

Partners in PRAYER

HARVEST 2017

NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER

Our Mission: The Anglican Fellowship of Prayer serves the church by encouraging, facilitating, and promoting the understanding and discipline of prayer in the Anglican Communion.

Letter from our president, the Rev. Dr. John R. Throop: Continuous Thanksgiving

Dear Friends,

One of the great challenges that the apostle Paul has put before the faithful is the work of thanksgiving. Think about what he told the Thessalonians: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (I Thess. 5:18). The work of the spiritual life is constant and continuous: Rejoice ***always***. Pray ***constantly***. Give thanks ***in all circumstances***. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus ***for each and every one of us***.

The spiritual challenge before you and me as faithful people, as lovers of God in Christ, is daunting. After all, there are times when the dilemmas we face make it hard to rejoice. There are many times when our attention is diverted from being in conversation with God in prayer. Perhaps the hardest spiritual task is to give thanks when it’s very hard to find anything to give thanks for. Throughout human history, there are many events that merit thanksgiving. So it is with many circumstances in personal life.

Martin Rûckert faced this very dilemma when he wrestled with tragedy after tragedy in 17th century Germany. As a Lutheran pastor in Eilenberg, he had to deal with refugees fleeing from surrounding villages during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), and from pestilence and plague as people lived in terrible conditions. At the height of the two-edged tragedy, Rûckert and four other pastors had to handle 45-50 funerals per day. Three of the pastors died in the sickness, and one fled to a healthier part of the region. So Rûckert carried the pastoral load alone.

He reflected in prayer and in poetry, and he wrote hymn texts. One of them we know well: “Now Thank We All Our God” (1645). He found ways to express gratitude and thanks in the difficult circumstances he faced. He wrote: “Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices, who from our mothers’ arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.” In a similar situation, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a first national day of thanksgiving in 1863—after the Battle of Gettysburg. It’s the greatest challenge to faith to give thanks in times of trial. But we must, for God is with us.

Then Rûckert confesses human limits to finding goodness in difficult times: “Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us, with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us; And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed; And guard us through all ills in this world, till the next.” If we begin in life circumstances to say, “God is here within this situation,” then we will not feel alone. Nor will we feel abandoned. God will show us purpose and promise.

The concluding verse directs our sight and insight to God: "All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given, the Son, and Him Who reigns with Them in highest Heaven—the one eternal God, whom earth, and Heav'n adore; For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore." The mystery of God's will and desire for all of humanity, and for each one of our lives, can't be understood. Yet we can know that God never will fail nor forsake us, and for that truth alone can we be thankful, and give God the glory.

Blessings in Christ Jesus,
The Rev. John R. Throop, D.Min.
President, AFP Executive Council U.S.

Reformation Sunday 2017

On Sunday October 30 of this year, some Christian denominations (including various Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Methodist leaders and congregations) commemorated the 500 years that had passed since the evening of October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther "posted on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg the notice of an academic debate on indulgences, listing 95 theses for discussion." (See *Holy Women, Holy Men*, p. 230).

From a variety of sources: Martin Luther had been giving popular lectures on the Bible at the time he posted his theses, and Thomas Cranmer belonged to a group at Cambridge which discussed Luther's findings (among those of other contemporary theologians). Translation of the Bible into the vernacular—and gaining familiarity with Holy Scripture—was a major point of agreement of those scholars and others, although at the time one might risk one's life in doing so. Cranmer was strongly on the side of reading scripture, insisted that his students at Cambridge do so, was inspired by William Tyndale's translation of the Bible into English (Tyndale lived from 1494 until his martyrdom in 1536) and urged King Henry VIII in that direction.

Some issues which used to divide Roman Catholics and Protestants no longer do so. See the article reached by the following link for a discussion of recent moves in this direction: <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2017/10/lutherans,-catholics-methodists-reformed-and-anglicans-drawn-into-deeper-communion.aspx> . The title of the article is " 'Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, Reformed and Anglicans 'drawn into deeper communion' " .

The Rt. Rev. Dorsey McConnell of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh preached on the English Reformation at the parish he visited Reformation Sunday (Christ Church, Indiana, Pennsylvania). As the Reformation began, so much happened in the space of around 30 years. Depending on who the current monarch was, much of the clergy and laity had to change denominations more than once to avoid persecution.

The Adult Study discussion group of that parish (Christ Church, Indiana, PA) is currently viewing and discussing *Luther: Gospel, Law, and Reformation*, a series of 24 teachings by Professor Phillip Cary of Eastern University, St. David's, Pennsylvania. The teachings are helpful in learning about Luther (his strengths and his faults), but above all, they do much to clarify Luther's understanding of and emphasis on the Gospel. The teachings are available in several formats: book, audio CD, and televised series (*The Great Courses*).

From the Diocese of South Carolina, ACNA

Ida Spitz Swindell has been an active member of the AFP for many years. Her new Book, *Hear His Voice: Healing for the Mind, Soul, and Body from Prophetic Intercession* is now available from the Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble websites. The description on Amazon.com reads as follows: “*Hear His Voice* was birthed from long years of daily meditating on the Word of God. Partaking of Holy Communion as often as possible was a big factor in the restoration process and healing of the author from many physical and emotional problems. This book speaks with a prophetic voice to reassure the readers that God does indeed speak to his children today. That they can hear God’s voice for themselves is the basic premise of this book. Establishing regular habits of fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit through Bible reading and prayer is encouraged throughout the entire book. Readers of *Hear His Voice* have experienced healing of minds, souls, and bodies. Spiritual growth is the goal of the author for each reader or for the listener, as the case may be. *Hear His Voice* will bring help to the hurting.”

From the Diocese of Pittsburgh

The Anglican Fellowship of Prayer was named and began to grow as an organization when Helen Shoemaker, its co-founder, was at Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh. Her husband, the Rev. Dr. Shoemaker was rector there in the 1950s and early 1960s. The AFP had devout, skilled, enthusiastic leadership, both lay and clergy, and there was a hunger for learning about prayer, including small group prayer. Parishes were strengthened. The AFP quickly spread throughout the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean, with some participation from England. The tradition of an annual “International Prayer Conference” began and continued for several decades in various cities.

The Rev. Jonathon Jensen, present rector of Calvary, Pittsburgh says he hopes the teaching and retreat offered there this October 14 will be annual fall event. The theme this year was “Meditations on autumn collects in the *Book of Common Prayer*,” led by the Rev. Scott Gunn, executive director of Forward Publications. Fr. Gunn reminded us of the meaning and beauty of Thomas Cranmer’s language, offering short but fascinating teachings on the Propers for Sundays between Oct. 12 (“Proper 23”) and November 23 (“Proper 29”). **Proper 23** is about “preventive grace,” or the grace that “precedes and follows us, that we may continually be given to good works.” *Proper 25*, written in 1525, asks that God “Increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity,” not in a sense of gentleness, but of strength: acts of will. **Proper 27** claims that Christ “came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life.” It is based on John’s epistles, which have to do with “God’s love and those things that resist it.” “We are in the midst of a cosmic struggle against the evil one, and it takes place “as near as our own hearts.” The cross shows God’s sovereignty. **Proper 28** is about Holy Scriptures, “written for our learning.” We pray that God “grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.” This enthusiastic expression of gratitude for God’s word was made by Cranmer just a few years after William Tyndale’s martyrdom for translating scripture into English. **Proper 29** (for the Sunday closest to November 23) begins “Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, King of kings and Lord of lords: and asks that God grant that “the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule...” Each of Fr. Gunn’s teachings was followed by time to find a quiet place to sit and think, or simply walk around the church and grounds. It was very good to have that time to reflect after each meditation.

From the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania

Many thanks to the Rev. Carol Carlson, vicar of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross, who has given us permission to quote from the sermon she gave this year at Pentecost. The church is in the little town of North East, Pennsylvania (so called because it is northeast of Erie). North East is situated close to Lake Erie, which can get pretty rough for boaters at times.

The text is Matthew 14:22-33, which is about the fear experienced by Jesus's disciples on Lake Galilee. "The wind is against them, the current is sweeping them backward, not forward, they're rowing like mad and getting nowhere, probably can't see where they're going very clearly at all—well, doesn't this sound like life in the church to you? This is where the church *lives* . . . doing what it's commanded to do, in toil and danger, out of sight of its Lord, often far from land . . . and Jesus is nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless . . . we are *not* abandoned. For Jesus' church (and Matthew's church), his being with the Father doesn't mean that he's *not* with them—the story says that *he came to them*, surely a reassuring thought. Or is it? It's the dead of night, and he shows up walking on water, which is impossible But he does show up, and deals with each aspect of the situation in turn. He starts with the terror: Take heart—let go of your fear, get back to the real world where our relationship lives and God is in charge. It's me—not a ghost, not an evil spirit, just me, the one you know Words like those of a mother to a fractious child, matter-of-fact, hardly like a miracle at all. And yet, because 'just me' is the presence of the living God in the midst of terrestrial reality, the reassurance has a catch to it—the idiom in Greek that translates 'it's me' is actually the words 'I am,' which is an echo of the name of God, I AM WHO I AM"

Verses 28-31 tell us Peter's response to Jesus's assurance, and what happened next. " 'Tell me to come to you on the water'. 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' "(*The NIV Study Bible*).

Back to the Rev. Carlson's sermon: "Peter isn't wrong to imagine he can do anything Jesus tells him to It's vitally important to get this across: at Jesus' bidding, following his command, a person can do just about *anything*." That is, "*only as long as we're obedient*. While Peter is paying attention to Jesus, he stays up; as soon as his attention wanders—well, they don't call him 'Rock' for nothing His only saving grace is—well, his reliance on *grace*, his ability to look for help where help is to be found. His prayer, 'Save me!', is about as raw and simple as you can get; and the story lets us know that such a request, made in that kind of faith, is not going to get turned down. Jesus 'reached out his hand', it says, and 'hauled him in '"

"The message to the church is simple: when there's trouble, hardship, toil and danger, God doesn't always either stop it or keep his chosen out of it. His will is always to *save*, but not always to *rescue* Sometimes his version of saving is just being in the boat *with* you, in the midst of life and all its decisions and miseries and confusion and pain. That's what God-with-us, Emmanuel, *means*, and that promise, the Gospel's first word, is also its last word: 'I am with you *all* days.' "

AFP Publications and Resources

We have the following books in stock: *The Praying Church*, by Bishop Hultstrand (\$14.95); *The Parish as a Center of Prayer* (\$5), *The Personal Prayer Notebook* (\$20), and *The Powerhouse of Prayer* (\$2), written under the auspices of the AFP with the help of Harry Griffith; and *The Magnificent Promise* (\$10), by Helen Shoemaker. We also have cassette tapes from AFP International Prayer Conferences. Jane Hall's *The Kingdom of Heaven is Like Unto: Devotions for Those Who Work in Corrections* is also available. Please call 724-463-6436 to order, or mail your request to the address above. Postage will vary.

If you would like to receive occasional prayer requests or AFP News Items via e-mail, please call 724-463-6436. About our AFP Web Page (www.afp.org): the sidebar has many useful addresses to click on. There is, of course, the Prayer Request ministry, which John Rohde (whose passing we mourn) and Robert Hilton so ably co-chaired. We are deeply grateful to Bob for continuing this ministry. Also: you can access many issues of the AFP Newsletter, useful resources if you are looking for prayers or articles about prayer—or would like to be reminded of AFP acquaintances and friends and things they said. And there is a link which connects you to churches in the worldwide Anglican communion.

Also: don't forget our AFP Facebook page. Thanks very much to board members Paige Grimball and Angie Forde, who set it up, and to all AFP members who contribute to it. Please don't hesitate to visit the FB page and add your own prayers and comments. Laird Mortimer, member of the AFP US COUNCIL for many years until his retirement, recently stressed the importance of sharing the prayers of members. If you don't do Facebook, please email such prayers to the recording secretary and newsletter coordinator at <celinda@fastmail.fm>

A final word

We are grateful, as always, for the encouragement and leadership in prayer of Bishop Don Hultstrand—also to board members Paige Grimball and Angie Forde, who set up our AFP Facebook Page. Thanks to AFP members like Gillian Farquhar Delancy (Diocese of the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands) for their informative and inspiring contributions to that page. We urge all of you to contribute. AND—we urge you to let us know if you, or someone you know, would be interested in serving on the board. About meetings: we have had three telephone conferences since our fall 2014 meeting at Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh.

Your prayers are asked for the US Council of the AFP as we seek new board members, and guidance on the possibility of hiring a part-time executive director for a specified period of time. We are grateful for the leadership of our president, the Rev. Dr. John Throop, in his second year as rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Sheboygan Falls, WI. The parish has grown under his leadership.

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Change Service Requested

Almighty and gracious father, we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, for the provision of our necessities and for the relief of all those who are in need, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

From the *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 246