



# SANCTUARY

St. Alban's Episcopal Church

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Elberton, Georgia

## INTERIM RECTOR'S REFLECTION



### *Accepting My Personal Cheeseburger*

In the Prayer Book liturgy of Holy Baptism, parents and godparents vow an affirmation to this question: "Will you by your prayers *and witness* help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?" (My italics) Later in the service, we pray that God will send the newly baptized out "into the world *to witness* to your love." (Again, my italics)

Episcopalians sometime have trouble with the concept of "witnessing." It smacks of what we may think of as a disagreeable form of "evangelism." There's a fine line between what we suppose the Prayer Book means about "witnessing" and what some of us regard as distasteful religious exhibitionism. Frankly, I'm not sure where that line is, and I think it may be that each of us has to find it for ourselves.

After the noon Bible Study at St. Alban's recently, Nicola and I stopped at the Wendy's in Elberton for lunch. A middle aged woman, wearing what we think was a Wendy's uniform, appeared to be on her lunch break. Two other women sat at a table near Nicola and me. The woman in the uniform finished eating, put away the wrappings and soft drink cup, and approached the other two women who were still eating. They apparently did not know her, nor she them.

"Have you ladies accepted the Lord Jesus as your personal savior?" she demanded abruptly. I could not overhear the whole conversation, but I believe they said they had, and the woman in uniform started trying to sell them on the advantages of her particular church.

I'm not sure what I would have said if she had approached

## TAKING NOTE

Nancy Whitworth and Joel Seymore married at St. Albans on July 27. The couple wishes to thank the parish for their congratulations, best wishes, and prayers.

Fr. Gene Britton and Nicola ask your prayers for them and their family and for the repose of the soul of his mother, **Ruth Smith Brtton**. She died Thursday 25 July and the funeral was held at First Baptist Church, Moultrie, the following Saturday.

John Keeler said that the Bishop and Vestry both approved St. Alban's profile and the Nominating Committee sent it to the printers. Copies should be available soon.

## COMING SOON: ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL



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us. I'm afraid my tact and Christian charity may have been overcome by my displeasure. I think I may have pointed to my meal and said something like: "I have accepted this food as my personal cheeseburger and would like to be able to enjoy it without being proselytized in a public restaurant!"

I feel sure that from her own theological perspective, the woman believed she was "giving witness" to Jesus. There was the look and sound of sincerity about her. She may have belonged to one of those super-Christian and probably fundamentalist groups who have "soul-winning contests." (I can't prevent the imagery of notches in a gun handle or scalps hanging from a belt coming unbidden into my mind. At the very least, there are stars in your crown for everyone you "bring to Jesus.") The witnessing woman believed, I think, that she was serving the Lord as He wanted to be served.

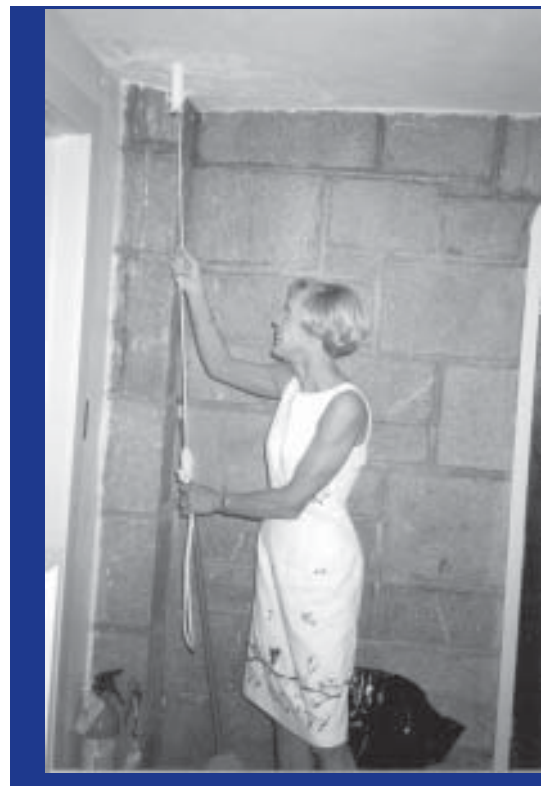
If the diners at Wendy's had said, no, they had *not* accepted Jesus as their personal savior, the witnessing woman could have worked her efforts toward "saving" them. If she had succeeded in persuading them "to accept Jesus as their personal savior" – then she would have saved them from burning eternally in hell. In that event, everyone – the witnessing woman, her two "converts," and maybe even Jesus himself would have been happy. Everybody would have been happy, that is, except for two Episcopalians who simply wanted to eat their cheeseburgers in peace and thought the scene before them was just dreadfully tacky and theologically *gauche*. (And, incidentally, how could there ever be an *impersonal* savior?)

The witnessing woman was apparently out to "save" anybody she thought to be "unsaved." But the witnessing woman *couldn't save anyone!* Saving people comes under the heading of Jesus' job. The witnessing woman, Nicola and I, and the other two diners at Wendy's "got saved" on the first Good Friday and Easter Sunday when Jesus died on the cross and was raised to new life to save *the whole world* for all time to come.

So what about evangelistic witnessing? How do we give witness to our children? How do we go about witnessing to God's love in the world? These are perfectly good concepts, straight from the *Book of Common Prayer*, for Episcopalians. Episcopalians don't generally feel called to preach on street corners or roam restaurants looking for potential converts. And yet we, no less than the witnessing woman working Wendy's, are called to be *evangelists*. That's a word that tends to make some Episcopalians edgy. *Evangelism!* That's what people do in fast-food places when they besiege customers who simply want to accept their food as their personal cheeseburgers.

*No!* That's far too limited a definition for what evangelism really means. Evangelism means a lot more than twist-

**Carol Coggins witnesses to the neighborhood "ringing her bell" on Sunday morning.**





***Marcia Jenkins and Cherubs display their T-shirts.***

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ing people's psyches into accepting theological constructs that are really unacceptable to them. The root word in Greek is *euangeleon* – the same root as "Gospel," *Good News*.

It seems to me that there are *two basic* ministries with which the Church as a holy whole is charged. One is pastoral ministry. The other is evangelistic ministry.

Pastoral ministry is that service directed toward the faithful. Pastoral ministry is what we do *within* the Church, *for* the people of the Church. Pastoral ministry includes the Sacraments, the teaching, the fellowship, the care, the love, the edifying of those who are already classified as "our own."

Evangelism is the Church's *outer directed*

***Ashley Moore and friends on mission trip to Montana.***



**"Evangelism means a lot more than twisting people's psyches..."**

ministry. It's what we do for others. It's what we do for those *outside* the Church. It's outreach. It's whatever we do to *witness* to God's love, not just in the Church, but also in the world. It's soup kitchens and homeless shelters. It's going out there to bind wounds and to proclaim Good News to those who are not used to hearing anything but bad news.

We need to maintain a good balance between pastoral ministry (which, I suppose, could be thought of as witness *within*) and evangelistic ministry (which, I suppose, could be thought of as witness *without*).

*How* do we witness? We all have to decide that for ourselves. There's a fine line between the Prayer Book concept and that which some of us may regard as distasteful religious exhibitionism. Frankly, I'm not sure where that line is, and I think it may be that each of us has to find it for ourselves. I didn't find the conduct of the witnessing woman in Wendy's very appealing – not to me personally. But I'm asking God to give me grace not to be too hard on her. She may know something I don't.

— Father Gene Britton+

# Congrats...

**To Brook Gaffney**

*For receiving her Lay Eucharistic Minister's license from the Diocese.*

**Thank you for serving us!**

# Thanks...

**To Louise Martin  
(and Andrea)**

*For faithfully editing and publishing the Sanctuary every month for two years..*

**Good Job!**

## **Nominations for Episcopal Lay Leadership Award**

The fourth Annual **Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans Award** will be presented in early 2003 by Virginia Theological Seminary.

Nominations can come from bishops, clergy or laity.

Nominees must be Episcopal laypersons who are active in an Episcopal congregation and living in one of several southeastern states including Georgia. Nominees should have demonstrated outstanding leadership qualities and persevering Christian witness over a significant period of time.

To nominate a Lay Leader in our parish, please request an application from Sara Baldwin. Nomination forms for the award may be submitted any time before December 31, 2002.

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