

## INTERIM RECTOR'S CHRISTMAS AND FINAL NEWSLETTER

Today marks one year and seven weeks I've spent as your interim here at St. Cyprian's Church, Roxbury, and I've been spending a lot of time lately thinking about my time spent with you. I remember how welcoming everyone was the first day I visited earlier in the year. Baptisms, funerals, special services, children and family services, and delicious food were memorable times. I have been honored to serve you with the UBE, Historically Black Churches, MLK Breakfast Planning Committee, The Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, with the Grandmaster, the inimitable Justin Petty, and outreach events. I remember all of the heartfelt conversations that have happened in my office and in the narthex. A senior clergy person once told me that an Interim priest is uncomplicated, who just does what needs to be done. Uhm... I summed up the basics of interim ministry.

- Serve as a consultant with the search committee as needed, to assist in the process, protocol, and resources needed to successfully secure a new rector.
- Help develop congregational trust and confidence in the church leadership team during the interim period.
- Assist in refining church mission, organization, and vision, as well as with conflict resolution and emergency counseling situations as these needs arise and as desired by leadership. This can also involve working with the church through change by helping it to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and preparing for any needed changes.
- Attend or give leadership to meetings as desired by the church. Christ loves the church and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5); "I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep" (John 10).

I was unable to implement all these basics due to circumstances but, churches enter a time after their priest has gone with uncertainty, confusion, and even fear. They need someone to model the love of the Good Shepherd and Head of the Church, reminding them He will never let them down and, in fact, He already knows who their next shepherd will be.

Its Christmas time, and Christmas is our story, the church's story. Actually, it's God's story, and He has called His people in the church to tell it to the world. So, as the world decorates and celebrates this holiday season, let's join in the merriment by telling the real story of Jesus' birth.

Despite declining rates of church attendance and professions of faith, nearly everyone in our culture still celebrates Christmas. They may call it the "holiday season" and not talk about baby Jesus or the manger, but we should be grateful that most of our neighbors will make the coming days special with parties and decorations. Even if they don't know the real story, Christmas is a big deal, just as the angel said, "good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

Gift giving is part of the story we tell. God gave the world the priceless gift of His one and only Son, and the magi brought expensive gifts to honor Jesus. Now, we give Christmas presents to family and friends as tokens of our love for them and of God's matchless love for each of us.

We also share the real story of Christmas in our music. While the world grooves to Mariah Carey and croons along with Bing Crosby, we sing carols celebrating Jesus' birth:

*Joy to the world the Lord is come!*

*The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.*

*O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

*Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

The spirit of Christmas has been exacerbated by the beautiful decorations around the sanctuary altar, gifts for children and recipients of our periodic sick communion.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our God who is in heaven for allowing me to write this letter since I am leaving the church I had called my home. My last service with you will be on Sunday December 29 at 10.30am. I can't forget how much you molded and helped me grow spiritually. I had experienced an insurmountable level of challenges through my heart surgery, and we have all been tried and tested. Your love conquered all.

I have been nurtured spiritually by so many individuals, and naming them would be unfair. The combined leadership and versatility of Josephine Mitchell (Treasurer and Administrator) and Brian Edwards (Organist and Choir Director) was undoubtedly impeccable. So many of you have continued with the same mantra here with clergy past and present and you are implored to build on the extension of the church using the teachings you had received. The Lay preachers during Lent and Advent bear testimony to that.

Today I am simply writing to say thank you. You are such an amazing congregation and it has been such a blessing to be your interim priest. I am continually blown away by your compassion, generosity and willingness to serve. I can only hope that I have inspired all of you as much as you have inspired me.

Thank you so much for all that you do. You make this great place with its historical pertinence possible. Keep displaying your culture. The Diocese of Massachusetts needs it, and you deserve recognition.

Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year. I'm going to miss you.

Pax et Bonum

Noble and Valda