

THE FOURTH DAY

OF CREATION



WE, EACH ONE, ARE ALL THE SOILS

AND EACH ONE, ALL THE WORLDS

+ WEED-CHOKED AND STONY, DEEP AND FERTILE +

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 1
EASTERTIDE, APRIL 2003

GOD'S FRIENDS

JOINING AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

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On the cover:
The Fourth Day of Creation,
by the hand of Betsy Porter, 2002.
Egg tempera and gold leaf
on wood.



Liam, by Dennis Murray, 2002.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

I can't quite remember how the idea for this issue on leadership and service arose. It just seemed like a natural, and now that it's come together, this issue feels to me like a little jewel. It's full of the voices and insights of people I admire unabashedly. Sara Miles writes about the utterly blessed food pantry she started two and a half years ago; Rick Fabian's wit and erudition urge a renewed Episcopalian diaconate; Karen Soleau tells how she has created a profoundly meaningful ritual for adolescent youth; and Karl Stockbridge distills a tremendous amount of wisdom and experience into an essay on leadership's spiritual aspects. Furthermore, Betsy Porter's serene and graceful icons adorn these pages, and Maria Schell has wonderfully captured the feel of St. Gregory's food pantry in her audio piece—a *God's Friends* first—in our online edition. This is a great issue.

This issue marks my last as editor of *God's Friends*, my last as leader. Filling this post has made me think a lot about what it is to lead and serve others. Good leaders channel our longing to be of use to one another, to be integral parts of our communities. They see our worth as well as our abilities, and their trust in us carries our trust in ourselves (and in each other) through some rough patches. They give us the space to create our communities. This is their service to us. A lot goes into it—more than a whole business school library could adequately describe. But here's what it looks like on the outside: Sara Miles says, "Show up and we'll give you an apron and put you to work," people do, and a food pantry thrives, feeding all kinds of people in all kinds of ways. It is sometimes messy and sometimes hard, and it's very beautiful.

—Clancy Drake

ABOUT THE FEATURED ART

The art in this issue is deeply connected to the St. Gregory's community: images by and of members of our congregation, and images that greet us whenever we enter the building (the mosaic details on each page and featured on page 4).

Our featured artist is Betsy Porter, painter of icons and teacher of iconography. Her work appears on pages 1, 7, and 10 of this issue. Here is what Betsy has to say about her work: " 'Icon' means simply 'image.' The term here refers to sacred images, specifically those developed in the Orthodox Christian tradition. These traditional images have historically been revered as equivalent in authority to Holy Scripture, as a visual expression of the Word of God.

"In iconography, a number of artistic rules and conventions apply. The underlying drawing is geometrically structured and proportioned. Color areas are clearly defined. Figures are elongated, eyes large and shadowed, eyebrows arched, noses long and straight, mouths closed, hands gracefully stylized. The forehead (seat of the intellect) and the collarbone (gateway to the heart) are emphasized. Both eyes and at least one ear must be visible to enable the holy figure to see and hear the viewer. Out of respect for the commandment against graven images, Orthodox icons avoid strongly three-dimensional effects. Perspective is flattened or even inversed.

"Iconography is both a spiritual practice and a non-competitive artistic discipline. This work is undertaken with prayer, in a contemplative atmosphere. Icons are left unsigned or signed only on the back, as 'by the hand of' the artist. With concentration and persistence, almost anyone can learn to paint a beautiful icon."

To learn more about the style of iconography Betsy practices, and to see more of her images, go to www.saintgregorys.org, and click on "Arts."

OPENING THE TABLE

by Sara Miles

*"Oh God of abundance, you feed us every day
Rise in us now, make us into your bread
That we may share your love with a hungry world ..."*

— Collect from the food pantry service

I started St. Gregory's Food Pantry—La Bodega de San Gregorio—in November 2000, two days before I was baptized, as a thanksgiving, an extension of the Eucharist that had converted me.

When I first walked into St. Gregory's early one winter morning, I'd never been to church before—never heard a Gospel reading, never read a psalm, never said the Lord's Prayer. I didn't even know that people don't generally dance in church.

I loved the singing, was uncomfortable in the silences, and fled the coffee hour quickly, before some weird Christian could try to chat me up. But I was just blown away by the Eucharist. I heard the deacon's announcement—*Jesus welcomes everyone to his table, so we offer communion to everyone, and to everyone by name*—and burst into tears. I stood there crying, terrified at what was happening, but I was so hungry for that bread that I kept coming back. I became a regular. After a while—my guess is because in any community there's a shortage of people foolish enough to get up and work at 6 A.M. regularly on Sundays—a priest invited me to serve as one of the people we call "deacons" at the early-morning mass. (Serving under an ordained deacon's leadership, lay people share many of the deacon's traditional liturgical duties at St Gregory's: welcoming people into the service, setting the Table, announcing the Gospel, leading music and prayers, and helping distribute communion.) Those words began to enter me in another way, as I spoke them aloud week after week. *Jesus welcomes everyone to his table*, I'd say, and hand the body of Christ to the body of Christ.

It sounds way too pretentious to say I had a vision, but the fact is I kept seeing a picture, during that first year of service as a deacon. Basically, it looked like St. Gregory's on any Sunday—a great, humming, semichaotic blur of people moving together around the Table, under the icon of the Dancing Saints. It was communion. I understood it as a food pantry. Some of the vestry and staff and members raised utterly reasonable objections to my proposal that we open up the church to offer free groceries every week to all comers: How would we pay for it? How would we find volunteers? What about thefts, and damage to the building, and security, and storage, and mess, and how were we going to keep it all organized and screen out troublemakers and not be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of need? How did this fit with St. Gregory's mission?

I wrote to the vestry: "The elements of St. Gregory's mission that I'd guess connect most strongly with the idea of a food pantry have to do

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At 3:30 every Friday, we open the church doors for the pantry, and people walk in. When they enter, and we greet each other, it's the thing I've been waiting for all week: a meeting, a recognition, a joy. Paul described it to the Corinthians: "You are all the letter we need, a letter written on our heart; any man can see it for what it is, and read it for himself. It is plain that you are a letter that has come from Christ for us to deliver: a letter written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, written not on stone tablets but on the pages of the human heart."



St. Gregory's Food Pantry,
by David Elliot, 2001.



Detail from The Burning Bush, by Felix Boukh and Sascha Fomina, 1993. Other details from this mosaic, which is based on Gregory of Nyssa's commentary on the life of Moses, appear as sidebar textures in this issue. To see full the mosaic in color, go to www.saintgregorys.org and click on "Arts."

OPENING THE TABLE

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with the welcoming of strangers, the invitation to find Christ embodied in our neighbors, and the physicality of worship.

"Of course there are the teachings about feeding the poor, but mostly I'm thinking of the Gospel's repeated insistence that God's right here, and we do not have to fear: "Take heart! It's me! Don't be afraid!"

Now, each week at La Bodega we serve over 250 families in the sanctuary, giving away more than three tons of groceries—rice, beans, fruit, vegetables, cereal, bread. We set up right around the Table, laying out bright altar cloths, putting up an icon at the door, piling the food high so that people can choose what they need. We have dozens of volunteers, some of them church members and many of them pantry clients—people who, like me, came to receive and stayed to help out. When it's time to open, we vest ourselves in aprons, gather around the Table, sing prayers, kiss each other, eat something, and start to work. We offer food to everyone, without exception: the deaf, the crippled, the aged, the insane, the perfectly healthy, and the faithful; doubters, convicts, widows, foreigners, and whores. And we offer it to everyone by name.

About a year ago, our rector Donald motioned me into the vestry during the food pantry. "I want to put this in here," he said, and opened up the huge official parish book that records all the services at St. Gregory's. "Bodega," he wrote, "Friday, 3:30."

The pantry did not become a "service project" of the church. It's simply church: a liturgy of acts, modeled directly on the liturgy of the Word. It's as necessary and as intimate as breaking bread together: daily bread, the bread of Heaven, and the bread that we become. We are bringing each other into communion.

There's a tendency to think of service as something auxiliary to "real" worship—something we do because, being edified and basically nice people, we want to be helpful to others. Or because, in that dreadful, condescending phrase, we feel an obligation to "those less fortunate than ourselves." We tend to think of service as something a committee does. Something you write a check for. "A good cause."

But the people who serve at the pantry, like those who serve in our liturgies, know otherwise.

When we sing our prayers together right before the pantry opens, holding hands, I often thank God for letting me feed others, as I have been fed, and for allowing me to give, knowing that at other times I have been, and will be, only able to receive.

I could just as easily pray in the words of another announcement the deacons make during Sunday worship: "Now seeing how greatly God loves us, let us share freely in the good things we have received, so the whole world may know God's love."

It's easy to hear this as a delicate pitch, implying a payback, some kind of a deal. But the pantry has showed me that the important word is "freely." We all come sinful and needy to the Table, so at the pantry we don't ask for ID, or try to ferret out and stop cheaters. This, after all, is how God gives: not because we especially deserve it, not because we've been good, not because we've performed the rituals correctly—but freely, because of love. Finding and following that spirit, in which I can stop judging others, stop trying to decide which poor people deserve my help, stop attempting to control the people I give to, is the thing that frees me.

The people who serve at the pantry are, like most of the deacons at St. Gregory's, lay ministers. Their work encompasses welcoming, organizing, feeding, teaching, anointing, listening, healing, hauling, singing, praying, and schlepping. They do everything: lift 50-pound bags of rice, light candles, bless children, break up fights, give a thirsty man a drink of water and a hungry woman a loaf of bread. They sort through pallets of lettuce and piles of potatoes. They tell strangers good news. They sweep the stairs and take out the garbage and touch those possessed by demons. They lead the people in prayer and in work. They keep the bathroom clean.

And over time, the food pantry has become a school for St. Gregory's deacons, as I've started to recruit people from among the pantry volunteers to serve in the liturgy. The Bodega and the Eucharist are, after all, different enactments of the same Gospel. It is the same invitation we sing, both on Fridays and on Sundays, when we gather God's people around the Table: "Draw near!"

It's easy to spot the likely deacons. They're not always the sweetest or the noblest ones. They're not Christians, like Peter, so busy with important holy business that they don't have time to wait on tables. They're not guilty or dutiful. Above all, they're not scared. They're the people who are having fun. They're outside swapping jokes; they're on the phone, dealing with a delivery crisis with gusto; they're in the sacristy, picking out the most beautiful altar cloth; they're making coffee for everyone and handing extra M&Ms to the kids. When I see someone like that—someone who can take care of business, who is equally willing to pick up garbage and to sit down and listen to any-

one—I usually make an invitation. “Hey,” I’ll say. “Can you take a chalice this Sunday?”

Many of our best volunteers at the pantry have backgrounds in restaurant service—cooks, waiters, expeditors. Lawrence, a maitre d’, began serving as a deacon in the liturgy after several months of volunteering at the pantry. Tall, gracious, unflappable, he deals with hundreds of hungry poor people, stressed-out priests, rich, cranky customers, and an unexpectedly large crowd of Sunday worshippers with the same ease. “It’s all about, ‘Your table is ready,’” he says.

Others started shy. “When I began volunteering at the pantry, I was pretty uncomfortable about having contact with poor people,” says Todd, an engineer. “I was good at systems, not at people.” But it wasn’t long before I’d see Todd hanging out, listening to confidences and talking for hours. I asked him to think about serving as a deacon. Again he demurred. “I’m not a good enough person to stand up there in front of everyone,” he said. “I’d have to be a whole lot more holy.” I laughed. “The thing about serving,” I told him, “is that it’s not about you.”

Service is thanksgiving, because it means not only giving freely, but understanding how greatly we’re loved. I remember an afternoon at the food pantry when I was trying to open up, while an impatient throng of people

shouted at me and at each other in three languages. I’d been unloading crates of oranges as fast as I could, and bossing the volunteers around, but we were still behind schedule. We were short a crate of snacks, and the two old Cuban sisters who always show up hours early were out front, bickering noisily. Three hyper little kids were pestering me for candy, and the crazy guy with apocalyptic theories kept trying to corner me and explain the secret messages he’d received. Some visiting minister was standing around, but I couldn’t get a minute to talk to him; new volunteers kept asking me what to do, but somehow nothing was getting done. Everything felt hectic and irritating and on the verge of chaos, and my feet hurt. I was sick of poor people, sick of church people, utterly sick of myself.

And then a woman pushed her way to the front of the crowd. She was Chinese, with a quilted jacket, and she was thrusting a package at me. I couldn’t understand what she was trying to say, but she kept smiling and coming closer. “Here,” she said, and handed me a piece of fish wrapped in waxed paper, still warm. “Food, for you.” ☺

Sara Miles is a writer living in San Francisco. She is currently organizing new food pantries around the city.

ON REVIVING THE DIACONATE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

by Richard Fabian

I taught for twenty-three years at the California School for Deacons, the largest deacon training institution in the Episcopal Church. So I take special note of two questions that arise about our use of deacons at St. Gregory’s, San Francisco, in services, on videotape, or at liturgical conferences in which I take part:

1. How dare you celebrate the Eucharist with Presbyter Rick as deacon? Or with lay people styled “deacons”?
2. Why feature the deacon’s role this way? It impedes lay ministry.

We customarily translate the Greek *diakonia* as “service,” and some who do want to restore the diaconate rhapsodize about the way it represents service after the fashion of St. Francis. But Hellenistic secular usage gives the term a different cast, something more like “official business.” The best modern analog is probably the diplomat pushing to the head of the queue at the airport check-in counter, crying, “Official business!” and taking the last first-class seat on the plane. That was *diakonia* as most people knew it in New Testament times.

That’s why the Gospels and Paul depict the distinctive Christian ideal of service as serving in a manner below the rank you are entitled to. Note Matthew’s Gospel explication of the Beatitudes: *praus* (wrongly rendered as “meek,” better as “doing your job whatever the cost”) and “poor in Spirit”: H. B. Green shows that this is Matthew telling us what Jesus was like. Likewise John’s

We had help last week from Tish, who picked up a huge grapefruit, amazed by all the beautiful produce we get—blushing red potatoes and curly spinach and organic oranges and ripe peaches—that grocers have discarded, and that instead of being trash is feeding people. I pointed to the grapefruit. “That’s the stone the builders rejected,” I said. I can see how we’re like that, too: the volunteers, and the families who come for groceries. Each of us, at some point in our lives, might have been rejected for being too young, too poor, too queer, too old, too crazy or difficult or sick; in one way or another not right. But gathered around the Table in this work we become right together; the cornerstone of something God is building.

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ON REVIVING THE DIACONATE

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Gospel has Jesus wash Peter's feet at the last supper, over Peter's protests—a scene John uses for general poetry about the passion. Paul's incarnate Christ in Philippians does not stand on his rights but empties himself to serve; and in I Corinthians, among other places, Paul says he himself does likewise. Serving in a lower role than you're entitled to is a central element of the New Testament portrayal of Jesus and Jesus' messianic people.

The Roman church preserved this notion at least formally throughout centuries of papal aggrandizement, with the papal title *Servus Servorum Dei*, cardinals serving as deacons at papal masses, and so on. The Byzantines, by contrast, followed court and civil practice precisely—naturally enough, as the emperor and court participated daily in liturgies and church affairs. For example, Byzantine canons forbade deacons, once ordained presbyter, ever again to vest or operate as deacons. Today Eastern Orthodox churches even omit part (not all) of the deacon's liturgy when there is no minister present who has been ordained deacon and not also ordained presbyter.

This policy has nothing to do with the Gospel, and even implies a contradiction. But it is not principally ecclesiastical. After centuries of turmoil ended in the peace of Constantine, Roman society became increasingly stratified and prescribed, to a degree unknown elsewhere except among the Incas and the Japanese. The general rule within the imperial family was promotion or exile—you've all seen this in *I, Claudius*. During the Byzantine period this regulation extended to all parts of the imperial establishment: army, navy, civil bureaucracy, and the church. This was natural enough, as the Christian emperor was as much a religious official as an Egyptian pharaoh had been. So in all reaches of Byzantine imperial government, once you got appointed or ordained to a job there were only three ways out: further promotion, death, or exile until death. (Clergy were luckily exempted from the fourth way out, which was maiming and blinding!) Demotions produced disloyalty and rebellion, so demotions were rare.

This grisly regulation served the Byzantine state reasonably well, preserving its institutions through many dynastic changes. And modern American corporations know the same rule. Demotion risks disloyalty; so it's up or out. Only one public profession continues the Byzantine one-way ladder: professional football players move upward only, until maiming injuries or surgeries force their retirement—whereupon they are exiled. Just like Roman gladiators! But they make a poor model for ministry.

Of course, the one-way ladder is fundamentally hierarchical. Today church renewalists are trying to accomplish two aims at once: reviving the diaconate and looking for a nonhierarchical church order overall. It is self-contradictory to try restoring the diaconate by reviving hierarchical rules. Moreover, people today won't buy a hierarchical diaconate. At International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) meetings, where most Anglican provinces oppose reviving it, the overwhelming obstacle has been its perceived hierarchical threat to lay ministry. Judging by that IALC response, I am convinced that the effort to restore the diaconate while protecting hierarchical perquisites has achieved all it is going to achieve, and if we stick with it, the diaconal movement will fail. Anglican churches worldwide are already moving to bypass the diaconate in favor of restoring active lay ministries, period.

Instead, I see a different strategy working. Today's secular world increasingly knows not a hierarchical career pattern, but plural jobs, even plural careers and professions. Outside church services, everybody expects people to dress for the job they're doing. For example, a surgeon with a law degree wears a white coat at the hospital and a suit (or wig and bands) in court, never confusing them! This is happening even in corporations run on so-called "Japanese" models (but not in the military, where hierarchy may be the appropriate arrangement). And in informal use—always the most interesting sociological sphere—waiters dress as waiters no matter what their social class. (In Aspen, for example, the waiters may have trust funds three times as rich as their patrons', but they vest for the job they're doing.)

The deacon's job began in synagogues with handling logistics during services: it was a way of making the services work; and it still is. The deacon marshals all the other ministries, reminding and enabling folks to do them on cue. It does take spiritual practice as well as training, and the deacon counts on the congregation's support and authorization, like any other minister. But what matters is that the liturgy go well, for all participating.

The Episcopal Church has long pioneered working functionally rather than hierarchically with the diaconate. Our so-called "lay readers" have evolved into a parallel diaconate, doing all the

deacon's jobs by appointment instead of ordination. Surely for most parishes this is a healthy pastoral and missionary development.

At St. Gregory Nyssen, San Francisco:

1. The diaconate is a job. A big job. Deacons run the liturgy, make everything happen, and talk more than anyone except maybe the preacher.
2. The deacon has no exclusive perquisites of rank. Not the Gospel reading, or preparing the gifts or the table—lay people do all these things under the deacon's guidance.
3. The deacon vests for the job. Ordained deacons wear the stole over the shoulder; lay people sharing the deacon's work wear it on the wrist ("maniple"). Both wave it around for attention. Late Roman ivories show that this was its function in centuries of civil usage, before it got considered a diaconal badge. In this way we keep all historic vestments visually present, tied as closely as possible to doing a job, instead of making them marks of clerical rank.
4. Lay people share in the job as they do in most Episcopal churches, but we don't label their work fictitiously; we tell them it's deacon's work they are doing. It is interesting to watch their shift in language as a result. They used to say "be the lay deacon" or "be deacon," but increasingly they make it a verb: "to deacon." This shift suggests they see the role functionally, as work rather than rank.

I think this is the better strategy for reviving the diaconate today. Instead of reconstructing and protecting the deacon's medieval perquisites:

1. Build the job up; give the deacon lots of authority in running the services.
2. Let parish rectors do this job. (Episcopalian rectors are ordained to the diaconate!) Let them do it, hold it up as a model of authority, and—as in my case—show people that they love the job.
3. Share it with lay people, as the Episcopal Church has long pioneered in doing.

So that our congregations will want the deacon's job done; and people will want to take it on in order to get the job done (not in order to have clerical privileges). This strategy means working out the deacon's role as we go. I admit that is unclear, but it's really where the North American Anglican churches stand with the diaconate: working it out.

We can find no refuge in recreating a stratified diaconate, especially a Byzantine-style hierarchical one, with exclusive perquisites (for example, the Gospel reading) or career patents (up-or-out mobility regulations). Nor does the answer lie in bureaucratic language like "transitional" versus "permanent" diaconate—an intrinsically hierarchical distinction. In our age, an age that suspects all hierarchies, such talk presents the diaconate as a sort of freemasonry, a colorful make-believe: this makes a poor apology for reviving the order and a poor apology for the church altogether.

Maybe those who see no purpose in reviving the diaconate are right. But because I do love the job, I'm willing to fight for it in my way. I enjoy the power a deacon has to make things happen all around her, to support people doing more than they might otherwise pull off, and to fix on the fly things that go wrong. This is the heart of the New Testament image of distinctively Christian diakonia—service at a lower, less prominent level than you're entitled to. I like to think that when I do this job I'm expressing something important to my whole congregation. Matthew's Beatitudes say that people who work this way, no matter what the cost, will inherit the earth. And the blood of martyrs in our own century says there's no make-believe there.☉

Founding rector of St Gregory's, Rick Fabian takes time off from his vocations of snowboarding, swimming, cycling, and harpsichord playing to serve as presbyter and deacon there. He taught at the California School for Deacons until 1999; co-chairs the Diocesan Commission on Liturgy and Music; and is a member of the North American Academy of Liturgy, Societas Liturgica, and the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation.



Sophia, the Wisdom of God, by the hand of Betsy Porter, 2000. Egg tempera and gold leaf on wood.

THE QUEST

AN INTERVIEW WITH KAREN SOLEAU

by Dave Hurlbert

In 2000, St. Gregory of Nyssa began celebrating a ritual for its youth. In this biennial event, called the Quest, young people aged 12 or 13 spend a weekend camping together with adult companions, engaging in a variety of spiritual, creative, and athletic activities. Afterwards the young men and women share their experiences with the other members of St. Gregory's in a special Sunday morning service. The Quest was the inspiration of Karen Soleau, a professional illustrator, mother of two, and Sunday School teacher at St. Gregory's. A longer version of this interview is online at www.godsfriends.org.

What was your life like when you were 12 or 13?

As a girl I was always gathering pinecones or acorns, feathers or shells. I'd give them as gifts, or I'd use them to create altars out in nature, art that other people could stumble upon.

My family lived next door to a Presbyterian church, which was always doing fun things: having a luau, decorating for Christmas, singing. I signed myself up there for Vacation Bible School each summer. I loved the crafts and the field trips, and I could share what I created with other people.

Trevor and Damon,
by Dennis Murray, 2002.



What has your own quest been like?

As far as a quest goes, a questing for God, I think it must have started for me in high school, when my life fell apart. My parents divorced, my grades dropped, I started hanging out with a bad crowd and skipping school. I felt neglected and completely alone. Things got even worse in college. I dropped out, and started working as a waitress. Up until I was 21, I'd work all night, then go out to clubs with my friends, drinking and carrying on. Towards the end of this phase I would find myself in the bathroom at a club, beating my head against the wall, saying, "O Lord! God! I'm so sorry! I'm wasting my imagination!" I'd always thought God gave me this really great gift, and I was just wasting it.

My sister had moved to San Francisco, and she invited me to live with her. I moved there, went back to college, got a job as a graphic artist for the San Francisco Symphony, married a man from Ghana, and had two children.

After seven years, though, my marriage ended. There were cultural differences between the two of us that we couldn't resolve, as much as we tried. I was left with two young children and a heap of bills. I was working then, part-time, as an art teacher, and barely making it. I got sick to the point of death with meningitis, and I contemplated suicide. I knew there surely couldn't be a God, and I wanted to give up. This

was the only time in my life that I didn't have any faith. Luckily for me, I was hospitalized for extreme stress. This gave me the opportunity to realize there were people around who loved me. I just had to stop thinking I was in control of everything, and let them in, and let them help me.

I realized that God had been walking with me through this whole experience, and that I needed to "bottom out" in order to rise up. My faith in God had been reconceived and restored. I began running hard in a park near my home, every day. As I ran I would chant over and over, "I am a child of God; I am a pillar of light." I began to refer to this ritual as "running with God."

How did the idea of a ritual for adolescents at St. Gregory's come up?

Until a few years ago, we didn't have a significant group of adolescent children at St. Gregory's. Now that group exists. The parents began asking for a ritual akin to a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony, something beyond Confirmation. The church gave me the artistic license to go with my creativity.

It was one of the most difficult learning experiences of my life. I had to deal with the complicated logistics, the clergy, adolescent kids, and parents with fears of letting their children make this passage. This was a brand-new baby, something we had never done before.

How is the Quest structured? What's involved?

The children begin intense preparation at the beginning of January of a Questing year. They each choose an adult companion, a member of the congregation, who is not one of the child's parents, to

join them. In the two Quests we've had so far, kids have chosen single parents, other parents, or singles in general, gay and straight, to be their companions. These companions agree to Quest with them, and to act as mentors.

We have sleepovers at the church to discuss what the Quest is about, work on our projects, and knit the group into a closer, more intimate community. This past Questing year I asked the children to choose a saint who truly spoke to them, and then to create a triptych to illustrate how that saint revealed Jesus to them. Our inspiration was the multitude of dancing saint icons on the church walls—everyone from St. Teresa to Anne Frank to Malcolm X.

The Quest itself lasts for three days. Our first two Quests were held in Lake Del Valle in Livermore, California. It's a remote spot.

The activities and ceremonies were slightly different for each Quest. In the first Quest we started with a blessing of the group, then set up tents. At the outset, the children and their companions were asked to find a rock or stick that spoke to them. In the evening the group gathered at the campfire to sing, discuss St. Gregory's values, pray, and engage in ritual.

The next morning began with singing the Sh'ma again, along with other hymns, and prayer. We asked the children to construct individual altars within the environment. They gathered sticks, rocks, bones, and leaves, and combined these with special things they'd brought from home. Working in spaces they chose—coves, trees, fields, a small carved-out embankment—the children built their altars. After lunch the whole group gathered together and made a pilgrimage to each site, where they gathered in a ritual each altar-builder had prepared. That evening the Questors read letters from their families, and offered their reflections on their parents, brothers, and sisters. On the third day, the kids sang together again, recited the Lord's Prayer, celebrated the Eucharist, reflected on their experiences, packed up the tents, and hiked back to the vans and cars.

Did the Quest go exactly as planned?

We were nearly overwhelmed by the surprises. When we arrived, we found that all our supplies had to be delivered to the campsite by boat. That was an unplanned event engineered by the Holy Spirit. Finding a boat moored there, we got in with our supplies and sailed across the lake.

Then the children discovered a huge rock jutting out over the lake, and they decided to add a new ritual to the Quest: jumping off. For most of the kids and companions, this was an act of overcoming very real fears. The rock was a symbol of jumping off into adulthood. It was frightening, and it was joyous.

I think the biggest surprise was the emotional and spiritual intensity of the event. Some, maybe all, of the children and their companions thought they were going to spend a few pleasant days together, camping out. That certainly happened. But the deeply personal sharing about the children's lives and their families was unexpected. During our final group prayer before departing, we, the children and their companions, were in tears. Today, three years later, some of those Questors and their companions have continued strong, close relationships with one another.

I understand last year's Quest, the second one, was a difficult time for you.

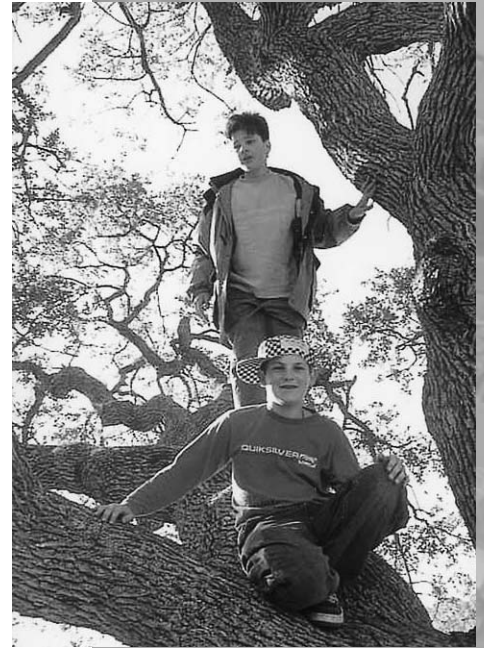
Yes, it was. My own son was a Questor. Because I'd made up the rule that no parents could accompany their kids on the Quest, I couldn't go; I couldn't lead. I had to let go of everything. I had to let go of my adolescent son. I had to face not being in control of planning the rituals, the games, or the discussions.

When it came time to attend the Quest "mitzvah" party to celebrate the kids' return, I could hardly get into the car to drive to the church. I was lying on my kitchen floor, crying and crying because I hadn't truly processed what this meant for me as a parent, not just a Sunday School teacher. It all came to me that I'd have to let go of my son, as he moved on to young adulthood, and I felt that I couldn't let him go. Finally, I made it to church. I can hardly remember that Saturday night or the special liturgy that followed the next Sunday morning, but I know they were both good.

It's taken me months to understand this experience. I've been trying to process the whole experience of the past four years, when the Quest started. I have strong faith that God has a plan, and that we are here to do what we can with our gifts. The sooner we realize what these gifts are, and how to share them, the better life can be. I've learned to let go, and let other people give their gifts. And I'm learning to let my son shine in his own gifts, and be joyous in that, and embrace that shining.

I'm content knowing that I'm a child of God. I don't need to run hard and chant anymore. Now I just walk with God and try to listen quietly. Mostly, I breathe deep in the silence, and it is good.☺

Karen Soleau continues to teach in St. Gregory's Sunday School, and is now helping to plan the next Quest. Dave Hurlbert is a member of St. Gregory's, and serves on the Editorial Board for God's Friends.



Alex and Nicholas, by Dennis Murray, 2002

An excerpt from the Questors' worksheet, "What does the Quest mean to you?":

"Questing requires thought, prayer, song, art, meditation, ritual, movement, risk-taking, and the ability to listen and respond. Through this Quest we want to give you spiritual tools to carry with you throughout your entire lives."

FOLLOW ME

LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL ACTION

by Karl Stockbridge

I am a businessman and leader in the company I work for. My work includes setting strategy and direction, showing up at plant openings and closings, and creating and telling our corporate story. All of these are important responsibilities, but doing them well would not get anyone to consider me a leader. A boss, maybe (often confused with leadership), but not necessarily a leader. Bosses manage while leaders, well, lead.

My own sense of leadership has been inspired by some of the stories about Jesus. Jesus assumed risk, exhibited calm, and told a story that gave us all room to write our own individual scripts. The parts of the Bible that reveal Jesus as vulnerable and afraid illustrate his profound courage; in the face of his own mortal fear, he calmly said, "Follow me." Leadership, by its nature, resists reduction to a recipe. It is an ongoing dance of personality, circumstance and courage that forces a continuous adaptation. That said, I have still found that leadership usually entails certain actions:

1. Accepting risks personally and transferring risks from the group to themselves The company I work for sells infrastructure products to the telecommunications market (we sell underground boxes to phone companies). Until Congress attempted to de-regulate the telephone industry in 1996, telephone companies were among the most stable companies in the world. Their markets, profits, and costs were carefully managed in conjunction with government agencies to insure stability. Working for the phone company was predictable.

By any measure, telephone companies now are in real peril. Jobs, markets, stock prices, and planning are all in complete chaos. I know twenty-five-year employees of the phone company who have been fired by registered mail while on vacation. I hear from people at all levels of these companies that, "No one can do anything." "We need real leadership."

The company I work for has developed some new products that one phone company wants to approve and purchase; by their calculations, these products would save them millions per year. Nobody in that phone company will drive 150 miles to a meeting to approve the product because none of them want to risk turning in an expense report. The word around their now-removed water cooler is that anyone who turns in an expense report obviously did not get the message to save money, so he or she is more likely to be fired in the next round of layoffs. I tell this story because it reveals something about leadership and its absence. The collective and individual goals in that telephone company are defined by risk avoidance. For a leader to emerge, an individual must take risks. When individual employees feel that they are less at risk, and the risk has been transferred to a leader, stress and fear are reduced in their personal jobs. They can work more effectively and feel better about themselves and their contributions. Committees cannot function as leaders, in part because they cannot assume risk personally.

2. Seeing chaos and challenges as opportunities In our company we often talk about the study that reveals that unhappy customers are actually an opportunity. It is very difficult to get a customer to speak glowingly about your product or service. Customers tend to save their most passionate feelings for complaints. However, if customers have been upset or angered, but you greatly exceed their expectations in how well you respond to the problem, they can be quite impassioned in their praise. The best example was IBM in the early computing days. Customers would rave that IBM kept a large staff on their sites "sleeping on cots" for days on end until the problem was solved. It did not seem to bother the customer that the systems were unreliable enough to require squads of technicians for days on end. No, the thing that mattered was that IBM exceeded the customer's expectation in their willingness to fix the problem.

In the same way, chaos and challenge are great opportunities for leadership. This might seem the painful elaboration of the painfully obvious, but I think it is often overlooked. When disasters happen, accounts get lost, or products go bad, there is a moment of recognition by people in an organization. The crucial distinction between boss and leader is revealed in that moment. Like holding fire drills, regular reminders that disasters are opportunities increase the chance that bosses will lead. Leaders foster, encourage, and support others developing into leaders. Leaders look for every opportunity to expand the circle of leadership within an organization.

3. Storytelling In moments of organizational crisis, a corporate leader works quickly to tell the story of the crisis, its meaning, its impact, and the possible solutions, if any. I think this is actually the "act" of corporate leadership (as opposed to, for example, battlefield leadership that has different "acts").



Christ as Man of Sorrows,
by the hand of Betsy Porter,
2001. Egg tempera and gold
leaf on wood.

The story does not have to guarantee an outcome, but it should identify the range of outcomes. In each possible ending there should be part of the story that explains how each participant emerges, not necessarily unscathed, but ultimately alright.

Over the last two years we have had a 60 percent reduction in sales. Sales reductions of this magnitude are 9.0 earthquakes on the business Richter scale. As individual plants were hit by the downturn, often quite suddenly, I would arrive to “tell the story.” The act of gathering all the employees, articulating what most of them already knew, and explaining the range of actions we might take, seemed important and good. Often the range of options included closing the plant and laying off all the employees I was addressing. Giving voice to their worst fears, and trying to help put it in perspective, seemed to decrease their fear and allowed them to get on with business.

I used to think I could not tell the story until I knew the outcome; after all, what is a story without an ending? This became a handy delay tactic. Once I recognized it as an excuse to avoid the unpleasant, I was shamed into showing up at the plants and telling everyone what I knew, and also what I did not know. Sharing an unfinished story gives the participants a chance to help write the ending.

It may seem paradoxical, but an unfinished story is much more powerful than a story with a neat ending. When the employees have a chance to help script the ending, they have a feeling of personal control and of being led at the same time.

4. Speaking up In my experience there are different paths to corporate leadership. There is the “born to it” path which is predominantly peopled by above-average-height white males with big voices. Good hair and teeth a plus. (Full disclosure: I am an above-average-height white male with a big voice.)

The second path is open to all. It is not based on appearance or socio-economic background. This path is filled with people who saw a challenge as an opportunity and mustered the courage to speak up. They found themselves in precarious situations and were forced to act (the bypasser noticing the burning building), or they were willing to escalate a routine situation to a risk-filled situation out of principle (Rosa Parks). We tend to call these people heroes rather than leaders, but I maintain it is the same; they assessed the situation and took personal risk for the good of others.

Heroism is almost impossible to pull off in the corporate setting, but acts of courage and job risk happen at all levels of organizations. People who never thought of themselves as leaders are

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LEADERSHIP BY
ITS NATURE IS
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ADAPTATION.

GREGORY OF NYSSA, a fourth-century bishop, theologian, and patron of St. Gregory's Church, saw life as unending progress towards discovering God at work among humanity, and sin as refusal to keep growing in this discovery. In this journal, which takes its name from his writings, we aim to further Gregory's vision by featuring two kinds of work:

⊕ essays on liturgy and church practice, focusing on fresh and ancient approaches to corporate worship that honor human experience as an opening to God;

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**THIS IS TRUE
PERFECTION:
NOT TO AVOID A
WICKED LIFE
BECAUSE WE FEAR
PUNISHMENT,
LIKE SLAVES; NOT
TO DO GOOD
BECAUSE WE EXPECT
REPAYMENT, AS IF
CASHING IN ON THE
VIRTUOUS LIFE BY
ENFORCING SOME
BUSINESS DEAL.
ON THE CONTRARY,
DISREGARDING ALL
THOSE GOOD THINGS
WHICH WE DO HOPE
FOR AND WHICH
GOD HAS PROMISED
US, WE REGARD
FALLING FROM
GOD'S FRIENDSHIP
AS THE ONLY THING
DREADFUL, AND WE
CONSIDER BECOMING
GOD'S FRIEND THE
ONLY THING TRULY
WORTHWHILE.**

GREGORY OF NYSSA

FOLLOW ME *Continued from page 11*

driven to speak up and go against conventional wisdom. (Creating a job environment that fosters this is one of the most important things bosses can do, but that is another topic.)

Many of these "new" leaders don't immediately change positions in the company, but they do become more important. Production workers who dare to speak up with an unpopular idea to fix a production problem, and are proven to be right, do not necessarily jump to production manager. But more importantly, they see themselves as leaders and others in the workplace do too.

5. Exhibiting courage Opportunities to lead are rarely anticipated and can almost never be planned for. When the usually unpleasant reality is perceived by a group (the biggest customer has just gone out of business, for example) a leader emerges or not. I have never heard of a leader who did not exhibit courage and calm to the group.

I have driven up to many a plant or office with my heart in my mouth, pulse pounding. Having to fire one person or many, or let an operation know that they have just been sold, scares me. Part of the fear is knowing that my fear can't show. I think it absurd to be self-absorbed while delivering bad news to others, but it is crucial that the leader maintain enough self-possession to prevent his or her personal fear from showing. I have met executives who maintain they can fire people without any distress of any kind. I cannot imagine that such a boss possessed enough empathy to be an effective leader.

Why would it matter that a dismissed employee thought me a leader? Firings, layoffs, terminations, redundancies (pick your euphemism) are another form of crisis; therefore an opportunity. I like to think that I "fire people well." Maybe it is just salve for guilt, but I think that bad news conveyed with courage and compassion is preferable to bad news communicated coldly or dismissively. I was once fired by someone who conveyed his dissatisfaction in every way except sitting down and telling me straight that I was out. I finally had to sit him down and raise the subject. He was a boss, not a leader.

Leaders are able to project themselves as the calm ones in the eye of the storm; even if they have to fake it. Leaders use all sorts of idiosyncratic strategies to achieve this apparent calm. (What would John Wayne do in this situation?) I am often unsure, and not at all certain that I am leading in the right direction. I believe this is one of the truths of leadership: it is better to lead a group with calm, even in the wrong direction, than to let a group wallow in uncertainty and fear. There is more opportunity to correct a wrong direction if there is some sort of momentum and if individual members are less distracted by their personal risk.

Leadership is a partner dance, not a performance. Leaders invite others onto the dance floor; they don't perform in isolation on a stage. My sense of leadership has been greatly informed by the theology often expressed at St. Gregory's, which focuses on a vision of God at work in our lives, inviting us into friendship and full self-expression. ☺

Karl Stockbridge has been a member of St. Gregory's since early 1979, and a long-distance member since 1985, when he moved to the Sierra foothills. He lives with his wife Joan and daughters Katherine and Margaret and attends Faith Lutheran Church, where he sings in the choir.



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