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## *Thanks For Another Birthday: Hope For Another Year*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Yes, I was definitely surprised. I still cannot believe that so many people and parishioners knew about my upcoming birthday-my fiftieth!-and were able to keep secret a special cathedral party on the evening of August 12. At around 5:30 pm on that day, my dear children said they had one more surprise for me that day; they had already given me a special wine tasting and an iPod (to make me feel younger, they said). So they blindfolded me and put me into the car.

For those of you who do not know: I hate blindfolds, and I hate being out of control. Here it was, my fiftieth birthday, and I was being led around by my children. I could not help but think of Jesus' words to Peter at John 21.18: "When you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

But I did trust my children to take me to a great place. I thought we were going either to the Braves game or to Johnny Depp's new movie. Thus, I was completely surprised when they removed the blindfold and I was in the parish hall. I am thankful, so thankful, to so many of you who took time out of your evening to be here at that night. I am also tremendously grateful to the Chapter for replacing the Cathedral automobile; I had no idea what a refreshing and respectable change that is!

There was some pretty good poetry recited that evening, and some pretty good poetry written, and even the new song, "Hey Sam." It was only when I got home that I read one of the poems someone had given me. It is titled "O Karma, Dharma, pudding and pie," written by Philip Appleman, and it ends like this:

And forgive, Ye Gods, some humble advice -  
These little blessings would suffice  
To beget an earthly paradise:  
Make the bad people good -  
And the good people nice;  
And before our world goes over the brink,  
Teach the believers how to think.

Those three little "blessing requests" brings me to this Sunday. I hope you all know that the Cathedral education program, and music program, and general parish life program all begin a new year this Sunday, August 20. It is Homecoming Sunday. We are all another year older, and I hope another year wiser, and I hope ready for God's surprises again. George Maxwell wrote eloquently last week that no matter how many times we have been to this Sunday before, it is still new and wonderful.

Our theme for this Sunday and Fall is "**Deep and Wide.**" God's grace and love are forever "deep and wide." But I pray in particular that all our programs can help fulfill those requests in Appleman's poem: let us help make the bad people good and the good people nice, and let us teach the believers how to think. That is good Christian formation!

The Dean's Forum theme this Fall is titled "**Religion for the Common Good.**" We will take as our context the world's present concerns about oil and energy, about pluralism and religious absolutism, about urban growth and development. Can religion provide something positive in these situations? With special speakers, fresh looks at old biblical passages, and striking conversation, we'll take a look at how religion can serve the common good.

Meanwhile, I continue to give thanks for this past year and for this community, and I have great hope for this coming year. Join us!

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler