



The Shepherd's Staff

*Newsletter of the
Diocese of the Western States*

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Keep Calm and Trust in the Lord

Christmas is coming and we await the birth of the Christ Child. I have been trying to visit many of our small and/or struggling parishes. They are filled with enthusiasm and yet run into one roadblock after another, the worst being the hearse and the moving van. They want change; but they don't know how to change. They want to grow; but too often they want the priest to do all the work. Their frustrating situations make them unhappy (even angry); but they don't know how simple the solution is which will cure their frustrations. They don't understand that they are not alone; most churches across the religious spectrum are in similar or far worse circumstances. (And I don't include the feel-good churches!) Our diocese is in good shape in so many ways but too many of us too often fall into the trap of yearning painfully to be successful. We say we need more people, or more families and children, or a (larger) building, or more outreach, or, or....but, when we adopt those attitudes, we make it all about us and not our blessed Lord.

Too often we fail to **keep calm and trust in the Lord**. We too often fall for the ABC Syndrome (success measured by attendance, buildings and cash) and we think we can "grow" or "plant" churches by imitating evangelical methodologies instead of emphasizing the Sacraments and catholic teaching. Stop and think! Has not the entitlement syndrome torn our society apart? Has not church attendance everywhere been hit hard? Haven't people we know put God away? We see this spiritual decay everywhere; it infects our families and friends – even our churches. And yet, I submit to you that what we celebrate every Christmas, the birth of the Son of God, transcends all problems and vicissitudes of this world. Don't misunderstand me. We must evangelize. Once there were only twelve Christians in the whole world; and they changed the world. And God did not become flesh amidst earthly comforts or to make his message less demanding.

And yet we live in comfort and God always supplies. Remember the lilies of the field! Moreover, Advent is a season of spiritual abundance! The Saviour is coming! He brings light and life! Two years ago, I bought a new crèche for the Church of Our Saviour. I knew that its beauty would help us once again remember the joy the angels sang to the shepherds. We come to worship our king. It doesn't matter how rich or poor we are; how big or humble our church is; how much demographics favor or hinder us. Yet, we are called to be successful. So how then can we be successful? The answer is so simple that we often don't see it. We are a successful Church when we preach Christ; when we live Christ; when others see Christ in us. It is that simple and that profound! It is why the Christ Child was born! The material things we need the Lord will supply. To be Christ's and to be like Christ in the world makes us successful beyond all earthly measurements. Let us never forget the souls we send to God, the souls our Churches touch and the love we share is a success which no earthly triumph can equal. **Remember, keep calm and trust in the Lord.** +dma

Seminary News

First Semester classes will conclude before Christmas and four classes will be offered beginning in January.

The Right Reverend Peter Hansen, Suffragan Bishop of the Western States, will be offering a course in the History of the Church and Development of Doctrine. Bishop Hansen reports that it will be a two-semester course which examines elements of Christian History, the effect that the Church had on society, and the errors, inspirations, heroic tales, heresy and orthodoxy, that brought the promise of Christ: that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. The Christian dogma came both by direct revelation, the “good news”, as well as in God’s corrective answer to the many false steps people of the early Church made, primarily in the first five centuries, and how the Church responded with the establishment of doctrine. The major decisions made by the General Councils, growing tensions between Greek and Latin Churches, the mounting threat of Islam from the East, lead us to the brink of the Great Schism in the first semester. The second semester takes us from the Great Schism, the Crusades, the medieval Papal States, universities and the rise of the middle class, city-states, nations and humanism, the Reformation, Anglicanism as opposed to both Roman and Protestant churches, and subsequent centuries and their challenges that continue until today. A mid-term and final paper will be required for each semester, reading assignments each week with responsive questions and written discussions. The course will be for Anglicans, so will not treat in depth all other branches of the Christian faith. The course begins in January 2020. I hope to find a day in common, my proposal to be Tuesdays 4 p.m., but please let me know what you can do. The art of the possible is in play. Required reading will be assigned prior to enrollment and is under study.

Bishop Ashman will only be offering two classes: Latin VI (his Latin III class is catching up over the Christmas break) and his class in Biblical Greek (Greek II). He wants to keep the same days and slightly adjusted hours. (Mondays; Latin VI, 10:30 a.m., beginning January 20th and Greek 3:30 or 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, beginning January 23rd) Please let him know your thoughts and any scheduling complications.

We have continued to perfect the Zoom Platform. It costs the student nothing; all the student must do is make sure the instructor has a current email address and the student will receive an email invitation to join each class. All the equipment that is needed is a laptop computer with a camera. There is also a way to listen in by telephone which many students have done. This system was also successfully used during the summer for students and clergy who could not attend the morning lectures at St. Joseph’s.

The cost is \$250.00 for credit and \$50.00 for audit per course. Please address any requests for tuition relief to the Provost at bishopashman@gmail.com or provostsjact@gmail.com.

When you sign up for your course(s), please send your information to the following:
The Provost (Bishop Ashman): bishopashman@gmail.com or provostsjact@gmail.com.
The Vice Provost (Bishop Upham): bishopjeu@hotmail.com

Send your check to the Registrar:
The Reverend Canon Ben Jones
C/O St. George’s Anglican Church
1210 Dixie Trail
Raleigh, North Carolina 27607

When you sign up be sure to include your name, address, email address; your parish, your sponsoring or parish priest, and the courses you have completed online or at Saint Joseph’s Seminary and the dates completed. If you are intending to pursue Holy Orders, please complete the application for postulancy found on the APCK Website: www.anglicanpck.org

Just a Few Pictures

(Wish I had more)



Top, Saint Luke's Redding CA; Center right and left, Father Napier and Deacon Karcher at St. Joseph's Berkeley CA; Right bottom, the Bishop with Father LaBarbera at St. Jude's Grants Pass OR

P.S. I'd love to print pictures of YOUR parish's events. Please send them. Please!

ACW Notes

Heartfelt thanks to all of you who have contributed to the 'Ultimate Fundraiser'. To date, we have raised almost \$2,000, and I know that there are still contributions to come! This will help those who otherwise could not go to camp, and probably change their lives in the future. Thank you all for your caring and generosity.

The Christmas season is fast approaching, and many ACW Chapters will have fundraising and social events planned. Please don't forget to take pictures and forward them to Bishop Ashman (bishopashman@gmail.com) so we can share with you through The Shepherd's Staff. The end of the year will soon be with us, and we look forward to the 2020 Synod, to be held in Chico, CA, starting on May 6. It is time to start thinking about contributions for the ACW Drawings, and items for the Welcome Bags.

The start of 2020 also means that ACW dues must be paid. Reminders for this will be mailed to the parishes, and every parish is responsible for paying these dues, even if you have no active ACW.

On behalf of all ACW-DWS members, I wish you all a blessed Christmas season, and a safe and productive New Year.

Gillian Golden
DWS ACW President

Diocesan Reminders

- Try to keep a holy Advent. Attend a midweek mass. Don't be so quick to set up Christmas decorations. Instead, set up an Advent Wreath. Volunteer to do more at your church (and make it a habit?). Be that person who (quietly) makes a difference in your family, your church or in your neighborhood.
- Support your Anglican Church Women! Even if you have no active chapter, send your dues to Gillian and Nona. I cannot emphasize how important this is.
- When you travel (as many of us do during December), try to seek out one of our parishes and visit them. It will make them happy and you will be satisfied that you have done your duty.
- Say grace before meals with your family; so much the better in a restaurant.
- Clergy: please pray aloud for Archbishop Morrison and our Suffragan Bishop Hansen by name during every Eucharist. Laity: pray for the clergy; they need all the help they can get. All of us: pray for Saint Joseph of Arimathea Seminary and the good work it does both for seminarians and active clergy.
- Deacons, Seminarians and non-parochial clergy; remember your Advent Ember letters are due during the third week of Advent.
- ***Please, o please, send me pictures of your Advent and Christmas activities. It bears repeating that your pictures mean so much to so many. And I know how hard that can be. I visited four parishes in November and took far too few pictures.***
- Be thinking about what you might contribute to the men's auction and the ACW auction at the 2020 Synod in Chico.
- Keep Calm and Trust in the Lord!

A Sermon for Advent Sunday

Advent Sunday is the first day of a new Church year. Advent means beginning or coming. It is like when we wake up each morning. Most of us do not jump up instantly into the work or enjoyment of the day; rather we prepare for the day ahead. We dress; we groom; we eat. And then we are off to work or play. And my point is that, if we are to fully prepare for Christmas, we must understand Advent in a similar manner. It is the work before the joy of Christmas.

In fifth and sixth centuries A. D., as the Roman Empire was collapsing, the most influential intellectual force in history, Christianity, was spreading rapidly to the pagan Celts and Germans in Northern Europe. They were barbarians but still sophisticated peoples who paid a lot of attention to the sun in the sky. Ever since summer, the days had gotten shorter and shorter. But then on December 24/25th, the sun stayed in the sky a minute longer and to these peoples this symbolized a great moment in the battle of life and death. This was day that life and light came back once again. The Romans called it Sol Invictus; the triumph of the Unconquered Sun. Life and light! The early church quickly picked up on this and placed the feast of the birth of the Saviour (who also brings light and eternal life) on the very same day.

The Church Fathers wanted the Celts and Germans to wait - not for the light of that warmed the earth - but for the light which warmed men's souls. And to that end, the Church chose the Gospels leading up to Christmas carefully as part of that spiritual preparation. These lessons are symbolic, eschatological and historic. Today's Gospel is symbolic. On Palm Sunday Jesus came to fulfill scripture and banish hypocrisy and greed not just from the Temple but from human hearts. If we want to greet Christ when he is born in the stable in Bethlehem, what are we doing about the hypocrisy and greed in our hearts? The Gospel next Sunday is eschatological, that is, having to do with things of Christ's second coming and the destiny of mankind. The parable of the fig tree, when it starts to leaf, then we know that spring is coming. There will also be signs that Christ is coming. Advent is the time for us to look for those signs and to prepare for his coming. The aging of our bodies is in itself a mystical sign that eternity is drawing nigh.

The third Sunday tells of John the Baptist in prison, historical yes, but also eschatological and symbolic. Jesus says, Go and show John what is happening: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Our destiny as humans is fulfilled when Christ removes our blindness, heals our crippled morality, opens our hearts and transforms us toward eternal life. The last Sunday of Advent tells of John baptizing in Jordan, historical and symbolic. The fact that John baptized with water was symbolic of his preparing the way for the Saviour who would baptize us with the Holy Ghost.

My dear friends, Advent is like getting out of bed and getting ready of the work of the day; it is a time of getting ready for salvation. And the Advent candles are symbolic of that preparation. Each Sunday we light a new candle and the light grows brighter. It should remind us of the early Christian missionaries who told the Celts and Germans that their idea about the sun coming back to life was not a bad idea, but an incomplete one. When the sun begins to come back into the sky, we all know that life is returning one more time on the earth. But the light of Christ tells us that the God has destroyed death once and for all. His light is brighter than the sun, because he brightens human hearts and turns them from the dark and the ugly into the bright and beautiful.

As some of you know, I am a Star Trek fan; it helped me with my university waiting period. In one episode a distant planet evolves much like earth but in its history the Roman Empire did not fall and survived into the industrial age. After Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock thwarted the Roman dictator-emperor, they beamed back to the Enterprise. Lieutenant Uhura reported that, while they were gone, she had been monitoring how the empire had mocked the slaves' worship of their God. Kirk thought that they worshipped Sol Invictus but Uhura answered, "No captain, not the sun in the sky but the Son of God."