



The Forward

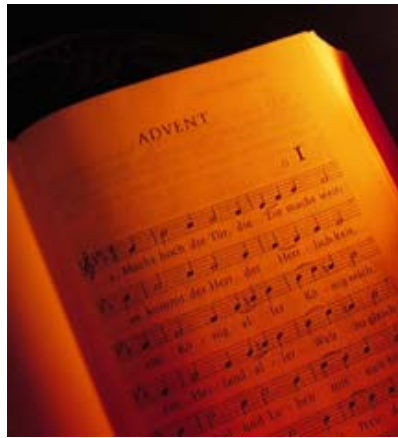
December 2008

Letter from the Bishop

The season of Advent is upon us. For some reason, every year Advent surprises me. I realize that it comes at the same time every year without fail, but it still manages to take me by surprise. Maybe it's because I'm usually not up for a whole season of 'watching and waiting' when 'planning and executing' is my preferred mode of operation. In this season, we are called to take a step back and experience the joy of hopeful expectation. If you are a 'type A' personality like me this might take some extra discipline.

I think what adds to my frustration is the whole 'Christmas season starts on the Friday after Thanksgiving' mentality. This is a time of year that I don't mind being counter-cultural. I try to boycott Christmas parties during Advent and singing Christmas carols during Advent makes me apoplectic. I've been accused of being a 'Scrooge' in the so-called 'Christmas' season. The last time I checked, though, Christmas is a twelve day celebration that begins with the nativity of our Lord.

The reality is that we do not go directly to Christmas. Instead, we are given the gift of Advent. Advent is a time of watching and waiting with hopeful expectation. We wait for hope that comes with birth of the Christ-child. The oft neglected part of Advent is waiting for Christ to come again. In that second-coming (forget about the *Left Behind* series) the fullness of the Kingdom that we pray for each day in the Lord's Prayer and look for in the world around us comes into being.



Watching and waiting makes space for God to teach us about discernment and patience. I never cease to be amazed about what God will do when I am willing to step out of the way. What if we were able to step away from

our need to 'do' this season and took this opportunity to watch and wait and allow God to control our imagination? Advent is yet another opportunity for us to commune with God in an intentional way and allow God to reveal the Kingdom in our midst.

Christmas will come soon enough. Right now it's Advent. Live in the moment.

Blessings,

+ Sean

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A Service of Lessons & Carols

Cathedral of St. Paul

December 14th at 4:00 P M

All are welcome.

A reception will follow. Child care will be available.

98th Annual Diocesan Convention Passes New Constitution and Canons

The 98th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania, held in Madera, PA, and hosted by Holy Trinity, Houtzdale, passed a new set of constitution and canons after a day and a half of debate and deliberation.

There were a few changes made to the canons, which can be seen on the Convention 2008 page of the diocesan website, and no changes made to the new constitution, which was on its second reading. Debate on the canons was lively, but respectful, and the convention worked extremely hard to ensure that the document was what they wanted for the diocese.

Besides the new constitution and canons, another major excitement was that convention was being held outside of Erie for the first time in many years, resulting in a high number of people registering for convention. The consensus was that the move was a success, due much to the hard work of Fr. Bill Ellis and the congregation of Holy Trinity, Houtzdale. They did a tremendous job at making everyone feel at home.



Photo courtesy of James Steadman

Other resolutions passed by the convention were the resolution on minimum stipends, proposed by Diocesan Council, and a resolution on fostering reconciliation, which was proposed by the Peace and Justice Task Force. Both can be seen on the Convention 2008 page of the website.

Elections were held for Standing Committee, Ecclesiastical Court, Constitution and Canons Committee, Diocesan Council, and Deputies to Provincial Synod. The Diocesan Council elections were held under the new canons, resulting in a smaller body than what the diocese previously had. Full election results can also be found on the Convention 2008 page of our website.

The 99th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania will be held on November 6-7, 2009, and will be hosted by Trinity Church, New Castle. Details will be forthcoming on the Diocesan Convention 2009 page of the website.

Diocesan Council Reminder

Diocesan Council members, please remember that council will meet on Tuesday, December 16, at 7:00 PM at St. John's, Franklin. Please let Vanessa know whether or not you are able to come to the meeting either by phone (814-456-4203) or by e-mail (vbutler@dionwpa.org).

Bishop Sean's & Canon Martha's Visitation Schedules

December 2008

- December 7th - Bishop Sean - Holy Trinity, Brookville
- Canon Martha - St. James', Titusville
- December 14th - Canon Martha - St. Laurence, Osceola Mills
- December 21st - Bishop Sean - St. Andrew's, Clearfield
- Canon Martha - Church of the Redeemer, Hermitage
- December 24th - Bishop Sean - Cathedral of St. Paul, Erie
- December 25th - Bishop Sean - Cathedral of St. Paul, Erie



Holy Trinity, Brookville

Advent Reflections by the Rev. Canon Martha Ishman

“Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility . . .” BCP p. 211

Advent is perhaps my favorite season of the liturgical year. I enjoy the quietness it brings to an otherwise hectic season. I also need the discipline it requires of me to properly prepare for and appreciate the coming of the Lord. Many of the lessons we hear are stark and demanding. This is reflected in the collect for the First Sunday of Advent. We ask the Lord to give us grace to do the hard things, to strengthen us to cast away all those things that are distractions or rabbit trails or even destructive to living a life in Christ. And furthermore, we are asking for that grace now. We need to be doing the work now and not waiting for some heavenly intervention because this mortal life has been blessed and valued because it has been shared by Christ himself. (Be careful what you pray for?)



All of that is difficult enough to do as individuals. As I travel around the diocese, I encounter many congregations that are struggling with these same issues corporately. What are our distractions? What are our rabbit trails? What is it that we are doing that prevents the light of Christ from shining in our communities? These are difficult issues with no ready answers. The Good News, as I see it, is that for the most part we haven't hunkered down in the darkness. We have congregations willing to put on the armor of light. We have congregations deciding to do things differently. We have congregations willing to work in the 'now' that God has graciously given us.

May you and yours have a Holy Advent and a Blessed Christmas.

St. Stephen's to Offer Training by Carly Rowe

Disciples of Christ in Community (DOCC) is an adult education program designed to provide an experience in building Christian community while encouraging individual spiritual growth. DOCC is congregation-centered and open to members of any church in which the lay and clergy leaders are interested in offering the program. The basic DOCC course consists of approximately 21 sessions and offers a high degree of flexibility to fit the needs of the congregation. Each session is in two parts: a presentation, led by a trained layperson or clergy, and small group discussions. Upon completion of the training being offered at St. Stephen's, participants will become licensed as facilitators, who together with their clergy person can take the program back to their home parishes.



The goals of the DOCC program as outlined by The University of the South in Sewanee are as follows: experience a deeper spiritual life; learn the basics of faith; develop a greater commitment to Jesus Christ; experience being a part of a caring community; learn to enhance particular skills, such as communication and active listening; and feel challenged to identify and exercise their ministry within the church and beyond.

This training will be offered in the diocese beginning at 3:00 P.M. on Friday, January 23 and continuing through 3:00 P.M. on Sunday, January 25. For more information or to register, please contact Carly Rowe at 814-474-5490 or by e-mail at carlyrowe@roadrunner.com.

If you have news, story ideas, or pictures that you would like to share with the diocese, please contact Vanessa at the Diocesan Church Center at 814-456-4203 or at vbutler@dionwpa.org.

My Journey to India Part 4—Mission & Ministry by the Ven. Gail Winslow

Now it is time to see the ministry that God added to the itinerary, St. Paul's Church, part of the Church of South India. I was made aware of St. Paul's just before leaving the U.S. I had the phone number of Sunil Yesudas, the young engineer who worshipped at the Cathedral of St. Paul while working at G.E. in Erie. We contacted him and made arrangements to visit St. Paul. Sunil said he might not be able to be there as he was scheduled to travel for work, but would make sure there was someone to meet us. In the meantime he asked if he could postpone his travel for a day to meet us. They said yes. Praise God.

We arrived at what we thought was the destination as the sign for C.S.I St. Paul's church was right there at the bottom of a very rutty uphill path. We asked Sunil where the church was. He pointed up the path, a 100-yard climb. We hiked up and sure enough there was St. Paul's church with Fr. Davis, Sunil's father, and several parishioners there to greet us. We were treated with fresh coconut milk straight from the coconut with a straw inserted.

They explained their need for a new church building. They had started the new one from the money they had raised and money from the Cathedral of St. Paul in Erie, but they had run short. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you why they need the new building. They have too many people to fit in the current one and the average wage for their parishioners is \$6.00 a day. You'll be hearing more about St. Paul's early in 2009.

This is a very brief summary of the work being done in Kerala. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

This trip has changed my life and re-affirmed to me how truly blessed I am. First and foremost, that God called me to this servant ministry of being a deacon. It felt, at times, like we were back in first and second century Christianity. Jesus is so alive in the lives of the people. These ministries are done when people hear the Gospel: feed my people, care for the poor, clothe them, give them shelter. Individuals may not know how or where the money will come from, but they trust in God and have faith that He will provide.

Jesus is so alive in the cities and homes. There are huge murals of Jesus on buildings and large statues in the middle of nowhere. When you look out from the mountaintops in remote areas you see miles and miles of green foliage and then right in the middle standing like pillar of smoke is a church with its steeple crying out, "This is God's creation and it is good." It was amazing on Sunday to see 300-400 people worshipping in a church the size of St. Francis of Assisi in Youngsville. Going to church in any city, any day, no matter the time of day, and seeing people praying and sometimes whole families reading scriptures was spiritually uplifting.

It has given me hope and the vision that it can be like that here in northwestern Pennsylvania. We need to allow Christ to be first in our lives. If we do this, our ministries will grow and others will come to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.



Memorial Service to be held for Bishop Davis

A memorial service will be held for the Rt. Rev. Donald Davis on Sunday, December 7, at 4:00 PM at the Cathedral of St. Paul. A reception will follow the service.

Bishop Davis was the sixth bishop of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania. He passed away August 31, 2007.

Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend.

