

Parish of the Good Shepherd
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DIAGNOSING OUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

(This is Fr. Welch's annual report to the parish)

When visiting a church, one of the first things I notice is whether the building looks cared for. Is it dusty and disordered? Are service books and hymnals where you can get to them? Then I pay attention to how people act when they come into church. Is the atmosphere prayerful? And then I look at the people themselves. Are all ages represented? Do they seem to be pleased to be there? And what about the service itself? Whether plain or elaborate, is worship done carefully and reverently? Are people engaged? Are they singing the hymns and praying the prayers? And what about the sermon/homily? Is it biblically based? It needn't be intellectual, of course, but is it intelligent? Does it show signs of thought and preparation? Does it engage people at the level of their lives? Are there opportunities for Bible study in this church? Is there evidence that the children of the parish are being taught the Christian faith and Christian values?

To know more about this hypothetical church I would want to look at their attendance records and financial reports. Is attendance at services growing or stable or declining? Do the members of the church practice good financial stewardship? Does every member make a pledge? Is the staff well compensated for their work? Does the congregation give a portion of their resources for ministry outside the parish?

But then there are those things which you would only know if you were actively engaged in the life of a congregation. Do people care about one other? Do they offer support in times of need and crisis? Are the clergy approachable? Do people treat one another with respect? Are people willing to work and pray with members of the congregation who might differ with them on matters political or personal?

And my final test of spiritual health? Does this seem like a church or a club? Clubs are places where the like-minded seek out people like themselves with whom they can feel comfortable. I'm all for clubs, although I've never been a joiner of them. But churches are different. They are made up of all sort and conditions of people who come together for some higher purpose. They transcend social class, politics, and natural attraction. They exist for the purpose of lifting the minds and spirits of what may a motley group of misfits toward the transcendent God. They are full of self-admitted sinners who know that they are no better than anyone else. And because of that, people in those churches pray for the grace to love their enemies, forgive their persecutors, and care for one another as Christ cares for them. Does this sound like Good Shepherd to you? I'd like to know what you think.

~ Truman



A personal note from Fr. Welch: My heartfelt thanks to all in the parish who have written or called me to express condolences on the death of my mother. She and my father would have been married for 70 years come this May. Please pray for my father as he learns to live his life without her.

PARISH NEWS – Jan. 18, 2012

Weekday eucharist: Wednesday, 7:15 a.m.

**Annual Meeting January 22
following the 10:00 a.m. service**

The Flower Chart for 2012

A new flower chart is posted downstairs in the Common room if you would like to sign up to give flowers in memory of, in honor of or in thanksgiving for a loved one on a particular Sunday. You do not need to provide the flowers unless you would like to from your own garden. There is a special container they must fit into so please stop by the church office to get measurements. If you prefer to have the florist deliver flowers we arrange for that. If you have special requests as to flowers or colors you may let the church office know of your request and we will pass it along to the florist. Suggested donation is \$65 (this covers the cost of the bouquet and delivery). Checks should be made out to Parish of the Good Shepherd with "flowers" noted in the memo area of your check. The office will be in touch as your chosen date draws near to find out how you would like the dedication to read and to see if you have special requests.

Adult Forums

Jan 29: How Humiliating!

Aaron Lazare, a psychiatrist, former dean and chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and a longtime member of our parish, will discuss the topic of his book-in-progress, with which, most likely, we all have some experience: humiliation. Does humiliation have any redeeming value? What can we learn from it? How does humiliation function in the Bible and in religious life? How is humiliation connected to the virtue of humility? Come join us for a lively discussion.

February 5, 12 and 19: Forum Series: Science and Religion

Is there a war between science and religion? And has science won? Or does a proper understanding of the relationship between science and religion leave them both strong, and actually enrich our understanding of not just religion but of God? Charles Foster will lead us in an exploration of the history of the debate between science and religion, and issues such as evolution and Intelligent Design, and neuroscience and religion.

Lenten Forum Series, beginning February 26: The Gospel of John

This Lent we will meditate the riches and mysteries of the Fourth Gospel. We will explore how John differs from the other three gospels; Jesus' unique identity in John; John's version of the Passion narrative, and the difficult issue of John's harsh language about the Jews. Join us for an in-depth reading of a biblical book that has had an enormous influence on the Christian faith.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:
www.TrueVineChronicles.blogspot.com

JANUARY

22 - No Level I Atrium

9:45 AM: Nursery Open
9:45 AM: Level II Atrium Open
10:00 AM: 3rd-5th gr to Loring Room
6th-8th gr to Youth Room

29 - No Level I Atrium

9:45 AM: Nursery Open
9:45 AM: Level II Atrium Open
10:00 AM: 3rd-5th gr to Loring Room
6th-8th gr to Youth Room

FEBRUARY

Level I Atrium Open 8:45 AM

Nursery Open 9:45 AM

Level II Open 9:45 AM

5 - No Level I Atrium

9:45 AM: Nursery Open
9:45 AM: Level II Atrium Open
10:00 AM: 3rd-5th gr to Loring Room
6th-8th gr to Youth Room

12 - No Level I Atrium

9:45 AM: Nursery Open
9:45 AM: Level II Atrium Open
10:00 AM: 3rd-5th gr to Loring Room
6th-8th gr to Youth Room

An atrium is a place of encounter with God, a place of worship. The environment provides the space, quiet, and time for those who enter there to hear, reflect, and respond to the mysteries of God; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.

Adults assist the catechist and help set and maintain the holiness of the atrium environment by being as silent as possible, by speaking quietly and moving slowly, and by consistently modeling the behavior being asked of the children. It is important that it is quiet enough for children to work, but we do not ask for complete silence. It is essential that children share their findings with one another.

The atrium is a community in which children and adults live together a religious experience which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the church, and other social spheres. It is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation, and prayer.

*Grace & peace,
Mary Ann.*