

St. James' E-pistle

January 31, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Thank you for a wonderful Annual Meeting last Sunday! As usual, the single-service format makes for smaller overall attendance, but it was a good atmosphere, and I was so pleased that nearly everyone stayed after worship for the meeting portion.

Congratulations to Christine Wardell and Meg and Kurt Burkhardt, this year's recipients of the St. James' Medal! The medal doesn't get you any points in heaven, and wearing it around town will only get you strange looks. What it does do, however, is simply say, "Thank You," for years of service and self-giving in the name of Christ for the sake of the Gospel. So, Thank You to Chris, Meg and Kurt!

In my Rector's Report for the year, I laid out several hopes and goals. In a way, they are a lot like New Year's Resolutions. You set your sights on them, and from the vantage point of the new year, they look appealing and attainable. Like resolutions, however, they often don't pan out the way we think. Still, we articulate the vision anyway because to move forward without direction is to wander aimlessly in the desert.

Besides, these are reasonable: learn better hospitality, have a VBS, participate in Bridge Builders, have a Walking Pilgrimage, focus on inner spiritual life. For the rest of the hopes and goals of 2014, you can read the rector's report which is in this edition of the E-pistle.

If you were not able to attend the meeting, please read the report.

There are so many great things happening here, and for that, I am thankful. I hope you will want to take an active part in them. And if you don't know where to start...start with worship, and prayer, and study of scripture. That'll get you going in a good direction!

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Acolytes training & schedule: An acolyte training session will take place this **Sunday, February 2nd, following the 10:00 AM service.** All acolytes, new and old, are expected to attend (everyone needs a refresher now and then - consider it continuing education). This is especially important for those who are new or who are ready to make the leap from torch to crucifer. We will also discuss the function of a thurifer.

Boy Scout Sunday: This **Sunday, February 2nd** is Boy Scout Sunday. Scouts from Troop 80 will attend services on that day in uniform and will host Coffee Hour. All Boy Scouts, especially Eagle Scouts, are also welcome to come in uniform.

Fireside Chats: The next Fireside Chat is **Thursday, February 6th**, at 7:00 pm. The title is, "FDR and the Post Office: A discussion of Roosevelt's passion for stamp collecting and its significance in saving his life." The presenter is Anthony Musso, local journalist and author. A reception will follow.

Lenten Meditations: It's time to get your favorite dates for the Lenten Meditations! Sign up this week to write one or two meditations to share with your brothers and sisters in Christ. It can be brief, long, poetry, opinion - or visual art. Whatever helps you reflect on the holiness of Lent and what Christ means to you. Scripture readings are provided each day which you may choose to use for inspiration.

Looking for Bible Study Participants: If you want to take a deeper look at or faith's foundational writings, if you want to ask questions about those uncomfortable and incomprehensible passages, if you enjoy spending time with others, our bible study wants you! We have been meeting Thursdays at 10 AM, but are willing to consider other times that accommodate today's hectic schedules. If you're interested, please contact either Fr. Chuck or Barbara Slegel. Hope to see you there - and bring a friend!

Notice of Inquirers classes: Bishop Dietsche will visit St. James' on December 14, 2014. He will confirm, receive and reaffirm the faith of all who seek it. To be confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church, you need to participate in the Inquirer's Series of classes. If you

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have not already done so, please see Fr. Chuck about registering for the classes. You have to be at least 13 to participate, and anyone under 16 must come to Fr. Chuck personally (their parents cannot speak for them) to discuss why they want to be confirmed.

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kathleen Craft, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, Andy Hall, Harold Hall, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, Don Renten, John Robinson, John Schroeder, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

Schedules

A Note about Schedules: The names you see below are those listed on their respective schedules. There are often times when, due to sickness or travel, substitutes are asked to fill in or trade positions. This will probably NOT be reflected in the lists below—so, if there is an inconsistency between what you see here and what you see on Sunday, that is alright.

Birthdays:	Beth Matranga, Daniel Matranga, Deirdre Mae Micker and Tanya Hall
Acolytes:	February 2: Eden Ciferri, Rebecca Gausepohl and Chris Santos February 9: Bryanna Burkhardt, Chris Granados-Kramer and Travyn Triola
Altar Guild:	February 2: Team III February 9: Team I
8 a.m. Readers:	February 2: Angela Henry and Lynne Koch February 9: Debbie Belding and Sue DeLorenzo
10 a.m. Readers:	February 2: Wilma Tully/Nancy Montero February 9: Regina Ardin/Bobbie Wells
Ushers:	February 2: Andrew and Tonya Hall February 9: Bobbie and Cliff Wells
Pledge Clerks:	February 2: Deb and Doug Belding February 9: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Coffee Hour Hosts:	February 2: Boy Scout Troop 80 February 9: Jodi Triola and Ross & Connie Eames

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This Week's Lectionary

Malachi 3:1-4

Psalm 84

Hebrews 2:14-18

Luke 2:22-40

Sermon Preached on
Third Sunday after the Epiphany
(January 26, 2014)

"Annual Report"

For there is only one persistent demand made upon us by the Spirit. It is that we are receptive. That we keep our eyes open, our minds unclosed. It is, in short, that we retain all our lives our sense of wonder. - Michael Mayne, The Sunrise of Wonder

This year has been one of extremes. Sometimes agitation, sometimes calm, sometimes both at the same time. Primarily, however, even in times of contention, there have been wonder and gratitude. I am thankful for this.

As you may remember, at last year's annual meeting there was contention regarding the future of music here. Certainly, part of that was due to poor decisions on my part.

Well, at the beginning of my ministry at St. James', one of the first things I told everyone was that there would be plenty of times when I would make mistakes, disappoint parishioners and fail in my duties. Don't say I didn't warn you. But mistakes and failures are unavoidable for anyone who wishes to do more than sit in their room curled up in a ball.

Fortunately, the church is a place for grace, forgiveness, changes in direction and room for honest differences of opinion. There is so much more right here than wrong that we are able to weather the inevitable storms that come with being in relationship. And for that, I am thankful.

Since last year's meeting, we have had several music related meetings, the most recent of which was a very productive meeting this past Thursday. I believe good things are on the horizon musically.

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This is born out especially in our choir, which choir is such an important part of our worship. I thank the choir members and Mary, our choir director for their mutual ministry. There is certainly more work ahead, but we can do that work secure in our commitment to each other.

As I look around the church, I note so many other good things happening and would like to share some of them with you:

Sunday School was a bright spot with its excellent teachers and wonderful skits which the kids performed periodically through the year. Thank you to Sunday School superintendent Valerie Gaulin and all our teachers!

The Lenten meditations written by the congregation were powerfully moving and inspiring - as always! By the way, sign-up sheets for this year's meditations can be found in the parish hall. And the Lenten breakfasts - well, I still feel a little guilty digging into those pancakes and bacon, but just a little. The fellowship that comes from them is so valuable, such a blessing and so worth a little guilt. Thank you to our kitchen crew who so faithfully and deliciously feed our bodies and our souls!

Also beginning last Lent, many of you signed up to follow the Bible Challenge, a schedule of daily bible readings designed to take you through the entire bible by the beginning of this Lent. From the confessions I've heard - and from my own experience - this hasn't been easy or without lapses. But it has been good, and many have continued to keep reading, if not exactly keep up. That is all anyone can ask for because, as we read our bibles, we get to know God better and we get to know our own story better. It is never too late to start - the challenge is always there. Knowing your bible is never a wasted effort.

One innovation we tried this year was Bright Sunday - the Sunday after Easter when we focused on laughter and jokes. Overall, I think it was a great success, and while the quality of the jokes may have been somewhat suspect, the fun was genuine. I still have a photo of that sign one of the Sunday School kids stuck on my back that reads: "Jesus is my Bro."

After Easter, a couple of things kicked in. Work to expand and, well, grow the Community Garden kicked into high gear. Nearly doubling its size over the previous year, it made room for Hyde Park residents to rent plots for gardening.

Spring also brought on my sabbatical. A sabbatical in the church is a time away from the parish, recommended for every five to seven years. This was my second sabbatical since coming to St. James', which tells you how long I've been here. Actually, it had been nine years since my first sabbatical in 2004 but you know, time flies when you're having fun.

For those who were not here in '04, I spent that time at a writer's retreat in Canada working on a novel about Abraham and Isaac. When I returned, we had a book study on the novel. No, it

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never got published, and no, I don't think I have the patience to try to get it published. It has served its purpose.

This year, I took a different focus and stayed at home. I spent the first two weeks working on scripts for the Graveyard Tours - more on that later. Then I took Spanish classes at Dutchess Community College and a language school in Wappingers Falls. The classes were good, and I did well, but I haven't been able to find the follow up I had hoped for. Still, I have a foundation to build upon.

Primarily, however, I made a study of pilgrimage. I studied pilgrimage from religions around the world but especially in the Christian tradition. What interested me was how so many Christian pilgrimages developed that had nothing to do with the Holy Land. In fact, back in the middle ages when it became unsafe for people to travel to the Holy Land, Christians simply invented new pilgrimage sites. As they then learned, the place they were going to was not nearly as important as the journey itself. This led me to think, "Hey, if they can do it, why can't I?" So I began to develop a pilgrimage of my own. More on that later. For now, let me say thank you to the entire congregation for the gift of time to study and rest.

Of course, the church continued to operate in my absence, and I thank my friend the Rev. Michael Shafer for taking such good care and interest. I thank the Wardens, retiring Senior Warden Doug Belding (who is breathing a sigh of relief today) and new Senior Warden Andy Hall for being heroes during the sabbatical and truly keeping St. James' alive and thriving.

In my absence, Brian Rance took over publishing the weekly E-pistle and digital bulletin (which I urge you to try - you can download it on the website or via e-mail). He finally said, "You don't have to say thank you each week - it's understood." So I'll just say it one last time: Thanks Brian!

This Fall, St. James' Nursery School celebrated its 50th anniversary. The nursery school has been a light on the hill in Hyde Park, and even though class size is necessarily small, its impact is big. We bring Christ's love to the town well beyond our little community. Last year, I was at the high school when some big kid called out, "Fr. Chuck!" and gave me a bear hug. Having no idea who this beast was, I said, "Hi," and he identified himself as a former St. James' student. I may not be able to remember all the kids, but they remember St. James' Nursery School.

Upon my return in the fall, we jumped straight into the Graveyard Tours. They have become, as the kids say, "a thing" in Hyde Park. Two observations come to mind immediately. First, neighbors around the community look forward to the tours - they are an annual event people now plan on. And believe me, they stop me in the street to ask when the tours are going to start again. Second, we have incredible actors in this church! Every single character was portrayed at least temporarily by one or more parishioners, and for my money, our folks were the best actors out there. What's more, people have already been asking to be actors for next year. There

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are so many people to thank because so many parishioners took an active role in these tours from directing to acting to parking to costumes to website management. Thank you to all of you! But special thanks go to Bev O'Halloran who coordinated it all and made it look deceptively easy!

The fall also brought a return to the weekly bible study. Over the past months we've worked on Acts and the Gospel of Matthew, which we are still studying. Jobs and other schedule changes have reduced our number recently, but we are determined to have Bible Study up and running here, so we look forward to you joining us! If you are interested in bible study, let me know a time that would work for you. Our book study group continues to meet Thursday evenings at 7:00, as we work our way through "A Prayer for Owen Meany." Since this book group was created to study that specific book, I do not know if there will be interest in continuing the group after "Owen Meany" is completed, but if so, I'll be there.

There are so many other things we have done over the year - many you'll hear or read about in other reports. I think of the participation of several of our youth in Bridge Builders work camp, of the Tea Room and Craft sale, of Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets. There are so many others who make this place tick - our ushers and altar guild and acolytes. And on and on. If I failed to mention you, that's because I would have to name practically the entire congregation to catch all who serve. So, thank you all.

Outside of the congregation, I continue to serve as Dean of the Dutchess North Clericus. I am a member of the Diocesan Deacons Committee. Locally, I sit on the ethics committee of Renaissance Rehabilitation Center and on the Ethics Board of the Town of Hyde Park. And of course, along with other clergy and parish representatives from around town, I help coordinate meetings of the Hyde Park Association of Churches (which we call HyPAC for short). HyPAC gets representatives of churches together for monthly meetings, worship, and service. Together, we provide a joint chaplaincy for the Hyde Park Police. This year, we observed the Community Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, with the biggest attendance I have ever seen. We celebrated the Community Thanksgiving Service this year at Hyde Park United Methodist Church, and now have added a third celebration. Starting this very afternoon, the collective churches of Hyde Park will observe The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with a special service. This year's service will be today at Mariapolis Luminosa at 3:00 pm. I will be there, and I hope you will be, too.

I would be remiss in closing out the events of the past year if I did not note the deaths of many parishioners this year. We have listed them in the necrology in this report, but it has been a particularly hard year. From Florence Fried at the beginning of the year to Rod Hitchcock, Don Weber and Elmer Van Wagner in the middle, to Josh Bohlmann, Nancy Nucci and George Buso at the end of the year, this has not been easy on us. Additionally, we observe the passing of

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former rector Frank Mahlau. May their souls, and the souls of all the departed, rest in the peace and love of God.

That is the past. Without keeping you here forever, let me share a glimpse into the future.

1. In Christian Education, I will soon begin the Inquirers Series of classes. These are required for anyone who wants to be confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church and are open to anyone who simply wants to learn more about their faith. They will start in the spring and carry on - with a break in the summer - to Bishop Dietsche's episcopal visitation on December 14. I encourage you to join in. Yes, I brought a sign-up sheet.

At the same time, the Vestry and I discussed the possibility of a Lenten program on hospitality. We believe that, while St. James' is a great place, and we make our doors open to all who enter, we can learn how to be much more attentive, much more welcoming in every regard: from ushers to readers to choir and altar guild, from clergy to every person in the pew, even in coffee hour - we can learn how to practice what some call radical hospitality, but what I prefer to call Christianity. I thank you in advance for wanting to be even better at welcoming and supporting those who walk through our doors.

2. On the subject of those new to St. James', next month, on Friday, February 21, I intend to hold our semi-annual Newcomers Reception. This is a time to welcome newer members (as well as those who are considering joining). We help them know where things are, who they can talk to, what resources are available - that sort of thing. But mostly, it's a time to meet people. If you are new here, you're invited. If you are not new but want to help others feel welcome at St. James', you're invited too!

3. I mentioned that during my sabbatical, I studied pilgrimage and was led to develop a pilgrimage. Not one to the Holy Land or England or anything like that. Nothing you have to travel far at all to get to. In fact, given how expensive those sorts of pilgrimage are, most of us just can't do them.

But with the awareness that it is the journey rather than the location, I used my sabbatical to develop a local pilgrimage along the region's rail trails. I plan on holding this first, pilot Rail Trail Pilgrimage during the last weekend of March. It will be a two-day-long walk covering nearly 20 miles.

I invite you to take part in this pilgrimage. I brought a sign-up sheet for those who want to find out more. Signing up does not commit you to this pilgrimage; it only guarantees more information. And if you are or know a medical person who is able to walk the entire distance and act as a "medical officer," I would welcome your participation. In fact, there are several volunteer positions available.

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4. Last year, Vacation Bible School hit some snags, but I feel strongly that it is important to the mission of this church and will put more of my energy into making it happen and making it succeed.

5. I hope to see more of our young people take part in the Bridge Builders work camp this summer and will plan on helping out at it if possible. I also hope to work with the youth of the parish in more outreach such as cooking for the Hillcrest House homeless shelter. These are ways we can grow spiritually as well as personally.

6. I intend to continue taking one Wednesday each month to spend at Holy Cross Monastery. There I will study, worship, and pray. I believe this monthly day apart will make me a more effective pastor and a more committed follower of Christ.

As we look ahead to this new year together, I invite you to find ways to grow closer in your relationship with God in Christ. Join a bible study, attend a book study, visit the monastery, become part of Altar guild or acolytes (there is no age limit!). If you want to worship more, come to me and see about starting a new service. If it helps anyone here grown closer to God, I'm in!

I told you that when I first came to St. James' sixteen years ago, I said I would make mistakes and disappoint you from time to time. That is still true, so be prepared. But mistakes are how we know who we are - they remind us that we are, in fact, not God. But they also remind us that God stays with us, encouraging us to move forward in the mission Christ has given us without fear.

There is so much to be thankful for at St. James', and one thing I'm most thankful for is you and your willingness to move into this new year with grace, peace and hope - with a wide-eyed sense of wonder - and most especially with the love of Christ. Thank you.