

## Annual Chaplains Report - 2018

4 February 2018

***“Oh, my head, my head”***

- 2 Kings 4:18

“Oh, my head, my head.”

So much for 2017.

In 587 BCE the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem, destroyed the city, burnt the temple to the ground, and deported the cream of the Judean citizenry.

The Book of Kings was written for the Jews who had witnessed the catastrophe, and for their children. It was meant to instruct and encourage, inspiring repentance and hope. Here was the point: though the kings were unfaithful, God remained faithful. Though the kings were unfaithful, God remained faithful. A number of story cycles were brought together to make that clear. Out of one of those cycles we have today's story of Elisha, Gehazi, and the Shunammite woman.

The Elisha stories are a fanciful repeat of the Elijah story cycle. Elisha was apparently a close personal friend of Jehu the Butcher. (“Yahoo” has come to mean both a struggling social media platform and a crude, brutish, rural person.) General Jehu, inspired by the prophetic utterances of an unnamed pupil of Elisha's, decides to make Israel great again following the defeat of Israel and Judah at Ramoth-Gilead. Privately anointed King (842 BCE – the north anoints individual kings, not a dynasty, and so is less stable than Judah), he storms in from the country to Jezreel, exterminates the elite, Phoenician styled, Baal worshipping, House of Ahab, killing Ahab's son Joham and throwing Queen Jezebel to the dogs. He kills Ahab's relative, Ahaziah, King of Judah, as well. (Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, was King Ahab's daughter.) The prophet Hosea will, later, condemn Jehu; “I no longer feel pity for the house of Israel, I abhor them utterly.” Hosea 1:6.

Moving back to Elisha, who has stopped playing Steve Bannon, we learn that God does care for his people even in the middle of this political crisis. Mimicking the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, Elisha miraculously inseminates the seemingly well-off Shunammite woman apparently for running an “Air BnB”. She bears a son. The son has a stroke. “Oh, my head, my head.” The Shunammite woman heads for Carmel, unhappy with the level of Quality Assurance provided by Yahweh-God's sub-contractor. Elisha sends out a technician, Gehazi, with the secret, magic, healing stick. Nothing. Elisha comes to provide artificial respiration, and the woman then takes her sneezing son away. Elisha also cures lepers, multiples loaves and vegetables, and purifies poisoned food in this story cycle.

“Oh, my head, my head.”

We have witnessed a political catastrophe in 2017. It is not a catastrophe of biblical proportions. It's not as bad as, say, the crises of 1968. But we seem at the end of “modern” rational politics. The “post-modern” individual is closeted in his mind and within her own devices beyond the reach of all other authorities except those of their own choosing. We could blame technology, but it probably begins with Immanuel Kant and the Enlightenment focus on the human mental

faculty. It's all whatever we think. (Though to be fair to Kant and later Adam Smith, they would have held for the kind of moral imperative or moral sentiment that we generally dismiss as weak or toxic today.) The social configurations, the politics, the crowd creates seem tribal. The tribal or clan affiliations seem feudal. Empire is gone. The American Century lasted 72 years, reports TIME magazine. Authority is decentralized. (At least for now. Read "The Circle" by Dave Eggers. It was part of Purdue's "Dawn or Doom" lecture series in 2016. The movie will star Tom Hanks and Emma Watson and the new guy in Star Wars. Recently in the "Pearls Before Swine" comic strip one character doing a crossword asks another for a three-letter word beginning with "g-o" that means "a supreme being". Rat answers "Google". Pig says, "but three letters!" and Rat says, "Abbreviate it.")

"Oh, my head, my head."

Here at Good Shepherd at Purdue in West Lafayette we offer the crowd community. (That does seem old-fashioned.) Here we offer the individual "koinonia". Here we offer the tribe the church. Together we tell the human story of God (Jesus) in our flesh. We tell each other our own stories. Those are revelatory too. We pray about love with memory. We pray particularly for those outside of the current social configurations. (The charm of the Elijah and the Widow's Son story was that it was about salvation for the poor. If the son is dead, the widow is doomed.)

We are a counter-point the fake good news offered by white Jesus and his judgmental old, white, male minions. We have a black woman Bishop born in the New York City projects. We seem radical because we are orthodox.

We use ritual (cult) to recall our story and preserve memory, history. We are not saved singularly, but within a community. This community of faith is most alive not in a church building but in the places where we live and work. We give thanks (Eucharist) in a free meal for the divine graciousness revealed in Jesus of Nazareth that can make us whole (holy) and keep us safe (saved). We pray across generations. We mark out that grace as it is found in the transition of the ages.

Even when those transitions give us a headache.

"Oh, my head, my head."

Now, we offer the crowd community as a part of the Anglican (English) Christian Communion. We are a part of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis. We have a history. We are part of an institution. As such, we have a bureaucratic language too. We are a business.

The business is doing okay.

We "made" \$24,000 last year. Our "profit" will not be that good next year. The loss of parking revenue because of the demise of Fresh City Market is a pretty big deal for us. Imagine if the Knapp's' left town and took their pledge with them. Ouch. The diocese, you will recall, pays my salary. Our \$136,000 budget is assembled in three parts; a \$44,500 program grant from the diocese (down from \$48,000 last year; 32%), \$60,000 in pledges (44%) and \$31,500 of "other" (24%). We will look at the budget in more detail at the annual meeting.

Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows and her new diocesan team are planning a new budget process for 2019. I do not know what that may mean for us, but it is a big variable for 2019. Program funding is never going up.

“Oh, my head, my head.”

Our number of “active baptized members” is up over 12% from last year. We have better student data than in the past few years, and much better undergraduate student contact, thanks in no small part to the work of our peer-minister, Erin Nicole Sample.

Our worship attendance is down 8%. Two things; we are a small congregation, so small changes are a big deal. The number also fluctuates. We were up 6% in 2015 and 4% in 2016. But generally in main line churches fewer people come to church “always”, more people come to church “sometimes”. So, you need a lot of new people to maintain the old attendance numbers. Still, I would rather be up 8% than down 8%. We will cover all other of our parish program items in the reports at the annual meeting.

As I did in 2017, let me note that our 2018 budget has a \$2500 “Transition” line item. This represents a second installment toward a search budget that could cost several thousand dollars. I reached 66 years old in 2017. I qualify for my full social security benefit. Bishop Waynick retired at 69. Ed Tourangeau retired at 66.

Let me remind you again that the Bishop controls this clergy position. Her money pays me. So she could roll out of bed one morning and appoint someone new to Good Shepherd. My job is to argue that as an exercise of this parish’s vocation, and as a part of the renewal of that vocation, you should be the chief player in a transition to new clergy leadership. In order to do that, the vestry will, someday, appoint a search committee. That search committee will need a budget.

I am NOT announcing my retirement today. I will not repeat the discussion of interim periods I offered last year. But, again, this is just over the horizon. Like “planet nine” (Google it), the math says we will see it soon, but it still cannot be seen. So again this year the vestry has been given a copy of an Episcopal Church Foundation Vestry Handbook with a blue post-it stuck at the beginning of Chapter 7, “Transitions”. My job is to hand off a financially stable, numerically viable, and vocationally sagacious community. My job in the next year or two is to see to it that you get the same deal Good Shepherd got back in 1985, the year of my hire. You should be treated like a parish in the transition process. When that process begins, the senior warden will then say:

“Oh, my head, my head.”

We have one award and two scholarships to hand out this morning.

First, the **Nellie Johnston Award**. Nellie wove our altar cloth decades ago, and it was good fun for a younger Peter Bunder to visit at Westminster. You could join her at 4:00 for the medicinal scotch she had been prescribed. Her daughter Kathleen paid for the upstairs kitchen here. So this annual award goes to the “grown-up”, whatever that means, who has done something here above and beyond the usual and customary at Good Shepherd.

This year the award goes to **Warren Eckels**. Warren teaches Mathematics at Ivy Tech and for many years has filled in as a replacement organist for us without taking any honorarium. He has recently begun work on his spiritual life in an admirable and disciplined way as a member of the Third Order Franciscans. The Third Order of the Society of St. Francis is an Anglican/Episcopal religious order for people of all kinds — single and in committed relationships, lay and ordained—who live by Franciscan principles “in the world.” We are very happy to present him with this award today.

Our **Good Shepherd Scholarship(s)** goes to a Purdue undergraduate who demonstrates need and is best able to propose a solution for this line found in the book “101 Reasons to be Episcopalian” compiled by Louie Crew; “#41 – “Where else can you be considered a young person until you’re forty?” The winners of our essay contest this year are **Morgan Callin** (Temple, Texas) and **Samantha Courtemanche** (North Attleboro, Massachusetts). Morgan has proposed that we provide transportation to Good Shepherd each Sunday morning. We can do that. Samantha held up the importance of our “Love is Love” pins, and the need we all have to share our personal experiences of faith and struggle.

Want to know what the best cure for our headache is? Samantha and Morgan. Erin and Warren. The vestry nominees on the back of your bulletin. Each and every one of you. All of us together.

Join us upstairs after the service for our annual parish meeting. Later the new vestry will meet back here in the chapel for an organizational meeting.

Amen.