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**#144**

*Founder's Forum*

**Fencing matches**

We often hear about those who build fences. Fences can serve useful purposes but they can also be very harmful. Such are some of the fences being built today—in the church.

Some examples? The role of verger, as outlined in various brochures citing the history of this venerable order, includes the task "to protect the clergy and processions from riffraff." It hardly seems that clergy and processions need that much protection today. At the same time, in the recent issue of *The Anglican Digest* there is a description of "Indiscriminate Communion." What? Can the sacrament instituted by our Lord at a simple wooden table be *indiscriminate* when the intention is filled with grace? I have seen eucharists at coffee tables have more grace and love than some at cathedrals!

We build fences when we say that unless it is done "the correct way" it is not valid. If the procession doesn't go "that way" it's wrong, if the vestments are not "those" the rite is somehow spoiled.

Though they killed Jesus on the cross, he overcame death. They could not destroy forever the spirit which that flesh incarnated—flesh and spirit that could cry out, "Father, forgive them!"

The cross—the fence they tried to use to take him from us—having failed, the world turned to a more subtle way of disposing of Jesus; it worshipped him. The church continues to build fences made out of the same material as that cross. We insist on putting him on ornate altars with costly symbols, and we say to him, "Stay there. That is where you belong. Stay there, and when Sundays come, we will worship you."

Stay there. Don't mix in with those with HIV/AIDS. Stay there. Don't mix with the homeless and destitute. And all the while, Jesus pleads: "Don't fence me in. Let me down from your crosses. Let me down from your altars. Let me out of the four walls of your churches. Let me into your minds and hearts. Let me into your homes. Let me into all you do, back where I started, walking in the common ways of men and women and talking about how to live and how to be one together. Give me a chance. Don't fence me in."

This is the message. The stone was rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. Let's not replace it with our own stones. Let us never replace that stone in an attempt to confine the influence of Jesus in our lives and works.

RTB

Do you want to honor the body of Christ? Then do not despise his nakedness. Don't pay honor to him here in church, where he is clothed in silk vestments, then pass him by outside where he stands naked and freezing. Remember that the same one who said "This is my body," also said, ' You saw me hungry and gave me no food, " and, "As you did it not for the least of these, you did it not for me." The body of Christ on the altar does not need clothing but the worship of a pure heart; the body of Christ in the streets does need clothing, and all the care we can give it . . .

Tell me, if you saw **someone** starving, but gave him no food, and instead told him you were giving money in his honor to adorn the altar, would he thank you? Would he not rather be outraged? . . .

Remember that Christ is the homeless one who comes in need of a room for the night. You turn him away and then start laying rugs on the floor, and hangings on the walls . . . I am not condemning this—beautify your house by all means, but also look to the poor; or rather, look to the poor first . . . Adorn your house as you please, but do not forget those in distress. They are temples of far greater worth.

—St John Chrysostom  
Archbishop of Constantinople

## Breathe on me, breath of God

The account of the Pentecost coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–11) is filled with hope and glory, filled with the possibility to be found in that new church whose birthday Luke describes with such joy—a church which can understand all people, truly hear what people say no matter what language they speak. The language of the heart is universal, and when the Holy Spirit is present then, in-deed, the community of God's people is a community of understanding. This is the great possibility of the church which we celebrate at Pentecost. It is a possibility of universal community in Christ, and, particularly, the living Community that is God: the Father who sent the Son and who also gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Divine Community is implied in the Gospel of John (14:8–17). "I am in the Father and the Father is in me ... " and "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of Truth . . . " Although "Trinity" is no-where mentioned in the Bible, there are implications for such Community-in-God, and this gospel passage connotes the Trinity.

However, in the midst of this wonder of which John writes, we also have the troubling reality about the Spirit of Truth, and this is what I want to focus on today. The full verse about the Holy Spirit reads, "This is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." I believe this to be the crux of our Christian faith. This is the truth about The Truth, that is, that the Truth of God is a truth which the world would rather not hear, a truth which calls people to account, a truth which speaks of a Divine Love so all-encompassing and so unconditional, and a love which abides in us. This inner abiding is such that when we see Love being denied in any way, Christians who know the Truth are responsible to live that Truth out no

matter how uncomfortable or at odds with the world we may be.

This is troubling, for Jesus seems to imply that when the Holy Spirit abides in us and we acknowledge such Love alive in us, we are called to be lonely voices and advocates for that Love in a world which "neither sees him nor knows him." Jesus calls us to be lonely witnesses to the Truth, to be on dangerous ground, to be prophetic, to be faithful, to be filled with the zealous Love which is justice in a world which is painfully unjust.

**St Athanasius said, "**

**God became human,**

**that**

**humans might**

**become God."**

How do we begin to do this—to live in all those lonely, prophetic places, to be lonely witnesses to the Spirit of Truth which calls us to account and calls us to love? We begin by learning to love ourselves in deep and abiding ways. This is no easy task, but it is, I believe, the first task to which we are called by the Spirit of Truth, which is, after all, our internal manifestation of God our Creator. The journey to self-love is long and arduous. We have so many messages deeply instilled in us from the time we were children which tell us that we are unworthy of love for so many reasons. It is terribly difficult to walk through the pain of those messages, and to find the deeply buried but abiding truth of God's unconditional love for us just as we are.

When Jesus breathed on us the *ruach*, the holy Breath, giving us the gift of the Spirit of Truth on Pentecost, he gave us the responsibility of learning to fully claim the Truth, the Love which is God, present in us and among us. It is a love

so powerful, given freely and with grace, that when we claim ownership of that love we truly learn to love ourselves because God loves us. This is a radical denial of the "world which neither sees him nor knows him"; this is a radical claiming of the world of God, the world which begins in self-love and which, by its selfless nature, goes out into that unknowing world and spreads the good news of the gospel through acts of love.

During the season of Pentecost, let us meditate and reflect upon how we deny the presence of the Spirit of Truth in ourselves and in our lives, how we turn from God's great gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, by not learning truly to love ourselves as God loves us. As we learn to love ourselves through the Spirit of Truth, we walk even more in the process of indwelling. St Athanasius said, "God became human, that humans might become God." This is directly tied into our incarnational faith. As the Son, through the Father's breath, breathed the Holy Spirit on and into the disciples, so it was breathed on and into us. With such indwelling, we are given the Way to Love—loving both ourselves and others. Because the nature of Love is to be in community, by first loving ourselves, we can then give that love away and form community with humanity. This is the great gift of Pentecost—the means to that great possibility as expressed so profoundly by St Athanasius. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—we can indeed become more and more that Love which is God. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Roger-Michael lives and works in the Diocese of Chicago. His full biography follows.*

## And grace will lead me home



Roger-Michael

I was born a Jew in 1946 in New York, and, by a long, circuitous,

grace-filled journey, found my way to Christ, being baptized in 1976 in Chicago. Since my birth, my life has been spent in solitary things. Trained from the age of 3 to be a concert musician, I had to be alone at the piano for many hours each day. I learned **quickly** that I was happiest being quiet, searching inside my-self for all the different possibilities, looking for God, reading, and reflecting. I also cannot remember a time when I did not want to be a monk or friar.

I am a musician and teacher, having studied at Oberlin College, Northwestern University, and Trinity College of Music in London. A former member of the faculty at the New School for Social Research in New York, and Columbia College in Chicago, I am currently on the faculty at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, where I chair the program for both the Bachelor's and Master's Degree in harpsichord performance. My teaching and concert/recording career have always been my ministry. It is through music that I have been able to gather community in sacramental celebration of life. Music has been my greatest outlet for feelings and faith; it is one of the times when I feel God's presence so closely I could reach out and take God's hand.

After nearly 20 years of harpsichord concerts and teaching, I felt a call to the

priesthood, to be a sacramental and liturgical presence for the gathered community of both the faithful and the doubtful. I received my MDiv from Chicago Theological Seminary in 1988 and the Certificate of Advanced Theological Studies from Seabury-Western in 1990. I am a postulant for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Chicago.

For a time, I served the church as organist-choirmaster; now my parochial work consists of teaching, counseling, preaching, and just being present to the folk in the parish. They teach me so much about how grace works in my life, about the Gospel and justice and compassion (it's all the same thing isn't it?). Because I am often asked to be a guest preacher in various Episcopal parishes as well as congregations in other denominations, I have the opportunity to listen deeply to the different voices of Christian life. From these holy conversations, I grow in my faith-walk, as I grow in my vision of God-with-us.

Along with my teaching and concert schedule, I maintain a private practice of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, working mostly with incest survivors and those whose lives are touched by them, and with people in the HIV/AIDS community. As one who is both an incest survivor and HIV+, I find that the work of "the wounded healer" is not just a euphemism or romantic notion, but, rather, a real work of grace for both my clients who honor me deeply with

their stories and for myself as I walk my own path. I also help my clients explore their spiritual journeys within the context of their sexuality—helping them find grace even in the midst of hostility. All of this is done within the context of my life lived with my extended family of dear friends and with my cats Jerusha and Maggie.

I felt a call to test my vocation to the Brotherhood in 1988, when I was received as a postulant. I was noviced in 1989, and, thanks be to God, made my first profession of vows last August at Graymoor Friary. Living by the Rule and Vows of the Brotherhood gives me, in the midst of a noisy world, the quiet and solitude which I have craved since childhood. I am blessed to have been called to this particular community—one which celebrates the fullness of life within the Vows and the Rule. As a Gregorian, my prayer is that I will be Brother Roger—who is also a musician, teacher, spiritual director, preacher, pastoral counselor, and—the church willing—priest. I am called to do what I can to help people come to know the love-beyond-love relationship between Christ and humanity—a love which I have come to know through this community, the sacraments, music, prayer and conversation, and through my own recovery work and healing. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

*Here and there with the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood*

## Community notes

### Winter Convocation

The 1992 Winter Convocation of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood took place at Graymoor, the mother house of the Roman Catholic Franciscan Society of the Atonement in Garrison

NY. The brothers and sisters gathered from across the country for this annual retreat and conference; this year's theme, "Unity Conversations," sought to draw the members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood closer together with the Friars and Sisters of the Atonement,

both as an extension of the Covenant of Prayer signed one year ago between the two orders and also in celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18 to 25), which coincided with the time of the convocation. This was the 84th anniversary of the

Week of Prayer, which was established by Fr Paul, the founder of the Society of the Atonement. The Society was the first Franciscan community in the Episcopal Church and converted to the Roman Catholic Church in the early years of this century. Ecumenism continues to be a driving force in the Society and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a focus for celebrating that ministry. This year the Brotherhood and Companion Sister-hood participated in many of the services and events, taking particular advantage of the opportunity to strengthen friendships on a personal level. This year's theme of the Week of Prayer, "Remember, I Am With You Always," was developed in daily public liturgies observed in the monasteries on the friary grounds and with the participation of a number of local churches, including Baptist, Methodist and Episcopal.

During the convocation, Virgil F **Fortuna** (Diocese of Massachusetts) was received into the novitiate and took the name **Andrew**, and **William A Webber** (Diocese of Southwest Florida) and **Gordon J Stanley** (Diocese of Chicago) were admitted to the postulancy; **Joan Knipple** (Diocese of New Jersey) became a novice in the Companion Sisterhood, taking the name **Francis Jane**, and **Ernestine G Burke** (Diocese of New Jersey) was admitted to the postulancy.

### Province I

The brothers gathered for a day with the Ecumenical Brothers of the Mercy of God, spent in prayer, fellowship, food and laughter. They shared mutual concerns and interests about the religious life and ministry. Future meetings will be held and other religious communities will be invited to join in the fellowship.

**Bernard** and **Benet** attended the Church Women United ecumenical service at St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston. + + + **Bernard** has begun to volunteer at the Boston Living Center, a center for people living with HIV. He attended the meeting of the National Committee on AIDS in Boston. + + + He also attended a Bat-Mitzvah at Temple Micah and St Augustine's Church in Washington DC. The synagogue and church share the same building. + + + **Benet** has corn-



*Mark greets Bishop Ting, President of the China Christian Council, Nanjing, China.*

pleted his term at President of the South Shore AIDS Project, Brockton MA.

**Andrew** has started his new job with the Boston Visiting Nurse Association and is working with people who are living with AIDS.

**Roy and Donovan Aidan** attended Divine Liturgy at St George's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral. The brothers were warmly welcomed by the people. Both now serve as acolytes at the Parish of the Messiah.

### Province II

**Richard John** assisted in the planning for and preached at the AIDS Management Program Memorial Service held at the Westchester County Medical Center Chapel, honoring fifty-two persons who died of AIDS during 1991. He recently completed 150 hours of service to the program; he has served another 200 hours in other areas of the chaplaincy.

The patronal feast was observed with a eucharist at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City. **Mark** was the celebrant, James the lector and acolyte, and **Tobias Stanislas** the preacher. **Richard Thomas** inaugurated the new chapel organ, a memorial to the Rev Gene T White. The instrument is a three-rank

tracker, designed and built by Bedient Organ. The service was well-attended, and the congregation sang out heartily.

Tobias Stanislas' article, "What Religious Life Is Facing," was published in the March 1 issue of *The Living Church*. It is based in part on some of the material in *The State of the Religious Life* (see back cover).

Mark and his wife Kathryn were part of a formal delegation from the National Council of Churches invited for a visit by the China Christian Council. The primary host was Bishop K H Ting, ordained an Anglican bishop but now president of this postdenominational church body.

### Province III

**Edward** was litanist at the Celebration of a New Ministry at the Church of the Redemption, Baltimore, where the Rev Fran Fosbroke was inducted as rector. + + + He led a three-session program on prayer at the Church of the Holy Apostles, Arbutus MD.

**Luke Anthony** has begun volunteer chaplain work at Community General Osteopathic Hospital, Camp Hill PA. + + + He attended a three-day retreat sponsored by the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania.