

## INFORMATION SHEET: PROVIDING FLOWERS AND GREENS FOR THE ALTAR

Flowers on the altar (and greens during Advent and Lent) are the norm, and we even expect to see them elsewhere in the church on special occasions. In fact, we've become so accustomed to seeing them that their absence is noted. What many of us don't know is that it wasn't until the late 1800's that flowers "on or above the Table" were considered acceptable in the Church of England and the Episcopal Church. Nor do most of us know that the only rubric (*written directions for the conduct of worship*) in the Book of Common Prayer that mentions flowers is found in the Dedication and Consecration of a Church.

Altar flowers *and greens* represent a gift of life and love presented to God, not to the congregation. Whatever your skill anyone, expert or not, can make an acceptable offering. The only standard for church arrangements is that flowers and greens blend into the background of the liturgy and increase its beauty.

The customary practice for flowers and greens at St. Stephen's:

1. Individuals or families sign up to provide the altar arrangements for Sundays and other special services, the exceptions being the memorial lilies and poinsettias.
2. Any natural materials can be used – flowers (from the garden, greenhouse, field, or woods – even the blossoms of what people consider to be weeds), leaves, branches, greens, grasses, nuts, berries, vegetables, fruits, pods and tassels. Dried and potted plants (e.g., memorial lilies, poinsettias and sheaves of wheat) are appropriate if they fit the occasion.
3. Artificial flowers and greens *are not used* for altar arrangements or elsewhere in the church at St. Stephen's.
4. Arrangements, when placed in the vases or other containers, shouldn't be taller than the altar cross. The black line to the left of the sink represents the top of the cross.
5. If a florist is used, provide some basic instructions for arrangements in the brass vases: the height of the arrangements themselves should not exceed 10-11 inches; the necks of the vases are very narrow – approximately 7 inches in circumference. Try to have little or no oasis showing above the vase tops. In general, the vases do not leave the church. If taking the vases to a florist is absolutely necessary, inform the Altar Guild Director or the Altar Guild Team or member scheduled to serve that you're taking them and how long they'll be gone.
6. The brass vases should be wiped with a soft cloth or paper towel to remove any water droplets before placing the arrangements on the altar. They are placed between the Eucharist candles and the cross when the service includes Holy Eucharist; to the outside of the candelabra when the service doesn't include Holy Eucharist (e.g. the Office of Morning Prayer or the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage without communion.)
7. The brass vases traditionally have been used to hold the altar arrangements, but other kinds of containers could be used. They should hold and display the arrangements well, fit the space available on the re-table (the shelf attached to the east wall behind the altar, holding the cross, candles and vases), be clean and *able to hold water* or prepared oasis. For example, low rectangular containers would be appropriate if you

would like to create horizontal rather than vertical arrangements. Good sources for containers would be floral supply houses, the floral sections of stores like Michael's, or your florist. Careful thought should be given to whether or not containers, other than the brass vases, should be visible. Consult the Priest if you have any question or concern about the appropriateness of the containers. The height limitation noted in #4 above applies here, as well.

8. Altar arrangements are always given to the Glory of God. They also may be given in memory or honor of or in thanksgiving for someone or some event. If so, the notice in the bulletin will read, "The flowers (or greens) are given to the glory of God by [*your name(s)*] \_\_\_\_\_ in memory/honor/thanksgiving of/for [*name(s)* \_\_\_\_\_]. When you are giving flowers or greens for a purpose, be sure to write the reason and the name(s) on the Altar Flower/Greens schedule.