



Grace Notes

February 2016

Grace Episcopal Church
106 Lowell St.
Manchester, NH

From the Rector — Rev. Dr. Marjorie Gerbracht-Stagnaro

When I first arrived at Grace Episcopal Church 4 1/2 years ago I had to get accustomed to new ways of being priest. For the first 16 years of ordained life I served as an associate priest, which meant that most of the time others within the churches and schools where I served controlled where I went, what I did, and many of the decisions executed within the framework of my ministry. Arriving at Grace changed that way of being entirely. Being a priest-in-charge, becoming a rector, meant all of a sudden it was up to me to decide how to order my days, pastoral care, preaching, and a host of other tasks that come with the work of ordained life. My favorite phrase in the entire Book of Common Prayer is found in our Prayer of Confession: *“We have left undone those things which we ought to have done. And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.”* Every day each one of us has God given, free will God to figure out how to order our days. Psalm 90, verse 12 counsels all of us, *“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* Daily I pray this verse in one way or another saying, *“Lord, help me figure out what’s next. Lord, guide me on the right path. Help me do what you would have me do.”*

One new reality I entered into was being responsible for dispensing money from the Rector’s Discretionary Fund. A discretionary fund is money set aside from the church budget to be used to help those in need. For a long time in our own parish the discretionary fund was a budgeted item. Now the discretionary fund gains income in one of three ways: (1) the loose offering (whatever cash or coins were placed in the offertory plate) given the final Sunday of each month (2) private donations (3) earnings the rector secures from funerals and/or weddings.

Dick Feren did a bit of research and discovered since my arrival as rector the amount of generated income for the Rector's Discretionary Fund has varied. In 2012 - \$9,300. In 2013, close to \$11,000. In 2014, \$8,900. And finally, in 2015, \$6,400. Every month, \$500 is placed into this account and is available for me to use, as the title says, at my discretion.

The idea of a clergy having a discretionary fund began, of course, in scripture. The first deacons of the church, mentioned in Acts 6:1-4, oversaw the distribution of the charity of early Christian churches to needy members. A more traditional name for this fund is the Almoner's Fund. That word, "almoner," has fallen out of use of English. Perhaps it falls easier on your ears if you are a Downton Abbey fan, as you might recall Cousin Isobel is the almoner for the local hospital. In British English "almoner" means, "a social-service worker in a hospital. But originally the term simply meant "purse" or "one who distributes alms." In the Church of England one of the most prominent offices to hold in the Church of England is the Lord High Almoner. The holder of that office is in charge of the Queen's discretionary resources, subsequently distributing money to the poor and those in need on her behalf.

Since my arrival the discretionary fund has been used in so many ways, for strangers and for parishioners. It has paid for bus tickets for people to leave town (the local bus station told me our checks are the only ones accepted as they never bounce!), groceries, and diapers. It has paid for rent to save someone from eviction, gassed up people's cars, covered car repairs and electric bills. (People often have a choice between heating or eating when winter hits New Hampshire.) It has paid for young people to go on mission trips with their college, for young people to go to college, for Market Basket gift cards for City Year tenants on a fixed income, for Christmas gifts for lower income families. It has provided money for breast cancer research, to send a child to camp, to fund research for rare illnesses, to support New Horizons food pantry.

If I am honest, being in charge of a discretionary fund is the

least favorite part of my job at Grace. I often worry and wonder if I'm using the funds in the right way. I have learned from my mistakes more than my successes. I've learned not to give cash as often it gets spent in the wrong way. I've learned not to give food cards as often they are sold and the money pocketed used for alcohol. I've worked not to become a religious ATM machine, a place where the same people come into the office time and time again, asking for money, promising to come to worship, and never appearing until the next crisis. I've learned there is a very fine line between being of use and being used.

But I do know this: discretionary funds make a difference. On Christmas Eve our parish helped save a parishioner from being evicted from his apartment. In the summer we paid for an air conditioner to stave the heat off for someone contained in their apartment because of illness. We made someone recently say, *"I didn't know where to go and then I remembered what my momma told me. Go back to Jesus. Go home to the church. Those good folk Episcopalians will know just how to help."*

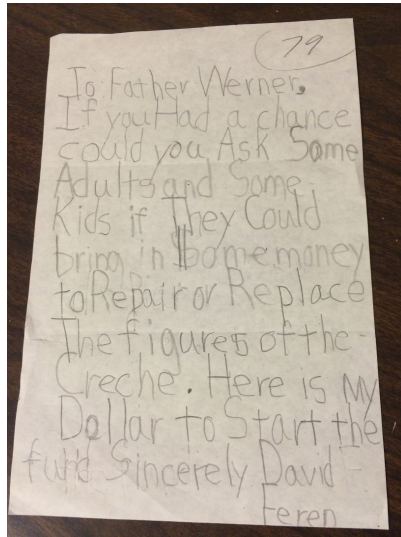
What do you think? In a city of great need, where should our discretionary resources go? Should we help those inside our parish, or people who walk into the parish office from the streets? Should we help the same person only once or many times? Should we only give to organizations or to individuals? Our church canons state that lay people have the right to dispense funds and leave the clergy completely out of the distribution process. Do you like this idea? Should we appoint someone other than clergy to monitor these funds?

The best advice I ever received about how to use discretionary funds was from the Reverend Kurt Roeschlaub, a long term mentor of mine and an Episcopal priest. He said, *"If you have money and someone is in need, give them what they ask. Then leave it up to God to monitor the results."*

Much love, Marjorie +

The Crèche Story—Revisited

After the Christmas of 1978, 6 year old David Feren, son of Nancy-Ann and Dick Feren, wrote the following letter to our rector, The Rev. George Werner. Nancy-Ann, one of our archivists, found the letter and we thought it would be fun to republish it:



Now, almost 40 years later, our crèche figures are again in need of repair. Parishoner and artist in residence Linn Krikorian has found an artist who specializes in ceramic repairs through her work at the Currier Museum of Art who will redo the figures for \$75 each. One king was done last fall as a test to see how we liked his work. All who have seen it are pleased.

We are now looking for individuals or groups of people who are willing to sponsor the repair of one or more crèche figures. If you are interested in donating money for one or more figures, please contact Nancy-Ann Feren at nferen@comcast.net or contact the Parish Office.

Take note that those who choose to repair one or more figures will be listed in next year's Christmas bulletin alongside our flower donations.

Many thanks,
Nancy-Ann Feren & Marjorie Ann Gerbracht-Stagnaro

Reflections AND THOUGHTS

God Can Use Natural Processes (Part 1)

In my September 2011 Reflection, I had written about an amazing set of circumstances that could have saved me from a serious problem while driving down a hill in Alaska. It seemed like God's work. Now I would like to describe two more events that were equally amazing, (but in a different way?).

The first happened almost 50 years ago, after I had been introduced to Nancy-Ann by my brother and his girlfriend. For a few weeks during the beginning of our junior year in high school, I really struggled with the question of whether I should pursue a relationship with Nancy-Ann, or whether I should pursue a relationship with another girl that I thought I liked more. The question was resolved for me one evening during the fall as I was doing my chemistry homework. The radio was on and I started to hear it playing the instrumental "Telstar" by the Ventures. As I listened to it, I had a very clear image of Nancy-Ann and me standing together, just the two of us. We have been together ever since.

The second happened when we got officially engaged, which was about four years after we were officially introduced. A couple of weeks before Christmas of 1966, Nancy-Ann and I had picked out an engagement ring for her, and then packaged it in a big shoe box so as not to arouse too much curiosity when we put it under her parents' Christmas tree. Our plan was for the two of us to exchange gifts on Christmas Eve at her parents' house. It would be just after their annual Christmas Eve dinner with friends and family. Exchanging gifts at that event was not part of their tradition, but we decided to do it anyway. After dinner, I said I had a present to give. I took it from under the tree and handed it to her. She quickly opened the box and put on the ring. A couple of minutes later, while people were still admiring and commenting, the door bell rang.

A small group of carolers had come to serenade people in the neighborhood

had come to their house at that special time. What made it especially incredible was that carolers had never come to the house, before or since.

In each of these special events I have described – from fixing a dangerous tire, to having a vision of my future wife, to receiving a special serenade – I can recognize that the holy Spirit was part of it. I can also recognize that each of these things could be interpreted as a natural event, with an incredible coincidence of timing. But isn't that how the Holy Spirit often works: using natural processes to produce miraculous results?

Dick Feren

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH Book Group

Monthly potluck lunch sessions begin at noon in the Parish Library.

Questions? Email Anne Lake ASL03104@aol.com

February 16, 2016	<u>Felicity</u> , Mary Oliver
March 15, 2016	<u>Go Set a Watchman</u> , Harper Lee
April 19, 2016	<u>The Boston Girl</u> , Anita Diamant
May 17, 2016	<u>Wonder</u> , P. J. Palacio
June 21, 2016	<u>We are Not Ourselves</u> , Matthew Thomas

LENT BEGINS WITH THE FOLLOWING SERVICES:

Shrove Tuesday: February 9

Pancake Supper, 6:00 pm

Burning of the Palms, 6:45 pm. (If you are unable to attend any of the Ash Wednesday services and would like to receive ashes, you may do so at this service.)

Ash Wednesday: February 10

Disposition of Ashes and Holy Eucharist,
12:15 pm and 7:30 pm



The following are the thoughts long-time parishioner Eileen Suckley shared about Richard Gesner at his memorial service

I came to know Richard Gesner when my son, Tom, was a little boy. He found it difficult to remain quiet and composed for an entire service so we would sit in the very last pew – Tom and I on one end and Richard on the other. It was a place where a child could feel relatively free to point, to ask questions, to fidget.

Of course, we were still disruptive and over time some people gradually moved their seating choices forward – but not Richard. He remained exactly where he was. And when it came time to exchange the peace, he greeted Tom with a cordial dignity and respect that underscored the sanctity of this space and the significance of the act.

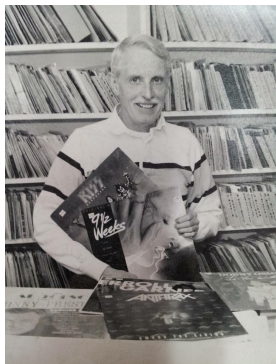
As time passed I discovered that Richard and I shared a passion for literature. We were continually exchanging books and articles. Richard was an honest man – the only person I ever knew who, when asked “Did you like such and such?” would respond sharply, “No”. And then he would tell me why: how the author had clumsily presented an idea or failed to develop a character. I would tell HIM why he was wrong, what he missed or failed to appreciate. And Richard would patiently explain to me where the plot faltered or the premise failed. The arguments could go on for weeks. They were good conversations; stimulating, thoughtful and always instructive. I never came away from talking to Richard without learning something.

He was honest about other things as well. One day he said, “Why do you always wear such dull, somber colors?” The question caught me off guard. “I don’t know, Richard. I suppose because I want to shield the world from the glare of my sparkling personality.” Richard snorted and shook his head.

But the important things he had to teach were not to be found in books. Richard was sick for quite a long time. He struggled against physical ailments that would have defeated most people early on. Many of us tried to help in a variety of ways but Richard would have none of it. His appearance retained a classic look that never wavered: dress pants, crisp button down shirt, sweater, polished loafers. We watched him grow thinner but we also saw the strength and dignity that he brought to the conflict. He continued to work, to read at services, to usher.

Richard never gave way to self-pity. There must have been dark days but publicly he never once displayed a hint of despair. I only saw him falter once, a few days before he died. I’d stopped to see him after school and he was

sleeping. I sank down into the easy chair by his bed and promptly fell asleep too until I felt something rapping my chair. “How long have you been here?” “I don’t know”, I said yawning. “Next time, wake me up.” He was silent for a few minutes after that. Then he began to reminisce about his boyhood, places he’d lived, his cat and finally, Bob. “After all these years, I still miss him every single day.”



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel observed that it takes three things to attain a sense of significant being: God, a soul and a moment. Richard was all about moments. He recognized them when they occurred. He noticed when a person acted with courage or selfless generosity – and when a person had the ability to do so and did not. He held his friends in high regard, supported them and held them accountable just as he did himself. Richard was always looking for new ways to help those who were suffering in the shadows. He had no patience with what is termed the arithmetic of suffering. Every life counted. He wasn’t seeking thanks or praise – he wanted to do something that would make a difference. Richard recognized moments and he was good at turning them into opportunities.

In his Narnia books, C.S. Lewis writes about the old magic, the deep magic. For me that allure, that enchantment, has always been found in the poetic beauty of the prayer book. The familiar words and phrases swirl in the air and bind us closer together especially in times of trouble. The words point us in the direction of a grandeur more profound, more exhilarating than anything we could begin to imagine. We sense the power and the all-encompassing love and we are drawn to it and to each other. Richard believed in that reality and he faced the future the way an adventurer faces the next trek into the unknown.

I will miss my friend. I will miss his honesty, his directness, his wry humor, his generous heart. Whatever form or shape the next phase of existence takes, I imagine Richard at the forefront absorbing every scintilla of the experience, reveling in the celestial strains of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, reunited with the people he loved best and waiting expectantly for those of us left behind.

My dear friends in Christ,

It is with gratitude and great joy I inform you that I have passed my Canonical Exams for the vocational diaconate and have been recommended to Bishop Rob for ordination.

This is by no means the end of my formation and discernment process. These two aspects of my daily life will always be a very vital and necessary part of my growth as I walk the path of servant Christ ministry. Be assured that your prayers and love will also continue to form me in new ways of being Eucharist for those I meet along life's journey.



I continue to enjoy my present ministry with the Sisters of St. Anne and the Bethany House of Prayer. This month I am helping to lead the Thursday morning Contemplative Prayer Group. I am also growing to love the unspoken but ever present Contemplative atmosphere that fills the many gardens and spaces here in this place. I have also found this to be true of the energy of Hospitality that seeks to serve all who come to this place seeking rest and renewal.

“Bethany” as I call it has become a sustaining grace in my life. Often I join the Sisters for sung Evening Prayer and morning Eucharist. My work here is balanced with the rhythm of prayer and is rewarding beyond measure. Our monthly diaconal formation retreats here at Bethany follow this same natural flow. We all feel privileged to have this continuing presence in our lives.

My deepest appreciation to each one of you for the privilege to follow my sense of call to diaconal ministry and pray that you will continue to be a very present part of that ministry.

Epiphany Blessings,
Maryan Davis (candidate to the diaconate)

Stewardship: Gifts Both Ways

Do you regularly come to Grace Church? Do you take part in activities? How are you involved? Some people come regularly to Sunday services, or to morning prayer or centering prayer; some do all. Some are involved with committees; some regularly count weekly donations. Some do Outreach, some do Fellowship; some do New Horizons; some work with Property.

There are so many ways to be involved, and all are important for building the Grace Church community. Thank you to all for building community. What do you get from Grace Church? I get a sense of community and friendship. I feel welcome, appreciated, and comfortable. Thank you to all who help make Grace Church welcoming and comfortable.

In addition to your time and talent, do you also give some treasure? When you come to a service, or to work on a committee, or to take part in a fellowship activity, do you ever wonder who pays for the heat and light? If you don't give any money, please consider it. Everything that Grace Church is and does could not happen without those who support it financially. If all those who don't give financially, started to give as little as \$5 or \$10 or \$20 a week, we could balance our budget.

Think about it. And if you decide to contribute some treasure, it is very helpful to say how much you will be giving. We base our budget on what we expect to receive. Thank you again.

Dick Feren, Member of
Stewardship Committee

To my Grace Church Family: Many thanks for all your kindnesses (flowers, notes, cards, prayers, etc.) while I have been in the hospital and Rehab. I continue to get stronger and hope to be back in the swing of things in the near future. Dwight.

Mystery Buffs: ALERT!

Our collection of white linen table cloths has escaped from the church! Extensive searches have proved fruitless. Our theory is that they hitched a ride with a parishioner and are hiding out forgotten in a car trunk or laundry room. Please check and see if they are lurking in your home. Much appreciation for their capture and return, dirty or clean!

A note from the family of Richard Gesner

Dear Reverend Marjorie: On behalf of the family of Richard Gesner (and, I personally), we thank you for all you did in arranging and conducting a most sincere final service for him. You and your parishioners responded to our need for sympathy and support. Your response to our pastoral need was very much appreciated and will be ever a part of our last remembrance of Richard. Thank you.

Sincerely, George {Gesner}

A note of thanks from New Horizons:

“Dear Reverend Gerbracht-Stagnaro and our amazing friends at Grace Episcopal Church:

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I wish to thank you for your generous donation of food items in the last part of the year. We are truly grateful for your support.

Winter has finally come to New Hampshire, and now that the holiday season is behind us, we wish to thank you for your kindness, generosity and compassion as they are needed more than ever before. During the holidays, we distributed 1,250 Thanksgiving food baskets and over 1,350 Christmas food baskets were delivered to our clients in need. We continue to provide nutritious food to over 850 clients each month in our food pantry and continue to house even more clients during the cold winter months.

We are challenged to continue to do what we do in light of cuts in Federal, State and City grants. As we have mentioned before, the daily cost to operate New Horizons and Angie’s Shelter for Women is now \$3,500 a day. We are only able to provide critical services to our clients with your generous help.

Thank you for your support.

Warmly,

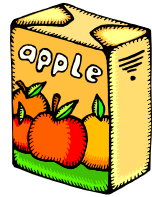
Charlie Sherman, Executive Director
Mary Silva, Food Service Manager”

11th Annual Dr. Seuss Breakfast

The Outreach Committee is sponsoring its 11th annual Dr. Seuss Breakfast on **Saturday, March 12 from 9 to 11 AM**. This is intended as an outreach activity to benefit children from several local elementary schools as well as from Grace Church. Activities are geared for children of kindergarten age to 3rd grade although all ages are welcome. Once again the Cat in the Hat will be present to meet our guests and to read stories. Krickey the Clown will perform with some "silly magic", interactive songs, and puppetry.



We need your time, talent, and treasure!
Could you contribute a bottle of apple juice or a dozen muffins?
Could you help supervise a craft project?
Could you help clean up after the event?
Sign up sheets are on the kiosk for these and other possible ways to help.



Tickets are free and can be obtained from members of the Outreach Committee or the church office.

There will also be canisters on the table at coffee hour during the month of February for monetary donations to help purchase supplies.

The Dr. Seuss Breakfast is a very popular event but can only be successful with your help.

If you have questions, contact Nancy-Ann Feren (603-627-2503; Nferen@comcast.net).



MILESTONES

Happy Birthday to our February birthday celebrants!

8	Maria Douglas	15	Paul Botana-Gumbs
12	Christine Anderson	17	Lucy Rhodes
	Lee Miller	20	Brent Stagnaro
	David Charlesworth	21	Karen Taylor Kimball
	Maureen Nagle	25	Rohan Cline
14	Debra Coakley	28	Ann Marvin
	Ed Doyle		
	Emma McIver		

If you don't see your birthday listed that means that we do not have it. Please call the office so that your special day can be acknowledged.

Watch over thy children, O Lord, as their days increase; bless and guide them wherever they may be. Strengthen them when they stand; comfort them when discouraged or sorrowful; raise them up if they fall; and in their hearts may thy peace which passeth understanding abide all the days of their lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, page 830

Other Milestones:

Baptism: Jeffrey McIver III – January 10, 2016

Marriage: Ashley Caron and Jason Harrison – December 31, 2015

Memorials: Richard Gesner – January 3, 2016

Note received from the Santa Fund:

Dear Ken, Marjorie, and our friends at Grace Church

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE Union Leader Santa Fund for The Salvation Army. As you know, this program is a success thanks to the generosity of individuals, businesses and organizations like yours. Thanks to you, the holiday will be better and brighter for many. All the best to you and yours this season and in 2016.

With sincere gratitude, Shannon [Sullivan, Public Relations Director, Union Leader]

Grace Episcopal Church

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Clergy

The Rev. Dr. Marjorie Gerbracht-Stagnaro, Rector

Vestry (through Jan 31, 2016)

Linda Heath, Warden
Nancy Johnson, Clerk
Mary Sargent, Warden
Ed High, Treasurer
Richard Feren, Assistant Treasurer

William Bochinski, Jason Carignan, Lauren Cline, Barbara Hermann, Ann Hewins, James Higgins, Miclena Linares, Jill Porter, Kevin von Braun

Staff

Mark Cleveland, Director of Music
Ken Grinnell, Organist
Carter Beck, Organist
Justin & Nicole Otto, Church School Coordinators
Marlene Thompson, Parish Administrator
Lyn Marino, Assistant Parish Administrator
Jill Porter, Bookkeeper
Emery Freethey, Sexton
Susan Senneville, Nursery Care Giver

Newsletter

Lauren Cline
Lauren6997@yahoo.com

Next Newsletter Deadline
February 15, 2016

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