

## Dear Companions on the Way...

Having just attended the latest General Convention of the Episcopal Church, I have had the opportunity to observe and reflect on the big picture of the Episcopal Church. I heard the Archbishop of Canterbury speak to us, as well as all the other top leaders of the Episcopal Church. I have participated in the councils of the church at the highest level, and I have had the chance to “run with the big dogs” as I sometimes say. And though there was much about the experience that was gratifying and positive, there are some deep trends and issues that will require of us whom are leaders our full attention for years to come.

Most significantly, the Episcopal Church is declining in membership and average Sunday attendance (ASA). In the last year for which we have good data (2007) we declined by 1.76% in membership and even more in ASA, which continues a trend of some many years running. At the national level, the church is also experiencing a significant decline in the finances to fund our operations and mission. At the General Convention, we adopted a three-year budget of \$141 million, \$23 million less than the previous budget. With those cuts, 30 staff persons lost their jobs and future meetings and conventions will be significantly scaled back.

There are some who say that the decline is due to the theological and political conflict that the church has experienced, especially regarding our debate as to the place of gay and lesbian persons in the church. Indeed, we at St. Mark's saw a significant number (around 25 people) leave six years ago after the Episcopal Church consecrated Gene Robinson – a partnered gay priest – to be bishop of New Hampshire. Other similar exoduses have taken place around the diocese and around the church.

But a closer look at the numbers reveals some other trends, potentially even more troubling. I would suggest that the age of Episcopalians should be a concern for our leaders. Far more Episcopalians are older than the average age of people in general and far fewer are younger. Along with an increasingly aging church, we have a low birth rate, typical of our demographic of a well-educated, predominantly white population. We have more deaths than births by 19,000 per year (according to Dr. Kirk Hadaway, program officer for Congregational Research). Another trend is generational; younger people are less inclined to join an institution of any kind than their parents are.

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What is troubling about these trends is that they don't change with the absence of conflict, and worse, the conflict we've been experiencing has been a distraction that has kept us from seeing the deeper trends. Other churches are facing the same trends (as reported in the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*); the Presbyterian Church declined by almost 2.8% in 2007, Lutherans by 1.4% and Methodists by 0.8%. Even the Southern Baptists have declined, as have Evangelicals and now the Roman Catholic Church reported a decline in 2007. Service clubs and Veteran's organizations are also seeing alarming declines in membership. Many of these other groups have not had the type of social or theological conflict that has been part of our more recent history.

These trends have been in my consciousness for some time – especially after serving for six years on the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church – but I'm finding myself encouraged about our future, especially with some of the things I heard and saw at General Convention.

It seems our leaders are awake to the challenges facing us. I was especially impressed by our Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefforts-Schori, who in her opening address to the convention, spoke very directly about our situation, calling it a crisis. But she then said "Crisis is always a remarkable opportunity" and "A crisis is time for decision-making, and a response cannot be avoided." She encouraged us to see "this crisis is an opportunity to refocus on what is most essential" and "The decision-making we face here is an opportunity to choose the directions of our journey into God's mission." And then in our actions, I believe we did indeed re-commit to a deeper sense of engagement in God's Mission.

I was also particularly impressed that Brian McLaren was chosen to give a sermon at one of the

large daily Eucharists. He is a leader in the "emergent church movement," author of a number of books and is a pastor of a large non-denominational church. He was one of the speakers at the emerging church conference in Albuquerque that 14 of us from St. Mark's attended in March.

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He pleaded with us to recommit to Evangelism, and asked "If Christian moderates and progressives seldom, if ever, share their faith with love and enthusiasm, what will their future be?" But he also spoke about challenges before us. One he identified is that we are "to faithfully work through this season of conflict without letting it form or deform [our] identity." But he also called us to resist being "tempted to lodge [our] identity in the saving of a beloved institution." Instead, he called us to choose an outward, missional focus; engaging in caring for those in need and in sharing our faith and love with others.

He called the church to align and retool the institution. I quoted McLaren the next day when I gave testimony about the church budget. I claimed that the Church is like G.M., with too many factories producing Hummers with lots of chrome and leather that nobody can afford. Our budget is full of special projects that respond to special interests that dioceses (the consumers) can no longer afford to fund.

We also need to retool and be better able to focus on Mission and Ministry, even as the institution adapts to change and limited resources. I believe our adopted budget does that.

One of the words that McLaren used captured my attention: “Redemptive Conversations.” We are, he says, to incite “redemptive conversations, asking good questions, helping people think about what they’re really seeking in life . . . and then it means inviting people to come and see . . . to come and experience . . . to join us on a journey of faith and mission and see what unfolds.”

An image someone used in one of our hearings at Convention was of an airplane that needs two wings to fly. Later, someone else picked up on that image and reminded us of Chuck Yeager, the first person to break the sound barrier. The claim was made that just before breaking the sound barrier, those first planes experienced terrifying turbulence, but upon breaking the sound barrier, the plane then flew smoothly. The person then claimed that the church has been going through turbulence but upon reaching greater clarity about our inclusiveness, we can expect more peace. That has been our experience at St. Mark’s. We are better focused on mission and are experiencing growth and vitality.

I’m grateful to be part of a wonderfully rich and historic institution – even with its troubles – but I’m also grateful to have gone to convention grounded in such a wonderful, healthy parish. We benefit by our connection to the wider communion, but the church benefits by our being part of it. As we learn new ways of being church and experience rapid change in the culture around us, we can help show the wider church ways of remaining faithful to our deep calling.

Shalom,



Andrew

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

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- August 7 . . . . . St. Mark’s day at  
Manna Soup Kitchen
- August 7 . . . . . Summer Concert
- August 9 . . . . . Loaves and Fishes Ingathering
- August 28–29 . . . Choir Retreat
- September 4 . . . . St. Mark’s day at  
Manna Soup Kitchen
- September 11–13 Parish Retreat

## William Eaton In Concert

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St. Mark’s is hosting a special summer concert. Join three-time Grammy Nominee William Eaton, virtuoso flutist Claudia Tulip, the incomparable violinist Allen Ames, fresh new talent: singer-songwriter Ty, and special guest Richard Cooke for an evening of original music and songs. This special concert will take place on Friday, August 7 at 7:00 p.m. at St. Mark’s. Advance tickets, available at the church, are \$10; \$12 at the door.

## Thinking of Joining the Choir?

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If you’re interested in joining St. Mark’s Choir, please set aside Friday evening, August 28, and all day Saturday, August 29. We begin each choir season with a retreat to help get a jump on the music. This year’s retreat will be in Durango. Please contact Scott at 247-1129, ext. 14 or via e-mail, [ScottH@StMarksDurango.com](mailto:ScottH@StMarksDurango.com), and let him know you are interested or for more information.

## Safe Church

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With recent news about children being at risk to sexual predators, you should know how we are committed to keeping your children safe at St. Mark's. St. Mark's has embraced the guidelines of the Safe Church program, in which the Diocese of Colorado sets forth strict guidelines for all Episcopal churches in the Diocese. These guidelines include the following measures that are in place to assure that our children are as safe as they can be. All of our teachers and staff who have contact with children are required to have taken the Safeguarding God's Children class. As part of the preparation for the class, we have developed a set of guidelines about making sure we have practices and safeguards in place. All teachers minister to children with other adults and are trained to notice behaviors that are inappropriate. And now, all staff, teachers and volunteers submit to background checks. The following are details about the specifics of our program.

- **Safeguarding God's Children Training:**

The Safeguarding God's Children program was designed by the Church Pension Group, and is aimed at preventing childhood sexual abuse. This curriculum is taught regularly throughout Colorado. It is generally a half-day training, and consists of two video presentations, information and discussion. All clergy, persons who regularly work with children or youth, persons who regularly supply transportation for children or youth, all employees or those adults whose living quarters are on the grounds of the church or school and all persons who supervise children or youth on overnight activities are required to attend the program. The Diocese recommends that Wardens and vestry members attend the program and all lay people are encouraged to attend as well.

- **Policies Packet:** The Episcopal Diocese of Colorado has strict policies and guidelines in place for all volunteers and workers who may work with children. Church workers are required to fill out an extensive application, which includes the request for several references, work history and volunteer history. The form includes a "Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children and Youth." The applicant must agree to adhere to each item in the Code of Conduct as well as agree to follow the Parish Policies set forth by the Diocese of Colorado. You can read and/or download the packet on the Diocesan website under the safe church link: [http://www.coloradodiocese.org/03\\_faithformation/safechurch.html#policies](http://www.coloradodiocese.org/03_faithformation/safechurch.html#policies).

- **Background Checks:** All persons who are required to participate in the Safeguarding God's Children program also must pass a background check. St. Mark's has a contract with a company that is recommended (and used) by the Diocese of Colorado. A standard application is completed by the applicant that includes an authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks including a criminal records check of all applicants, except Sunday school teachers, in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven years, and other states, if any, as determined by the church; a sexual offender registry check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven years; driving or motor vehicle records check if the person will be regularly transporting children or youth.

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- **Insurance Requirements:** Our insurance company requires that we have measures in place to help prevent improper conduct with children.

• **Trainers at St. Mark's:** In 2008 three people from St. Mark's, Terri Cooley, Peggy Glasco and Bob Seney were all trained to instruct the Safeguarding God's Children Program. Previously, trainers would come to Durango or members of St. Mark's would have to drive a significant distance to attend the half-day workshop. Both of these options have been limiting to our ability to offer trainings more conveniently and more frequently. Now, with having local leadership, not only can we offer the free workshop more often, we can make it more available to other Episcopal churches in our area, including Pagosa Springs, Mancos and Cortez.

## Habitat for Humanity Update – No August 22 Work Day

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We've been advertising all summer about the St. Mark's workday with Habitat for Humanity on August 22. It turns out that Habitat for Humanity has had a lot of extra hands working on the current project and they are just about finished, which means that there will be no work to do on the day we were scheduled to work. Next year they will schedule our work day for earlier in the project

## Loaves and Fishes Ingathering Sunday is August 9!

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Bring your groceries from the following list to St. Mark's and we'll bless the food and distribute it to area food pantries. Items needed:

- 2 cans of chili
- 2 pounds of rice
- 2 cans of tuna
- 2 cans of beef stew
- 2 pounds of dry beans
- 2 boxes of mac and cheese
- 1 box of powdered milk
- 1 jar of peanut butter
- 1 can of pasta sauce
- 2 cans of vegetables
- 2 cans of tomatoes
- 1 pound of pasta
- 1 box of instant oatmeal or 1 container oats
- 1 box of cereal
- 2 cans of fruit
- Healthy snacks
- Coffee and tea

Also toiletries such as toothpaste, toothbrush, shampoo, feminine products, bath tissue, soap, etc.

Thank you for any contribution you can make.

*Of note:* a family of five can eat for three days with the items on this list.

## Deadline for September Newsletter

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Deadline for the next issue is August 20. Submit information for the newsletter to Tonya Wales at 259-4166 or detwales@msn.com or contact Cheryl at CherylW@StMarksDurango.com.

## Parish Retreat September 11–13

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Come one, come all to the 2009 St. Mark's Parish Retreat September 11, 12, 13. Spend the weekend getting to know God, your friends, your family, and your fellow parishioners. We'll gather at Cross Bar X Ranch, which is southeast of Durango on Florida Mesa, to learn from Fran McKendree about "Walking in the Paths of Love."

We really encourage participation by everyone – families with children, youth, adults, seniors, whoever! The ranch offers great facilities and many activities – games, sports, ropes course, group swing, maybe even use of the lake. Some activities will

require sign-up and an extra fee, but it will be exciting, especially for young folks, and there will be plenty of free time to take in everything. Meals, organized by Cheryl in her fabulous style, will be included in the registration cost; lodging is extra. The dollar amounts are still being nailed down, but will be very affordable. For those who like a camping atmosphere, you can stay in one of the cabins or dorms; two or three families might share a cabin. Other folks may prefer to sleep in their own beds – the close location makes this perfectly feasible.

Our schedule currently looks like this (the exact times are still being determined):



### Friday, September 11

**Afternoon** (1:00 p.m. until dinner)

Arrival, registration, basketball, volleyball, other games

**Evening**

Dinner, teaching by Fran, program for children 6–12, nursery for 1–5 year olds

### Saturday, September 12

**Morning**

Breakfast, teaching, kids' program, nursery

**Afternoon**

Lunch, free time, ropes course etc., optional seminars and workshops presented by St. Mark's folks

**Evening**

Dinner, teaching, kids' program, nursery

### Sunday, September 13

**Morning**

Breakfast, Holy Eucharist with music by Fran

The Cross Bar X staff will lead the children's program; St. Mark's will provide the nursery. Teens will join the adult sessions (don't worry, with Fran, you'll never be bored). This will enable those who usually teach Godly Play, Sunday School, VBS, etc. to relax and be spiritually nurtured themselves!

We urge you to make this retreat your number-one priority for the weekend. Even if you have soccer, other sporting events, work, etc., we encourage you to participate as fully as you can. Come learn about "Walking in the Paths of Love" with your parish family, some of whom you may not have connected with before. This is also a good time to invite friends, neighbors, and others who may not normally attend a worship service. You don't want to miss this opportunity to be refreshed in body, mind and spirit.

**SING & MAKE  
MUSIC  
WITH ALL  
YOUR SOUL!**  
—Psalm 108

## **Use Your Musical Talents to the Glory of God**

*St. Mark's offers music ministry opportunities for everyone!*

### **St. Mark's Children's Choir**

Tuesdays from 4:00–5:00 p.m. beginning September 15

### **St. Mark's Choir**

The choir season begins with an in-town choir retreat August 28–29.

*If you are interested in attending, please let Scott know soon!*

Rehearsals are offered **Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m.** (beginning September 2)  
and **Saturdays at 9:30 a.m.** (beginning September 19)

*Come to one or both rehearsals. Youth and adults welcome!*

*No audition necessary; music reading helpful.*

### **Play an Instrument?**

Interested in purchasing a set of handbells for St. Mark's?

Please let Scott know!

**MUSIC**  
*at* **ST. MARK'S**  
**EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

## Calling All Artists, Poets, Songwriter/Composers and Volunteers!

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The fourth annual Sacred Arts Festival, celebrating artistic expressions of the sacred – representing any faith tradition – will be held from October 1–4. The festival includes a roundtable discussion and features art, poetry and music events. The festival is hosted by St. Mark's.

The 2009 festival opens with a benefit preview luncheon Thursday, October 1 at 11:30 a.m. and continues with a roundtable discussion at 7:00 p.m.



Friday, October 2 features the opening artists' reception for ICON from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. The exhibit continues through October 30. Submission drop-off is September 21.

Poetry for the Spirit features a poetry reading and poets' reception Saturday, October 3 at 7:00 p.m. Submission deadline is September 8.

Music for Sacred Spaces will showcase the work of songwriters, composers and arrangers who write sacred music for any faith tradition. A concert will be performed by the selected musicians on Sunday, October 4 at 2:00 p.m. Submission deadline is September 8.

Entry forms for all three categories of the festival are available online at [www.SacredArtsFestival.com](http://www.SacredArtsFestival.com), at St. Mark's Church or by calling the church at (970) 247-1129, extension 10 or 14. All categories will be juried. For more information call C. Scott Hagler, festival director, at (970) 247-1129, extension 14.

## Up With People Opportunity

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Up with People ([www.upwithpeople.org](http://www.upwithpeople.org)) is looking for Host families for their group this August 17–22. A major element of the Up with People program is living with local host families in the communities they visit. This is where the sharing of cultures and values really takes place. Over the last four decades, Up with People participants have interacted with nearly 500,000 families in 40 countries. Students will arrive in Durango on the evening of August 17 and depart the morning of August 22. As a host family we ask you to provide the following for your guest(s) during their visit: a place to sleep, most meals (lunches will mainly be provided by UWP), limited transportations and an overall safe and comfortable atmosphere to promote the sharing of customs and cultures. If you are interested in hosting, please contact Mark Whitaker at (303) 803-0337 or [mwhitaker@upwithpeople.org](mailto:mwhitaker@upwithpeople.org).

## Summer Adult Education

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Continuing through the summer at 9:15 a.m. in the downstairs conference room we will study Gospel-Based Discipleship. This is a form of Bible study based on the idea that when people engage with the good news of Jesus, transformation takes place. We will read the gospel for the day and engage in discussion about what we are hearing and how God is calling us through the text.