

# VESTRY PAPERS

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CHURCH FOUNDATION  
empowering congregations

*To inspire, affirm and inform Episcopal leaders in their work*

## Create holy time away for your vestry

by Randy Ferebee and Alan Akridge

Why do so many vestries go on retreats? Why do they clear their busy calendars and make such time a priority for the health of their congregation? Vestries and clergy intrinsically know the team building and energizing value of taking time away, apart.

We have spent hundreds of hours with vestries in retreat and the common thread is a search for meaning (the universal search!) which informs their ministry as servant leaders in the local church. More specifically, these men and women want to know how to focus and harness their individual and collective gifts to build or keep vitality in their congregation.

With the knowledge that healthy leaders create healthy churches, consider the following elements when planning a vestry retreat.

### Time away

Choose a place which is apart from the church. Conference centers are a great choice. Parishioner-owned vacation homes

can be an economical alternative. The beauty of nature has a way of letting the hand of God work silently.

### Participation

Seek full participation from the vestry. For perspective, it is sometimes helpful to widen the circle to include, for example, a youth representative, former wardens, and/or leaders of various ministries.

### Leadership

Resourced parishes may engage a retreat leader who has skills in vestry ministry. Those with limited resources may ask for a leader from the diocese. Any vestry can also have a "paper leader" by using, for example, a selection of articles from *Vestry Papers* for presentation at the retreat (see page 2).

### Spirituality

Any retreat should be wrapped in prayer. Consider giving each participant a set of

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*This Issue:  
Vestry Retreats*

*Circulation 24,500*

*Advent, a key time of preparation and anticipation, also inspires thoughts of vestry renewal. What better way to get to know your fellow vestry members than to share in some off-campus time of reflection and restoration? This issue considers ways in which vestries might best plan time away from the "business" of the parish — strengthening both spiritual and personal bonds of joy.*

St. Andrew's House, Union WA



*Inside:*

*Secrets of the*

*Advent Artichoke*



# Create holy time away

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scripture to reflect on in advance; utilize in Bible studies and liturgies. Begin or end by celebrating the Eucharist with the homily time previewing or summarizing the time together.

### Schedule

Plan for at least twenty-four hours together. Even better would be two nights to allow more time for interaction and development. A good schedule allows for gathering, worship, presentation/discussion, meals, free time and commissioning/sending. In addition to the annual retreat, consider scheduling a mini-retreat midway through the year.

### Fellowship

Ample time for conversation, friendship, and play builds camaraderie, trust and cohesion.

### Content

This is a highly variable element of a retreat. Save the business for another time or at least concentrate it into a brief session. Presentations and experiences form a common ground which all share. Every member of the vestry brings a rich experience of leadership in the world. The church is a different place where new skills and approaches, sometimes at odds with the world, are used and may need to be learned. (See below).

### Principles and Values

Retreats are key times in which to establish the culture of the vestry and the way it embodies the reign of God honoring Jesus' words that he came bringing abundant life. There are well-worn paths to both a depreciative culture as well as paths to health and abundance.

The vestry chooses the path. Use the retreat to name that which you value. These may include such principles as disallowing anonymous information and communication triangles, using consensus in decision-making, seeking to become tithers, committing to a significant level of outreach, use of appreciative language, and more. Name your principles, then form them into a paragraph or two as a vestry covenant which all sign and publish in the church. Use the covenant at each meeting to remind each other of the commitment made.

### Conflict

Finally, if there is any overt or covert conflict in the church or on the vestry, it is of supreme importance that an outside consultant be engaged. Resourced parishes may engage a consultant; churches with limited resources will find assistance through the diocesan office.

Baptism is the origin and source of all ministry. The ministry of a vestry serves as a beacon in every church to shed light on this focus and to energize the gifts of the Spirit given in baptism. Every vestry is called to lead in discerning and building the form and face of the reign of God. Vestry retreats are food for this journey.

*The Rev. Dr. Randy Ferebee and the Rev. Alan Akridge, Directors of Epiphany Institute + Consulting, specialize in leadership development in congregations (www.epiphanyinstitute.org). They are the coordinators for the annual Kanuga Vestry Conference and church consultants. Dr. Ferebee recently retired as rector of Saint Alban's Parish in Hickory, North Carolina. Fr. Akridge is the rector of Saint Mark's Church in Brunswick, Georgia.*

Learn about faith, leadership, stewardship, safe church issues and more. Some sixty past issues of Vestry Papers, all free of charge, can be found on the Episcopal Church Foundation's website. Go to [www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org), locate the search engine, and enter "Vestry Papers Archive."

## Content ideas for vestry retreats

- Introduce Life Cycle as a model for finding where your congregation is in its journey. Go to [www.epiphanyinstitute.org](http://www.epiphanyinstitute.org). Click on Vestry Resources and then on "life-cycle saarinen."
- Use storytelling to remember spiritually significant times in the church.
- Learn Appreciative Inquiry processes; see Rob Voyle's vestry retreat suggestions at [www.clergyleadership.com/handouts/vestry-retreat.pdf](http://www.clergyleadership.com/handouts/vestry-retreat.pdf)
- Read *Asset Mapping* by Luther Snow (Alban Publications) and preview its use at the retreat.
- Read almost any book by Loren Mead and work with his ideas. See page 6.
- Attend a vestry retreat at a church conference center; for example, see [www.kanuga.org/conferences/2010/vestry.shtml](http://www.kanuga.org/conferences/2010/vestry.shtml)

Next issue:  
Congregations in transition

# Build bonds of joy in a spirited retreat

by Donald Peeler

It is truly unfortunate when a vestry gathers in retreat to address only the mundane business that confronts every parish. Our vestry of All Saints in Omaha, Nebraska, has learned instead to overtly invite God into our annual retreat — we call it our “Spirited Retreat” — so as to build both our personal relationships with God and our spiritual relationships with each other. This in turn allows us to better serve as vestry members and as lay ministers to our parish. The difference becomes reflected throughout our vibrant parish life.

drive from church provides a physical separation from home, work, and church that readily welcomes God into our midst. Our solemn surroundings set a spiritual tone from which it is easy to express our gratitude for our many blessings, and dream together to build a future with His direction.

With all the necessary services provided, we may then focus entirely upon our spiritual growth, assisted by a retreat facilitator.

Professional meeting planners will claim special qualifications for facilitating spiritual



Kanuga Conferences

*Some congregations attend to parish business on retreat while others don't. Try just leaving the business at home, and give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work more actively with a new and unfettered agenda.*

Our experience is that it is not possible to develop these necessary relationships during a busy monthly business meeting. And so the first task is to escape the distractions of everyday life in order to craft our faith-filled visions for the future of our parish.

Two important criteria determine the success of a Spirited Retreat: the location of the retreat and the use of a retreat facilitator.

We utilize the overnight, dining and meeting facilities of a Christian-based campground amidst rolling hills overlooking the glorious Platte River Valley. The first order of business at our Spirited Retreat is to lead each participant to the awareness of God's presence all around us, and the thirty mile

retreats, but we have found only one special qualification: that the retreat facilitator NOT be a member of the vestry or our parish clergy. There is no place in a successful spiritual retreat for rank or title. All participants are children of God, clergy included, and must participate on an equal basis, in full trust and vision, so that the future to which God calls us as a group may be completely embraced in love by all.

## **A desire to answer a special calling**

In selecting a retreat facilitator, do not ignore the special gifts of lay persons within your parish. Our best facilitator had no greater qualification than a passionate love for Jesus

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# Build bonds of joy

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Christ, and a genuine desire to answer a very special calling.

The facilitator will direct the spiritual program, but often does not serve as its leader. Rather, it is up to the retreat facilitator to only facilitate such leadership. For exam-

Most important is the development of the bond of joy between participants whereby all might better work together to fulfill God's calling. Recently when my father was hurried to the hospital with heart and kidney failure, it was a vestry meeting night. I

## The beauty of nature has a way of letting the hand of God work silently.

ple, our retreat includes fellowship through worship, the singing of hymns of praise, Bible study, prayer, and team building activities. The facilitator assigns leadership responsibilities for each activity, asks the questions that serve to initiate and stimulate discussion, and helps keep us on task and on schedule.

Other important criteria include the length of the retreat — ours spans twenty-four hours — and the program objectives of the retreat which may be set through a prior discernment of the core values of your parish. Our initial Spirited Retreat helped us define the core values of our parish through the sharing of ideas and suggestions, and prioritized the items to be worked upon in the coming year.

shared our situation, and then there were prayers for not only for my father, but for my mother, sister, brother and myself. The doctors say that Dad has had miraculous improvement. Each of us has been richly blessed by inviting God into our lives.

May your vestry find fulfillment in a Spirited Retreat.

*Donald D. Peeler has attended All Saints Episcopal Church in Omaha, Nebraska, for twenty-four years, and is presently serving in his second year as a vestry member there. Don and his wife, Melissa, were founding co-chairs of its Christian Outreach Mission Team in 2006. They remain active in its many mission initiatives, including a trip to Nicaragua this summer to serve deaf students and their families.*

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to  
bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to  
the captives and recovery of sight to  
the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

*Luke 4:18-19*

*Peeling onions is a great way to build community, even with a few tears here and there. Make up a roster of jobs that need to be done on your vestry retreat, so there are opportunities to just have fun and get to know each other.*

# Secrets of the Advent artichoke

by Barbara Bartocci

One day before Christmas, my four-year-old grandson Danny was acting particularly obstreperous. His exasperated mother finally said, "Danny, settle down and behave or Santa's going to bring you rocks and sticks." Danny's eyes lit up. "Goody! I like rocks and sticks!"

We laughed, but though he didn't know it, my grandson was reminding us of the joy that exists in what is *real*.

Members of vestries deal with what is real — the secular business of the parish — every day. But here's something to remember for the season of Advent. This is a time of

## Borrowed values

Most of us follow what we learned from parents, teachers, church pastors and the media. But is it time to take a second look? What if you're ignoring something that may be different from what you learned but is God's way of alerting you to a unique gift you haven't yet used?

## Unnecessary fear

Jesus said, "You *cannot* serve two masters." He didn't say, "You *should* not." He said you *cannot*. It may be necessary for vestry members or church pastors to occasionally



*expectation, of preparation:* a time of longing for the reality that is birthed in each of us as Christ within. So that we can say, as St. Paul said, "Not I, but the Christ in me."

A common symbol of Advent is the wreath. But when I lead Advent retreats, I use a different symbol: the Advent Artichoke!

To eat an artichoke you must pull off the outer leaves in order to reach the succulent delicious heart. We, too, need to pull off whatever may be keeping us from recognizing our deepest selves, for that is where we find Christ who lives in our hearts. For instance, superficial status symbols. The right label, the right car, the right neighborhood. Are we clinging to these?

take a risk, to step out of your comfort zones now and then. Don't let fear hold you back. Fear will push out love and prevent a quiet trust in the will of God.

Here are four of the words I offer at my retreats that can help us pull off outer leaves.

**Watch.** Jesus often encouraged his disciples to "watch." This Advent, pay attention to your actions. Check out your motives. But do it non-judgmentally, simply as a way of gaining information about yourself. About what is really going on with you.

**Accept.** We live in a time of turbulent change. Parishes are struggling more for money. This Advent, practice accepting each day as a gift from God and vow to recognize

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*O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, page 833)*



*Almighty and eternal God,  
so draw our hearts to  
you, so guide our minds,  
so fill our imaginations,  
so control our wills, that  
we may be wholly yours,  
dedicated unto you, and  
then use us, we pray  
you, as you will, and  
always to your glory and  
the welfare of your  
people, through Jesus  
Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(Book of Common Prayer,  
page 832)*

# Bootstrap your vestry retreat

by Loren Mead

"I really had a bad experience my first time on the vestry," Anne said to me. Of course that upset me — in my years as a pastor I really did all I could, especially with my senior warden, to make our work as a vestry EFFECTIVE, first, but also enjoyable. Indeed, I hoped vestry persons would have some fun.

Anne was the first to say something like that to me, and it made me come up short. Later, Chuck Olsen (author of *Transforming Church Boards*) let me in on a dark secret — apparently LOTS of people run into negative experiences. (Incidentally, that book, published by Alban Institute, remains a useful piece for those on vestries.)

Over the years since, I've used various methods to help retreats become both a time where work is done well, and participants experience a personally and spiritually positive experience. Such a time needs to be a bridge when we ourselves do some growing and find ourselves fed as persons and as disciples.

Let me suggest a way you and your vestry can work at this issue. Here is a design you can use and develop yourselves, without a consultant, thus the name "bootstrap":

Either in your first vestry meeting of the year or on your annual retreat, begin by splitting up into "classes" (I'll call them freshmen, middlers, and seniors, since many vestry terms are for three years. You should end up with three groups of four, or five or six, depending on the size of each "class" and when people are scheduled to rotate off the vestry.)

In each step, have one person lead and another make notes to report out later.

## STEP ONE 1

Senior Group:

- What did you expect it would be like to be on the vestry before you were elected?
- How did you learn what was expected of you?
- What was the best thing that happened that first year?
- What were your unexpected disappointments?
- What do you wish you had known before you joined the vestry?
- What do you hope the new members will bring?

## Middler Group:

- When you were elected last year, what did you learn from the people who were on the vestry?
- What do you wish they had taught you?
- What was the best thing you remember from your first year?
- What was least pleasant in your first year's experience?

## Freshman Group:

- What have people told you about being on the vestry?
- What do you think the parish needs most from its vestry this year?
- What do you think you need most from the rest of the vestry to do the job well?

## STEP TWO 2

The leader should begin by asking each group to take fifteen minutes to summarize what their discussion has clarified for them about:

- What's been good in this parish in how our vestry works.
- What we need to do better.
- The kinds of behaviors that have been most helpful.
- The kinds of behaviors that have gotten in our way.

## STEP THREE 3

Groups take turns and share.

## STEP FOUR 4

With all the groups assembled, list "guidelines" to be used for making vestry work more effective and rewarding. If possible, write the list on newsprint for display at future meetings.

One option is to revise and repeat exercises like this in subsequent years — because each time gives vestry members a chance to review HOW they are doing their work and how they are feeling about it.

Nobody wants the new vestry members in your congregation to feel the way Anne did after her first term.

*The founder of the Alban Institute in Washington, DC, the Rev. Loren Mead is a well-known author, educator and consultant who works to strengthen religious institutions, especially local congregations.*

# Secrets of the Advent artichoke

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all that happens in your life as part of God's plan for you.

**Choose.** An "attitude of gratitude" will help us discover that ultimately all things intermingle for good when we place God at the center.



**Pray.** Those serving on vestries often say they wish they had more time to pray. See *Grace on the Go: 101 Quick Ways to Pray*.\*

(Morehouse) It offers ways to find prayer opportunities in the daily actions you're already doing, including:

**Practice shower power.** As you take your daily shower, pray to be cleansed from any feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness or regret. Recall the words of Isaiah (58:11) "...You shall be like a watered garden, whose waters never fail."

**Make a driveway meditation.** Before leaving on your morning commute, place your hands lightly on your car's steering wheel and breathe deeply. Ask God to steer you through your day.

**Pump in the spirit.** Need gas? As you fill your car, ask God to fill you with loving kindness toward everyone you meet that day.

As a final reminder, try serving artichokes at dinner. As you pull off the outer leaves, let this act remind you that Advent is a season for removing what doesn't really count in our lives in order to discover the true Christ that lives within our hearts.

*A member of St. Michael's and All Angels in Mission, Kansas, Barbara Bartocci is an award-winning author of nine books, including the Grace on the Go series\* from Morehouse (most recently: Grace on the Go: Powerful Prayers to Ease Money Worries.) She also speaks frequently to church groups. Learn more at [www.BarbaraBartocci.com](http://www.BarbaraBartocci.com).*



*Thanks to all who participated in our recent survey about the impact of Vestry Papers on you and your congregation. As always, your ideas are important to us, and continue to be welcome.*

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*to contribute your thoughts or to get the results of the survey.*



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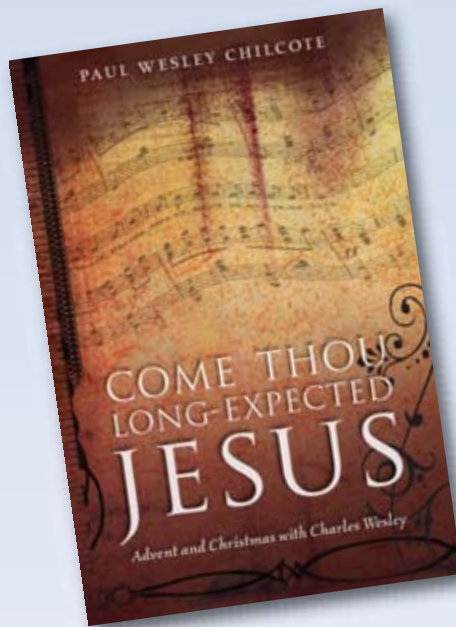
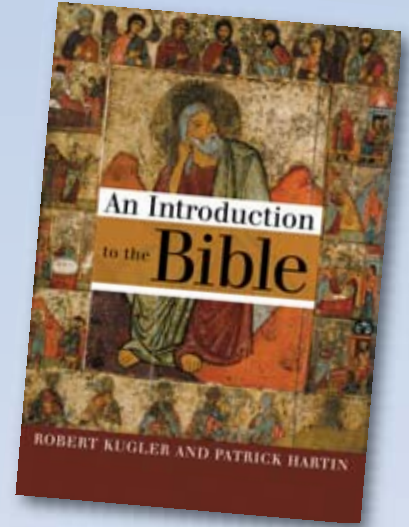
## Reader's Corner

### *An Introduction to the Bible*

by Robert Kugler and Patricia Hartin

Dust off those old commentaries and include this new contribution to the field of biblical scholarship in your parish library or rector's study. Informative and well-researched, *An Introduction to the Bible* by Robert Kugler and Patricia Hartin is a worthy tool for a range of endeavors: Bible study, sermons, or embarking on that most important of all journeys — deepening our faith through disciplined reading and reflection.

Wm B. Eerdmans  
[www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com)



### *Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Advent and Christmas with Charles Wesley*

by Paul Wesley Chilcote

Music lovers and scholars, unite. It's hard to believe that Charles Wesley wrote some 9000 hymns, one of which was *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, always popular in the Christmas season. This expertly-written book explores Wesley's contributions with a hymn, reading, reflection and prayer for each day in Advent and Christmas. The author is president of the Charles Wesley Society and professor of Wesley Studies at Duke University.

Morehouse Publishing  
[www.morehousepublishing.org](http://www.morehousepublishing.org)

### *Light to the Darkness: Lessons and Carols, Public and Private*

by Katerina Whitley

There are two ways to participate in the Advent season: treading the same well-used path or taking a new one. This book urges the second way, and makes it easy by offering a range of reflections and dramatic monologues designed to be read in church or in groups, marking the Advent season. Centering around the service of Lessons and Carols, author Katerina Whitley combines both creativity and scholarship in this compelling read.

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