

The Seventh Rectorship

Times of Change and Renewal in the Church

by *The Reverend John J. Bishop*
1990

Prelude: A Search Committee and a Sabbatical

I regard it a privilege to be able to offer some personal reflections on the twenty-three years I served as rector of the Parish of the Epiphany. These years form a remarkable period in the history of our church. The simple exercise of describing all that forms part of local church life today that was not present as I began my ministry in the parish is sufficient to illustrate this. Few periods in the history of the American Episcopal Church have seen as much change or been fraught with as much turbulence. Change and the turbulence change can create are therefore a dominant theme in this record of mission and ministry.

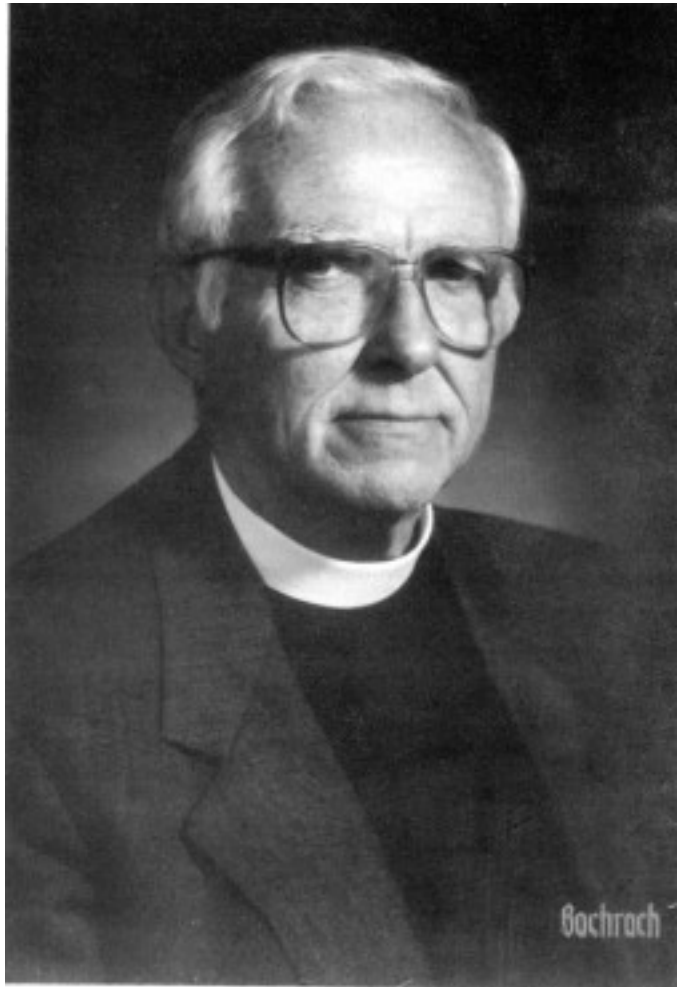
My thoughts go back to the time when it all began—the winter of 1966. In Winchester, a search committee was at work. It was charged with the responsibility of recommending to the Vestry the candidate to be chosen seventh rector of the parish. Across town in Westwood, I was completing my tenth year as rector of St. John's Church and was preparing for a four-month sabbatical at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge. I was invited to meet with the committee in January, and I recall a note that I received following that meeting. It did not close the door to further conversations, but its tone was such that it did not raise any false hopes. I was free to give undivided attention to the sabbatical. Those were the days of church expansion in the bustling young suburbs, and countless congregations in every denomination were engaged in building programs to accommodate the new membership. Critics decried the "edifice complex" of church people and looked askance at roadside billboards proclaiming that "church-going families are happy families," and "families that pray together stay together." At the same time, new ideas were being developed in the world of academic theology. Both the "Death of God" theologians and the authors of the "New Theology" came to prominence, and a growing thrust placed the highest priorities on the church's response to the issues of contemporary society. It was a time for reflection on two movements that affected church life: the ecumenical movement, which changed dramatically as the Second Vatican Council introduced Roman Catholic participation, and the civil rights move-

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ment, with Martin Luther King's doctrine of nonviolence a radical restatement of faith in action.

A weekend field trip to New York City for ten graduate fellows was the zenith of the sabbatical. I observed the ministry of the East Harlem Protestant Parish. The missionary, one of those lively souls whose personal commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ was unmistakable, spoke about the quality of the church's ministry in suburbia. Little did I realize that his prophetic words would become indelible guidelines in my own ministry. "The people with power are there. The people who can make the difference are there. I am worried about the church and what it is doing for youth. There are some dark clouds forming. I am worried about what the church is doing for women: the age of volunteerism is ending."

Shortly before the conclusion of the sabbatical, I was invited to meet again with the search committee in Winchester. In early May, the Vestry extended the call to be rector. In August I began my ministry, and on St. Matthew's Day, September 21, I was instituted formally as rector by the Ven. George Ekwall, Archdeacon of the Diocese, acting for the Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Anson Phelps Stokes, Jr. With this introduction completed, I turn to the task of chronicler, journal keeper, historian, or whatever one wishes to call the priest as narrator.



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Beginnings

I remember those initial months, filled with first impressions and with the task of establishing priorities for ministry. There were three factors in the way life at Epiphany was ordered that I came to respect early on. They have remained constant over the years. First is the weekly mailing or newsletter, *The Three Crowns*, an invaluable form of communication. Although I often have felt pain in meeting weekly deadlines, I appreciate it as a unique way of getting the church's story across.

Second is Adult Class—what an inadequate and often-threatening title that is—a legacy of the Episcopal Church's education program of the fifties, commonly known as "The Seabury Series." The Adult Class has provided a time for the weekly gathering of the faithful, for nurturing in the Faith, for listening to our God. It is a time for members to grow in self-understanding and in their roles as ministers and servants of their Lord. Take away Adult Class, and the nerve center of the Epiphany community is destroyed.

The third factor I have honored is the role of the wardens. The incumbent wardens informed me at the very beginning that it was an Epiphany custom for the rector to meet monthly with the wardens to review the life of the parish and to set the agenda for the Vestry. In addition, I was assured that a warden would be on duty every Sunday, and, if ever that were not possible, an appropriate substitute (usually a former warden) would be present. That quality of leadership, of faithfulness and loyalty, is one of the hallmarks of parish life. The wardens are present, representing the people, leading, always available to the clergy for counsel, advice, and feedback.

There were two highlights in the first year. In the fall there was a series of house meetings at the rectory. Women of Epiphany joined with the new rector and his wife in providing hospitality for twenty-two evenings. These were informal gatherings to which all in the parish were invited. The guest log listed 500 signatures, and number 500 was Donald Wilkins, beloved sexton of the parish. The theme was "getting to know you," and that we did. Here were the beginnings of a rich pastoral ministry:

In the spring, another event, known to the town as METCO, became an issue in community life. METCO (Metropolitan Education Training Council) is an enrichment program in which minority children in the city are bused to suburban schools. Several Boston suburbs had become partners in the program, and the local school committee voted that Winchester should follow suit. The committee vote set off a controversy that divided citizens and parishioners. Those on either side of the issue formed political action groups: NOW, Neighbors For an Open Winchester, and VOW, the Voice of Winchester. The depth and tragedy of the town's division was reflected by the decision of several proponents and opponents to sell their homes and relocate. Both sides, obviously for different reasons, claimed that the town was an "unhealthy" and "dangerous" place in which to raise a family. The controversy continued for over a year. Several town meetings and countless

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informal gatherings led eventually to a public referendum. Although in the end a small majority favored METCO, the METCO board in Boston rejected any and all proposals coming from the town, declaring that the climate in the town would provide unfavorable learning conditions for minority children.

The role the clergy of the community played throughout the METCO crisis is not to be minimized. The now defunct Ministers' Alliance, composed of the pastors of the Protestant churches, was succeeded by the Winchester Ecumenical Association, as Roman Catholic clergy, reflecting the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, joined with their professional colleagues in Protestant churches. The Rt. Rev. Joseph A. Lyons, pastor of the new Roman Catholic parish, St. Eulalia's (organized in 1966), the Rev. Richard Diehl, assistant at the First Congregational Church, and I—all relatively new in the community—urged the clergy to support the school committee's decision and address the issue of racism. The Rev. Dr. Robert Storer, beloved pastor of the Winchester Unitarian Church, became spokesperson for the group in town meeting. In and through all this a new ecumenical spirit became a reality in community life.

Days of Crisis and Change

Before we were able to assimilate the METCO crisis in parish life and reflect on its meaning for us, another crisis of far greater proportions hit in the fall of 1967. Parish clergy became involved in the peace movement and the nationwide protest against our country's involvement in the Vietnam War. Our local conflict, known as "the draft card crisis," began in October, when the Rev. Michael Jupin, who had been appointed assistant to the rector earlier in the summer, turned in his draft card at a peace demonstration. The demonstration, held in Boston's Arlington Street Church, was led by national celebrities Dr. Benjamin Spock and Rev. William Sloane Coffin. At the outset, the act was viewed by some as insignificant because Mr. Jupin was an ordained person and as such enjoyed a deferment from military service. The fact that the card was not burned but placed on an offering plate and turned over to government authorities meant that the parish assistant's name would be placed on a formal list of dissenters. The report of the event in *The Three Crowns* evoked the bitterest controversy in the eighty-year history of the parish, and Epiphany became a microcosm of life in American society in the late sixties. The wardens of the parish, Kenneth Colony and Admiral William Buracker, deserve the highest praise for their leadership. I am sure that, more often than not, they found themselves very much alone over the months that followed as they tried to keep lines of communication open and met with and counseled those on both sides. Regretfully, there are no diaries or journals available to support an accurate chronology of events. One can only cite some of those details reflected in the Vestry minutes, *The Three Crowns*, and the Register of Services. After that first report in the weekly mailing, the wardens met with me, and the inevitable question was asked: "Jack, this is very serious. In the event that things really get out of hand, and it is clear we have to get rid of Jupin, what do we do?"

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“You get rid of the rector,” was my reply. In the heat of that moment I probably did not fully appreciate what I had said. That, indeed, was what had to be said, for I not only agreed with the protest, but I also was ultimately responsible in the rector-assistant relationship. Although Admiral Buracker did not agree with my position, as an old Navy man he understood it, and later he spoke of its integrity. At that meeting, the wardens asked that first the clergy and then Bishop Stokes speak at services on the following Sundays. Following the presentation by the clergy, members gathered in an Adult Class led by the wardens. Each person present was invited to write a personal statement, and the wardens used these in an evaluation session with the clergy. Bishop Stokes’ sermon, preserved in parochial and diocesan archives, referred to our National Church’s position on civil disobedience and called for us all to bring forth the fruits of a ministry of reconciliation in parish life. After the Bishop’s visit, some members of the Vestry were ready to close the book on the “draft card crisis,” but the parish was far from that point.

Other events in national church life were added to the local agenda. Under the leadership of Presiding Bishop John E. Hines, the 1967 General Convention in Seattle adopted a radical statement of mission in what became known as the General Convention Special Program. Several million dollars were to go to community self-help organizations throughout the country that were committed to a ministry to the dispossessed, the poor and broken in our society.

At the same time, the Convention gave its approval for the trial use of new liturgies and for the continued development of a new prayer book. One Sunday a small green booklet with the new Eucharistic rite appeared in the pews. Several worshipers were alarmed, believing that the rector was introducing his own communion service. The imprint of a San Francisco publishing house, which appeared on the back cover, indicated that there was a bit more involved than the whim of a local parson. Those who were upset shook their heads, smiled, and, I am sure, walked away that day wondering (like the rector) what change was coming next.

Dissenters carried their signs of protest in the demonstrations of those days. Clergy soon learned that the members of the church had signs of protest as well: their pledge cards. In the 1967 canvass of the parish, pledges were cut or canceled in the amount of \$11,000, a decrease of fourteen percent of the total pledged in 1966. Again the leadership of the wardens was visible. One decided to announce publicly the amount of his pledge for the coming year and called on all to reaffirm their personal support. Budget discussions at the 1968 annual meeting were intense. Parishioners acted on Vestry recommendations to withhold full payment of the Diocesan quota, freeze salaries, and defer mortgage payments on the rectory. A proposal calling for fiscal responsibility was offered by a group of members. It featured the presentation of a series of dinners designed specifically to raise funds, not only to meet the mortgage payments, but also to go far beyond that and retire the en-

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tire \$37,000 mortgage. There was a MMMM (Monthly Meal for Mortgage Money) each month in parish life for over two years. In 1970, members rejoiced together at a mortgage burning, made possible by a corps of women and their remarkable imagination, energy and planning—not to mention superb cuisine. Call it all a miracle of the grace of God. A parish community survived, grew, and maintained a creative tension between the extremes of the radical and the reactionary, the liberal and the conservative, and, in doing so, knew and experienced at first hand a ministry of healing and reconciliation.

Mutual Ministry

One of the significant movements of renewal in the 1970s and 1980s grew from a restatement of the doctrine of ministry. In the Outline of the Faith that appears in the 1979 Prayer Book, there is the question, “Who are the ministers of the church?” and the answer, “The ministers of the church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.” The days of clericalism, when the chief function of the laity was to care for the prudential affairs of the parish (finances and property), slowly gave way to a new day of mutual ministry, when all those baptized in Christ, lay and ordained, assumed responsibility for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and knew ministry in every area of parish life. The Baptismal Covenant, in a sense, stands as a revolutionary document on which this new understanding of ministry is based. All the baptized, members one of another in the body of Christ, are the ministers. Nowhere has this been more clearly demonstrated in parish life than in the various expressions of two ministries: outreach and pastoral care.

If there was anyone significant point where this new expression started, it was at a Vestry conference in early 1972. Out of that summit meeting came the recognition of two important groups in the parish. One group called for a greater expenditure of energy in support of mission and ministry beyond the parish and the Winchester community, and the other affirmed the priority of a ministry of pastoral care and love for our own. Newly formed Outreach and Pastoral Care Committees raised up new priorities in parish life.

Outreach

The Outreach Committee set out to build bridges between city and suburb. Years ago, when the cry to support foreign missions was heard, detractors and critics would resist and bid the leadership of the church to concentrate on the “mess in our own backyard” before we sent gifts abroad. The urban crisis in American society exposed the greatest areas of need in our own backyard—the tragic cycle of poverty in which the poor and dispossessed were trapped by inadequate educational standards, poor housing, the inability to compete for good jobs, dependency on welfare, the breakdown of the family unit. What developed in parish outreach ministry over the years, however small and insignificant the contribution of one community of faith might be, touched on the different points of that insidious cycle. Members soon learned about the ministry of the Episcopal City Mission in our

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diocese and became a strong part of its support system. Parish participation in a tutoring program in Lynn in the late sixties was followed by a response to a new program in Roxbury. High school students volunteered to work with elementary school children in the city in a one-to-one relationship. The Outreach Committee enlisted the support of parents in transporting young people into the city for their weekly session. Although the program was initiated by the parish, it quickly became an interfaith ministry. By 1985, it had grown from a dozen or so committed high school students to some 40 to 50. Few outreach ministries have touched the lives of so many in city and suburb alike, and young people in one affluent suburb have been able to get a glimpse of what it is like to grow up in poverty.

In the 1974 Convention of the Diocese, our Bishop, the Rt. Rev. John M. Burgess, called on parishes to respond to the world food crisis. Parish delegates presented a plan to the Outreach Committee and the Vestry, and Epiphany's "Feed the Hungry" program was launched. The Vestry approved a regular third-Sunday-of-the-month offering of money for the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief and a collection of nonperishable foods for St. Stephen's Parish in Boston's South End. Three years later, the Outreach Committee recommended that the offerings of money be divided between St. Stephen's and the Presiding Bishop's Fund, and that the parish try to establish a more personal contact with members of the South End congregation. A parish member, Dr. Richard Kingsbury, was appointed by the Bishop to chair the special Diocesan Committee on St. Stephen's. In 1985, members gave \$25,000 to a special Diocesan fund to rehabilitate the church and parish house buildings on Shawmut Avenue. Far more important than all the gifts of food, clothing, Christmas gifts for children, and money have been the informal gatherings of the two congregations, the celebration of St. Stephen's Day in the city and the Advent and Pentecost festivals in Winchester.

A lay assistant on St. Stephen's staff was responsible for initiating another outreach ministry. "Saturday's Bread" was organized to provide one meal each week for the homeless. The meal is prepared and served by volunteers from congregations and civic-minded groups in the Greater Boston area. Over fifty members of the parish have participated in the program since its inception.

Another strong link in Epiphany's outreach has been the contribution of the Women of Epiphany. In addition to supporting the United Thank Offering, a ministry of our national church now in its second century of life, the Women of Epiphany have remained loyal to a policy that directs half of all receipts from the annual fair and the semi-annual rummage sales to outreach work in the community, diocese, nation, and world. Grants from the women have supported all outreach ministries of the parish and new community agencies designed to meet the needs of women in the city, Such as Harbor Me in East Boston.

The most recent development in the parish outreach program addresses the

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issue of affordable housing and the failure of our own community, along with the great majority of suburban communities, to become part of the solution to the housing crisis. A Housing Task Force, appointed by the Vestry, developed a recommendation that the Vestry place \$10,000 of endowed income with the Boston Community Loan Fund at a low rate of interest, to be used by custodians of the Fund in facilitating the development of low and moderate income housing stock in the city. On the local front, the Task Force recommended that the parish join with other congregations of the community in creating an interfaith housing corporation in the spring of 1988.

Outreach ministries find a people of God taking seriously the terms of their baptismal covenant: “to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself” and “to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” That is what has been at stake over the years. The call has been to heed the classic prophetic warning that “without vision, the people perish” and those more recent words that came out of the ecclesiastical councils of the sixties, “the church that lives to itself dies by itself.”

Pastoral Care

Claiming equal honors with the outreach has been the pastoral ministry of the parish. The prophetic and the pastoral go hand in hand; the two are interdependent. One feeds the other. Take away one, and the church suffers. Pastoral care in the parish brings forth an unlimited supply of remarkable human resources—an embarrassment of riches. Few parishes can claim the quality of commitment and service that has been evidenced by members of Epiphany. When I came to the parish in 1966, I found a newly formed group of women. They had one task: to keep in touch with those who were shut in and who no longer were able to be present when the parish community gathered for worship and informal activities. A life-line and a soul-feeding ministry at its best, Epiphany Visitors has been a vital force in parish life.

The Pastoral Services Committee of the Vestry, organized in 1972, developed significant educational programs on alcoholism, ministry to aging parents, death and dying, marriage and family life, and parent-teen relationships. It also claimed responsibility for welcoming new members, shepherding older members of the congregation, and convening the parish family for informal times. The Tandem Club, starting in the early sixties, provided a monthly dinner and social event that became an important time for members to be together, a time for building a sense of community. Its successor, Crown Club, eventually disappeared from the scene when the supply of enthusiastic volunteers to prepare the dinners decreased and other activities in the parish increased in popularity.

In 1983 a new group of lay visitors appeared. Its task is to reach out in many ways to those who are new and who want to know more about the parish, to those who are alone, to those who have suffered personal loss. Like the

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Epiphany Visitors, the Lay Visitors show the grace of God at work, a reality that a parish community praises and from which it grows.

I cannot move away from these reflections on pastoral ministry without reference to the role of the clergy. My personal training for ordination included the experience of growing up in a large parish where clergy were known for their pastoral calling and for their availability and visibility as pastors. My bishop never allowed his candidates to lose sight of this priority. Today parish life is different from what it was then. What we formerly referred to as routine parish calling has passed from the scene. The parish priest no longer embarks on an afternoon of parish calling and finds families at home. Many women have joined the work force and are out of the community during the day. Those who are present are busy transporting children to a host of extra-curricular activities or meeting the heavy demand for volunteer service. That leaves only evenings and weekends for parish calling. Despite all this, clergy of the parish have continued to value the opportunities, limited though they may be, to be with parishioners in their homes: listening, interpreting, discerning gifts, and helping people relate their faith to what is happening in their lives. In addition to home visits, clergy spend a considerable part of each week calling at the hospitals, administering the communion to the sick and shut-in, visiting those who are new, and responding to emergency and crisis situations. All this comes to mind when I use the phrase, “the romance of ministry,” to describe the work of a parish priest. No two days are ever the same, and one is summoned always to expect the unexpected.

Worship Of The Church

Anyone who sets foot inside the Church of the Epiphany is struck immediately by the beauty of the place. The first rector, the Rev. John Wallace Suter, was gifted in his understanding of aesthetics. His leadership included the ability to engage architects, artists, and artisans who knew how to create a place of worship. For its size and its place in community life the building is second to none. A friend visiting the rectory family exclaimed, “This is very church!” For the parish priest, one of the great joys of ministry here comes in the preparation and conduct of the services, be they the great festival celebrations, services on quiet summer Sundays, or a service marking a rite of passage in the life of a beloved member.

Little did any of us who were around in 1966 ever dream what the next twenty years would bring in the liturgical life of the Episcopal Church. Little did the clergy then appreciate what an awesome responsibility theirs would be in introducing the people of God to new forms of worship that would be incorporated in their final form in the 1979 Prayer Book and the 1982 Hymnal. Beginning with the initial experiment, the Liturgy for Trial Use of 1967, the church made its way through the Green Book, the Book of Authorized Services (affectionately called the “Zebra Book” for the brilliant green and yellow stripes on its cover), and finally the Blue Book. There are those who have referred to this period of church history as the “new refor-

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mation.” The old “high church”/“low church” distinctions for the most part passed from the scene. The laity enjoyed new roles in public worship. National and diocesan church leadership called for the establishment of a worship committee in every parish. Laity took on new roles, devising education programs, processing all the feedback on the new forms, advising clergy, planning special liturgies, and monitoring various liturgical ministries. Lectors read the lessons and lead the prayers of the people. Eucharistic ministers now administer the chalice in the communion services and are being trained to take the sacrament of communion to the sick, after the manner of the early Christian communities. The various liturgical ministries are no longer the special preserve of men. Beginning with the admission of girls as acolytes in 1968, women and men now share every liturgical role. It was in the fall of 1969 that members first were enlisted to administer the chalice in the Eucharist. A local administrative policy evolved, directing the clergy to suggest persons to serve in this role to the Liturgy Committee. The Committee then brings its recommendation to the Vestry. A nominee, once licensed by the bishop, serves for three years. This policy has enabled many members to serve as chalice bearers, rather than just a few. Clergy praise this ministry and see in its exercise the highest quality of commitment and sensitivity offered by the laity.

In the Parish of the Epiphany one does not talk about worship without reference to the ministry of music and the high standards maintained by organists and choristers. Over the years the music program has expanded to include three choirs, filling Thursday afternoons and evenings with rehearsals. There are at least two special music services every year and a summer concert series. Carl Fudge served as organist from 1965 through the spring of 1974. In his day the children’s choir, reflecting the baby boom following World War II, numbered over 50. It also was during his tenure that the parish resolved a controversy of some twenty years about the purchase and placement of a new organ. The Charles B. Fisk Company of Gloucester was contracted to build a two manual twelve-stop organ. A new balcony was built at the back of the Church to house both organ and choir.

Victoria Sirota became the organist in 1974. A brilliant musician, she served the parish for three years before resigning to assume a teaching position in a local independent school. John H. Corrie brought forth spirited participation by young people in the four years he was with the parish. Mary Beekman, a highly gifted choral conductor, followed him for a year before Laurence N. Berry joined the staff in 1983. Interest in the adult choir reached new heights under his direction, and his personal sensitivity to the Anglican tradition of church music became an important contribution to parish life.

Choir members score a record of faithful service. Many in the senior choir have participated for over twenty years. When asked what motivates them, some point to the group itself and the support system it provides, some see in the weekly rehearsals a time of recreation and a time when the human soul is fed, some are present because they enjoy singing with others, and some, I

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am sure, know that the Gospel of God is proclaimed with a voice of singing. Whatever be the case, the parish and its clergy are indebted to those who offer this liturgical leadership and who maintain the rich tradition of music of the Episcopal Church.

Education

The ministry of education is another place in parish life where lay leadership has made the difference. Here many of the successes of the seventies and eighties were the direct result of all that happened in the fifties and sixties, when our church invested human and financial resources to develop a national program of Christian Education. At that time, under the leadership of its rector, the Rev. Dr. John W. Ellison, and his associate, the Rev. Dr. Charles E. Batten, the parish became a center of testing and training and a place where the new church's teaching series operated at its very best. There were four basic priorities required if a parish was going to succeed: the establishment of a family service, the provision of a fifty-minute class period for children, the creation of a leadership core of concerned persons developed through parish life conferences, and an on-going program in adult education. Epiphany had all these in place.

I already have spoken of the value of Adult Class. If I were to cite the one unique feature of parish life for almost a quarter of a century, I would point to what happens on Sunday morning through the active season in the informal setting of Hadley Hall. Nothing else has demanded the quality of preparation that the adult education ministry has demanded. Many members have been involved in designing and leading the programs. It was here that the parish was introduced to the new liturgies of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. It is here that members have grown in their understanding of the mission and ministry of our parish and of the Episcopal Church. The various outreach ministries that the parish has supported enthusiastically and the concerns and issues of pastoral ministry have formed the agenda for Adult Class programs. Winning a positive response have been Lenten programs on the life of Christ, the Fourth Gospel, the Meaning of the Eucharist, and fall programs that involved all ages in a Bible study of Genesis and Exodus.

Especially popular have been the mini-courses offered each year in the Epiphany season, normally an "off-season" in parish life, when winter holidays in the sun or on the ski slopes offer attractive alternatives to worship services. Yet parishioners support this annual educational event with well over a hundred taking part in the five courses. Parochial structures, committees and commissions, programs and activities come and go, but that which enjoys the unpretentious title of "Adult Class" continues to stand at the center of parish life. It is here where people meet each other on deeper levels and where honesty and openness in discussions of faith issues lead to the creation of trust relationships, to new understandings, to new life, and to the building of a rich sense of community.

Growing out of this unusual commitment to adult education has been the

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program for children and young people. Following the fifties and sixties, when parish facilities were taxed to the limit to accommodate the “baby boom,” we moved through a period marked by experimentation and change in curriculum development. The Seabury Series, in which so much had been invested by our national church, proved wanting, especially in its social content and in its limited adaptability. In this period Protestant churches found themselves cooperating in a new way to create educational material that all could use. New approaches in the Roman Catholic Church, all the result of Vatican II, produced educational resources that could be used in the parish program. This was particularly true of curriculum materials on the Eucharist, as the parish responded to another issue of renewal and admitted children to the communion before confirmation. Now, as we move into the nineties, we continue to struggle with the perennial issues that surround the religious education of children. Curriculum materials are a potpourri at best. What successes we have enjoyed, and in recent years there have been many, may be attributed to the ministry of a faithful company of people, mostly parents concerned about their own children’s religious development.

“What about the young people?” “What are you doing for them? They are the church of tomorrow. You’d better not forget that.” In response to these oft-repeated comments, there have been various expressions of ministry for junior and senior high young people over the years. In my first years as rector, I remember questioning why the Epiphany still referred to its youth ministry as “the YPF” (Young People’s Fellowship). Some ten years earlier, our national and diocesan leadership had employed the initials EYC (Episcopal Young Churchmen) for youth ministry. “Episcopal Young Churchmen” proved to be a grossly inadequate title in the wake of the women’s movement of the seventies, and hindsight suggests that the persistence of parish young people in the sixties carried a prophetic tone. YPF it remains as the curtain falls on the twentieth century.

When I reflect on youth ministry, I recall especially the sub-culture that evolved in the Vietnam War days when drugs—from marijuana to LSD, all the “uppers” and “downers”—sadly claimed positions of prominence in our culture. The interfaith ministry, with other community agencies, developed excellent educational drug programs for young people. The most effective of these, “Concern” involved young people in senior high school teaching children in the elementary grades and junior high school. I recall a dark day in community and national life when Winchester High School students stayed out of school to protest the shooting of students at Kent State, and clergy of the Ecumenical Association were asked to come to the school and be present with them. At the Parish of the Epiphany, the Garret Coffee House, operating on weekend evenings for some twenty months from 1969 to 1971, won mixed reviews in the wider community, but its value as a place for many young people to be together and in touch with some sources of support and help could not be underestimated.

Opportunities to serve others became key ingredients in youth ministry. It

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was in the late sixties that Winchester High School students first became involved in an interfaith tutoring program. Others formed a group that went into the South End every Saturday to participate in a program of rehabilitating houses for low-income occupancy. It also was during these times that two men indicated their intention to enter the ordained ministry of the church. The Rev. John B. Chane now serves as rector of St. Mark's Church in Southborough, Massachusetts, and the Rev. Frederick B. Thayer is rector of Christ Church, Forest Hills, New York. If you ask YPF alumni what they remember most, they invariably tell about their experiences on retreats. For them these events provided the indelible moments of high school days, times to be away from home with friends and colleagues. For the clergy, these were significant opportunities to wrestle with questions of faith and personal issues.

Honoring a high priority for youth ministry has meant reserving the role of acolyte for junior and senior high young people. There is a high school choir. Since the early seventies, three youth representatives have served on the Vestry. There are Sunday morning classes for young people, in addition to YPF on Sunday evenings and informal programs for those in junior high.

The Role of Women

If one were to ask what was the most significant change in the life of the Episcopal Church during the years I served as rector, I am sure that the answer would be the role of women. Women always have served in parishes and, for the most part, have kept them strong and vibrant. Beginning at the altar, they have offered loyal and faithful ministries as members of the altar guild. More often than not, they have been the teachers and leaders of children and young people. The parish suppers, the church fairs and rummage sales, food sales, and other money-raising ventures are sources of energy that have maintained many small congregations and more than a few larger ones. Yet it was not until the fifties that women began to move into positions of power, serving on parish vestries and as delegates to the Diocesan and General Conventions. In 1953 Marion Grush became the first woman to be elected to the Vestry of the Epiphany. It is significant to note that it was over thirty years later, after the church had approved the ordination of women in 1976, that a woman—Constance Marshall—was elected to the office of warden. As the final decade of the century begins, women participate fully in all aspects of parish life. There have been those occasional Sundays in recent years when all participants responsible for the conduct of the church's worship have been women. It was helpful to be able to remind any who may have been bothered or upset by this relatively recent phenomenon that for the preceding nineteen centuries the reverse had been true.

The parish has claimed a place as an early advocate of the ordination of women. I served as clerical deputy to the 1973 General Convention, at which our church said "no" temporarily to the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate. It was clear that those in favor of women's

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ordination would not stand idly by until the next convention. At Epiphany that fall, a Sunday morning Adult Class indicated where the parish stood on this issue. In answer to the question, “Had you been a delegate at the Convention, how would you have voted on the ordination issue?” over 90 persons present said “Yes,” and a half-dozen replied in the negative. Later in the winter a chance meeting with Jeanne Sproat became the first step in an exciting process. I invited her to join the staff as a pastoral associate. A year later in June, 1975, Bishop Burgess ordained her to the diaconate in a glorious service at Epiphany. In June, 1976, the Vestry voted to add her to the staff as full-time ordained assistant. At the time the vote was taken, there was no guarantee that the General Convention due to meet in the fall would give consent to the ordination of women. Failure to do so would have left the parish with one priest on the staff (the rector) and the Vestry with the responsibility to provide additional staffing. Any concern or fear over this evaporated when the 1976 General Convention in Minneapolis gave a strong, hearty approval to the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate. January 15, 1977, became an unique moment in local church history when the first woman was ordained to the priesthood in the Diocese of Massachusetts. She was our assistant, the Rev. Jeanne Sproat. The Bishop was the Rt. Rev. John B. Coburn. The preacher was the Rev. Carol Anderson. The place was the Parish of the Epiphany, and a people of God responded with joy and thanksgiving and were rightfully proud of their part in the making of the day.

Ms. Sproat served as assistant to the rector until 1980, when Bishop Coburn appointed her canon pastor at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston. The Rev. Rachele Birnbaum succeeded her. In 1986, the Rev. Jane S. Gould became the third woman to serve as assistant in the parish.

Another high point in parochial leadership came in 1988 when Bishop David E. Johnson appointed me to serve as co-chair of the Nominating Committee for the Election of a Suffragan Bishop. From the very outset of its work, it was clear that members of that diocesan committee would nominate at least one woman. Parish delegates to the special convention of the diocese in September, 1988, were among those who supported the election of the Rev. Barbara C. Harris, the first woman to be chosen bishop in the Anglican Communion. We rejoiced and gave thanks with her and some 8,000 others at the memorable Consecration service on February 11, 1989, in Boston’s Hynes Auditorium.

The Staff of the Parish

The record of these years is incomplete if it fails to praise the work of the professional staff. My personal preference has been to enlist as assisting clergy men and women who are completing their formal training and beginning their ordained ministry. Epiphany has been a teaching parish in the very best sense—a place where young clergy learn and grow, make their share of mistakes, and enjoy early successes as well. When I think of those who have

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served as assistants, I think of their rich diversity of gifts, their faithfulness and their loyalty, their sense of dedication, their vision of the church and its mission. The Rev. J. Michael Jupin, the Rev. Charles L. Hoffman, the Rev. Jurgen W. Lias, the Rev. M. Jeanne Sproat, the Rev. Rachelle Birnbaum, the Rev. Robert S. Goldsmith, the Rev. Jane S. Gould, the Rev. Richard C. Witt, and the Rev. Mark B. Cyr served as assistants while I was rector.

The one experienced priest to serve as assistant was the Rev. Ralph B. Putney, Associate Rector for twenty years, from 1958 to 1978. Hailed appropriately as “Epiphany’s hardy perennial,” he was present as pastor, friend and healer to many and, perhaps most important, as enabler and instrument of God’s grace in days of change. In his late seventies, he sought to understand the new liturgies of the church and to celebrate them with the same dignity and conviction he brought to his leadership of the traditional forms. That October Sunday in 1978 when he and his wife, Mary, bade their thank-yous and good-byes, was one that will live forever in the hearts of those of us who knew and loved them and received so much from them.

In addition to the succession of young assistants and Mr. Putney, the Rev. Ralph B. Macy served as an interim in the winter and spring of 1972, and the Rt. Rev. Morris F. “Ben” Arnold, Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese from 1972 to 1982, began his retirement as an associate on the parish staff. It is interesting and, at times, entertaining to listen to parishioners reflect on these various ministries and to tell how these ordained persons touched their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

The parish also has been a training center for the field educational program of the Episcopal Divinity School. In my first years as rector, I qualified as a field education supervisor at EDS, and each fall over the years, one or two students were assigned to work in the parish. We claimed an even closer tie to the school when the Rev. George I. Hunter, Jr., a member of the parish, was appointed to the faculty as Director of Field Education and Professor of Pastoral Theology. As this program grew, members of the parish joined with me in the supervisory task. Students’ assignments included working with young people and in the church school, planning and conducting the services of the church, parish calling, and serving on various committees.

Another invaluable role on the staff has been that of the parish secretary. Jessie Salter served for over twenty years under two rectors from 1958 to 1980. Susan O’Toole was with us for ten years. Both brought unique gifts—incredible patience being among them—to the task of administering the daily life of the parish and being present for so many. Dorothy White joined the staff during my final months and maintained the quality of work in the office. From time to time, others assisted: Marjorie Merriam, Marjorie Moore, Mary Macy, and Constance Pappas. I once heard it said that three people know the rector best—spouse, secretary, and successor. That assessment probably stands as a fair appraisal in Epiphany’s experience.

I already have referred to the role of the organist in parish life. Let me add

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here that in the second half of my ministry, the organist assumed a key role in staff work. Laurence Berry's part in introducing the 1980 Hymnal is one illustration of this that comes immediately to mind.

Very few things happen at the Epiphany without the help and the leadership of the sexton. He is responsible for the general maintenance of the property, an almost impossible assignment in itself. His presence and his labor at parish activities and celebrations are necessities. Donald Wilkins always will claim a special place in the oral history of the parish. Each member who knew him and had occasion to work with him has her or his own story to tell. All remember with affection his wit and wisdom, salted with that Maine accent. Al Coffelt, Norman King, Leonard LaRue, and Michael McGah assisted over the years, and, in my final years in the parish, Frank Muraco and Fred Benson signaled the beginning of a new era in the care of parish property. One member's assessment—"they're spoiling us"—became an accurate tribute to them and their work. No rector can have an effective ministry without the support of a strong staff. I have been most fortunate over the years to have had just that and to be able to say that it has been fun—for the most part, that is—working with all these people and facing together the demands that a parish like the Epiphany makes.

Postlude

I choose to conclude this personal commentary with some remarks on our stewardship as a people of God, and with a few observations about rectory life. I am convinced that how we perform as disciples and stewards of God's grace is the ultimate measure of effective ministry in a suburban community. It goes without saying that we are among the "haves" of this world, members of the "overclass" in society. Men and women of this parish have easy access to the corridors of power; indeed, some are frequent inhabitants of them. We are blessed beyond measure with innumerable gifts. I think of the oft-repeated saying, "Those to whom much is given, much will be required." That always has been true for the covenanted people of God. The record of our stewardship has been a reasonably good one, filled with its ups and downs. There was the year of the draft card crisis, when the parish lost some \$11,000 in pledges. That was 1967. There was a year in the seventies when the wardens, reviewing the financial resources of the parish, were alarmed to discover that five families were responsible for fifteen percent of the annual pledged income. Out of that discovery came a radical turn to anew concept of stewardship, the doctrine of proportional giving. In 1967 pledges stood at \$78,000. In the late eighties, they totaled around \$245,000. Yet, given inflation and increases in the cost of living, these figures are not very impressive. They represent one of the glaring weaknesses in an otherwise strong and deeply committed community of faith. Two Biblical images have remained with me throughout my ministry. One is that terse teaching that has been proved right again and again, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The other speaks especially to us in suburban America. It features the rich young man conversing with Jesus, hearing what he had to

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say about how he should handle his possessions and “going away sorrowful”—literally leaving Jesus behind him in the dust. Suffice it to say that we always are going to be caught up in that struggle between what is and what ought to be. We always are going to be dependent on that amazing grace to help us find the answers.



Ready for the Centennial Banquet, April 8, 1988

Stewardship ultimately has to do with the way we live with one another. Nowhere have I felt this more than I have in my own marriage and in the task Betsy and I have shared in parenting four children. As a priest in Christ’s Church, I am reminded of a question I answered on the day of my ordination. “Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your own selves and your families, according to the Doctrine of Christ; and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lieth, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?” That was the way it read in the 1928 Prayer Book. Betsy and I have tried to take these things seriously. The task has been to achieve that delicate balance. Sometimes living in a rectory is like living in the proverbial fish bowl. There always are limitations on your privacy. Somehow that never has bothered us. With our children we have tried to avoid incurring that judgment you often hear: “I got too much religion as a child.” Church attendance on Sunday morning was not negotiable; as long as they were in school and at home, the Bishop four would join others at the Parish of the Epiphany. They were free, however, to say “yes” or “no” to other activities at church—acolyting, singing in the choir, taking part in youth ministry. The evening meal each day and lunch on Sunday were prime times for

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the family to be together. Be it tuna fish casserole or “Sunday’s chicken,” the family table provided quality time. The greatest dividend of rectory life came in the people who appeared there—members of the parish, guest speakers and preachers at church events, candidates for staff positions, civic leaders. There were many difficult moments in our early years, including harassing phone calls in the early morning hours and a time after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. when one of our children questioned seriously the safety and security of all clergy active in the Civil Rights Movement. In the seventies, when the parish sponsored a refugee from Southeast Asia, he lived at the rectory during his first three months in this country. I remember one summer evening when children were setting off fireworks around Wedge Pond and Ta Chi, understandably, feared that he was caught in the midst of another conflict. Then there was that other evening a few weeks later. Betsy and I were out and phoned to check in. Ta Chi, who by this time was adapting graciously to his new environment, answered, “Everything OK. No. 27 hit home run!” Maybe out of self-defense, he was watching the Red Sox on TV.

Looking back over the years, we can recount many wonderful moments, so many moments of grace rich in blessing. This was home. Betsy and I both lived in Winchester longer than any other place. This was the place where we saw our children live from childhood through their teenage years and on into adulthood. It always is going to claim a unique place in our hearts.

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So the curtain falls on twenty-three years of life and ministry we have had together in Christ’s church. We have lived through days of change and renewal, not all easy by any means, yet filled with so many good and wonderful times. It was the people that I met and worked with on all kinds of occasions that made the great difference. What remarkable gifts of the Spirit they possess! I am speaking of a parish community that has been blessed beyond compare. I am speaking of a company of men and women who are ready to take seriously their Baptismal Covenant. They are ready for ministry in the world.

I carry with me the memories of those precious moments of grace—being present with a people of God in all conditions of life, baptizing, marrying, burying, proclaiming the word and making Eucharist, serving and living for others in the world. Together we have been about the business of delivering a loyalty to Jesus, “the first born of all creation, the Head of the Church, and the author of our salvation.” And how paradoxical it was that in the midst of my last days in the parish and during those memorable and joyous celebrations of our life together, joy and thanksgiving were linked with sadness and suffering as we reached out to support and affirm an organist and choirmaster in the final hours of his ministry and life.

In and through all this, we are speaking of things eternal and of the things that endure, are we not? For them and for being a part of the journey in faith

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of so many, I count myself fortunate, exceedingly fortunate, and give thanks to Almighty God. *JJB*

