

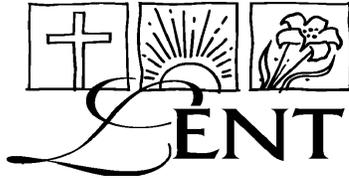
# The Messenger

The Church of St. John in the Wilderness, Copake Falls, NY  
A Non-Network Church in the Diocese of Albany

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Lent 2008

## Father Walt's "In the Wilderness Musings"



When you receive this edition of The Messenger we may already be in Lent. Boy, is it ever early this year! How early the Season of Epiphany ends and how early Lent begins is entirely dependent on the date of Easter, a date which is determined by an ancient lunar configuration. The date of Easter Day this year is March 23<sup>rd</sup>. There can be as many as 9 Sundays in the Epiphany Season, this year there were four. The last Sunday after the Epiphany, whether it's the fourth or the ninth is always called "The Last Sunday after the Epiphany" and the Gospel reading on that day, no matter which of the three Lectionary cycles we are in, is always the account of the Transfiguration, where Jesus appeared before his disciples on a mountaintop accompanied by the figures of Moses, the great Law Giver, and Elijah, the first of the major prophets, thus demonstrating that Jesus was the fulfillment of Torah, and Biblical Prophecy.

The First Sunday after the Epiphany the Gospel tells of the baptism of Christ, just as the Last tells of his Transfiguration. In both these accounts God is reported to have said, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him." In the account of the Transfiguration,

we are told that Jesus was bathed in a bright light - - in Hebrew the Shekinah - which symbolized the presence of God. In later Christian iconography a halo was substituted. The Greek word "epiphaneo" literally means "a shining forth" or a manifestation. When Jesus was presented in the temple as a small boy, St. Simeon said that "he would be a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel." In St. John's Gospel Jesus frequently referred to himself as the "Light of the World." Jesus came to this world to give us a glimpse into the heart of God. The Gospel readings in the Epiphany Season tell of the miracles of Jesus which demonstrated in St. Paul's words, "the light of that love which is immortal, revealed in the face of Christ."

But now it's Lent. The word "Lent" is the Old English word for "spring" - time of the lengthening of days. This season comprises the forty days before Easter, (excluding Sundays which are always festivals of the Resurrection). The event in the life of Christ which serves as the theme of the Lenten Season is Jesus' forty days sojourn in the wilderness area by the Dead Sea after his baptism, during which he fasted and prayed and fought demonic temptations to exercise his Messiahship in ways that would not have been what God had in mind when he called Jesus to manifest His will, His words, and His actions in the world. Jesus came out of that wilderness retreat convinced his ministry was not to be one of

self-aggrandizement, but rather one of self-denial culminating in the ultimate self-sacrifice on the Cross.

The commemoration of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday where doing the liturgies of that day the priest makes a cross of ashes on the foreheads of those who wish to participate in the rite saying, "Dust you are and to dust you will return." This is a reminder of our mortality, and the importance of our getting our priorities straight and learning what it is to "walk the way of the Cross" through acts of self-denial, fasting, praying, receiving the Sacraments of Grace, and , in the words of a prayer book collect, "reading and digesting" God's Holy Word. There used to be an emphasis in the Church on "giving up" things for Lent (I was always happy to give up water skiing for Lent!), but today the emphasis is on taking things on during Lent removing those things that are barriers to our loving God and loving each other, which the Christian life is all about, and taking on those spiritual exercises which I listed above that will open our hearts and minds and wills to the new resurrected life which God wills for us, and prepares us to celebrate with joy the Festival of our Lord's Resurrection, Easter Day. The last week in Lent is "Passiontide" in which we trace the final events in Jesus' life, beginning with his final entrance into Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday", and ending with his Crucifixion and Burial on Good Friday. But more about that in my next "wilderness musings."

Affectionately,  
Fr. Walt



## WEDNESDAYS IN LENT

As we have done in other years, the Roe Jan churches will meet on Wednesdays in Lent at 6:30 PM for a Soup Supper and Lenten Study. Plan to join your neighbors for this evening of food, fellowship and study. Our church will lead off on Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>:

- February 13<sup>th</sup> - Church of St. John in the Wilderness
- February 20<sup>th</sup> - St. John's Lutheran Church, Ancram
- February 27<sup>th</sup> - Craryville United Methodist Church, Craryville
- March 5<sup>th</sup> - St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church, Copake Falls
- March 12<sup>th</sup> - West Copake Reformed Church, West Copake

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## Search Committee News

The Search Committee continues its work to find a new rector for St. John's. The Parish Self-Study was sent to our members in late November. 51 surveys were returned by the deadline of December 13<sup>th</sup>. The Search Committee was heartened by the positive responses regarding our activities and worship life at St. John's. The responses were entered into an electronic survey entitled Survey Monkey (!). The findings from this report were then analyzed by the program and contained in a Summary Report.

The position Profile has been created with information from the {Parish Self-Study and will be posted on the Episcopal Church's national website by the end of January. A new website for St. John's will be created by a committee headed by Charlie Musselman. Copies of the full summary report of the Parish Self-Study are available for those who would like to read the entire report including the comments. The following highlights of this Summary Report are as follows:

### Demographics

- C 31.4% of the parishioners are in the age range of 65-74; 21.6% are 55-64; 21.6 are 75+; 9.8% are 45-54; 7.8% are 35-44; 3.9% are 12-18; and 2% are 19-24
- C 75% are female and 26.5% are male
- C 56.9% are retired, 29.4 % are employed (including work at home)
- C 79.2% attend the 10 AM service, 14.6% the 8 AM service and 6.3% attend the Wednesday Healing Service
- C 22.4% of us travel less than 1 mile to church, 20.4% travel 10+ miles; 14.3% travel 5-10 miles and 12.2% 1-2 miles.

### Stewardship

- C 80% of the parishioners who completed the survey pledged to fund the ongoing work of St. John's. Indeed, although parishioner largely voiced no preferences regarding gender, age or marital status of a rector, they did indicate willingness to increase their pledges to help fund health insurance for a married rector (95.2%).

### Overall Satisfaction

- C 50% are satisfied with the overall St. John's experience
- C 40% are very satisfied

- C and 10% are neutral
- C A notable statistic considering the developments this past year, 62.2% said that their overall feeling for St. John's had not changed, indicating a vital and steady faith community.

### Programs and Activities

- C Some of the following activities were rated by the parish as very important at St. John's: Fellowship (91.5%), Choir (84%), Country Fair and Auction (83%), Vestry (77.5%), Church School (67.5%), Interpersonal support (65.8%), ECW (58.5%), Altar Guild (55.3%), Newsletter (50%) and Youth Programs (50%)

### New Programs - some suggestions

- C More outreach to newcomers...maybe a welcome packet, newcomers recognized in Messenger and Bulletins
- C An effort with other area churches for a youth group and/or after school program for kids,,a community based program would have more resources and enable more kids to be involved, helping to make the group more successful
- C Book group...find a facilitator

### Additional activities

- C more adult education, more youth programs to attract younger children, church dinners, choir concerts with other church choirs, retreats, more social events for youth...Bible study, discussion groups, day care for working mothers.

### Importance of elements of worship

- The top five rated as very important
- C Choir 87%
- C Sacraments 83%
- C Sermon 78%

- C Prayers of the People 74%
- C Hymns 73%

**Education Programs**

- C 72% were interested in Bible Study,
- C 68% in church history
- C 68% in spiritual life

**Leadership and Programs - Leadership and programs reflect parish's views as follows:**

- C 52% fairly well
- C 34% very well
- C 9.1% unsure
- C 2.3% not at all
- C 2.3% not very well

**Regarding change**

- C 53.2% moderately open to change
- C 19.1% very open to change
- C 12.8% fairly resistant to change
- C 4.3% very resistant to change
- C 10.6% are unsure about change

**Growth - what is important to achieve growth**

- C Number of active communicants 68.1%
- C Preaching that inspires and strengthens 67.4%
- C Educational programs for teens 55.8%
- C Educational programs for children 54.5%
- C Music program 50%

**Five most important personal attributes**

we would like a rector to possess:

- C Compassion 76.1%
- C Sense of humor 73.9%
- C Leader 39.1%
- C Good listener 37%
- C Energetic 32.6%

**Prior experience of candidate**

- C Some experience 36.2%
- C significant experience 25.5%
- C have no preference 36.2%

**Age, Gender, Marital Status, Family Status**

- C Largely no preference 85.7%
- C Gender 85% no preference
- C Marital status, 76% no preference
- C Family status, 74.5% no preference

**Most important tasks of clergy to maintain vibrant life in the congregation:**

- C Preacher 61.7%
- C Pastor 51.1%
- C Counselor 38.3%
- C Youth worker/Leader 34%

**What made you come to St. John's in the first place?**

- C I was looking to fill a void
- C After visiting several churches in the area, I found St. John's to place less emphasis on social stigmas, financial classes, and political issues, thus creating an atmosphere that allows me to feel the grace of God.
- C My grandmother started bringing me to church.
- C Family connections...had my children baptized. Fr. Byers was very open and hospitable.

**What keeps you coming?**

- C It is always quiet and peaceful to me.
- C This church is like a second family.
- C The worship is joyful, the relationships between parishioners are caring and supportive and we just seem to enjoy each other and share our love for this church.
- C I like to come.

**If you could change one thing what would you change?**

- C Although everyone is friendly, we tend to be a bit picky about things that have always been done in a certain way. We need to be more

flexible, accepting, and appreciative. We have hurt folks and lost some without meaning to.

- C Better attendance, so there would be more people available to share jobs.
- C Dynamic, inspiring pastor!
- C Need more young families. Create events and or a committee especially for marketing our church. Bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century; more young adults are searching for a church home. The church must welcome new ideas and activities and believe in the ability of youth to lead and teach us...Closed circles need to open. If new ideas fail, we need to guide them to success, not take over and revert to the old ways.
- C More programs for youth, gotta draw in more youth cause they are the future of the church
- C The church needs repairs and to be more accessible to people with physical limitations.
- C To make our church more appealing for the new minister, I think that while we have spare time at night and on weekends, we should be fixing up the rectory, going from room to room painting, polishing, and cleaning. Or we can make it a contest. Let a family group or person pick a room and at the end see what group has done the best job. It would be better to do this now rather than wait for the end of the search.
- C Reach out to other people in the area...invite them to worship with us. Maybe have a special Sunday where we each invite a friend to come to church with us and then do something special at Coffee Hour to welcome our guests.
- C Maybe we could have a music group once a month to shake the rafters and energize the congregation. This has

worked in other churches.

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## Episcopal Church Women

ECW will not meet in February. The next meeting will be at 1 PM on Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup> in Burke Hall. Your attendance and input are needed to help us plan our activities for the coming year.

We are starting out with a Bakeless Cake Sale. If you have not received a pink card, please feel free to send a donation to our Treasurer, Mrs. Bea Baxter, 2889 Route 7, Copake NY 12516 Please make your checks payable to St. John's ECW.

We have one raffle prize - yes, Ralph Platt has volunteered to build a bird House! We need two more prizes. Please consider donating a hand made prize. We have donations to print tickets, now we need you to sell and buy!! The Country Fair will be here before you know it.

Looking forward to seeing all of you at our March 4<sup>th</sup> meeting. We appreciate your help and support.

Marge McClurg, President

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- February 1 Clinton Kay  
Susan Mollo
- February 2 Marya Dodd
- February 6 Harry Koeppel  
Frances Zitek
- February 11 Melanie Kay
- February 15 Rose Moore
- February 19 Marilyn Kay

## “Can We Talk?” Maybe...

The quotation above, from Joan Rivers, is also the title of a meeting of 250 to 300 Episcopalians that took place at St. Andrew’s, Albany, on Saturday afternoon, January 19. The occasion was a visit by Bonnie Anderson, President of the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops. Sponsored by Albany Via Media, its purpose was to promote communication among the diverse viewpoints that make up the theologically mixed Diocese of Albany.

The afternoon began with a 1 PM Eucharist at which Bp. William Love celebrated and preached. After brief post-service social, President Anderson gave a half hour introduction to the polity and history of the Church, then was joined by Bp. Love and Fr. James Brooks-McDonald of St. Stephen’s, Schenectady, for questions and discussion.

The Eucharist, with abundant music provided by St. Andrew’s excellent choir, was worthy of Westminster but much too long. Our time for discussion was shortened by almost an hour and limited to just two of the five areas that we had hoped to explore: 1) how a diocese of one theological bent can accommodate members who think otherwise; and 2) how to satisfy the Windsor Report’s requirement that dioceses listen to the experiences of homosexuals.

With regard to the first issue, Bonnie stressed the need for open, intentional discussions such as the present event. Bp. Love said that his recent visits to all of the deaneries illustrate his willingness to reach out to all sides, but he emphasized his obligation to choose carefully what groups and events to encourage. This selectivity presumably explains why our request to list Bonnie Anderson’s visit on the diocesan

calendar was ignored.

Although, as Bp. Love stated in his sermon, sexuality is not the only issue that divides the Church, it is very contentious in this diocese. Bonnie told us that the national Church can help dioceses initiate listening programs and, after the meeting, sent AVM contact information. Near the end of the meeting, a woman with a very long history in the diocese noted that discussions of human sexuality are not unprecedented here. Bishops Hogg and Ball encouraged such programs, though Bp. Herzog did not. Neither, so far, has Bp. Love, though he denied allegations that he doesn’t listen to homosexuals or their supporters.

Civility prevailed during the afternoon, with just one exception. A questioner complained that Albany’s website links to a blog that frequently refers to homosexuals as “sodomites” and “heretics.” After some discussion, Bp. Love said, “Just don’t read it.” A roar of disapproval followed, and Bp. Love later apologized. (As of January 29, the noxious blog is still on the Albany website, with other blogs of similar orientation. No moderate or progressive blog is listed.)

The third item on our agenda was a diocese’s financial obligation to the Episcopal Church. We could not discuss this for want of time, but Bonnie touched on it, briefly but effectively. She said that most dioceses commit to a specific level of support each year. Many meet their commitments in full; some fall short. A handful of dioceses, Albany included, make no specific commitment to the national Church. (Albany gives just under half of what the Church requests.)

After our meeting with Bonnie, she

went to dinner with Bp. Love and Albany's General Convention deputies. Shortly before we adjourned, Mike Losinger of St. Paul's, Albany, presented AVM with checks worth a total of \$1000. Because AVM does not collect dues, this gift was very welcome. We were also pleased that St. Andrew's joined AVM in donating the day's collection – \$800 – to Remain Episcopalian, a group that is struggling to rebuild the Diocese of San Joaquin, whose Network bishop has led most of its parishes to abandon the Episcopal Church.

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My reaction to our meeting with Bonnie Anderson is mixed. I'm delighted that so many people turned out – at least four times as many as showed up at AVM's last annual meeting! Although a right-leaning blogger surmised that most of the audience was there to support Bp. Love, most of the people who asked questions are obviously liberal or moderate. That's sad, for we hoped that Bonnie's visit would attract people from across the right-left spectrum.

"Can we talk?" I can't answer that now, but more than 250 Episcopalians have demonstrated a willingness to do so. We'll see if Bp. Love accepts the invitation.

Bob Dodd

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## The Vestry invites you to a CHILI SUPPER!

**Saturday, February 9**

**5 to 7 PM**

**in Burke Hall.**

**\$7.00**

**includes chili, bread, salad and ice cream!**



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A Blessing for You

May there always be work for your hands to do.  
May your purse always hold a coin or two  
May the sun always shine upon your window pane  
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain.  
May the hand of a friend always be near to you and  
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.