



## A LETTER FROM THE RECTOR

### St. Thomas'—A Praying People

Each inaugural gathering this past week began with prayer. We're a praying nation—we're a praying church—we're a praying people. Prayer shapes us as powerfully as a lack of prayer does. In the Episcopal Church, we're a people of the Book of Common Prayer and we embrace an understanding that praying shapes our believing. I've asked our vestry to join me in daily prayer for our new administration and their families, for this first 100 days. It could be a powerful witness, a powerful current in the life of this city and our public servants, if we as a parish community would pray for our new president, vice president, this new administration and their families for these first 100 days.

### A Word about Prayer

Prayer is such an obvious word...yet what is prayer? Most of us learn about prayer the way we learn about so many other things, by experience, sometimes in moments of desperation. Faced with challenges that we don't feel we're capable of facing, most people—without thinking much about it, instinctively decide to pray. “There are no atheists in foxholes,” the old military saw reminds us. But are such “prayers of desperation” really what Episcopalians mean by prayer?

According to the catechism in the back of our Book of Common Prayer (BCP), “prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.” That probably says both more and less than you may have expected. It says more than we usually mean since it includes actions as well as thoughts; it says less than we usually mean since it invites us to think of prayer as not requiring words at all. Moreover, the BCP further qualifies this definition by saying that “Christian prayer is responding to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

According to the BCP there are seven kinds of prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, petition. I'd like to reflect with you about what each of these means, and how our prayer in common, in community shapes what we believe—in at least the following seven ways. For purposes of our Phoenix publication and length limits, I'll speak to the first three kinds of prayer, and with our next months publication, finish with the last four.

Most of us think of prayer as only, or at least mainly, asking for something in time of need, either by way of petition (asking for something we need—the correct answer on a test, the blue light on the state trooper to be after someone else, the cancer test result to come back negative, a job) or if we're practicing generosity, by way of intercession, asking for something having to do with the needs of others). The BCP doesn't discourage us from bringing our own needs and those of others to God in prayer. Yet the way we do so goes a long way towards shaping our prayer life. For the BCP reminds us that the only real point of such prayer is “that God's will may be done.” If we're honest, how often do we really pray for God's will in our lives and those of our neighbors, rather than for our will about what we think God should do? If we're honest about

whose will we usually want to have the lead in our lives, we can be led to the third from of prayer that the BCP speaks about, penitence, where “we confess our sins”—the chief one of which is often the desire to take God’s place and be in charge. Again both more and less is said than we expect. The BCP says less than we might expect because it doesn’t mention any desire on God’s part for vengeance, or that we be utterly humiliated by our penitence. However, it says more than we often mean by confession because the BCP says that in penitence we not only confess our sins yet also make restitution where possible, with the intention to amend our lives. Penitence among all the types of prayer demands both words and deeds that we pray not only with our hearts—we follow our words of prayer with actions reflecting our words.

Next month I’ll reflect on the four remaining kinds of prayer. Until then, simply calling President Obama, Vice President Biden and families and all our nations leadership to mind, holding their safety, health and integrity to serve God and all God’s creation to the best of their ability—holding all that in the palm of your hand, and releasing this prayer as incense is a good and faithful prayer.

God bless each and every one of you this New Year.

Love, Nancy Lee+

## **A LETTER FROM THE ASSISTANT RECTOR**

There is this juxtaposition that exists around the month of February: the shortest month of the year can feel like, for many, a very long slog. Studies have shown that February can be a month that sees a spike in depression affecting more people. These studies claim that there are numerous reasons for this phenomenon, some of which are: dwindling light, winter doldrums, impatience for spring, Valentine’s Day. All these, or just one, can contribute to a feeling of unhappiness with the shortest month of the year.

Growing up, going to public school in Westchester County, New York, we always had a week off in February, called mid-winter break, and another one in mid-April, called “mud week”. The name given to the February break provides some hint and explanation of the bad reputation February is held in by some: “Mid-Winter”, smack in the middle of cold, snow, ice, frigid rain.

We don’t have to think of this month in that way though. We can focus on different things, positive aspects of what is going on in our lives, positive steps being taken in our spiritual lives together. We can reflect on how God has graced us with the good fortune of being part of a thriving, healthy and growing congregation.

Besides being in the midst of winter, we are also smack in the middle of the Epiphany Season on the church calendar. Epiphany is that season between Christmas and Lent which begins when the three Magi reach Jesus’ birth place. This Epiphany season is often times an un-noticed season in the church calendar. I have always thought of Epiphany as the “A-Ha” season: a time when our lectionary readings provide us with the opportunity to witness the growth and flowering of Jesus’ ministry giving us moments of insight (“A-Ha” moments) into the Kingdom

Jesus is creating. These “A-Ha” moments are wonderful things to reflect upon when we find ourselves falling into the doldrums of February, of being immersed in the mid-winter blues. We need to remember that whether in midwinter or in spring, summer or fall, God is walking with us, loves us, wants to be in conversation with us, and relishes us having these “A-Ha” moments.

God’s Blessing and Peace,

John+

## SIGN UP for Foyer Dinners!



### **\*Building Community One Meal at a Time\***

Are you committed to building community? Can you make sharing one meal each month with fellow parishioners one of your priorities?

If so, the \*Foyer Dinner Program\* is for you! Sign up now for the March thru June series!

This program has been a long standing St. Thomas' tradition that brings small groups of parishioners together every month to share a meal in each other's homes. These casual, agenda-free get-togethers are loads of fun and give us a chance to be introduced to a wide array of fellow parishioners – including those beyond our current social circles. There's not a better way to get to know each other and build community! More than 40 parishioners participated in the last series that recently ended.

Please join us! The dinner groups will be assigned after the completion of the sign up period. Each group is limited to about six or seven parishioners – a number which allows for great conversation and community building in even the smallest of apartments. Participants gather for four meals during the four month March to June period. The dates and times of the gatherings are flexible and decided the month before by the consensus of the group.

Your active participation in this program helps extend our radical hospitality beyond our Sunday services. Please make your participation in our program a priority. Come share your presence! Gain an understanding of others! Perhaps even make a new friend! Joining others in this breaking of the bread shows your commitment to building community one meal at a time.

Sign up on the doors leading to coffee hour through Sunday, February 22nd.

For further information, see or e-mail Jerry Donahoe at [maineescape@aol.com](mailto:maineescape@aol.com).

## **News From St. Paul in the Desert, Palm Springs**

**\*Vestry Class of 2011\***

Elected on January 18 at the Annual Meeting

Russell Gamble - Russ is a native Californian and much more recently an Episcopalian. He holds a Bachelor of Architecture and an MBA. He and his partner retired to Palm Springs in 2001.

He served on the Vestry of St. Thomas in Dupont Circle, Washington D.C. for 7 years, 5 ½ as Jr. Warden. He is looking forward to using his fiscal experience, particularly from St. Thomas, as St. Paul's confronts these challenging financial times and moves forward serving the Palm Springs area. Russ's partner, Phil Dick, died in July of 2008.

## Bishop Gene Robinson

From Louie Stewart

St. Thomas' Parish played its own small role in the historic inauguration of President Barack Obama. Inauguration participant Bishop Gene Robinson used the parish to conduct press interviews on Monday, January 19.



Nancy Lee got a call from the bishop's secretary just the Friday before asking whether Robinson he could use the sanctuary. Nancy Lee readily agreed and organized refreshments and

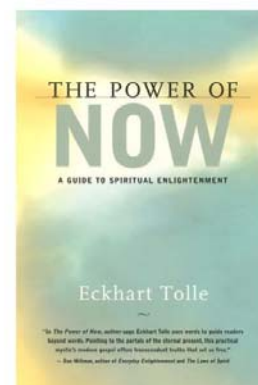
hospitality for our guests which included a film crew doing a documentary on the bishop, various reporters and the bishop's small entourage which included his spouse, Mark Andrew, and his daughter, Ella Robinson. Ella, a New York public relations specialist, had volunteered her time to handle her father's busy schedule for the Inauguration Weekend.

The interviews in the sanctuary began around 11 and ran to after 1 p.m. with a short break for lunch. Our guests were pleasantly surprised when they arrived in the Guild Room and were greeted with warm coffee and food. The parish slide show ran silently on the large television and many guests commented on its content as they learned a little more about what goes on at St. Thomas' parish. Louie Stewart, on behalf of the parish, presented Gene a special gift commemorating his participation in the inauguration of President Obama. Not only did the bishop handle all the press requests but the parish showed quietly St. Thomas' generous hospitality and our guests learned more than a little about our mission in the Church.

## The Power of Now

From Ron Wilson

The Power of Now, by Eckhart Tolle, has sold over 2 million copies worldwide and has been translated into over 30 foreign languages. The book has been on



the New York Times Best Seller List for many years and Oprah keeps a copy of the Power of Now in each of her bedrooms for her guests. Much more than simple principles and platitudes, the book takes readers on an inspiring spiritual journey to find their true and deepest self and reach the ultimate in personal growth and spirituality.

In the first chapter, Tolle introduces readers to enlightenment and its natural enemy, the mind. He awakens readers to their role as a creator of anxiety and shows them how to have an anxiety-free identity by living fully in the present. The journey is thrilling, and along the way, the author shows how to connect to the indestructible essence of our Being created by God and shows that only after regaining awareness of Being, liberated from Mind and living intensely in the Now, is there “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” He also refers to the teaching of Jesus from Matthew 6:8 “And why are you troubled about clothing? See the flowers of the field, how they come up; they do no work, they make no thread.”

I recommend the Power of Now as our minds are often a ticker tape of flowing worries/anxieties and yet there is a peace to be obtained on a daily basis “which passeth all understanding”. The beauty of Tolle is expressed in the following: "Having gone beyond the mind-made opposites, you become like a deep lake. The outer situation of your life and whatever happens out there, is the surface of the lake. Sometimes calm, sometimes windy and rough, according to the cycles and seasons. Deep down, however, the lake is always undisturbed. You are the whole lake, not just the surface, and you are in touch with your own depth, which remains absolutely still.” The Power of Now is a book that will go as deep as you dare to go and you will want to go there

*That's all for the February edition of the Phoenix. I'm really looking forward to participating in the Foyer Dinners this time around (I think I finally have enough seating), drawing from my Swedish Grandmother's fabeled recipe box. I hope everyone stays warm during this icy month and please keep on sending your contributions to our newsletter!*

**GM**

Updated Parish news can always be found online at [www.stthomasdc.org/news/index.html](http://www.stthomasdc.org/news/index.html)

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[phoenix@stthomasdc.org](mailto:phoenix@stthomasdc.org)  
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