



Calendar Teeming with Christian Formation Time to Deepen Your Beliefs, Stretch Understanding

As this remarkable congregation struggles to catalog its assets and then share those gifts with others, it is determined to move ahead. Two great opportunities:

They'll Meet New Bishop, Explore Their Effectiveness

Vestry groups from all over this diocese will retreat to Day-Spring early next month. On March 2 & 3 dozens of church representatives will seek much advice from the development staff of the our national church about increasing their effectiveness.

The Director of Congregational Development for the national church, **Fr. Charles Fulton**, is coming with his staff and a program touted to assist parishes with their growth no matter the age and stage of the ministry.

Themed as "Called to Lead," this will be the first-ever diocesan-wide Vestry Retreat.

And just a week before his consecration, the vestries will spend some casual time with the diocese's newly-elected Bishop Coadjutor, **Fr. Dabney Smith**.

There is no cost for the two day weekend.

**Your presence,
O God,
is the light
piercing the darkness
of our way,
making us see
beauty and worth
in all human beings.
from *Gates of Prayer***

What can we learn from ancient religious and secular writings?

And can this make our faith stronger?

For instance, how did first century women influence the beginnings of Christianity? What part did slaves and marginalized peoples play in the early church?

In a seminar called *The Social World of Early Christianity* conversations about such questions will be the primary focus this coming Friday and Saturday at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Sarasota. This is one of the "On-the Road" presentations of the **Jesus Seminar**.

But first: why bother to study other books about scripture? **Isn't it enough just to read the Bible?**

Most people have asked such questions at one time or another. But "we all need to recognize that meanings change over time," explained **Virginia Ryan**, Sunday School teacher here for several years. "Scholarship derived from archaeology enables us to grow in our understandings of scripture."

It is this kind of scholarship that the Jesus Seminar has been bringing to west Florida for over sixteen years.

One of this week's presenters is **Hal Taussig**, a United Methodist pastor, currently a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in NYC. He will describe festive meals of ancient times and trace their influence on early Christianity's development: its stories, traditions and rituals. He will give special attention to the place of women, slaves, and other ethnic minorities.

A second presenter, **Kathleen Corley**, will explore ways in which women's mourning rituals contributed to early church practices and to development of empty tomb traditions. "Women's roles in the early church have important lessons," she says, "for today's understanding of gender, women's leadership and justice." She is currently the Distinguished Daily Northwestern Professor at Wisconsin State University-Oshkosh.

Since 1985, The Jesus Seminar has been asking "**Who was the historical Jesus?**" Sixteen years ago a woman from Idaho asked them to come to her church and share what they had learned. Your scholarship is fine, she said, but what does it mean to me?

Since then, scholars have answered that question wherever church people have invited them to come.

Talk with **Judy Krug** for information about cost and car pooling to Sarasota.

Dozens Killed in Baghdad Bombing. Sectarian Violence Reigns. US Puts More Troops Into Religious Hotbed.

All these news reports are about Jews and Muslims and Christians and the endless violence among God's people. We are all descendants of Abraham, all members of one family. Yet, we live with terror.

So what in the world is going on?

Is religion an obstacle to peace?

That's the central question to be asked of three nationally recognized clergy this coming Thursday evening here in St. Petersburg. The 7pm event is at the Palladium Theater, 5th Avenue North and 3rd Street. It is free.

Hamas Preaches Israel's Destruction. More Bombings in Occupied Territory.

At a time of so much hatred, a local organization of Christians, Jews and Muslims has come together calling themselves **Serving the One**.

Thursday, they will gather three prominent leaders to confront whether religion is a possible obstacle to God's peace.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow founded The Shalom Center, bringing spiritual practices to bear on seeking peace and justice. He is a strong critic of Israeli policies in the West Banks and Gaza. In 1996, he was named a "Wisdom Keeper" by the United Nations.

Rev. Donna Schaper is one of the United Church of Christ's first female clergy. She is one of the best known feminist civil rights and peace advocates in the church. Today she is respected as a social action pioneer.

Imam W. Deen Mohammed is the son of Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam. As a young man, he separated from the beliefs of his father and was excommunicated from the Nation of Islam. Later, he rapidly moved a community of Muslims from the race-based, separatist beliefs of the Nation of Islam toward the orthodox practice of Sunni Islam. His mosque is steeped in the idea of self-reliance and spirituality and his community continues to grow.

Please see box on back page.

This weekly newsletter is for members and friends of one courageous Episcopal Church in south St. Petersburg, FL. The publication is about recognition and nixing hearsay, about candor, spiritual attitude and, yes, unashamed cheer leading. Members Judy and Tom Krug are the project's co-editors. Some 65 parishioners are essential to the effort. We think of this publication as the first draft of our congregation's recent history. Issues are available each Sunday after the service and also online at www.staugstpete.org, our web site for church-shoppers.

Bits o' News...

Barbara's Lu, Archdeacon, Seeks Prayers for His Late Father

"My dad passed away in London, England on Thursday, January 18th, after several months of illness at home and in the hospital."

That was from **Lu Watkins**, our **Barbara Watkins'** husband and 20-year old **Deborah's** father, seeking prayer from his home church members. Assigned to St. Thomas Church on Snell Isle here in St. Petersburg, Lucien has been the diocesan lead deacon for well over a year.

His father, **Lisue**, migrated from Antigua in the Caribbean in 1956 to England where he worked with London Transit and with the English Postal Services from which he later retired.

Funeral services were held the end of January and Lucien planned to attend the funeral. He asks for our prayers for the Watkins and Sheppard families.

Diocesan Convention Moves to October

Each year we elect representatives from this church to attend an annual convention of our Southwest Florida diocese. At the 2006 convention in December, delegates heard from seven candidates for Bishop Coadjutor (the bishop-elect), then chose New Orleans priest Fr. Dabney Smith on the first ballot.

This year the convention has been moved up six weeks to October 20th, 2007 in Venice.

At our Annual Parish Meeting, last month **Shirley Davis** and **Tom Krug** again accepted nominations as delegates, but another delegate, an alternate, must be nominated soon. Elections will follow shortly.

You're Worried About That Younger Generation? Not!

This New Year's message was sent to us, her church family, from 20-year old **Jericka Knox**, a sophomore at the university in Gainesville:

Live simply.

Love generously.

Care deeply.

Speak kindly.

Leave the rest to God.

You are the miracle.

Your life either shines a light...

or casts a shadow.

A blessed 2007 and beyond to you all.

Acolytes Get Some Recognition

Two recent announcements concerning those young people who serve at altar-side as candle-bearers and bell-ringers:

1. St. A's is seeking a way to send some of them to Camp Kanuga next summer. Kanuga is a much loved Episcopal retreat center in the Western North Carolina mountains.

2. One of our acolytes will be selected to be in procession with our St. Augustine's banner at the consecration of our next bishop on March 10 at St. Jude's Roman Catholic Cathedral on 5th Avenue North in St. Petersburg.

RN = "Real Nurse" Certification

On her very first try, **Ericka Knox** has become a certified LPN, a Licensed Practical Nurse. That's impressive, certainly, but this was a mid-life career change. Ericka, mother of **Jericka**, 20, and 14 year old **LeQuina**, took up this training after she had already received her bachelor's (Sociology) and master's (Business) degrees!

Only 9 of the 22 who graduated in her LPN class have taken the certification exam and only 7 of those 9 passed.

"I've been working as a Graduate Nurse since school was finished, but now that I'm certified, there's a nice pay increase," she said. Next? "I'm going to get my BSN."

Moon Glow, Take the A Train, C Jam Blues

Black History Month is just the occasion. The date to scrawl on your calendar is next **Saturday the 10th at 2:00**. But the reason is "The Opposite Sax," that renowned five-piece jazz combo that features our own **Emile and Laura DeCosmo**.

They'll be making great sounds at the **Johnson Branch Library**, 1059 18th Ave. South here in St. Pete.

Those titles in the headline above are just a few of the numbers in their planned tribute to the country's most loved jazz musicians and composers.

Amazingly, this concert is free. Refreshments will be served as well.

Believe in a Miracle!

More than 1,000 women are expected to attend this Feb. 10th Day of Women's Renewal with Bishop Stephen Charleston, dean of Episcopal Divinity School and music by Dr. Horace Boyer. Cost is \$10, lunch included. 9 to 4 at the Venice Community Center

Essential Ingredient for a Church Recipe Book:

Not saffron, not tonka beans, but just as *rare*: a good manuscript typist. That's what **Virginia Abrams** has been doing to those hand-written favorite recipes submitted for our next fund-raiser project.

Publication date: springtime!

Serving The
ONE
Invites You to an Honest Conversation Between
Jews, Christians and Muslims

The
TRIALOGUE
Is Religion an Obstacle to Peace?

Featuring Three National Speakers (bios on back):
Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Rev. Donna Schaper
and Imam W. Deen Muhammad

Thursday, February 8, 2006 ~ 7pm
Palladium Theatre, 253 5th Ave N, St Petersburg, FL