

At A Glance – Unconditional Welcome

by John Mennell

This is the time of year where hospitality and our willingness to open our hearts and our homes is almost a prerequisite of the season. It is the season of the Church year where we welcome the living God into our earthly realm.

This opportunity to welcome Jesus serves as a perfect occasion to talk about the Unconditional Welcome effort that is underway at Saint Michael's. In our call to grow and to bring others into relationship with Christ, we must start with a welcome that knows no bounds of gender, race, social status, sexual orientation or any other excuse that we use to not include others. We are to welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God as Paul says in Romans 15:7.

This powerful statement lies at the heart of our Christian experience and calling. To me, this feels like a clear urging to share this magnificent gift of Christ and Christ's love with all we meet. This can happen on the street and in the work place, but it is most important that we model this behavior within our walls.

The application of the Unconditional Welcome is something we can all participate in at St. Michael's. It can

be as simple as introducing yourself to someone who looks unfamiliar or simply admitting our own inability to remember the names of everyone we meet. We can wear nametags as often as possible and look for ways to invite and include others in all the joyous activities in our parish. Additionally, there are several programs being put in place to support the Unconditional Welcome in which you are encouraged to participate. We are in the process of identifying and training Greeters whose specific responsibility will be to identify and welcome those who have made the effort to join us for worship on Sunday. The Life at St. Michael's introductory program is designed to help those unfamiliar with us or the Episcopal Church get answers to some common questions. The First Tuesdays program (see cover) is an opportunity to welcome both new and old members and keep the community dialog about our growth alive and open.

Please contact John Mennell (jmennell@saintmichaelschurch.org) if you are interested in becoming a Greeter, need a new name tag or just want to know more about the Unconditional Welcome.

Deadline for January Messenger

Have an article or story idea for the January issue of *The Messenger*? Please forward to dmyers@saintmichaelschurch.org by Thursday, Dec. 9, 2004. All articles must be typed and sent electronically.

St. Michael's is Proud to Introduce its First High School Choir

Christmas is a time for family, gifts, being thankful and music!! Music at St. Michael's is proud to introduce its newest family member – The High School Choir – which will be making its debut at the Parish Holiday Celebration on Saturday, December 18. Under the direction of Rosalyn Peachey-Robinson, this group of 14 young men and women plan to sing everything from gospel to spirituals to traditional Anglican music.

“With more and more families choosing to remain in the city, there are more and more teenagers,” said Rosalyn Peachey-Robinson. “And this gives each teenager an opportunity to meet new friends and sing!”

The goal of the high school choir is for each singer to be able to sing in four-part harmony – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The Music at St. Michael's program wants to help develop singers who would eventually become a part of the adult choir but more importantly would become life-long singers.

Music at St. Michael's currently offers two children's choirs and two adult choirs. The two children choirs are the Angel Choir,

which is for children from kindergarten to second grade, and the St. Cecilia Choristers, which is an auditioned choir for third through eighth graders.

“The teenagers are delightful,” added Rosalyn. “Many of the children have been singing at St. Michael's and it was great to hear how their voices have developed. Tim Hamlin and James Kennedy's voices changed to singing tenor. Raymond

Robinson's voice grew into a second bass from a high soprano. Hallie Stotler is discovering that she loves to sing alto. And many of the girls can now sing soprano. A few of the boys whose voices haven't quite changed are enjoying alto as well. There is an abundance of sopranos but that is usually the way it is in most choirs and I'm thrilled

to have them. They are all very excited with the growth and development of their voices and I am very happy to go on the journey with them.”

The group has met a couple times so far this year. Rehearsals are every Sunday from 11:15 – 12:15 at St. Michael's Church. For those who are interested in auditioning for the high school choir, please contact Rosalyn.

Check out the
Debut of the
High School Choir
on December 18!

First Tuesdays with Father Brandt

On the First Tuesday of each month from 6:00 pm to 7:30 p.m., Father Brandt welcomes all parishioners to the rectory (next door to the Parish House on 99th Street) for light refreshments and conversation. Reviving the old tradition of opening the rectory to callers seemed a natural outgrowth of the unconditional welcome that is helping to shape the hospitality efforts at St. Michael's Church. St. Michael's is a growing parish where people come together to worship, socialize

and care for each other and these gatherings provide an opportunity to talk with the rector, staff members and other parishioners about our journey together in Christ. The church continues to grow and thrive, making it more and more important to have additional opportunities for people to come together.

The first “First Tuesday” will be held on Tuesday, December 7 at 6:00 pm.

Sunday School News

by Father Lew Johnson

Our winter season is in full swing! On November 21, nine members of the *Journey to Adulthood One* (J2A-1) group, Henry Barr, Nora Barr, Luke Bonner, Nicole Delany, Jeanette Green, Jamie Kennedy, Jessie King, Beth Jessica Lobasov, and Hallie Stotler, were our "Celebrities" in what is becoming a St. Michael's annual institution, the *Celebration of Manhood and Womanhood*.

Then on Sunday, November 28, we all gathered in the reception hall to make our Advent Wreaths! Thanks to Lauren Attinello and George Campbell for their help. We couldn't do it without you!

Our annual Christmas Pageant/Revue is coming up on Sunday, December 19 at 10:00 AM in the Upstairs Hall. We want to encourage you to mark this event in BOLD on your calendar. You will witness some of the most original, heart-warming expressions of the meaning of Christmas that you are ever likely to have the good fortune to see. We guarantee that your Christmas Spirit will be renewed!

A United Thank Offering Thank You

by Arlene E. Bullard, UTO Coordinator

The 2004 Fall Ingathering United Thank Offering totaled \$1500! My thanksgiving to the people of St. Michael's for your generosity.

Sisters of the Circle Retreat

by Ann Durell McCrory

The Sisters of the Circle had their bi-annual retreat in the Convent of St. Helena in Vails Gate, New York, November 12 to 14. Heaven seemed to bless the occasion by dropping two inches of white snow that covered everything except the roads and sidewalks! So we looked out on a landscape against which red autumn leaves were truly beautiful.

As always, the warmth inside the convent was spiritual and physical. We attended the four daily offices sung in the chapel as well as the Eucharist that follows Matins each morning. The officiating priest was Canon Mary Michael Simpson, a special friend of St. Michael's, so Heaven was operating for our benefit within as well as without.

The next Sisters of the Circle retreat will be March 4 - 6, 2005, and will be the convent's Lenten Retreat, a very special way in which to enhance one's spiritual life during this holy period. All women of the Parish are cordially invited to attend and can contact Ann Durell McCrory or Anne Stribling for details.

Mark Thy Calendar

Thursday, December 2: The Tiffany Consort is hosting a party to celebrate the release of their new CD. The group will perform selections from their new CD, *O Magnum Mysterium: Music for the Christmas Season*. At 7 pm in St. Michael's Hall at St. Michaels Church. Cost: FREE

Friday, December 3: 20s/30s Group City Wide Christmas Party. 7:30pm until whenever. In the atrium of St. James Episcopal Church at 865 Madison Ave, on the corner of 71st Street. Annual event with carol singing, and festivities. BYOB. Please bring Friends!! Cost: FREE

Sunday, December 5: St. Michael's annual vestry election and annual parish meeting.

Sunday, December 5: The Parish Choir and St. Michael's Choir join forces to present *Advent Lessons & Carols*. Beginning at 4:30 pm. The service is preceded by a recital of organ music for Advent given by Barbara Bruns, beginning at 4:00PM. Cost: FREE, an offering will be taken.

Tuesday, December 7: The Yale Schola Cantorum and Collegium Players, under the direction of former King's Singers baritone, Simon Carrington, will present Heinrich Biber: *Vesperae Longiores ac Breviores* (1693). At 8pm in St. Michael's Church. Cost: FREE

Tuesday, December 7: First Tuesdays Gathering. At 6:00 pm in the Rectory. Cost: FREE

Sunday, December 12: Episcopal Church Women (ECW) Christmas Craft Fair and Bake Sale. At the coffee hour following the 9:00 am and 11:15 am service.

Sunday, December 12: St. Michael's Choir, The Tiffany Consort, and Spiritus Collective Present *Claudio Monteverdi: The Vespers of 1610*. At 7 pm in St. Michael's Church. Cost: \$50/\$40 special senior seats/\$30 General Admission/\$20 Students & Seniors.

Thursday, December 16: Annual holiday decorating of the church. 6:00 - 8:00 pm.

Saturday, December 18: A Parish Holiday Celebration at 5:00 pm featuring guest trumpet soloist Samuel Martin and the children's choirs of St. Michael's. Community carol sing with the von Beckerath organ. Dinner Party to follow with entertainment from St. Michael's own Jeff Miller in the hall. Please bring a dish. Sign-up sheets on the bulletin board. Cost: FREE

Sunday, December 19: Angel Tree Party. 2:00 - 4:00 pm. St. Michael's Church, reception room. This party is when we give the children of Angel Tree their presents and show them we care: All are welcome. Cost: FREE, but please bring goodies to eat or a talent for entertaining our guests.

Sunday, December 19: Christmas Pageant/Revue, 10:00 am, Upstairs Hall at St. Michael's Church. Cost: FREE

Tuesday, December 21: Linda Russell and Company introduces Sing *We All Merrily*, a musical celebration of an 18th century Christmas. At 7:30 pm in St. Michael's Hall. Cost: \$15/\$10 Students & Seniors.

Friday, December 24: Two Christmas eve services at St. Michael's. The first is at 5:00 pm. The second is at 10:30 pm with a Festival Christmas Holy Communion. An organ and choral prelude begins at 10:00 pm.

Saturday, December 25: MERRY CHRISTMAS! Holy Communion at 10:00 am.

Sunday, December 26: Lessons and Carols for Christmas at 10:30 am. The typical 9:00 am and 11:15 am services have been combined into this 10:30 am service.

Saturday, January 1: HAPPY NEW YEAR! Holy Communion at 10:00 am.

Thursday, January 6: Volunteer's party. 6:00 - 7:30 pm at the Rector's Home.

* St. Michael's office will close at 12 noon on Christmas eve, Friday, December 24.

Seasons For Connecting

The Rev'd Stephen M. Bolle

Christmas thinking has been underway in our household since early November. That's a little early, even for us, but what's driving it is that we know our older daughter will be coming home to us from her new home in North Carolina and that she'll be here at least a week. On this good news her sister is now persistently reminding the whole family that we have to observe all the family traditions!', all being the operative word and including everything we've ever done more than once: everyone comes to Midnight Mass and then we have Christmas dinner at 1:30am when we all get home from church, etc., etc.

Adherence to family traditions is one important way in which we stay connected - to each other and to the families from which we have emerged. Why else would Great-grandma's Christmas cookie recipes be important? Why else would we tell and re-tell stories of family Christmases past?

But not everyone shares this experience of Christmas. For many it is a painful season, marked by neglect or abuse or worse; more like Mary and Joseph's experience - which wasn't even Christmas until their baby was born. Their trip was long, lonely and dangerous; their arrival marginalized to the cattle shed; their baby's birth onto a bed of straw. They had more than enough reason to be hurt and angry. But hurt and anger never figure into their story.

From that beginning Jesus goes on to be recognized as Savior of the whole world by those who come to believe in God through him. It seems to me that God is most mindful of the hurt, anger and despair rampant in the world - God's world - and God very deliberately chooses to enter it right there. How better to be able to take on and heal the world's pain than to be one with it? God's promise to the world is

that that's what God does, and will do, for the rest of time.

A primary community that God seeks to use in this healing work is the Church, that continuing, living Body of God's son: Jesus. The Church is designed to be a community of love that has the capacity to overcome pain, anger and separation with a new connectedness. This connectedness begins in the waters of Baptism and is sustained in the communion of the Lord's Table: here we have a father and a mother who will never leave or hurt us. It grows in the discovery of brothers and sisters we never knew we had until we find them next to us in church or over a cup of coffee after the service. This connectedness develops as we learn God's word in Bible study and in Faith-nurturing classes. It matures as we find ourselves drawn to be of service to others. It multiplies as our example draws others into God's community seeking the same blessed connection we find here.

St. Michael's Church is a community in which this 'connecting' is happening! Are you ready to take a next step in your journey here? Find out more about us in the 4-session 'Life at St. Michael's' course. A new one will start in January. Want to have a great evening out? Come to our Holiday Celebration on Saturday, December 18. Is it time to enter more deeply into this Body? If so, join the *EMMAUS: The Way of Faith* class to learn Christianity's family traditions! The *EMMAUS* class is St. Michael's way of preparing adults for Baptism, Confirmation and Reception into the Church - the next 15 session *EMMAUS* series begins Wednesday, January 26, 2005. A bonus of this course is that all participants are our guests for dinner at Wednesday's Bistro St. Michael! Talk about a growing family tradition...

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH (Episcopal)
225 West 99th Street,
at Amsterdam Ave.
New York, NY 10025
(T) 212.222.2700 (F) 212.678.5916
www.saintmichaelschurch.org

Clergy and Program Staff

The Reverend Canon George W. Brandt, Jr., *Rector*
The Reverend Stephen M. Bolle, *Associate Rector*
The Reverend Lewis C. Johnson, *Assisting Priest*
The Reverend Deacon Frank (Pete) Peterson
Nicholas J. White, *Organist and Choirmaster*
Barbara Bruns, *Associate Organist and Choirmaster*
Rosalyn Peachey Robinson, *Director, The Children's Choirs*

Marilyn Thompson, *Altar Guild & Saturday Kitchen Coordinator*
John A. Mennell, *Seminarian*
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Joe Finocchiaro, *Director of Stewardship*
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For questions or suggestions about the Messenger, please contact Doug Myers at dmyers@saintmichaelschurch.org or call 212.222.2700.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday

7:45 am Holy Communion
9:00 am Holy Communion, Hymns and Sermon
10:00 am Sunday School (preschool to 12th grade)
11:15 am Holy Communion, Hymns, and Sermon

Weekdays & Saturdays

7:15 am Chapel open for prayer
7:45 am Morning Prayer and Holy Communion
8:30 pm Office of Compline (Wednesdays)
12:00 pm Holy Communion and Healing (Thursdays)
9:00 am Morning Prayer and Holy Communion (Saturdays)

For the second "People of St. Michael's" article, the editor of The Messenger sat down with Deacon Pete Peterson to learn more about the man you see almost every Sunday. What you probably don't know is he used to work at a bank, is restoring a house in Connecticut and used to be a red head!

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: Miami. Left there when I was 18. Went into the Air Force for 4 years then attended Florida State University. Finished up at New York University at night after I got up here.

Q: How was the air force?

A: Great. I was only 18-19 and I got to see the Far East – Japan, Korea.

Q: Not to date you or anything but what was Japan and Korea like – in what year was it?

A: Mid-50s – after the Korean War. There was lots of war damage but people were recovering. I like to call them the peaceful years or the Eisenhower years between the Korean and Vietnam wars. Japan is an incredible culture that had rebuilt itself quickly – 10 years after the end of World War II. I remember the delicateness of the Japanese people – and their sensitivity to design and nature.

Q: How long have you been at St. Michael's?

A: Since 1998. I was ordained in May 2002. St. Michael's was the sponsoring parish.

Q: What did you do before joining the ministry?

A: Before entering the seminary, I was in human resources at The Bank of New York for 37 years and retired in 1997. I watched the organization grow from 1,000 to 20,000 employees – it was so great to be involved with its growth.

Q: When did you move to NY?

A: January 1961 – right out of the Everglades.

Q: What was your first impression of New York?

A: I was so impressed with New York. I stayed at the "Y" on 34th street when I first got here – where many young people go who don't have any money. I don't think the "Y" still offers rooms – my first morning here, I heard what I thought were bells – looked out my window and it was the snow plow going by. It was the first snow fall I'd seen.

Q: Where do you live now?

A: My friend, Roger, and I live on the Upper East Side and also have a house in the northwestern part of Connecticut – it's about a 3 1/2 hour trip from Manhattan.

Q: How long have you and Roger been together?

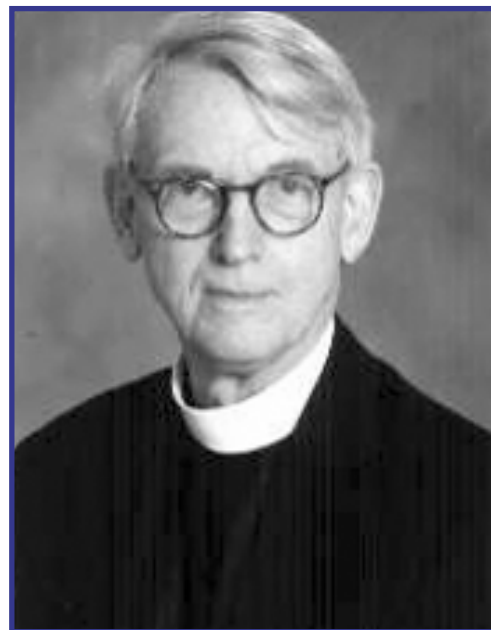
A: 22 years.

Q: What is your mission here?

A: Pastoral care and counseling which I love. Healing ministry is a major part of my work here. As the deacon, I have a major role in the liturgy proclaiming the Word. I like to preach and find sermon preparation a wonderful task. I always learn something.

Q: You also lead the healing support group and job seeking support group, tell me little about these?

A: Margaret Cotterell started the healing support group and we help people deal with chronic diseases through prayer, an exchange of ideas. The job seeking support group was started by Robert Clark – who is very skilled at helping people get a job – everything from resumes to interviews to networking.



Deacon Pete Peterson

Q: What is your favorite movie?

A: A great movie I saw recently was called Sideways – about these two friends and wine tasting and pinot noir – it's really funny. I like off-beat movies. My favorite movie of all time is Casablanca – I like anything with Ingrid Bergman in it.

Q: Favorite book?

A: Novels by Susan Howich – she's very spiritual – and Iris Murdoch. Favorite gospel is the gospel of John as well as the psalms. Jurgen Moltmann's books on theology have inspired me.

Q: Why the Gospel of John?

A: Because it lays the ground work for Christ as pre-existent with God meaning that Christ always existed before his birth. There was never a beginning to his life, he was always there. And we had the privilege of knowing Christ for those 30-some years he was on earth.

Q: What do you do in your free time?

A: Restore a house. It is an English arts & crafts house built in 1908 [what is an arts & crafts house I asked?] it is staccato, wood, stone with high sloping shingle roofs. Roger does most of it. I just do what I'm told. We bought it two years ago and it had the original wiring from 1908!

Q: If you could be any place in the world right now, where would you be?

A: Rome. Because of the layers of history. I think I must be Italian.

Q: Do you speak Italian or other languages?

A: Only enough Italian to get by...but my father was fluent in all romance languages. He was a Spanish language teacher in high school.

Q: What is your favorite season?

A: Summer – I like the water. But not the beach. The sun isn't good for someone with fair skin like mine. Before this set in [points to his head], I used to be red head.

My Dear People of St. Michael's...

This will be the second Christmas in which our military forces have been engaged in combat far from home. As wars always do, this conflict in the Middle East has begun to have profound effects on our country. It has touched thousands personally through injury and death; it is affecting our national economic health and our political and civic lives.

More importantly, however, it is radically influencing our spiritual lives as Christians reflect from one side or the other upon the presence of God in all of this and what a faithful Christian is supposed to do. It is evident that there are zealous Christians who support the government's actions in Iraq and there are those zealous Christians who do not.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was born into a world of conflict and exploitation in which human life was dangerous, cheap, and short. For a great many people in our world today that reality is still with them.

As warm and beautiful as Christmas is for many of us, it is anything but that for so many here and in vast regions of our world. Where is Our Lord Jesus in this?

Charles Dickens' "Scrooge" which we know as "A Christmas Carol" had as its object the shaming of a smug, arrogant, and self-satisfied society which was built on the exploitation of the working and underclass in Britain, and which was part of a still expanding empire which was also based on the principles of master and servant, exploiter and exploited, superior and inferior. Where was Our Lord in that?

Some would argue that He was being brought to the unenlightened and superstitious by those who served Him and His purposes of uplift and evangelization. Some would argue the opposite.

So today some would say we are fighting for freedom and democracy and others would claim it was for oil and military bases. Where is Christ in this, this Christmas?

I think and believe that Our Lord is there with our Marines in Fallujah, and with the Iraqis who fight them; he is with those maimed and killed by our weapons; he is with the raped women

and abused children in Darfur; he is with the woman wrapped in blankets against the cold on 57th Street and with servers and served alike in our Saturday Kitchen; he is with the abused child and with the child molester; he is with the victim and the victimizer; he is with all who seek warm and loving human relationships and with those who are desperately lonely and know no love.

You see, the human condition has not changed since God entered into human history in Our Lord's birth that first Christmas. What has changed is that God has made himself a part of us so that in his power of love we can, through him, change the human condition. That is why we celebrate Christmas, because God has given each of us, by our Baptism, the power to

become his children and disciples and to effect the transformation of the world by transforming the human condition by his love.

When we finally understand that God is calling us to bring the world to Him through Our Lord Jesus Christ, then we understand that

Christmas is the beginning of the new reality

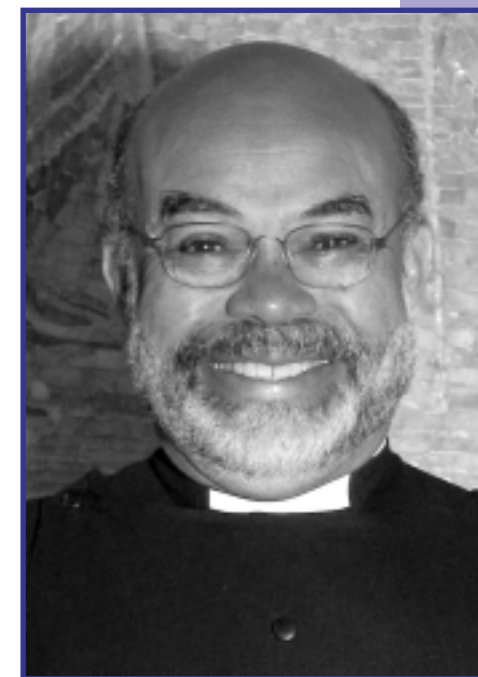
God wants for the world. He came in Christ to save – to save and transform not in compulsion and domination but in love and service to one another.

So may you all have a Happy and Merry Christmas in celebration of our ever new opportunity to become God's children and instruments of His love and power.

Yours in Christ at Christmas,

Father George

"When we finally understand that God is calling us to bring the world to Him through Our Lord Jesus Christ, then we understand that Christmas is the beginning of the new reality God wants for the world."



George W. Brandt, Jr., Rector

Episcopal Church Women Diocese 41st Annual Stony Point Conference

The Episcopal Church Women (ECW) Diocese of New York 41st annual fall conference, *Call to Faith and Action: Face-to-Face*, was held October 28 and 29 at the conference center in Stony Point, New York. Margaret Cotterell, Jane Emery, Frances Harlan, and Ginger Lief from St. Michael's were among the more than eighty participants who attended from over twenty diocesan parishes. The main speaker was the Reverend Canon Sylvia Vésquez, one of the three diocesan Canons for Congregational Development appointed in 2003. In her keynote address and workshops Canon Vésquez gave guidance and hope for new life and growth for our Church.

WESTSIDE WEDNESDAYS AT ST. MICHAEL'S*

Bistro

6:00-8:00pm: Bistro St. Michael
6:00-9:00pm: Nursery & child care (grades 1-5)

Choir Rehearsals

3:45 pm: St. Cecilia Choir
5:15 pm: Angel Choir
7:00 pm: Parish Choir

Groups

6:00 pm: Quilting
6:30 pm: EMMAUS: The Way of Faith
6:30 pm: Quiet Game Room for ages 6-12
7:00 pm: 20/30's: Lectio Divina
7:15 pm: Social Concerns

Prayer

8:30pm: Quiet prayer: the Office of Compline in the Chapel

COME JOIN US FOR A SPECIFIC EVENT
OR FOR THE ENTIRE EVENING!
HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

*events take place concurrently throughout the night.
Westside Wednesdays begins at 3:45 pm with the
St. Cecilia Choir rehearsal and concludes with quiet
prayer in the chapel at 8:30 pm.

Giving Back

By Kris Ishibashi

As we approach the holidays and reflect upon the blessings of our lives, many of us will find that we are truly fortunate. We have enough to sustain us, we have people that we love who share some parts of our lives, and we belong to the community of St. Michaels.

For myself, as I look at the year I appreciate the richness of the offerings: the education, the ritual in a beautiful building, the incomparable music, the cozy comfort of the bistro, and above all, the caring community.

We will shortly be sending out a year end Stewardship mailing. We will ask that you consider making an additional gift to Saint Michael's. In case you missed our earlier announcements, we are changing our stewardship schedule and will not be asking that you pledge for next year until the end of January.

In addition, if you wish to help those who need it, the Sisters of the Circle are looking for donations of socks, gloves or small toiletries for the homeless men who use our shelter. I ask that each of you look into your own situations see if you can share some of what you have to help our community.

St. Michael's Anglican Church, Promosa, South Africa

By Margaret Cotterell

When the Episcopal Diocese of New York extended its mission ministries to include South Africa it became a Companion Diocese to the Diocese of Matlosane. We at St. Michael's in New York were linked with St. Michael's Anglican Church in Promosa, South Africa.

At St. Michael's New York, we have maintained a strong bond with St. Michael's Promosa through our prayers, letters and an annual gift of money to support its programs, which have included the Sunday School and Mother's Union (donated by the ECW). The rector and some parishioners have visited Promosa in the past and hopefully more of us will join the pilgrimage being planned for 2005.

Shortly, we are expected to send our annual gift to Promosa which is derived from the donations of our parishioners and friends. Help us keep this program alive by making a contribution. It's not too late to support it! For further information contact Margaret Cotterell, Francis Havan, Arleen Bullard or Peter Ennis.

Music At St. Michael's

By Nicholas White

There is no month in the calendar year that gives opportunity for rich, varied, musical expression than December. St. Michael's proves to be no exception to this tradition, and below are some of the events to take place here during the next month. For more events please review the "Mark Thy Calendar" section on Page 2. The various members of the music department, from the youngest Angel Choir member to the most experienced Adult Choir member, look forward to welcoming you to our rich, musical feast.

Sunday December 5th, 2004 at 4:30PM - Advent Lessons & Carols

The Parish Choir and St. Michaels Choir join forces to meditate on the season of Advent, with this traditional service of Lessons and Carols. The carols are by Chilcott, Guerrero, Leighton-Jones, Palestrina, Warlock, White & Wood. The service is preceded by a recital of organ music for Advent given by Barbara Bruns, beginning at 4:00PM.
ADMISSION FREE.
An offering will be taken.

Sunday December 12th, 2004 at 7PM - Claudio Monteverdi: The Vespers of 1610

Please join us for the first annual performance of Claudio Monteverdi's famed Vespers of 1610. Three acclaimed ensembles - St. Michaels Choir, The Tiffany Consort, and Spiritus Collective - will come together under the direction of Nicholas White to celebrate this masterpiece. Contrasting moments of grandeur and sublime intimacy will resound in the glorious basilica setting of St. Michaels Church. Reserve early for this NOT-TO-BE-MISSED performance!
ADMISSION: \$50 Special reserved seats/\$40 special senior seats/\$30 General Admission/
\$20 Students & Seniors.

Saturday December 18th, 2004 at 5PM - A Parish Holiday Celebration

Join us as the Angel Choir, St. Cecilia Choristers and newly formed high school choir conjure up the atmosphere of the season with their carols, returning parishioner Samuel Martin dazzles with his trumpet, and everyone has the opportunity to sing carols with the mighty von Beckerath organ. Our traditional festive party takes place in the hall afterwards.
This is a FREE concert.

Praying the Psalms

By Deacon Pete Peterson

"The experience of praying can often be an experience of desperate struggle – but it is not a struggle with God – the struggle is with us. There are times we just cannot pray – we can't get into it. We are too worried about something to be able to concentrate. All the "what ifs" can be rampaging in our minds." "Whatever will we do if ___ happens?" The "what ifs of life" can take over. We fret and we fret about today and tomorrow. We may be tired or demoralized or distracted when we try to pray – it just won't come.

A way to help focus one's mind to begin to pray is by using the Psalms. It's an ancient approach to prayer. It is, in effect, to pray the Psalms – using them as a prayer or as an opening to prayer can be enriching and liberating. You might try beginning and ending your prayer with a Psalm or a part of a Psalm. Read slowly a line at a time. Let the images flow around you as your own images. If you feel the need to stop and ponder a line or an image within a line, do so. Never try for efficiency in prayer – it is not to be a chore.

There are many ways a Psalm can become your own prayer – especially through images the words of the Psalm may invoke in you. Using the Psalms as a starting point in prayer was demonstrated to me recently. A friend was telling me what a hard time she was having in praying – she was tired and did not feel well and she was facing some difficult medical tests. We turned to Psalm 121, which begins: "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." We prayed and meditated on one verse from Psalm 121: "The Lord himself watches over you." My friend called me a few days later to tell me she had used that verse – the image of the Lord watching over her, during her tests – she used it as a prayer picturing the Lord watching over her – Jesus sitting next to her during the procedures – holding her hand. By using images from the Psalm she was led into other prayers and to a feeling of confidence and peace.

Consider using the Psalms in your prayer life – at good and at bad times.