

life at ASCENSION

Volume 30, Number 6

December—January, 2009-2010

THE BIG MOVE

Beginning this January and for many months after, our big church sign on Fifth Avenue might read like this: “Here is the Church. Here is the Steeple. Go ‘round the block to see all the People! Join us for 11:00 am Sunday Worship at Ascension in our Parish Hall at 12 West 11th Street.” Starting on Sunday, January 3, 2010 our congregation will be making the move out of our beloved sanctuary space into our parish “common room” for our weekly gatherings.

What can we expect to happen there on a typical Sunday morning? First of all, the worshippers at the early 9:00 am service will be celebrating the Holy Eucharist in the intimate quarters of the All Saints Chapel, where we have been conducting our daily services for a while. Entering as usual through the garden entrance on Fifth Avenue, they will find a simple liturgy in a lovely, inviting setting. Meanwhile, the choir will be rehearsing in the Parish Hall as they usually do on Sunday mornings and the Altar and Hospitality Guilds will be putting everything in readiness for church.

For members of the 11:00 am congregation, arriving to church on Sundays will mean going to the Parish Hall entrance at 12 West 11th Street where you will be greeted as usual by helpful ushers. We will have coat racks in the entry way and each worshipper will be given a hymnal and a service leaflet that will contain everything needed to participate. Our seating will be on folding chairs in the Hall arranged in a semi-circle pattern facing the longer North wall. As a focal point in the room an attractive dossal curtain will provide a backdrop for the gilded cross from the Side Altar (or the plain wooden cross in Lent). In front of the curtain we will use a small oak free-standing altar and lectern with chairs for the three ministers – a celebrant, a preacher, and a deacon – and an acolyte to act as the server. We plan to have recorded music playing quietly in the background – perhaps selections from a “Voices of Ascension” CD – to set a meditative mood.

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Vestry Notes

At its October Meeting the Vestry:

- Learned that Phase 2 construction which is the exterior brownstone repair on the South clerestory, roof repair and gutter replacement is planned to be completed by mid-November.
- Heard the Finance Chair, Mary Gaillard, give an overview of the recent report of the Special Committee on the Diocesan Budget and report that there has been a 20 percent reduction of the diocesan assessment this year.
- Unanimously approved an application to the diocese for a grant in the amount of \$10,000 to support electrical work in the church.
- Approved Warden John Grimes as chair, Stephen Hagerty, Ned Fitch and Mary Gaillard as members of the nominating committee for the Vestry elections.

At its November Meeting the Vestry:

- Learned from Fr. Andrew that Fr. Merz and the sexton staff have been working hard to clean the kitchen, replace old cabinets with res-



taurant style metal shelving and have had the dishwasher repaired.

- Learned from Fr. Mark that Ascension will join with Grace Church for Christmas caroling in the community on December 22nd.

- Learned from Deacon Anne that Ascension will be part of the interfaith worship service at First Presbyterian on Thanksgiving Eve.

- Heard the Finance Chair, Mary Gaillard, report that the November 12th Sealed By The Spirit event was very nice, well attended and brought in new pledges for the campaign.

- Unanimously voted to accept the bid from Preserve to be the general contractor and the bid from Evergreene Studios to do the plastering and painting for the interior restoration of the church. Ω —*Sibyl Piccone, Warden*

The Vestry generally meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Parish Hall. Meetings are open to the parish and parishioners are welcome, in advance of the meeting, to request time to address the Vestry.



The Feast of the Nativity

Christmas Eve, Thursday December 24
Family Service 5 p.m.
Music for the Christmas Vigil 10:30 p.m.
Festival Eucharist 11 p.m.



Christmas Day, Friday December 25
Holy Eucharist 11 a.m.

Final Sunday in the Parish before the 2010 Restoration Sunday December 27
Holy Eucharist 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.



First Sunday Out of the Parish for the 2010 Restoration
Sunday January 3, 2010
Holy Eucharist
9 a.m. All Saints' Chapel
11 a.m. Parish Hall



FAREWELL, DEAR FRIEND Goodbye to the Holtkamp organ

During much of the past two years, as plans for the magnificent new Quoirin organ have progressed, I have often found myself playing music on Sundays, thinking, “Wow, this piece is really going to sound incredible on the new organ!” There’s no question that, for me, the excitement is building, especially after hearing some of the pipe work already completed in France a few months ago, and after receiving regular photos of the progress by email. A year from now, when we all hear the first few sounds of the organ in our beautifully renovated church, it will be an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

But, in the last few weeks, I have to admit I’ve been struck with sadness and vivid remembrances of events that have taken place with our 1967 Holtkamp organ, an instrument that, in just a few weeks (the Sunday after Christmas), will sound forth for the last time after 43 years of service. What an amazing array of great music has occurred on it over those 43 years!

I recently went through stack after stack of old bulletins and programs to look back and see some of the amazing moments of our Holtkamp’s history:

- The organ was dedicated at the 11am Morning Prayer service on Sunday, January 15, 1967. In lieu of the usual sermon, Vernon de Tar (the Organist and Choirmaster from 1939-1981) played a “sermon in music” – organ works from many centuries and nationalities. The choir sang grand anthems. One week later, Vernon played the dedicatory concert.

- In the next months several great organists were heard in recitals, including Robert Baker, André Marchal, Charles Krigbaum, Jack Hennigan, Marilyn Mason and Leonard Raver.

- In the summer of 1967, a precocious 14-year-old organ student from Los Angeles wrote Dr. de Tar, asking permission to play the new organ while he was in New York visiting his grandparents. They had never heard him play the organ, even though he had already been playing seven years. Dr. de Tar said “yes” and the boy was absolutely overwhelmed with the magnificent new organ. The boy was me, and little did I know I would someday end up as the organist here!

- Over the years, many of the world’s finest organists played (and gave masterclasses) here, including John Ferris, Preston Rockhold, Allan Birney, Harvey Burgett, Lionel Rogg, John Paul Imbert, Donald Dummer, Will Headlee, Anton Heiller, Martin Neary, Michael Radulescu, Roberta Gary, J. Reilly Lewis, Donald Sutherland, George Ritchie, Herbert Burtis, Mireille Lagacé, Richard Peek, Jon Gillock, David Craighead,

Calvin Hampton, Mark Kruczek, Rollin Smith, John Weaver, Harry Huff, Marie-Claire Alain, McNeil Robinson, John Walker, Robert Quade, Richard Heschke, Nicolas Kynaston, Todd Wilson and Marie-Madeleine Duruflé.

- My first New York recital occurred in the summer of 1971 (when I was Assistant Organist here and a freshman at Juilliard.) It was not exactly the kind of debut event I had expected: only four people were in attendance, and one of them was robbed at gunpoint during my Franck *Prière*. (At the end of the concert I saw two policemen in the north aisle, and thought, “I



know I didn’t play very well, but is this necessary?”)

- In 1972, Vernon de Tar played the Complete Works of Franck in a series of three concerts, each played twice. He was widely regarded as one of the great Franck interpreters of the day.

- In 1974, Jon Gillock played the New York Premiere of Olivier Messiaen’s *Meditations on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, one of the greatest masterpieces ever composed for organ. This was followed one year later with the first New York performance of the Complete Organ Works of Messiaen. This series was covered extensively in the press all across the country.

- To celebrate the church’s Sesquicentennial in 1977, Vernon de Tar made a recording of organ pieces on the Holtkamp organ, called *Ascension Voluntaries*. We plan to re-release this beautiful recording on CD in the next year. (The only other recording made of the Holtkamp was a 1996 recording on the Jade label – still available - entitled *Organ and Harp*, which features Jon Gillock and harpist Kathleen Bride. We will have copies of this available in the future as well.)

- In 1981, Vernon de Tar retired after 42 years at Ascension. Over the years I had turned pages for

him, my teacher, more times than I could count, and I was there at his last service, turning pages as he ended his magnificent tenure at Ascension. I began September 1, 1981. During my first year, a substantial, totally un-expected bequest appeared and became our Visscher Fund, the proceeds of which go to the maintenance of the organ and the stained glass windows. Since then, the parish has not had to pay one penny from its operating budget for the maintenance of the organ (which in recent years has been substantial!)

- In the early years of the AIDS crisis, one of the great American organists, Calvin Hampton, played his final concert here. Memorial concerts for Leonard Raver and baritone William Parker were also given during that period.
- In 1989, we produced *Tribute to Duruflé – The First Complete Retrospective*. This festival received national press coverage and the concerts were broadcast all across the US and Canada on public radio. The legendary Marie-Madeleine Duruflé resumed her concert life at this festival, after a fifteen-year hiatus caused by an automobile accident. Four years later, in November, 1993, she played at Ascension what turned out to be her final organ recital.

Amongst all this activity, what were the highlights? For me, I have certain memories I will never forget about this organ which I have known for most of my life and which has been my beloved musical partner for twenty-eight years. I remember clearly the first time I played the instrument (I loved the flutes!), and the first time I heard Vernon play it (Mendelssohn *Sonata IV*), and, throughout several years, Vernon's inspired hymn-playing (Oh, what hymns!), and when he made his recording, I was there, turning pages, as he played an absolutely ravishing performance of the *Andante Sostenuto*. I remember a thrilling *Pièce Héroïque* Mark Kruczek played before one of my early Services of Music, and Calvin's sensitive rendering of a Widor Adagio. And, finally, Jon Gillock's extraordinary Messiaen performances and Mme Duruflé's final concert. For me, when I have been playing, I'll always remember certain passages in certain anthems with my magnificent choir, and, always, always, the wonderful hymn-singing of the Ascension congregation.

Yes, when we start hearing the sounds of the new Quoirin organ next fall, the sounds will be incredible - far beyond what the Holtkamp can offer. And we'll begin a new and extraordinarily exciting chapter in our parish's history. (There might even be another precocious teenager visiting the new organ!) But as we say farewell to this dear old friend, don't be surprised to see me shed a tear or two. Ω

- Dennis Keene



Homelessness “Beside The Golden Door”

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, newly released data show that for the first time ever, more than 39,00 homeless New Yorkers sleep in municipal shelters each night. That includes more than 10,000 homeless families (with more than 16,500 children), an increase of 12 percent since last year.

And just when you thought things couldn't get worse, Marc L. Greenberg, Executive Director of the Interfaith Assembly, cautions that the temporary suspension of rules established under Governor Pataki may be re-implemented now that the Mayoral election is past. Under these rules shelter residents would not only be charged rent, but also be required to adhere to multiple rules and regulations with non-compliance carrying the threat of 30-day eviction from the shelter and the likely consequence of children being moved to foster care.

And what of the homeless that slip through the cracks? There are an estimated 15 to 20,000 homeless youth in NYC with 20 to 40% of that number identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) with the majority of existing shelters and other care systems not providing safe and effective services for this population. Covenant House, for example, provides more than 60 percent of beds for homeless youth. It is analogous that if an organization's core belief is that homosexuality is wrong, that organization may not respect a client's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Where are they to secure shelter? Since the adult shelters are too dangerous, and there

are only two emergency shelters, Sylvia's Place with 10 beds and Street Work's drop-in center with 18 down from 30, and but a handful of transitional shelters geared to this population, couch surfing and the streets are all that remain. As pointed out in the New York Times after the murder of Ali Forney, "They are invisible until they get sick, arrested or murdered."

Please take action by writing to the Governor; volunteering at the Homeless Shelter; and donating blankets and coats to Street Work. Ω *Deacon Anne Auchincloss*



After over 50 years as the curator of Ascension's organs, our dear friend James McGregor will be retiring after Christmas. On Sunday, December 20 at the 11a.m. service (and at coffee hour) we will be celebrating his amazing contribution to our parish. Be sure to join us for the celebration!

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(The Big Move—continued from page 1)

When it is time to begin, instead of an organ prelude, the choir (seated near the courtyard door) will sing an introit or a “Call to Worship” during which the clergy will take their places. The service proper will start with an opening hymn and proceed as usual through the Ministry of the Word with lessons, a homily, and prayers led from the lectern. After the exchange of the Peace and a choral Offertory, the table will be set with home-baked Eucharistic bread and wine. Communion will be distributed at a “station” in front of the altar by the celebrant, flanked by two chalices to serve each person who comes forward.

At the conclusion of communion, the closing prayer and blessing, we will sing a final hymn and be bid by the deacon to “abide in peace.” The next step will call on the cooperation of everybody as we move the folding chairs to the sides of the Hall and put our hymnals away. Then, it will be time to enjoy the Coffee Hour and extend our weekly time of fellowship.

After the first few weeks of worshipping in this way, we will all become familiar and at ease with the changes. As the months of construction go by, we hope to have “field trips” into the sanctuary from time to time so we can monitor the progress that is being made. Before we know it, we will be moving back home to a beautifully restored space.

I cordially invite you to join us in this year of adventure and anticipation! Ω



A previous use of the Parish Hall

Special Organ Program and Evensong

One of our very own members will be playing a short organ program at St. Mary The Virgin in Manhattan in December. Roger Castellani has been a member of Ascension for 8 years and has often played at our Wednesday even song programs. St. Mary's has one of the finest instruments in the city and the organ program and evensong that follows is not to be missed.

Sunday, December 6, at 4:35 p.m.

Roger Castellani

Organ Concert prior to 5 p.m. Evensong and Postlude
Works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Buxtehude and others
free of charge,

St. Mary The Virgin,

145 WEST 46TH STREET NEW YORK CITY

Ascension December, 2009 & January, 2010 Events

Book Group: Wednesday, December 2nd at 7p.m. in the Parish Hall "The Mother's Recompense" by Edith Wharton The Pulitzer Prize-winning author relates the story of a mother and daughter whose infatuation with the same man causes shock waves through 1920s New York high society.

Saturday, December 5th, 2009 10 a.m.-2 p.m. "DO NOT BE AFRAID": An Advent Quiet Day that includes silent reflection on words and visual art, opportunities for journaling, and discussion of spiritual practices for the season of Advent. The day will be led by ANNE WINCHELL SILVER, Ph.D., a spiritual director at Grace Episcopal Church in Brooklyn Heights and an adjunct professor of ascetical theology at The General Theological Seminary. A donation in the range of \$5-\$10 is asked to help cover lunch and expenses. Please RSVP to Stephen Hagerty at sphagerty@gmail.com

Sunday, December 6th 12:45 p.m. Anglican Prayer Beads in the Ground Floor of the Rectory Since the earliest of times, people have used pebbles or a string of knots or beads on a cord to keep track of prayers offered to God. Virtually every major religious tradition in the world uses some form of prayer beads. Learn more about beads as a form of prayer, contemplation, and see how it can enrich your spiritual life.

Recovery Eucharist Sunday, December 6th , 2009 & Sunday, January 3rd, 2010 at 4:00 p.m. in the All Saints' Chapel Ascension's Recovery Eucharist focuses specifically on the brokenness that comes from addiction, both for the afflicted and the affected and the significance of God's gift of love, grace and understanding in the midst of it. Join us for prayers, music and communion.

Sunday December 13th after the 11:00 a.m. Eucharist Join fellow parishioners and the college students for the tree, the food, the Holiday cheer and perhaps a special guest for our Annual Christmas Party.

Christmas Carols December 22nd 2009 at 6:20 p.m. Meet in the Parish Hall, then we will make our way to Grace Church for rehearsal. We will gather with our neighboring parish, Grace Church, enjoy eggnog and Holiday Cheer, then go to select homes in Greenwich Village to sing Christmas and other Holiday favorites in the community.

January Book Group Wednesday, January 6th at 7p.m. in the Parish Hall

In the novel, *Siddhartha*, a young man, leaves his family for a contemplative life, then, restless, discards it for one of the flesh. He conceives a son, but bored and sickened by lust and greed, moves on again. Near despair, Siddhartha comes to a river where he hears a unique sound. This sound signals the true beginning of his life - the beginning of suffering, rejection, peace, and, finally, wisdom. The translation is by Susan Bernofsky, and the book is a Modern Library classic. There is also an introduction by Tom Robbins.

VOICES OF ASCENSION CHORUS & ORCHESTRA

Dennis Keene, *Artistic Director and Conductor*

Announcing the 20th Anniversary Season

“On Tour in New York”

Four Concerts in Four Exciting Venues

Candlelight Christmas Concert

Tuesday, December 15, 2009, at 8:00 pm
At the Church of the Ascension
Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street

Fauré *Requiem*

Thursday, February 4, 2010, at 8:00 pm
At St. James' Church
Madison Avenue at 71st Street

Voices of Ascension Signature Pieces by Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff, Bruckner, Holst, Stanford and others

Rossini *Petite Messe Solennelle*

With international opera star Jennifer Larmore
Monday, March 22, 2010 at 8:00 pm
At Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center
65th Street and Broadway

The Glory of Palestrina

Wednesday, May 12, 2010, at 8:00 pm
At the Church of St. Mary the Virgin
145 West 46th Street, just East of Times Square

For Ticket Information CALL 212-358-7060

Or visit www.voicesofascension.org



VOICES OF ASCENSION
CHORUS & ORCHESTRA

DENNIS KEENE,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR