

The Church Newsletter Seen as a Travel Diary: It Was Quite a Ride

Publishing *more** from St. Augustine's has been like being on a wonderful journey with you. So I'm thinking today that perhaps what you have read in this newsletter for three years is not so much a parish report as it is a travelogue. As you know, *more** has tried every week to record what we have seen and experienced on this metaphorical drive across St. Augustine's varied landscape.

Sometimes our travel was, figuratively, more of a challenging adventure than a serene Sunday afternoon drive. We started, you may remember, with a lot of baggage in June, 2005. Back then our parish was in serious turmoil. Fr. Crawford took a sabbatical.

From Co-editor Judy Krug

The vestry struggled to find a new direction. We were on deadline to incorporate the treasures we had rescued from Holy Cross Church.

So this journey actually began as a pretty bumpy ride. The saving grace was that we traveled as ONE that summer.

And by fall, as we looked out the window of our imaginary vehicle, we saw that the interior of our sanctuary and parish hall had been transformed. So we stopped, took a short breather and celebrated with a "brag party." We had definitely reached an early check point on our journey, but had not yet arrived at our destination.

So it was back on the road again. Soon we picked up another traveler, Fr. Whitlock. He seemed to have a good sense of direction, so we left some old baggage behind, made room and welcomed him aboard.

Now we were in a hurry.

It was pedal to the metal, full steam ahead. In that next year we covered so much ground. It was as if our vehicle had an endless supply of fuel; our energies, hopes and dreams, our visions and calling just kept replenishing themselves. Was there a sinkhole ahead? Someone knew a way around. A hurricane approaching? We weathered it. People shared their resources. Prayer kept us on track. The Spirit was with us and we were renewed.

Yes of course, there were times of weariness and dissension. As on any long journey, we got bored, impatient. "Are we there yet?" was heard. "I want out of here!" was not.

We kept on moving.

As I've traveled with you on this journey, you've been good, good traveling companions. I heard opinions; you shared dreams and worries. Together we witnessed the workings of the larger Episcopal church and, week by week, saw more of the inner workings of our own church. And over time, as we had hoped, everyone on this journey seemed to rely less on hearsay.

As a travel diary, *more** from St. Augustine's was a first draft of our recent history. Even more, it was a testament to the faith and persistence of this extraordinary group of parishioners.

Over 750 separate articles in *more** tried to cover the gamut of life within our parish family. Many people saw their names in print. Numerous personal achievements were celebrated and many significant decisions probed. Information was published about parish policies and events so that readers could know what was going on and we could all share the same understandings. You can cover a lot of territory in 146 issues and *more** tried every week to excite, inform, explain and lift up this parish.

But today we've come to a stopping off point. Our vehicle, *more** from St. Augustine's, has suddenly been impounded by the authorities. To continue our journey, some different kind of vehicle must now be shopped for. *continued, page 2*

This Could Be Your Last Issue of This Newsletter

This past Wednesday evening Judy and Tom Krug, *more's* co-editors, were asked to meet with Joyce Corn, Greg Duckett and Fr. Whitlock in Ford Hall. At that meeting, also attended by vestry representative Shirley Davis, a sheet of policy decisions was presented that prescribed a plan to replace this weekly with a different kind of publication, one that would be published once a month.

Why? "Because people tell me that nobody reads it," Greg Duckett said. "Because we don't need a weekly newsletter," Fr. Whitlock asserted. "Because it served its purpose several years ago and now it's time to move on," Joyce Corn added.

Other assertions at this meeting: The current weekly newsletter is not reaching enough people. It should have more contributions from the priest. It should have more features on individual parishioners. And Greg noted that one vestry report had misled readers about the condition of St. A's finances.

It was said that that *more** only reaches those who come to church on Sunday and something should be mailed to shut-ins. In response it was pointed out that this newsletter is e-mailed to 20-some others who've either shown an interest in St. Augustine's or who have an investment in our church's work: area churches, diocesan offices, and past donors.

A better publication would feature an official church calendar, which would include every use of the St. Augustine's facilities (Alumni Singers, LINKS meetings, A A gatherings, Men's and Women's club meetings, office hours, Altar Guild events, etc.). No such calendar yet exists.

And there should be lists of worship participants for the month. But this listing has not been compiled, so administrative work needs to be done before this information can be printed. There should be writing by parishioners and articles that educate members of the congregation.

Still the editors do not understand why the plug is being pulled on this publication. It costs the church almost nothing. It has welcomed all contributors. A weekly could do everything a monthly accomplishes and more. It does not seem to have offended anyone.

Prior to this Wednesday meeting these decisions, labeled 2008 Newsletter Policy, had not been taken to the church's vestry.



* This newsletter might be seen as the first draft of our church's recent history. It is about recognition and spiritual attitude, candor, nixing hearsay, and cheer leading unashamed. Members Judy and Tom Krug are its co-editors and some 65 parishioners are essential to the effort. Issues are available each Sunday after our 9:00 service. We e-mail it to several dozen churches and supporters. It is also archived at www.staugstpete.org, our web site for church-shoppers.

To Our Successors We Bequeath These Few Things

After over three years of almost-weekly publication and hundreds of revisions and redesigns, there are a few things we have learned while publishing this church newsletter. We feel compelled to pass some of this on to whomever will steer the monthly that succeeds this newsletter.

Of course we've listed the items that seem most valuable to us; new publishers will pick and choose from this list.

* Try to write most about what is coming, not about what has already occurred.

* Cooperate with every other church body to cultivate, promote, advertise.

* Include lots of names, in bold type.

* Look for human interaction: the human component at meetings, how folks react and interconnect,

* Seek out quotes. What people say gives flavor to any article. Sure, sometimes you approximate the precise wording, but strive to be accurate in attitude and tone. Never upgrade the language – people do not speak in long sentences and careful prose.

* Variety, variety. How do people live their beliefs everyday? How does faith apply at work?

* Mix it up: News. Raw information. Features. Parish, national church, world efforts. Our church, nearby churches, the cathedral. Priests and bishops, deacons and wardens -- but more about individuals without titles who do special things.

* Church is stability, but it is also awe, perspective, euphoria, and achievement. Feature these assets.

* It's the design work that is so very satisfying. A logo for a special event. A column heading. A look for a recurring feature. A new front page banner. A box for scripture readers. A new font for easy reading. New paragraph leads. A proper ad layout for a tea, a fun layout for a game night, a bold look for baseball, a subtle feel for a luncheon.

* Somehow the publication should be trustworthy and cheer leading at the same time. Both folksy and dignified. Both devotional and provocative. Both formal and fun.

* Spin? Softening the blow? Your newsletter writing should never deliberately protect or mislead. Truth is better, almost every time, even if it makes people squirm.

* Positive writing, of course. But not everything is a grand success. "A wonderful time was had by all" -- well, not always, as we know.

* Don't get discouraged by small readership numbers. You'll never hear about some readers. Your publication may get seen several times before it's tossed. Press on.

* Welcome artwork and pictures from multiple sources.

* Use photos liberally but crop them, adjust brightness and contrast, add sharpness, and realize that they must look good in both black/white (xeroxed) and in color (on the web as a pdf). Make close-ups whenever possible, but never use a photo in which a person looks unattractive. Remove distracting elements from backgrounds and occasionally squeeze the pictures to flatter folks as they get older.

* For an integrated look, try to maintain a single headline font style, but vary sizes.

* Compose pithy headlines that compel people to read what could be dry church stories.

* Vary layouts from week to week to keep the newsletter appearance fresh and alive. Change paper colors too.

* Recruit others, including younger people, to write letters and columns and poetry.

* Cultivate people's inclinations to alert you to news, milestones, happenings.

* Embrace the internet as a source of inspiration, research, international stories, cartoons and humor.

* Cultivate exchanges with other church newsletters.

* Adapt liberally but always give credit. Never plagiarize: we churches have no special rights to other people's work.

* Suppress the urge to write to amuse yourself; instead, try fervently to write to engage, please and challenge your audience.

* Style issues are quite debatable: we think newsletters should be informal at all costs; "our" suggests cohesiveness and ownership; "this" and "those" are preferable to "the;" grammar is important, but spelling and proofreading are imperative and show respect for your reader.

* Publishing takes huge amounts of time -- and that simply cannot be changed. You'll get better, but then you'll make changes and you're back to too many hours to plan, collect, outline, write, rewrite, layout, proofread, print, duplicate, staple, distribute and rest up.

Newsletter as Travel Diary continued

Is our journey over? Oh, no, but there are some flashing hazard lights ahead.

Our old car ran pretty well, looked pretty good, cost almost nothing to run, and it carried us in comfort for a whole lot of miles. Will the new one serve us as well?

It seems that the new wheels will face new "rules of the road." and new people will be recording the scenery along the way.

When I finished reading over many of the past issues of *more** I couldn't wait for someone to start recording once again the sights and sounds of this parish's extraordinary journey.

For now, thank you for letting us be your diarists for the past 146 issues of *more* from St. Augustine's*.

**Cynthia's
corner**



Cynthia Allen is 10.

Hello Readers.

I am sorry for my recent absence at the church. I miss you all.

Well, time for the scoop on news!!!! Now if you read my column last week, you would see that fresh, new, ideas are needed for MORE.

It is true I could come up with a few ideas myself, but I would like to hear from my readers this time. Just to give you guys a head start, here are a few ideas I came up with.

* A riddle every week then the answer the following week

* A crossword puzzle

* And maybe a section for feedback about how MORE is doing so far

In other news, do not forget about Tom Krug's and my father Rodney Allen's birthday. They are both in October!!!!

Scripture for Next Sunday, September 14

Exodus 14:19-31 Donna McRae.

Psalms 114 Richard Smith.

Romans 14:1-12 Mordecai Walker.

Matthew 18:21-35 Deacon Bauknight.

Prayers of the People Shirley Davis.