



SIMPLE SUPPERS

Donna McRae and Louise Stroude will prepare our Simple Supper this Lenten Wednesday. We'll have a short devotional starting at 5:30 pm and then salad, soup and good bread will be served about 5:45.

Then at 6:25, our guest speaker will begin a 20 minute walk with us through her Journey of Faith.

This week our guest is Maria Scruggs-Weston from our neighboring congregation, McCabe UMC. She is chief organizer of McCabe's annual Jazz Festival. Currently, Maria is working in the juvenile justice system in Orlando (Yes, she commutes every day!). Previously, she ran for city office here in St. Pete.

Come for this Lenten meal (simple *and* delicious), hear Maria's journey of faith and stay for choir. This is Lent. Feel it. Here, on Wednesday.

Plan Now For ...

ECW Annual Quiet Day on Saturday, March 31st, 9:30 to 1:30pm at St. Matthew's. \$10 donation includes lunch. Meditations by the Rev. Carolyn Kirk Biggs, St. Matthew's rector. For reservations, call 864-6796 or 866-2187.

What's All the Fuss About Bishops?

Why does the Episcopal Church have bishops? The answer comes from the New Testament and the history of the early church -- back to the apostles of Jesus who were the initial evangelists. But by the beginning of the second century, church leaders decided that the title "apostle" should be reserved for those who were chosen by Jesus himself. So the authority of those original apostles became invested in bishops.

How are bishops chosen? In the United States, bishops are elected by individual dioceses. But those elections must be approved by a *continued, back page*

Want to grow? Here's the Recipe

Worship joyfully. Because if "joyful" is consistently an accurate descriptor of our worship, we have the potential to grow by 32%. Honest!

Don't use an organ. Celebrate -- as we do -- with other instruments, even percussion. **Laura and Emile DeCosmo** are moving us in a direction that may mean a whopping 44% growth here at St. A's.

Don't be boring. Don't do the same ol', same ol' over and over again. By bringing variety to our services, even a little unpredictability, we might contribute to growth by as much as 28%.

Is it really just this simple? Well, no; but these characteristics are significant markers in growing Episcopal parishes according to survey responses from 3000 Episcopal parishes.

This survey, titled FACT 2005, was recently commissioned by our national church. The big picture painted by the survey is that, overall, Episcopal membership is down by 1.7%; not good, but not too bad when compared to other mainline churches.

This is information that 350 vestry members from 42 parishes heard this weekend at the First Annual Diocesan Vestry Retreat at DaySpring.

Friday afternoon, **Inez Ford, Judy Krug** and new vestry member **Mattie Austin** drove down to Ellenton with **Fr. Whitlock, Mary Clowers** and **Claude Reynolds** traveled with **Greg Duckett** in a two vehicle caravan across the bridge. They returned to DaySpring on Saturday with **Joyce Corn** joining them.

Friday evening was devoted to meeting vestry members from other parishes and hearing from the **Rev. Dabney Smith**, our soon-to-be-bishop coadjutor.

But clear winner in the "what will be remembered" category was the transformation of DaySpring's dining hall into an elegant bistro featuring music, oysters on the half shell, a made to order pasta station with chef in full regalia, shrimp, salmon and a table full of desserts to die for.

"If we told everyone at St. Augustine's what an extraordinary event *continued, back page*

Coming Next Weekend...

The Consecration of the Rev. Dr. Dabney Smith as the bishop coadjutor of the Diocese of Southwest Florida will occur this weekend.

When: 10 a.m., Saturday, March 10th.

Where: The Cathedral of St. Jude, the Apostle at 5815 Fifth Avenue North, in St. Petersburg.

Chief Consecrator: The Rt. Rev. Clifton Daniel (East Carolina) assisted by the Rt. Rev. William Folwell (retired, Central Florida), the Rt. Rev. Charles Jenkins (Louisiana) and our bishop, the Rt. Rev. John B. Lipscomb (Southwest Florida). **Who gets to come to the consecration?** Even though the cathedral holds about 1,400 people, there will be relatively few seats available for parish members.

Where did all those seats go? After seating bishops, special guests, participants of the service and all of our priests, deacons and retired clergy, there are only 692 seats left. Tickets for those seats have been given to congregations based on their 2005 average Sunday attendance. On that basis, St. Augustine's has four tickets. "They're in the mail," **Fr. Whitlock's** been promised.

So if I want to watch this important event, what can I do? You can attend and watch the service via closed-circuit television in the cathedral's chapel. Or if you have a computer, you can watch it live over the internet. And the complete service booklet will be available for downloading so you can follow along. DVDs will be available soon after the service.

THE WRONG QUESTION

Tom Krug with more thoughts about our parish...

Not long ago someone asked me what I thought Fr. Whitlock's vision was for St. Augustine's. A little more talk revealed that the conversation-starter was directed at building projects, campaigns to bring in new people and such.

"Why isn't his leadership more obvious?" might have been another tack.

As so often happens, I did not have the right answer readily available. We pattered around in various directions, then let the subject go away. But now, much later, I think the answer is that it simply ain't his job.

Fr. Robin Whitlock revels in the potential of this congregation. He probably could draw out a plan that would raise money, raise buildings and raise hopes. Surely he knows the formulas for overhauling timid churches. But I am sure that he knows that we, the people, must map our own way here. Like we did in Our Remarkable Summer of '05, we must find *continued, back page*

All About Bishops *continued*

majority of diocesan standing committees and bishops throughout the Episcopal Church. **Why?** Because a bishop serves not only his or her own diocese but the entire church.

How do bishops become bishops? The Episcopal Church (and the Anglican Communion) consecrates bishops by the laying on of hands of other bishops. The apostles laid hands on Christians who were called to a particular service. So when we do this now, it's called "apostolic succession." In the Episcopal church, three bishops must lay hands on a new bishop to validate the consecration. Each of those three bishops was consecrated in this same way, and so it goes, all the way back through time to St. Peter himself. This apostolic succession is believed to keep alive the line of authority that goes back to Christ and his apostles.

Do you have to be a priest to become a bishop? Yes. Bishops are chosen only from among priests. This has not always been the case, but it has been true for many centuries.

How long do you have to be a priest before you can become a bishop? There is no set time, although usually the church calls seasoned priests to become bishops.

How old do you have to be to become a bishop? You must be at least 30 years old when you are elected.

Are there term limits for bishops? No. They are elected for life; but when they become 72, they must retire as bishop of a diocese.

This information is from the Nominating Committee in the Diocese of Virginia. You will find their complete report on our diocesan website: dioceseswfla.org

Wrong Question *continued*

our own muse and shape a community that is us, not the rector's.

Too obvious, you say?

I'd bet that our half-time Priest-in-charge has rejected any scheme to build a fire in this place. He could preach longer and louder, get uppity about regular attendance and arriving on time. He could be more pointed about our reluctance to embrace a prayerful resurgence in outreach efforts. Fr. Robin could whip up a campaign and do his own stewardship talks. He could train all the spotlights onto the clergy alone and just pretend to need lay participants.

That must be a grave temptation indeed, and it's done everywhere. But not here. I suspect this priest wants not to feed us, but to teach us to fish.

And that may not always be what we want for ourselves. We will focus and pray and try things and stumble. We'll probably embarrass ourselves. And then we will recall that follow-me leaders make everything seem simpler. We may pine for that kind of vision.

But I don't think we'll find it here.

Truth is we seem to be a long-term investment for Fr. Robin's pastoral talents. I think he's here to stay for a good while. The Whitlocks have begun a major overhaul of a St. Petersburg house. Fr. draws his own floor plans for that big home, but I believe that his vision for St. Augustine's is far more complicated.

There can be no five-year blueprint for this congregation, because as animate, willful, God-blessed people we must never be pressed into forms as if we were block walls. A plan for us is subject to endless development. We don't design our plan, we discover it, and then, gulp, we follow.

Church buildings and family homes have plans. Church people must seek the mind of God.

Recipe for Growth *continued*

the diocese provided," Inez said, "we'd have our whole parish running for vestry next year."

Saturday, after an outdoor eucharist, vestry members heard two presentations aimed at helping structure parishes for growth. "If a parish is unsure they want to grow," explained Dr. Kirk Hadaway, author of the study, "they won't grow." Simple as that. "But if there is a strong and universal commitment to grow," he continued, "this survey predicts an increase of as much as 28%."

In fact, if members are generally in agreement and serious conflict is rare, "seekers" will find a church attractive. "That shouldn't be surprising," Dr. Hadaway said, "but many churches aren't aware of the devastating effect their internal conflict has on visitors' opinions."

A characteristic that brought smiles to faces of our vestry members was the statement that developing parishes have websites. And St. Augustine's has a good one, staugstpete.org.

Perhaps the most surprising conclusion of this survey is that it's not liberal, progressive churches that are experiencing the greatest decline in membership. Instead, they are increasing in size and energy while predominantly conservative churches decline.

And the effect of a new priest in a parish? Growth either happens immediately or at a four year point, but not so much in between.

Our vestry members found all this information both serious and exciting. Their consensus is that St. A's has a lot going for it. Fr. Whitlock reported that "we're gaining more members than we're losing." Pledges are up and the "fallen away" are starting to come back. Our music is improving in exciting ways (Joyful Jazz!) and music is primary to attracting new members.

"Even so," Mattie said, "we've got a lot of work ahead. But now it's hopeful work."

Lenten Words:

**"Nothing we do changes the past.
Everything we do changes the future."**

Sister Joan Chittister

WE'RE NOW GRATEFULLY CELEBRATING 80 YEARS OF CHURCH LIFE IN ST. PETERSBURG

This weekly newsletter is for members and friends of one courageous Episcopal Church in south St. Petersburg, Florida. 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.