

Today Christ & Holy Trinity returns to its three liturgies of a Sunday morning; our children begin church school and Christian formation classes; a host of programs, including the Men's and Women's Spirituality groups as well as other formative endeavors are underway for adults; the youth and adults involved in the extensive music ministry of this church have begun their rehearsals; the middle school meets for discussion with our new seminarian, Marissa; the Confirmation program with 34 youth led by Kerith and many adult sponsors are off to a roaring start; last Sunday's Fall Festival, Ministry Fair and picnic was a huge success; about 30 persons—about a half of all who cook dinner for the Gillespie Center met to strategize this Friday evening. There is a stirring of the Spirit within this congregation—this community called Christ & Holy Trinity in downtown Westport. We hope that all persons – seekers and searchers will find this church and sense here an openness and respect for our individual and collective journeys into Christ; that all will know that all are welcome to root themselves in and connect with God, one another and the world.

I would like to reflect briefly about the character of this church, this community in Christ whose mission: **sheltering body and soul** proclaims that we will supply *shelter*—aid and comfort for those without benefit of family, food and housing and that we will offer *shelter*—a haven of peace, affirmation and comfort for all seeking nurture, love, forgiveness and opportunities to begin anew and fresh.

By way of illustration of what I mean to nurture of soul and body—in the Lives section of this week's NY Times magazine, Michelle Kuo entitles her article: *The Lost Student, the difference an idealistic student can make and the difference she can't*. A graduate of law school organizing a legal-aid clinic in an Oakland, California high school, Michelle taught for two years in the **Teach For America** program in Phillips County, Arkansas, one of the poorest in the United States. There she met Patrick, a young man attempting the 8th grade for the third time, having flunked out twice. Patrick rarely showed up for school for as Michele suggests, "He had no reason to, nobody made him". Disappearing for yet another long spell, Michele visited him at his home. She gave him a postcard of Rodin's, *Thinker*, telling Patrick that the statue reminded her of him since she believed in him and knew, that if he put himself into it, he could make it through 8th grade. With hard work and her support she said, he could even graduate high school. Stirred by her support, Patrick returned to school where he applied his God-given talents, made great progress, jumped up reading levels and even won an award for the Most Improved. Michelle worked on Patrick's reading, finding him books, encouraging him in his writing. Patrick continued to do well, for a time, and then Michelle left Teach For America for Law School. A few years later, Michele learned that Patrick, not even 19, had been arrested for stabbing and killing a man. Michelle explores her feelings, knowing the huge obstacles and odds against the students of that poverty ridden world. Without guidance and support, Patrick could not maintain his focus and ran off the rails. Knowing him a bright, gifted young man with a future, Michele believed that to succeed, Patrick, like so many of us, needed guidance, positive reinforcement, encouragement – someone who would walk the walk that we keep our eyes on the prize, focused on the positives rather loose ourselves in all the negatives and hard things in all of our lives. No one stepped up with and for Patrick and he lost his way. If that is not a story straight out of the Bible, I do not know what is?

Jesus said, *If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown in to the sea.*

Patrick and Michelle's story suggests that the church needs to be the church—how those of us in Christ in this community are called to care for one another in the good and hard times. It suggests the role and importance of church school teachers to the young people of this parish; of the importance of mentors and sponsors to the Confirmands; of the importance of Marissa Rohrbach with our middle school students, of Kerith Harding with the Confirmands and their parents; of Cappy Kuhn as teacher and mentor for our acolytes; of Kimberly Andrews as our Youth Minister with and for the high school students of Christ & Holy Trinity. What these teachers, role models and adult leaders offer our young people is perspective, wisdom, and inspiration in which our young people can grow up into the full stature of Christ becoming the persons God intends for them to be, persons intrigued by faith, and hope and grace and the promises and challenges given by God, persons willing to risk, imagine, and believe when so many others have lost that capacity to act and believe not only in themselves but also in a world filled with mystery, paradox and love.

Parker Palmer, writer, teacher of teachers, activist, Quaker. Let your Life Speak, Listening for the Voice of Vocation, When he was in his 40s, on the edge of this first depression, Parker Palmer thought Outward Bound would shake up his life enabling him to learn some of the things he needed to know.

In the middle of the week, I faced the challenge I feared most. One of our instructors backed me up to the edge of a cliff 110 feet above the ground, tied a very thin rope to my waist—a rope that looked ill-kempt to me and told me to start “rappelling” down the cliff.

“Do what?” I said.

“Just go!” the instructor explained in typical Outward Bound fashion.

So I went—and immediately slammed into a ledge, some four feet down from the edge of the cliff, with bone-jarring, brain-jarring force.

The instructor looked down at me; “I don’t think you’ve quite got it”:

“Right,” said I, being in no position to disagree. “So what am I supposed to do?”

“The only way to do this,” he said, “is to lean back as far as you can. You have to get your body at right angles to the cliff so that your weight will be on your feet. It’s counterintuitive, but it’s the only way it works.”

I knew that he was wrong of course. I knew that the trick was to hug the mountain, to stay as close to the rock face as I could. So I tried again, my way—and slammed into the next ledge another four feet down.

“You still don’t have it”, the instructor said helpfully.

“O.K.” I said, “tell me again what I am supposed to do.”

“Lean way back, said he, “and take the next step”.

The next step was a very big one, but I took it—and, wonder of wonders, it worked. I leaned back into empty space, eyes fixed on the heavens in prayer, made tiny, tiny moves with my feet, and started descending down the rock face, gaining confidence with every step.

I was about half way down when the second instructor called up from below. “Parker, I think you’d better stop and see what’s just below your feet”. I lowered my eyes and saw that I was approaching a deep hole in the face of the rock. To get down, I would have to get around that hole, and I knew for certain that attempting to do so would lead directly to my death—so I froze, paralyzed with fear.

The second instructor let me hang there, trembling, in silence for what seemed like a very long time. Finally she shouted up these very helpful words: “Parker, is there anything wrong?”

In a high squeaky voice, I said, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

Then, said the second instructor, “its time that you learned the Outward Bound motto”.

Then she shouted ten words I hope never to forget, words whose impact and meaning I still feel: **“If you can’t get out of it, get into it!”**

There was no way out of my dilemma except to get into it—so my feet started to move, and in a few minutes I made it safely down.

Near the end of his life, Robertson Davies, Canada’s best known author—20th century novelist, playwright and professor wrote a novel entitled, The Cunning Man, (Penguin Books, 1994) in which his one of his characters says:

(P. 143) Armed with my youthful egotism...I ... went to church twice on Sunday—a different church, to get as much of the flavour as I could—and had a high old time laughing and jeering at the faithful as the Baptists whooped; as the Methodists leaned forward in prayer, resting their heads upon the back of the pew in front, as though suffering from a hangover; as the Presbyterians listened to their highly literate, carefully argued, and quite incomprehensible ”discourses”; and the Anglicans met with the vicar at the church door, for reassurance of a superiority and not being as other men.

Of course I did not neglect the Catholics, (and)...I even ventured into the ...Orthodox Church, and stood stolidly among people who seemed all to be under a Dostoevskian depression,You must find the church that suits you, that you can stand and that can stand you, and stick with it.