Omaha

I am riding on a limited express, one of the crack trains of the nation.
Hurtling across the prairie into blue haze and dark air go fifteen all-steel coaches holding a thousand people.
(All the coaches shall be scrap and rust and all the men and women laughing in the diners and sleepers shall pass to ashes.)
I ask a man in the smoker where he is going and he answers:
“Omaha.”

Carl Sandburg, 1916

In the musical, Annie, Daddy Warbucks, at one point, states, “After New York City, everywhere else is just… Buffalo.” In a similar vein, to a Chicagoan of the early 20th century like Carl Sandburg, Omaha was a symbol of everywhere else, of anywhere else, or where you ended up if you weren’t going anywhere, or where you ended up if you didn’t know where you were going. “Omaha” is simply a stop on the line, a neither-here-nor-there on the way from somewhere to somewhere else.

(I have been to Buffalo, and I have been to Omaha, and they are both, in fact, lovely places in their respective ways. But let’s stay with the poetic metaphor for a moment.)

In Lent, we are given, each year, the opportunity to take stock, to gauge—if you will forgive the railroad pun—where we are headed in our journey of life. In Lent, we are faced with the question of whether our lives are directed somewhere, are headed in a particular course, or if we are simply riding to “Omaha.” This season soon upon us offers the chance once again and anew to strip away all that keeps us tied down to life as it is instead of being open to life as it could be; to be once again and anew restored and refreshed in our relationship with God, with God’s creation, and with God’s other children; to be directed—to use that lovely and neglected word—Godward. In brief: what is preventing us from living Godward lives? What is keeping us from the destination of being immersed in God’s grace and presence, of being enveloped by God’s love? What, in our lives, in our work, in our relationships, is keeping us aimed toward “Omaha,” wherever or whatever Omaha may be for each of us? This Lent, what single item, what particular practice, what personal hindrance can we offer, remove, exorcise, jettison as we seek to be reclaimed and recreated by God?

One final note about Carl Sandburg’s brief poem; and that is the fact that the title of the work is, simply, “Limited.” It refers to a particular train, yes; but it also refers, it seems to me, to the life we too frequently live. And is not Lent a time truly to become unlimited with and in and through God?

Ash Wednesday: February 10

This year, we will observe Ash Wednesday, February 10, with the Holy Eucharist and Imposition of Ashes:
7:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., and 5:30 p.m. Please note that there is no 9:00 liturgy that day. This schedule has been established in the hope that some people—especially, perhaps, those who work nearby—might be able to come to the Eucharist over the noon hour, and that the later afternoon service will be more convenient to some commuters and families with school-aged children. Please make a special effort to participate in one of these celebrations in order that, as the Book of Common Prayer exhorts us, we might all make a "right beginning" to the holy and poignant season of Lent.
Daily Eucharists; Thursday Morning<br>Lenten Eucharist and Breakfast

As we move into and through Lent, don't forget the quiet, thoughtful, and inspiring Eucharists that are offered every day in the church. The liturgies are celebrated at 9:00 a.m. each day, save Thursday, and are a perfect way to be renewed and refreshed during the week. On Monday, Tuesday and Saturday, the services are traditional; on Wednesday and Friday, Contemplative Eucharists are offered, designed in such a way as to provide fresh imagery and language for worshipping God.

On Thursdays, the Eucharist is celebrated at 7:00 a.m., and, during Lent, is followed by a nourishing breakfast in the Great Room. During the rest of the year, this service includes a healing rite, but we suspend that practice during Lent in order to provide time for fellowship and food following the Eucharist. If you have never attended the early service on Thursdays, this would be a perfect year to make it part of your Lenten journey. The early Thursday Eucharist is particularly perfect for those who would like to worship during the week but also need to head off to work.

Please join us any day of the week, as part of your Lenten experience, to give thanks to God for all of life's blessings and delights, and to raise up your sorrows and concerns into God's care.

Calling All Palms

As many are aware, the ashes used on Ash Wednesday are created from burning the palms distributed the previous Palm Sunday. This takes place on Shrove Tuesday. If you have palms or palm crosses from last year or even longer ago, please bring them to the church by Sunday, February 7, and leave them in the front office. Thanks, in advance, for your offerings.

Powerball Frenzy  Marc Franson, Stewardship and Canvass

Just a few short days ago the country was mesmerized with Powerball and the possibility of winning $1.5 billion! People lined up to buy tickets. Non-players played just to get a possible shot at winning. Millions dreamed of what they would do with their winning. And every ticket holder wanted to win. Some of us even prayed to win.

What did you dream about when fantasizing about winning the lottery? How would you spend your winnings? Was giving a portion back to God part of the plan?

A fellow parishioner passed me in the church hall on the day of the lottery drawing and told me that his pledge to Holy Comforter would be raised if he won the lotto. Although amused at the comment, it got me to thinking and wondering. How many of us in planning our lavish winnings set a place at the table to give the Lord a piece of the action? And even if we did, would we consider the tithe -- 10%? It would of course help trim down the tax bill.

But just think about what that tithe would do. $150 million would support a lot of ministries, feed quite a few hungry folks, and spread the Gospel far and wide. Had any of us won, what would have been our response? Would we consider this as a gift from God? Would we in thanksgiving give back to the Lord?

Would it be a tithe? Or would we grab it for ourselves, hold on to it and not willingly want to share the blessing reaped upon us?

Well, none of us won. But the questions still linger. We may not have an extra $1.5 billion hanging around, but most of us are not in financial want and many of us are financially blessed. So with what we have been given by God, how are we responding? Are we giving the work of the church its fair share with what we have been given? That is part of our spiritual journey and being accountable to our God.

The chance to win the lotto seem to excite just about everyone, even when those chances are not very good. But look around this sacred place we call Holy Comforter. We find spiritual nourishment available every day, a caring community full of education, fellowship and outreach. And the gift of eternal life. Those seem like much better odds. A better place to put our trust and our treasure. It is a sure bet.

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Ash Wednesday Liturgies
February 10th
Holy Eucharist and Imposition of Ashes
7:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, and 5:30 p.m.
Building Bridges Lenten Adult Forum Program  Chris Hardman

On February 7, the last Sunday of Epiphany, we will learn more about the “Adventist” tradition. Our quest speaker will be Mr. Homer Ma, an Elder in the Northbrook Seventh Day Adventist Church. On February 14th we will hold a Celtic Healing Service at 9:00 am in the parish hall. After the service, there will be an informational meeting to discuss our plans for the August 1st, weeklong Mission Trip to North Dakota.

For the next Sundays in Lent we will begin a series entitled “Overcoming Barriers and Building Bridges.” Since it is better to focus on the positive, we will refer to it as our “Building Bridges” series. First up, on February 21st, is Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, who is the communications officer of our Diocese. Jennifer presented in the fall with a well-received program on racism. She is returning in February to deepen our understanding of racism and the many problems it creates.

Since many of us are having difficulty separating “Radical” Islam from “Regular” Islam, we have a “real” Muslim family that lives in our area who will speak with us about how their faith is practiced here on the North Shore. Dilnaz Waraich, educational consultant for Envision Education and member of the Winnetka Interfaith Council, will speak along with her two sons, Mohsin and Sawleh. Mohsin is a senior at New Trier, a football quarterback, avid skier, and passionate social activist in Chicago. Sawleh is a freshman at New Trier, a wrestler and snowboarder, and has raised over $50,000 in the past 5 years through the Waraich Family Bowling Fundraiser for causes such as Oxfam, IMAN, Water.org, Pakistan Relief Fund, and 100 Wells Project in Africa. While Dilnaz will begin the presentation, I am quite confident the boys will take over from there. They plan to talk about their everyday life and how their Islamic Faith is practiced in this area. (By the way, as if all that weren’t enough, Dilnaz will be climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro the week before our meeting.)

February 7th
Mr. Homer Ma of the Northbrook Seventh Day Adventist Church will present on his Adventist Faith.

February 14th
Celtic healing Service at 9:00 am. Mission Trip discussion session to follow.

February 21st
Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows will speak on Racism in America

February 28th
The Waraich Family will speak on how their Islamic Faith is practiced on the North Shore.

Please join us as we overcome barriers and build bridges. It will be a most meaningful way of preparing for Easter.

Reel Spirituality: Dancing with God

A couple of weeks ago I saw one of my favorite movies for the umpteenth time, Yankee Doodle Dandy. And it is a dandy! It stars tough guy James Cagney in a most unusual role—the song and dance man, George M. Cohan. It is a wild romp through vaudeville and the early 20th century musical theatre that is both captivating, heart-warming, and loads of fun. To see Cagney dance is a real treat. He has his own unique and energetic style that almost jumps off the screen.

The movie starts with George M.’s birth on July 4th and progresses until he and his little sister join their mom and dad in the family act, the Four Cohans. The movie shows a scene where all four dance in unison, but also have a chance to perform individually. As I was watching this scene I realized, “that is a metaphor for the Trinity! That revelation, of course, led me to the title for this year’s Reel Spirituality series, “Dancing with God.”

In our first session we will think about God as a “dance of self-giving love” by looking at a number of my favorite musicals. Besides Yankee Doodle Dandy, we will look at Babes in Arms, Top Hat, The Jolson Story, Grease, and Chicago. Then we will explore some of the key theological and ethical components of our understanding of God as Trinity. For instance, we will look at those barriers to mutuality that so often pop up in our lives. We will look at the power of self-giving love and how that can transform the world as well as the process of death and resurrection that allows that love to grow. We will look at a model of humanity that can
lead us to make sense out of our own desires and yearnings. As always, we will use movies to illustrate our points.

A product of this series will be the development of some models that can help us view modern cinema in a new way, one that can deepen our faith in God. We hope this will lead to the formation of a “movie group” that will continue to look at movies together throughout the year. Oh, we are going to have a wonderful and I hope meaningful time together this year. This series begins Wednesday, February 17th, and lasts 5 weeks. We will meet at 6:00 pm for soup and salad with the program starting at 6:30 and lasting about an hour.

I do hope you will join us and bring your friends.

Respond to Laurel (ldodonnell@holycomforter.org) and let her know if you are going to participate. We need to know how much food to order. In the meantime, “keep on dancing!”

Lent in a Bag by Heath Howe

Lent is such an important time of the year for Christians, for it is the time in which we prepare for Easter morning, the season to follow that morning, and the new life available to us because of the events of that morning. When I teach children about Lent, I explain that it is in many ways to Easter what Advent is to Christmas. It is our getting ready time. “It takes longer to get ready for Easter than Christmas,” I remember one child observing as we looked at our church calendar. That’s true. It does.

Advent is important as we do need to prepare for the incarnation, the gift of God among us; however, preparing for our own participation in the type of life Jesus lived and calls us into takes a while. Jesus calls us out of a life of enslavement and into a life of love. We are used to living a life of dualistic thinking and behaving so it takes longer for us to prepare for a life where all are welcome and all are one. To love as Jesus loved can take a life time. The season of Lent is our yearly reminder to stop and have God guide us in a little spring cleaning of the soul. Leaning into the power of Lent enables us to fully grab hold of our new life as Easter People.

To enhance this idea I offer you “Lent in a Bag,” a tool to use at home. The resource is adapted from a tool created by the Reverend Shawn Schreiner and Vicky Garvey, both leaders in our diocese. It can be done on your own, with a partner or friend(s), or with your children.

The materials for this tool may be found in the parlor at Holy Comforter on Ash Wednesday! Please note, there are two adaptations of this tool. The first is geared toward families with young children. The second is for older individuals and those families with older children.

You may also access the Lent in a Bag instructional booklet here: www.holycomforter.org, and follow the link in the lower loft corner, to Lent in a Bag 2016.

In addition to the items contained in your bag, reflection and wondering questions are provided with each. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers; allow your heart to guide your reflections.

Two suggestions for using the contents of this bag:

Choose one night of the week and invite those around your table to pick one of the symbols as a starting point for conversation for the whole group, including children.

For your own daily or weekly devotion, choose one of the included symbols for your own reflection as you make your way through the season of Lent.

Wishing you and yours a blessed and meaningful season of Lent.

Adult and Family Mission Trip by Chris Hardman

Our inaugural Adult and Family (children 5th grade and above) Mission Trip to Standing Rock Reservation is booked and set for the first week in August, 2016. We arrive on Monday August 1st and the mission trip culminates with a POW WOW on August 6th.

For more information email or call Fr. Chris. jchardman@holycomforter.org or 847-251-6120. Make this summer an unforgettable one; please join us on this journey!
Our 22nd annual Lenten Evensong will be February 21st at 5:00 p.m. This year’s service will include the beautiful Requiem, Op. 9 by the 20th century French organist and composer Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986). 2016 marks two important dates: the 30th anniversary of the death of Duruflé, and the 50th anniversary of the installation of our Aeolian-Skinner organ.

Composers have written settings of the Requiem Mass since around the 16th century when the austere beauty and polyphony of the Renaissance reached its full flowering potential with the works of Palestrina, Lassus and Vittoria. By the end of the 18th century, Mozart and Cherubini added a more theatrical flair to this genre, albeit within the context of the very sacred element. The theatrical and operatic nature of the massively orchestrated Requiems by Berlioz and Verdi brought the development of this genre to a pinnacle. Johannes Brahms added his genius to the repertoire with his unique German Requiem, a large, multi-movement work for chorus and orchestra based on Biblical passages and written in memory of his mother. However, Duruflé’s Requiem is similar to the subtle and serene style found in the setting written by the very influential French composer Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924). Unlike other Requiems by other composers which utilize the Dies irae Sequence, a very dramatic and often bombastic illumination of the day of wrath and judgment, Duruflé carefully weaves the Gregorian chants from the Mass for the Dead throughout the nine movements of this work. Since its premier in 1947, this beautiful work has become one of Duruflé’s best-known compositions. The last time the Duruflé was sung here at Holy Comforter was in 1995.

While all of our Lenten Evensongs are presented as offerings to God, this particular Evensong will be unique since we will be presenting a setting of a Requiem. This will be an opportunity to remember our loved ones who have gone before us. Please feel free to contact me with a list of names of your loved ones so we can include them in a List of Remembrances in the Evensong bulletin.
The First Years Last a Lifetime  Mary Johnson, Children’s Ministries & Director of ATB&B

Though the language of Early Childhood Education has changed somewhat over the years, the facts have remained consistent. The early years matter. From the findings of Dr. Arnold Gesell as early as 1911 to Howard Gardner in the 1990’s, the principles of Child Development have remained consistent. From birth, the human brain needs stimulus to promote language, social and emotional connection, and physical growth and development. Because research has shown that 90 percent of brain function is formed in the first five years, the first years last a lifetime.

In January, I attended two fascinating presentations and both included the profound impact the development of the brain has on a child’s prediction for future success. Dr. Diana Rauner, the First Lady of the state of Illinois and director for The Ounce of Prevention and Dr. Marcy Guddemi, CEO of the Gesell Institute for Child Development on the Yale campus, both showed the same slide in their presentations. It was a depiction of the synaptic density in the human brain. And while it is tempting for me to get transfixed by the physiological components of early childhood, it is more important to remember that the development of a child is incumbent upon the loving, nurturing and stimulating environment in which they grow. For a child who does not hear language or have human contact, or have meaningful interaction with the adults in their world, their opportunity for future success is compromised. And by success I mean cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.

We are incredibly blessed in this community to have parents who recognize the importance of quality early childhood programs and that their children will benefit greatly from these opportunities. Both presentations stated that there is an alarming gap in the growth and development of children as it pertains to their socio-economic circumstances. When parents read to their children, engage them in conversation, provide music and art and physical activity in a variety of venues, and PLAY with their children, the benefits are profound. For the child who does not experience these things, the synapses are pruned and the opportunity to revive them is greatly diminished if not impossible in later years. At Dr. Rauner’s presentation, a questioner from the audience referenced the 30 million word gap study that was conducted by Stanford University. He wondered why the child who may not have a parent or caregiver talking to him but listens to a TV all doesn’t have the same vocabulary as the child who interacts with parents and teachers. Dr. Rauner responded that it is proven that the human component – the face-to-face interaction - is what is required for language and vocabulary retention, and vital social and emotional growth.

Having heard these two similar presentations on the importance of Early Childhood Development I come back to this fact. I’ve said before and it bears repeating: the teachers at All Things Bright and Beautiful embody all the vital elements of best practices in Early Childhood Development. It is an honor to work with them and a joy to see the growth in the children who benefit from their passion for teaching.

Need a ride to Fr. Chris’ Evening Lenten “Reel Spirituality” Series or Ash Wednesday Services?

Please call the Parish Office at 847/251-6120 and we can help to arrange a ride for you.
We (myself included) fall into the trap of thinking Sunday School is just for little kids. And this is because we think of Sunday School as craft time – as gluing little cotton ball sheep to a poster board and memorizing bible verses and singing. And it’s true that in some places it is that, and it is good and right for that church; or it’s what their resources and volunteers can pull together, and God bless them for that. But here at Holy Comforter, we have a deeply spiritual and mature curriculum for children called “Godly Play” and it stems out the Montessori-based Catechesis of the Good Shepherd curriculum which I grew up with. The most beautiful part of it, in my opinion, is that it starts from the knowledge that the child has their own, unique relationship with God already: that it is not always our (the adults’) job to set that relationship upon them, like some kind of ill-fitting armor. In fact, Catechesis, and by extension Godly Play, insists that the child has something to teach us about God. We only need to provide the children with an open, quiet, nurturing space to discover the nature of Love.

Believe it or not, the clergy and I have tried to make sure that this dynamic is a trademark of the older grades, too. These days, youth have plenty of space to prove their intellect, their can-do, and their work ethic. In fact, their lives are veritably packed to the gills with all that. Very rarely, however, do they have the space to delve into why they are on the planet, how to Love radically, or who they are in relationship with the Holy. That sort of thing is just not a built-in given to their lives, even if they pray before meals.

Oh, wait. Yes it is! Sunday Morning. Or at least, Sunday morning can be that.

I’m going to go ahead and make a bold statement, here: spiritual exploration makes our teens better students. Delving into a relationship with God can include meditation, prayer, inquiry and journaling. All of these practices have been known to increase the brain’s gray matter density, which can reduce sensitivity to pain, enhance your immune system, help you regulate difficult emotions, and relieve stress. Not to mention that any daily rigorous practice of the above has proven helpful to people with depression and anxiety, cancer, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, rheumatoid arthritis, type 2 diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, and cardiovascular disease. TRUTH.

And a spiritual community that can help you through difficult times or that you can rely on for God-centric advice is *crucial* to a young person’s development. We care about role models so much in education, sports, and leadership. We should care equally about spiritual role models! Much of that clicks in the teen years, or right afterwards. For instance: my childhood Sunday school teacher had always seemed to me wise, solemn and sort of magical when I was little. But it wasn’t until I was in High School and she attended our youth Mission Trip as an adult chaperone on that I found out she was also hilarious, smart as a whip, full of energy and loved me deeply. All those years, she had been loving me, and I had never been in close enough proximity to her to know it. She made God’s role in my life seem bigger. She made spirituality and kindness and prayer seem *essential* and even fun.

We must not sell short the gift of bringing our children to church. Or, as I know the case may be, MAKING them come to church! It is hard to see with the “God-lens” the whole picture of how a spiritual practice will affect a young person. They may not feel or understand the way it has nestled in their hearts for a long time. I know for myself that I am still coming to realizations about that.

As Anne Lamott says,

“Teenagers who do not go to church are adored by God, but they don't get to meet some of the people who love God back.”

“It's good to do uncomfortable things. It's weight training for life.”

Anne Lamott, Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith
In the Vineyard

We Welcome with Love to God’s Family and the Family of Church of the Holy Comforter

Josephine Odessa Rex
Baptized Epiphany Sunday
January 17, 2016
Parents:
Cameron Russell Rex and Elizabeth Erin Rex
God Parents:
Charles Walton Rex IV and Edward John Feldner

Winter is here and it is cold outside, so we would like to share the warmth and reach out to those less fortunate. We are asking that each parishioner bring a new pair of gloves or mittens, or even hats and scarfs by February 12th. A Mitten Tree will be set up in the Parish Office hallway to collect all of the donations. We will send them off through the Outreach Ministry of Holy Comforter along with the homemade Valentines from the ATB&B children. Please join us in this sharing and caring opportunity.

The Butterflies, Dragonflies, Fireflies and JK Teachers

Church of the Holy Comforter
222 Kenilworth Avenue
Kenilworth, IL 60043
847.251.6120

Lenten Celtic Healing Eucharist
Sunday, February 14
9:00 a.m.
In the Great Hall