

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

This month, on the 22nd, I will celebrate ten years of priestly ministry. It has been quite an adventure for me and, I am sure, for those whom I have been privileged to serve. I want to thank everyone at Saint Alban's for your support and encouragement over the years. As most of you know I was ordained out of this parish, so this church and all of the people who have been part of it over the years have a very special place in my heart.

By the time you read this we will be in Eastertide, celebrating the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Easter is the most joyous time of the year. Because Christ was raised from the dead, so we who are "in Christ" - who are members of his mystical Body by faith and baptism - will one day be raised from the dead. What an unfathomable and awesome thing that is to consider!

Looking back, our Lenten services and activities went very well. Everyone who came to them seemed to enjoy the time of fellowship and worship. If you missed them then you missed out on a blessing! Our Tuesday evening study on "The Four Great Heresies" was well attended, and we had some interesting and edifying discussion. Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was better attended this year than last, as were the few Prayer Book holy days that fell during Lent. If you only had time to make it out for one activity this year plan on making space to attend more of them next year. Devotions like "Stations of the Cross" become more and more meaningful the more we do them. Setting aside 1/2 hour *each* Friday for 40 days drives home the message of the passion of our Lord in a much greater way than does attending it only *once* during that forty days.

In the ancient world the period after Easter was a time of "mystagogy" - a time for newly catechized and baptized Christians to delve deeper and deeper into the mystery of their new faith in Christ through prayer, worship, study, and good works. That is something that we can try to do during Eastertide. Even though most of us were born into the church as children and reared in Christian homes, there is always more to learn, and there are always more ways to grow in our faith in God in Christ. I find the study of the resurrection narratives and related passages as appointed in the daily lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer to be very helpful things to study during this time of year. They help me deepen my faith and understanding of what God did for His Son that first Easter morning. Why not make a special point to read through them this Eastertide?

May God bless and keep you during these "great forty days" of Easter!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

April 2016

IN THIS ISSUE:

Ten Years of Priestly Ministry, pp. 2-4

How I Became a Priest

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

Apr 6th - Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Apr 25th - St. Mark

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 2nd - Ss. Philip & James

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 3rd - Rogation Tuesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 4th - Rogation Wednesday

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 5th - Ascension Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 16th - Monday in Whitsun

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

May 17th - Tuesday in Whitsun

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 11th - St. Barnabas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jun 24th - St. John Baptist

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

10 YEARS OF PRIESTLY MINISTRY: *The Story of How I Became an Anglican Priest*

Ten years ago on April 22nd I was ordained a priest right here at Saint Alban's Church by our bishop, the Most Rev'd Walter H. Grundorf, D.D. The church was packed with laity and clergy, friends, and family, all celebrating the momentous occasion. I remember fighting back tears (just as I had to do at my ordination to the diaconate six months earlier) when we began to sing Down Ampney ("Come Down, O Love Divine"). The Rev'd Canon Chandler Holder Jones, SSC (now "Bishop" Jones!) preached, and the Rev'd Raymond Unterburger (now "Rev'd Canon" Unterburger!) presented me for ordination. The bishop's chaplain was the Rev'd Canon Rob Tregenza, Ph.D.

The story of how I was ordained, however, goes back a lot further than ten years. In high school (a Christian school) it was suggested to me by a few teachers that I might have a vocation to full time Christian ministry. When I went to college (a Christian college) I majored in history with the goal of teaching at a Christian school. I later decided that I wanted to go into pastoral ministry, as that would be a more direct way of "helping" people. (I now know that one should not seek ordination in order to "help" people. But that is a different article!)

While in college I became increasingly frustrated that even though I was paying for most of college I didn't have the time in my schedule to take an art or music class. Thankfully, I learned from someone that the type of undergrad degree one got had no bearing on being accepted into a seminary. So I switched my major to art (painting) and also began taking a number of music classes (classical guitar) still with goal of attending seminary and becoming a pastor. While in college I participated in off campus ministries such as nursing home visitation and evangelism. At home during the summers I was involved with my local church in various ways. Little by little, though, as I studied art, I lost interest in becoming a pastor. My goal now became to "move to New York City, become an artist, and live a Bohemian lifestyle.

While all of this was happening another important change happened in my life. I discovered Anglicanism. My family was Presbyterian. I was reared at Valley Presbyterian Church in Lutherville... a wonderful church full of great people. My parents are still members. The thing that led me to explore Anglicanism was my growing interest in liturgy and music, fueled by listening to CDs of the "Tallis Scholars" - one of the world's premier choral vocal ensembles that specializes in singing Renaissance choral music. Their recording of Robert White's church music made a big impact on me. The Latin polyphony and Gregorian chanting of the Magnificat, Regina Coeli, and

other prayers and motets blew my mind! I had no idea that church could be this sublime. Meanwhile, at the Presbyterian church, our new pastor - a very man - began introducing these sappy and banal Bill Gaither choruses at the end of the Sunday morning service. That, along with the "praise and worship" choruses that began the service (an innovation introduced by his predecessor) was anathema to me. After a while I couldn't stomach it anymore. I tried visiting other Presbyterian churches in the area but something just did not seem right about them. God was leading me elsewhere... but where?

Then one day I saw an ad in the local paper for Saint Stephen's Church in Timonium. It was intriguing. It spoke of "proclaiming the historic faith once delivered to the saints" and the "1928 Book of Common Prayer." I didn't know what that meant but I thought it sounded good, so I decided to visit. This was back in 1996 or so. The rector Fr. Guy P. Hawtin, was an Englishman, and a really neat person. He is still pastor of the parish to this day, and we remain good friends. The church, which was full of the most fascinating people you'd ever want to meet, welcomed me with open arms, so I began attending regularly. While the music at St. Stephen's was not very good at that time (now it is tremendous) the liturgy was spectacular. Like most converts to Anglicanism I was astonished at the great beauty and theological and devotional intensity of the classical Anglican liturgy. I was hooked. It wasn't long before a man named Don Stevens asked me if I'd be interested in serving at the altar.

After attending Saint Stephen's for almost a year I began to get bored with it. (This happens a lot with people, actually. The initial wonderment of the liturgy and the ceremonies gives way to a boredom with it. I always tell people. "You love the service now, but it will become rote and boring after a while. Stay with it and get over that hump and you'll be fine." A priest colleague of mine actually says that it takes 10 years to really become an Anglican!! I would tend to agree with him.) I was just getting ready to move on when I heard that the parish was going to be interviewing a young priest for the position of curate, so I decided to give the church a chance. This man was the Rev'd Chandler Holder Jones. He was young, dynamic, and full of life. After a service where he preached I went to talk with him in parish office. (I remember the conversation including where we were standing, etc. like it was yesterday.) In the course of the conversation it came out that I had once considered becoming a Presbyterian pastor. Upon hearing that Chad immediately said, "Ahh, perhaps God is calling you to be a priest in his Holy, Catholic Church!" I was blown away. I felt like St. Matthew as he is depicted in the *(continued on the next page)*

famous painting “The Calling of Saint Matthew” by Caravaggio... Christ was pointing at me! The light was on me. I had run from the Lord, but now he caught up to me and wanted me to reconsider becoming a pastor. Over the next few months and years Chad and Guy mentored me, giving me books to read, and getting me involved in the ministry of the church. I was confirmed in 1997 by the Rt. Rev’d John T. Cahoon, Jr. Bishop Cahoon found out that I was interested in possibly becoming a priest, so we met one night for dinner and got to know each other. Nothing really happened though, because I was hemming and hawing again. About that time an opportunity arose with the company where I worked (Keane, Inc. - at the time the nation’s fifth largest IT consulting firm) to go overseas and do consulting on military bases in Germany, Belgium, and Holland. Naturally I jumped at the chance to make tons of money in such a fun way. I lived in Europe for several months traveling from base to base, socking away all of the money. (While working at Rammstein AFB I met the Rev’d Carl Walter Wright, the episcopalian chaplain, and attended his church. How surprised I was, almost 16 years later, to learn that he was a Marylander, and that he’d retired and moved back home. He now serves as archdeacon of the Diocese of Maryland, and we remain good friends, getting together from time to time.)

When I came back home to America I thought, “This is it! The moment I have been waiting for has arrived. I finally have all of the seed money I need to move to NYC and fulfill my dream!” But then I remembered the idea of becoming a priest. I’d been praying about it, and talking to Chad and Guy about it, but never did anything with it. Now I had the chance. But what was it going to be NYC or seminary? I opted for the latter, thinking that if I didn’t like it I could just quit, and then I would never have to worry about the call to full ministry ever again. (Ironically, I would later turned down two job offers in Manhattan with Keane because I was in seminary!)

So, I put in my notice to Keane and applied to Saint Mary’s Seminary, School of Theology. Being a Roman Catholic school they did not want to admit me. I remember having to practically argue with the Jesuit dean of the school and professor of canon law that I had taken lots of undergrad courses in religion and other liberal arts and not just a bunch of art classes. They finally admitted me as a non-resident student in the Roman Catholic seminary. I quickly rented a flat in the Bolton Hill section of Baltimore and got ready to hit the books. Thankfully, Keane decided not to let me go, but rather keep me on as a part time administrative assistant. That enabled me to pay my bills while in

school, and eke out an existence. For most of seminary I was impoverished. I barely had enough food to eat... I’d even save the tobacco ends from my cigarette butts to roll into extra cigarettes. At one point I had to steal toilet paper rolls from work because I couldn’t afford to buy any of my own! (Being this poor was good preparation for being a parish priest.) Seminary was an interesting and sometimes alienating experience. The classes were incredible stimulating, and I was impressed with my classmates’ spirituality and intellect. Most of my friends from college abandoned me because I was no longer in communion with their infallible “pope” John Calvin. My parents were not enthusiastic about it and were only marginally supportive. My best friends were people I worked with at Keane, people from church - especially Chad since were around the same age - and some new friends I’d made in the area... Victoria, Dave, Suzanne, Norman, Karl, Gerald, Evan, and some others. The rejection by my closest friends from college had a profound and life changing impact on me. It is amazing how badly Christians sometimes treat each other!

Sometime around 2001 an acrimonious situation had arisen at Saint Stephen’s. Without going into detail, as that is all water under the bridge now, it was very bitter and ugly... enough so that I became disillusioned and left. I stayed on at seminary to finish my degree and graduated in May of 2001. Around this time I converted to the Roman Catholic Church, thinking that would be a safe and wonderful haven. (Little did I know that the sex abuse cover ups would blow up in the national news!) I went back to work for Keane full time on a project with the State of Maryland. Looking back, it is amazing how God always provided for me financially when I needed it. I worked there for about two more years and then just couldn’t take it anymore. The corporate world was making me go nuts. From Keane I went on to teaching art and religion at a now-closed Catholic school in West Baltimore, which proved to be a total disaster. After only a few months I quit and went to work for my old man, who very generously offered me a job. That job was a great experience in so many ways. I learned a lot about the building trade, sales, promotion, and more. But alas, I was not happy. I began applying for jobs in NYC and elsewhere but nothing materialized. Life as a Roman Catholic layman was not very inspiring. While I thought the church looked good on paper, and while I was impressed with the deep spirituality of my classmates at seminary, the reality of life at the parishes was dismal and depressing. The liturgy was insipid and dull at its best, and ghastly at its worst. I was now more miserable than ever before. *(continued on the next page)*

Everything changed one day when I was driving to Columbia for an interview with American Express Financial Services. During the interview process I began thinking to myself, "What are you doing here, Gordon? You don't want to do this." So I got up and walked out. Driving home on 95 I prayed to God, "What do you want me to do with my life, Lord?" He answered me in my heart: "I already told you what I wanted you to. I want you to be an Anglican priest. The only thing stopping that from happening is *you!*" "Wow." I thought. "It really is that easy, I guess." I also thought about how much I had sacrificed (a LOT... time, money relationships, and more) to become a priest, and how many other people had helped me along the way, and how I was now doing NOTHING with my degree and training! That did not seem right to me. In retrospect I see how God allowed me to go through that time of "wandering in the wilderness" to test me and equip me for the ministry to which he called me. To this day I use every single thing I ever learned in the corporate world, teaching, sales, and more, in parish ministry!

When I got home I e-mailed my old friend Chad Jones and told him the news. He was delighted and directed me to St. Alban's Church where he had once served as rector. (Chad was now residing with his family in Florida, and serving as dean of the pro-cathedral.) Obviously this meant leaving the Roman Catholic Church. At the time this was not a hard decision to make, especially because I was so completely grossed out by the sex abuse scandals and cover-ups. I couldn't believe I had joined such a church! Thankfully they have now straightened all of that mess out.

I returned to the Anglican Church in late 2002/early 2003. Fr. Dic Baskwill, interim rector at St. Alban's, graciously welcomed me home and got me back to serving at the altar. Other parishioners whom I had known - the Brownes, the Minshalls, and more - were equally welcoming. A month or so later, Fr. Raymond Unterburger came to the parish to serve as rector. Fr. Ray got me back in the process to become a priest. Although I had a seminary degree I had to fulfill certain canonical requirements to be ordained. The bishop had to meet me and approve me, as did various lay and clerical committees. I had to read several books and write papers on them, and then be trained in the art of priestcraft and parish ministry by Fr. Ray and others. It was during this time - in December of 2004 - that I met my future wife, the beautiful Valerie Clemmer. I was ordained to the diaconate at the pro-cathedral one week before marrying Valerie, in September 2010. Ordination to the priesthood came six months later, and took place as I mentioned here at Saint Alban's. Fr. Ray took up a collection from the parish so I could buy the needed items for my priestly

ministry, including vestments, an oil stock, a chalice and paten, and other such items. Ten years on, they show their age, but every time I use them I am reminded of the great love of God and of his people towards me, and of the solemn trust placed in me by the Church.

Looking back on these ten years, there is much for which to give thanks. Celebrating the liturgy and making Christ present on the altar under the forms of bread and wine is a transcendent and mystical experience. Celebrating with families at the big celebrations in their lives - baptisms, weddings, confirmations, etc. - is a great joy. Comforting the sick and afflicted, blessing those who mourn, and burying the blessed dead is a very moving experience.

Being a parish priest is very challenging. I am often asked what it is I like the most about my vocation and that is the answer I almost always give: I like the challenge of it. There is always something new going on. Living on the low salary is certainly difficult - especially if you're married with kids. It can also be very difficult to minister to a broad cross-section of people (different ages, professions, backgrounds, nationalities, etc.) in a small church setting. The spiritual dimension of the priesthood always keeps you on your toes. Normal everyday conflicts can take on a diabolical dimension when they occur in the church!

I have learned a lot over the years about ministry and myself. I have had to learn to manage my expectations - of myself and of my people. What I think may be a big, successful event or activity for the church may be a total flop because of the dynamics of the parish. In the past I have been crushed when no one shows any interest in a parish activity, or study that I am leading. Now I know not to take it personally, and to channel my energy into figuring out what sorts of activities work to help us grow as Christians and human beings. I have certainly learned what battles to fight, and that it is not worth dying on every single hill. I have learned how important it is to stay grounded in prayer and the study of scripture. The Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer sustain me in my parish ministry and spiritual life.

I want to thank each person at Saint Alban's, Saint Francis (now Saint Philip's), and Saint Mark's Churches for their love and support over the years, for putting up with me and my weaknesses and eccentricities, and for always welcoming and loving me and my family. I want to thank my fellow clergy for their fraternal love support as well. And mostly, I give thanks to our Lord Jesus who, of his own mysterious love, has called me, Gordon Anderson, to serve in his person at the Altar, preach his Holy Gospel, and make him and his matchless love present to people's lives! Please keep me in prayer as I pray for each of you. ✠