



The S. Stephen

The monthly news at S. Stephen's Church in Providence

September/October, 2009

Vol. 9, No. 1

Father Alexander's letter to the parish



My dear people:

It has been a good summer. I took a couple of weeks off at the beginning of August; and Elizabeth and I spent a week on a road trip that took us to Stockbridge, Massachusetts – including Tanglewood – and Montreal, Canada. I hope that your summer vacations, if any, were equally enjoyable.

Our new Curate, the Rev'd Deacon Michael G. Tuck, took up his duties on Sunday 19 July. That same afternoon, Susan Olson and Phoebe Pettingell hosted a get-together at the Regency Plaza to welcome the Tucks to Providence. Thanks are due to everyone who helped organize this pleasant event, including Kari Johnson, Louise Wells, and Ransom Widmer, as well as everyone who brought food.

Deacon Tuck is off to a running start and is already a big help to me in the daily work of the parish. In his capacity as Curate at S. Stephen's, he assists at both Masses on Sunday morning; and in his capacity as Episcopal Campus Minister at Brown University he will be conducting a service on Sunday evenings followed by a meeting of the student group that he will be gathering. Elsewhere in this issue of *The S. Stephen*, he describes his first impressions and planned activities in the parish.

If you have not yet met Deacon Tuck, I would urge you to come to Mass and Coffee Hour and introduce yourself to him, his wife Annie Haftl, and their two children Holly and Porter. They are a lovely family whose presence enriches our life together as a parish. If all goes as planned, Deacon Tuck will be ordained to the priesthood at S. Stephen's on a yet-to-be-determined date early in 2010 – Stay tuned for details of this exciting event.

At the time of writing (in late August) I am looking forward intensely to the return of the *Schola Cantorum* on Sunday 20 September and the resumption of the full Solemn High Mass. In case you ever wondered, there is actually a method by which we determine the choir's start-up date. The choir gets a full three months off every summer; and the choir season always ends on the Sunday after Corpus Christi. So, the date that the choir resumes in September varies according to how late or early Easter and Corpus Christi were the preceding Spring. Convoluted as this method may seem, it keeps our costs fairly constant by maintaining more or less the same number of choir Sundays each year.

By now you will either have received or soon be receiving copies of our *Liturgical Music* and *Parish Programs and Events* leaflets for 2009-2010. You will notice in both brochures some cut-backs in the music program. We have scheduled the Advent Lessons and Carols, and of course full choral liturgies on such principal holy days as Christmas Eve, Ash Wednesday, and the Easter Triduum. Otherwise, we have had to cut back on such services as Sunday evening choral Evensongs and Solemn High Masses for major Feasts that occur during the week.

The reason is partly financial. In the past few years, several generous individuals have died who used to give regularly to the Special Music Fund; its amounts have dwindled and must be carefully conserved to provide funding for such special events as the anticipated Ordination to the Priesthood, or the accustomed chamber orchestra for Mass on Easter Sunday. Also, given the rather sparse attendance by parishioners of non-Sunday morning choral services in recent years, it seems good stewardship not to expend too many of our financial resources in this direction. This assessment

of the situation could change, however, and if you are interested in helping to make more choral services possible in future years by contributing to the Special Music Fund at S. Stephen's, we would be delighted to hear from you.

We are not cutting back on worship. The daily Mass continues as ever at S. Stephen's. On Saturdays during the coming year we shall be experimenting with a series of Votive Masses, about which I write elsewhere in this issue of *The S. Stephen*. Also, beginning with St. Michael and All Angels on Tuesday 29 September, we shall resume the occasional Sung Evensongs and Masses for some of the more important major feasts of the Church year. These unaccompanied plainchant weekday liturgies have proven popular during the past couple of years; and they are noted in the *Programs and Events* leaflet for 2009-2010.

A word about Confession:

When I arrived at S. Stephen's nine years ago, the designated weekly time for confessions was (as I recall) Saturday at 11 am. While a few individuals did come from time to time, often many weeks went by when no-one showed up. So I eventually changed the time of confessions to "by appointment," and thus it has remained until now. I can't help thinking, however, that an Anglo-Catholic parish really should have a scheduled time when those who want to confess can do so without having to make an appointment. The best time is when I am already here; so as an experiment I will be available to hear confessions at 6 pm on Fridays, immediately following the 5:30 pm Mass. Those wanting to make their confessions do not have to come to Mass beforehand; but they should arrive promptly by 6 pm and let me know that they are here for this purpose; I will not be sitting in the confessional but will be available in the

(Continued on page two)

the vicinity of the Lady Chapel. If no-one shows up within five or ten minutes of the end of Mass, then I will leave as normal on a Friday evening.

As detailed elsewhere in this issue of *The S. Stephen*, finally, the parish leadership is in conversation with the board of the Epiphany Soup Kitchen (ESK) about the possibility of their relocating their operations to S. Stephen's. If this new initiative comes to pass, then S. Stephen's will have moved more and more into the forefront of the Church's mission to the community, between hosting the Episcopal campus ministry at Brown / RISD, and hosting a significant feeding ministry for the underprivileged and homeless of Providence. These developments are welcome and most gratifying. Yet, as I write elsewhere in this issue, the work of an Anglo-Catholic parish always begins and ends in worship – above all in the Sunday Mass. I look forward to seeing you in the congregation as we continue to fulfill the liturgical mission of the Church both in the coming year and beyond.

This letter comes with best wishes and prayers. I remain, faithfully,

Your pastor and priest,

Fr. John D. Alexander

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www.sstephens.org

His advice to many seeking absolution: "Go home, wash your face."

Joseph of Cupertino (d. 1663)



Guess who's coming to dinner?

by Tom Bledsoe, Warden

On October 17, S. Stephen's Church will take a significantly more active role in the Epiphany soup kitchen when the weekly operation is moved from Grace Church to S. Stephen's.

In a major undertaking, S. Stephen's will become the host and location of the soup kitchen for the foreseeable future. Every Saturday, volunteers will arrive around 2:30 pm to prepare a meal that will be served at 4 pm. Cleanup is usually finished before 6 pm.

The soup kitchen has been in existence for many years, initially founded by and in residence at Epiphany Church in the South end of Providence. A few years ago, due to the deteriorating physical structure at the Epiphany church hall, meals were moved to Grace Church on Westminster Street downtown. Since then, it has become apparent that the Grace Church kitchen is not up to the task. As it is not a commercial kitchen, certification as a meal serving facility was not forthcoming and with that went the resources of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. For the last year or so, the Epiphany soup kitchen board has been searching around Providence for a more appropriate site.

Last fall, while volunteering one day, Richard Noble and I noted the marked inadequacy of the Grace church kitchen (despite its apparent excellent location downtown) and reflected on our gleaming, industrial-strength (though rarely used) kitchen on George Street. When our eyes met, we both formed the idea of exploring moving the operation up to College Hill. Father Alexander received the idea quite enthusiastically. After careful consideration, the vestry was also strongly behind exploring the idea. Considerations of fire safety, insurance, wear and tear on the building, safety and security and renovations for food storage were diligently explored. A few months of conversation and then negotiations with the Epiphany soup kitchen board followed. As they were committed to keeping the soup kitchen operation based in a church in the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island, S. Stephen's became the preferred option.

The soup kitchen serves between 80 and 125 meals every Saturday year round to those in need from the community. Patrons of the soup kitchen often travel by bus, so the stops on Thayer Street are relatively convenient. Additionally, many of the patrons know S. Stephens by location and hospitality as a result of our yearly New Year's Day dinner. The weekly soup kitchen is staffed by rotating groups of volunteers (mostly churches but some business groups volunteer as well, coordinated by one of the board members) and has a paid cook, coordinator and cleaning person. The operation is overseen by a volunteer board and it is in the process of being incorporated as a nonprofit organization (previously operating under the umbrella of the Epiphany Church). S. Stephen's parishioners Bruce Lennihan and Ransom Widmer are active on the board. Volunteers from S. Stephen's Church staff the soup kitchen about six times per year.

The anticipated arrangement will provide for supervision of the kitchen's operation by our sextons as well as cleanup after the soup kitchen is completed.

Over the next few weeks, you may note some renovations to the food pantry in the cloak room as it is revamped and expanded to allow storage of soup kitchen supplies. Moving date is tentatively scheduled October 12 (to take advantage of the Great Day of Service, a community service day that occurs yearly at this time).

As it turns out, we were scheduled to be the first group of volunteers to step into the kitchen at its new location on October 17. All volunteers are welcome; contact Bruce Lennihan if you are interested in helping out!

Curate's Letter

Deacon Michael Tuck writes:

Dear People of S. Stephen's –

Thank you all so much for the kind and generous welcome that you have extended to me and to Annie over the past couple of weeks. Providence is really beginning to feel like home, and your kindness has been an important part of that. Since this is the first issue of *The S. Stephen* since I've joined, I wanted to write a few words introducing myself.

I grew up in a small town in the suburbs of Philadelphia, where my father was the rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Norwood (another S. Stephen's Church!). I was blessed to be brought up with an active faith and a solid grounding in the Anglo-Catholic tradition.

When I was choosing where to go to university, I wanted to make sure that the Church could continue to be an important part of my life. Part of my decision to come to Brown was because I knew that there was a great parish right on campus. My time at S. Stephen's was very formative for me. For the first time, people knew me not as the priest's kid but as a fellow parishioner. The encouragement that I received here to consider Holy Orders was some of the most important in my process of discernment. After Brown, I returned to the Philadelphia area to continue to explore what God had in mind for me. It turned out that part of His plan was that I would get married to Annie and that we would have two wonderful children.

For the past two years, we have been living in West Yorkshire where I'd been attending seminary at the College of the Resurrection (everyone calls it 'Mirfield' which is the name of the village). Mirfield was founded by the Community of the Resurrection, a men's religious order that follows a Benedictine pattern of life. The College played an important role in the Anglo-Catholic movement of the twentieth century. The brethren intended the College to be a place where working class men could train for the priesthood – an idea which was quite scandalous in 1906! The College continues to worship with the monks everyday. Personally, I found great value in studying with and praying alongside



the members of the Community. At my time at Mirfield, I had a unique opportunity to learn just a little bit about the values of obedience, stability and balance which are essential to Benedictine spirituality.

Over the past month, I've been settling into my two roles as curate at S. Stephen's and as Episcopal Campus Minister at Brown-RISD. As curate, I have two principal tasks. The first is to support Fr. Alexander in the care of the parish. I will be preaching periodically, and after I am ordained priest, I'll be taking a full share of the services. My second task is to learn. Part of the learning is the practicalities of liturgy and leading a church, but there is another learning about pastoral care and listening for God's voice.

In addition to my tasks as curate, I will also be serving as the Episcopal Campus Minister to Brown-RISD. This role is distinct from the curacy, but there will inevitably be some overlapping events and services. As the Campus Minister, it is my responsibility to care for the spiritual well being of Episcopal students in the Brown-RISD community and also to ensure that a distinctly Anglican voice is a part of the dialogue of the community. In the services and in our programs, we will draw on two key strands of our Anglican heritage: the power and poetry of our liturgical tradition and our willingness to engage in robust

academic thinking about our beliefs. With these values and principles in mind, we will begin our services in the Lady Chapel on Sunday evenings on September 20th. This fall, we will be saying Evening Prayer at 5pm which will be followed by supper. My hope is that the services will provoke some thinking which we can explore together.

For students at Brown and RISD, expectations run very high. In some respects, the formidable expectations created by the institutions themselves pale in comparison to those imposed by parents, society or themselves. These expectations, almost always so well intended, can become a millstone. I believe that an important part of my ministry on campus will be to create space for people, space which is free from those expectations, a space within which God's call can be heard. This is a time in people's lives when they can and should begin to explore their faith and their relationship with God on their own, to claim the unique call that God has for them.

I believe that these are very exciting times for S. Stephen's. There is an incredible opportunity right now to share the gifts that God has given us – our traditions, our worship, our teaching – to a new generation who haven't yet heard the Gospel. Thank you again for welcoming me into this wonderful parish, and I look forward to the years to come.

Stewardship Campaign Kick-off Parish Luncheon

The month of October brings us to the annual Stewardship Program at S. Stephen's Church. Following last year's pattern, we will begin on an enjoyable note with a parish luncheon following the 10 am Mass on Sunday 4 October.

This year's speaker will be Mr. Scott Nicholson, a parishioner at St. Columba's, Middletown, who serves on the diocesan Finance Commission and comes highly recommended by several people, including parish Treasurer Brian Ehlers (who also serves on the Finance Commission).

Please mark your calendars and watch for further information in the Parish Kalendar.

What is a Votive Mass?

by Father Alexander

During the coming year, we are planning to schedule a series of recurring Votive Masses on Saturday morning. Thus it seems opportune to offer some information on Votive Masses: what they are, why they are offered, and what rules govern them.

The word “votive” comes from the Latin *ex voto*, which denotes an offering to God made in fulfillment of a vow or in thanksgiving for a blessing received. A votive candle, for example, is offered in gratitude for some blessing or in prayer for some special need. This summer, Elizabeth and I visited the Church of *Notre Dame de Bonsecours* in Montreal, where model ships hang from the ceiling of the nave – votive offerings given by sailors and their relatives in thanksgiving for deliverance at sea.

The term Votive Mass is loosely related to this idea of votive offerings, and describes a Mass offered either for a special intention, in thanksgiving for some blessing, or in devotion to some particular mystery of the faith. An example of a Mass offered for a special intention is a “Mass for the Nation” offered during a time of crisis. An example of a Mass offered in devotion to a particular mystery is a “Mass of the Holy Angels.” Votive Masses are included in the 1979 Prayer under the heading “for Special Occasions.”

With certain exceptions, Votive Masses can be celebrated at any time of the year as the need arises. In this way, they differ from the perhaps more familiar round of the Masses appointed for specific days of the Church year. The principles governing Votive Masses are fairly simple to understand.

The Mass of the Day

On Sundays and most weekdays, the prayers and readings at Mass follow the Church calendar. The Prayer Book appoints specific collects and scripture passages for each Sunday and major Holy Day of the Church year. Likewise, on many weekdays, the collect and readings used – as well as the colors of the vestments worn by the celebrant – will be those of the saint whose day it is. Days known as *ferias*, however, are those for which the calendar gives no commemoration of a saint. One widely-used option on these days is to repeat the prayers and readings from the preceding Sunday.

The Option of Votive Mass

Another option for weekdays, however, is to celebrate a votive Mass in place of the Mass of the day. The Prayer Book gives a number of propers for “Various Occasions” that can – again, with certain exceptions – be used at any time of the year. (The collects are found on pages 199-210 of the Prayer Book, and the corresponding readings on pages 927-931.)

So, for example, there are votive Masses “Of the Holy Spirit,” “Of the Holy Angels,” “Of the Holy Eucharist,” “For the Departed,” “For the Unity of the Church,” “For the Nation,” “For Peace,” “For the Sick,” “For Social Justice,” and “For Education,” to name just a few. Likewise, the Masses celebrated at weddings and funerals belong to a special category of Votive.

Rules Governing Votive Masses

Generally speaking, Votive Masses may not be celebrated in place of the Mass of the Day (a) on Sundays or major Holy



Days; and (b) during the Seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. On certain Sundays and Holy days, however, a Votive Mass may be celebrated *in addition to* (rather than in place of) the Mass of the Day.

Thus, for example, at the 10 am service on a Sunday in late September we usually celebrate a Mass of the Dedication of the Church; on Remembrance Sunday (the Sunday closest to November 11), we celebrate a Requiem Mass; and on the Sunday following Corpus Christi we celebrate a Mass of the Blessed Sacrament. These are all Votive Masses. But henceforth on these Sundays we shall try to ensure that the Mass of the day is celebrated at the 8am service as well (a principle that I have overlooked until recently).

Saturday Morning Votive Masses at S. Stephen's

During the coming year, we are planning as an experiment to set aside the 9:30 am Mass on Saturdays as a Votive. With some exceptions, the schedule will be the following:

- First Saturday – Votive of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Second Saturday – Votive Requiem Mass (For the Departed)
- Third Saturday – Votive of the Blessed Sacrament
- Fourth and Fifth Saturdays – Votive Mass for some other Intention

There will be exceptions to this pattern – particularly on major Holy Days and during Advent, Lent, and Eastertide. In any case, the Mass to be celebrated each Saturday will be announced in the preceding Sunday's *Kalendar*.

Votive Masses and Devotional Societies

Initially, the Votive of Our Lady on the first Saturday of the month will usually coincide with a meeting of the Society of Mary to follow immediately afterwards. My hope is that over time we will succeed in organizing parish wards of the Guild of all Souls and the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, whose meetings will follow the Votive Requiem on the second Saturday and the Votive of the Blessed Sacrament on the third Saturday respectively.

Conclusion

In the famous “purple passage” at the conclusion of *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945), Dom Gregory Dix gives a sense of the countless needs for which the Mass can be offered:

For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action [i.e., the Eucharist] has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to old age and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; - one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them.

The liturgical calendar of the Church is so rich in saints' days and other commemorations that it is easy to get caught up in its observance to the point that one overlooks the equally rich heritage of Masses that can be celebrated at any time of the year as the occasion warrants. This experiment with Saturday Votive Masses is designed to emphasize an aspect of the Church's liturgical heritage that is perhaps in some danger of neglect. It has the potential of greatly enriching our parish's liturgical and devotional life. Who knows, it may even attract more people to attend Saturday morning Mass!



October 15

Teresa of Avila (d. 1582)

She was the daughter of a Spanish Noble who, at the age of twelve upon the death of her mother, asked Our Lady to be her mother. At seventeen she ran away from home to become a Carmelite. She had visions, was a mystical writer, was proclaimed Doctor of the Church in 1970 and she was funny.

"A sad nun is a bad nun . . . I am more afraid of one unhappy sister than a crowd of evil spirits . . ."

When asked how she made so many converts with so little money, she said: "Teresa and a couple of pennies is nothing, but Teresa, a couple of pennies, and God, that is everything one needs."

Teresa traveled a great deal and during one trip she had encountered disaster after disaster before she fell and injured her leg. She picked herself up and said to God, "Lord, you couldn't have picked a worse time for this to happen—haven't I had enough problems?"

The Lord answered, "Don't you realize that this is how I treat my friends?"

"If this is how you treat your friends," she answered, "it's no wonder you don't have very many."

Traveling from convent to convent Teresa made many friends. She loved God and her friends zealously. "I have no defense against affection. I could be bribed with a sardine."

"From silly devotions," she said, "and somber, serious, sullen saints, save us, O Lord. Lord hear our prayer."

Summer Reading

by Priscilla C. Martin

Summer, we are told, is the season for light reading. While I did consume a couple of non-taxing novels, my attention was focused on two somewhat more serious books: *The Misunderstood Jew*, by Amy-Jill Levine, and *The Aryan Jesus*, by Susannah Heschel. Levine is a professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and Heschel a professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth.

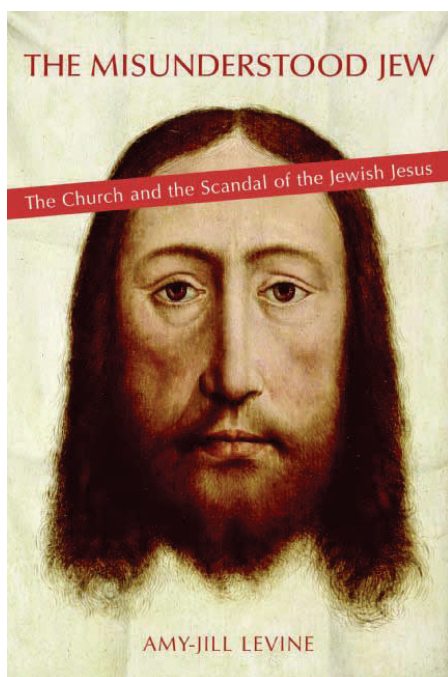
Levine was born and remains an observant Jew who has since childhood been fascinated by Christianity. Her initial impression of the New Testament was that it was a collection of "good Jewish stories told by a good Jewish storyteller." Her study of Jesus emphasizes his Jewishness, shown especially in his method of teaching by parables.

Yet a common contemporary assumption is that Jesus was at odds with Judaism, "against" the Law and the Temple, a revolutionary who rejected narrow-minded preoccupation with the minutiae of religious observance and with the suppression of women. Certain academic schools of thought see Jesus as a Galilean peasant from a region "religiously and ethnically distinct from Judea" who dismisses basic Jewish practices, turns "away from his Jewish identity," and becomes the rebel who, unlike every other Jew, practices social justice, speaks to women, teaches nonviolent responses to oppression, and cares about the poor and the marginalized. Levine says such stereotypes of Judaism are characteristic of liberal Protestantism.

To understand Jesus, she says, one must be familiar with the Scriptures that shaped him. Insisting on his Jewishness reinforces belief "that he was fully human, anchored in historical time and place." If we disregard history we are "unfaithful to both Judaism and Christianity," which are historical religions.

Over and over she emphasizes that first-century Judaism was far from monochromatic, that it was, in fact, just as diverse as twenty-first century Judaism or, for that matter, Christianity. This made sense to me, as I have often wondered how one might explain away certain New Testament evidences of diversity. The gospels mention at least two different religious parties, Pharisees and Sadducees; and refer to a group of women providing for Jesus out of their own pockets (implying that some women controlled property). In Acts, we learn that Lydia, one of St. Paul's converts, was a businesswoman who dealt in purple goods, and who apparently controlled an entire household, since they were all converted with her. Then there was Priscilla, who, with her husband, Aquila taught the new way. Incidentally, two of the three references to this couple in the Acts account mention her name first..

Fresh from my encounter with Levine's book, I began to read Heschel's recently published volume. The review I had read indicated that it concerned a group of German theologians who in 1939, founded an institute to "de-judaize" Christianity. It looked as if this was a blatant if insincere attempt to ingratiate themselves with Hitler and the Nazi regime. (The book's cover photograph is of a German altar with a small crucifix; emblazoned on the frontal is a large swastika.) What the review did not mention was that the views of these Protestant theologians long antedated the Nazi era.



Heschel's thoroughly researched (but with its many typos inadequately proofread) volume shows the development of "Aryan Jesus" ideas from the 19th century on. Some German scholars claimed that Jesus was not a Jew at all because he came from Galilee, an area with a large non-Jewish population. Various academic disciplines in addition to theology were involved in the attempt to make Jesus an Aryan, or at least a Jew who completely rejected Judaism. Serious late 19th-century scholars suggested that the gospels were loosely based on Buddha legends, proving the "Indo-Germanic nature of Jesus." Persian connections were also "proved," and parallels with Teutonic myths found.

After Germany's defeat in World War I, which many blamed on the Jews, anti-Semitism grew virulent, with enthusiastic university students in the forefront of the growing Nazi movement in the 1920s. The budding theologians among them, along with their professors, devoted much scholarly attention to "de-judaizing" the Bible and cleansing the German Church of Jewish influence. While the idea of rejecting the Old Testament goes back at least as far as the second-century heretic, Marcion, Hitler's regime with its increasing persecution of Jews gave added impetus to these efforts. In 1939 they founded the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. Its leading

light, Walter Grundmann, had joined the Nazi party several years before Hitler's rise to power. Heschel includes quotations from their writings which go well beyond anti-Jewish theological arguments. For example, Grundmann wrote in 1942: "A healthy Volk must and will reject the Jews in every form. ... If someone is upset about Germany's treatment of the Jews, Germany has the historical justification and the historical authorization for the fight against the Jews on its side! ... We know that the Jews want the annihilation of Germany."

One of their projects was Bible revision to fit Nazi ideas. They removed favorable references to Jews from the New Testament but retained unfavorable ones, and they reshaped the four gospels into a single gospel narrative. They kept selected passages from St. Paul's epistles, eliminating any autobiographical material as too Jewish. Liturgy no longer included Old Testament readings. A politically correct hymnal was published.

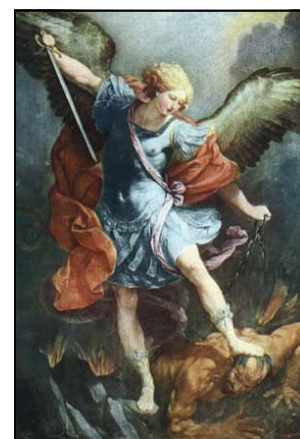
It was a great shock to learn that Gerhard Kittel, first editor of a seven-volume theological dictionary of the Greek New Testament, had been among the Institute's members. Since I still have (and use) my late husband's copy, I looked at its list of contributors of scholarly articles, and found that six (Grundmann among them) of the thirty had close ties to the Institute.

Yet, after World War II he and numerous other participants were soon "denazified" and successfully continued academic or pastoral careers. According to Heschel, this was fairly easily accomplished because they all vouched for each other. Most, in spite of the evidence of their own publications, protested that during the Nazi era they had been completely a-political, interested only in scholarly research. She says that by and large they did not in later years change their basic ideas about Judaism and its supposed malevolent influences.

Heschel's book deals only with the so-called German Christians. Since the more theologically conservative Confessing Church and the Roman Catholic Church did not participate in the Institute she says little about them other than to note that they did not

differ significantly from the German Christians in their attitudes toward Jews.

The two books are in a disturbing way complementary. The "liberal Protestant" ideas described by Levine are clearly foreshadowed in these German theologians. Aware of the high reputation of German scholarship, one can scarcely escape wondering how far their influence extended. Do current rarely questioned ideas about Jesus and the Judaism of his day have a less than innocent origin?



Sung Vespers & Mass for Saint Michael & All Angels

Tuesday, 29 September
5pm/5:30pm
In the Lady Chapel

You don't have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body.

C.S. Lewis

Please visit our website:
www.sstephens.org

Read *The S. Stephen* online. Go paperless or print your own copy. Contact Cory MacLean in the church office. She will put your name on the email list and each month you will receive the link to the online issue of *The S. Stephen*.

THE SUNDAY MASS IN THE LIFE OF THE PARISH

By Father Alexander

S. Stephen's Church has been aptly described as "a diverse community of Christians united in the worship of God." That description is right at several levels.

We are certainly diverse. A parish in the Catholic tradition seeks always to incorporate all sorts and conditions. We welcome everyone, regardless of race, age, educational level, political persuasion, or socio-economic status. It would be a betrayal of our catholic identity to seek to attract only those who fit a certain professional profile, or who share the same cultural attitudes.

Instead, the common denominator is the worship of God in the Catholic tradition. And the pre-eminent place where we come together as a community united in worship is at the Sunday Mass.

The Holy Eucharist has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension, the worship of God, is of course primary. We offer the Church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving through Christ to the Father. In this way, we begin to fulfill our human vocation to know God and adore him forever.

But the Mass also has a horizontal dimension: the gathering of God's people. The Greek word for Church, *ecclesia*, literally means "those called out," and it originally referred to an assembly or town meeting of all the citizens of a city or *polis*. In the ancient Greek world, one reaffirmed one's citizenship in the *polis* by responding to the call to come out and join the assembly. Failure to do so without a compelling reason amounted to a repudiation of one's citizenship in the *polis*, and the consequences could be dire.

The Sunday Mass is likewise the weekly gathering of the Christian *ecclesia*, the assembly of God's people. By our presence we reaffirm our loyalty to Christ through membership in his Body, the Church. From the earliest days of Christianity, failure to attend the Sunday Eucharist without some compelling reason – such as grave illness or unavoidable travel – has been regarded as tantamount to a denial of our Christian identity and Church membership. It is not, of course, an unforgivable sin. One can always repent and be forgiven; and for this reason even in this day and age we go to Confession to receive Absolution for needlessly missing Sunday Mass.

A typical parish church has a number of programs and activities during the week that gather smaller subsections of the congregation based on common interests or specific ministries: Altar Guilds, Bible studies, Prayer Groups, Soup Kitchen teams, Buildings and Grounds committees, support groups of various kinds, and other groups that meet for fellowship.

The Sunday Mass is the one gathering, however, where the members of all these groups come together to realize their unity in the worship of God. In the Anglo-Catholic vision, all parish activities flow from and return to the Sunday Eucharist. These parish activities represent the fanning out of the

members of the congregation into smaller groups to pursue common interests and exercise various ministries in response to their particular vocations. But the Sunday Mass represents the re-gathering of all these diverse groups into the overarching unity of Christ and his Church.

It follows that the Sunday Eucharist is primary and foundational, while all other parish activities are secondary and derivative. It is a reversal of priorities when participation in any parish program or ministry, however laudable in itself, becomes an excuse for missing Sunday Mass. It effectively saws off the branch on which we sit, for the Eucharist is the source of all authentic Christian ministry and fellowship in the first place. Divorced from the Eucharist, even our most altruistic ministries of helping others cease to express our Christian commitment and risk instead becoming efforts at self-justification.

In the 1920s the great Anglo-Catholic bishop Frank Weston once famously exhorted the faithful who had learned to adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament not to stop there but to go out into the highways and byways and serve him in the faces of the poor. Nowadays, however, we perhaps need the reverse exhortation: for we cannot hope to recognize and serve Christ in the face of the stranger unless we first learn to adore him in the liturgy and the Sacraments.

In one of my previous parishes, a certain individual used to come faithfully on his assigned Sundays to host Coffee Hour – except that he didn't bother to come to Mass first! A

busy individual, he found it a much more effective use of his time to arrive late and set everything up in the parish hall after the Mass was already underway. He eventually had to be admonished either to start coming to Mass on these Sundays or give up hosting Coffee Hour. The good news is that he finally realized that important as his Coffee Hour ministry was, being at Mass was infinitely more important; and he repented and amended his ways accordingly.

It embarrasses me when well-meaning parishioners tell me of their intention to miss a coming Sunday's Mass on account of what seem to them compelling reasons and ask for my understanding. What I usually think but can't quite manage to say in response is that I do understand, all too well, but I'm not the one they need to whom they need to be making their apologies! They're not letting *me* down as much as they're letting down God, his Church, their fellow parishioners, and themselves.

So much more often than we realize *someone* in the congregation is counting on seeing us at Sunday Mass, and goes away disappointed when we're not there. In the Anglo-Catholic vision, we are not isolated and autonomous individuals coming to Church for our own personal "worship experience." We are interdependent members of a body, bound together by ties of mutual obligation and service. By our common presence in the *ecclesia*, the Eucharistic assembly, we reflect God's love to each other and open our hearts to receive God's love through others.

We do well, then, to remember that the essence of parish life in the Anglo-Catholic tradition is to be "a diverse community of Christians united in the worship of God." Worship comes first and last in our life together. Everything else comes in between.



S. Stephen's Church in Providence
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Address Correction Requested



*"The aim and final end of all music should
be none other than the glory of God and the
refreshment of the soul."*

Johann Sebastian Bach

Memorial Recital

Sunday 18 October at 5:30pm

With the music of J.S. Bach,
including Cantata, BWV 82 "Ich habe genug."

James Busby, Organist
John Whittlesey, Baritone
Matthew Knipple, Cello

