

In the history of the Christian Church bishops are always known by the cities or towns in which they have their cathedra. And so there are Archbishops of Canterbury and York, bishops of Winchester and London and Salisbury, but not a bishop of Kent or Gloucestershire. Except of course in the Episcopal Church, where we have a bishop of Vermont, not Burlington; a bishop of California, not San Francisco, and perhaps oddest of all, a bishop of El Camino Real, a bishop not of a city or a state or region, but the bishop of a highway, and even then not ALL of the highway, just a bit of it! Currently our diocese is taking time to reflect on what it means to be a diocese of the highway, to be a pilgrim people. This resonates with many powerful themes and images in both Jewish and Christian history, from the great journey of the Exodus, through the pilgrimage routes that have figured so prominently in popular religion, most notably the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, right down to the pilgrimages and mission trips Christian communities continue to undertake in our own day.

In the next edition of *Calling All Saints* you'll read about this idea I had a few weeks ago, about using the slightly derelict Waverley Window – the display case that fronts on Waverley Street from the church offices – into a sort of wayside shrine. If you ever looked for a church in which to pray when your life is in crisis, you'll know how hard it is to find one open. How much harder when your whole world and existence is in crisis, when you don't have a home, when you're wandering the streets in the early hours of the morning, that time of acute loneliness and hopelessness and terror. This shrine will have a cross and a collection of icons of different saints as well as written prayers.

Near our apartment in New York there was a T-shirt store with occasionally brilliant window displays. One memorable T shirt bore the message, *It's not all about you*. Of course, it had a matching T shirt, *It IS all about ME*. Perhaps we need to put that first T-shirt in our own display case: unless you are someone wandering the streets at night, homeless and adrift, then *it's not about you*. Our window is not intended to express a consensus of our particular theologies and ecclesiologies and devotions, a sort of lowest common denominator we can all agree on, but something which is not much about us at all, something grounded not so much in our opinions as in another's needs.

I wonder if this little wayside shrine, this place of prayer for those who live not, like most of us, in fixed places, our homes, but on the *camino*, might itself become an icon not of saints of the past, but of whom we are and who we want to become: a church that routinely gives consideration to the needs, traditions, customs, sensibilities, and the very presence of the wanderer seeking a place of rest? A few weeks ago, after a church, I was desperately trying to engage with a visitor, but I couldn't break away from someone who wanted to tell me at length about something that was neither urgent nor even important. When the visitor walked past and I attempted to break free, I saw this parishioner's eyes quickly run over the visitor and dismiss him as someone unknown, and perhaps someone not worth the effort of knowing, someone certainly far less important than the topic of conversation. We say we want diversity, we say we want financial security, we say we want to grow, we say we want to be a place of prayer and support and encouragement for all of God's people, and yet when God sends us someone, we sometimes reveal a whole hidden set of expectations and requirements that suggest that God could, and should, do better.

Stephanie Spellers is a Boston priest whose book *Radical Welcome* has not only had a significant effect on our church but also on our own bishop. It is a profoundly challenging work, and on many levels, but one of the simplest points she makes is that people know they are welcome when they recognize part of themselves, their identity or culture or race or history, celebrated and honored in a community. Just as at Christmas I spoke about the barbarians sparing the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome because they saw themselves honored in its mosaics of the magi, so she talks about the visual signals we all look for in a place that tell us we are safe, even valued. When I lived and worked in New York City, it wasn't unusual to realize you were the only white person in a packed subway carriage: imagine living with that experience everywhere, every day, knowing you were the only person like you in a

restaurant, on a bus, in an office, in a store, and in a church. Again, we want to grow, we want diversity, but what signals to someone who is not a middle class WASP that they are even welcome here, let alone valued? This is not simply a case of putting on a kente cloth chasuble and installing a banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, although they might both be good things. I would love to do both, as long as they weren't gimmicks, but arose out of deep believing, deep conviction, signaling an effortless, reflexive response of openness and welcome. Years ago on a visit to southern California Dennis and I researched where we would go to church on Sunday and found an Episcopal church that actually advertised in the gay press; when we got there, people maintained a sterile distance around us, no one spoke to us, except the woman at the welcome table who asked us to return the welcome package she had just handed me when she discovered we were just passing through and weren't prospective members.

I want to suggest that we can acquire that reflexive response by studying and reading about it, and we must; by praying and asking for it, and we must; and by understanding other traditions and cultures through works of service, and that I think we must also do. And so as a band of pilgrims, travelers along this part of the *camino*, I would like us to intentionally open ourselves to recognizing and welcoming the Christ who walks among us and with us, through new directions in our reading and study and formation, in our liturgy and prayer, and in new approaches to outreach.

- On Good Friday night, with the gracious cooperation of the choir and Rodney, we will be offering an entirely new service for us, based on the Orthodox liturgy of the Burial of Christ, a sung type of sung Vespers. It's one way of broadening some of our horizons and although months away I encourage your support and participation.
- During this year I believe that the Outreach Committee will offer us an entirely new and different service project in which we can all participate according to our capacities.

And finally I want to offer a special thanks to one person, or maybe two: for just about everyone who walks through our doors, Mabel's is the sweet face of loving welcome and gracious acceptance, but there is someone else for whom welcoming our guests is a passion and whom very few visitors elude, and it seems particularly appropriate today to acknowledge and thank John Sack for his extraordinary sheep-dogging abilities. In addition to the amount of time he has devoted to the tasks of Senior Warden during this most crucial year of calling and then settling a new rector, John has never ceased being attentive to the unknown Christ who walks through our door every Sunday, a Christ who is never beneath John's interest or attention.

At the same time, I want to also thank and acknowledge Mattie and Jodi for their years of service to the Vestry. When our family first visited All Saints' we spent many hours with Mattie and Charlie in a variety of settings, but most memorably at their home, where we all felt very much at home, and not surprisingly have returned many times. Mattie's creativity and enthusiasm and energy – the whole magical, mystical package that is Mattie – cannot be easily described, let alone replicated, and we will miss her infectiously joyous presence on Vestry.

Jodi wasn't here when we visited All Saints' – she was traveling for work! - which is one of the greatest attributes that Jodi has brought to the vestry, the determination to be of service to the parish while maintaining an incredibly busy work schedule, calling in to Vestry meetings despite three hours time differences and jet lag. She was always present, not always physically but fully present in her energy and drive and commitment.

Thank you to all three. If I can't give you the keys of the kingdom, I can at least give you the key ring.