



Winged Lion

A publication of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Prattville, Ala.



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From The Rector

We began October with the tragic news of the death of our editor's youngest son, Andrew Obert. Our prayers continue to go out to Bill and Becky at this very sad time. Becky is editing this issue of the Winged Lion and we welcome her back with loving thoughts and lots of hugs.

We finally saw some rain in October. The drought in Alabama is still very much on our minds even though we (thanks be to God) had some rain after a prolonged dry spell.

The drought in Alabama is nothing along the lines of those we read about in the Bible, or that some lands (and American states) continue to experience, but it did make many of us aware of just how dependent we are on mother nature to supply our needs.

It occurs to me that we can go through other times of drought as well — all kinds of droughts. For instance, here at St. Mark's we are currently experiencing a drought of children. We have less than a dozen (if I counted correctly) actively participating in our parish life. I find that to be really sad. We need to all be recruiting families into our wonderful parish.

But, there are other types of droughts.

Individually, we can experience a spiritual drought — times when our soul languishes, either through neglect or perhaps a reaction to a personal crisis. Often, when people are angry at God they will quit reaching out to him, cutting themselves off from the very thing they need the most.

Other times, we are so happy with how things are going in our lives that we don't think of God or of our need for him.

Then, when the good times fade, we can be left feeling empty and alone. Maybe we've become too busy for God, filling our life with so many things that we haven't made time in our day to spend with him.

Whatever the reason, a spiritual drought can isolate us from the very one we most need in our lives. It can drive us away from the community of faith as well and leaves us feeling as dry as parched earth.

The answer of course is for us to be sure to leave a door open... to be willing to look for God's presence in our lives in different ways.

It has been my experience that all those times when I thought God had left me were, in truth, just the times

when God had come to me in ways I wasn't expecting.

God doesn't obey our whims and desires; he doesn't just show himself to us in the manner that we want or expect. No, he always manifests himself *as he IS*, not as we necessarily want him to be. That means we have to be open to seeing him in new ways.

God is always active and on the move. The trick is not to be constantly looking over our shoulder for him but to be looking ahead, behind the next corner, moving forward.

Droughts will end, the rains come and wash away the crustiness so that new life may take hold. Whenever we experience a drying out of our spirit, that's the time to hang on, reminding ourselves of all the times God has been there for us in the past.

For one thing is sure: God will not carry us this far only to abandon us. No, he is faithful to us and will be with us through it all.

**Blessings,
Father Scott**

EVENSONG WITH A TWIST will be Sunday night, November 3, at 5:30. Our band has been practicing throughout the month of October and we are looking forward to this special service. A pot luck dinner will follow the service. Be sure to invite your friends and neighbors!!!

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF FAITH

When I arrived at St. Mark's nearly 15 years ago I was amazed at how many children there were in the parish. I went back recently and counted the number of kids in an old directory... there were 57 under the age of 18! We had Sunday School classrooms for all grades. It was amazing.

I remember thinking on my first Sunday here: "Wow! This is unusual. You seldom see a church this size with so many kids."

Today, as I write this, I can count only 11 active parishioners under the age of 18. We have two Sunday School classes. One of them only has two children.

Kids grow up, families move away... and we have not replaced them. As a result, our congregation reflects a different demographic and dynamic than it did in 2005. We are older now. The vast majority are over 55 and most of our folks are retired. We continue to have a spattering of a few young families, but (at least for now) we are an older congregation. But... **there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.** Most Episcopal Churches our size have older congregations. Back in 2005 we were the exception to the rule.

Knowing this about ourselves doesn't change who we are, but it may just change how we think about ourselves. Maybe we can give ourselves permission to enjoy the finer things about being a 'mature' church. Mature congregations tend to be settled, friendly, accustomed to one another. They tend to appreciate a gentler lifestyle, worry less about *programming* and are more fixed on generating a solid sense of *community*.

Studies have shown that mature churches provide a sense of belonging that seniors often lack of purpose as they age. As people grow older, they retire from the work force, their families become self-sufficient, they lose their spouses. This lack of purpose can be challenging for some. People like to be depended on. When you're part of a bigger group, people depend on you for various things. Not only that, but churches specifically provide outreach, giving seniors a chance to give back to their community through charity and good works projects.

"The selflessness that comes from going to church encourages one to action. Places of worship oftentimes promote service and goodwill action and will host a variety of events for volunteering, enabling one to teach, guide, and help others," notes HealthFitnessRevolution.com.

While the ideal congregation might be one that had an equal mix of kids, young adults and older adults, that is not who we are at the moment. Although (at present) we no longer are a church brimming with young people, there are certain advantages that an older membership offers to its people. For instance, I read another study which showed that staying social as we age reduces our risk of death from a number of causes. Church provides opportunities to be social – which is incredibly important for aging adults. Between worship services, potlucks, bible study, and other community events, seniors often socialize with church friends multiple times per week. "Being social can help to stave off cognitive decline and help to prevent seniors from falling into depression caused by loneliness." (Cathedral of Hope publication)

Of course, congregations are almost always in a state of flux. Who knows what the demographics of St. Mark's will be ten years from now. I realize that I have been beating the drum of 'getting new members' for some time now. I've tried to think of all sorts of ways to encourage younger families to come join us. How many times have you heard me ask you to invite your friends and neighbors... often adding something about making sure you invite that new young family down the street. I think that somewhere in my mind I equated younger demographics as somehow being healthier. Yet, statistics indicate that there is more unease in younger parishes, more distrust, more squabbles. More mature congregations seem to focus less on differences and more on reliance upon each other.

Saint Marks is a wonderful group of people. (We all know this about ourselves!) Sure, it would be great to be twice our size, or to have lots of kids running around again, but this is who we are right now. Let's focus together on ways of celebrating who and what we are as God's people. Who knows where God will take us? (Or how much fun we will have getting there!) Let's simply celebrate our little corner in God's great big, wonderful kingdom.

-Scott

Thank you

To all who came out and helped during last Saturday's Great Grits Cookoff... it was a "rainy success!" Our team was led by head cook, Les Amidon. Special thanks to John Kongable, Scott Brown, Zelda Stokes, Rob Gaston, Lynn Taylor and Richard Byard for helping serve tasty Smoked Gouda Cheese, Conecuh Sausage Grits to the masses.

Just a friendly reminder to mail or bring your estimate of giving cards to the Church. You can place them in the offering plate if you'd rather not mail them. If you have already turned yours in...THANK YOU!

“It’s Advent; Slow Down”

I remember Bishop Parsley's words every year as we enter into the busy season of Advent. They are words that I still need to hear. I'm using this as a theme for something new here this Advent season.

Beginning on Monday, Dec. 2, we will have Noonday Prayers and Lunch with a Guest Speaker for the first three weeks in Advent.

We will begin at noon each Monday and finish by 12:55 p.m. The service is brief, and the luncheon will be simple—in line with Bishop Parsley's admonition to keep things simple during this holy time.

The success of this year's luncheons will dictate whether we try this again in the future.

The luncheon will be \$5.

The Men's Prayer Group

Are you male and between the ages of 16 and 116? if so, come to the opening men's prayer breakfast at Chappy's on Tuesday, September 3. We meet at 6:45 a.m. for breakfast, prayer and fellowship. Your first breakfast is on us. Please be sure to tell Fr. Scott it's your first time.

THE ST. MARK'S BAND IS BACK!

Come to Evensong with a Twist (potluck following) this Sunday night (5:30) for a rousing worship service featuring our own band of Les Amidon, Yuliya Childers, Mark DePlanche, David Gatch, Josh Lane, Carolyn Miller, Steve Wingard (and Fr. Scott). Make your favorite dish and bring it to share after.

This year's parish fund-raiser will be Saturday, Nov. 2nd from 1 until 4 in the afternoon. The St. Mark's Chili-Cook-Off will feature several local businesses competing against one another to see who will be rated as making the best chili in Prattville. There will be a judges' award and a people's choice award. A bouncy-house will entertain the kids while the adults visit arts and craft vendors. We hope everyone will come and enjoy the day. Thank you to all our participants for helping us in this year's endeavor. Thank you especially to Lynn Taylor, Hayley Taylor, Jim Byard, Chas Cowart, Rob Gaston, Gordon Faulk and Les Amidon for rounding up all our vendors and making this such a wonderful event!





Newsletter Submission Info

Just a reminder: all articles for the Winged Lion are due no later than the 20th of each month. Please see to it that your news and information are submitted to the editor, Becky Obert, by that date. Becky has a mail box in the office hallway or you can email her at beckyobert@mac.com.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

PLEDGED TO DATE	191,520.00
PLEDGED GIVING needed per month	19,563.00
PLEDGED GIVING past month	10,488.00
PLATE & OTHER GIVING past month	491.92
TOTAL GIVING past month	10,979.92
TOTAL PLEDGED GIVING TO DATE	150,710.00
BUDGET TO DATE	232,864.00

THANK YOU to SANDY FOWLER for organizing a wonderful parish retreat last month. Camp McDowell is a wonderful place to renew both mind and spirit... and it most certainly did both for all our members who participated. We are looking into ways in which we can possibly defray the costs of future retreats so that more of our members can participate.

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