
The Contests Of Winter

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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In the wintertime, the contests to which I am accustomed usually involve professional football. Last Sunday, I watched both of the National Football League playoff games. Even in those rough conflicts, the athletes can be incredibly graceful.

Of course, this year, another contest competes for my attention: the race for the United States presidency. I actually like the political debates that are consuming much of our media attention. These contests-sometimes conflicts-are important ways that we develop our national identity.

Therefore, already at the Cathedral of St. Philip, we are preparing for the contest of February 5. That's right. Super Tuesday. Super Tuesday will apparently be one of the great primary election days of our country.

Why should the Cathedral be concerned about that day? Well, the problem for the Cathedral is that February 5 is also Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. Of course, we always keep Ash Wednesday, but Shrove Tuesday brings hundreds of folks to Child Hall for a raucous Mardi Gras and Shrove Tuesday observance.

So, what's the problem? Why so much careful concern? Well, because the Cathedral of St. Philip, like many churches across our country, is a polling place. At every election, from the smallest to the largest, the Cathedral offers safe space, open for every citizen to cast a political preference. That space is usually our parish hall, Child Hall.

Thus, on Shrove Tuesday, two events are contesting for our attention. We will certainly have hundreds of people arriving at the Cathedral to cast primary votes. But we will also be devoted to the hundreds of people arriving for pancake supper and Mardi Gras!

How can we manage this conflict? How do we decide this contest? Well, the Cathedral supervises contests all the time. The contests are rarely violent or vicious, but they are conflicts. Every day, we at the Cathedral have choices-and conflicts-in how we use our space and our time. We strive to be proper stewards in those conflicts.

You, too, are involved in contests of space and time and resources. How will you spend your time in three weeks? How will you spend your money during this year?

As I write these words on a winter day, many in the United States are worried that a possible recession this year-or even the threat of a recession-will cause people to suffer financially. We may all have to watch our spending habits. But I hope, not so much that we tighten our habits, but that we direct them in the right way. What is worth spending time and space and resources on, and what is not?

I hope you are able this year to spend time and space and money on the items that bring glory to God and that bring grace and love to the world. That is why, for instance, the Cathedral of St. Philip asks for your pledges and money. With those resources, we can be a healthy place of grace in the midst of conflict.

Conflicts might be political. Conflicts might be about space and time. Conflicts might even be between members of our

own body. It is our ministry at the Cathedral of St. Philip to transmit grace in those conflicts. We will do that on February 5, on Shrove Tuesday, on Super Tuesday, on Ash Wednesday, on Easter, and throughout this year.

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The Very Rev. Sam Candler