

Watch or Pray? By Barbara Pitts, Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth

Beloved family, as you can imagine, I have mixed emotions as I bid you farewell. I feel very excited about the direction St. Matthew's is aiming, and I have a delightful sense of curiosity regarding my future work; at the same time, I can't easily imagine life without you. Some of you received me in this parish sixteen years ago – and have steadfastly loved, encouraged, and supported me. Others of you I first got to know when I was a Sunday school teacher – and you were three-year-olds! In that case, I supported and encouraged you; by now, the relationship has become one of mutual support. What fine young women and men you are.

And how many of you I have gotten to know through your children ... we have laughed and cried together over your children's antics, their luminous God-moments, and their painful dilemmas. You've also invited me to share some of your own secret joys and sorrows. I shall always treasure your love and trust in me.

It would take pages to name all the people who have been influential in my life here. I love you, and I thank you. I do want to name Joe Di Paola who has unequivocally believed in me, Susan Barnes who has dared to call me forth to a greater faith, and Merrill Wade, who has provided professional development of a caliber that has enabled some of my deepest spiritual growth.

I'd like to share an insight I was given years ago that I think is apropos to grappling with the idea of change, as St. Matthew's will be doing. I was told, "In a sermon, you can watch to see how the preacher is going to do, or you can pray the preacher does well." I would add, "We can watch to see how the leadership – clergy, vestry, and all – does, or we can pray they do well; and we can watch to see how St. Matthew's does in this time of transition, or we can pray it does well."

Do well: be faithful in knowing Christ and growing in Christ. Be still, listen to God. Study scripture. Read. Dialogue. Mid-twentieth century Quaker master Thomas Kelly prayed, "God, open thou my mind. Guide my thoughts where I dare not take them, but thou darest. Thy will be done." It – your life, your faith, this church – is not going to look like you may have ever imagined it would (nor was Messiah's life as anticipated, was it!). Trust God for these leaders and for this church; build confidence in God for your own life and faith formation

Pitch in: Be faithful in being here. Be faithful in bringing your children. Join a youth community. Join an adult community. Provide a way for your own children to develop a community here. Contribute; serve each other. Share Christ's love.

So, how will I spend my summer? Much of my summer will be devoted to my sons John and Jamie, whom some of you know. John, 29, will be married in Mexico City this August and will continue to live in Austin. Jamie, 25, will receive his Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Seminary in June, leading to an internship at *Sojourners* in Washington, D.C. In the midst of these celebrations, I have been invited to join my 87 and 90 year old aunts and my 85-year-old mother for a mid-July opera tour of Italy. Throughout the summer and time to come, I pray you do well.



Hi-Lights for Children's Sunday School

9:30

Level I: 3-yrs-Kinder After the Feast of Easter: These children will celebrate the empty tomb with a liturgy of the Light of Christ. The people who had walked in darkness received a great Light – the Light of Jesus, upon his birth. At his death that Light was extinguished, yet with his resurrection death was conquered for all time. Therefore the Light can nevermore be extinguished. Children conclude the regular school year with work that deepens their understanding of how we are invited into the very life of the Risen Light through our Baptisms.

Level II: 1st-3rd grades After the Feast of Easter: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again," is often referred to as "The Mystery of our Faith." And, indeed, it is! Our children spend time considering this mystery during May, as well as concluding the month working with the books of the Bible.

Level III: 4-5th grades Faith: Mirrored in Movies; Open House; Peace Village: On May 7 these children invite their parents and all interested parishioners to join them for an open house and journey through this past year. May 14 brings the questions "What should a Christian think about magic, wizardry, and sorcery?" and "What about the Love of Power versus the Power of Love?" using excerpts from *The Sorcerer's Stone*. This class will begin using "The Peace Village" during the final two weeks of May. Look for more information about this in your June issue of *The Word*.

Club 45 Shaving Cream War! Yes, you read it right! Our end of year party will take place from 4:30-6:00 PM on Sunday, May 21st.

10:30 Follows the Sunday lectionary, celebrating the risen life of Jesus Christ and preparing for Pentecost.

New in May at Sundays4YOUth

Welcome Patrick Sanders to *Faith-in-Action*, as our May 7 guest speaker/performer for Middle and High School students, in the Youth Bldg. Go to www.stmattsaustin.org > Sundays4YOUth for weekly details

Senior Warden's Report by Kevin McGillicuddy

The Vestry is in the process of addressing a number of deferred maintenance items at St. Matt's, based on a report received from the Buildings and Grounds Commission. These include a number of major projects with high priorities, such as replacement of lighting in the Sanctuary, replacement of heating and air conditioning units in the Sanctuary and lower floor, replacement of the Sanctuary roof, and improvement of campus drainage. We also have a "wish list" of items that B&G has recommended we address. It is likely that taking care of just the priority projects will cost in the neighborhood of \$250,000. These Capital projects are all outside of our normal Operations budget.

The good news is that our current financial position is very sound, due to the faithful pledging and giving of our members and due to our lack of any current debt. We also have a substantial amount of capital funds already in the bank. However, in order to accomplish all of the priority items in the next few months, we will likely be obtaining a line of credit against which we will draw the necessary funds.

Over the next few months I would also like the Vestry to start more actively to address our existing long-term campus completion plan, which dates back several years. The long-term plan includes expansion of the Day School building, replacement of the Youth building and increased parking, as well as other possible projects.

As the Church plans are developing, the St. Matthew's Day School has raised considerable monies towards paying for an expansion of the Education Building that would finalize their needs on the campus of St. Matthew's. If the Vestry and Diocese choose to approve this expansion, which would be funded entirely by the Day School, the Day School would have a library, new offices, a break room, a music room and a place for their motor skills classes. The library would also serve as a good meeting space for mid-size meetings for youth and adults. These additions would mean that they would use far less of the campus of St. Matthew's during the week.

Site completion has in the past taken a back seat to more immediate needs, but I believe that it is time to seriously consider moving forward with those plans. Whether the Vestry decides to undertake all or only some of these capital-intensive projects, we will need at some point to raise the necessary funds through a capital fund drive, or through a capital budget separate from our operating budget. Be assured that your Vestry and staff are attempting to be good stewards of all that we have been entrusted

Vaya con Dios, Barbara by Clarissa Vazquez

As we say thank you and farewell to Barbara Pitts in our own special ways, we remember all the wonderful gifts she has shared with the children and families of St. Matthew's. Barbara you will be missed!

With summer quickly approaching, exciting family events are in the process of being unveiled! Kathy Dugat has been asked to assist in the planning of these summer events and we are delighted that she can help us.

There will be a special reception for Barbara and we hope you will join us in recalling those great memories with her.



with, and I will be happy to discuss our developing plans with you at any time.

Conversations on Prayer by Fr. Jim Williams

I missed my time at the YMCA Fitness Center this week – again. Well, it's paid for, and I'm the one who loses. I know I'll get back to it, because I need to. The organization checks on new members, at least at first, but it's really up to me, whether I go or not. I do realize that if

missing becomes a pattern, then I am on my way out of the organization, as other things soak up that time in my daily or weekly pattern. Days can become weeks before I know it. I am the customer, the consumer, and my decision (non-decision) sets the tone for my participation – or not. I chuckled at the thought, "At least the Y is not hurt by my absence."

Then an entirely different thought intruded into my reflection. The Church and the Y – both in my life. The thought grew out of different conversations with people who struggle with their spiritual life, with maintaining a quiet time for prayer, with feeling that they do not see anything relevant for them to do in ministry; with the suspicion that they do not have an essential part in the life of the church. I began to realize that there is one thing common with many persons who are struggling – they are not regularly in worship, or are no longer attending as they once did. This observation is in no way judgmental – it is just an observed fact; it connects with my own experience.

Word and Sacrament. We all need this spiritual nourishment to the point that we almost forget how absolutely essential it is to our very identity. Without it, the spiritual life – which is my life itself – becomes attenuated, eroded, and faded. Before long I no longer realize how thin everything has become, everywhere in my life. Things seem out of focus, chronically anemic.

Let me say here that I also recognize the essential need for persons who have been highly engaged in ministry for a while and especially in leadership, to take a "Sabbatical" – to step back, regroup, replenish, even to heal. The irony is, and I know this personally, that there is a tendency to drop out, to step back from the worshiping community – to take a "vacation" from the one thing needful for restoration. Renewal is an ongoing need for us all, and is always rooted in reconnecting with Word and Sacrament, and with my life in prayer.

What goes on in Worship and how it is conducted is certainly about forms of liturgy, types of music, sermons, or anything else in our mutual efforts to worship together. But it's far more about us all, gathered into prayer, into responding to God's Word, into coming to the Lord's table, into praise and thanksgiving, which continually puts us back into perspective, and helps us restore the balance in our lives. What's really important comes back into focus. It is about where the arrow points – to God, not me.

When we come to the Lord's table "hungry," eager, open, and listening, God is always going to speak to our individual condition – through everything that goes on – including a word from a friend at the Peace, a line from a hymn, a phrase in a prayer, a thought while staring at the Rose window. We so easily forget the riches of what we miss when not present. And when we miss it often enough, like someone starving, we even lose our hunger.

St. Matthew's Day School Report

On April 6, following a hamburger supper and video of the day school children's activities, church members and day school parents gathered in the sanctuary to participate in a typical children's chapel service and hear special messages. Following are excerpts of the remarks given by Day School Board President, Crystal Edwards.

"I'm so pleased to be with my St. Matthew's brothers and sisters tonight. I would like to thank the Clergy and the Vestry for inviting us to address you on behalf of the Day School. Last year was my first as a St. Matthew's Day School parent, and it seemed that every week there was some new facet of the school I discovered and fell in love with. As my daughters grow up and become more independent, and as I grow older and crotchety, I find I often need the guidance of both parts of St. Matt's. My questions have ranged from "How do I teach my children God's Word?" to "Can anybody reassure me that this is just a phase she's going through so I don't lose my mind?" I'd like to point out that both of those questions have been answered, as well as the hundreds more I'm too embarrassed as a mother and supposedly educated individual to repeat aloud in public.

The Board of Trustees of St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School has been charged with the oversight of the school's budget, policies, and physical facilities. I'm happy to report the budget is healthy and that the physical facilities are up to the task of holding and educating nearly two hundred enthusiastic children. The Board has been blessed in leadership by Father Merrill Wade and director of the school, Pam Littlefield. Junior Warden Babs Clendenin, Vestry Representative on our Board, has been of immeasurable value to us as we try to increase our role in the life of the parish.

In the past year, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church refined its mission statement to read, "To Know Christ, Grow in Christ, and Share Christ's Love." You've all had the opportunity now to see what our chapel service is like. I have a secret for you: they're better during the week, when all the kids and teachers are here and the back of the sanctuary is lined with parents, grandparents and parishioners who often sing the songs and pray the prayers with more excitement than even the children. I believe our chapel services absolutely illustrate the school's dedication to the church's mission that we, indeed,

know Christ and grow in Christ. And how do we at the school share Christ's every morning, on this campus. I see parents going from a teacher or fellow parent. I see parents leaving and happy expressions on their faces. I see children with the respect for their individuality we generally only see given to adults.



love? I'm going to tell you a little bit of what I see every week, through difficult times hearing a loving and reassuring word the church office after meeting with Father Wade with calm blossoming under the care of teachers and staff who treat them

When I come in at 9:00 on Monday, I see children hugging one another, asking how the weekend went. It's cute - of course it's cute, and kids hug each other all of the time. But the way this particular hug is performed is like what I see on Sunday mornings before church. I hear the same things: "I thought about you and wondered how you were." "I prayed for you." "You're special to me."

Sharing Christ's love. It happens every minute of every day in this church, on this campus, in our school. Even the kids get it. I know each of our students takes it home, shares it with his own family, demonstrates it with his own friends outside of the school day. Think how many people that must reach, some of them perhaps unreachable by our ministries in any other way except there, right there, in the middle of a skinny-armed hug from a dusty and Band-Aided four year old.

In closing, I would like to tell you all how thankful I am for the support and generosity shown to the school from parishioners here at St. Matt's. You've given our school the opportunity to minister to the community around us. You've given us the best job in the world.



A Successful First by Babs Clendenin, Junior Warden

We need to thank our Day School staff, teachers, and, of course, the children for hosting a first----a first gathering of St. Matthew's Church and St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School on April 6, 2006.

The Day School personnel graciously and enthusiastically greeted all visitors. While the Holy Smokers served great hamburgers with all the trimmings, a video was shown for the purpose of introducing many to the exceptional advantages of our school. An example of this was a chapel service held in the Sanctuary and attended by the guests which enabled them to witness how services are conducted every Wednesday and Thursday at 9:15 a.m. St. Matthew's Mission statement "To Know Christ, Grow in Christ, and Share Christ's Love" was visible

Pam Littlefield, Director of the school and Crystal Edwards, president of the Board along with Layne Levine, church member and Dana Fallon non-church member explained pertinent aspects of the school and shared why they had chosen the St. Matthew's Day School for their children.

David Barrow, architect and Michael McCollum, Chairman of Building and Grounds Commission explained the proposed expansion plan for the school followed by a time for Q and A.

As Pam Littlefield stated, "It was definitely, a feel good evening" Definite plans are being made to build on these feelings.

(continued from Page 4)

Did anyone notice the gently ironic, yet plaintive comment by the Rector that we Episcopalians needed to consider the Holy Week liturgies through Easter to be "Holy Days of Obligation?" Was it perhaps that he longed for everyone, the whole Body, to participate in reliving the whole incredible story together? And don't forget, the Sunday after Easter is unofficially called "low Sunday," because it typically has the lowest attendance of the year. Why is this? Perhaps we Episcopalians need to reconsider our attitude and commitment to attendance in corporate worship – our ministry of presence – to God and one another.

And this whole line of thought pointed me to another part of the mystery, which goes to the very heart of the matter: not only do we suffer when we are not present, but so does the whole community of faith. "We are members one of another," Paul says. The whole Body is weakened by the absence of any. What you and I have to give, just by our presence, strengthens the Body – and strengthens us. Christ is present in us and through us. Again Paul, "We who are many are one Body, because we all share one bread, one cup."

Recovering and strengthening what it means to be the Body of Christ is a vital task for us all. The whole Body is hurt by our absence, as are we, individually. This is not the YMCA.

Peace, Jim+

Safeguarding God's Children

On Saturday May 13, 9-12, at St. Matthew's in B-18, Jeanne and Bob Langston will facilitate a session of Safeguarding God's Children. This training is recommended for all members of the parish, particularly those involved in ministry with children and youth. To register, download the form on-line: http://www.epicenter.org/edot/Safeguarding_God's_Children.asp?SnID=1688921122.

Sharing Christ's Love: St. Matthew's Outreach in Action

"Daddy, remember when we lived in the house..." by Amy Novak

Homelessness is a reality for hundreds of Austin families. The Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) is a way to help; one, two or three families at a time. Places of worship like St. Matthew's, that are members of the Network, provide food and housing to families as they seek affordable housing and resolve some of the issues that contributed to their housing instability.

Starting on Father's Day (June 18th), we will be hosting 3 families -- all of them with children, often young children -- for a few weeks. To support these families, we will need volunteers to help setup living spaces, to cook and serve meals, and to be gracious hosts. Evening hosts help with activities between dinner and bedtime. Overnight hosts stay on campus with the families through the night in case of an emergency. Volunteer sign-up will begin in late May.

All volunteers must have seen the IHN training video and Evening Hosts must have completed Safeguarding God's Children training. If you are interested in helping, or might be interested in helping, please contact Amy Novak (795-8089), Margaret Carpenter (345-7630) or Susan Barnes (345-8314 x 217) If you need training, see the banner just above this article.

New Orleans/Katrina Mission Trip by Vickie Blumhagen

The Outreach Commission is gathering a group from St. Matthew's to help with Hurricane Katrina recovery in St. Bernard Parish, New Orleans, June 10 to 17. Participants must be 16 or over. Currently, volunteers are housed in climate controlled Army tents that are single sexed and sleep 10 to 14 people. FEMA is presently funding this camp while Habitat is running it.

Volunteers are asked to arrive at the "tent city" by 7pm on Saturday, June 10. According to Map Quest, it is approximately 8 1/2 hours by car and just over 500 miles. On Sunday the 11th there would be an orientation at 1pm. The work week is Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm. Different jobs include raking trash, gutting houses, working in a soup kitchen, administrative work, etc. The jobs available depend on the need at the time. A school bus funded by local parishes takes volunteers to their job each day.

Meals and laundry are provided. There may be a \$5 per day optional fee to pay for propane and diesel to cook the meals. Transportation and spending money would be the only cost to volunteers. According to staff at St. Bernard Parish, it is only 30 minutes by car to the French Quarter and many volunteers spend their evenings stimulating the New Orleans economy!

For more information please check www.habitat-nola.org. Please contact Susan Robertson, srobertson44@austin.rr.com or Vickie Blumhagen, vblum@austin.rr.com by **May 15th if you are planning to go so we can have a definite number to give Habitat!** Your friends, neighbors, extended family, co-workers, or anyone else you want is welcome to go as well. If you are unable to go during this time, individuals and/or groups can sign up on-line for another week.

Faith in Action: West Austin Caregivers

West Austin Caregivers is a coalition of congregations whose goal is to offer a wide range of volunteer services to older adults within its community. During the month of May, information will be available following each of the Sunday morning services. This is a wonderful ministry that offers much both to those who receive and to those who give! You may contact *Gidget Fisher* @ 328-2088 or gid92get@yahoo if you have any questions.