

# Partners in P R A Y E R

Lent 2012

## NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER

**Our Mission:** The Anglican Fellowship of Prayer is a lay ministry which serves the church and the world by encouraging, facilitating, and promoting the use, understanding and discipline of prayer.

### *Letter from our president*

Dear Friends,

The season of Advent directed us to begin looking for Christ. We did, and then Christmas, that wonderful occasion of our Savior's birth, was celebrated with much joy and excitement--so much so that as we entered the Epiphany season I hardly noticed the fact that the days had begun to lengthen. When we entered the Advent Season days were still getting shorter and the nights longer, but since December 22<sup>nd</sup> we have been picking up a minute or two earlier at sunrise and minute or two later at sunset. A few weeks ago, however, the sun peeked under my shade and caused me to stir and look at my clock for I was sure it was way beyond my normal rising time. To my surprise I discovered it was well before that time. Cloudy and rainy days had made it seem darker than otherwise but that day was bright and clear, and it came to me that we were rapidly moving toward spring. Our pantries had been cleared of all the delicious foods which tempt us, and we got rid of them by celebrating Mardi Gras, and now we begin our journey into the Lenten season.

We have, up to now, focused our full attention on Jesus, and rightly so, but now we find ourselves brought into the picture in trying to decide how we can keep a faithful Lenten season. The question becomes what to deny ourselves so that we might, though vicariously, in some way feel akin to Jesus in his 40 days of fasting? Is the discipline of denying ourselves, i.e. fasting, completely or partially, more important than the discipline of taking on something such as serious Bible study or worshiping at church, not only on Sundays, but during the week day services as well? Or living our week days as we profess on Sundays? Could we do all of that? Is our participation just perfunctory or do we feel overwhelmed by our sins and find it hard to participate sincerely in the discipline of Lent? How do we know how God feels toward us, sinful people that we are? Well, the answer to that is found in our collect for Ash Wednesday which begins, "O Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of those who are penitent" ... As Herbert Driscoll writes in Prayers for the Breaking of Bread, God might hate things (such as insincere worship, insincere fasting, or insincere prayer) but nowhere are we told that God hates persons." With that in mind we can boldly come to God and ask Him to "create in us new and contrite hearts so that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness may obtain of you, God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness." What a promise that is as we begin this Lenten season.

So whether we deny ourselves, or take on something to improve ourselves spiritually by taking that prayer seriously and unto ourselves, we can then move into the discipline of Lent with a clean heart, soul, and mind which also brings us closer to God the Father who created us, to God the Son who denied himself for us, and to God the Holy Spirit who strengthens us for the 40 days ahead.

May God bless you,

*Will Williams*

Dr. William C. Williams, President, U. S. Council

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

### *Tribute to Tom Gracie, AFP Canada*

Our annual Christmas letter from Tom and Betty Gracie brought some sad news from Betty, a long time member of the Board of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer from Canada, as she told us about Tom's death. Tom accompanied Betty to our board meetings, and, though not an official board member, participated in our discussions. We all benefitted from his wisdom and input on the various subjects we were discussing not to mention his great sense of humor which often set us on the proper path. After AFP expanded by dividing into AFP Canada and AFP U.S. we missed seeing all of our Canadian friends. However, the Gracies' Christmas letter, through their poetry, kept us apprised of all they had been doing throughout the year, and it allowed us to keep up with Tom's slowly deteriorating condition.

I remember so much his friendship and the various stories he told, most of which will not come across to be as funny written as they were when Tom had told them. One of those stories I have used on several occasions, and I will share that with you now. It involved a time when Tom was asked by the rector of this church to return to preach one Sunday. Before the service Tom was approached by a parishioner who excitedly thanked him for coming and told Tom that he was present at his previous visit and how it had changed his life. At that comment Tom gave a big smile, puffed himself up and asked, "What was it I said that impressed you so?" The man admitted, "Oh, it was nothing you said", and went on to tell how he was in church early praying that day and noticed that the Gospel candle was not lighted. At that he asked the Lord why the Epistle candle should be lighted for the church service but not the Gospel candle. Then he heard Lord speak clearly to him and say, "Why do you wonder? You have been in this church 25 years, and you have never been lighted". Tom was deflated for a moment when he heard that, and he and we laughed heartedly at that story hearing the way he told it and how he had rebounded, for there was a message as well as laughter there. Tom was like that. He could laugh at himself and also make us laugh and think. I know I can speak for the U.S. Council when I say we miss that a lot and we miss you, Tom, but know that you are now with the Lord, and I would like to think that you are perhaps even now giving the Lord a few chuckles.

With Christ's love,  
*Will Williams*

### *From AFP Board Member Patricia Hayes, the Diocese of Oregon*

There will be a **Quiet Day March 10th** at St. Bartholomew's church, Beaverton from 8.30 am to 3 pm., lunch provided. Registration forms will be going out soon. The Rev. Jennifer Cleveland will lead the Quiet Day and it is open to all interested persons.

### *By Frederick William Faber (1814-1863): On Patience*

Annie Stinson, a member of the Order of the Daughters of the King in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, recently shared a quotation from Daily Strength for Daily Needs by Mary Wilder Tileston, a book of devotions which she'd treasured since she was twelve. The author of the original passage was Frederick W. Faber. From a chapter called "On Patience" in his book Growth in Holiness:

The English habit of always standing up for our rights is fatal to perfection. It is the opposite of that charity to which the apostle says, it seeks not its own. Now this spirit is ... mortified by the exercise of patience. It involves a continual practice of the presence of God; for we may be come upon at any moment for an almost heroic display of good temper... for nothing is left to self; all that seems to belong most intimately to self, to be self's private property, such as time, home, and rest, are invaded by these continual trials of patience. The family is full of such opportunities, and the sanctity of marriage abounds with them.

Note: Faber wrote the hymns "Faith of our Fathers" and "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy."

***From AFP Board Member Celinda Scott, the Diocese of Pittsburgh: On Prayer and Evangelism***

Do you remember AFP's partner "Pewsaction" groups, active a little more than a decade ago, but –with some exceptions-- facing declining membership today? Like the AFP, the groups are based on the conviction that Christ is in charge, that He cares about us, and wants us to witness to others about his redeeming love. I think that is part of the definition of "evangelism," and it certainly involves prayer. From a short history of this fellowship of "evangelical" groups in An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church (Armentrout and Slocum, Church Publishing Co., 2000), I found that the idea of the "association of fellowships" was discussed at the 1970 General Convention of the Episcopal Church. It was followed up first in New Orleans at the February 1972 meeting of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, and then at the home of Helen Shoemaker (AFP co-founder) in 1972. Fred Gore, president of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, is said to have suggested the name "Pewsaction": Prayer, Evangelism, Worship, Study, and Action. The first member groups included the AFP, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the Order of the Daughters of the King, and Faith Alive. A number of other groups joined and by 1998 there were around twenty-one, meeting triennially at Ridgecrest, North Carolina at a "Conference on Evangelism and Renewal." Starting in 1995, however, Pewsaction had begun struggling to keep a common sense of mission, and in 1999 it formally dissolved. Ironically, that was the last year of the Episcopal Church's official Decade of Evangelism. There was an attempt to found a group called "Reconcilers For Christ," but it did not succeed.

The name "Pewsaction," although an acronym, suggests that all these associations are forms of lay ministry—that is, ministry done by the people in the pews. Lay ministry is strongly supported by the leadership of the Episcopal Church today, but the particular concept of lay evangelism and prayer as ministry (centered on witness to Christ, and on service supported by prayer) may not be understood. If so, could we help make it understood? I do know that Daughters of the King, one of the original groups, is experiencing growth in membership. And I would like to see AFP do so, also! But I know I must be patient.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church formed a Standing Commission on Evangelism in 1988. In 1997, it was replaced by the Standing Commission on Domestic Mission and Evangelism. Finding "new directions for evangelism" was recommended. The Standing Commission's report to the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention (2009) is available on-line, and it has met several times since then. The words "Domestic Mission" were replaced in 2009 by "the Mission." The minutes of the meetings are available on-line, and make very interesting reading; the members of the commission say evangelism is the central mission of the church, must be a top priority for all of us, and explore many different aspects of it. However, no existing organizations within the church which have evangelism as their central mission are mentioned; the idea is that the whole church should be involved. I understand the necessity of the involvement of the whole church, but I think it would be helpful if the commission recognized the work of lay organizations which have long had this task as their mission, and worked with them. Does anyone have an idea about how this could be done?

***From the Rev. Dr. Philip Wainwright of the Episcopal Barnabas Project***

Dr. Wainwright (Diocese of Pittsburgh) coordinates a blog called "The Barnabas Project (formerly known as 'No Plan B')." It is accessible from the AFP website ([www.afp.org](http://www.afp.org)). "A blog for Evangelicals who intend to remain within the Episcopal Church, it was set up at the request of a gathering held at Virginia Theological Seminary on May 23rd 2009." All are welcome to comment and it is fairly lively. Dr. Wainwright was asked to write some words of advice for the AFP and other groups dedicated to prayer and evangelism, but who may be discouraged by small numbers. His essay, "Only God!" follows.

## Only God!

The other day I was commiserating with a friend on the decline in numbers and activity of so many parishes and organizations in the Episcopal Church—the most recent meeting of the Executive Council is said to have studied a very sobering report on all that—and there is clearly much cause for concern. But, we decided, there is no reason to be discouraged.

The story of Gideon, and what great things God did through him when he had so little going for him by worldly standards, and what mighty things God did with his willingness to stand up against God's enemies anyway, seemed like a great word for us at this season in the life of the church.

Gideon is famous as a mighty warrior, but that's not what he was when God first called him. Judges 6.11, where his story begins, tells us that he was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. Now that may not sound weird to you, because you've probably never tried it, but the way you threshed wheat in those days was to toss it in the air with a shovel and let the wind blow the chaff away as the grain was falling back to the ground. You kept tossing till there was nothing left for the wind to blow away, and you had a pile of chaff-free wheat. A winepress was sheltered from the wind, and it would have been a lot of extra work to do it that way—but it was also sheltered from view, so doing it that way meant that passing Midianite raiders wouldn't see you and take your wheat as soon as you'd finished.

So there was Gideon, hiding his wheat from the Midianites, when an angel appeared and said 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.' And Gideon said 'yeah, right, if the Lord is with me, how come the Midianites keep terrorizing us? If I'm such a mighty warrior, why am I threshing wheat in a winepress?' Then the Lord decided He'd better take over from the angel, and said 'Gideon, you just go smash the Midianites. I'm sending you, so you don't have to worry about anything.' Gideon wouldn't believe it; 'I'm the weakest man in the smallest family', he told the Lord. 'I said, I will be with you,' said God. 'Smash them.' 'Prove that this is for real,' said Gideon. So God had His angel set Gideon's packed lunch on fire—and Gideon still didn't believe it. He told God, 'prove it again—send the dew on this fleece of wool and on nothing else.' And God did that. And Gideon *still* didn't go smash the Midianites! He said, 'here's another fleece, send the dew on everything else and leave the fleece dry.' And God did that. Finally, Gideon decided to do what God told him, and fight the Midianites.

He sent out a message across the nation summoning all the warriors to join his Army, but God said 'Wait a minute, Mr Needs-God-to-prove-Himself, I haven't shown you enough yet. Not only am I going to make a mighty warrior out of somebody hiding from the big nasty Midianites in a winepress, I'm going to make a mighty army out of a handful of men who don't even know how to drink from a stream!' (Read it in Judges if you don't remember the details.) And God did that, making Gideon send thousands of those men home, whittling the army down till it was just Gideon and 300 men, and then sending them into battle. And those 300 men smashed an army so big they were 'like locusts for multitude... without number, as the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude.'

It doesn't matter how weak we are, how small we are, how few we are, if we are doing what God is calling us to do. Because what God wants to do, *only God does*, even when He does it through ordinary men and women. It's still God at work, and when God is at work, not only can Gideon be a Gideon, but I can be a Gideon, you can be a Gideon, and together we can be Gideon's army.

The key is listening to God and going where He sends us. Most of us are certainly like Gideon in one respect—we have to have the point repeated over and over before we get it. We think we've heard God's voice and are ready to act, and then suddenly we back away and say 'I'm not sure, is this really God? He wouldn't want someone like me to do anything as illogical as take on the reformation of a parish, would He? He couldn't mean to renew a whole church with just the handful of faithful people that are left in it, could He?' We wouldn't, we couldn't, but that's the point—*only God* does this sort of thing. Only God. God *has* reformed a whole parish that was on the wrong path with a handful of the people in it many times. And only God does that.

God *has* revitalized a whole church with a handful of faithful parishes many times. And only God has done that. That's the way God works, and only God works that way. It's not about us becoming the way Gideon was by the time God had done His work, because Gideon didn't do anything. He let God do something through him. The reformation of the Episcopal Church is not about us making something of ourselves, it's about what God wants to do with us, about us still being there when God decides to do whatever unlikely thing He will do next.

*Only God.* That's the lesson Gideon teaches us. God brings His people to a point where it just can't be about them, it can only be Him. Only God's power can give us a future as people of faith in the Episcopal Church. Only God's power can give the Episcopal Church a future as part of the great church worldwide. Only God. The great thing is that God does what only He does. You watch.

### ***Prayer Unites: from an AFP Prayer Card***

Although General Convention (July 2-12 this year, in Indianapolis) is the work of deputies and bishops, every member of the Episcopal Church can share by prayer. To pray is to open the church's life to the leading of God's Spirit. The motto on the compass rose symbol, the symbol of the whole Anglican Communion, is *The Truth shall make you free.* We do not pray that our position or point of view may prevail at Convention, but that Convention will be lead by the Spirit into the Truth.

Almighty God, you called your church to be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. By your Spirit, guide the preparations and deliberations of General Convention that our church may be **One** because we find true oneness in doing your will, **Holy** because we seek inspiration through your Holy Spirit, **Catholic** because we maintain the universal truth that is in Jesus, and **Apostolic** because we remember that our Mission is to share by life and witness the good news of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

### **AFP Resources and Meetings**

1) Please visit our website at <[www.afp.org](http://www.afp.org)> and recommend it to others. 2) If you are on Facebook, you can "friend" our Anglican Fellowship of Prayer "Group Page." 3) Bishop Don Hultstrand's books [The Praying Church](#) and [Holy Living](#) are good resources for your church prayer or study group. They are available from our website, or the telephone number below. 4) In the works: a new printing of AFP's [Personal Prayer Journal](#), done by St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Charleston, South Carolina. As of this writing, it is almost finished.

**The US Council of the AFP plans to meet at Camp St. Christopher in Charleston, South Carolina, June 8-11. On Saturday, June 9 there will be a teaching on prayer open to all. Please write, call (see below), or e-mail ([celinda@fastmail.fm](mailto:celinda@fastmail.fm)) if you are interested in attending and would like more information.**

NOTE: we would appreciate any donation you might be able to make to support our ministry, and the publication and mailing of the newsletters. *Please send to AFP, 1106 Mansfield Avenue, Indiana, PA 15701.*

**Anglican Fellowship of Prayer  
1106 Mansfield Ave.  
Indiana, PA 15701**

Change Service Requested

**Lift us, O God, to your presence  
where we can be still and know that you  
are God, that you are closer to us than the breath  
we breathe, and that you are always doing for us and  
for those we love far better things than we ever desire  
or pray for. --*Trinity Church, St. Paul's Chapel***