoyer will serve his first term as a clergy deputy at the 2015 convention. He serves as Associate for Congregational Ministries for the Diocese of California, responsible for Anti-Racism Training and multi-cultural ministries, and he serves as an instructor for another Diocesan program, Equipping the Beloved Community. He also serves as Priest Associate at St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church, San Francisco. As co-chair of the Racial Reconciliation Task Force and member of the Afro-Anglican Commission, Eric is a committed contributor to the conversation about multiculturalism in the Diocese.

Nominees Sought for Deanery

At the Annual Parish Meeting on January 26, we will elect seven Deanery delegates plus seven Deanery alternates. They participate in Deanery meetings and events held three or four times a year, and they represent St. Mary’s at the Diocesan Convention every October, during which they take part in adopting the diocesan budget, deliberating on resolutions before the diocese, and electing new leaders. This parish is filled with talented members; if you know of someone you feel would be a strong leader and servant of St. Mary’s as a Deanery delegate, or if you feel called to this ministry yourself, please contact Roulhac Austin, our Deanery Convener at roulhac@flash.net or Tom Robertson at trobertson@pacbell.net.

Dr. Rod Dugliss is re-elected for the fourth time to represent our diocese at General Convention.

Two of St. Mary’s own will represent our Diocese at the next General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2015 in Utah. Rod Dugliss will serve a fourth term as a lay deputy; he attended General Conventions in 2006, 2009, and 2012 where he was appointed to the Legislative Committee on Ecumenical Relations and to the Legislative Committee on Ministry Development. Rod is currently the Dean of the School for Deacons at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and serves as Director of Field Education for the Diocese.
M.O.M.S. Back at St. Mary’s!

Kathleen Bean, Associate for Adult Formation

The M.O.M.S. Program is:
~ a seven-week journey of spiritual renewal and reflection
~ an opportunity for women to reconnect with all aspects of themselves – mother, daughter, spouse, friend, professional, and spiritual being
~ a group experience of learning, praying, and caring for each other

M.O.M.S. (“Ministry of Mothers Sharing”) was created to help women reclaim their own dreams and reconnect with their spiritual selves in the midst of the busyness of raising a family. Over the past eight years, more than 70 women have participated in the M.O.M.S. workshop here at St. Mary’s; here’s what past participants have said:

“Sharing the MOMS course with seven wise, compassionate and thoughtful women transformed my heart, mind and soul. They took away the loneliness and anxiety that often accompany me on this journey of motherhood. I feel so blessed to be part of the circle of mothers on this sacred journey.” ~ Debbie V.

“M.O.M.S. allowed me to tap into a spiritual part of myself that needed to be reawakened. A life-affirming event!” ~ Christine M.

Join us! We’ll meet on Tuesday mornings in the Study from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on January 14, 21, 28, February 4, 11, 25, and March 4. A Celebration Dinner will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 6. There is a $75 materials fee. The program is limited to eight participants.

Please note that attendance at every meeting and the dinner is expected – the unique experience of this program depends on the full participation of every member of the group! Register online at www.smvsf.org. For more information, contact facilitators Kathleen Bean at kathleen@lavalake.net or Jaime Lindauer at jaime@spring44.com.

Annual Parish Meeting

On Sunday morning, January 26, 2014, we will come together for our Annual Parish Meeting. Once again, this meeting will take place in the Church, beginning at 10:30 a.m., following the 9:00 a.m. service. A lunch in the Great Room will be served right after the meeting.

The 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services will be combined, taking place at 9:00 a.m. on this day.

The Annual Parish Meeting is different from most of the obligations we experience elsewhere; for, in addition to taking care of some of the normal temporal actions we need to fulfill—such as the election of new members of the Vestry and new delegates to represent all of us within the Diocese of California and the San Francisco Deanery, as well as reflection on the proposed budget for the coming year—we also take time to ponder our spiritual health and condition.

We receive reports and remarks about many of our ministries and programs, and take time to raise questions about how we might better serve the community and the world. Parish leaders, lay and ordained, offer their reflections on the State of the Parish. And, unlike in many other meetings, we join together as one community: we sing, laugh, remember our departed sisters and brothers, and, in general, recall who we are, whose we are, and why we gather, week in and week out, season after season, and year after year, in this holy place. Child care will be available, and we encourage teenagers to attend.

Please take part in this year’s Annual Parish Meeting, and join your sisters and brothers in faith, discerning God’s presence in, and call to, this community of faith.
Day of the Dead

Drawing from the spirit of her Mexican heritage, the Rev. Mary Moreno Richardson (above) fired up her artistry to make a magnificent altar shrine in our chapel to commemorate La Dia de los Muertos. Parishioners contributed photos of their departed loved ones around which Mary carefully placed marvelous handcrafted dolls, flowers, candles, and other objects of love and respect. Mary channels her artistic talents into spiritual healing through the Guadalupe Art Program, whose mission is to heal violence against women and children through the arts. An exhibition of self-portraits created by participants in the Program is now on view at Grace Cathedral’s Dio House. All are welcome to attend a reception at Dio House, 1055 Taylor Street, on Thursday, December 12th at 6:00 p.m.

Right: Sunday School students in the fifth and sixth grades also created a colorful and heartfelt altar for the Day of the Dead.
ADVENT

December 1  First Sunday of Advent

9:00 & 11:00 a.m.  The Very Rev. Alan Jones preaches
7:00 p.m.  Candlelight Concert  “Old, New, Borrowed, Blues”
            Tamalpais and Monteverdi Brass

December 8  Second Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m.  La Virgen de Guadalupe Celebration
            Children’s Choir
6:30 p.m.  Parish Advent Dinner and Sing-Along

December 15  Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m.  Sankta Lucia Celebration
            Children’s & Youth Choirs

December 22  Fourth Sunday of Advent

8:00 a.m.  Holy Eucharist
9:00 & 11:00 a.m.  A Service of Lessons and Carols
            Children’s, Youth, & Parish Choirs and Chamber Orchestra

CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24

3:00 p.m.  Christmas Pageant
            Costumed players and live animals
5:00 p.m.  Christmas Eve Eucharist
            Children’s and Youth Choirs
10:30 p.m.  Candlelight Carol Sing
            Parish Choir and Chamber Orchestra
11:00 p.m.  Candlelight Eucharist
            Parish Choir and Chamber Orchestra

CHRISTMAS DAY

December 25

10:00 a.m.  Holy Eucharist with Carols
            Parish Choir and Organ

December 29  First Sunday after Christmas

8:00, 9:00 & 11:00 a.m.  regular service times
5:30 p.m.  Taizé Eucharist

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

January 6

9:00 a.m.  Visit of the Magi
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HIGHLIGHTS—WINTER 2013 - 2014
Also visit www.smvsf.org

SPIRITUALITY & PASTORAL CARE
- Schedule of Advent and Christmas Services – See inside back cover
- Praying the Rosary – Wednesdays, in the Study, at noon
- Wednesday Prayer – In the Chapel, at 7 am
- Nursing Home Ministry – every 4th Sunday, Golden Gate Healthcare Center, 2707 Pine Street, at 1:30 pm
- Presidio Gate Ministry – 2nd & 4th Mondays, 2770 Lombard Street, at 10 am

OUTREACH
- Raphael House Ministry – First Monday of each month. Contact Alisa Quint Fisher at alistquint@mac.com

MEETINGS & MISCELLANY
- Christmas Flower Donations – due Wednesday, December 18
- Deadline for the Spring 2014 Cow Hollow Church News – February 1. Please email articles to inkyword@aol.com

SAVE THESE DATES
- Candlelight Concert by Tamalpais and Monteverdi Brass – Sunday, December 1, at 7 pm
- Tidings Benefactor Party – Friday, December 6
- Pantry & Greens Sale – Sunday, December 8, in the courtyard, between morning services
- Parish Advent Dinner and Sing-Along – Sunday, December 8, at St. Mary’s, at 6:30 pm
- Guadalupe Art Program Reception – Thursday, December 12, Dio House, Grace Cathedral, 1055 Taylor Street, at 6 pm
- Community Caroling – Saturday, December 21, meet in the courtyard, at 1 pm
- M.O.M.S. Group – Begins Tuesday, January 14, in the Study, at 9:30 am
- Personal Preparedness Workshop – Wednesday, January 15, in Fowler Hall, at 6:30 pm
- Annual Parish Meeting – Sunday, January 26, at 10:30 am, following the 9:00 am service; lunch following meeting
- Daughters of the King Quiet Day – Saturday, February 8, in the Great Room, at noon