

From the Rector's Study ~

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life of worship, and governance of the Church.

These questions and answers are part of the Catechism of the Episcopal Church, called also "An Outline of Faith." The entire catechism can be found in the Book of Common Prayer beginning at page 845. It's also available here online: <http://www.bcponline.org/>, just select 'The Catechism' in the menu on the left of the screen. I highly commend it to your review.

ECR's Committee on Stewardship is in the midst of its annual effort to raise our collective consciousness to the matter of financially funding the ministry and mission of our parish community. In the words of the Catechism, the committee is calling our attention to how it is that ECR shall be able to 'bear witness to Christ' and to 'carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world.'

Working on behalf of the Vestry, the members of the Committee and I are busy with two main tasks: to inform the congregation's wider membership of the Christian duty to support the Church's ministry and mission in the local parish; and to create a realistic and faithful budget proposal to offer the Vestry for their approval. The Vestry will then review the proposed budget, modify it if the members agree to do so, then present the final budget as accepted by the Vestry to the parish community in January at our Annual Meeting in order to inform the congregation of ECR's financial foundation for our ministries and fellowship for the next year.

My hope is that all of us are grateful for the blessings that God has poured into our lives and our hearts through this community, and for the privilege of our participation in its ministry to others in Christ's Name. My prayer is that each of us is faithfully determined to support generously ECR's ministry as 'an open Christian community putting God's Love into action,' by 'welcoming all people as they are, on a journey of worship and service.' Our mission statement does a fine job of describing the unique ministry that is ours here at ECR. My hope and prayer is that our commitment to our ability to bring to one another and to the wider community what only ECR can bring will manifest in

our vows to the financial budget, the worship, the ministries, and the fellowship of our community for 2012.

When I ask myself, 'What would Austin miss if ECR weren't here?' I think of many and varied answers. Austin would miss much. Our warm vibrant welcome to God's Love for all would be gone. Our ministries to the poor and the homeless would be gone. Our concert events would be gone. Our fellowship gatherings at Dine Out and Foyers would be gone. Our ministry groups for worship, like the Choir, the Altar Guild, the Readers, the Chalcists, the Ushers, and the Greeters would be gone. Our Pastoral Care to our members, their friends and loved ones would be gone. Our service groups like the Daughters of the King, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the Episcopal Church Women, the Threads of Love, the St. Lydia's Guild, the Naomi Guild would be gone. The blend of our ancient traditions of liturgy with a widening repertoire of music in worship, along with intellectually stimulating educational programs would be gone. Austin would miss these and all the joyful and sacred elements of our life and ministry here at ECR, for there is no other church community like ours. The folks who are looking and longing for a community like ours would miss them. You and I would miss them. Our children, grandchildren, and the next generation of our legacy would miss them.

As the Catechism indicates, what the Church teaches us to be are servants. In all that ECR does and is, we are guided by our faithful understanding that Jesus calls us to serve. In a wider environment of social and ecclesiastical emphases upon leadership, ECR's instinct is to serve, instead. Leaders are interested in directing a group of devoted fans, while servants sacrifice themselves for the good of others. In this day and in our context, I believe that this may be the single most spiritually and socially valuable gift that we offer. Service to one another and to others in Christ's Name is, I think, the highest form of stewardship that anyone can vow.

Please turn your prayers and attention at this time to the vows that you will make for ECR's stewardship, our service in ministry and fellowship, in the year ahead. Join me in giving God thanks for the blessings we enjoy here at ECR and for the challenges that help us to grow in our relationship with God and one another. And please join me and your fellow members of ECR by making your vows to the financial budget, the worship, the ministries, and the fellowship of our community so that 2012 will find ECR continuing our service of 'bearing witness to Christ' and of 'carrying on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world'.

God's Peace. *Jim +*