

# Trinity Parish

January 8, 2007

Dear Trinity Parishioners,

This is a story of answered prayers...

- In 2005, the people of Trinity Parish prayed for an Interim Rector to heal us and guide us through a difficult transition.
  - Our prayers were heard, and we found the Reverend Anne Jensen.
- In 2006, we prayed that the Spirit watch over our New Rector Search Committee and our search process, and bring candidates to our call.
  - Those prayers, too, were heard, and an “inspired” search found many exciting and qualified candidates.
- In these last months, we’ve prayed that the Lord would lead our search committee and our Vestry to discern His will and identify the candidate meant for us.
  - With God’s help, both groups did their work with joy and love, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December the Vestry selected a candidate unanimously on a single ballot.
- In the days before Christmas, though most of Trinity was unawares, the members of your Vestry were deep in prayer that the Holy Spirit would move Rev. Michael Spillane, Rector of Church of the Holy Nativity in Meridian, Idaho, to agree that Holy Trinity was where God was sending him.
  - This we asked for and this we received. On Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Mike and his wife, Julie, graciously accepted our call.

In deference to Fr. Mike’s desire to inform his current parish in a sensitive manner, we held off the public announcement and celebration of this great grace. But now, Fr. Mike has now given us the “green light” to announce our joy and excitement to the world!

This is certainly a time for thanks and praise for the Lord who has heard our prayers and led us to the spiritual leader we need. In the coming weeks, you’ll hear much about this very special priest; for the moment, we have attached, with Fr. Mike’s permission, the written answer he provided to an essay question in his original application. We’re sure reading this essay will lead you to see why the search committee reacted to his application with a resounding, “Wow!”

So what happens now?

First, we will plan a joy-filled celebration of the Rev. Anne Jensen’s ministry among us. Much of the success of this search is due to her sensitive guidance and spiritual support. She put us in a place to discern God’s will with joy and amity. We have much to thank her for.

After a brief respite “between rectors,” we will welcome the Spillane family—Fr. Mike, Julie, and their two children, Brendon (12) and Kim (7)—to Trinity. We are still working on the details of how we will welcome Fr. Mike and his family to Trinity, and how we will honor and celebrate Mother Anne’s valuable contributions to our parish. If you would like to be a part of the planning for the celebration of the Rev. Anne’s ministry at Trinity, please contact Frances Nuelle ([fnuelle@sbcglobal.net](mailto:fnuelle@sbcglobal.net)). If you would like to be part of the planning for Fr. Mike’s welcome, please contact either Shirley Hagey ([sjbhagey@comcast.net](mailto:sjbhagey@comcast.net)) or Lisa Deal ([lisadeal@hotmail.com](mailto:lisadeal@hotmail.com)), who are co-chairs of the Welcoming Committee.

We will welcome Fr. Mike as we welcome the first blossoms, in early spring. His first Sunday with us will be March 18<sup>th</sup>. There will be many more communications from your Vestry as these plans take shape. If you are not on our email list this is a good time to sign-up on the Web site ([www.trinitymenlopark.org](http://www.trinitymenlopark.org)) or send your e-mail address to [communications@trinitymenlopark.org](mailto:communications@trinitymenlopark.org).

In the meantime, remember to give thanks for our many blessings as we start this exciting New Year, especially for the work of the New Rector Search Committee, the ministry of the Rev. Anne Jensen, the arrival of the Rev. Mike Spillane and his family into our community, and the spiritually thrilling years we will experience together. Give thanks for our answered prayers!

Sincerely,

David Arscott  
Co-Senior Warden

Frances Nuelle  
Co-Senior Warden

## **Essay Question in the Application of the Reverend Mike Spillane to Trinity Parish**

*Please describe your spiritual journey.*

A number of years ago, I would have jumped right into this question without much thought, giving you highlights, major events, people, places, and so forth. But I now realize that in some sense, everything that happens in our lives, from the mundane to the spectacular, is a part of one's spiritual journey. It is an autobiography that we are all writing each day about how God is present in each moment of our lives and, more importantly, how we respond to that presence.

And so the question, for me anyway, becomes, how does one truly share their spiritual journey in a single-spaced, 11 font, page or two. How can I truly share in this short space some of the processes, the motivations, the values and difficulties that led me to where I am today? The answer, I suppose, is to pray that God will guide me in this writing and so give you a sense of the significant experiences, formations, trials and blessings in that journey that have brought me to this point in time on my spiritual journey where I have felt led to apply for the position of Rector at Trinity Parish, Menlo Park.

Over the past few years, I've coached both fifth and sixth grade girls and boys basketball teams at my son's school (a private Christian school). And each year, before starting, I have to fill out a background questionnaire. One of the questions on that questionnaire is always the same: "When did you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" And each time, I have to write that I can't remember one specific occasion when I "accepted" Jesus Christ, but that I have always had an understanding and knowledge of Jesus ever since I was a little child.

I grew up in a typical Irish Catholic family, who were at times quite serious about their faith and at other times just went through the motions. It was from my mother and grandmother that I first learned about Jesus, and that learning continued later in the Roman Catholic elementary and secondary schools I attended. The priests and nuns who taught us about this loving and compassionate Jesus could also strike in us the fear of God, and this dichotomy stayed with me for years. The thing I remember most, however, to this very day about my religious childhood experiences were the times my family and I would go to Mass, whether in Ireland or in New York, and the singing, the flickering candles, the ringing chimes, the wafer put on your tongue, the very mystery of it all would fill me with wonder and awe.

The first time I think I actually realized that there was a spiritual journey to be undertaken in one's own personal life was round-about the age of 25. I do realize on reflection that a lot was going on in my childhood which I didn't appreciate at the time and which was part of this nascent spiritual journey. I had moved to England shortly after college to travel around Europe and to visit relatives in Great Britain and Ireland. Little did I know at the time, that this would be a profound and life-changing moment in my life/spiritual journey. I had planned on being overseas for six months, possibly a year. I ended up staying eight years.

We've all heard the phrase, "God works in strange ways." It is true. I lived with an aunt in London for a short time whose son was applying for a position with the Metropolitan Police Constabulary. I decided to go down to Scotland Yard with him and, at the spur of the moment (the moving of the Holy Spirit!), applied for a job, never thinking I would seriously be considered. I was, after all, an American. But besides working in strange ways, God also has a sense of humor. I was accepted and entered the police training college two weeks later. Three months after training school, I was walking the streets of London as a police constable (a London Bobbie).

I was now living on my own, working some very odd hours, had little contact with my relatives, and making friends--other than with fellow police officers--was difficult. So, despite thoroughly enjoying what I was doing, it became a time when I began to experience a deep sense

of loneliness. I knew something was missing in my life. I missed my family and close friends, who were living in the States, but it was more than that and I couldn't put my finger on it. It became a time when I began filling my free time with spiritual reading, prayer, overnight visits to monasteries, serving at food banks, soup kitchens. I was seeking to understand what this longing in my heart was all about, and hopefully would come to know God's will in my life. A wise spiritual director once quoted a poem to me by Francis T. Thompson, called "The Hound of God," suggesting I had been hiding from God and it was only through my sense of loneliness that God could get my attention:

*I FLED Him down the nights and down the days. I fled Him down the arches of the years. I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways. Of my own mind and in the midst of tears I hid from him...*

Whether the spiritual director was right or not, God certainly had my attention now. One day I was walking through the library at a monastery in London and a book sort of fell off the shelf into my hands. You know, it didn't literally, but I was walking along and it "fell off the shelf into my eyes" first of all, and so my hand went up and took it down. I flipped through it, and thought, "This looks interesting," and put it together with some other books I'd picked up, and checked them out. I went back to my apartment in London where the book sat there for about a week. I finally got to it, and opened it. It was Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*, the story of his spiritual journey, his autobiography. It resonated with me and I couldn't put it down. It was the story of this bright, educated, talented, worldly man who began searching for renewed personal meaning and direction in his life and wound up choosing a solitary life with God, that of a monk. It was a book that started me thinking, ever so tentatively, about ordained ministry.

As I became more aware of my deepening faith and of God's presence in my life, and as I was praying to God for guidance, I was led to two people who would have a direct bearing on my call to ordained ministry. One was a Roman priest, Father Thomas Faucher, who I met in London while he was attending a theological school. The other was an Anglican priest, the Rev. Thaddeus Birchard, the vicar at St. John's, Hyde Park, who became a good friend, mentor and teacher of all that is Anglican. Both men encouraged me to consider ordained ministry.

I first met Rev. Birchard when I was a home beat officer covering the Paddington area of London that included St. John's. Thaddeus was not a "typical" priest, or at least not like the priests I had known growing up. He was approachable, had a sense of humor, liked to kick a soccer ball around, but, most of all, was caring and sensitive to the needs of all those who approached him. His church was a magnet for all types of people, from wealthy diplomats and rock stars to the Hyde Park bag ladies and men who came for hand outs and to keep warm and dry during the winter months. All were treated with dignity, respect, compassion, just as Jesus would treat people. As I watched him at work over the years of our friendship, I now realize his ministry and humanity had a profound effect on my call to ordained ministry.

I met Fr. Faucher while we were both attending a course on prayer at the University of London. Being the only two people from the United States, we connected, and at the end of the seminar decided to keep in touch with each other. To make a long story short, Tom returned to the States but we kept up a correspondence via letters, and in that correspondence he explained that his diocese in Idaho (I had to look on the map to find where Idaho was located) had a program where those who might be thinking about ordained ministry could come and work in the diocese for a year to further discern that call. The vocations director from Idaho wrote inviting me to spend the year. The Bishop also wrote to me inviting me to come to Idaho. I think it was the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor who noted that "God does not call us once but many times," and so, after seven years of praying, discerning, and denying, I decided to go to Idaho and spend the year to see if God truly was calling me to a life of ordained ministry. I honestly went hoping that this crazy notion of a call by God and by the church would be decided once and for all and I could go back to London and continue my work as a Police Constable, which I truly enjoyed.

Well, that wasn't to be. In John's gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, "I chose you...you did not chose me." After a fruitful year in Idaho, the decision from the mutual discernment that had taken place between God, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Idaho and myself was that I should go to seminary. I was sent to St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, and, four years later and almost twelve years from the "start" of this process, I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest serving at St. John's Cathedral, Boise.

I was on top of the world. It seemed right for me to be in ministry. It is who I am. So, I was settling into a life of ministry in the Roman church when, once again, God surprised me and two and a half years later, I would leave the Roman church to marry Julie. It was love at first sight. Let me stop here for a moment. I truly believe that if we look back on our lives we will see a pattern and the hand of God in all that has happened to us. Why did I end up Idaho of all places to answer the call to ordained ministry? Why did I know (as did Julie) that God meant for us to be with each other? Why had I become friends with an Anglican priest who would teach me all there was to know about the Anglican Communion?

God came knocking again shortly after I had left the Roman church. A Deacon serving at St. Michael's Episcopal Cathedral in Boise suggested to my wife that she and I go see the current Episcopal Bishop of Idaho, John Thornton. Once again, God blessed us as we walked into the office of one of the most caring, compassionate and holy persons we had ever met. Bishop Thornton immediately embraced us and after a year of school, study and prayer, he received me into the Episcopal Church as a priest and I was asked to be the Missioner of the Central Deanery Cluster, assuming responsibilities for the administration and ministry in six small churches in and around Twin Falls, Idaho (a sixty-mile radius).

So, for the second time in my short life as an ordained priest, I was now settling into a life of ministry that continues to this day. It is certainly not one I would have ever imagined or planned, but a ministry that has been fruitful, challenging, and painful at times, but something I would not change for anything in the world.

Fifteen years later, God continues to surprise and bless me. And I suppose the biggest and best surprise over all is that I have been blessed with two wonderful children and a wife who is a supporter, sounding board and confidante in my ministry.

Over the past year and a half, through prayer, family discussions, conversations with my spiritual director and with my current Bishop, it seems that God is calling me to new challenges and opportunities in the Episcopal Church. Like my experience in London, things are going extremely well here in Idaho, the Church of the Holy Nativity continues to flourish, Julie's family is here, and Boise is a great place to raise kids. I have been more than blessed. Why move? Once again, it is only through listening to the God within, through prayer and through the voices of others, that I can be sure this is the right thing to do at this point in time in my life as an ordained priest. All I can do, and am doing, is responding to what I believe is God's prompting and then leave everything in His hands. I continue to thank God for all those who helped shape me and who were instrumental in their encouragement, their support and their love during the whole discernment process that led to ordination. I am humbled when I realize that God is also using me to shape the lives of others.

I will close with something Henri Nouwen wrote and that I try to remember each day:

*".....the minister, who takes off his clothes to wash the feet of his friends, is powerless, and his training and formation are meant to enable him to face his own weakness without fear and make it available to others. It is exactly this creative weakness that gives the ministry its momentum."*

(*Creative Ministry*, [New York: Doubleday, 1978, p.113])

**--Father Mike Spillane, Rector, Church of the Holy Nativity, Meridian, ID**