

HOLLISTON TAB

A Decade of Reflections

By Christine Whittaker
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Ten years ago I got a phone call from Rob Borkowski, who was at that time the editor of the Holliston Tab. He asked if I would be interested in writing an occasional column for the paper. His goal was to get all the Holliston clergy to write so that each of us would produce a column once every six weeks. For various reasons, the other clergy were unable to make this commitment so after my first column appeared I was invited to become a regular biweekly columnist.

Since that first column, I have written six hundred words or so and sent them to a succession of editors (I think I'm now on my fifth editor) on Monday mornings every other week. I never aspired to be a newspaper columnist so why did I take on an unpaid assignment that meant meeting a deadline on my day off? Somewhat to my surprise, I have found it a useful discipline that has given me the opportunity to write on a wide range of topics that I might otherwise never have addressed. When Rob Borkowski first invited me to write, he told me that he wanted something about my parish, St. Michael's Episcopal Church, and what interested my parishioners, but not a sermon.

My first column described characteristics of the Episcopal Church that can be readily understood by any American – we are the church that brought you the King James Version of the Bible and we have a democratic constitution written at the same date as the United States Constitution. A few subsequent columns have touched on those themes but many have ranged widely. A jazz Eucharist at St. Michael's led me to write about Adolphe Sax and the wonderful instrument he invented. Last year's Valentine Chocolate Festival at St. Michael's inspired me to ask whether it is a sin to eat chocolate, which involved an overview of the history of that most delicious of all foods.

A fair number of my columns have sprung from my travels overseas and my interest in comparative religion. During my first sabbatical I was able to study Christian-Muslim relations, including visiting Ethiopia, Iran and Morocco, and on my second sabbatical, I explored Christian-Buddhist dialogue by traveling the Buddhist pilgrimage route in India and Nepal. The latter spurred some negative comments online from those who thought that as a Christian priest I should not speak of learning anything about meditation from Buddhism.

In general, I have heard little opposition to my opinions. The strongest objection came to a column I wrote about The Clergy Letter Project, an endeavor supported by more than 12,000 Christian clergy that aims to demonstrate that religion and science can be compatible and to

elevate debate on this issue. I am saddened that some Christians think that they must reject the findings of scientific research and instead turn the Bible into a science textbook.

There are many issues that arouse my passion and I could probably continue to write about them for years to come. But this is my last column. On May 19, I will step down as the priest at St. Michael's and I want to leave the way clear for my successor to establish his or her own relationship with the people of St. Michael's and the readers of this paper. I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to give voice to news of my parish and my opinions on many topics and thank my editors for their support.

Christine Whittaker is the priest at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Holliston.