

# The Peppercorn

St. Peter's Newsletter

January- February 2011

Dear Friends in Christ,

The headline from a story at the bottom of the first page of the *Asbury Park Press* on January 2 caught my eye: "Most churchgoers fall out of step with their denominations." The article, by Bob Smietana of Gannett News Service went on to describe how mainstream denominations (Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, and, yes, Episcopal Churches) have been steadily losing members since 1960, while recent decades have seen a surge in the number of 'non-denominational' Churches. Membership in such non-denominational churches now accounts for 15% of all Christians in the US. (Membership in the Episcopal Church, by contrast, accounts for less than 1%)

The article went on to describe how the membership decline of the mainline denominations over the last 40 years is attributable to a number of factors, including a smaller number of babies born in typical mainstream denomination families, as well as aging church members (The Episcopal Church, for example has two times as many elderly people and two times fewer children that the US population as a whole.) But much of the membership decline is due to the fact that some members of mainline churches have left for non-denominational churches.

As I read that article, many emotions were raised in me. One was irritation, when I read how one pastor dropped his denominational affiliation because being part of a denomination "just seemed like a lot of meetings and a lot of talk." The same pastor went on to say that although non-denominational churches such as his might be aligned with a like-minded group through a so-called 'affinity network' "at the end of the day...I can just walk away." Not much in the way of commitment, I thought, and little sense of the spiritual and theological reality that the Church is the Body of Christ, and to 'just walk away' from the Church is tantamount to walking away from Christ himself -- a serious matter indeed. The local congregation, despite all of its quirks and flaws, is the place where we learn the Christian faith, grow in discipleship, and follow Jesus in service to the world. It is not a source of entertainment of a hobby to be abandoned whenever something more interesting or captivating comes along -- even if that 'something more' is another congregation. I felt sadness to think that some people could be so casual with their commitment to their primary spiritual community.

But I also felt deeply concerned. A denomination, and a local congregation for that matter, cannot continue to lose membership before a slow decline eventually turns into a swift downward spiral. Ultimately, any institution in decline is liable to become a dead institution. Even churches die. Two months ago, at the meeting of the Monmouth Convocation (a local association of Episcopal congregations in Monmouth and Northern Ocean Counties) Bishop Cancell stated bluntly that a number of Episcopal churches here in New Jersey will close this year. That is partly due to changing neighborhoods and shifting demographics which means that some churches in areas that once were vibrant, lively, and filled with Christians are now in completely different neighborhoods. But some of those church closures are due to the financial reality that many smaller congregations can no longer afford to pay for the upkeep on their buildings, let alone a clergy salary.

Thankfully, St. Peter's does not fall into that category. St. Peter's is by no means a dying Church -- far from it! We have a far-reaching outreach program that provides tens of thousands of free meals to the hungry each year, and Emergency Housing

Intake which helps to shelter homeless men every night for the four coldest months of the year, as well as the Keith building's many ministries to those in need. We have a thriving music program with four choirs, a praise band, and a concert series. We have a life-long Christian education program that enrolls over 80 children as well as Bible Café for adults on Sunday. We host many opportunities for fellowship, including the Bazaar, and the Founder's Day Dinner Dance and Auction. There are many evidences of God's presence in the loving and compassionate acts of the members of St. Peter's Church. Considering all of these signs, this is a lively, inspiring, and active congregation.

This year at annual meeting, part of my report will include some statistical information. For example, the average Sunday attendance at St. Peter's is down from over 200 several years ago to 187 last year. Giving patterns note a shift from a high of 152 pledges amounting to \$298,752 in 2007 to a total of 114 pledges amounting to \$226,295. We are going to continue to be a lively, inspiring, and active congregation, doing the good work of the Gospel.

So maybe our collective 'New Year's Resolution' could be not to 'fall out of step' but instead to commit to doing even better at three key aspects of our life together: Prayer, work, and giving.

**Pray:** for St. Peter's Church, for me, for the Church staff, for all those who work in ministry here.

**Work:** if you have not already done so, find some way to give of yourself, of your time and abilities. The Thrift Shop is always seeking volunteers, and now that the shop is open three evenings each week those who work or are otherwise occupied during the day can assist in that important work. Likewise, the Friday evening Community suppers are often understaffed and could use more help. There are many Church boards, groups, and committees that would appreciate your participation and your contribution: the Finance Committee, the Christian Education Board, the Downtown Concert Series Committee, the Altar Guild – just ask me, ask any member of the vestry, or any member of the Church staff how you can help. You might be surprised at what joy and fulfillment you will find in service.

**Give:** sacrificially, and generously. In other words, give as God has given to you. Here are a couple of practical suggestions about how you might do that: make a one-time gift to the parish if you receive a refund at tax time, or consider once over the course of the year giving one weekly contribution in the same amount as your regular offering (as a kind of '53<sup>rd</sup> week).

Most of all, don't "fall out of step." Keep in step with God's work of love, service, and compassion here at St. Peter's for 2011

Peace and Blessings,

Frank+

Our condolences to Linda, Alex, and Stephanie Thomas on the death of Gus Thomas, Linda's husband and Alex and Stephanie's father. Father Hebert officiated at the Burial Office and Holy Eucharist held at St. Peter's and interment at Old Tennent Cemetery on Tuesday, January 4, 2011.

Our condolences to the family and friends of Helen List, who died in December of 2010 at the age of 99. A Memorial service is scheduled to be held at St. Peter's on January 22, 2011.

Congratulations to Matt and Monika Evans on the birth of their third child, a son, Elijah Mark, on January 6, 2011. Elijah joins big brothers Noah and Matthew.

### **NOTES AND NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE**

Our condolences to the family and friends of Marjorie B. "Sue" Simms, who died on December 23, 2010 in Mount Holly, New Jersey. Sue was a member of the choir and volunteer at the Thrift Shop. Funeral services were held in South Jersey on January 8, 2011.



## **A BOUNTY OF THANKS**

Dear Father Frank and my St. Peter's family,

Thank you so much for hosting and sharing my ordination day with me. It was a very joyous day for me and my family – I could not have asked for a more perfect time. I felt very blessed to have had the opportunity to have been ordained at my family's home church amongst so many beloved friends. This parish and all of you mean so very much to me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart! You are all in my thoughts and prayers!

In Christ,

Lisa

## **ARE YOU OVER THE AGE OF 55? ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED?**

If so, you may be eligible to be paid to work at St. Peter's Thrift Shop through a federally funded job training program administered by the National Council on Aging. A stipend of \$7.25 per week is available for 20 hours per week. Under the guidelines established by the US Department of Labor this is not a job, and those contracted under the program are employed neither by the National Council on Aging, nor the US Department of Labor, nor of St. Peter's Church.

For more information, contact Sylvia Johnson at St. Peter's Thrift Shop at 732-462-9264.

**Annual Parish Meeting of St. Peter's Church** will be held on Sunday, January 30th. ON THAT DAY ONLY, there will be two services - - at 7:45 AM and 10:00 AM. Children go directly to Sunday School classrooms at 10:00 and adults to worship. Following the 10:00 service, the Annual Meeting will begin in the Parish Hall. All communicant members of St. Peter's age 16 and older are eligible to vote and so are urged to attend. Child care will be provided downstairs in the Parish House in classroom A and the nursery. IF YOU HAVE A CHILD WHO WILL BE IN CHILDR CARE THAT MORNING, you are requested to volunteer on half-hour of time during the

meeting to assist with the program downstairs. Lunch will be provided for all.



ACOLYTE FESTIVAL

The Diocese of New Jersey's annual Acolyte Festival is scheduled for Saturday, February 12 at Trinity Cathedral, 801 West State Street in Trenton. The day will begin with registration at 9:30 a.m. and will end at about 3:30 p.m.

Acolyte Festival is designed to offer the acolytes of each of the 160 parishes in the diocese an opportunity for fun, fellowship, and learning in a day-long celebration of their ministry. Participants will be able to attend a morning and an afternoon workshop of their choice. Workshop Lists and Registration Forms are available on the Diocesan Website, [www.newjersey.anglican.org](http://www.newjersey.anglican.org). They can also be obtained by calling Fr. Mark Chatten at Holy Trinity in Collingswood at (856) 858-0491.

The Cost of the festival is \$25 per person in advance (\$30 at the door). Lunch, morning refreshments, and event t-shirts are included in the price. (Please make a note on your registration form if you are on a restricted diet.)

A Celebration of the Holy [Eucharist.in](#) the cathedral will close the day, so we will be sure to bring vestments, processional cross, torches, and our St. Peter's Church banner. Parents and other guests are invited to join us for the service, which will begin at 2:00 p.m.

*The Wardens, Vestry and the Parishioners of*

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church*

*invite you to join us for*

*the Celebration of a New Ministry and the Institution of*

*The Reverend Gideon Arinzechukwu Uzomechina*

*as the Priest In-charge*

*by the Bishop of the Diocese of New Jersey*

*The Right Reverend George E. Councill.*

*Saturday, February 26, 2011*

*3:00 pm*

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church,*

*148 Lee Avenue,*

*New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901*

*Reception follows immediately in the Parish Hall.*

# SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY

CHAMBERS OF  
**LAWRENCE M. LAWSON**  
ASSIGNMENT JUDGE



MONMOUTH COUNTY COURT HOUSE  
71 MONUMENT PARK  
ROOM 144 EAST WING  
FREEHOLD, NEW JERSEY 07728-1266  
TELEPHONE (732) 677-4100

December 7, 2010

Mrs. Sylvia Johnson  
Community Service Coordinator  
St Peters Church Thrift Shop  
67 Doral Ct  
Toms River, NJ 08757

Dear Mrs. Johnson,

On behalf of all of the judges and court staff in the Monmouth Vicinage, I am writing to thank you for your continued support as a community service site. Your agency's availability as a community service site during 2010 was greatly appreciated. It is an excellent example of the cooperation and assistance which the courts in Monmouth Vicinage receive from the community we serve. With your assistance, Monmouth Vicinage offenders performed 84,758 hours of community service in the fiscal year of 2010. The Monmouth Vicinage applauds you for this accomplishment.

Best wishes for the Holiday Season and for a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Very truly yours,

LAWRENCE M. LAWSON, A.J.S.C.

# DOWNTOWNCONCERTSERIES

PRESENTED BY ST. PETER'S CHURCH



*Kenji Haba, guitar & Gregory Durozel, violin*

## *Music is the food of love*

Enjoy a beautiful evening of seldom heard  
guitar and violin duo works  
by Kolb, Piazzolla, Rebay, and others.

**Saturday, February 12, 2011 at 7:30pm**

After the concert meet the artists at the American Hotel.

Concert \$20 Children 13 and under \$10  
Seating is limited. Order your tickets now.  
[downtownconcertseries.org](http://downtownconcertseries.org)

Save the date for the next concert:  
Eduardo Villa, tenor  
Saturday, May 7, 2011 at 7:30pm

St. Peter's Church  
33 Throckmorton Street  
Freehold, New Jersey 07728  
732-431-8383



This concert is made possible in part by a generous contribution from Cornetone Music Studios at Millinocket.