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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

No greater gift could ever be given at Christmas or any other time, than that which God the Father gave the world that very first Christmas – the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. With the exception of Mary and Joseph who were visited by an Angel and told the identity of the child in Mary's womb; and Elizabeth who (filled with the Holy Spirit) exclaimed to Mary: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (Luke 1:42-43); and the shepherds who were greeted by a heavenly host announcing the birth of the Christ Child; and perhaps the Magi who saw a mysterious star in the sky and came bearing gifts for the “child born King of the Jews” – no one else had any clue of the priceless gift that God gave the world that first Christmas. Life went on for the people in and around Bethlehem as if nothing happened. Little did they know that the child born humbly in the manger world change the world forever.

Tragically, some 2000 years after His birth, billions of people alive in the world today (to include many in our own communities and perhaps our own homes) still have no clue who Jesus is, and the gift of eternal life He offers to ALL who believe in Him.

God is calling all Christians (clergy and laity alike) to go forth in His Name and share the “Good News” – the Gospel of Jesus Christ with family and friends, acquaintances, strangers, whoever the Lord brings into our lives or sends us to. While we can’t, nor should we try to force our Christian faith on others, we are not only called, but commanded by Christ in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to share the gift of faith which we have received in order that others may be strengthened in their faith. And, for those who do not yet believe in Christ, may our Christian witness help them come to believe in Jesus, accepting Him as Lord and Savior of their life.

No doubt, there are many reading this letter who are thinking – “That’s the job of the clergy. They are the ones who are called and paid to preach, teach and offer the sacraments.” I would agree that it is the job and ministry of the clergy, however, it is also the ministry of the laity to help share the Gospel and make Christ known throughout the world.

In “The Examination” of the ordinand, during the liturgy for the “Ordination of a Priest,” we hear the following:

“All baptized people are called to make Christ known as Savior and Lord, and to share in the renewing of his world.” (BCP 531)

Similarly, in the Catechism, found in the Book of Common Prayer, the Church teaches:

“The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ... The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace,
and love...The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.” (BCP 855)

The Episcopal Church is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. It is a liturgical and sacramental Church, and as such, the ordained clergy have a very special and vital role in the life and ministry of the Church, particularly sacramentally. The bishops and priests are the ones who are called to serve as the celebrant at Holy Communion; anoint the newly baptized with holy chrism; grant absolution during confession; and offer the nuptial blessing during the sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

While they also play an important leadership role in preaching and teaching and providing pastoral care, apart from the sacramental ministry, much of what clergy do in the day to day life of the parish can be done by anyone – lay or ordained. I believe for far too long, we as the Church have depended too much solely on the clergy to carry out the mission of the Church, while failing to fully appreciate the importance and necessity of the laity’s participation in the mission of the Church. Given the current clergy shortage and the fact that it is only going to get worse in the near future for a variety of reasons, we need to rethink how we are doing things.

As with many aspects of our life, for better or worse, finances control much of what we do and how we do it. The escalating expense of a traditional three year residential seminary education is causing the Church to rethink how we train and educate our clergy. Similarly, the ever growing struggle of many parishes to afford full-time clergy is forcing us to rethink how we carry out the mission and ministry of the Church in the parish. Even if it were possible (which it’s not) for every congregation (regardless of size or location) to have its own priest every Sunday, there is far too much ministry that needs to be done for the building up of God’s Kingdom, to be carried out solely by the clergy.

Jesus initially called and trained the 12 apostles to share and carry on His ministry. However, we are told in Luke’s Gospel that as Jesus continued moving toward Jerusalem, He appointed seventy-two others and sent them ahead in groups of two to all the towns and villages where he planned to go. Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.” (Luke 10:2)

The “seventy-two others” weren’t the apostles, but they had an important role to play in preparing the people for Christ to come into their lives. Similarly, not all Christians are called to the ordained ministry, but all Christians are called by Christ to be ministers and to go into “the harvest field” to proclaim the Gospel and help prepare people for the coming of Christ. The “harvest” is indeed plentiful. As mentioned above, there are currently over five billion men, women and children alive in the world today who have not yet come to know and believe in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14: 6), He wasn’t kidding. The salvation of billions of lives is at stake. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus commands us to love God first and foremost, but also to love one another – even our enemies. If we are to truly love others, it is imperative that we share God’s love with them. The Lord is sending us into the world to do just that. During their final night together before He was arrested, Jesus prayed for the Apostles and for each of us. He said, “Father...As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world... My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” (John 17:18, 20-21)

The Apostle Paul heard and obeyed the Lord’s command to go into the world and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. He knew the importance and necessity of preaching the Gospel in order that others might come to know and believe in Christ. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’” (Romans 10:13-15).

Dear Friends in Christ, the “Harvest” is plentiful, so much so that it is going to take far more than just the clergy to go out into the “Harvest Field.” As I have been praying about how we as the Diocese of Albany can better minister to the needs of our congregations, and also go out more effectively into the world to share the Gospel, I believe the Lord is calling us to focus more on building up and equipping the laity to become even more involved in carrying out the mission of the Church – “To restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” (BCP 855).

As I have traveled around the world, visiting different provinces of the Anglican Communion, I have noticed that lay leaders/ministers have played a key role in those areas where the Church is exploding in growth, particularly in Africa. Unlike the United States where a parish church
normally refers to one congregation, in the Anglican Provinces in Africa, a single parish is usually made up of 10 or more separate congregations. The parish priest travels to the different congregations providing for the sacramental needs of the people while the laity carries out much of the rest of the ministry. I realize the American and African cultures are vastly different, however, I believe there is much we can learn from the way our African brothers and sisters carry out the various ministries of the Church. They have raised up, trained and empowered the laity to serve as: lay administrators, lay catechists, lay Eucharistic ministers and visitors, lay evangelists/church planters, lay preachers, lay readers, and lay worship leaders, just to name a few.

I am very appreciative of all the laity in the Diocese of Albany and the many ministries they are already involved in, such as wardens and vestry members, choir members, acolytes, altar guild members, Daughters of the King, lay Eucharistic ministers, lectionary readers, parish secretaries, treasurers, Bible Study and Sunday School teachers, healing prayer team members, etc… These are all important ministries and need to continue. In many instances, however, we need to do a better job as a Church, training and preparing people for these ministries. Often times we plug people into ministries without giving them adequate training or explanation about the importance of these ministries.

This year’s Parish Leadership Conference will focus on lay ministry. We will be taking a look at existing lay ministries and how we might improve them or empower them to do even more. We will also be exploring new lay ministries, or bringing back past ministries such as officially licensed and trained Lay Readers who can lead congregations in Morning or Evening Prayer Services. I also believe we need to have trained and licensed lay preachers. There is a growing need for lay vicars and lay administrators, especially in some of our smaller rural parishes. We need trained and licensed lay evangelists and church planters to help us reach out more effectively into the world sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I invite and encourage everyone in the Diocese (clergy and laity) to join me for this year’s Parish Leadership Conferences as we celebrate the lay ministries of the Diocese and explore ways to improve and expand them to better meet the growing needs of the Church and its mission “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” May God Bless us and use us mightily as we go forth boldly into the world in the name of His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, offering ourselves as an instrument of His love and mercy and healing grace.

This year’s Parish Leadership Conferences will be held from 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. on the following dates and locations:

• January 20, 2018: Holy Family School, Malone
• January 27, 2018: Christ the King Spiritual Life Center, Greenwich
• February 3, 2018: St. James, Oneonta

Faithfully Your Brother in Christ,

+ Bill
On October 31 we observed the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s nailing his 95 theses – directed against the practice of indulgences – to the castle church door in Wittenberg. This bold action initiated the Protestant Reformation which changed the church and the world in ways that are still very much with us.

Four days before there was another anniversary; it went unnoticed – but it changed the church and the world even more profoundly. On October 27, 312, a general named Constantine approached the city of Rome with 40,000 soldiers in order to challenge his rival, Maxentius, in a final contest over who would rule the Roman Empire. His biographer, Eusebius, the great church historian and bishop of Caesarea at the time, describes a vision that Constantine experienced just before the battle, in which he saw the image of a cross in the sky.

“The victorious emperor himself long afterwards declared it to the writer of this history, when he was honored with his acquaintance and society, and confirmed his statement by an oath, who could hesitate to accredit the relation, especially since the testimony of after-time has established its truth? He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, ‘in this sign conquer.’ At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed the miracle.”

Constantine was a Roman pagan, and Christianity was still an illegal sect. Only a few years before, the church had endured the most severe persecution in its history under Emperor Diocletian. According to Eusebius, however, Constantine was not so hostile to the Christian movement, and was looking for a source of divine aid beyond that offered by the Roman Gods. “Because of the wicked magical enchantments so diligently practiced by the tyrant Maxentius, Constantine was convinced that he needed more powerful aid than his military forces could give him, so he sought the help of God.”

His vision convinced him that he would find that aid from the Christian God. So he had his soldiers paint the “chi rho” symbol -- indicating the name of Christ -- on their shields, and his army faced Maxentius under a battle standard called the “Labarum,” which consisted of the Chi Rho resting on a cross.

“He called together the workers in gold and precious stones, sat in the midst of them, and described to them the sign he had seen, telling them to represent it in gold and precious stones. And this representation I myself have had an opportunity of seeing….A long spear overlaid with gold with a transverse bar laid over it formed the figure of the cross. A wreath of gold and precious stones was fixed to the top with the symbol of the Savior’s name within it – the first two [Greek] letters of Christ’s name, the rho (R) being intersected by chi (X) in its centre.”

The two armies met at the Milvian bridge, and Constantine routed Maxentius’ forces, driving them into the Tiber River. Many, including Maxentius himself, were drowned. Constantine was now the ruler of the empire.

Constantine took this as a sign that the God of the Christians was the
one supreme and all powerful God. In 313 he issued the Edict of Milan, which granted religious toleration to all sects within the empire and lifted the persecution of Christians once and for all. From that point, Constantine began to show favor to the church. Christianity was to be, in his view, the spiritual force that would unify the empire, and he granted the church wealth, power and prestige. Says Eusebius,

“The Emperor personally invited God’s ministers to spend time with him. He showered them with every possible honor... He let them join him at table. They accompanied him on his travels, believing that the God they served would help him as a result. He gave vast amounts of money from his own personal treasury to the churches of God, for the enlarging and heightening of their sacred buildings and for decorating the sanctuaries of the church.”

Eusebius and his fellow bishops took the church’s new prestige and wealth as a sign of God’s blessing and the triumph of the Gospel. After centuries of struggle and persecution, Christ had triumphed of the pagan deities of Rome. In their eyes, a new Christian era had begun.

“...the Church laid it down”

In a letter dated October 23, 1906, Richard Meux Benson, an English priest and founder of an Anglican monastic order called The Society of St. John the Evangelist, offered an incisive assessment of the Church’s change of fortune following Constantine’s vision. He said, “I always regard Constantine’s vision as an artifice of the devil. When Constantine took up the Cross the Church laid it down.”

Why would he say such a thing? Father Benson was calling attention to Jesus’ admonition, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34) His point was that raising the cross as a battle standard while you drive your enemies into the churning waters of the Tiber is not what Jesus had in mind by “taking up your cross.”

Jesus had said, “those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you.” (Mark 10:42-43) But that is precisely what took place. In what has been called “The Constantinian Settlement,” the Emperor offered a partnership between the Church and the structures of power and prestige in society. The bishops of the Church agreed for the sake of the church’s mission and the spread of the Gospel. But as Father Benson recognized, it deeply compromised the Church’s adherence to the way of the cross.

Luther’s Theology of the Cross

Six months after Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg castle church door, in April 1518 he attended a disputation in Heidelberg. It was held by the Augustinian Order, of which he was still a member, and its purpose was to give Luther a chance to expound upon his theology. Again he offered a series of “theses,” including the following, which expressed what has been called Luther’s “Theology of the Cross.”

- He deserves to be called a theologian, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.
- A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.
- That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

Luther contrasts a “theology of Glory” with a “theology of the Cross.” A theology of glory regards God and his purposes in terms of human achievement - “in works as perceived by man.” Luther stresses that God’s revelation of himself and his purpose takes place entirely on the cross. We know Who God is, what he has done, and how we are to respond, by looking to the suffering and death of Jesus.
And this recognition entails a reversal of all human values and aspirations to greatness and glory.

Mary, the mother of the Lord, announces this great reversal in her Magnificat: “[God] has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

This reversal finds expression in numerous sayings of Jesus: “the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:17)… “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35)… “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:44). Jesus explicitly links this last admonition to his own example and his saving work on the cross, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

**Paul’s “Word of the Cross”**

It is the Apostle Paul who is the great evangelist of the Cross. As he tells the Corinthians, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2) Like Luther after him, Paul recognized that to many, the Incarnation itself, God’s becoming human, was a giving up or “self-emptying” from its inception; Christ “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7) This divine self-emptying reaches a climax on the cross as “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Paul is not just proclaiming the means of our salvation here, he is presenting it the example of pattern of life — “have this mind among yourselves,” he says.

We live in a post-Constantinian age; secularism has gone a long way stripping away the power that the Church once had in society. Bishops no longer have private armies, the church no longer colludes with the state to execute witches and heretics. But the temptation to lay down the cross, and to “lord it over them as the gentiles do” is always there — especially if it seems to further the Church’s mission. For the sake of the Gospel we must “know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” But is it not enough to proclaim the saving work of Christ on the cross; for the Gospel to have credibility we must “have this mind among ourselves” and take up our own cross.

The Rev. Dr. Brown is Rector of Trinity Church, Potsdam, and a regular contributor to The Albany Episcopalian
Suppose you are offered a job. You have found a job that you think is just right. It looks like a job that the people will be fun to work with. Even so, you don’t take the job right away. You want to make sure that this is the job that God wants you to have. So, you pray about it every day. You ask God to shut down the offer if it is not from him. The job stays open and you have a feeling of peace about it. So you take the job, but it eventually turns out to be terrible. The people you work with don’t like you. They make life hard on you. They tell stories about you. They give you bad peer reviews. They make fun of you. You ask God, “how did this happen? I asked you if this was the right place and You let me take the job anyway!” I thought God wanted me to take this job.

These are good questions. It doesn’t have to be only a job; it can be dealing with friendships, marriage or going to school. You say, “God, I wanted you to guide me. How did I ever get in this situation?”

Would God ever let you get into some place where you were having a good time? Would God ever let you get in a situation where you would feel miserable? Well, maybe He did. He wants us to go into places where we will ask him for help. He wants you to depend on him. He wants you to cry out to him. If you’re drinking wine and eating bon-bons every day, you’ll never cry out to him. Instead, God wants you to cry out to him, “God, I’m desperate, I need your help. If you don’t help me, I’m in deep trouble”. Why would God do something like that?

Take a look at the gospel for today. It begins, “…immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side.” (Matthew 14:22) He made the disciples get into the boat. He didn’t ask them or even tell them. They didn’t want to go. They said, “It’s too stormy. The wind is against us. We might sink.” He made them get in, anyway. Why is this? It is because he wanted them to become people who would trust him in dangerous situations. He wanted them to learn to ask him for help. And he knew when they asked him for help they would be on the road to being holy, like him.

Reading the Epistle of James, chapter one, beginning with the second verse, it says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Did you know that God’s goal for us is not that we go to heaven? It is that we be perfect, perfect in...
everything we do, complete and lacking in nothing. But, how do we get there? How do we become perfect? The answer is in the need to express faith in Christ in the midst of hardships. Expressing faith in Christ in church is easy, but expressing faith in Christ in an atmosphere where people think you’re crazy for doing so, is hard! But, that’s the kind of thing that builds the kind of character, the kind of personality, the kind of dependence on God when we encounter various trials. So, what does it mean to count it all joy when you encounter various trials? Does it mean that when you lose your job, you say “whoopee?” When your bank account goes down to zero and you still owe thousands of more dollars, are you supposed to say, “I love that stuff?” Of course not. You know that God will always love us, care for us. “God, you got me here for a reason and I depend on you for everything. I thank you, praise you and worship you for your constant care for me.” That’s what’s supposed to happen when things get tough. If we do that, we get steadfastness, perfection and completion.

You probably get the theory now that this is not an easy thing to do. The practice is much more difficult. In practice, when we encounter bad things, we try to give thanks to God, but eventually we say, “This isn’t working. Something is going wrong. Where is God in all this? Why did God leave me alone? Why doesn’t he help me?” When things are at their very worst, God is not far away. As written in Matthew 14, “The boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch, (between 3 and 6 A.M.), Jesus came walking toward them on the water.” They’ve been crying out, “We’re going to drown! Where is Jesus? Why did Jesus send us out here?”

The gospel of Matthew tells us that the apostle Peter wanted to walk on the water like Jesus did. And he said to him, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you.” Jesus said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. The text says, (Matthew 14:30) “But when he [Peter] noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink…” Peter was okay when he looked at Jesus. But when he thought about the strong wind, he forgot about Jesus, and was no longer able to stand on the water. Just like he did with Peter, Jesus is going to call us to do things that are difficult for us. In each of these things, we have a choice of focusing on 1) the circumstances, 2) our resources, or 3) Jesus. He does this so that we will learn to focus on him in difficult and dangerous situations. In reality, we need to practice depending on Jesus before we get into difficult and dangerous situations. We need to practice so that we know that we can learn to depend upon Jesus and so that we do not become frightened by situations. You can learn to depend upon Jesus by having a prayer partner. The idea here is that you have a Christian friend and you call the Christian friend every two or three nights and tell him or her what you need prayer for. Your friend tells you what he or she needs prayer for. Then you pray for each other’s situations on the phone and you promise to continue to pray during the day. Having a prayer partner gives you practice in expressing helplessness and the need you have, for Jesus to help you.

This now brings me to Elie Wiesel.

Elie Wiesel was an Austrian teenager, a 15-year-old Jew, who was rounded up by the police in 1940 and sent to a Nazi concentration camp. Miraculously, he survived the concentration camp, and after the war he lived and spent the rest of his life advocating for people who were in horrible situations and writing books about the horror of
concentration camps. In his first book, “Night”, he recounts the time when he and the other men were brought out of their barracks just before dawn and made to stand in ranks in front of three scaffolds. As they watched, the guards brought out three people whom they explained were going to be executed for crimes they had committed in the camp, such as stealing food. They tied the hands of the first man behind him, stood him on a chair, put his neck through a noose, tightened it, then kicked the chair out from under him. After he died, they did the same with the second man. Everyone then gasped at the sight of the third prisoner that turned out to be a five-year-old boy. They did the same with him as they had done with the two men, but the boy was not very heavy and it took a long time for him to suffocate, wiggling at the long end of the rope. As the men watched the boy struggling, someone in the ranks cried out, “Where is God?” In the darkness, Elie Wiesel found himself yelling out, “he is at the end of the rope.”

Where is the worst place you can be? Suffocating at the end of a rope? Where is God? He is with you at the end of the rope. There is no place you can go that is so bad that God will not be with you. It is for some of us here, the fourth watch of the night. The wind and waves are against us. We worry that we will die. But Jesus is coming. You will see him.

Whatever the worst situation is in your life, God is always there. If you lost your money, or if your marriage is falling apart, or if there is terrible sickness in your family, or if things that the medical profession has given up on you, God is always there.

For some people, like the disciples, this is the fourth watch of the night. But Jesus is coming. As Peter is sinking, he cries out, “Lord, save me” (Matthew 14:31). “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” This is the same lesson. The epistle of James (4:2) says, “you have not because you ask not.” We go through the day worrying. Can I do this? Can I do that? Will there be enough? What will happen to me? Jesus wants us to go through the day depending on him. Jesus, I need your help here. I need your help there. I cannot do anything without you. Please help.

Whenever you’re in deep trouble, there are three possible things to think about. First, the circumstances – in this case the “wind, water and the waves”; next the resources; in this case of the boat filling up with water, and third, thinking about Jesus. You’ll always have a choice. At work, you could think about your resources, i.e., working harder and/or smarter. You could then think about the possible necessity in firing five people by Christmas, or third, call upon Jesus. “Jesus, I don’t have any resources. I desperately need your help.” That’s what Jesus wants. Jesus wants us to call out to him.

We need to make statements of confidence in Jesus. Some people wait until things are difficult to begin. There’s nothing wrong in doing that, but it’s very difficult to pray prayers of desperation and dependence if we haven’t done it before on a regular basis. You will lose confidence that your prayers are not being heard. You will think that your prayers have gone to the ceiling and bounced back. You need to go through the day telling Jesus you have confidence in him in every little thing you’re doing that day and asking him for help.

Going back to the epistle of James, “You have not because you asked not”, Jesus loves to be asked because asking opens the channels of communication between us and him. He can make us more and more dependent on him, he can change our character and make us more like him. We need to be in touch with how desperate we are and how much we need Jesus, to talk out and talk through these things.

Tell God who we need to be so he can work in you and make us holy. Amen

The Rev. Canon Haskell is Canon to the Ordinary, Diocese of Albany. This writing was the sermon given at the Cathedral of All Saints, Albany, on August 13, 2017.
On Saturday, October 28th, the Cathedral of All Saints hosted the highly anticipated Albany Diocesan Acolyte Festival. More than 100 acolytes and leaders from area parishes were honored for their service to the Episcopal Church.

“The word acolyte is derived from the Greek word, acolytos, meaning companion, attendant, or helper. Its roots can be found in the Old Testament where the prophet Samuel is found assisting Eli, the Levite priest, and Elisha is seen assisting Elijah the Prophet. In the early Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the acolyte was the altar server; even given the rank of minor clergy called the taper-bearer, responsible for bearing lights during processions and liturgical entrances.” Today’s acolyte continues to play an important role in every liturgical event.

This year’s Festival began with the acolytes ceremoniously processing within the Cathedral in a Grand Eucharistic Procession; each robed in a white vestment and many carrying either a cross, torch, thurible or church banner. To this writer and to others in attendance, it was a beautiful sight to behold.

The highlight of this day, similar to Festivals past, was the Presentation of Acolytes when they reaffirmed their dedication to the service of God. Those honored for the first time received a newly minted brass pendant, designed with the Historic All Saints Bishop’s Cathedra Emblem and the Albany Diocesan Shield, as a gift from Bishop Love. To those who had already received their pendant at a previous festival, a special pin was given in recognition of their continued dedication and service.

The awards presentation was followed by the Holy Eucharist with Bishop Love, Celebrant, and The Rev. Matthew Stromberg, Rector of St. George’s, Schenectady, Preacher. At the conclusion of the Eucharist, the gathering moved on to attend one or more of several workshops offered by the Cathedral. Lunch concluded the day’s events with fellowship, friendship and, most of all, spirituality; a spirituality that provided the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be an acolyte in the service of the church and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

- The Editor
Parishes of Christmas Past

From the Editor...

The Albany Episcopalian wishes to thank all the parishes that submitted photos of their churches at Christmas from years past. Congratulations go to Jane Agee for her photo of the sanctuary of Bethesda, Saratoga, that is featured on the cover of this TAE issue. Sincere thanks and appreciation go to all the parishes that sent in photos, seven of which, are featured here - St. George’s, Schenectady, Church of the Cross, Ticonderoga, St. Philip’s, Norwood, St. John’s, Cohoes, St. George’s, Clifton Park, Christ Church, Duanesburg, and Christ Church, Gilbertsville.

St. George’s, Schenectady
Photo by Christopher Henry

Church of the Cross, Ticonderoga – Photo by Judy Walker

St. Philip’s, Norwood – Photographer unknown

St. John’s, Cohoes – Photo by Rev. William Hinrichs
Bethesda, Saratoga – Cover photo by Jane Agee

Christ Church, Duanesburg
Photo by Sherry Schrade

St. George’s, Clifton Park – Photographer anonymous

Christ Church, Gilbertsville
Photo by Gordon Brannick

St. John’s, Cohoes – Photo by Rev. William Hinrichs
When we were invited to write a Christmas article for the Albany Episcopal it was tempting to build upon the message of "Joy to the world, the Lord is come - Let earth receive her King." It does not get any better than this as years of fond memories from this special time of year come to mind. Then there was the other, all too familiar, side of Christmas to write about, that time of year when our thoughts can so easily become focused on "making a list and checking it twice." Just listen to the advertisers inviting us to follow some marketers’ magical formula to assure a “perfect” Christmas Season and celebration. In the midst of all this excitement: the buying and receiving of gifts, shopping the best sales, the decorations, music, parties and the like - Christmas can quickly become overwhelming and very distracting.

The infant Jesus who was laid in a manger - a feeding trough, bringing the gift of salvation promised through him, IS the gift of Christmas. Jesus is the One who has come into this world offering a way of life that leads to eternity for all who accept him as Lord and Savior. To unwrap this precious gift is to take Jesus out of the manager and invite him into our lives, embracing his way of life and all its implications. To ignore or reject the Baby Jesus is to leave him in the manger.

As we began to reflect on a Christmas message, we looked around at a polarized and divided nation and world desperately in need of the Prince of Peace. Many people today are filled with uncertainty, confusion and melancholy. Watch the news, read politicized or agenda driven Facebook posts, read the newspaper or the like and it will not take you long to find stories of families, friends, churches and communities divided over a plethora of issues. There are many important matters to be discussed: injustices in the world, hunger, poverty, addictions, abuse, violence, racism, and the drug epidemic to name a few. With Jesus, these potentially paralyzing conversations become life-giving and possible.

Jesus, God incarnate - Emmanuel, is the one who has come to show us the way of love and the way of life. Jesus entered this world vulnerable and humble in the midst of a very troubled world. Looking down into the manger, as if we were looking into a beautiful and clear reflecting pond, we find the perfect mirror upon which we see ourselves as God sees us. We see in Jesus what God desires for each of us. Jesus was born vulnerable and humble into the midst of a chaotic and anxious world that wants to run from the manger while craving the castle. In the Book of Common Prayer (p. 840) there is a prayer of thanksgiving that invites us to encounter Jesus in the humility of the manger and helps equip us go out into the world as the people of God –

"O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This infant Jesus is also the adult Jesus who was constantly surrounded by people who held differing opinions from his. He ate with sinners, spent time with
To unwrap the Baby Jesus is to accept and be challenged by his ministry of reconciliation.

When we take the Baby Jesus out of the manger and invite him into our lives, we take all of him, manger to cross. On the cross Jesus gave us the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. We cannot pick and choose. We accept his gift of love AND his gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation. When we truly accept his gift of love we cannot help but offer forgiveness and reconciliation. His love in us compels us to love even those who would reject and betray us.

The Barna group has reported that over 51% of adults in the Capital region are unchurched. That means that for every person of faith in our churches there is at least one adult in this region who does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. This Christmas, unwrap the greatest gift that you will ever receive and then give it away as freely as it has been given to you. Take Jesus into your life, share his love, forgive those who offend you, and strive for reconciliation with all. That's the best gift that money can't buy.

Share the Baby Jesus and share the gift of true love. Unwrap the Baby Jesus and take him out of the manger so that the world may know the true gift of love. “Joy to the world, the Lord is come - Let earth receive her King.” May this be a Merry and Blessed Christmas!

The Rev’d Thomas Papazoglakis is Rector, and his wife Rev’d Elizabeth, is Associate Rector of St. George’s Church, Clifton Park.
The 2017 Diocesan Mission Conference was hosted by St. John’s Church in Essex on September 23. The theme of this year’s conference “Be the light. Let it shine” is reflected in the great work that Albany Diocese Mission teams do throughout the world. The College For Every Student provided space used by the 64 attendees as well as an area for Mission team displays.

St. John’s parishioners opened their homes to all conference attendees who wanted to come the Friday night before the conference opened. Jim and Colleen Van Hoven graciously hosted a dinner for the early arrivals to get to know each other and learn about the mission work that they are doing.

St. John’s Senior Warden, Dick Perez, welcomed everyone to Essex and took special pride in introducing our new rector, Fr. Craig Hacker. Canon Bob Haskell officially opened the Mission Conference with a prayer and then spoke about the importance of missions.

This year the Conference had two sessions. The first session featured the wide variety of work done by Albany Diocese Mission teams. Thirteen speakers represented local, national and international missions. Rev. Donna and Kevin Steckline spoke about their recent work in Madagascar; Richey Woodzell explained the work of the Episcopal Relief and Development; Katharine Preston spoke with passion about our environment; Erika Adams described the work being done for the children in St. Andres school in Flande, Central Haiti; Dcn. Patti Johnson’s moving Days For Girls talk about the plight of girls and young women in third world countries who have no access to feminine hygiene supplies and the horrible consequences when such supplies are not available. Following this, Noel Dawes discussed the Welcome Home Initiative and their healing programs for combat veterans and their spouses; Jan Bedoukian talked about the work that Libros Para Los Niños has done in the Dominican Republic over the past ten years; Mike Anderson from the Northern Ireland Teen Trip reported on their work in the Eglington community; Sr. Mary Elizabeth spoke during the lunch break, conference attendees could take advantage of the beautiful fall day and lunch outside. St. John’s provided cold cuts and a salad. Home baked cookies by the St. John’s parishioners Lynne Goepper and Sandy Trombley and apples donated by Northern Orchard were delicious.
The Mission Committee members are Jenn Dean (chair) (St. Stephen’s: Delmar), Canon Bob Haskell (Diocese of Albany), Dcn. Donna Steckline & Kevin Steckline (Christ Church: Gilbertsville), Cindy Schmehl (St. John’s: Troy), Dcn. Patti Johnson (St. James: Ausable Forks), Rev. Jean Devaty (St. James: Lake George), Jan Bedoukian (St. John’s: Essex), Nancy Cairns (Adirondack Mission), Rev. Lynne Curtis (St. Luke’s: Mechanicville), Karen Love (St. Mary’s: Lake Lucerne), and Dcn. Susan Plaske (Cathedral of All Saints: Albany).

of “Goat Song and Mission” about goats and the Sisters of St. Mary in Luwinga, Malawa and Greenwich, NY; Cindy Schemhl talked about the work To Love A Child does to feed, cloth and educate children in Zimbabwe; Mtr. Anne Curtin discussed Healing a Women’s Soul; and Nancy Cairns spoke about Episcopal Appalachian Ministries and the work being done at Grace House on the Mountain and in communities struggling with property in rural and mountain areas.

In the afternoon session attendees chose one of four workshops: Choosing a Mission and Bringing in Others moderated by Rev. Donna Steckline, Building a Successful Mission moderated by Kevin Steckline, The Devil Within: Dealing with our Hidden Prejudices moderated by Bobbi Perez, and Mission Support: Chasing the Funds moderated by Nancy Cairns. After the sessions, each workshop gave a summation.


Fr. Craig Hacker closed the 2017 Mission Conference with a prayer.

For further information about the Albany Diocesan Missions Committee, any of the workshops presented at the conference, or missions opportunities as individuals or for parishes, please contact the Missions Committee at albanymissions@gmail.com
St. Matthew’s, Unadilla, and area churches commemorate The Reformation

Tuesday, October 31st, marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, when history says Martin Luther tacked his 95 theses onto a church door in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517. Churches the world over observed the event, with emphasis on unity and recognizing their fraternity, regardless of sect.

In commemoration of the historic event, congregations and choirs from three area churches worshipped together in an ecumenical service on Sunday, October 29th at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church, Unadilla. St. Matthew’s is the village’s oldest church, having been founded in 1809.

Rev. Paul Hamilton, of Unadilla’s First Presbyterian Church, delivered the sermon highlighting the commonalities of Christian faiths. A potluck lunch hosted by the church followed the service that included an informative talk about Martin Luther by Rev. Paul Messner, pastor at Atonement Lutheran Church, Oneonta.

Later in the afternoon, much like the celebration to be held in Wittenberg, Germany, the Catskill Valley Wind Orchestra performed at the First Presbyterian Church. One of the pieces performed was “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, Psalm 46.

Deacon Charles Bailey, of St. Matthew’s, hopes it is the start of more collaborative programming between churches in the area.

Left to right: Rev. James Ingalls, pastor of Faith Community Church, Sidney; Rev. Charles Bailey, Deacon at St. Matthew’s, Rev. Paul Hamilton, pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Unadilla, Crucifer John Jones, St. Matthew’s.
On Tuesday, October 31st, Joan Ecker, Business Officer and Transition Assistant, officially retired from the Diocesan staff after 28 years of service. During her tenure, Joan served faithfully with three Diocesan bishops (Bishop Ball, Bishop Herzog, Bishop Love), one Bishop Suffragan (Bishop Bena), and supported several accounting managers and treasurers.

Joan was unfailingly courteous with all those she served, including the Diocesan staff, clergy, laity, or parishes of this Diocese. Always concerned about even the smallest details, she made sure that everything she did was complete and correct. She was not only an efficient clerk, but a compassionate friend to many in the office and members of the Diocese and handling of requests from clergy and laity regarding parish assessments and insurance benefit decisions with skill and compassion. Outside the office, her meticulousness was humbly presented at each Diocesan Convention as she oversaw the Convention altar guild, preparing the two Convention Eucharists in two consecutive days for over a thousand communicants each year.

Joan faithfully served our Lord and His Church and has been an inspiration to all. Her impish smile, loving laugh and gentle demeanor will be sadly missed around the daily lunch table and throughout the office. We know her retirement will be a time of faithful service to our Lord, showing compassion and mercy and getting things just right wherever she serves.

May Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Savior bless His faithful servant Joan with strength and perseverance this day and always.
CLERGY IN TRANSITION

Appointments
Fr. Richard Lehmann has been appointed Priest-in-Charge of Zion Church, Hudson Falls.
Fr. Alistair Morrison has been called as Rector of Christ Church, Duanesburg.
Fr. Shaw Mudge has been appointed Priest-in-Charge of St. Mark’s, New Britain, CT.
Fr. Harold Reed has accepted a call to serve as Priest-in-Charge and Headmaster of the Day School at St. Andrew’s, La Mesa, CA.

Departures
Mtr. Teri Monica, Rector of Trinity Church, Plattsburgh, has stepped down to return to Florida.
Fr. James Brisbin, Rector of St. Francis Mission, Albany, has left St. Francis Mission. He continues to work for the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants in Albany.

In Memoriam

Convention 2018

DIOCESE OF ALBANY’S 150TH ANNUAL CONVENTION
JUNE 8TH – 10TH SPECULATOR, NY
WITH PRESIDING BISHOP MICHAEL CURRY

Theme: Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever. ~ Hebrews 13:8

Episcopal Charities of Albany offers eye care grants
Episcopal Charities of Albany offers direct assistance in the form of grants to indigent persons regardless of faith, who are in need of eye care, or who otherwise suffer from eye disorders, and are unable to afford such eye care of necessary related services. Grants are limited to eye examinations, purchase of eye glasses and special equipment or medication needed by an individual by reason of his or her suffering from eye disease and surgical procedures to restore or maintain normal vision.

Grant awards are limited to a maximum $1,000 per grant and to those residing within 19 counties of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany (northeastern New York State.)

Those who feel they may qualify for an eye care grant can apply by contacting the Administrator at ECA@albanydiocese.org or writing to ECA, 580 Burton Road, Greenwich, NY 12834.
THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

“The Twelve Days of Christmas,” has several interpretations of its lyrics. Here is one favorite…

My true love .....................................God, and the gifts from God
The partridge .....................................Jesus
Two turtledoves .................................The Old and New Testaments
Three French hens .............................Faith, Hope and Charity
Four calling birds ...............................The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Five golden rings ................................ The Torah (The first five books of the Bible): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy
Six geese a-laying ...............................The six days of Creation (Genesis)
Seven swans a-swimming ................. The Seven Sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing the Sick
Eight maids a-milking ....................... The eight Beatitudes in Sermon on the Mount - Blessed are: the poor in spirit; those who mourn; the meek; those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peace makers and the persecuted for the sake of righteousness. (Matthew 5:3-10)
Ten Lords a-leaping ...........................The Ten Commandments
Eleven pipers piping ......................... The Apostles (not including Judas) who spread the Good News
Twelve drummers drumming .......... The Twelve Articles of Faith in the Apostles’ Creed: “We believe… in God the Father; Creator; God the Son; Crucified, died, buried; raised from the dead; ascended into heaven; God the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; communion of saints; forgiveness of sins; resurrection of the body; and life everlasting.”
UPCOMING DIOCESAN EVENTS

January
8  Standing Committee Meeting
   Great Chapter Meeting, Cathedral of All Saints, Albany
13 Commission on Ministry Meeting
20 Parish Leadership Conference (PLC) – N. Adirondack & St. Lawrence Deaneries, Malone
27 Parish Leadership Conference (PLC) – Susquehanna & W. Mohawk Deaneries, Oneonta

February
3  Parish Leadership Conference (PLC) – Hudson, Metro, S. Adirondack, & Upper Hudson Deaneries – CTK
5  Standing Committee Meeting
10 Commission on Ministry Meeting
13 Trustees Meeting
14 Ash Wednesday

March
5  Standing Committee Meeting
6-9  House of Bishops Spring Meeting – Camp Allen, Navasota, TX
10 Commission on Ministry Meeting
25 Palm Sunday
26 Chrism Mass – Cathedral of All Saints
27 Chrism Mass – St. James’ Church, Oneonta
28 Chrism Mass – St. Thomas Church, Tupper Lake
30 Good Friday

April
1  Easter Sunday
9  Standing Committee Meeting
12-13 Synod of Province II, Desmond Inn & Conference Center, Latham
14 Commission on Ministry Meeting
16-18 Clergy Conference (with spouses invited)
27-29 Men’s Cursillo Weekend
30 Pre-Convention Information Meeting – Christ Church, Cooperstown

May
1  Pre-convention Information Meeting – St. Mark’s Church, Malone
7  Standing Committee Meeting
10 Pre-convention Information Meeting – Church of the Messiah, Glens Falls
8  Trustees Meeting
10 Ascension Day
12 Commission on Ministry Meeting
20 Pentecost

June
4  Standing Committee Meeting – if required
8-10 150th Convention of the Diocese of Albany

July
5-13 General Convention, Austin, TX
24 Trustees Meeting

August
To be Determined

September
7-8 Postulants & Candidates Retreat – Christ the King SLC
7  Commission on Ministry
10 Standing Committee Meeting
15 Diocesan Council
21-23 Clergy Wives Conference

October
1  Standing Committee Meeting
1-3 Holiness Conference
5-13 Clergy Conference Diocese of Down & Dromore (travel included)
13 Commission on Ministry Meeting
19-20 Healing Event featuring Judith McNutt
23 Trustees Meeting
26-28 Deacons Retreat – Christ the King SLC

November
5  Standing Committee Meeting
6-9 Priests Retreat – Christ the King SLC
10 Commission on Ministry Meeting
# Bishop Love’s Visitation Schedule

## January
- 7  St. Paul’s Church, Keeseville
- 21  Zion Church, Colton
- 28  St. Mary’s Church, Springfield Center

## February
- 4  St. Ann’s Church, Amsterdam
- 11  St. Peter’s Church, Albany
- 25  Christ Church, Ballston Spa

## March
- 4  St. George’s Church, Schenectady
- 18  St. Paul’s Church, Greenwich
- 25  Palm Sunday – Grace Church, Waterford

## April
- 1  Easter – Cathedral of All Saints
- 8  St. Luke’s Church, Chatham
- 15  Christ Church, Coxsackie
- 22  Calvary Church, Cairo
- 25  Gloria Dei Church, Palenville
- 29  St. James’ Church, Lake George

## May
- 6  Church of the Good Shepherd, Canajoharie
- 13  All Saints Church, Round Lake
- 20  Pentecost – St. Augustine’s Church, Ilion

## June
- 3  Trinity Church, Granville

## July
- To be determined

## August
- 26  St. Paul’s Church, Waddington

## September
- 16  St. John’ Church, Copake Falls
- 30  St. Luke’s Church, Catskill

## October
- 14  All Saints Church, Hoosick
- 21  Christ Church, Greenville

## November
- 4  Church of Our Saviour, Lebanon Springs
- 11  St. Andrew’s Church, Scotia

## December
- 2  St. Andrew’s Church, Albany
- 9  St. Paul’s Church, Albany
- 16  St. Stephen’s Church, Schenectady
- 23  Bethesda Church, Saratoga Springs
Hey everyone,

Beaver Cross has been building community in Christ since 1964 and has been a place of spiritual formation and a home away from home for many generations of young people across the diocese. We are pleased to announce that registration for your Diocesan Youth Camp – Beaver Cross Camps – will be open on January 1st 2018. Consider giving the gift of camp to a loved one this Christmas. We would like to invite you to be part of the summer Beaver Cross experience and register for summer camp 2018 at: http://www.beavercrossministries.org.

More information about camp can be found on the Beaver Cross Ministries website. From all of us at Beaver Cross Camps, we would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and hope to see your registration in the New Year!

~Danny & Kait Hyde

2018 Beaver Cross

Save the Dates

- JR./ Sr. Sonshine (6th-12th) February 16-19
- Convention Youth Rally (6th-12th) June 8 – 10
- Day Camp: (K-8th) July 2nd - August 26th
- Overnight Camp: Dates July 6th - through August 3rd
  - Beaver Bound: July 4-6
  - Discoverers: July 1-6
  - Adventurers 1: July 8-13
  - Adventurers 2: July 15-20
  - Pioneers 1: July 22-27
  - Pioneers 2: July 29-August 3
Planning your schedule

- 12/8 - 12/9 - Advent Retreat
- 12/9 - Commission on Ministry
- 12/13 - Soaking Prayer
- 12/19 - Lessons & Carols
- 12/25-12/26 - Christmas and St. Stephen’s Day - CtK Closed
- 1/10-18 - Soaking Prayer
- 1/13 - Commission on Ministry
- 1/27 - Parish Leadership Conf.
- 2/10-11 - SHP L3 First weekend
- 2/16-19 Jr. & Sr. Sonshine
- 2/17-18 - SHP L3 Final weekend
- 3/8-11 - SHP L1
- 3/16-17 - Mike Hutchings Conference
- 4/9-11 - Women Veterans’ Retreat
- 4/14 - Debt Proof your Marriage
- 4/20-21 - SHP REFRESH
- 4/21 - Ecumenical Healing Service #1

Has the Lord been nudging you to draw closer to Him?

During his ministry, Jesus needed to step away and get in touch with His Father. (Luke 5:16) How much more do we need to come away to draw close with the Lord?

Personal Prayer Retreats are, about more time in the Lord’s Presence. For those who are looking for healing - physical, emotional, or interpersonal - Personal Prayer Appointments may be made.

Retreats are about you and the Lord. They are tailored to your individual needs.

Give us a call today. 518.692.9550, ext. 201

Personal Prayer Retreats
Are Available at anytime by prior apt.

Mark your calendars for the 3rd Annual Women’s Retreat

February 23-24, 2018

Details coming soon!
The Diocese of Albany is One Church fulfilling the Great Commandment and Great Commission, moving from membership to discipleship; equipping, emboldening and sending disciples to make disciples.

- Diocesan Vision

The Albany Episcopalian is printed four times a year. Publication is scheduled the months of March, May, September and December.

Submissions for consideration must be received prior to the first Monday of the month before publication. News items of diocesan interest are welcome, and should be sent to the Business Office at 580 Burton Road, Greenwich, NY 12834, in care of Editor or transmitted via e-mail to: TAEeditor@albanydiocese.org.

Diocesan Website
For the most up-to-date information about events in the diocese, parish and clergy directories, mission news, parish resources, and more, visit the diocesan website at www.albanyepiscopaldiocese.org. You can also visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/albanydiocese.