



## **EPIPHANY E-NOTES**

**December 2023 - January 2024- ISSUE 29**

*We will embrace all we meet with words and deeds of:*

*Welcome and acceptance*

*Service*

*Growth in a life of prayer and faith*

*Healing and reconciliation*

*Celebration*



## The DRG's 71<sup>st</sup> Convention

The 71<sup>st</sup> convention of the Diocese of the Rio Grande took place on Friday-Saturday, November 11-12, in El Paso, Texas. Father Steve, Susan Stone, and Ben Bankson, shown above, were Epiphany's delegates. They joined those from 46 of the other churches in the diocese in attendance. Bishop Michael Hunn presided, and Canon-of-the-Ordinary Lee Curtis served as the secretary.

Established in 1921 in El Paso's Morningside Heights district, the host church, St. Alban's, is the oldest of the five Episcopal churches now in the city that once had six. Its stone structure was built in 1949-50. Once a parish, it is now a mission with a vicar, Jim Tolbert.

The convention began on Friday afternoon at 3 with a Holy Eucharist service in the nave of St. Alban's. The other convention sessions were held in the parish hall with the delegates at assigned round tables. The sessions included a Morning Prayer service on Saturday and a catered lunch of delicious Mexican food at noon.

Bishop Hunn was the celebrant and preacher at the Eucharist. In the sermon he repeated that God is loving, liberating, and life-giving as he walked up and down the central aisle. He noted that this was the feast day of Pope Leo I, also called Leo the Great. He was known for meeting Attila the Hun in 452 and persuading him to turn back from his invasion of Italy. Theologically, he elucidated Christ's uniting in one person the divine and human, "with neither confusion nor division."

The delegates addressed the following four items that made up most of the business of the convention:

- + Acceptance of the diocese's 2024 budget showing total revenue of \$1,664,979 and expenses of \$1,633,232. The budget gives Cost-of-Living Adjustments of 4 percent for the staff and cuts the items for communications and the archives approximately by half due to changes to be determined for both programs in the new year.

- + Rejected a proposed canonical amendment whereby "no individual of Holy Orders nor any person in the process of ordination may serve as Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer or as either of the Chancellors of the Diocese of the Rio Grande." The proposal wanted only "lay adult communicants in good standing" to serve in these positions. The present treasurer, J.P. Arrossa, is a priest at St. Michael and All Angels in Albuquerque, being the minister of community care, and was reelected to a new three-year term.

- + Adopted a resolution asking the 2024 general convention of the national church to raise the mandatory retirement age from 72 to 75. Reasons cited for the change were that the average life expectancy in 2020 was 77.22, age is not a determining factor in the effectiveness of the ministry of those in clerical order, many of those seeking ordination are responding to the call to ministry later in life and deprived of being able to share in the Episcopal Pension Fund, and the church has endeavored to end prejudices that limit access to the ordained orders of ministries.

+ Adopted a resolution on "Migration With Dignity" that begins, "As people of faith [who] recognize and honor the divine spark that animates all human beings, we advocate for ...a set of immigration policies that assure equal and respectful treatment of all people. This advocacy follows directly the teachings of Jesus, while aligning with the world's other great religions and principled humanism."

"Acknowledging that grave and serious mistreatment of ethnic minorities, migrants, and refugees is currently on the rise in the midst of record migration across international borders," the diocese, consistent with resolutions of the general conventions of the Episcopal Church, "declares itself to be in support of Migration With Dignity for all migrants, including refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, and those who cross borders in search of opportunity.

"Human rights included within the Migration With Dignity framework are: a universal right of movement consistent with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), including freedom to leave and return to one's country of origin and freedom of movement within one's country of origin or country of resettlement (UDHR, Article 13); the right to be secure from sexual violence including rape and sexual exploitation, human trafficking, slavery, forced labor, and arbitrary and abusive detention; the right of equality to include (1) equal treatment with no discrimination under the law based on color, gender, language, religion, political affiliation, and national origin, and (2) equal opportunity for upward mobility; rights to a basic quality of life, including employment, housing, and food rights; the right to access services such as health care, education, and legal representation; and civil and political rights guaranteeing the right to identity, to use one's language, and to freedom of speech and religion."

The resolution concludes with a call to all Episcopalians "to advocate that local, state, and national and international governing bodies promote Migration With Dignity by enforcing existing laws and policies on behalf of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, and displaced persons and by enacting new laws and policies guaranteeing their welcome, protection, and integration into our common human journey."

Unlike for past conventions, Bishop Hunn released his address in advance so that when present in El Paso the delegates could use the time to discuss "our lives together in community." The discussion was done in two rounds with the delegates mixed in small groups. The first round gave feedback to the "Where We Are" part of the bishop's address and the second to "time for us to dream" about the future of local churches and their changing relationship to the diocese.

Other convention business included the presentation of the bishop's medal to longtime diocesan archivist Charles Evan Davies, who died last July 2 at age 86. He was the founder and director until his death of the Institute of Historical Foundation that was a state-of-the-art archive, library, and museum in Mesilla Park. The bishop's presentation took the form of his showing the homily he gave at the memorial service on August 26 at St. James Episcopal Church in Las Cruces. The anecdotes he shared underscored Davies' attention to correct historical details and his broad scholarly interests.



## **A Time for Hopeful Joy**

*By Father Steve*

**A**t this time of year, life seems to try to tell us to change our pace and slow down to prepare for the changing seasons. I look out onto my yard and see the beautiful blanket of gold and red as the leaves fall from the trees to cover the ground with color. In church we also have a reminder of change when our colors at the altar go from green and white to purple or blue.

The scriptures begin to tell us again to be alert, awake, prepared for what is to come. We remember the coming of our savior as a vulnerable baby, God's son entrusted to a young girl, Mary's child born in humility. What a wonderful gift.

I am reminded that as we prepare a room in our hearts for him, we too may need to reflect, to renew, to put down our wants and desires and remind ourselves that he brings all we need. He brings the never-ending love and commitment of our God, our father for each and all of us. We are to put down bickering and division and make a home for him in love in our hearts.

I hope this Advent season is filled with joyful hope for each of us and that we can truly celebrate God with us this Christmas. In church we have our Advent events, prayer, study, outreach, and worship. Let us this Advent journey in our hearts with Mary and Joseph as they travel to Bethlehem. I wish all a happy and holy Christmas.

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## What's Happening in December and January

This two-month period begins with a Quiet Day on Saturday, December 2, led by Mother Linda and Susan Stone, shown above. The day starts at 9 with coffee and is followed at 9:30 by Morning Prayer and the day's program ending at 12:30. Participants are to bring a journal or whatever makes their reflections flow and a sack lunch by those who want to stay afterwards for conversation. Beverages and a dessert are being provided.

Then follows the four-week Advent season that features:

- + Joint Advent lessons and carols services at 6 on Sunday evenings December 3, 10, and 17 at St. Matthew's in Los Lunas, Epiphany, and St. Philip's, respectively, with a choir made up of singers from the three churches.
- + Advent Evening Prayer services with follow-up discussions of the gospel readings for the three prior Sundays and soup suppers beginning at 5:30 in the parish hall on Wednesdays the 6th, 13th, and 20th.
- + A "Chats" session following the Holy Eucharist service on Sunday, the 10<sup>th</sup>, on "Why Gaza Matters" (see following story).
- + During the coffee hour on Sunday, the 17<sup>th</sup>, when the day's collect begins, "Stir up thy power, O Lord," Epiphany's traditional stirring together of the ingredients for a King's Cake.
- + On December 24, the fourth Sunday of Advent as well as Christmas Eve, a Morning Prayer service at 11 followed by the greening of the church; at 6, caroling accompanied by the folk musicians; and at 6:30, the Holy Eucharist Christmas service with organ accompaniment of the music.

+ On Saturday, January 6, an "Envisioning Epiphany's Future" planning session from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. that includes lunch.

+ On Sunday, January 14, the postponed "Chats" session following the Holy Eucharist service about our Book of Common Prayer led by Father Steve and Warden Bill Stone.

+ On Sunday, January 28, the tentatively scheduled annual meeting of the church following the Holy Eucharist service. The meeting includes reports, the election of two proposed members of the bishop's committee and delegates to the diocesan convention, and the adoption of the 2024 budget.

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## **'Chats' Session to Focus on Gaza**

"**Why Gaza Matters**" is the timely subject of the "Chats" session at Epiphany on Sunday, December 10, following the Holy Eucharist service. Our guest presenter is Mary E. Neznok of Washington, D.C., shown above. She is an authority on Middle East issues and a parishioner at St. Mark's Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill where she sings in the choir. While here, she is being hosted by Epiphany members Kathy and Bear Albrecht. The session includes lunch.

Mary's higher education includes studies in Arabic literature at Harvard University and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Affairs, George Washington University, and George Mason University. There she studied conflict analysis, peace and justice issues, and the situation in Israel and Palestine.

She edited several study books while at the Institute for Palestine Studies headquartered in Beirut, Lebanon and has been an instructor in the study of traumatization. She continues educating on Mideast issues in Washington with the Episcopal Peace Fellowship and the Jewish Voice for Peace. Her most

recent visit to Gaza was in 2019 when she presented a paper at a conference of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program.

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## Notes From the Bishop's Committee

The meeting of the bishop's committee on Tuesday, November 21, included a surprise for Warden Bill Stone, the presider. He was presented with a black cassock and white surplice to wear when officiating as part of his preparations for ordination as a priest. The cost came from the vicar's discretionary fund, and Annie Danielsen of the committee and its clerk handled the purchase. In the photo above, she looks on happily after he tries on his new vestments.

In response to the news that Bishop Michael Hunn has asked Bill "to step back" from the office he held since 2019 to concentrate on his now being a postulant, he told the committee of his expectation to serve until the church's annual meeting in January or possibly longer as determined by the bishop in consultation with Father Steve. Starting in January, he possibly will be absent one Sunday a month for visits to other churches.

The vicar's comments at the meeting included a "Visioning" session on Saturday, January 6, to plan "how we move forward." Other coming events mentioned are listed in this issue in "What's Happening in December and January."

The warden shared with the committee his draft of a letter to go to members of the church asking them to "think prayerfully about what you can give back in time, talent, and treasure" and regarding treasure to make a pledge in support of the 2024 budget. His reference in the letter to the Sunday school prompted a



request for a clarification of its present state. Eileen Comstock of the committee, who handles our work with children, responded that on Sunday mornings any children present are offered Bible stories and that on Thursday afternoons a Bible study for children takes place with a rehearsal of the children's choir.

The committee took the usual actions in approving the minutes of its October 18 meeting and the budget covering January through October. It showed income totaling \$111,546.87 and expenses of \$110,381.19. The respective budgets were \$108,105.52 and \$108,637.50.

Proposals offered by member Jon Morrison for consideration were the purchase of a large TV screen to be mounted on the wall of the parish hall and that the condition of the foundation of the hall needed to be given attention.

Eight of the committee's nine members were in attendance. The absentee was member Carolyn Jokinen.

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## **On Our Being Good Stewards**

*Stewardship was emphasized in short talks given in the Holy Eucharist services during the four Sundays in November by Ben Bankson, Robert Minchin, Eileen Comstock, and Bill Stone. The emphasis was tied to the fall's pledge drive having the theme, "Coming Together as Community." Of the talks, the one by Eileen, shown here, is shared as follows;*

I have been thinking about stewardship for a while. The gospel this Sunday, Matthew 25:14-30, was Jesus' story about a man going on a journey who entrusted his property to his slaves and gave them "talents" to invest and on his return settled the accounts with them. It reminded me of what God wants us to do. We are given talents, but we are not supposed to just hang onto, hoard, and sit on them. God wants us to take good care of his creation and help it grow.

In my thoughts about stewardship comes the questions, what is the church asking me to give? What can I do? What is it dragging out of me? I looked up the definition of stewardship and found that it is taking





good care of things over which you have control. The only thing I have control over is myself. I can start there, taking care of myself and the gifts God has given me to do things. And then I can expand that. I can help take care of my friends, my relatives, all those in my church and community. And I can help them grow.

If God has given me the means to exert control, then I feel bound to exercise that control in ways that further his purposes and love. With respect to the church, there are so many ways I can share what God has given me the ability to do. I can sing. I can help the children. I can wash the dishes. I can serve at the altar. I can pray with people. I can introduce myself to visitors and invite them to come back. And I can contribute money to help keep this building and institution going and especially to help our community to reach out to those in need of services.

There are so many things you can do for other people, but many of them take money. And if we do not have money, then our bodies can serve too. Stewardship does not mean spending all the money in the world. It means we should take good care of what we have and what we have control to do. I am so proud to be part of the Epiphany community because we have so many good stewards among us.

In the words of the words of the hymn the children sang as the Offertory: "Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee; take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love; take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne. Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King; take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose. Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee."

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[Section redacted]

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## And Pray!

**For peace**, that God will guide negotiations to bring an end to warfare and violence especially in Israel and Ukraine, to protect children and the elderly from harm, and to address the needs for food, water, healthcare for all the human family.

**For the earth, God's creation**, that we may become better stewards of what we have been given and share our gifts with more equity, and where there has been misuse, work for its restoration.

**For our nation**, that God will heal our divisions and guide us toward a greater respect for one another and a renewed commitment to our common values.

**For all who struggle with life's demands**, particularly the poor, the homeless, migrants, and refugees, and the homebound and their caregivers.

**For strong faith**, that in these times of chaos, confusion, and challenges we may be confident that Christ will defeat all evils, including death, and lead us to fullness of life with God.

**For those among us commended to our prayers:** Skeeter Leard, Gaby Benalil, Christopher Bechtol, David Davis, Cindy Madrid and her sister Celeste Taylor, Randolph Elliott, Bill Giebitz, Joyce Bankson, Laurie Gregg, Malik Osman, Jewels Wolf, Laurin and Phil Threatt, and Bear Albrecht.

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**EPIPHANY E-NOTES** is a monthly email newsletter about the programs and people of  
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