

July 2012



The Shape

Newsletter of The Episcopal Church in Almaden

From the Rector

For our June VBS, I immersed myself in stories about the Olympic Games. Our theme was ‘Go For the Gold!’ and every day we focused on an athlete or team whose story told some truth about God and us. We wanted the kids who came to go away knowing that God loved them and wanted them to love one another, and that God’s strength could carry them through anything. It wasn’t hard to find the stories.

We talked about Jesse Owens and Luz Long at the 1936 Berlin Games – a black American and an Aryan German who formed a friendship despite the

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Service Schedule

SUNDAY SERVICES

7:30 AM

10:30 AM

THURSDAY SERVICE

7:30 AM

Rector

The Reverend Katharine Flexer

(408) 364-6524

Staff

Susie Ferguson

Youth & Christian Education

Kristal Kim

Music Director & Organist

Bill LaVallee

Treasurer

Dennis Elliott

Administrative Assistant

Assisting in our Ministry

George Romer

Senior Warden

Steve Wing

Junior Warden

William Bond & Inge Bond

Acolytes

Bobbi Finley

Altar Guild

Kathy Mastre

Coffee Hour

Sharon Mills

Greeters

Jenny Hoyt

Lay Readers

Ann Avoux

Prayer Vine

Dave Byers

Ushers

Bonnie McPherson

Junior High Youth Group

Inge Bond

Senior High Youth Group

Andy Kerr

Stewardship

Worship Schedule

July 1 - Proper 8

7:30 & 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist - Folk Sunday

July 5 - John Hus, trans.

7:30 AM Thursday Morning Prayer

July 8 - Proper 9

7:30 & 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist

The Rev Roger Wharton, preaching & presiding

July 12 - Nathan Soderblom

7:30 AM Thursday Morning Prayer

July 15 - Proper 10

7:30 & 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist - Healing Sunday

The Rev. Debra Low-Skinner, preaching & presiding

July 19 - Macrina

7:30 AM Thursday Morning Eucharist

July 22 - Proper 11

7:30 & 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist

July 26 - Joachim & Anne, parents of Mary

7:30 AM Thursday Morning Eucharist

July 29 - Proper 12

7:30 & 10:30 AM Holy Eucharist - New Music Sunday

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From the Rector

[Continued from cover]

ideological and political forces separating them. The commandment to ‘love your neighbor’ became more powerful with a story to express it. We talked about the 1980 ‘Miracle’ US hockey team, the group of disparate rival college kids who finally coalesced into a unified team and beat the older, more experienced Soviet team. An amazing example of community, both for the team and for the effect they had on our whole country at the time. We talked about Lilo Ljubisic, a shot put and discus thrower who didn’t let her increasing blindness impede her gifts and desire to excel in athletics, winning medals in five consecutive Paralympic Games. The teaching ‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me’ (Phil. 4:13) now had a concrete, vivid story of real perseverance and faith. We talked about Shane Gould, the 15-year-old Australian swimmer in the 1972 Munich games whose talent put her under intense pressure to be the best in every competition. When she came in third in a race she expected to win, she suddenly realized that winning wasn’t everything, for God only wanted her to do her best. And we wound up the week recapping the stories and hearing the reminder from Romans 8:38-39 that God loves us no matter what: ‘Nothing can separate us from the love of God.’

Parables are everywhere. Jesus used farming and fishing metaphors with his listeners in 1st century Palestine because those made sense to them. We can hear those same truths Jesus taught in stories from our own context every day – from the Olympic Games and athletics, from our children’s growth and development, from our own experience of aging, from the beauty of our surrounding mountains and the central California coast. Kids ‘get it’ better when there’s a story told to express a truth – but really, we all get it better that way.

That’s why scripture is full of stories – ideas and principles only live for us when they’re fleshed out with real people, real decisions and dilemmas, real discoveries.

Parables are everywhere, but we don’t always notice them or remember them. So it takes a little practice on our part, learning to look around us for God’s fingerprints, to listen more attentively for God’s voice. A prayer practice like the Ignatian examen of conscience can help. It’s a review at the end of the day where you ask ‘Where did I see God today? Where did I miss God acting today?’ As you do this more and more, you begin to notice in the moment where God is at work – you train yourself to see and hear. Having a spiritual companion or director is also helpful, someone who can sift with you through the events of your life and look for where God might be acting. The more someone else helps you to see, the more you begin to see for yourself. There’s always a story ready to teach you, if you’re ready to hear.

I remember the Olympics being a really big deal when I was younger. In the days when everyone watched the same televised event at the same time, it was like the whole world focused on sports and clean competition for two weeks. Media and culture has changed enough now that it doesn’t feel like that anymore. But reading up on these stories for VBS inspired me all over again. This month the London Olympics begin on July 27. We’ll have to find ways in our household to stream the Games, of course, since we don’t own a TV. But somehow or other, we’ll be watching. God is always speaking, and I’m ready to listen.

Kate Flexer

Senior Warden

This month I became keenly aware of age and its various interpretations and celebrations:

- The United States of America celebrates its 236th birthday this month
- The USS Nimitz is 37
- The Golden Gate Bridge is 75
- I am “celebrating” my last year in the 60th decade of my life
- We are marking our 46th year of marriage
- ECA will be 45 this year
- And, so on.

We humans mark age with sayings, jokes, cake & ice cream, “I Love You’s”, cards & presents, etc. One internet slide show of beautiful photographs tells the story of the human aging process:

- Before 21 we can’t wait to age
- We BECOME 21
- We TURN 30 (bad fruit!?)
- We PUSH 40 (where to?)
- We REACH 50 (didn’t think you’d make it?)
- We MAKE 60 (what did we make it out of?)
- We HIT 70 (I guess it’s a shock for some!)
- We GET INTO the 80s (like into the car or into bed?)
- At 90+, we say I’m JUST 90-something (that’s all!?)
- We’re very proud to be any number of days over 100! (Just ask Joyce Wing’s dad – “Yay, I woke up today!!”)

The presentation goes on to conclude that life is not measured by the number of breaths we take (chronology), but by the moments that take our breath away. Possessions don’t enter into that equation. Flowers fade and dry up, vestments fray,

clothes become dated, books become “dog-eared,” shoes wear out, but memories that good friends and family make last a lifetime. We take care to preserve the memories with physical articles, memorial gifts, plaques, roses, trees, streets, towns, cities, states, etc. However, the physical crutches for memory are just that – reminders of the more important things in life.

So, as we go through our various celebrations of aging, let’s keep the focus on the reason for the events or articles of remembrance – the life and love of Christ for us which he gave to enable us to learn that all-important lesson: Love one another.

George Romer
Senior Warden

From the Editor



I love gadgets. Really, I do. My love of gadgetry and “convenience” is often strangely tempered by a desire to live simply. I love the fact that I can have a phone with literally more computing power than the entire FAA had on the year I was born. I love the fact that we can now buy a car that will detect cars and pedestrians in your path and keep you from hitting them. Yet time-saving cooking and construction devices don’t interest me at all.

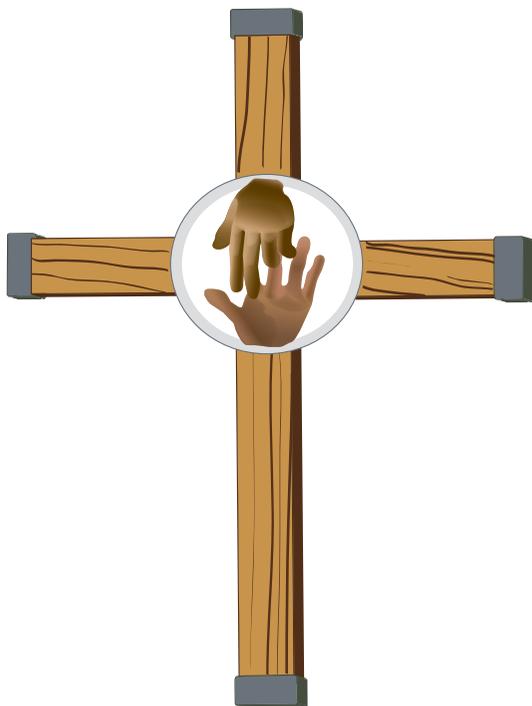
Technology is such an odd bag. Sometimes, the more technology I am surrounded by, the less I think I might need it. Of course I have to categorise technology into groups because where would it end? I think my sense of “technology” only involves things that have risen to popularity recently. Our flights of novelty and whimsy tend to only stretch back a generation or two. For me, the digital camera, cell phone, personal computer, VHS, DVD and the internet all fall into the categories of “technology” or “gadgetry”. Items like the calculator, television in general, electricity, the automobile and indoor plumbing seem normal, expected and not really a marvel. Farming, raising livestock and very mechanical “time-saving” machinery all fall into the whimsy category since they are not efficient by modern standards, but at one point were the height of modernity.

The funny thing that made me realise how our perspective on life changes, was standing in line somewhere and hearing a conversation behind me. A mother and child were having a conversation: the boy (all of 6 years old) was demanding to use her cell phone. The mother was of my generation where you couldn’t contact anyone at a moment’s

notice. You called someone’s home from the awful orange or avocado kitchen wall telephone supplied to you by AT&T. It was the only phone in the whole house and had a cord long enough to reach just about any corner of the joint. (And since you frequently took that phone to all corners of the house you had to untangle the thing constantly). You couldn’t make quick calls, mostly because your mom and dad didn’t pay for touch tone dialling. You grumbled when you had to call numbers with too many 9s or 0s in the number and when the person you were calling wasn’t there you grumbled to yourself and had to repeat the process later since there was no contraption to talk to on the other end. Of course now we all call people on their cell phones and the ability to reach someone at any time wherever they are is expected.

Our perception of the world and connectivity is so condensed it’s no wonder we miss the forest for the trees. Remember dialling a wrong number? Not only did your finger eventually wear out from spinning the dial, but you also apologised for dialling incorrectly when you reached a random person. Now we just hang up. Wrong number? Telemarketer? Political advertisement? Computer-generated reminder? All of them may be dismissed with the press of the “End” button. Still, I am sure that in the grand scheme of things the telephone is vastly less personal than a calling card—having the wrong address would mean you would have to interact with a total stranger. God forbid. I am forced to wonder however if all the connectivity and technology has simply served to strengthen the barrier that prevents us from connecting with others. Not the ones we text or call, but the others around us that we don’t know.

Alex Dykes



Pastoral Care

If you or anyone you know is in need of assistance, please give one of our willing volunteers below a call!

Meals

Anne Tysanner
artysanner@yahoo.com
(408) 927-7140

Rides

Gayle Byers
dng_byers@sbcglobal.net
(408) 268-0448

Small Repairs

Allan Jones
adjones9966@yahoo.com
(408) 268-3322

Prayer Vine

Ann Avoux
annavoux@gmail.com
(408)270-2406

Card Ministry

Margaret Halliwell
(408) 267-5229

Receptions

Marianne Schmidt
mschmidt8120@sbcglobal.net
(408) 323-8025

We're on the Web!

<http://www.eca-sj.org>



- **Worship Matrix**
- **Bulletins**
- **Past Shape Issues**
- **Church Calendar**
- **Recorded Sermons**
- **Upcoming Events**

JV Updates

- The parking lot paving was completed the week of April 23. Looks GREAT – thanks to Dave Byers for managing this project.
- You may have noticed that the trash & recycle dumpsters have been moved to the double parking spaces at the far northeast corner of the property right off of Camden. Why, you ask? We're trying to minimize the impact the big garbage trucks have been having on the parking lot by having them traverse a much smaller section of the lot to do their weekly pickup. Yes, it does mean a longer walk with kitchen garbage but we're looking at getting more big cans with wheels to mitigate.
- Mike Hertzner continues to do a stellar job with the grounds. Notably, gopher activity has decreased, and the garden area looks very nice and ready for various youth activities to come. Mike has published a very detailed list of grounds-related “play parties” to keep the momentum going (see the midweeks lately for all the details). Attend a “play party” when you can to keep our physical church and environs looking spiffy.
- The new lift, unfortunately, still has had a few hiccups. Ron Howie has spent a considerable amount of time on the lift and Mike Moore (from CCAVUCC) has been supervising the repairs. It should be sorted out soon.
- The Youth are planning on moving the youth center to the far corner Sunday school room. Then, an update of the old fellowship hall/kitchen area will be in order.
- The Halls have graciously offered the use of a freezer to replace the one that recently failed us. Many thanks, Sharon & Don.
- The JV audit has not been completed as yet – we're hoping for the end of June.
- The Roof: JV recently received a letter from our insurance company stating that our roof needs to be evaluated and certified for insurance purposes. To that end, JV has solicited, received, and accepted a bid from the construction company that did the work last time to effect minor repairs and resurfacing work on the roof and re-certify our roof warranty for another 10 years. Expect this work to be done soon.

Steve Wing

Neighborhood Watch

Just a reminder about the Neighborhood Watch meeting coming up soon. If you have not RSVP'd yet, there are sign-up sheets in the fellowship hall. Be sure to let us know you can make it!

When: Wednesday, July 18 6:30pm - 8:30pm

Where: ECA Fellowship Hall

What: Neighborhood Watch meeting

Who: YOU and your neighbors

Come ready to learn how to keep your neighborhood safe. Come with questions. Come with your neighbors—the more the better! Come meet our local neighborhood watch specialist, Ray Cedeno, of the San Jose Police Department.

Through this positive, pro-active program, we will learn facts about:

- Crime trends in our area
- How to react to suspicious or criminal activity
- How San Jose's 9-1-1 system works
- Recommended security measures and more!

Together, we can help ***“TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME.”*** See you there!

Wendy Martin
(408) 997-1313
odatwendy@yahoo.com.

Land o' Goshen

Have you ever heard that expression? We discovered its origin in our study of Genesis last year. Remember the story of Joseph? He was sold by his brothers to be a slave in Egypt, but eventually he became Pharaoh's Number 2. When drought strikes his father, Jacob, and the family back home, Jacob sends the brothers to Egypt to buy food. They don't realize the one they are trying to do business with is their brother Joseph. As they say in the play, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," Joseph, "takes them for a ride," testing their motives. Anyway, they eventually discover that Joseph is their brother. He forgives them completely! Joseph invites them all to come to Egypt (where they will be near him and safe from the drought) with the promise that he will give them the best in the Land of Egypt, the Land of Goshen. Thus, the expression, Land o'Goshen indicates a good outcome coming from the last thing or person you'd expect.

I hope you will join us next fall when we begin to study the Book of Exodus. We will be expanding Bible study to include a weekly evening session. The Bible study is open to everyone. Start planning for it now!

Mary McPherson

Gifts of Gratitude

Gwen Hacker and Joe Machado for donating a microwave for the kitchen.

Suzanne Mayo for her work with Montgomery Meals and many other jobs at ECA.

Betty Consorte for a new garbage can and labeling the garbage cans.

Inge Bond and Bonnie McPherson for their dedication and commitment for taking time off from work and taking our youth on the mission trip. Their hours of planning and follow-through are so greatly appreciated in giving our youth this invaluable experience!!

Susie Ferguson for orchestrating language readings on Pentecost Sunday.

Kathleen Eagan for organizing the June 5 senior ministry luncheon and pursuing this ministry at ECA.

Wendy Martin, Mary McPherson, George Romer, and Susie Ferguson for cutting weeds and raking them out in preparation for VBS activities on the volleyball court.

The whole congregation for supporting the Youth Mission Trip and making it possible for the youth to serve.

Anniversaries

George & Nancy Romer	2
Arnold & Susanne Moore	17

Birthdays

Rob McClaine	2
Melinda Jennings	2
Jessica Fahlen	4
Roberta Verderico	10
Robin Williams	10
Guido Spanjaart	11
Dom Consorte	12
Suzanne Mayo	12
Tyler Miller	14
Todd Axtell	15
Annie Estrade	18
Kabeja Fallone	20
Matt Gunderson	20
Kathryn Hussain	22
Ed Mueller	23
Arnold Moore	25
Taylor Wing	30



Vacation Bible School

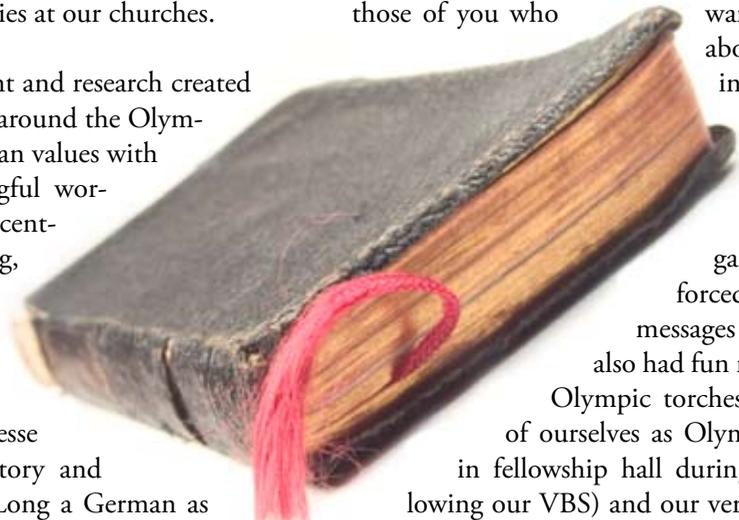
Our VBS program for 2012, “Go for the Gold,” is now history. And what a great piece of history it is for our churches! Not only did we write our own program which was timely and creative and very well received; we offered extended care for the first time to accommodate working parents. We were absolutely delighted to have 18 children join us this year (3 from ECA, 3 from UCC, and 12 from the community.) Hopefully they will all look forward to what we will offer next year and join us again bringing more friends. Maybe even some will consider joining us during the year. We plan to stay in touch with our new friends/families and keep them apprised of the wonderful opportunities at our churches.

A great deal of thought and research created a wonderful program around the Olympic theme and Christian values with a balance of meaningful worship time, learning centers of science, cooking, music, and storytelling and puppetry, plus games and art. Our featured Olympic stories included Jesse Owens sharing his story and friendship with Luz Long a German as we taught the Great Commandment, “love God, love your neighbor.” The US Hockey team winning the gold in 1980 gave us the opportunity to focus on team spirit, working as part of a whole for one goal (1 Cor. 12:12-27, one body with many parts). Lilo Ljubisic gave us a chance to learn “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”(Phil. 4:13) Lilo, a blind athlete, won her gold medals in the shot put and discus in

the Paralympics. So on her day we introduced the children to both the Paralympics and the Special Olympics. These are wonderful opportunities for athletes with challenging physical and/or mental abilities. Our last Olympic story was an Australian swimmer, Shane Gould, who taught us how to deal with the disappointment of not winning all the time, but being happy with doing our best. She also reminded us of who we should thank for our special gifts and talents. Shane Gould placed all her medals on the altar of her church giving thanks to God for all He had given her as she retired from swimming competitively at age 16. All their stories are fascinating and can be found online for those of you who

want to learn more about them during this Olympic Summer.

During our centers and games, we reinforced the Christian messages of each day. We also had fun making our own Olympic torches, flags, pictures of ourselves as Olympians (on view in fellowship hall during the week following our VBS) and our very own Olympic team t-shirts stenciling special designs around an Olympic torch. Our outreach project during the week included baking cookies for Montgomery Meals which happened on the Friday of our program. The children made wonderful “God loves you” messages that were packaged with the cookies to be served that evening as dessert. Of course, everything all week, even the circles on which the children wrote their messages, highlighted the



Vacation Bible School

colors of the Olympic rings, even to our napkins at snack time.

It is not possible for me to thank adequately all those that stepped up to help me put all this together and supported me all week with endless hours of help and words of encouragement to continue the high energy level necessary to see it all through to its end. First, I owe Kate thanks for helping me to believe it was possible to write our own program and giving me this creative opportunity. Her wisdom and guidance as we moved through this project were invaluable. Her special gifts and talents to tell stories to children in ways they can relate and lead them in worship were inspirational to all of us who witnessed these special times.

Kate helped me form a creative team which included Sharon Hall, Wendy Martin, and Kelly Yamanishi. The five of us met and outlined our scope and theme for the week, planning the daily schedule and organization, and researching appropriate activities for our different centers each day. During our VBS week we were blessed with Phyllis Chai's commitment to handle one of our centers offered each day and be extra hands at all our total group times of games and art. Julia Samuel joined us to be our younger group's shepherd all week. You may remember her as Gabriel in our Christmas pageant and choreographer of our "bell dance" that the littlest angels did in that pageant. Julia is a natural teacher with great skills in working with young children, keeping them interested, involved, and focused. Then just look through this list: Suzanne and Peter Mayo, Nancy Romer, Maryke Williams, Mike Schmidt, Emilie Egger, Alex Alvarado, Nikki DeVelbiss, Gwen Hacker, Josephine Tshibola, and three teens, Tyler McPherson, Nick Martin, &

Daniel Quint. Two or more of these volunteers joined us each day to lend extra hands for a variety of needs and activities. They were all vital during our snack, game, and art time as we managed our 5 to 11 year old children through those activities. Then I also had Bob Green, George Romer, & Mary McPherson help with special needs and requests before and during our week.

We closed our VBS week with a short presentation featuring our youngest children on our "indestructible children's bells" and our older group on the chimes. The children sang their songs from the week and shared the stories of our Olympians in their own words. After our program for their parents and other visitors, we all enjoyed edible Olympic torches. (Maybe we can share our extras some Sunday during the Summer Olympics.)

I know there were many in our church families that prayed for us, for the children, and for our program all week. Thank you for your prayer support. It was important to our success and greatly appreciated.

So now we move on to renovations of our Sunday School and Youth areas preparing for the fall.

Susie Ferguson

Welcome to ECA

We're glad you came to join with us
In our worship time today
We hope that you have felt God's love
In a new, refreshing way
For you're so welcomed in this place
And we hope you'll come again
To join with us in fellowship
And to make some special friends

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Fellowship Events

July 4th

Concert at Los Gatos High and picnic on the lawn.
There is more information and a sign up sheet on
the ECA bulletin board.

July 8th

Barbecue after the 10:30 AM service.

August 3rd

Trip to the Jelly Belly Factory.

August 12th

Barbecue after the 10:30 AM service.

August 15th

The book group will meet at the home of Suzanne
Mayo.

August 25th

Steak & Stein.

Avon Walk

We are only days away from participation
in the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer on
July 7th & 8th. To each of you who have
already donated, thank you so much. Your support
and generosity means a great deal to both of us. We
are both almost to our goal but still need a little
bit of help. If you would still like to donate there
is time! Donations can even be submitted after the
walk. You can go directly to our personal pages on
the Avon Walk website and make a donation di-
rectly into our accounts or you can give us a check
made out to Avon Walk for Breast Cancer and we
will take it with us when we register the night be-
fore the walk. The direct link to my page is [http://
info.avonfoundation.org/goto/sharonkaymills](http://info.avonfoundation.org/goto/sharonkaymills) and
for Taylor it is [http://info.avonfoundation.org/
goto/taylorkmills](http://info.avonfoundation.org/
goto/taylorkmills).

Thank you again for all of you encouragement and
support!

Sharon & Taylor Mills

Tune into iTunes

We hope you enjoyed last month's article "Web site in sight" about the ECA web site, and took the opportunity to browse around our web site a bit. We left you with a promise to show how to listen to voices from the past, so read on. Ever since Rector Kate's arrival at ECA, we have recorded both the weekly gospel and sermon. To date we have over 50 such recordings waiting for you and anyone else to enjoy.

The simplest way is to start a web browser on your favorite computer, e.g. a PC or Apple desktop, iPad or Android tablet, iPhone or Android phone, with Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome, Firefox, etc. And let's not forget about your eBook reader such as the Kindle. Basically anything you use to browse the internet can be used. Then go to our web site at <http://eca-sj.org> and find in the right

column 'sermons', and in there, click on 'Read/Hear sermons'. The window will update and show the latest sermons in our database. All sermons are available in text form, and you can scroll down in the window to see older sermons. At the bottom of the page there is a link named "Older Entries." Click that if you want to go farther back in time. For each sermon, the title and the first twenty-or-so lines of text are shown, followed by a link that says '[Read more ...]'. Click on this link to see the complete sermon. When an audio recording is available from

the gospel/sermon, you will see a small circle with a triangle near the top. Once you click that, the audio will start to play. You can stop, rewind, and skip part of the audio. And there is a volume control built in as well.

A bit more classy approach to listening to the Sermons is through iTunes. The simplest way is to find on our website in the right column 'sermons', and click on 'Subscribe in iTunes'. This will bring you to a web site showing all available audio podcasts, and an option to 'View in iTunes'. Click on 'View in iTunes' and once iTunes opens, you can subscribe to this podcast. The great thing is that when you subscribe to this ECA podcast channel, new sermons will be automatically downloaded to your computer, and you can set it up to automatically download to your phone as well. Now, how cool is that!

And for those who wish to stay away from iTunes: under the 'sermon' section, click on 'Subscribe in reader'. This will open up your email program, and add the ECA news feed. From that point onward, Kate's sermons get automatically delivered to your email program, much like any regular email.

We hope you will enjoy some of Kate's past sermons, and share them with friends. Tune in next month when we show you the crystal balls that predict the future, a.k.a. calendars and upcoming events.

*Hans, Mary & Jim
webmaster@eca-sj.org*



Youth Mission Trip

The youth are back from their mission trip and they want to thank everyone from both congregations who supported them financially, with prayers, and with socks and toiletries. We couldn't have done it without you! The trip was exhausting, rewarding, spiritually uplifting, energizing, heartbreaking, and a truly wonderful experience. The kids made me burst with pride: they worked hard, were warm and gracious with the people they interacted with, and got along famously—even in tight quarters and through a 3 day monopoly game. Inge, Laura, and I were able to participate fully in the service activities, because the kids were so professional and followed the rules of our host and the different service sites so flawlessly. I have reprinted the email “blurbs” that Inge wrote during the week we were gone, as they truly capture the spirit of the week and give those of you who missed them a chance to see what service activities we did. Enjoy!

Day 1

This morning we headed to the Alameda County Community Food Bank where we, working alongside one other group, packed 16,900 lbs of oranges for distribution—before lunch time! We were given a fascinating tour of their operation and learned that 1 in 6 people in Alameda County received from the food bank last year—that is a staggering figure. The food bank is spotless and efficient—for every \$1 donation, they are able to distribute \$5 worth of food to the needy. They have a full recycling program and compost on site. The tour guide was so inspiring, drawing us into how needed the food is and how valuable our efforts were. Some of us were moved to tears. (I'm not saying who).

We had sack lunches at the food bank, sorted more oranges and cauliflower for another couple of hours, and then departed for San Francisco. In the

city, we divided into two teams and, on foot, delivered hot meals for Project Open Hand. All of the clients live in Single Room Occupant (SRO) hotels in the Tenderloin and are suffering from AIDS or other chronic or terminal health conditions. We walked quite a long way, at city speed, and climbed many flights of stairs—the elevators in many of the hotels are not safe.

After dinner a few of us could have happily collapsed into bed, but Lauren [one of our youth] had other ideas and we headed out for another prayer tour, this time of Oakland. We drove through, or near, the West Oakland, San Antonio, and Fruitvale neighborhoods, and it was eye-opening. We learned about the incidence of gang violence, drug use, and prostitution in neighborhoods where most residents make far below a living wage. Literacy rates are terribly low and schools struggle to keep good teachers in such challenging conditions.

Day 2

We spent the morning assembling bags of groceries for needy seniors at Old St. Mary's catholic church in the financial district. Groceries for Seniors distributes food to roughly 1250 seniors each week, year round, with exactly 2 employees. Everything else is volunteers. It is amazing, and we are grateful for all who care for the seniors who are out of sight and too often out of mind.

We spent the afternoon at the after school care program operated by Bay Area Rescue Mission in Richmond. The violence and pain in Richmond are readily apparent, but so are the energy and love invested by so many adults in the community's children.

Day 3

We had another productive day—this morning we

Youth Mission Trip

worked at the San Francisco Food Bank sorting oranges (again—tired of oranges!) and packaging oats from enormous bales into exactly-one-pound-not-an-ounce-more packs. This afternoon we drove to the Tenderloin where we were divided into two groups, instructed to assume typical homeless personas and given a set of tasks. We had to feed our group and at least one stranger on an \$8 budget, find housing and food resources, identify possible employment, and engage people we met with a series of questions about the city—its best aspects and biggest problems. It took each group 2 hours and several miles to reach the same conclusion that good old peanut butter sandwiches were our best bet. The dollar store seemed like an option at first but we had no dishes or heat. Even fast food is expensive (not to mention unhealthy). We briefly considered 10lbs of fruit but decided it mightn't be the best plan for our bellies. 'Nuff said.

Our interviews of the locals were well received and interesting, and each group was able to distribute half of its sandwich stash to homeless and poor people we met on the street. It was challenging for this group of busy people to accomplish all tasks and then be stuck with no money, no cell phones, and no cars, for two more hours. A couple of the kids looked around at all the homeless folks sleeping on the plaza and followed suit. The pace of homeless life (from this brief glimpse) is very slow. We found it frustrating.

Day 4

We walked the whole district and eventually met woman with developmental disabilities whose rent had just been raised from \$300 to \$450/month. The kids took her grocery shopping, bought her a solar calculator so she could keep track of bills and groceries, and walked her back to her apartment.

We ate lunch at the north vista point of the Golden Gate Bridge, then took a silent prayer walk on the bridge, where we concentrated our prayers on the newest residents of the city, those who had come to the US and to San Francisco to seek a better life for themselves and their families.

From there we went to Agesong, a senior residence in Hayes Valley. Our boys joined the men's group meeting, and the girl's joined the ladies', and all enjoyed sharing stories with one another. You will have to ask the kids about some of the stories they heard about the wars, first cars, and feminism. Residents of Agesong generally have dementia or have had a stroke, so the kids learned a bit about patience and about the vulnerability of these seniors. I was afraid the kids might find the senior home less interesting than some of the edgier experiences they've had, but they were genuinely moved by the connections they made. The seniors loved having the youth and their fresh ears, too :).

We spent the whole day at one agency today, working in the classrooms at St. Anthony's Day Home in the Acorn projects in West Oakland. St. Anthony's has offered low-income child care for over 100 years! The facility is spotless and colorful. It purely feels happy.

We ask you to pray for the cities of Oakland, Richmond, San Francisco and our city of San Jose... there is so much need out there, and we have so much! Find a way to share with someone who needs it, or volunteer yourself... say the Lord made you do it!

Shalom, Bonnie McPherson

The Story of Salvation

I don't know how many of you receive the weekly newsletter from the Diocese of El Camino Real. Being a diocesan delegate, I get it. Recently, Bishop Mary invited all of us to tell the story of salvation in 100 words or less. She wrote:

From the beginning, in say, 100 words or less tell the story of salvation. On the website of the Diocese of Connecticut, they challenge people to speak the story of mission in 100 words or less. 'Salvation' is a less familiar word to the non-religious person, and mission isn't even a word that Reform Jews use – so pick one, and include Jesus and his work of salvation since that is what Christians believe – and try and tell the story. After that, ponder your experience of salvation and learn to tell that story. Why are you a Christian?

I think this is a valuable exercise. When I sat down to tackle the story of salvation assignment, my discourse came out at 493 words. I guess I've got some editing to do. Would anyone else like to accept the challenge? Mary Beth Powell, Bishop Mary's admin, invites you to share your version via email to her at marybeth@edecr.org. Good luck!

Mary McPherson

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