

# The First Order

## St. Stephen's Parish

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MARCH 2016

Reflections

Two days ago, the windchill broke winter cold records set before I was born. Today it is EIGHTY degrees warmer than it felt then. Every cell in my body is confused right now.

If you are feeling discombobulated, or disoriented, or just ratty, my friends, cut yourselves a little slack! In the past few days, I have heard good people speak about feeling they are bad, or needing to be punished...maybe it's a "Lent" thing? Childhood church programming that has left dark inner sadness or pain?

I honestly am not going to buy into medieval church teachings about our sinfulness, which perhaps helped churches stay in business back then, because the only way to grace and salvation was through sacramental confession and heavy penance. IT WAS NOT GOD'S WILL, it was a strategy. And it worked great. Sadly, it still seems to be working.

What if ~ just what if ~ we walked away from that old, old teaching? What if I told you that our God is a loving God, who cares for all Creation, of which YOU are a part?

My former bishop, Gene Robinson, has said, "It's funny, isn't it? That you can preach a judgmental and vengeful and angry God and nobody will mind - But you start preaching a God that is too accepting, too loving, too forgiving, too merciful, too kind, and...you are in trouble."

Lent is a time to reflect on the mystery of brokenness and the availability of love and healing, around every corner. For all of us. We are, each and every one of us, both wounded one and healer. We all carry the broken bits of our own lives, and we all have the power to reach out to another in pain, and offer forgiveness or solace.

Labeling ourselves as bad or sinful shuts down our ability to receive good things, and slows down our inclination to reach out in love to others.

This Lent and Easter, BE the conduit of grace and hope.

May God's love flow through us to others and, in letting it flow, may we find ourselves healed as well.

love,  
Cricket

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## Announcing: the St. Stephen's Parish

# Wish List...

We presented as "tight" a budget this year as we could, which means there are things we need which aren't IN this year's budget.

If you or someone you know is able to help at any point throughout the year, we will have a Wish List posted in the hallway outside of the offices, and will add to it as items come up. You may also call the parish and ask what items are on the current list.

### Current WishList Items:

**\*A month of advertising at the Beacon cinema! \$260**

Did you know we now are advertising before movies at the Beacon?

This year's new initiative immediately got 4 months backing after we mentioned it at a Vestry meeting.

Sponsor a month at the Beacon & help us reach the community with our Good News!

*Send a check to the office, with "Beacon ads" on the memo line!*

**\*New doors for the elevator! c. \$7,000**

YES, we will put your name on a plaque!

The doors are aging. At some point fairly soon, we will need to replace them, whether or not we have the money to do so. We'd love your help with this!

## Cricket on Leave in April

To assist with reducing our budget deficit this year, I offered to take 4 weeks off without pay in 2016, in order to finish a book that needs to be to the publisher by June 1<sup>st</sup>.

The book, which has a working title of Chemo Pilgrim, is an account of my recent battle with non-Hodgkins lymphoma (2012), and the pilgrimages I went on~spiritual and geographical~ that gave me strength and helped me along that journey. It is slated for publication in Spring 2017, by Church Publishing, Inc.

With Jenny guiding and Joseph assisting during that month, it seemed a solid time to step away to finish work on the book, during the usual lull following Easter. I will be thrilled to return to you at the end of the month, and will look forward to seeing you in church on May 1st!

# March

### Happy Birthday:

- 1 Sadie Watford
- 2 Henry Morris
- 3 Maureen Connors, Christopher Harrington, Nicole Marcil (5), Andrea Stasiowski, Brooke Thomas (6), Mia Thomas (6)
- 5 Josh Reynolds, Rebecca Smith
- 6 Ericka Hanger
- 7 Sean Connors, George Mathes
- 8 Liz Harrington
- 10 Zachary Senecal (17)
- 11 Christine Reynolds
- 12 Brayden Billetter (7), Jacob Billetter (7), Madeleine Holmes (10), Grant Morin (6), Virginia Smith
- 13 Makaanley Cookis (16)
- 14 Sarah Smith, Wavelyn Hine
- 15 Tyarah Dowling-Black (7), Doreen Sosa
- 16 William Engle, Angie Moon (a milestone!), Annie Rodgers
- 17 Grady Pedersen (17)
- 19 Mary Turner
- 20 Gary Curry
- 21 Ian Borosky (12), Jim Currie, Wendy Goodwin
- 22 Tommie Coles (a real milestone: 90!!), Jaden Coscia (15), Pat Moynahan
- 23 Joan Evans (a milestone!), Megan Pedersen
- 24 Joy Mullen, Debbie Stillman
- 27 Madelyn Croce (12)
- 30 Marianne Rud (a milestone!)
- 31 Gerry Crane

### Happy Anniversary:

- 13 Crystal and Jason Hassan (2004)
- 22 Harriet and Lew Cuyler (1975)
- 25 Noreen and John Reynolds (1972)





# The Rule of 7: Help Us Help You!!!

The old advertising adage says that a consumer needs to see or hear an ad seven times before actually registering the information in her/his own mind.

## SEVEN times, more or less!

If you find yourself feeling out of the loop, or if you hear about an event and want more information, or if you simply want to stay UP TO DATE with what's happening at St. Stephen's, the information you seek can almost always be found in most of these SEVEN PLACES:

- 1) The Sunday bulletin
- 2) The weekend services verbal announcements
- 3) The monthly newsletter
- 4) The MidWeek email blast
- 5) The church website
- 6) The parish Facebook page
- 7) Your parish directory, the Annual Report, bulletin inserts, direct mail.

Your church staff and Vestry want you to feel warmly included in all that goes on here, but we need your help!

**First**, check to be sure that you are indeed receiving **mail** at your current address! Your quarterly statement, or Jenny's recent all-parish letter, would be good examples of whether you are connected. If you never receive anything from us, PLEASE call the office to be sure you are on our list correctly!

**Secondly**, do you receive the monthly **newsletter**, *The First Order*, in the mail or in your email? There are always extra copies at church, but make sure you are getting your personal copy!

**Thirdly**, do you want mid-week announcements, reminders, and info on upcoming events? Sign up for our **email list** on the parish website (see the large blue "buttons" on the right side of the page!)

**Finally**, we always hope to see you in church, but when life intervenes...**take a moment** each week to check the website, Facebook page, or MidWeek email blast for upcoming events and information.



## Volunteer Opportunities

**SHINE Counselor:** The Elder Services SHINE Program is currently seeking volunteers to become trained as SHINE Counselors. The SHINE Program, a statewide initiative, provides free unbiased counseling and information regarding Medicare, Mass Health, and insurance-related public benefits to Medicare beneficiaries and their families throughout Berkshire County. It is estimated that local SHINE volunteers and staff saved Berkshire County residents approximately 4 million dollars in insurance costs last year. Volunteers receive 50 hours of classroom instruction (11 classes), additional mentoring, and must pass a state exam. Volunteers provide counseling in a variety of locations including local non-profits and Councils on Aging. No prior knowledge regarding insurance is required. This is an excellent opportunity for someone seeking to develop unique skills, work in a dynamic environment, and make a significant difference in the community. This program also relies on the efforts of several individuals who provide administrative support, data entry, filing, photocopying etc. Interested parties should contact: Shauna Post, Elder Services SHINE Regional Director, at 413-499-0524 or [spost@esbci.org](mailto:spost@esbci.org)

**Money Management Program Volunteer:** The Elder Services Money Management Program is currently seeking qualified individuals to provide basic money management assistance to program participants. Bill-payer Volunteers are matched with one or two individuals who have difficulty maintaining their finances due to physical disability, confusion, or vision impairment to provide ongoing support with basic budgeting, mail sorting, and bill-paying. These vital services allow the participant to remain as independent as possible while ensuring that their basic needs are met. This is an excellent opportunity for individuals who wish to contribute in a meaningful way but have limited availability. Volunteers typically contribute 1-2 hours of service per month. This is a fully insured program. Interested parties should contact: Shauna Post, Elder Services Money Management Coordinator, at 413-499-0524 or [spost@esbci.org](mailto:spost@esbci.org)

## Did You Know?

- That **Celeste Wheelock** was named to the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts fall semester Dean's List.
- That **Quinton Cookis**, majoring in history in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech, was named to the Dean's List for the spring semester.
- That **Kasey Turner** made the Dean's List at High Point University in North Carolina.
- That **Zachary Turner** made the Honor Roll at Wahconah High School for the first semester.

## We Get Letters

### From Community Partners – Thanksgiving Angels

Dear St. Stephen's,

Thank you for your generous donation to this year's "Thanksgiving Angels" distribution of turkeys and fixings to local families. Your donation of \$600 and 2,000 cans of corn made Thanksgiving a joyous and abundant holiday for 1400 local families

Weekly, during the year, our community partners provide staples for families with food insecurity throughout the city. At Thanksgiving, these pantries, churches and agencies join together to soften the sharp edges of poverty in our community. Each organization takes responsibility for procuring a specific food and provides volunteers. Centrally located South Church is the distribution center. The distribution day is a community celebration of good will, kindness and sharing the season's bounty – turkeys, stuffing, canned and fresh vegetables, cranberries, butter, eggs, breads, pies and toilet paper for 1400 families.

Your gift helps make this possible. Thank you for sharing with us as we seek to make our community healthier and more cohesive for us all.

Sincerely, Mary Wheat

# A Word from Joseph

It is often said that you can only know your own culture or language by learning about another culture or language. I can attest that this is true, especially as far as language goes. It was only when I took German in high school that I really understood English grammar. This is one reason it is helpful to study other religions; by understanding the commonalities and the differences, then we can understand the Gospel that we proclaim. I can certainly attest also that as a religion major in my college days, encountering different traditions and their very different world-views and claims about truth helped me to sharpen exactly what it is I believe.

Another reason is to be neighborly; by understanding what is important to others, then we can have meaningful conversation and foster deeper respect and community with each other.

It is for this reason that St. Stephen's and other Episcopal parishes in the Berkshires are taking the opportunity during Lent to learn about Islam. This gives us the opportunity to learn about the Islamic tradition and what is meaningful to that tradition and to reflect on what it is we proclaim.

One of the important developments in interfaith and ecumenical dialogue in recent years is that we no longer start from a position of "We all really believe the same thing, right? Everything else is non-essential." What that assumes is that our agreement has to come first and that our differences are unimportant! "Different" does NOT mean better or worse. It simply means "different."

We now start instead from a position of, "Share with me what you believe, and I can share what I believe, and we can go from there." This assumes that we start from a position of respecting the other person first, and that we do not have to agree to come together. We get to share our differences instead, and share what means the most to us, and the journey and conversation progress naturally. We don't know where the dialogue will take us, but we will let the dialogue guide us.

As you continue your Lenten journey, consider what is important to you and what makes you you. What makes you the person you are, and how are you called to walk in the way of the Cross in this world, that all people may know the powerful love of Christ?

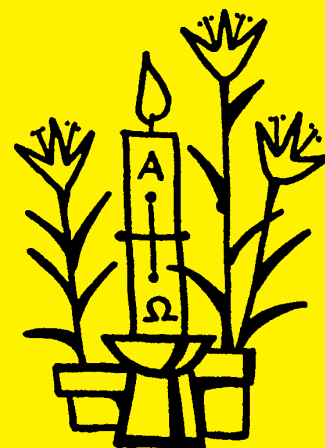
Peace,  
Joseph +

## Eclectic Book Club

We're back in the swing of things again and had a smallish but enthusiastic group in February. We will next meet on Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, in the Sears Room, where our co-hosts, Don and Linda Walsh, will treat us to wine and nibbles beginning at 6:00 p.m. By 6:30 we will be ready to enjoy our usual delicious and varied potluck supper, followed by a discussion of the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. When I asked for it at the Athenaeum, the gal offered the opinion that it was "an excellent book" and well worth reading!

## Easter Envelope

Included with this issue of *The First Order* is an Easter envelope. We ask that you prayerfully consider a special gift for this very special, glorious occasion. The Lord is Risen – Alleluia!! Those who receive the newsletter electronically can pick up an envelope in the Parish Foyer or at the back of the Church.



# Thoughts on Lent – and more

When you read this, we will be well into our practices of Lent.

During this Special Season in the Church Year:

**Has** our Faith been growing stronger and become more Christ-centered?

**Have** we opened our hearts in order to help others?

**Have** we reached out to family, friends, neighbors or, yes, even total strangers, to offer them emotional and spiritual support?

**Have** we personally invited someone who may have drifted away from the church to come with us and renew their relationship with Jesus?

In this Lenten Season, our 5th and 6th grade students will be enacting the Stations of the Cross.

As we meet Jesus in Holy Week, we will see His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, when He broke bread with His disciples and all of us, His Trial, and struggle toward Calvary, Crucifixion and death on the Cross.

If we take the events of Holy Week to heart, we can see ourselves waving palms when Jesus enters Jerusalem, we can imagine being at the Last Supper whenever we receive Communion, the Body and Blood of Jesus given to strengthen and enable us to celebrate the Jesus within each of us and one another.

We will see ourselves walking the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, as Jesus falls three times, met His Mother, is helped by Simon, is treated with compassion by Mary Magdalene, greeted by the Women of Jerusalem and is subjected to torment by the soldiers. We can even identify with our own doubts and failings when Jesus asks His Father, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" We can feel true sorrow when we see Jesus on the Cross as He says, "It is Finished" and dies.

On Easter we rejoice with the Resurrection and the opening of Heaven to each of us as we are promised Eternal Life!

May we truly EXPERIENCE the remainder of Lent and Holy Week as the family of God in the community of St. Stephen's.



On the more specific side, we are happy to report on the success of our "Soup for Superbowl" collection. Our young collectors wish to thank the many people who contributed to the amount of \$477.77, which will be used at St. Stephen's Table. It is the first time we have joined in this nationwide program to help fight hunger and was a great lesson for our students. Many thanks!

Our Valentine's Outreach was met by great enthusiasm and talent when our students were asked to present their Valentine to someone in the congregation whom they did NOT know. In turn, the person receiving the Valentine was asked to pray for that student, establishing a prayer link from adult to child. From the faces of both giver and receiver, we believe it, too, was a great lesson for all.

And we send a very special thank you to the members of St. Martin's Church for their contribution of school supplies. Our children and teachers will put them to good use in praising God and praying for all the St. Martin's parishioners during this difficult time. We invite the children and teachers of St. Martin's to visit the Sunday School at St. Stephen's. We would love to have them join us and be a part of all we do.

Respectfully submitted in the love of our God,  
Mamie Collins

# St. Stephen's Parish

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