

# Saint Thomas Church



*The Rector's Chronicle*

*Lent 2008*

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

The last time Lent was this soon after Christmas was the year Dr. Stires and our forebears dedicated our church building. The stained glass window restoration going on over our heads makes this coincidence timely. The calendar hasn't been like this since 1913, with Easter and therefore Ash Wednesday so early. Three and a half weeks after the Choir School's return from the post-Christmas break, the boys were singing Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere* as we received our ashes on February 6. Eastertide will end May 11, the Feast of Pentecost. Easter Day in Western Christianity will not again be this early, March 23, until the year 2160.<sup>1</sup>

## THE REASON WE ARE HERE

Whenever the date of Easter falls, the event it marks, the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, is the reason there is any church at all, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 53<sup>rd</sup> Street or anywhere else. On Saint Thomas's Fifth Avenue façade, below the image of Christ crucified, are the words, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ," words of life and hope to the multitudes who pass by, many of whom enter to be still and pray.

Our entire schedule, our staff, our whole church family, organizes itself around the celebration of this Easter wonder, the "Paschal Mystery," which Saint Thomas's architecture proclaims to the world. It is important, crucial, to understand that the whole pilgrimage from Ash Wednesday to Easter reveals the Victory we are given by Jesus Christ in its completeness, especially the last eight days, Holy Week, from Palm Sunday to the Day of Resurrection. For it is quite impossible to grasp the depth and height and breadth of Easter without coming to terms with Jesus' suffering and death in His Passion.

The times of Saint Thomas Holy Week liturgies from Palm Sunday through Easter Day are both online and on schedules available at the church. These liturgies come to us through the generations of Christendom from earliest times and are yet contemporary, addressing us here and now. They are designed to impress upon the observers, who are moved by the Spirit to become worshipers and participants, the drama of Christ's self-emptying love for lost mankind and His triumph over all that truly ails us, aptly summarized in Scripture by the two words, sin and death.

---

<sup>1</sup> Easter Day is the first Sunday after the full moon occurring on or after March 21. It is possible for Easter to occur as early as March 22, but that hasn't happened since 1818 and won't happen until the year 2285.

This will be the twelfth Holy Week and Easter I have had the privilege of leading at Saint Thomas; it is a responsibility and joy that takes me to the heart of my own calling as a priest and Christian. I urge you to take the fullest possible measure of participation in these glorious services. At Saint Thomas, the combination of liturgy, music and preaching – all focusing on the mystery of Jesus Christ our Lord and God – can be overpowering. This is as it should be.

Joining us on Maundy Thursday for the Foot-Washing Ceremony as he has frequently done is the Right Rev'd E. Don Taylor, Vicar Bishop for New York City. On Good Friday, preaching the Seven Last Words of Christ from the Cross in the Three Hour Service from 12 noon to 3:00 p.m., will be the Rev'd F. Washington (Tony) Jarvis, distinguished Headmaster *Emeritus* of the Roxbury Latin School in West Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts, and Assistant Priest at the Parish of All Saints Ashmont, Dorchester, Boston.

### **EXTRAORDINARY CONCERT, CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS**

The Saint Thomas Concert Series this season is passing some milestones – artistically, spiritually and financially. The good work of our Concert Series team Claudette Mayer and Jacqueline Slater in support of Maestro John Scott has made our Concert Series self-supporting. The Concert Series is an important form of outreach for Saint Thomas. Now the people who enjoy the concerts are funding them; we've moved from the red to the black. Jacqueline and Claudette have brought in many new Friends of Music including some major sponsors, skillfully publicized our various concerts, and exercised careful expense control. This positions us well for the American premiere, on Friday, March 7, of Sir John Tavener's "Universalist" setting of the Mass in honor of our Lady's Immaculate Conception. We're very grateful to the British Consul General in New York, Sir Alan Collins, and Lady Collins, who hosted a reception at the Consul's Residence on February 1<sup>st</sup> to promote this concert. In his talk on Tavener and the Mass on that occasion, John Scott showed himself to be as winsome a speaker as he is an outstanding musician. Sir John Tavener is an Orthodox Christian who is one of the great contemporary composers in the United Kingdom.

Speaking of contemporary composers, parishioner Nico Muhly's (b. 1981) *Bright Mass with Canons* was sung by the Choir of Men and Boys under the direction of John Scott, Sunday, February 3 at the 11:00 a.m. Festal Eucharist, as was choirboy Daniel Castellanos' (b. 1995) anthem *Eternal Light*. *The New Yorker* magazine featured Nico in a substantial article, "Maestro of Generation Y," by Rebecca Mead, this February. You can hear his *Bright Mass* again in the Choir's "American Voices" concert, Tuesday, May 13. Danny is the first recipient of the Ogden N. Lewis, Jr., Choristership at the Choir School.

### **WELCOME**

Before we leave Christmas behind to prepare for Holy Week and Easter, I congratulate three Saint Thomas staff parents on the birth of their first children in the holiday season: our clergy Youth Minister Jonathan Erdman and his wife Andrea, on the birth of daughter Sarah (born on Saint Thomas Day); Choir School History Teacher Mary Beth Benbenek and her husband Guilio, on the birth of son Adriano; and Voice Teaching Assistant Jolle Greenleaf and her husband Hank on the birth of daughter Hannah. These new parents have certainly brought Christmas home. May God bless them and their children.

It was a joy in the Advent season to applaud the appointment by Maestro Scott of Fred Teardo as Associate Organist. We're delighted that Fred, who has been the Assistant Organist since 2006, has accepted this position. He is a good colleague, full of energy, enthusiasm and obvious ability, enjoying the confidence of his peers and choristers. Fred says he loves as much as anything he does to play the hymns of the Church. It shows.

We are very pleased to announce the appointment of Ann Hall Kaplan as Director of Development. She began with us this February. Ann has many years of experience in development and most recently spent seven years at St. Bartholomew's Church, our neighbor on Park Avenue, in a similar role. The Rector of Saint Bart's recommended Ann strongly and warmly to us. We are confident that Ann's experience will result not only in a successful capital campaign but also to the establishment of a first-rate Development office.

### **LOOKING AHEAD, AROUND AND ABOUT SAINT THOMAS**

Our esteemed friend, the Very Rev'd Robert Willis, Dean of Canterbury Cathedral, will preach for us Sunday, April 13, at the 11:00 a.m. Festal Eucharist. Dean Willis is here for the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral in the United States (FOCCUS), who will meet at Saint Thomas later that week.

On Sunday, May 4, the Right Rev'd Andrew St. John will preach, administer Confirmation and celebrate our 11:00 a.m. Festal Eucharist. Bishop St. John, who comes from the Anglican Church in Australia, was recently instituted Rector of the Church of the Transfiguration ("The Little Church around the Corner" on 29<sup>th</sup> Street) by Bishop Sisk. Though he is a local Rector, he is empowered to perform Episcopal Ministry on behalf of the Bishop of the Diocese. Bishop St. John has given new life to our local Midtown clergy gathering called the Clericus and is a genuine encourager of his fellow clergy, including yours truly. He frequently attends Choral Evensong at Saint Thomas. It will be a pleasure to have the Bishop with us on Confirmation Sunday. We'll have a class of adults and young people to present to him for Confirmation and Reception into the Episcopal Church.

I commend my fellow clergy in another season of faithful service. Father Stafford, our Pastor, together with Pastoral Care Coordinator Linda Morfi, continues to extend with grace and skill our ministry of pastoral care to those many who call on us. They also have made the gatherings, outings, and meals of the Women of Saint Thomas a bright spot in our parish life; and here we must mention as well the Evening Group events for the parish held throughout the year. Robert and Linda, and Secretary to the Rector Douglas Robbe (who has worked with me for 23 years), are a mainstay of Saint Thomas's ministry. Our Theologian-in-residence Father Austin's classes this year have been enthusiastically and well attended, the subjects too many to list here. His assistance with the Rector's Christian Doctrine Class has been invaluable and has helped attract sizable classes this new year. He is also working on some publications that will be of interest to parishioners in due course. In addition to the healthy life in the Sunday School, our Youth Minister Father Erdman helps shepherd the younger adults of the congregation, among whom there has been a most pleasing development. Those in the age range of the twenties and the thirties who meet regularly for fellowship and Bible Study at the Erdmans' apartment are outgrowing their space and need to be subdivided and, perhaps soon, to find larger meeting quarters. The growth on all these fronts of our ministry is good news and means there are new faces and fresh blood coming into Saint Thomas.

The Every Member Canvass for 2008 will soon surpass \$1.3 million. The EMC committee has finished its “Candlemas Campaign” to gather in late pledges. This is a record, again. It is not yet our stretch goal of \$1.5 million, but we are within striking distance of it. Most impressive. Thanks to EMC co-chairs Lucky and Kari Gold and Jeff Wentling, their working committee, and to Colin Fergus, the chair of the Vestry’s Canvass and Development Committee. You are doing a great job. Thank you.

The webcasts of our Choral Services have boosted Saint Thomas’s website and led to a congregation of listeners “out there” whose financial support has made the choral webcasts self-supporting. Thanks to those who have contributed to this outreach ministry, but especially to Verger and Communications Manager Max Henderson-Begg for his oversight, and to those technologically adept older choirboys who assist him in the monitoring of the webcasts.

Saint Thomas Choir School is doing well in terms of student enrollment and recruitment, finances, and morale on all levels. Many people are part of this, but the person responsible, who sets the tone and oversees all, is our superb Headmaster, Father Charles Wallace. He has been with us since 2003, Headmaster since 2004. Saint Thomas requires the closest trust and collaboration among the Rector, the Director of Music, and the Headmaster; we must be a real trinity of co-operation, and we are. I know Dr. Scott joins me in thanking God for Charles Wallace, and so should the whole parish family.

#### **SIGNING OFF**

I do most of my novel reading each year while vacationing on Monhegan Island, Maine, in July. I try to get a few read through the year, and there is a chance during the post-Christmas break. The interest among parishioners in my book reports testifies to how important such reading is for many of us. A good novel is re-creational, taking you to a place of an author’s creation, refreshing your imagination and spirit. Out of four post-Christmas books, my fiction recommendation is Sara Gruen’s *Water for Elephants*, one of the best jobs of narration I have read in years. Her narrator and hero is a 95-year-old man telling the tale of the pivotal three months of his life at the age of 21, and she gets inside him with credibility. Don’t be put off if you don’t like the circus; besides, an elephant is a leading character in the drama.

May we all be blessed by the observance of our Lord’s Passion and Death, and the celebration of his Resurrection. May the joy of Easter be yours.

Faithfully your Priest and Rector,

