



Around Our Diocese

Issue #109

The Diocese of Northern Indiana

November 2009

*A Passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ
A Willingness to do Whatever it Takes*

*A Heart for the Lost
A Commitment to One Another*

A Letter from the Bishop

Dear brothers and sisters,

The Nones are growing!

Did my spellcheck fail to catch an error? Not at all! The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey reports that people who claim no religious affiliation whatsoever represent the fast-growing segment of the population. They check “None” when asked their religious preference. In 1990, they accounted for 8% of the American public. Today their numbers have nearly doubled. 15% of all Americans are Nones. USA Today notes that “this category outranks every other major U.S. religious group except Catholics and Baptists.” In the religious cafeteria that represents our culture’s spiritual offerings, the Episcopal Church holds a shrinking place. There are now almost 2.8 million people who claim affiliation with new religious movements - including Wiccan and Spiritualist - well more than even the most optimistic reckoning of Episcopal membership.

Even more troubling than the numbers is the survey’s analysis of our culture and the place of faith in people’s lives. Barry Kosmin, the survey’s co-author, “concluded from the 1990 data that many saw God as a ‘personal hobby,’ and that the USA is a ‘greenhouse for spiritual sprouts.’ Today, he says, ‘religion has become more like a fashion statement, not a deep personal commitment for many.’” That’s a frightening analogy. Will it be Gucci, Prada - or God?

Frightening, yes, but also an opportunity. The church first grew in just such a setting. “While Paul was waiting for [Silas and Timothy] in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, ‘Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:17, 21-23). Athens had its share of Nones and of religious dilettantes, people of no religion or any religion, fashionistas of their own day. It was to them that Paul

spoke, arguing from the beauty and order of nature and the Athenians’ own philosophical tradition that “God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands,” and concluding: “[God] has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (17:24,31). Paul understood the culture of Athens - its unique blend of religious skepticism and religious yearning - and he understood how to communicate the Gospel in ways that the Athenians could understand.

All of which leads me to some conclusions and some challenges. As Christians we should

Know our culture - be aware of people around us, their spiritual yearnings, the places in their lives where (whether they identify it or not) they have a “God-shaped vacuum”,

Know our own stories – how Jesus became real to us, what he means to us, how he has drawn us to himself and changed our lives,

Know how to tell our stories – be able to articulate, briefly or at length, the story of our encounter with Jesus and the Christian community, and to share that story with Nones and seekers who ask us (for example) why we bother to go to church on Sunday morning.

Bishop Todd MacGregor, Bishop of Tulear on the island of Madagascar (a huge land mass 300 miles east of southern Africa), told our recently-completed diocesan convention about the challenges he faces when he shares the Gospel with a culture in which half of the population adheres to traditional African religions, and many Christians attempt some sort of religious syncretism. As I listened to him, I found myself thinking of the Nones and the seekers in our own culture. Wherever we are, people need Jesus. That was the challenge in Athens two millennia ago, the challenge in Madagascar today, and the challenge we face in the northern third of the state of Indiana.

Yours in Christ,

+Ed

News from the Cadets at Howe

The cadets at Howe Military School have commenced supporting the local feed the hungry program sponsored by the LaGrange Methodist Church. The cadets provide servers and kitchen help on the first Sunday of each month and are on call if assistance is needed at other times. The Feed the Hungry program is conducted for those in need for the Sunday dinner meal. The program is open to anyone in need whether they live in LaGrange County or not. Other local churches also take part in supporting the program for example the LaGrange Mount Zion Lutheran church provides helpers on the third Sunday of each month. Although the program is still new it does seem to be gaining interest and the cadets enjoy doing something to help others.

Quiet Day Invitation

The "Sisters in Service" of St. Christopher's Crown Point are hosting a quiet day centered on the theme of Advent on Saturday, November 21st. The day will be led by the Rev. Charles Hensel and will begin at 9:00 am (cst). A light lunch will be served. To RSVP, contact Julie Chandler at (219) 662-7869 or at Ruth Joyce (219) 696-0936.

Diocesan Convention Thank-Yous

The diocese extends a sincere and heartfelt thank-you to the Rev. Canon John E. Schramm and the people of St. Thomas, Plymouth for hosting convention on Saturday, October 24th. A special thank-you is also in order to Patty Moberly and the parish's convention committee for being such gracious hosts.

Thank you as well to the delegates from each parish for being willing to serve our church by your thoughtful and committed participation.

The diocesan staff is already at work brainstorming ideas for next year's convention, which will be at St. Paul's, Munster. It is our desire to balance the need to disseminate the necessary information to the delegates with the purpose of equipping and inspiring them for mission in their parishes so that they can return to their homes in a timely manner. We will look to make changes to the agenda and its structure to serve this end.

Bishop & Diocesan Calendar for November 2009

November 1-5, 2009

House of Bishops Planning Committee

November 6, 2009

12:05 PM (EST) Holy Eucharist at the Cathedral

November 8, 2009

Visitation to St. Paul's, Munster

November 9, 2009

Howe Military School Board of Trustees

November 11, 2009

9:00 AM (EST) Anti-Racism Training at Cathedral

November 13-14, 2009

Congregational Development Institute at Donaldson, IN

November 15, 2009

Visitation to St. David's, Elkhart

November 15-20, 2009

Leadership Training Institute at Donaldson, IN

November 16, 2009

12:00 PM (EST) Planned Giving Committee

November 18, 2009

12:05 PM (EST) Holy Eucharist at the Cathedral

November 21, 2009

10:00 pm (EST) Commission on Ministry

November 21, 2009

3:00 pm (EST) Ultreya at St. Alban's, Fort Wayne

November 21, 2009

9:00 pm (CST) Quiet Day at St. Christopher's, Crown Point

November 22, 2009

Visitation to Christ the King, Huntington

November 24, 2009

12:00 PM (EST) Standing Committee

November 25-27, 2009

Diocesan Office Closed

November 29, 2009

12:00 PM (EDT) St. Christopher's, Crown Point

Around Our Diocese is published monthly. Please send stories, articles, and images by the 15th of each month to:

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The editor reserves the right to edit all articles. Please visit www.ednin.org for regular updates and more news from around our diocese.