

Church of the Advent

Celebrating 150 Years

Franklin and Washington Streets

Cape May, New Jersey 08204

<http://capemayadvent.org>

E-Mail: adventinfo@comcast.net

Fr. Douglas C. Halvorsen, Interim

Patricia E. Keltie, Editor Emeritus

Kathe Christensen, Editor



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Tigers, Alpines, and Decision Making

It was a gorgeous early spring Kentucky morning in 1969. I was cruising alone north of Lexington on Interstate 75 in my recently-off-the-show-room-floor, burnt-yellow, Fiat 124 Sport Coup. I loved that car with its Stebro exhaust, dual Webber carburetors, four wheel disk brakes, five speed gear box, Vredestein radials, 50/50 front/rear weight distribution, aftermarket planed head, dual air horns, and yes, infamous and totally deserved, abysmal Fiat reputation for horrendous reliability. But that was not a morning to be concerned with probable future failures; that was an instant in time to savor the current perfect marriage of automotive performance, youthful arrogance, and spectacular weather.

Twenty-five miles into the drive, relishing every moment, and doing a cool 80 mph, I overtook a disreputable looking wreck of a ragtop two seater. From the looks of it, the trip across the “pond” from Britain must have taken a terrible toll and the owner subsequently must have treated the poor beast with total disregard. I assumed the wreck to be what remained of a Sunbeam Alpine. Dropping down from fifth to fourth gear, I dismissively accelerated off, expecting that to be the end of it. In my rear view mirror, I was utterly stunned to see TWO columns of black smoke blowing out of the back of the Sunbeam. Somewhere just north of 100 mph, the wreck blew by me as if I were at a dead stop and continued on accelerating until out of sight. The wreck I had assumed to be a four cylinder Sunbeam Alpine was in fact a dual exhaust, Ford V8, Sunbeam Tiger, one of the earliest, custom modified cars of Carroll Shelby (yes, the same genius of Cobra and Mustang super-performance fame).

So what is the point? The point is that in my youthful conceit, I had selectively seized the superficial evidence (i.e., disreputable appearance) and ignored the significant evidence (i.e., dual exhaust) that then confirmed my fantasy (i.e., my car was hot and the other was not). The point may not be profound but it is certainly germane to more general and significant decision-making. It is all too easy to let our conceit and preconceptions blind us in data collection, data analysis, and subsequent data based action (i.e. decision making).

So why does this happen? Clearly it does not happen simply because of youth. If it were, most “older” decision makers would be wise and most “older” decisions would be spot-on.

Why do we selectively seize the superficial and ignore the significant, and then wonder what went wrong?

Leon Festinger's seminal work, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957) brought this process into high relief. If we strongly hold something to be true and are faced with compelling evidence (data) to the contrary, we generally seek to reduce the attendant discomfort. Some of those attempts may achieve a measure of short-term consistency between what we expect and what we actually experience, and therefore less discomfort. However, many such attempts at reconciling strongly held, emotionally laden beliefs with contradicting evidence may be at the cost of long-term effective decision-making and action. Confirmation bias underlies many irrational conclusions drawn by seemingly rational decision makers.

So how does one effectively resolve such dissonance such that data collection and analysis are done without confirmation bias and subsequent data based decision-making and action have an enhanced probability of yielding superior (if unexpected) results? Let me suggest a few practices that offer hope overcoming our own biases.

The more intensely one holds to a belief, the more frequently and rigorously one needs to test that emotionally invested belief. Strength of emotional investment is not a guarantee of error; it is simply a warning indicator of possible risk. There is a crude analogy in statistics where a null hypothesis is tested. Simply put, does my belief really explain results or improve outcomes better than an alternate? If it does not, what is the advantage of the alternate and what is the peril posed by continuing as before?

Subject beliefs with significant cost vs. benefit outcomes to "outside" review, preferably from a congenial but competent "dissenter." Two heads are not necessarily better than one, but if the other head is a dissenter, at least there may be an alternate option opened for consideration. If the original belief survives the review, there are good odds that it will be enriched and matured.

Beware of "paradoxical confirmation" or what is more commonly known as the "backfire effect." This risk to decision making takes the form of one's beliefs actually being strengthened by being exposed to contradictory, in reality accurate information. Paradoxically, especially when one feels persecuted (whatever shape that experience takes), that experience may be interpreted as confirmation of being correct, and maybe even one being of special importance.

Play a mind game. Imagine the one person you most despise in the world; could be a corrupt politician or the perpetrator of an especially egregious investment fraud or maybe a particularly heinous mass murder. Now imagine that this most despised person agrees with your ardently held belief and actually publically supports it. Does that enhance your opinion of the despised person or does that make you question your own position? If you lean toward enhancing your opinion of the despised person, vigorously question your own belief.

Pay attention to significant “dual exhausts” not superficial trivial appearances. It is the unexpected details in the data underlying a deal or decision that precisely because of being contrary to what one assumes, are in fact what makes the difference. Search for what refutes your position not what supports it. Supporting evidence will be obvious and enduring. That which is contrary to your assumptions may be harder to uncover, and given the investment in your existing belief, harder to establish credibility.

Finally, careful introspection and rigorous testing of strongly held beliefs must never be confounded with cowardice. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan’s famous dictum, “Verify, then trust.” Test, question, evaluate, analyze, correct, and then with courage and conviction, decide and act.

Fr. Doug+

COMMUNION CHALICE

Church of the Advent’s historic practice is to invite to the Eucharist all who have been baptized. To receive the Host, extend your crossed palms to the Priest or Deacon. To receive the Cup, place your fingers on the base of the Cup (do not grab it from the Chalice Bearer) and allow the Chalice Bearer to tilt the Cup for you. If you choose Intinction, carefully dip just the Host into the Cup yourself. Only one Cup is placed on the Altar for Consecration. We have returned to Advent’s previous, long established tradition (and that of the vast majority of Episcopal Churches) of not designating a separate Cup for Intinction. If you choose not to receive the Host or the Cup, cross your arms over your chest: the Priest will then bless you. Approach the Sacrament with joy, penitence, and thanksgiving for in the Eucharist, God is uniquely with us.

CHOIR CAMP

This summer will mark the 30th time we have hosted the Diocese of New Jersey Choir Camp. This year’s program begins on Sunday, July 15 and ends with a Choral Evensong on Thursday, July 19 at 4:00 PM. All are invited to attend this Evensong. James M. Hopkins, Director of Music at Washington Heights Choir School, is our Choir Camp Director.

Notes from the ECM

The July breakfast meeting of the ECM will be Tuesday, July 3. The August breakfast meeting will be Tuesday, August 7. The meetings begin at 8:30 AM, with coffee ready by 8:00 AM. The cost is \$5.00 and all men of the parish are invited.

JULY AND AUGUST ECM DINNERS

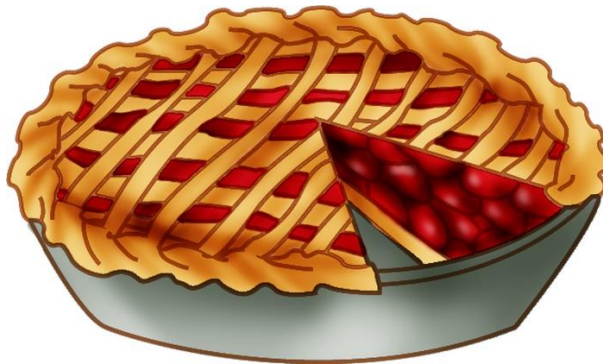
The July dinner will be held on Saturday, July 28. The menu is Boneless Turkey and will offer coffee, iced tea and homemade dessert. A vegetarian entrée will also be served. The August dinner will be held on Saturday, August 25. The menu will be Baked BBQ Chicken. A vegetarian entrée will also be served. Guests are welcome to bring beer, wine or soda to accompany their meal.

Table service begins at 4:30 PM and continues until 7:00 PM. Take-out meals are also available. The cost is \$15.00 at the door (\$6.00 for children). If you purchase your tickets in advance, the price is \$13.00 (\$6.00 for children). Consider purchasing our 10-meal ticket for \$120.00 (a \$150.00 value).

THANK YOU!

Thank you to all who provide such wonderful treats for our monthly Saturday evening dinners. We are so thankful to have your support.

--The Dessert Committee



THE NEXT VESTRY MEETING IS SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 IN THE UPPER ROOM

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Plans are underway for Vacation Bible School at Church of the Advent. The dates are July 30 through August 3, and will be held in the early evening (6:00 to 8:00 PM). Children from the age of 3 and up are invited to attend. Music, stories and crafts will be included in this year's program entitled "Rolling River Rampage". If you would like to participate in the VBS adventure this year, please contact the church office at 884-3065 or adventsecretary@comcast.net. Please do not hesitate to share your talents and interests!

Parish Picnic Time--- Sunday September 17

Come one, come
September 16 at
the 10:30 service
grill masters

There will
so that you can
we can get an



all. Our annual parish picnic this year will be the Coast Guard base pavilion. We will gather after for hamburgers and hot dogs prepared by our crack along with sides and deserts from all the rest of us. be sign-up sheets on the Sundays before the picnic indicate what you are planning to bring and so that idea of how many are going to join in the fun.

SUMMER OUTREACH PROJECT

The Outreach summer project will be "Let's Bag It", which is specific food collection for the Presbyterian Church Food Bank. Today we will distribute grocery bags with a list of needed items. Please fill the bag and return it and we will continue filling bags all summer. Our past record was 100 bags! Let's beat this record. Items needed: laundry detergent, shampoo, paper towels, boxed spaghetti or pasta, peanut butter and jelly, canned soup, canned tuna, canned corn, green beans, peas.

PARISH GAME NIGHT

Continuing our desire to develop activities that bring together parishioners from the 8:00 and 10:30 services, we will hold a monthly parish game night in the Parish Hall, beginning in September. Games and cards would be inclusive, easy to learn and play and generate easy conversation. Light snacks could be furnished by attendees, as willing. More information will come in September.

Marks of Mission #5:
**“Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew
the life of the earth.”**

Your lay parish convention deputies have begun sharing in this space sketches of five, “good news” derived blueprints to guide our diocese’s emerging identity as a missional component of The Episcopal Church. These blueprints, preached on by our Bishop in the last convention, are called *Marks of Mission*.

Marks of Mission #5 has the clear-eyed aim of ceasing self-destructive environmental habits, remediating the damage, and renewing life-sustaining measures and principles for all life on our planet. From the moment God declares in *Genesis* that His Creation is “good,” to the culminating vision in the *Book of Revelation (21:5)* where His exalted Son proclaims: “See, I make all things new,” the business of the created order—of all things—is God’s business; hence, as his stewards it is ours.

I reflect on this interrelated natural order, prompted by the change in seasons, the green of early summer and of the season of Pentecost. Spring has brought its great message of hope, sunlight has vigorously returned. Now, it is a time for earnest growing . . . and . . . learning.

Surveying from my porch, my squatty little garden that not too long ago lay fallow, I see that my emboldened tulips, daffodils and jonquils have flourished and gone. Instead my meager plot has sprung up with California poppies, resurgent pansies, perky daisies, bee balm, butterfly bush, swelling lilies, guarded by the annual, humble marigold. Promenading around one end of this rectangle of raucous color are large and small clay pots of spice and herbs and a lemon tomato plant. Varieties of mint group-hug in an old gargoye pot nearby in a shaded spot.

Recreational stewardship of this micro-garden yokes me into daily weed pulling, dead-heading, watering, and feeding. I cannot help but observe the elemental symbiosis between root and soil, mineral and water, leaf and sunlight. At some point my “learning” leads me to extrapolate a mind’s eye image of a greater garden, a world, a creation that 14.5 billion years ago burst into being as God’s cosmic incarnation. In evolving time, this divine revelation becomes reified, intensified, and focused in God’s *human* incarnation in His Son, Jesus Christ. Here, God’s mystery, the hidden plan for all from the very beginning is revealed (*Ephesians 1:9*). We also hear from Jesus the good news that our Creator is our Father, one and the same.

Clearly, we have a role to engage with life, human and non-human, fauna and flora, in respectful recognition of the sacred “goodness” of all things. This recognition manifests itself in the stewardship of acts and avoidances, personal and collective, small and large. Clearly, we must turn back from an (*continued on next page*)

(*continued from previous page*) idolatry of careless consumption and thoughtless throw away despoliation. God’s sacred gift of himself to us, Cosmic and Christ, is to be revered in trusted stewardship.

*Sam Wilson, Rhonda Jackson
& Corbin Cogswell*

FAMILY PROMISE

Advent will be hosting Family Promise again on Monday, July 9th and Tuesday, July 10th. We are hosting at the Cape May Methodist Church. Any support you can offer in these area is greatly appreciated.

Social Hour Hosts – Monday and Tuesday (6-8pm) Overnight - Tuesday (9pm to 7am)
.....AND our Advent *Hospitality Chefs*, Amanda and Josh, may need some support with food prep or supplies should you have an urge to be in the kitchen!

Advent Family Promise Team: Connie Campanella (703) 623-2408 & Marty Torpey (802) 238-0545.

TIMES OF REFRESHING

In the heat of summer; day
The ground becomes parched and dry;
Then God sends the refreshing showers,
The earth begins to beautify.

Sometimes our heart grows troubled,
We tire from the pressures of life;
Our voice cries out to the Lord,
Asking for peace amid the strife.

It's then that our Father answers
And calms our anxiety,
Sending a blessing that refreshes,
Helping us His goodness to see.

As we keep our heart open
In tune with the Father's will,
He will come and refresh us,
His promise to fulfill.

Freda Dehoff