



CHRIST CHURCH

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The Rev. Matthew Hoxsie Mead
Rector

The Rector's Chronicle

November 2015

Dear friends in Christ,

November and December are two of the most active months in the church year. In this Chronicle I want to update you on several of the ongoing ministries around the parish, and look ahead to November and December, including New Consecration Sunday, Advent and Christmas.

WHAT IS NEW CONSECRATION SUNDAY?

If you have been anywhere on the church property over the past few weeks you have noticed the “It’s Coming! November 15, 2015” signs. They are certainly effective in getting people’s attention, and I hope you will be able to be in church on November 15 for Consecration Sunday which concludes our 2015 Stewardship Campaign.

The Stewardship Plan we are using is called “New Consecration Sunday”. The plan is “by the book” (you can purchase the book online, it is by Herb Miller), and it has been heavily promoted by the diocese for the past year as a great way of helping congregations think about Stewardship in a new way. It’s a detailed plan that provides a timeline for event, charts, letters, and talking points, and gives everyone the opportunity to think in a spiritual way about why and how each of us gives to our church.

Miller notes that churches that use the plan without modifying it (i.e. rewriting letters or changing the timeline) experience, on average, an increase in financial giving between 15% and 30%. My previous parish, Good Shepherd, Granite Springs, used this program in 2014, and we saw an increase of 31% in our pledging. I know of six other Westchester County congregations that used this stewardship plan in 2014, and they all experienced increases above 15%. Because of our combined experience the Congregational Development Commission of the Diocese of New York offered several presentations formally recommending New Consecration Sunday for use across the diocese. Members of our Stewardship Committee were convinced by these presentations that this was something we should try at Christ Church, and wanted to use it this year. Conveniently I already had experience using the plan, so we decided to try it out.

The New Consecration Sunday plan puts an emphasis on thinking spiritually about giving. Over the course of four weeks, five different people speak personally about money and giving. The voices are

different, but they all proclaim the reality that our monetary gifts support those common resources that we all tap into (clergy, staff, buildings, etc.), and our financial support builds up and facilitates the many ministries that the different parts of the Body are engaged in at Christ Church and in our community.

It is a challenging plan, and I mean that in two ways. First, it is challenging for the Committee to offer: I am very grateful to John Fox and John Lent for co-chairing our Stewardship drive this year, and I am grateful to Colette Phipps, Jeff Bodenmann, and John Lent for making heartfelt testimonials about their own financial support of Christ Church. The other members of the Stewardship Committee may have been less visible, but they have all contributed many hours behind the scenes making sure the plan runs smoothly, and I want to offer them all my gratitude.

Second, the plan is challenging because personal finances are by definition personal, and talking openly and directly about money means moving out of our natural comfort zones. I think it is essential for any priest to lead by example, and for that reason I think it is important for you all to know that I support the church financially. Nicole and I have tithed (10% off the top before taxes) to the church since we were married. It was a big step getting there, but we have managed to continue tithing through thick and thin, and part of the reason is that we give a percentage, not a specific amount. Whether our income has increased or decreased (to be clear: it has done both) we have always given the same proportion of our combined income to support the work and ministry of the church. Doing that has not always been easy, but then again it isn't always easy to preach the Gospel, visit the bereaved, or be a parent. I believe supporting the church financially is as important as anything I do as a Christian, and for that reason I am very happy to accept this challenge.

I encourage you to take part in New Consecration Sunday and to reflect on the various announcements, letters, and sermons made in the weeks prior to that day. Our guest preacher for November 15 is my father, the Rev. Andrew Mead, Rector Emeritus of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue. I'm happy my dad is coming to preach, but I have to admit that it was not my idea. The plan calls for a guest preacher, and several members of the Stewardship Committee who knew my father through his time at Saint Thomas asked if I felt he might be interested. I'm honored that he will be with us and looking forward to his sermon on Sunday.

That Sunday, "estimate of giving" cards will be passed out and an opportunity will be given during the service to fill out and return the cards. Each service will be followed by a very festive, catered meal provided by the Stewardship Committee. Because the meals are catered we hope to get an accurate count, and we have been trying to get people to RSVP. If you aren't able to be with us on November 15, the Stewardship Committee will mail you an estimate of giving card with a stamped return envelope. **After that, the plan is done!** No phone calls asking for money, no December or February follow-up letters, no midyear Stewardship appeals, etc. Four weeks and then we are done.

I hope you can be here on November 15 to celebrate the conclusion of our stewardship program. When you think about Christian Stewardship and the vital role that each of us has at Christ Church, remember that we are all in this together. Therefore, I invite you to give thanks for those who are making the journey of faith with you and to pray about what your next step on that journey is going to be.

AROUND THE PARISH

One of my priorities as your rector is encouraging and building up our children and youth ministries. We have lots of families and children of all ages in the parish (including my own two sons), and I hope we can build on the wonderful things currently happening around the church.

Our Church School is looking to expand in the coming years, and that begins with bringing in additional teachers to help out with what we are already doing, and to help us grow the Church School. In the coming weeks I will pass around an “Are You Interested Sheet” for anyone who has interest in helping out with Church School. You don’t need experience as a Church School teacher, just a willingness to lend a hand in this essential ministry in our parish. That said, you don’t have to wait – if you are interested in helping out with Church School, please contact the parish office or contact Marcie Wiehagen, our Church School director.

A few weeks ago, parishioner Jane Cooke and I had a breakfast to discuss forming a Youth Group that can be divided into two different age groups (4th to 7th grade & 8th to 12th grade). Our vision is to offer a place for fellowship and conversation for all of our youth that breaks through some of the natural cliques of town, school, sports, and activities. For the older group, we are planning a trip to New York City; we don’t have a date yet, but the hope is to visit a prominent Episcopal Church, see an important historical site in the city, and have a meal at one of the city’s famous pizza places. For the younger group, we are planning an event at the parish that might include games, food, and maybe a movie. If you are interested in helping Jane and me out, or if you have children who might be interested in taking part in Youth Group at Christ Church, please contact me or Jane.

Our Confirmation Class met for our first monthly meeting on October 25. There are seven young people in our class: two in ninth grade and five in eighth grade; five from Pelham and two from New Rochelle. Deacon Katie and I facilitated a discussion about how we are each part of the Body of Christ, and we began to think about how each of us can use the different gifts that God has given to us. Our “lab” for the class was making a delicious feast. We gathered in the undercroft kitchen and prepared and cooked a roasted whole beef tenderloin, roasted potatoes with garlic and herbs, roasted broccoli, sautéed mushrooms, and a horseradish cream sauce. Deacon Katie and I were privileged to spend the evening getting to know a great group of young Christians. All in all I think it was a really fun and productive night, and I am looking forward to our next class on November 22 at 9:00 AM, when we will discuss Outreach and Ms. Missy Palmisciano, President and Founder of County Harvest, will be our guest speaker. If your child (8th to 12th grade) is interested in joining the class, please contact Marie Main; it isn’t too late to join the group.

Speaking of Outreach, I’m delighted to report on a few opportunities offered by our Outreach Committee, chaired by Courtney McGrory and Geoff Allen. Most noticeable is the recent and ongoing collection of supplies in the narthex; there are flyers around the church indicating which supplies are needed. As we move towards Thanksgiving, parishioner Beth Conway has spearheaded the annual Thanksgiving Box drive, and there are flyers detailing that as well. A third opportunity for Outreach is the annual Episcopal Charities Tribute Dinner on December 2 at the cathedral. It is a gala evening that usually raises about \$1,000,000 for Episcopal Charities, and the proceeds benefit more than 100 different outreach programs supported by congregations around our diocese. A group of parishioners

from Christ Church is planning to go to the dinner this year. Please contact Father Matt if you are interested in going or if you are interested in supporting Episcopal Charities in some other way.

This season's Adult Christian Learning offerings have begun, and I am grateful to the work of our Adult Christian Learning Committee, led by Alice Dean. Thus far I have led the first three classes/discussions, and we have had very good attendance. The first class was on the basics of the Bible, and the second class was an Instructed Eucharist question and answer session about why we *do* what we *do* in the Eucharist. On Sunday, November 8, I led a second Instructed Eucharist question and answer session about why we *say* what we *say* in the Eucharist. On Sunday, December 6, at 11:30 AM, I will offer a class/discussion on the Birth Narratives in the Gospels. Our Winter/Spring calendar for 2016 is in the works and will include a number of Tuesday evening events.

On Thursday, December 10, our Seniors Group will meet for our annual Christmas lunch and carol party in the Parish Library. A personal invitation will go out to everyone who we know is over age 65 in the parish. Please mark your calendars for this festive event. Looking ahead, Nicole and I are planning to host the Seniors Group for a lunch at the rectory in the spring. I am also interested in leading a Seniors trip to visit and take a guided tour of our cathedral. If you are interested in helping to organize Seniors events, please contact the parish office.

THANKSGIVING, ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

Thanksgiving Day, Advent, and Christmas are nearly here! The coming weeks are among my favorite of the entire year, and I invite you to immerse yourself in the many ways that we are observing and celebrating Advent and Christmas at Christ Church this year.

At Christ Church, Thanksgiving begins a week before Thanksgiving Day. On Thursday, November 19, the church will celebrate the annual Thanksgiving Dinner & Silent Auction. The Silent Auction is new this year, while the Thanksgiving dinner has been a part of life at Christ Church for years. Thanks to Jackie Kraft and Jennifer Alleyne for organizing the dinner, and thanks to Eileen Wolfe and Marie Dumas for organizing the Silent Auction.

The annual Pelham Interfaith Thanksgiving service will be at 2:00 PM on Sunday, November 22, at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church. The service will be followed by refreshments. This annual interfaith gathering is an excellent opportunity to meet some of the other members and clergy of the other worship communities in Pelham. We have a great group of clergy in Pelham, we meet about once a month to discuss common concerns and for fellowship, and I was honored that several of our group were present at my Institution on Michaelmas. I will be at OLPH for the service, and I hope you will join me.

On Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 26, at 10:00 AM, we will celebrate a said Eucharist with Thanksgiving hymns. There are a number of beautiful (and quite well known) hymns that are allotted for Thanksgiving Day. Whether you are travelling locally or staying home, I invite you to stop in at Christ Church for a Spirit-filled forty-five minutes.

Advent is the season when the church prepares for the arrival of Jesus Christ. As each week progresses the church reflects on what it means when we sing “O Come, O come, Emmanuel”. We begin Advent hearing about the Second Coming of Jesus. The season then shifts gears, and we hear about John the Baptist who prepares the way for Jesus. Finally, as we transition into Christmas, we hear about the blessed Virgin Mary and her willingness to bear the Son of God. The Advent carols that explore these themes are marvelous – and we have gorgeous blue vestments that are only used on these four Sundays. Living into Advent has helped me gain a new perspective on Christmas and I hope you will not miss a Sunday in Advent this year.

In addition to our normal Sunday morning schedule throughout Advent, we are offering several special events on Sunday afternoons in Advent.

On December 6, the Second Sunday of Advent, at 4:00 PM, we will gather together to green the church. We will take a brief break at 5:00 PM for an Advent version of Come As You Are, and then return to greening and conclude with a sumptuous potluck supper.

On December 13, the Third Sunday of Advent, at 5:00 PM, we will offer a festival of Advent Lessons and Carols. (Note: this is not to be confused with Christmas Lessons and Carols). The evening will consist of seven lessons that look ahead (but do not reach) to Christmas, several carols sung by our choir that explore the themes of looking ahead to the Messiah’s coming, and a handful of well known Advent chestnuts sung by the entire congregation. The service should be about 45 minutes, and it will be followed by a reception (we are looking for hosts and sponsors for this reception – contact Marie Main in the parish office if you are interested in helping out). It will be a true example of the church celebrating the beauty of holiness, and I think that it will really deepen everyone’s appreciation for Advent as an integral part of the church year.

A highlight of this season is our Christmas Pageant which will be on Sunday, December 20, at 4:00 PM – this year we are using the stage in the Hoag Parish Hall for the Pageant, and it should be lots of fun! Pageant rehearsals will be on Wednesdays at 5:30 PM, for approximately one hour, November 18 and December 2, 9 and 16. A few roles will also require some Saturday rehearsal time TBD. Please see Michael Fawcett or Carla Carroll at Coffee Hour to register and ask questions. The Pageant will be followed by a potluck reception (also in Hoag Hall).

All of these wonderful events lead up to and will prepare us for the big day, Christmas! On Christmas Eve our Family Eucharist will be celebrated at 4:00 PM. That service will be preceded by 20 minutes of carols for choir and congregation, beginning at 3:40 PM. Our Midnight Mass begins at 10:30 PM, and is also preceded by 30 minutes of carols for choir and congregation, beginning at 10:00 PM. Our two Christmas Eve services will be similar yet different. The Family Eucharist will be Rite 2 with a homily particularly appropriate for children, while the Midnight Mass will be Rite 1. I think this reflects and appreciates that we have sizable congregations that worship in Rite 2 and also Rite 1. We have taken special care this year to make sure none of the “greatest hits of Christmas” get left out or sung at only one or the other of the services.

The Christmas Day Eucharist, celebrated at 10:00 AM, will be a said Eucharist with well-known Christmas Carols. After the service, I am starting a new tradition at Christ Church (though it isn’t new to me), and I invite you to join me in the Parish Library for Bagels, Lox, Cream Cheese, Champagne,

and Sparkling Cider – I capitalized the food because it will be delicious. The readings and some of the carols are different on Christmas Day, and the fellowship afterwards is always a lot of fun.

Christmas continues for Twelve Days. The themes of the First and Second Sundays after Christmas explore the Incarnation and mark the transition to Epiphany, respectively, and I've always thought it was fun to see how the content of the hymns on those Sundays mark that progression.

Eight days after his birth, according to Jewish custom, the Church celebrates the naming of Jesus on New Year's Day; I invite you join me for a 12:00 PM said Eucharist at the Bolton Altar.

Epiphany, January 6, closes Christmastide, and it is one of the Principal Feasts of the church year. We will celebrate Epiphany on Wednesday, January 6, at 7:30 PM with a said Eucharist with hymns. Like Thanksgiving Day, there are some gems of hymns that are appointed for Epiphany, and we will sing them that night! The service will be followed by a chocolate, champagne, and sparkling cider reception (again, if you want to sponsor or host this reception, please contact the parish office).

My family and I are looking forward to all of these events and celebrations; we are thrilled to be part of this vibrant and active parish! I am very grateful to you all for the many ministries, known and unknown, that you all take part in and support at Christ Church and in Pelham. Know that you are in my prayers and thanksgivings every day, and please let me know if there is anything I can do to support you in your faith journey.

I leave you with one of my favorite prayers which we will sing on the Second Sunday of Advent: The King shall come when morning dawns and light and beauty brings: Hail, Christ the Lord! Thy people pray, come quickly, King of kings! May you have a Happy Thanksgiving, a blessed Advent, and a very Merry Christmas.

In Christ and with fondest affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Hoxsie Mead". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

The Reverend Matthew Hoxsie Mead, Rector