



Church of Our Redeemer  
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# Redeeming Features

**Volume 29**

**Issue 1**

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**Jr. Warden:** Ian Fox  
**Treasurer:** Frank Kern  
**Clerk:** Paula Antonevich

**Vestry Members**

Bob Bettacchi      Tony Johnson  
 Jim Bradley        Sarah Neumann  
 Lance Conrad      James Surprenant  
 Susan Emanuel

**Inside this issue:**

<b>Greetings</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Parish Life</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Nominating Committee</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Mission</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Vestry</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Music</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Christian Formation</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>January Calendar</b>	<b>16</b>

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**Greetings from Rev. Kate Ekrem**

Dear friends,

Some years ago, the Massachusetts legislature was considering a bill that would require all churches to make their budgets available to their members, and, more significantly, to have a yearly professional audit, at a cost of about \$10,000. Needless to say, this made my parish (with a yearly budget at the time of about \$100,000) and a lot of other small churches very nervous. So I called our local state representative, and he offered to meet with our town's interfaith clergy. At that meeting, most of us brought copies of our budget – the same ones we hand out at Annual Meeting ever year.

I'll never forget the look on his face when I handed him my church's budget. He was shocked and seemed scared to touch it. He said "Am I really allowed to see this? I don't need to see this," and hastily handed it back to me. He was very surprised when I told him we hand it out to all our parishioners at Annual Meeting.

Obviously, the bill came to the state house because of concerns that some church members don't have access to their church's budget. But that has never been true in the Episcopal Church. Sometimes I think our members don't realize how much our budget is really YOUR budget. You decide what the income side is through your yearly pledge. And you influence and shape what the spending side is through your involvement in our ministries and committees. Each committee proposes its ideal budget to the vestry who, with the help of our finance committee, make the final decision on how to make all the numbers work. Our budget can't and shouldn't be secret. Your vestry works hard to make it as transparent as possible, which is only right as we are the stewards of your generous donations. We express our ministry and spirituality through our money as



### Greetings from Kate (cont'd)

much as we express it in any other way. So, if you are at all like that kind state rep who was willing to take a meeting with local clergy, and think that the budget is "not for you", then please take the time to come to our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 27. Hearing presentations from our treasurer, Frank Kern, on the 2012 budget, and from the chair of our finance committee, Jim Neumann, on our 2013 budget, will be just some of the important business that we do on that day. But it's YOUR business, and your church.

Peace and blessings,



### Redeeming knitters

Redeeming Knitters are meeting in the Library, Thursday, January 17th at 7:30 p.m. We will be working on hats, scarves, mittens, and prayer shawls.

If the Lexington Schools are closed on the 17th, then we will meet on Thursday, January 24th.

Linda Kukulich has guessed our mystery knitter, as Madame Defarge. There she will be with us in spirit in our January meeting.

Please mark your calendar for next knitting day on Thursday, February 21st.



### Bad Weather



A reminder of our bad weather procedure: You can call the church office at 781-862-6408 for a voice recorded message, check for an email update, or go on our Facebook page to see if services are cancelled. Usually those are updated by 7am. It's our general policy not to cancel worship if the clergy can get here. However, that does not mean you have to be here! On stormy days, all those with official duties are excused. Often we hold worship but cancel choir, Christian Formation, coffee hour, and other non-worship events, and operate without acolytes or Liturgy Team. Please use your own judgment and only come to church if it's safe for you to travel.

Also, WCVB-TV/Channel 5 and their website, WCVB.com, are again ready to handle our closings and delays.

You may also sign up for text message or email alerts at this page: <http://www.wcvb.com/weather/closingsignup>



THE ANNUAL MEETING OF  
THE CHURCH OF OUR REDEEMER  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 27TH

We will open with worship and the **Report of the Rector-elect** at the 9:30am service. We'll continue with brunch downstairs as we:

- **View our annual slideshow**

Many thanks in advance to Seddon Beaty, who snaps photos throughout the year and then sorts, crops, and arranges them for us to view. Not to be missed!

- **Elect Vestry, Deanery and Endowment Committee members**

Our nominating committee has completed their work and proposes the following slate of candidates for election at the Annual Meeting on January 27<sup>th</sup>. Nominations from the floor are always accepted as well. Feel free to talk to the candidates and ask any questions you need to decide about your vote on January 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Vestry:**

**Senior Warden** (1 year term): George Murnaghan (for re-election)

**Junior Warden** (1 year term): Ian Fox (for re-election)

**Treasurer** (1 year term): Frank Kern (for re-election)

**Clerk** (1 year term): Mary Etta King

**Vestry member at large** (3 year term): Julia Francis

**Vestry member at large** (3 year term): Nancy Grayson

**Youth Vestry member** (sharing one position, 1 year term): Eliza Koso, Renee LeBlanc

**In addition, the following vestry members continue to serve and are not up for election this year:**

**2 Years remaining to serve:** Tony Johnson, Lance Conrad

**1 Year remaining to serve:** James Surprenant, Jim Bradley

**Deanery Representatives (1 year term):**

1. Mary Ann Burnside (for re-election)
2. Mary Bicknell (for re-election)
3. Connie Parrish (for re-election)
4. Linda Kukolich
5. Vacant as of this date



Respectfully submitted by the Nominating Committee for 2012,  
Ellen Cosgrove, Jed Geyerhahn, Evelyn Haussein, Sam Stevens (chair), Bill Vogele and Nancy Williams.

**Nominate and elect a five-member Nominating Committee for 2013 positions.** Are you interested in helping to identify candidates for vestry next year? Do you know members of the parish that you'd like to see serving on vestry? If so, please



## Annual Meeting (cont'd)

consider standing for election to the Nominating Committee! (Committee members cannot be nominated for any positions.)

Want to learn more about how things work at Redeemer, and prepare for Annual Meeting? Read our by-laws, minutes from vestry meetings, and minutes from previous Annual Meetings. All are available online at: [www.our-redeemer.net/community\\_docs.htm](http://www.our-redeemer.net/community_docs.htm)

**Hear about our financial situation as we close out 2012 and look ahead to 2013 with the budget presentation.** Hopefully, you've made a pledge commitment to support all that you hope can occur at Redeemer in 2013. Now it's time to hear from the vestry about our plan for 2013.

All adult (age 16+) members of the congregation have a voice and a vote as we celebrate the many gifts of our life together this past year and plans for 2013.

**Childcare and an activity for children & youth aged 15 and younger will be available.**

## Lexington Town-Wide Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration

Lexington's CommUNITY committee invites everyone to this year's Twentieth Annual CommUNITY Commemoration Honoring the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., on January 20th from 2:00-4:00 at Cary Hall. The particular focus this year will be on the actions that the Lexington Public School Department and its administrators and faculty have taken to nurture our diversity.



Robert Harris, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, will open the program with the history and demographics of the Lexington Public Schools. He will talk about METCO, the METCO Scholars program, the Diversity Award given annually by the Schools' Diversity Task Force, and the new program "Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers." He will give his perspective on where he believes the Schools will be going in the future.

In the second part of the program, there will be a panel of former recipients of the Diversity Award to speak about their work. The panel includes Ann Tenhor, Instructional Technology Specialist in the Lexington Elementary Schools, teacher and former dean Bill Cole from Lexington High School, and guidance counselor Melissa Buttaro, also from Lexington High School. At the end of the panel, a 2012 METCO graduate, Malik Alfred, will speak about his experience in the Schools.

The Bowman School Fifth Grade Chorus, under the direction of Martha Rogers, will provide music for the program, including African-American composer Andre J. Thomas' "I Hear America Singing," with musical quotes from the spiritual "Walk Together Children," and a medley of songs from Kenya, where Bowman has a sister school.



## Lexington Town-Wide Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration (cont'd)

Preceding the Cary Hall program, those who wish will gather at 1:15 at the Minuteman Statue to walk from there to Cary Hall. Congregations are invited to bring their church or community banner to carry in the walk. If anyone would like to carry Redeemer's banner, please let Kate know. The CommUNITY Committee hopes this celebration will be an opportunity for Lexington to honor our community's work, and will point the way forward as organizations and individuals continue to work in partnership for our shared vision of a community ever growing in heart, mind, and spirit.

## Nominating Committee: Seeking nominees for Annual Meeting

Are you interested in being part of a short-term group that does a major ministry for our parish? Perhaps serving on the nominating committee is for you! The nominating committee is elected at Annual Meeting, Sunday, January 27<sup>th</sup>. People can be nominated from the floor, and you can also nominate yourself.

The Nominating Committee is an independent, 5-member committee of active parish members. They are responsible for identifying nominees for officers of the parish (Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Treasurer, Clerk and vestry persons), and Deanery Representatives.

Six members (5 active and one alternate) are elected at the Annual Meeting for a one-year term. It is desirable that one of the active members be a continuing member from the previous year.

### TIME COMMITMENT

The Committee convenes in the fall and completes its work with the Annual Meeting report due in December.

The number & frequency of committee meetings is determined by members. Meetings are generally Sunday mornings before or after church.

### RESPONSIBILITIES / PROCESS

Meet with executive committee in September to learn about which positions are open and clarify procedures.

Assemble list of candidates for each open position

Contact candidates and invite them to serve

Present committee report to the Clerk of the vestry four weeks before Annual Meeting

Announce nominee slate at the Annual Meeting



## Mission News

*"As we listened to the stories and learned about the growing AIDS epidemic in Honduras, most of us in the room struggled to fight back tears.... Valerie's words to the room were direct and to the point: "come be with us." "Hold an orphaned baby, play games with a dying child, and demonstrate to all of the children that they are loved...just come." Many of us exclaimed, "We had no idea the situation was so bad!" It's difficult for us to know this information, and even more difficult to understand and internalize it...that is, until we've experienced it for ourselves."*

- The Rev. Ted Gaiser, from [http://www.diomass.org/mission/global\\_partnerships](http://www.diomass.org/mission/global_partnerships)

### **Thank you!**

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the Grow Clinic over the holiday season! Whether you knit hats, baked cookies, volunteered at the party, or brought books or contributions to the Creche service, your support made it all possible.

### **Welcome back, Ted!**

We are honored to welcome back The Rev. Ted Gaiser on Sunday, January 13 to visit, preach, and lead adult forum. Ted served as a Deacon at Redeemer and since February 2012 he has been serving as missionary in Colombia. Since arriving in Colombia, Ted has written a blog that covers topics ranging from food to preaching the good word to politics to perceptions. Be sure to check it out: <http://tedabroad.wordpress.com/>.

We have chosen as a church to support Ted's work through our mission budget and gifts from parishioners. We are sure that Ted will return with new lessons, questions, and opportunities to think about our own work for others. Please join us!

### **Another opportunity to support Habitat for Humanity**

As you know, Habitat for Humanity is one of our core ministries. We appreciate the support that comes from the congregation as individuals volunteer for Habitat workdays and contribute financially. If you are particularly drawn to Habitat, you are invited to attend their annual gala.

On Saturday, February 2 Merrimack Valley Habitat for Humanity will host its signature fundraising event, *Building Dreams Gala*. There will be dancing, dinner, and an auction. You can find an announcement about the event on the website: [www.merrimackvalleyhabitat.org](http://www.merrimackvalleyhabitat.org).

### **Time is running short...Is 2013 your Year for El Hogar?**

#### **Trip dates: July 12-19 or July 12-26, 2013**

Redeemer will send its 8<sup>th</sup> group of volunteers to Honduras this summer to spend a week working and living side by side with the students and staff at the Agricultural School of El Hogar Ministries. This mission trip is open to adults and to teens 15 years old and up; often a teen and his/her parent volunteer together. Maximum group size is 15.



## Mission News

For more information or if you wish to go, contact: Jessie Maeck [jmaeck@aol.com](mailto:jmaeck@aol.com) 781-863-8053.

*El Hogar, a joint project of the Episcopal Churches of the United States and Honduras, provides education to 250 boys and girls in Honduras. Redeemer has sent volunteers 6 times since 2006 to participate in this inspiring organization.*

## What's Your Vestry's Been Up To?

Our December Vestry meeting primarily focused on two important discussions: our 2013 budget and where to direct the proceeds from the collection at the December 24 Crèche service.

On the budget, Vestry held a special meeting in early November at which we heard from all our ministries about their budget requests-what they wanted to spend-for 2013. This includes areas such as Church Community, Mission, Christian Formation, Music, Office, Property and Personnel, and this allows Vestry to hear what each group foresees and desires for 2013 and, of course, the dollars and cents attached to those plans. Finance then prepares a draft budget, incorporating known income items like rents and leases and making some assumptions about pledges and other contributions, so we get a basic sense of how the budget is shaping up. By December's Vestry meeting, we have some information on 2013 pledges to work with, but we still don't have the final picture. Until we have a clearer picture on pledges, Vestry is not in a position to make the budget final, but we were able to vote and pass the Personnel parts of our budget, which allows us to inform our clergy and staff of their 2013 compensation before the end of the year. We expect to finalize the budget at the January 16 meeting. (A request: if you have not yet made your 2013 pledge, please do so at your earliest convenience, before January 16 if possible. That will help us greatly with the final budget decisions!)

We also voted to devote the entire undesignated portion of the collection at the Crèche service to the Grow Clinic. This continues the long-standing tradition at Redeemer of using the Crèche service collection to support local social services agencies who work with children and families in need. We had a vigorous and spirited discussion of why we do this and affirmed the overall desire to continue with this support, which is used to support, among other things, holiday gifts for children who might not otherwise receive one. What is so moving for me is the spirit of generosity within our Redeemer community which has existed for so long and which continues to grow.

As we move forward into the New Year, we will hold our Annual Meeting on January 27<sup>th</sup>, at which time our new Vestry will be elected. We'll hold our Vestry retreat on February 10<sup>th</sup>, at which time we will focus on what lies ahead in 2013. We look forward to keeping you informed of our work as the year progresses.

George Murnaghan  
Senior Warden



## Music News

Many thanks to all who sang, read, baked refreshments, set altar candles, helped with, and/or attended Redeemer's annual **Candlelight Service of Lessons, Anthems, and Carols on December 2nd at 4:00**. *It was especially gratifying to all of our musicians to see the sanctuary nearly filled.*

For the **Feast of the Epiphany January 6th**, Redeemer welcomes back guest organist and choral director Geoffrey Wieting, while Bernadette is away on vacation. The choir will sing a favorite English Epiphany anthem "A Gallery Carol" arranged by Willcocks and Jacques.

The Atrium Singers will offer music in services on **February 3rd, March 3rd, and March 31st (Easter Sunday)**; [April and May dates TBD]

On **Sunday afternoon February 10th at 3:30**, our Redeemer choir sings once again in the **8th Annual Lexington Choral Festival** at Hancock Church, along with 12 other Lexington choirs. The combined finale selection will be the grand and beautiful *Dona Nobis Pacem* from **J.S. Bach's B minor Mass with organ and brass**.

On **Sunday morning March 3rd** we will welcome the Back Bay Ringers ([www.backbayringers.org](http://www.backbayringers.org)), - Boston's premiere auditioned touring hand bell ensemble, for a special Lenten service.

**Adjunct Singers** are always welcome to join the choir for Holy Week and **Easter Sunday (March 31st)** services.

Finally, the music committee and Redeemer will host a full scale concert by the **Back Bay Ringers, on Saturday evening, June 8th**, in our sanctuary, for Lexington and neighboring communities

As always, the music and worship committees welcome your thoughts about any and all music-related topics.



Advent Service of Lessons, Anthems, & Carols



## Adult, Youth & Children Christian Formation

On January 6, Rev. Kate will complete her forum on Marcus Borg's *Heart of Christianity*. Following that, on January 13 Ted Gaiser will be preaching and leading an adult forum session on mission. You can check out his blog on his time as a missionary in Colombia at <http://tedabroad.wordpress.com>.

There will be no Christian formation for adults or children on January 20<sup>th</sup> due to Martin Luther King weekend. Normal formation sessions will also be suspended the week of January 27<sup>th</sup> for the annual meeting. During the annual meeting for adults, the youth and children of the parish are invited to watch a film and enjoy some refreshments together.

Looking forward to February 3, we look forward to welcoming Dr. Meghan Henning, a biblical scholar who will lead an adult forum on hell, the apocalypse, and the end times.

*Adult Christian Formation Contact Person:* The Rev. Danielle Tumminio ([danielle@our-redeemer.net](mailto:danielle@our-redeemer.net))

# Happy New Year!

## Atrium Training

For anyone interested in knowing what goes on in the Atrium, our Christian Formation for the younger children in the church, Evelyn Hausslein will be offering a workshop for potential assistants or others interested in learning. On January 12, a Saturday, there is a day long introduction to the methods and materials of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. This is offered to all in the diocese, but available here at Redeemer.

You must pre-register on forms available on the bulletin board outside the atrium. The \$25 fee will be covered by the parish. Evelyn can answer any questions, but mark your calendars now.



## Joseph Ratzinger, the Essence of Marriage and the Human Body: Please Pass the Heartburn

Bill Fortier

Well I'm sipping on egg nog and watching my midsection grow to Santa-proportions, all in the service good cheer, and, unbeknownst to me amidst my oblivious, and might I say cheery, consumption, Pope Benedict is tormenting my progressive friends with his homiletical Christmas jingles. Since when have I become the Vatican complaint department? Sadly, I've carried this strange burden, from the Episcopal bench, for fifteen years (insert the melodramatic sigh here).

So, Redeemer Pals, I don't know if you're following the popular press but Pope Benedict, Joseph Ratzinger, has been letting the world know recently that he's none-too-happy with the spread of gay marriage across Europe and the United States. My progressive friends have been exfoliating their scalps and railing against the Bishop of Rome and his views, smelling traces of Nazi thinking. I think Joseph's wrong here but I think my friends are wrong too, with their suspicion of dark motives.

So I want to offer an empathic explanation of the pope's thinking and then I will point out where he and I don't agree, but as Christian friends, not enemies. Feel free to complain to me about it: all my other friends do.

Joseph cites a French rabbi who sees gay marriage as **an attack on the structure of traditional marriage** and then goes on to say that gay marriage is an attack on the **divinely made** structure of marriage and the **divine structures of the male and female bodies**. So there's two parts to the pope's complaint: **attack and structure**. These aren't replaceable figures of speech for him: Benedict thinks the actual spiritual essences of marriage and the spiritual essences of human bodies are under siege. Wow. Since we're in the war room, I say put a helmet on and join me for a drink. Nothing goes better with war I say than a drink. After all, we're Episcopalians.

First, attack suggests violence and retaliation, an ominous term indeed. Is he paranoid, seeing monsters in the middle of plain ole social disagreement? I don't think so. I think he's still smarting from the hostile back-and-forth that characterizes academic disputes in the European university and European culture. Let me tell you, it's a nasty food fight in the halls of European academia and Joseph's been splattered on many occasions. On a few occasions I've been yelled at because of my ideas and it's always a special treat to field a disagreement, delivered in a shrill, red faced screech. I cherish the memories. Make that two drinks, please. I think the pope's martial language represents, in part, painful memory.

I also think Benedict sees marriage and human bodies as having supernatural essences which come from God. Marriage and its human members have a permanent structure to Joseph, even though this structure can't be seen or registered by our senses. Gay marriage violates the sex-arrangements of this supernatural structure, in his view. The integrity of this spiritual form is breached in Joseph's view.



## Joseph Ratzinger, the Essence of Marriage and the Human Body: Please Pass the Heartburn (cont'd)

Marriage and its heterosexual pattern are not merely social creations in Benedict's view. They're from God and revealed by God. Human alterations are more than a wee bit presumptuous and audacious. God, in Joseph's view, doesn't approve of our creative license. God wills us to conform to the revealed form of marriage according to this **classical platonic model** of marriage. In this very classical view, an **eternal measurement** exists and we're all called to compare ourselves to the supernatural model, revealed in the Bible and Church teaching.

Benedict isn't pulling this stuff out of dusty old theological cabinets either. This has been the way the Roman church has understood human beings and human institutions, like marriage, for centuries. Strict measurement has also been a Roman trademark: most people and most relationships fail in their comparison to the divine standards. This isn't selective platonism. Instead, it's theological essentialism across the whole board and most of us, most of the time, don't measure up: in Roman parlance **we're disordered as persons and disordered in our relationships**. In other words, we don't match up to the divine measurements. From Benedict's perch, the US and Europe are legislating more ordinary-divine-mismatches and further eclipsing the divine models: spiritual amnesia advances farther and farther over Western culture in his view.

In case you've forgotten, **Platonic** refers to the idea that ordinary persons, places and things have spiritual and supernatural models. According to platonic thinkers we're called, each and everyone of us, to mold ourselves to these divine forms. To recap: Benedict sees hostile innovation for two reasons: The ugly tenor of controversy in European universities and his platonic understanding of people and marriage.

Now before we huddle all together and snicker at Joseph's platonism, let's remember that the human mind is innately platonic. Remember essentialism, Jesus Scouts? That's right: we automatically make categories and we feel that our categories are real somewhere inside us and around us. This essentialism is a direct product of our nerve cell circuits. Our circuits are spread throughout our brain and these separately-spread-circuits are also plugged right into our emotional circuits. The-circuits-for-categories and the-circuits-for-stuff-we-put-in-categories are different and separate circuits. We feel their independent existence because of our wiring. Essentialism is a result of our common brain design.

So if you're still scratching your head about essentialism, imagine the weight chart in my primary care doctor's office. He doubles as a sadist and a physician: according to his height and weight chart I'm six hundred pounds overweight and, according to his viscous laboratory geniuses, my cholesterol is worshiped by the good people at Crisco. Essentialism holds that there are supernatural charts that measure us and our actions. The Roman chart is every bit as rigorous as my doctor's. None of us measure up. We're all morally mutant in some way. Benedict is holding up the chart and calling us all moral circus side shows. At this point I guzzle more egg nog. I'm still waiting for the drinks. The service rots in this establishment. It's the essence of



## Joseph Ratzinger, the Essence of Marriage and the Human Body: Please Pass the Heartburn (cont'd)

slow.

Why do I keep repeating myself about this essentialism stuff besides the fact that I'm a perseverative bore which has been proven in the centrifuge of marriage? We liberals tend to think essentialism is passé, a stubborn quirk of culture but it's not. It's a robust feature of human brains. Benedict is exhibiting his human brain, a brain he shares with you and me, not a Nazi pedigree. We are in biological communion with Joseph, precisely in our essentialism, our innate platonism. The snickers boomerang right back at us. That hits me right in my pomposity. Ouch.

Even more than accidental and innate essentialism though, Joseph is a deliberate and very careful platonist. Platonism is a distinct feature of his theology too. He's not Neanderthal about it either: he includes modern science but does not weigh it as heavily as the eternal forms that lie behind specific earthly representatives. The sex roles of this divine arrangement are not changeable in his theological map. They're eternal and they match each and every biblical reference in the Bible. So he's being a classical platonist and a classical biblical theologian here. I'm ducking at this point behind my table and reminding my apoplectic reader that I'll get to my disagreement shortly. Out of justice and charity, beloved progressive peeps, it's important to see his theologically sincere motive.

Joseph is also arguing with **postmodernist philosophers** in his remarks. Some philosophers, called postmodernists, believe that there is no objective foundation to our notions of the human body and human bodily arrangements. These are social fictions, according to this collection of very smart guys and gals, fictions made up by people and imposed on everyone, whether they fit or not.

Postmodern philosophers are vigilant in their quest to keep social fictions humble. Oppression is a common concern of the postmodernists. Joseph pulls his papal locks out when he reads postmodern philosophy, both because it rejects supernatural essences and the objective nature of the body. He is also worried that postmodernism's lack of objective standards reduces everything to power. Without right and wrong, only might makes right.

In Benedict's view this is the ugly irony of postmodernism. He sees postmodernism as a misguided quest for lawless freedom, ironically sneaking in naked power politics. These postmodernists are also the folks who yelled at him the most when he was a university professor. In his view, gay marriage has a lousy theological, philosophical and behavioral pedigree.

So Joseph argues for the essence of bodies and essence of marriage as well as good manners. He's certainly following the innate features of our common human thinking here and he's being very, very thorough too, as well as classical, and who can fault him for the manners part? So he's holding onto bodily and marital platonism and he's doing so consistently. From his platonic view point, gay marriage is an oxymoron, an arrangement which cuts across the invisible and eternal structures of the human body and human marriage. He's a Christian platonist, not a homophobic Nazi. I'm still ducking. If this next section doesn't assuage my company, forget the



## Joseph Ratzinger, the Essence of Marriage and the Human Body: Please Pass the Heartburn (cont'd)

drinks. I'll just take the check.

I also think he's trying to indirectly influence the consciences of the Catholic supreme court justices in the US, who are currently deliberating two gay marriage cases in this term. He's hoping to tweak their consciences by arguing for absolute, supernatural laws and our common obligation to those laws. This is what he means by justice: giving the essences of marriage and the human body, the spiritual laws of marriage and our sexual bodies, their due. This is precisely the classical understanding of justice: granting each person and their essence precisely what's due. So he's also being a crafty political Christian platonist here, using his big gilded pulpit in Rome and using military language to make his theological point.

I think this is very politically unwise though. A PR disaster really. Since almost everyone who reads the news reports doesn't care a smidgen about theological and academic positions, and doesn't understand them either, he's putting a **kick me** sign on his cassock in today's public discourse. He's guaranteed to be misread as hateful and discriminatory. His public relations department is spectacularly lousy. They conform to the platonic essence of inflammatory morons. I've used this firm myself, a number of times, with identical results.

I don't think Joseph Ratzinger is a homophobic Nazi, though. Instead, he's a very smart Christian platonist who is being true to his theological conviction in his role as pope. I disagree with him and I think he's a sincere and sweet guy. And I also think he both understandably and mistakenly chooses unintentionally inflammatory language. He needs a speech writer and if he already has one, he needs a new one, fast. So what are my disagreements?

So we're all innate essentialists, platonists, because of our brain architecture. I share this brain with Joseph and you do too. I also don't subscribe to postmodernism because I don't think we have the kind of stretchability that postmodernists imagine. **We have and are bodies**, which are meticulously specific in their features. Benedict and me agree here too. It doesn't matter whether you believe in cardiology: If you're heart stops, game over peeps.

So too with the brain: I've heard postmodernists knit very intricate word webs about our minds and bodies. It's truly impressive and evocative. It's just plain wrong though: if the language circuits in our brains are damaged, we lose our abilities to speak and understand language. If we have damage to our front circuits, our highest thought processes evaporate. I've been a part of these debates and they're brilliantly kooky: the biological science is firmly settled though because it's been demonstrated over and over again but some folks won't yield in the face of the facts. I could go on and on with example upon example but the point is clear: the facts of human anatomy and physiology withstand even the most clever words. Gay marriage doesn't need postmodernism though. Gay marriage has science in its court.

Our sexualities emerge from circuits in our middle brains, most of them found in the hypothalamus, amygdala and other middle pleasure circuits. These circuits steer us around and stir us up. Quite simply, there are gay and bisexual circuits.



## Joseph Ratzinger, the Essence of Marriage and the Human Body: Please Pass the Heartburn (cont'd)

That's it. It's as simple as that. How did these cell combinations get turned on and wired together? We don't know. And we don't know what we don't know either. This much we do know: there are gay and bisexual brains.

We have researched the psychological states of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons. And we have also researched their performance in institutions, such as the military and yes, the intimate institutions of two-person-bonds and child rearing. The verdict is in: no problems and, in some studies, slightly better scores than strait cohorts. Now that's a bit of irony, huh?

The science of gay and lesbian psychology and the science of their relationships has answered the question: homosexuality is neither pathological nor pathogenic. Homosexuality isn't a psychological problem and it doesn't cause problems. Homosexuality is a normal variant of human sexuality and love. Gay and lesbian persons contribute to the color pallet of love in the world. Gay people are coequal representatives of human sexuality and love. It's really that clear and simple. Science has settled the controversy and, once again, dismantled the stereotypes.

Classical Christian platonism has collided with the scientific evidence and the evidence has clearly called for a revision of the classical model. I don't think we should throw out either Christian platonism or essentialism though. By the way, we can't throw this stuff out because, remember, its part of our brain. So what's a theologian to do here? Imagine my hands wrapped around my face, perplexed.

I recommend, for starters, turning to the second chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians. This may be the oldest piece of Christian worship we have. In this poem or hymn, Christ empties himself of everything, including his divine nature and his human dignity, in service to God and the human family. I say that we empty ourselves of every vestige of essentialism that does not survive scientific investigation and which does not survive the march of civilization which extends dignity and its concomitant rights to each and every member of the human family. This includes racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism. It's a lifelong fight with our brain, endless really. Our job is to pluck out our offensive essentialist eyes and cut off our offensive essentialist hands. Whoa! Don't rush. Everybody will get a turn here. Is this thing on?

Everyone has to surrender here, even some of our most cherished notions. In this way we are servants of the truth and servants of a tangible love towards our fellow travelers, male or female, Jew or Greek, gay, strait or bi. In fact, scientific investigation leads all of us to surrender even our most cherished ideas when the evidence rolls in. Scientific surrender is tough on the nerves, even for scientists because the chips fall where they will, not where we want them to. Science is a position of surrender before the results of investigation. Science follows the model of Jesus who surrenders to the truth wherever it leads.

But what's left of essences, these eternal structures which we're always scanning for alongside of our Christian ancestors since the beginning of Jesus School? Well, again drawing from Paul's letters, let's go for the oldest versions of essentialism: **faith, hope and love**. In Paul's beautiful



## Joseph Ratzinger, the Essence of Marriage and the Human Body: Please Pass the Heartburn (cont'd)

ode to love, found in the thirteenth chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians, when all of our religious stuff withers and blows away, **love remains**. Both figuratively and objectively, **love is the essence of Christianity, personified in Jesus**.

The Gospels, all four of them, also tell us that Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God. When we read the parables and when we read Jesus' sayings, it's clear that **radical dignity** is central to the Gospel and not some leftist hippie rant from filthy Jesus-commies.

Dignity is so deep to Jesus that he tells us that forgiveness is mandatory, as is prayer and good intentions towards others, especially our enemies and opponents. Jesus restores dignity when he feeds, when he heals and when he exorcizes as well as when he forgives, even his executioners and their conspirators. In God's Kingdom, we become royal subjects and honored ambassadors of God's rehabilitative dignity. Dignity is the mission of the Kingdom and dignity has a supernatural pedigree, a divine origin. In other words, **another essence of Christianity is dignity**. So we have at least two essences. Let's get greedy and add one more: **the essence of facts**.

What the heck is that you may ask if you haven't nodded off, quietly drooling on the page? All truth winds its way to God the Father, the ultimate source and home of truth, and to Jesus, the ultimate judge of truth. Even and especially when the facts cut across our beliefs, they contain divine DNA. Facts are always spiritual, even when we have to hold our nose to face them. C'mon: hold your nose along with me and follow the facts wherever they lead because they ultimately lead right to Jesus, even when we can't see him on the horizon.

This is how we can clearly and strongly disagree, in love, with our Christian brother, Benedict, while holding him and his inestimable dignity in our hearts. In keeping with our absolute dignity and the ultimate essence, love, as well as the essence of scientifically tested facts, the empirical face of truth, gay marriage is right: two people in committed and doggedly faithful love teach us about faith and give us hope. Marriage, both gay and strait, represents the divine essences, embodied in Jesus and his school: **faith, hope and love**. Now let me get back to my my weight gain program and forward future pope complaints to your friends at the Adult Forum.



# Calendar

January	Date	Event Details
Monday-Thursday	All month	9:00am - Morning Prayer
Tuesday	1	New Year's Day - Office Closed
Saturday	5	9:00am - Liturgy Team Meeting
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>6</b>	8:00am - Holy Eucharist, Rite I 9:30am - Holy Eucharist, Rite II 10:50am - Christian Formation for children and youth 10:50am - Adult Christian Formation: <i>The Heart of Christianity: Last Part</i> 12:00noon - Executive Committee meeting
Monday	7	7:30pm—Church Community meeting
Saturday	12	8:30am - Atrium Assistant's Training
Thursday	6	7:30pm - Redeeming Knitters
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>13</b>	8:00am - Holy Eucharist, Rite I 9:30am - Holy Eucharist, Rite II w/ Holy Baptism 10:50am - Adult Christian Formation: <i>Ted Gaiser's Mission in Columbia</i> 12:00noon - <i>Worship Committee meeting</i> 5:30pm - Family Circle Potluck
Monday	14	7:30pm - Mission Committee meeting
Wednesday	16	7:00pm - Alewife Deanery meeting 7:30pm - Vestry meeting
Thursday	17	7:30pm - Redeeming Knitters
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>20</b>	8:00am - Holy Eucharist, Rite I 9:30am - Holy Eucharist, Rite II, Mission Offering for Ted No Adult, Children or Youth Formation
Monday	21	Office Closed - Martin Luther King Day 7:30pm - Finance Committee meeting
Sunday	27	8:00am - Holy Eucharist, Rite I 9:30am - Holy Eucharist, Rite II w/ Rector's Report 11:00am - Annual Meeting No Adult, Children or Youth Christian Formation Nursery Care available, Children and Youth Program during Annual Meeting
Monday	28	1:30pm - Cook for Bristol Lodge

Please send all announcements by email to [office@our-redeemer.net](mailto:office@our-redeemer.net) or for those without email, call or send to the church office, with "RF" clearly marked.

The **monthly deadline** for the February Redeeming Features submissions is January **15th**.